ISSN: 0391-5956

ISTITUTO UNIVERSITARIO ORIENTALE

anglistica

direttore, Fernando Ferrara

COMITATO DI REDAZIONE

Lidia Curti, Laura Di Michele, Fernando Ferrara e Marina Vitale

Per ogni anno solare è prevista la pubblicazione di tre fascicoli.

XXV, 1 1982

INDICE

Mario Agrimi, *On the 250th Anniversary of the Istituto Universitario Orientale* . . . . . pag. 5

ARTICOLI E SAGGI

Tony Bennett, *Text and Social Process: the Case of J. Bond* . . . . . » 15

Keir Elam, *The Words of Mercury and the Songs of Apollo: The Status of the Linguistic Sign in* 'Love's Labour's Lost' . . . . . » 35

Patrizia Fusella, *L'ultima manifestazione del caso* 'Coleridge on Imagination' . . . . . » 81

Elizabeth Glass Immirzi, *« One Part Record, Two Parts Ideology ». Images of the English 'Countryside' in the Seventies* . . . . . » 113

John Mepham, *V. Woolf and the Burial of the Dead* . » 145

RECENSIONI

G. Franci, *La messa in scena del terrore* (M. T. Chialant) » 159

R. Jackson, *Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion* (A. Mineo) . . . . . » 161

G. Mochi, *Le « cose cattive » di H. James* (S. Cenni) . » 165

W. B. Yeats, *John Sherman; Dhoya* (F. Ferrara) . . . » 167

E. Figes, *Sex and Subterfuge. Women Novalists to 1850* (V. Barone) . . . . . » 169

AION

anglistica

ISTITUTO UNIVERSITARIO ORIENTALE

ANNALI

XXV, 1

anglistica

IST. UNIV. ORIENTALE
N. Inv. 53604
Dipartimento di Studi letterari
e linguistici dell'Occidente.

NAPOLI 1982

ON THE 250TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ISTITUTO UNIVERSITARIO ORIENTALE

by
Mario Agrimi

This year the Istituto Universitario Orientale celebrates its 250th anniversary. It was founded in Naples in 1732 by Father Matteo Ripa of the Congregation of the Holy Family of Jesus Christ, and was first known as the « Collegio de' Cinesi ». Clement XII's papal brief *Nuper pro*, dated 7th April 1732, stated that the College's « praecipuum institutum est educatio alumnorum Sinesium et Indorum, qui ex iis regionibus advenient pro addiscendis catholicae fidei praeceptis, amplectendo statu presbyterali, ac sese parandis ad predicandum in eorum patria Christi Evangelium », and added that « in quo tamen Collegio etiam admitti possint omnes alii ex quacumque parte Europae existentes », who wished to undertake training « ad sacras Missiones obeundas ». On 22nd March 1736 this same pope issued a further bull *Injuncti nobis* giving definite approval of the Rules and Constitution of the College, as well as mentioning « dilectus filius Mattheus Ripa, ipsius Congregationis seu Collegii Fundator ». And this year also celebrates the 3rd centenary of the birth of Fr. Matteo Ripa, a lively and remarkable missionary of the first half of the 18th century he was born at Eboli on 29th March 1682, and died in Naples on the same day of March in 1746.

Even before the College had been officially founded and formally recognized, Ripa, on his return to Naples in October 1724 after more than fifteen years spent in China, brought with him a group of Chinese youths and began

his exacting work in the final period of the Austrian viceroyalty. With unparalleled constancy he was to be found in the thick of long and difficult negotiations — in Rome with Pope Benedict XIII and the prelates of the Congregation de Propaganda Fide, in Vienna with the Emperor Charles VI and the chief representatives of the Spanish Supreme Council, and in Naples where (in spite of the prevailing anti-Curia policy) an agreement between the political and ecclesiastical powers was reached, which revealed Gaetano Argento, regent of the Consiglio Collaterale and delegate of the Real Giurisdizione, as a staunch supporter of Ripa's work. Indeed, the civil authorities encouraged the tenacious missionary's project, and Charles VI himself, in a despatch dated 3rd July 1728, authorized the transfer of the property (« house, church and adjoining garden towards the Capodimonte hill ») intended for the College, in derogation of a precise prohibition « from which » the despatch reads « it is my will that the aforesaid Collegio de' Cinesi be excepted on this point alone, as I have taken it under my Royal Protection ». From the very beginning the enterprise aroused such widespread interest that it was certainly not due to chance that Montesquieu, on a visit to Naples in the Spring of 1729, wanted to meet Matteo Ripa and learn about his work.

The new institution met with success in its work. Subsequently a section for the preparation of missionaries to the Near East was added, which made it a unique European centre of Oriental languages and culture. It continued its activities even throughout the most troubled events of the Kingdom of Naples and, amongst other things, received an offer from Napoleon Bonaparte, who was interested in a pacific French penetration of the Far Eastern countries, to move to France.

With the unity of Italy, the laic policy of the liberal governments (involving the suppression of religious orders and the confiscation of Church property) also placed the Collegio de' Cinesi and the Congregation of the Holy Family in a difficult position. These difficulties were to some extent overcome by the acknowledged original cultural

value of the institution. For example, it is to be noted that, in June 1870, for a delegation of Chinese diplomats on an official mission to Italy, the highlight of their visit was when they were solemnly received at the Collegio de' Cinesi in Naples. A troubled period of controversy was, however, to follow — this being part of the overall situation of difficult relations between Church and State in the decades immediately after the unity of Italy — but the State remained firm in its intention to safeguard such an important cultural structure and to reclaim it for civil and national ends. On the other hand, its original religious and missionary aims now encountered changed circumstances, with Catholic seminaries having been set up in the countries of the East, mostly by the French and Portuguese.

In 1874 a parliamentary committee (whose members included Antonio Scialoia and Quintino Sella) put forward proposals for the reform of the College, and in October 1875 the minister Ruggero Bonghi issued a decree for its reorganization that turned out to be inadequate and of little effect. In October 1878 Francesco De Sanctis, Minister of Education, proposed a new reform so that the Institute, as the relevant decree reads, « might meet more suitably the needs of the times and the progress of civilization, while maintaining the spirit of the original regulation of its founder ». The change of name of the College was confirmed, and the first article of the decree reads: « The Real Collegio Asiatico of Naples, a recognized institution of public education under the authority of the Ministry of Education, aims to provide introductory and upper-level courses in language studies for young Italians and foreigners who wish to devote themselves to the Catholic missions or to the consular service, to trade, scientific exploration, teaching in Asian countries and similar duties ». The following languages were to be taught: Chinese, Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Hindustani, Japanese, Slavo-Serbian, Modern Greek.

The impossibility of reconciling the original religious aims of the College with its new civil and national structure gave rise to a long-lasting judicial contention, that

resounded in the meetings of Parliament on several occasions. At last the Act no. 5873, 3rd series, of 27th December 1888, that had been presented by the minister Pasquale Stanislao Mancini, constituted the « Regio Istituto Orientale di Napoli » and established its aims (« the aim of the Institute will be the practical teaching of living Asian and African languages, and these subjects may be accompanied by others on the historical and present-day conditions in those countries and their relations with Europe and especially with Italy »), and formulated the Regulations defining its academic and administrative organization (« The professors of the Institute shall receive a salary equal to that of University professors »). At the same time the administrative position of the existing ecclesiastical staff was defended, its members being admitted to teach in the Institute wherever the conditions allowed. All the same, the State's decision met with hostility in Catholic circles and Pope Leo XIII, on Christmas Day 1888, loudly voiced his protest, complaining that « there was no respect even for the charitable foundations whose task it was to carry to far-off countries, together with the name of Italy, the benefits of the Faith ».

This new set-up was an important stage in the life of the Institute, though it was soon seen to be inadequate to meet the growing demands in teaching and scientific research. In the meantime the greatest Oriental scholars in Italy succeeded one another at the Institute (Giacomo Lignana and Michele Kerbaker, to name just two of them), while the debate continued on the need to give the Institute a more convincing face and wider prospects in its scientific and didactic activities. This necessity was also stressed by Benedetto Croce in 1909, in the journal « La Critica ». There was a great deal of pressure to take over the Institute for preparing the cadres of the diplomatic service, and to this end it was proposed that it be co-ordinated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and — as was the case for a time — with the Colonial Ministry.

After the second World War the Istituto Universitario Orientale eagerly resumed its activity. Harking back to its

illustrious traditions, it revived them with effective qualification, and gradually enriched its cultural interests. On the basis of a succession of reorganization laws — the most recent one passed in August 1973 being of fundamental importance — the particular characteristics of the Institute were confirmed, and a dynamic association between wide fields of teaching and research fostered the development of learning, the aim being to set up a fruitful and well-founded collaboration between different areas of Oriental and Occidental studies. This meant that the Institute could rightly take its place, with its own unmistakable characteristics, in the Italian university system. It comprises a Faculty of Arts, a Faculty of Political Science and a School of Islamic Studies, which provide seven degree courses in all: Arts (classics or modern major), Philosophy, Foreign Languages and Literature (European or Oriental major), Philology and History of Eastern Europe (with majors in Slavonic, Baltic, Finno-Ugric or Southeast European), Oriental Languages and Civilization (sections: Far East, Near and Middle East, Africa), Political Science (with majors in international politics, political history, Eastern Europe, Orient), and a Diploma in Islamic Studies. The Institute is now about to experiment a division into seven Departments (Asiatic Studies, East European Studies, the Classical world and the ancient Mediterranean, Africa and the Arab countries, Philosophy and Politics, Occidental Literary and Linguistic Studies, Social Science).

The Istituto Universitario Orientale intends to take the opportunity provided by the aforementioned anniversaries to set in motion an organic programme of study and research. This programme takes as its starting-point the interesting vicissitudes of the « Collegio de' Cinesi » and its founder, including the subsequent phases in the history of the institution, and goes on to investigate all the aspects of Italy's knowledge of the East in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Ripa's youth and his vocation as a missionary were closely connected with people and phases of importance in the religious and cultural life of Naples, particularly

« quietism » and Fr. Antonio Torres. His experiences were bound up with the question of the « Chinese rites » — a complex controversy that spread throughout Europe between the second half of the 17th century and the early 18th century, involving theological problems and rivality between religious orders and the interests of the European states in the East. For more than 50 years in Europe the intricate question gave rise to lively debates of great religious importance (one of the matters that cropped up was the contrast between Jansenist rigorism and Jesuitic flexibility), which also had widespread repercussions in philosophical, political, anthropological and artistic circles. A disquieting comparison was drawn between European traditions and the refinement of Chinese civilization, of which a thorough knowledge was gained, and all this made a considerable contribution to the dawning of a pre-Enlightenment atmosphere. At one stage the Church intervened resolutely and sent an apostolic mission to China and the East Indies. The mission was led by Cardinal Maillard de Tournon, at whose death in Macao (on 8th June 1710) Matteo Ripa was present. In the years to come Ripa was to play a leading role, as can be seen from his writings, both published and unpublished. The very foundation of the « Collegio de' Cinesi » may be to some extent be considered as a positive reply to the controversy.

It is only too well known in how many aspects the Age of Enlightenment was indebted to Eastern civilizations. There are promising prospects for research to be done along these lines, concerning the relations between Italy and Europe and the various cultural areas of the East during the 19th century. A special series of publications will be devoted to the results of this research, which is likely to be spread out over a long period and to which it is hoped that numerous qualified contributions will be made.

One thing to be undertaken in the immediate future is the reprinting of the three volumes of the *Storia della Fondazione della Congregazione e del Collegio de' Cinesi scritta dallo stesso fondatore Matteo Ripa e de' viaggi da*

lui fatti, Napoli, Dalla Tipografia Manfredi, 1832. This has now become a rare work, a document containing a wealth of biographical and historico-cultural information, which belongs to the genre « missionary history » but with an originality all its own. Another project is an archives and libraries, starting with Naples. But a great deal of material must also be sought in the Vatican Library and the Secret Papal Archives, as well as in the archives of the Congregation de Propaganda Fide, the general archives of the Society of Jesus, the Casanatense and Corsiniana libraries in Rome, the general archives in Paris and Madrid, and the archives of the archdiocese of Hankow that are now kept in the mother house of the Minorites in Rome. This means that the job of classifying and cataloguing the material will be a long and complex one, resulting in the publication of collections of documents of the utmost importance.

articoli e saggi

Le problematiche connesse con la identificazione del testo, inteso non meramente come oggetto materiale e circoscritto alla pagina scritta, sono alla base degli studi che pubblichiamo in questo numero di Anglistica. Sulla scia di Leavis, Macherey ed Eagleton – e in parziale polemica con quest'ultimo – Tony Bennett nell'articolo « Text and Social Process » propone una concezione del testo come entità in costante trasformazione e progresso. Attraverso l'analisi del ' caso James Bond ', un fenomeno culturale che si è espresso in una molteplicità di testi pluricodificati che hanno modificato nella sua essenza l'opera originaria, l'autore lega l'analisi letteraria e narratologica, oltre che alla storia delle condizioni materiali del testo e delle sue riproduzioni in canali diversi, a tutto ciò che è stato scritto e detto su di esso.

L'attuale diffusione di rappresentazioni narrative e documentaristiche della campagna inglese (in risposta a un bisogno di evasione dalle condizioni della vita urbana) può essere inquadrata in una lunga tradizione letteraria. Elizabeth Glass Immirzi, in « One Part Record, Two Parts Ideology », osserva l'insieme dei testi – scritti, visuali ed iconici – che costituiscono la visione nostalgica e romanticizzata del ' panorama ' come segno di un'immagine idilliaca e privilegiata della nazione, in contrasto con la crisi sostanziale dei valori ad essa collegati. I nuovi linguaggi tecnologici e i codici e canali ad essi pertinenti vengono attivati in funzione di ideologie tradizionali.

In area più spiccatamente letteraria, gli articoli di Patrizia Fusella su I. A. Richards e di John Mepham su Virginia Woolf riferiscono i testi esaminati alla tradizione critica e letteraria in cui vanno inquadrati. Nel primo caso, si illustrano i mo-

menti salienti del dibattito sviluppatosi intorno alle teorie e al pensiero di I. A. Richards, con particolare riferimento al saggio Coleridge on Imagination, considerato nell'ambito della critica letteraria anglosassone come segno del mutamento – 'radicale' o 'apparente' – della visione dell'arte richardsiana. Nel secondo, l'arte di V. Woolf viene vista in contrasto con la tradizione narrativa prevalente in epoca vittoriana ed eduardiana, e più vicina ai 'ritmi e agli incantamenti' della poesia, in particolare a quella di T. S. Eliot. La rappresentazione della morte è un esempio di quella esplorazione nel 'paese oscuro dell'esperienza femminile' che è al centro dei romanzi della Woolf.

Infine, nel saggio intitolato « The Words of Mercury and the Songs of Apollo » (la cui prima parte è stata pubblicata nel terzo fascicolo del 1981), Keir Elam procede nella sua meticolosa indagine semiologica e filosofica sulla dizione di Love's Labour's Lost.

TEXT AND SOCIAL PROCESS: THE CASE OF JAMES BOND

by
Tony Bennett

In an interview he gave in 1977, Pierre Macherey contested the view that the study of literature consisted in the study of literary works conceived as finished products. Supposing, he asks, that literature doesn't consist of 'works'? What, then, will studying a specific text entail? 'It'll mean', he argues, 'not just studying the text but perhaps also ... everything which has been written *about* it, everything which has been collected on it, become attached to it — like shells on a rock by the seashore forming a whole incrustation. At which point the idea of a « work » loses all meaning' (Macherey, 1977, p. 7). From this perspective, Macherey advances the view that the proper concern of literary theory is with the study of 'literary phenomena within social reality' (*ibid*, p. 3) — a definition which both exceeds the conventional construction of the literary work as a finished product and calls it into question. Rather than requiring that the text be regarded as a completed given which is to be studied on its own terms, it directs attention to the history of its use, of its perpetual remaking and transformation in the light of its inscription into a variety of different material, social, institutional and ideological contexts. This is not the familiar and unexceptionable demand that such considerations might be regarded as worthy of study in their own right, but as extrinsic factors which have no essential bearing on the text or the way it should be studied. It is rather a call to displace the existing object of literary analysis — the text — in

the sense that, from within the perspective which Macherey recommends, the text itself, as something that is independent of the varying contexts which define the real history of its productive consumption, is an inconceivable and non-existent object.

I want to explore this view, develop some of its implications and illustrate them by considering the case of James Bond. This choice is not methodologically innocent. To speak of James Bond is to speak of a cultural phenomenon which, to be sure, has certain textual conditions of existence — in the novels of Ian Fleming, for example, and in the Bond films — but which, at the same time, exceeds those conditions of existence, spilling over into a plethora of related texts (literary and film reviews, press articles, interviews with the author, with film stars, starlets, directors and producers) and which reaches ultimately beyond the world of texts, in the functioning of Bond in everyday language, fashion systems, commodity design and so on, as a portable signifier capable of being inscribed within an almost infinite variety of contexts. Furthermore, neither Fleming's novels nor the Bond films can be regarded as 'works' in the sense that Macherey intended. The transformation of a set of texts into a body of 'works' grouped in relation to an author, a school or a tendency and attributed a certain cultural significance or status, is a labour undertaken by criticism and that, at least not yet, has not happened in relation to the set of texts which serve as the substratum of the Bond phenomenon. Nonetheless, the case of James Bond is exceptional only in the respect that its investigation more readily requires the adoption of theoretical options which have a more general applicability across the range of literary and cultural studies.

However, before delving too deeply into the case of James Bond, I should like to review the methodological status that currently is granted to the concept of the text within literary theory, and to do so by means of a historical detour through the debate between Leavis and Bateson on the nature and function of literary criticism. There can be little doubt, now as at the time, that Leavis won

this contest. He was right to insist that no amount of contextual information could provide the criteria whereby a specific interpretation of a text might be finally validated as correct. He was even more in the right to insist on criticism's active and formative role — 'to define — that is, to form — the contemporary sensibility' (Leavis, 1953, p. 178), is how he construes it — in maintaining that the 'serious critic's concern with the literature of the past is with its life in the present' (*ibid*, p. 178). This clear and open claim of an active political vocation for criticism contrasts markedly, and favourably, with Bateson's naively empiricist protest that, if the meanings of literary texts are not to be validated by referring them to their originating contexts, there 'is no alternative — *except to invent the meanings ourselves*' (Bateson, 1955, p. 320). Yet, as is widely known, Leavis consistently undercut the active, constructive and interventionist nature of his own critical practice, denying the premises on which it was based, by his own peculiar brand of empiricism, more pervasive within our critical culture than that of Bateson's and just as disabling. For Leavis, 'the text, duly pondered, will yield its meaning and value to an adequate intelligence and sensibility' (*ibid*, p. 103). The poem, he says, 'is a determinate thing; it is *there*' (p. 174); *there* with a degree of ontological force that only the use italics can convey. And all that is necessary is to '*read* it' (p. 169) — again in italics — in the 'serious sense of the verb' (p. 169). It is between these two italicizations that Leavis's familiar repression of all questions of method and theory takes place. It turns out that what is *there* — on the desk, so to speak — is not just the text as 'a determinate thing'; its meaning is also *there*, available to those who know how lo look for it, who know how to *read* in the 'serious sense of the verb'. On this matter, Bateson was undoubtedly correct. In the case of a poem, he argued, 'there is nothing *there*, nothing objectively apprehensible, expect a number of conventional black marks'. For Bateson, the text that is there — on the desk — is, in itself, merely a meaningless jumble of material notations.

Although the debate has gone beyond the terms of the exchange between Leavis and Bateson, the status of the text within literary theory, the authority that is to be claimed for it and the sort of ontological being-ness it is to be conceived as having, remained uncertain. That the text does not speak for itself may, and has been readily granted; the text of which the critic speaks and, in turn, which is allowed to speak through the critic's secondary discourse is the text-for-criticism constituted by the theoretical procedures and assumptions brought to bear on it. We know also, principally through Derrida, that the text is totally iterable; that, as a set of material notations, it may be inscribed within different contexts and that no context — including that in which it originated — can enclose it by specifying or fixing its meaning or effect for all time and in all contexts. Finally, we know that the reader's response cannot be deduced from an analysis of the formal properties of the text; that there are independent determinations bearing on the ideological and cultural formation of the reader which must be taken account of in order to analyze the history and social distribution of varying aesthetic and political responses.

In these and other ways, the earlier view of the text — according to which the text is conceived as a kind of shadow text, an ideal and metaphysical presence which, lodged behind the material surface of the text, guarantees and secures its own meaning — has been displaced. It is such a construction of the text that Leavis has in mind when he speaks of the text being *there*; a sensibility which is made manifest in the text's material properties but which can be reached only by a process of reading through these. The text is now more typically viewed as a material entity, a set of historically specific codes embodied in material notations, that is constantly inscribed within different contexts and caught up in an ever shifting set of relations with other texts such that it is productive of variable effects and meanings. Yet the earlier view is so deeply engrained in our theoretical culture that its traces can often be found even where it is under attack.

Terry Eagleton, who has constantly alluded to these problems in his recent writings, is a case in point. In his study of Walter Benjamin, he rejects the false polarity according to which the text is conceived either as 'closed' — as the guarantor of its own meaning and effects, as 'the same for everybody' — or as 'open', as 'different for everybody', merely the site at which a potentially infinite plurality of meanings meet — in favour of a view which is alert to 'the multiple destinations of the text', to 'the ways it will be constructed in particular conjunctures' (Eagleton, 1981, p. 123). In doing so, however, he takes issue with what he construes as 'that vein of scepticism now sometimes fashionable on the intellectual left, which posits the « text itself » as an unknowable *Ding-an-sich*, dissolving it into the *ensemble* of its reading conjunctures' and insists that 'the text, like any other product, exerts a certain determinacy over its modes of consumption' (*ibid*, p. 122). That seems reasonable enough and, for all practical purposes, I agree with it. Nonetheless, this particular formulation of the issue is misleading and, in some respects, theoretically disabling.

In the first place, the scepticism of which Eagleton speaks is not Kantian in nature; indeed, it's not even scepticism. No-one, at least not to my knowledge, is saying that texts do not exist, nor that a knowledge of them is impossible — although one would want to insist on the plural, on the *knowledges* produced by the rules and procedures of the bodies of theory (Marxism, psychoanalysis, semiology) brought to bear on the study of literary texts. But to contend that texts can be known only from within specific systems of knowledge is not to posit an unknowable *Ding-an-sich*, a text hidden behind the material surface of the empirically given text, somehow *there* but unreachable. To put the matter this way is to concede the ground to idealist formulations even in the process of contesting them. The point is not that the 'text itself' is unknowable but rather that the very notion of the 'text itself' is inconceivable, an impossible object.

Let me elaborate, for I accept what I think is the

main point of Eagleton's argument: namely, that the text the reader or critic has in front of him or her is encountered as a resisting force, constraining the interpretative and analytical options that may be adopted in relation to it. That's fine. But then one must ask, what sort of a thing is this text that the reader or critic has before him or her and that exerts 'a certain determinacy over its mode of consumption'? It has a determinate material form — a book on one's desk, pages covered with written marks manipulated in a socially conventionalized way. But even its material form is variable — different typefaces; hardback versus paperback editions; as a single title or as part of an anthology — and may, according to the blurb used, cover design and the way in which it is advertised be already, before it is opened, inscribed within a specific ideology of consumption. Only intellectuals read texts; most people read books, and books are different even when — because they have the same title and the same author — they may seem to be the same. Moreover, depending on the form in which the book reaches us, we encounter it as the bearer of and as, together with ourselves, inscribed within different social relations — the commercial relations of the railway bookstall, for example, or those of the pedagogic apparatus in which we find a title housed on the library shelves. What most needs to be stressed, however, is that, whatever the material form or the social context in which the text reaches the reader, it does so only as already covered by a pre-existing horizon of interpretative options, options which are encountered as limits, as a force that has to be reckoned with. As Frederic Jameson has argued, 'texts come before us as the always-already-read; we apprehend them through sedimented layers of previous interpretations, or — if the text is brand-new — through the sedimented reading habits and categories developed by those inherited interpretative traditions' (Jameson, 1981, p. 9). It is not some shadowy ideal text, a text hidden within the materiality of the text, but the text in its specific material form as inscribed within a definite set of social relations and as already covered by an accumu-

lated history of readings that, in the present, exerts a determinacy over the modes of its consumption. It is the readings already produced in relation to a text, and not some notional 'text itself', which bear upon and limit present and possible future possible readings of a text. It is for these historical and not at all for essentialist reasons that texts are encountered as a resistance.

I want to argue, then, that *texts* exist, but that *'the text'* — in the sense in which I have described it — does not; that *texts* have material effects, but that *'the text'* does not. And I want to make this point in a strong rather than a weak sense by accepting its full implications — namely, that there is *no* text behind or beyond the diverse forms in which it is materially produced, the social relations in which it is inscribed and the interpretative horizons in which it is embedded such as could, *in principle*, limit the readings that might be generated in relation to it. In maintaining this, I have three considerations in mind.

Firstly, the retention of such a conception of the text is not necessary and has no political implications for the practical conduct of criticism. Terry Eagleton asks what a 'revolutionary literary criticism' should do, and answers: 'It would dismantle the ruling concepts of « literature », reinserting « literary » texts into the whole field of cultural practices. It would strive to relate such 'cultural' practices to other forms of social activity and to transform the cultural apparatuses themselves. It would articulate its 'cultural' analyses with a consistent political intervention. It would deconstruct the received hierarchies of « literature » and transvaluate received judgements and assumptions; engage with the language and « unconscious » of literary texts, to reveal their role in the ideological construction of the subject; and mobilize such texts, if necessary by hermeneutic 'violence', in a struggle to transform those subjects within a wider political context' (*ibid*, p. 98). I think that is well put, and I agree with every word of it. But no part of this programme requires or is served by the notion of some unbreachable limits to interpretation and analysis imposed by the text in some pure condition

of it — its-selfness. Indeed, the concept of 'hermeneutic violence' would seem to speak explicitly against this. All that is required is knowledge of and respect for the available horizon of readings in which the text has previously been netted, and a politics of reading that will take up a position and measure itself in relation to those readings.

Secondly, if strictly interpreted, the attribution of any *necessarily* determining role to the text is theoretically impermissable. To assert that the text exerts a certain determinacy over the modes of its consumption must mean, when it comes to the crunch, that certain interpretations of it can be unequivocally excluded. This is what Eagleton had in mind when he argued, in another context, that whatever *Macbeth* is about, it is definitely not about Manchester United (Eagleton, 1979, p. 20). In one sense, that is true. It is inconceivable that such an interpretation could be just parachuted into the critical arena without being laughed out of court, precisely because there are no critical protocols which, at the present moment, might support it. But that's quite a different matter from ruling that, for all time and in all contexts, specific readings should be necessarily excluded. To do this would be to anticipate a history that is yet to be, an idealist pre-emption of the future in the name of critical categories that are operative today.

The third and most crucial consideration is that, from the point of view of a theory of literature that will be concerned, as Macherey put it, with the study of 'literary phenomena within social reality', an appeal to the authority of the text may serve to exclude from analysis those incrustations which have built up around the text, those contexts in which it has been inscribed by the uses to which it has been put and the interpretations to which it has been subject, where these are felt to lack any textual warrant within the horizon of any given school of criticism. Let me give this point some substance by means of a couple of examples. The reading of the Bible proposed by the so-called 'cargo cults' of Melanesia would have been inconceivable to the medieval scholastic; indeed, such readings

would be formally excluded as lacking any textual warrant — as bizarre as saying that *Macbeth* might be about Manchester United — from any point within the western Christian tradition of Biblical exegesis. Yet, viewed in the light of its conjunction with Melanesian ancestor myths and of the social relations of imperialism within which, in the Melanesian context, the text of the Bible was inscribed, the scriptural interpretations of the cargo cults make perfect sense (see, for example, Worsley, 1970). From the point of view of any history that is concerned with the effects of the Bible in the light of the varying social and material relationships in which it has been inscribed, as distinct from a religious concern to correct false readings in the light of some revealed truth allegedly lodged in the scriptures, such readings have to be included and on their own terms.

They are just as real, just as secure ontologically speaking, as any of the readings produced within the western Christian tradition. Undoubtedly, in a global perspective, these may have more weight but their ontological status is precisely the same as that of so-called 'false' or 'untutored' readings. Neither more nor less real, they too are the result of the inscription of the Bible in particular material, institutional, social and ideological relationships.

My second example is closer to home: the case of James Bond. I would imagine that if I were to argue that James Bond is 'one of the seven greatest legendary champions of Christendom' (Boyd, 1975, p. 25), you would be fairly sceptical. Yet the view has been advanced, in all seriousness, by Ann Boyd in a book — *The Devil with James Bond* — published in 1967 by the John Knox Press in America, a book that was sufficiently material in its effects to be republished in 1975 and published in a separate edition in Britain. In this study, Boyd compares Bond to a series of mythological heroes — Hercules, Perseus, St George, Christ himself — and places Fleming's novels in a literary tradition which includes Wordsworth, Ruskin, Bunyan and Spenser whilst, at the same time, articulating them — that is, connecting them to and using them as

a means of expressing and promoting an existentialist Christian theology. 'Not only does James Bond represent a modern St. George', she argues 'but the primary dragon or devil which he must battle with is that of the capital sin of our generation, the sin of sloth, the accidie which is a refusal of life and joy...' (*ibid*, p. 87). I must admit that I find this theological interpretation of Bond fairly bemusing. But there are two points to note about if. First, Boyd presents her reading as the hidden truth of the Bond novels. Her appeal is to the authority of the texts themselves. Identifying a considerable number of references to the theme of St George and the dragon in the Bond novels, she construes each of the villains (or dragons) Bond encounters as representing one of the seven deadly sins and argues that the Bond novels as a whole form a cycle in which, allegorically in the person of Bond, the Christian soul is brought face to face with and triumphs over the temptations which beset it. Boyd is even able to argue that Fleming intended the moral purpose she claims to detect in his work and interprets apparently contradictory statements of Fleming's in a way that is consistent with this view. Fleming's authoritative confession that he wrote chiefly for commercial reasons and that his primary purpose was merely to get the reader 'to turn the page' (Fleming, 1963, p. 14), she argues, must not be taken at face value but should rather be seen as an attempt by Fleming to consciously downgrade his work 'so that whatever didactic element it does contain might remain unstated, and, therefore, by being well-dramatized, be able to insinuate itself through art...' (*ibid*, p. 40). In short, what is offered is a reading of the Bond novels which, given its own critical protocols and concerns, is perfectly consistent. Of course, that is no reason to accept it. It both can and should be opposed, but such opposition can only take the form of a *different* reading of the texts produced by *different* critical concerns, protocols and procedures rather than the form of an appeal to the authority of the texts themselves. The second reason why Boyd's study is fascinating is that it offers a tantalizing glimpse into the

inscription of literary texts into religious rather that secular pedagogic apparatuses, a glimpse into the radical heterogeneity of the social destinies of literary texts. No matter how much it might wish to 'correct' such 'misuses', academic criticism must recognize its own relative and, from a social perspective, marginal place alongside such competing critical discourses and the different social and material inscriptions of literary texts of which they form a part.

That's a longer theoretical detour than I had intended, but it was necessary to establish the ground rules for what follows. Let me summarize the two points I have been most concerned to make. The first is that taking account of, as Macherey puts it, the incrustation that have been built up around a text entails recognizing that, except as a methodological fiction, that text does not have any existence that is separable from such incrustations. The status of the text within such an approach is that of an absence which we must continue to speak about but which, contrary to Leavis, is never *there*; all that is *there* are texts, not 'the text', and the diverse relations in which they are inscribed. Secondly, and as a consequence, to study the connection between literary phenomena and social processes requires that everything that has been said or written about a text, every context in which it has been inscribed by the uses to which it has been put, should, in principle, be regarded as relevant to and assigned methodological parity within such a study. There is no reading, no use or inscription of a text which may be left out of such an account because, from a particular critical standpoint, it is regarded as 'false' or 'untutored'. 'Untutored' readings are just as real and material in their effects as 'tutored' ones and may, indeed, be considerably more influential.

The reason I find the case of James Bond so intriguing from a methodological point of view is that little headway can be made in relation to it without taking steps of this

kind. The scale of Bond's popularity — international in scope and continuously felt now for over a quarter of a century — is well enough known not to require further elaboration here. Suffice it to say that, in the case of the figure of James Bond, we have to deal with a cultural phenomenon which, whilst having a point of origination in the novels of Ian Fleming in the 1950s, is by no means limited in the range of meanings it has signified to those originating texts or their social context. Rather, the figure of Bond exists as a mobile signifier, located at the points of intersection and within the circulations between a vast and expanding body of texts, which is productive of meaning independently of those originating texts — even for those who have never read them. Two points follow from this. The first is that none of the texts which serve as the supports for the ideological figure of James Bond can be conceived as privileged in relation to the others or, more accurately — as I shall argue shortly — that different sets of texts are privileged, but in different ways and at different points in the construction and circulation of the figure of Bond. The second is that there is no way of reading, nor any point in trying to read, the original novels as if this could be done independently of the successive incrustations which have built around them. These overwhelm the novels and, in ways we can't avoid, activate our reading of them.

Let me illustrate both points by considering some of the principal textual supports of the figure of Bond and the shifting order of the relations between them. Most obviously, there are the written texts in which Bond functions as a fictional character. These constitute a set of texts which exceed the terms of analysis proposed by author-based schools of criticism. They include the novels and short stories written by Fleming, although one of the novels which bears Fleming's name — *The Spy Who Loved Me* — was not written by him. There are also several Bond novels which bear the names of other writers — Robert Markham (alias Kingsley Amis), Christopher Wood and John Gardner, for example. These considerations are of

more than ordinary significance since, in all cases, Fleming's included, the name of Bond dwarfs that of the author in terms of cover design and lay-out. In terms of the market, the Bond novels are grouped together as 'texts of Bond' — public signs of their place within a wider cultural phenomena — in a way that defies their separation and treatment as discrete sets of authored texts.

Even if we restrict our attention to the texts which bear the name of Fleming, however, the material history of their publication reveals, in the case of each novel, not a single text but an incredible heterogeneity of texts, each inscribed in different social and ideological relations by different publishing apparatuses. Cover designs — one of the primary means whereby literary texts are assigned a place in relation to other such texts, subjected to a preliminary ideological definition and inserted into available aesthetic categories — are of interest here. The covers of the first edition hardback imprints of Fleming's Bond novels typically consisted of a collection of objects associated with either espionage or luxurious living, or both, and connoted the category of superior quality, 'literary' spy fiction — and all the evidence from reviews in the literary weeklies of the time suggest that this is precisely how they were regarded; as, in the terms Fleming later used to define them, 'thrillers designed to be read as literature' (Fleming, 1963, p. 14). Today, the design on all the paperback editions of Fleming's novels consists of one or more exotically but scantily clothed women aside, astride or otherwise placed in relation to a large golden gun — a cover which activates the texts in a specific way in cueing, as their central concern, that of the phallic subordination of women.

Anthologies and serializations of the Bond novels bear witness to a number of more specific localized inscriptions of the Bond novels. These, or parts of them, have been anthologized in collections of spy stories, gambling stories, golf stories, card stories, tales of erotica travel stories and crime stories suggesting that, outside the academy, the categories in relation to which reading is defined are more

fluid and varied than the genre divisions posited by literary theory. Of the many serializations of the Bond novels, the contrast between the serialization of *From Russia with Love* by the *Daily Express* in 1957 and the serializations, in *Playboy*, of *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (1963), *You Only Live Twice* (1964) and *The Man with the Golden Gun* (1965), is instructive. In the former case, not surprisingly given the nature of the *Daily Express* and the political concerns of the period, Bond — and the Express focused on Bond rather than Fleming — was presented unequivocally as a hero of the Cold War. *Playboy*, by contrast, sought to aestheticize the Bond novels — each of the serializations was accompanied by reproductions of oil paintings depicting scenes in the novels; these were specially commissioned for the occasion and were signed by the artist — and attempted to install Fleming, via a series of interviews with him and articles written by him, in a position of some importance within *Playboy's* pantheon of modern intellectuals by establishing him as the author of a body of 'works' of implied literary merit. It needs to be added that these serializations were usually accompanied by photo-essays of 'The Nudest Miss Bond' type, their dominant function thus being that of serving as a 'pre-text' and as a means of providing an aesthetic and intellectual justification for *Playboy*'s monthly diet of male voyeurism.

What of the relationship between the Bond novels and the films? The novels are undoubtedly privileged in the sense that, historically, they came first.

They function as a textual source for the films, and as legitimators — both culturally (an authentic Bond film must, however loosely, be based on a Fleming source) and legally (Eon Productions owns the film rights to all the Bond titles except for *Casino Royale*). From this point of view, the films are secondary and derivative in relation to the novels. From the point of view of their role in the construction and circulation of the figure of Bond, however, the films are clearly privileged in relation to the novels. This is not merely to say that many more people have seen the films than have read the novels; rather more important

is the fact that, for most readers, the films came first and the novels second. The graph of sales figures for the Bond novels shows that, in publishing terms, they were relatively small beer until the release of the first film, *Dr No*, in 1961. Sales in Britain rose from slightly above the 300.000 mark in 1960 to 670.000 in 1961, nearly 1½ million in 1962, 4½ million in 1963, nearly 6 million in 1964 and nearly 7 million in 1965. It is clear from this that, for the vast majority of readers, the films constitute a determination which must be taken into account in assessing their relationship to and mode of reading the novels. The figure of Bond established by Sean Connery's portrayal, for example, is likely to have cancelled out and overriden other minds-eye images of the person of the hero that might earlier have been constructed in relation to the novels. We have Fleming's word for it that this was true even for the author. 'Not quite the idea I had of Bond', he said of Connery, 'but he would be if I wrote the books over again' (cited in Passingham, 1975, p. 26). In these and other ways, the films have effected selective activations of the novels in a way that, owing to their preponderant cultural weight, cannot be undone so as to yield an unfettered access to those texts. These now reach us as already 'overcoded' by the films.

And we can't stop at the films. The range of texts that refer either to the novels or the films and which take up a position in the cultural space they map out is simply massive. Interviews with Fleming and Connery have played a particularly important role in the construction, elaboration and ideological articulation of the figure of Bond as their biographies have been transformed into exemplary lives, welded with the fictional character of the hero in a composite identity located at the intersection of diverse ideological themes.

In a *Playboy* interview with Connery, the juxtaposition of Connery's own 'rags to riches' history with his attitudes towards the figure of Bond results in the construction of a composite Bond/Connery figure which effectively articulates ideologies of individualism and self-reliance. Asked

what qualities he most admires in Bond, Connery replied: 'His self-containment, his powers of decision, his ability to carry on through to the end and to survive. There's so much social welfare today that people have forgotten what it is like to make their own decisions rather than to leave them to others' (*Playboy*, November 1965, p. 76). Similarly, the real biographies of the actresses who have played leading roles in the Bond film have been projected as real life testimonies to the ideological subordination of women to men effected by the relations between Bond and the heroine in the films. When ITV bought the television rights to the Bond films in 1975, the TV Times ran a feature in which actresses who had played opposite Connery were invoked — either in the form of their careers (they had nearly all 'settled down' to marriage and motherhood) or in their comments on women's place — to underwrite the fictional representations of the films in this way. Here is what Claudine Auger, who played Domino Vitali in *Thunderball*, had to say: 'I think a woman needs to feel the strength of a man to acknowledge his superiority. The fact that young men today are not so strong is basically the fault of women who dress to look like boys. A woman should always keep her femininity. I like the Bond girls because they are free, make love easily and they are on equal terms when it comes to intelligence. But they are all essentially feminine. I married an older man because he knew what life was all about. And he married me because I have a feminine body. I would not have put on the trousers unless I was going horse-riding or hunting' (Passingham, 1975, p. 27). Finally, mention must be made of the countless photo-essays of 'The Nudest Miss Bond' type which have appeared, with predictable regularity, in men's magazines every time a new Bond film has been released. For the male viewer, these complete the scopophilic drive of the films in placing him, at last, in a position of complete and total specular dominance, the position of Bond himself, as the full nudity of the Bond girls — never shown in the films — is at last revealed 'for his eyes only'.

I have examined several hundred sources of this type

as part of a study which aims, in Macherey's terms, to analyze 'literary phenomena within social reality' or, as I would prefer to put it, to insert the study of texts within the study of social processes. This has entailed attempting to assess the ideological effectivity that might be attributed to the Bond novels and films in the light of their changing and mobile inscription within the shifting ideological relationships between rulers and ruled in Britain since the late 1950s. A purely textual analysis of the novels and films would clearly be radically insufficient in relation to such a concern. Nor is it enough, if debate is to advance beyond the unacceptable polar views of the text as either totally closed, 'the same for everybody', or as totally open, 'different for everybody', merely to note — as an afterword to the continuing and unmodified practices of textual criticism — that, of course, interpretations may vary. If we are to acquire a concrete knowledge of the varying social destinies of texts, rather than merely gesturing to their existence, a knowledge of the determinations or, as I would prefer to regard them, the *activations* which bear most closely on the ideological and social relations in which the acts of reading and viewing are inscribed is necessary.

I do not want, here, to summarise the results of this study except to say that the activations of the Bond films and novels do form identifiable clusters — there is no infinite plurality of readings to contend with here — and that the configuration of the relations between them, whilst attesting to a persistent heterogeneity of contexts into which the texts have been inscribed, also suggest shifts over time in the dominant patterning of such inscriptions. The Cold War inscription that was dominant in the 1950s, for example, rapidly gave way, in the early 1960s, to Bond's inscription within a new discourse of modernity as the most prominent fictional embodiment of a new image of cultural and political leadership constructed by the media's projection of a rising generation of public figures as a new talent-based, classless, untraditional, anti-Establishment elite destined to lead Britain into the modern age — which, in case you haven't noticed, hasn't happened.

However, rather than dwell on such considerations, I would rather conclude by returning to the more general theoretical issues I broached in my opening remarks by extrapolating the methodological implications of a study of the type I have outlined. Before doing so, and in case I am misunderstood, I should like to make it clear that I am not arguing against textual analysis, even of the most minute and painstaking kind, provided that it recognizes itself for what it is: an intervention within the politics of reading, a particular activation of the text which aims to inscribe it within social and ideological relations of a particular kind. Nor am I arguing against what might loosely be referred to as contextual criticism, the reinsertion of the text in its originating conditions of production and consumption, as this forms a vital and necessary ingredient within any Marxist analysis of literary phenomena. But I am arguing that neither of these approaches can come to terms with the equally real, equally material and perhaps more socially consequential issues posed by what I have elsewhere called 'the living life of the text' (Bennett, 1982) — the real history of its activation. Once this perspective is admitted, two consequences follow. Firstly, the concept of the 'text itself' ceases to be necessary — it's not what one is interested in — and, furthermore, is revealed as an impossible object: the text is never available for analysis except in the context of its activations. Secondly, different protocols of reading are required such that the text and its activations are accorded methodological parity, parts of a mobile system of circulating signifiers, the analysis moving between them to construct a knowledge of the text in the light of its activations, a knowledge not of 'the text in itself', but of the activated text, the only existing, concrete social entity that is capable of giving rise to any effects whatsoever. This means taking account of marginal as well as dominant activations of the text. There is, for example, in the case of Fleming's novels, a fascinating history — contained mostly in the columns of *The Spectator*, the *London Magazine* and the like — of an attempted middle-brow literarization of Fleming. This consisted in the

identification of Bond's mythic prototypes and in the construction of a series of allusions, within Fleming's novels, to the literary canon — comparing Dr No's fortress to Kafka's castle and Bond to K., for example. The effect of such readings, as Eco suggested in his study of the Bond novels, is to produce a 'knowing reader' in which pleasure is aesthetised and the possession of cultural capital comfortingly confirmed in the superior vantage point it affords in relation to vulgar readings which fail to see through the surface violence and sexuality of the novels to their redeeming literary and mythic antecedents (see Eco, 1966).

I should like, finally, to point out that the limb I seem to have climbed out onto does have some support in the writings of Benjamin and Adorno.

Although they interpreted its consequences differently, Benjamin and Adorno agreed that the development of techniques of mass reproduction, detaching the work of art from the aura which adhered to it by virtue of its singular existence, radically and lastingly altered its conditions of existence by conferring on it a radical iterability such that its meaning could not be specified in advance of the contexts in which it might be inserted. It's worth remarking that they felt the same about books too, so much so that, for Adorno, the relations in which books are inscribed by the conditions of commodity production and dissemination overwhelm the 'texts' they contained. 'In a world where books have long lost all likeness to books', he argued, 'the real book can no longer be one. If the invention of the printing press inaugurated the bourgeois era, the time is at hand for its repeal by the mimeograph, the only fitting, the unobtrusive means of dissemination' (Adorno, 1974, p. 21). Whilst I am not tempted to embrace Adorno's radical pessimism, it is important to remember that reproducibility, and therefore iterability, is a condition of the existence of books. In view of this, I would argue that, in place of 'the text', literary theory would do well to concern itself with the material history of books.

REFERENCES

1. Adorno, T. W., *Minima Moralia* (London, New Left Books, 1974).
2. Bateson, F. W., 'The Responsible Critic', *Scrutiny*, summer 1953.
3. Bennett, T., 'Text and History', in Widdowson, P. (ed.), *Re-Reading English* (London, Methuen, 1982).
4. Boyd, A. S., *The Devil with James Bond* (Westport, Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 1975).
5. Eagleton, T., *Walter Benjamin, or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (London, New Left Books, 1981).
6. Eagleton, T., 'What is Literature?', *New Statesman*, 6 July, 1979.
7. Eco, U. 'The Narrative Structure in Fleming', in Eco, U., and Del Buono, O. (eds.), *The Bond Affair* (London, MacDonald, 1966).
8. Fleming, I., 'How to write a Thriller', *Books and Bookmen*, May, 1963.
9. Jameson, F., *The Political Unconscious* (London, Methuen, 1981).
10. Leavis, F. R., 'The Responsible Critic: or the Function of Criticism at any Time', *Scrutiny*, Spring 1953.
11. Macherey, P. (interview), *Red Letters*, no. 5, summer 1977.
12. Passingham, K., 'The Gorgeous Girls of James Bond', *TV Times*, 23 Oct., 1975.
13. *Playboy*, November 1965; interview with Sean Connery.
14. Worsley, P., *The Trumpet Shall Sound: A Study of 'Cargo' Cults in Melanesia* (London, Paladin, 1970).

THE WORDS OF MERCURY AND THE SONGS OF APOLLO: THE STATUS OF THE LINGUISTIC SIGN IN *LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST* AND OTHER SHAKESPEAREAN COMEDIES

di
Keir Elam

PART II

iv) « *The Songs of Apollo* »: Orphic Effects

The association of the pastoral aspects of certain comedies with the mystical conception of language espoused by the syncretizing Platonists may appear less arbitrary if considered under the aegis of what, in the Renaissance, was held to be one of the profoundest and most ancient of religious cults, namely the Orphic. The revival of the myth of Orpheus as wonder-working poet and prophet was inaugurated, at the end of the fifteenth century, in Neoplatonic philosophy and on the stage contemporarily, i.e. in the writings of Ficino and Pico — notably the latter's *Conclusiones de modo intelligendi hymnos Orphei* — and in what is generally classified as the first pastoral drama (its author himself being a member of Ficino's Florentine Academy), Politian's *Orfeo*.

For the Academic Platonists, Orpheus's claim to reverence lay principally in his position within a long line of so-called *prisci theologi* — ancient teachers of divine mysteries — that began with Adam and included Moses, Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, Pythagoras, Plato and, finally, Christ himself (see Walker 1953: 105). The particularly elevated status attributed to Orpheus was due in

part to his supposed role as teacher of Pythagoras, who in turn passed the secret doctrines on to the divine Plato. The Orphic didactic method, termed by Pico the *poetica theologia*, consisted in encoding the mysteries in apparently trivial hymns and love poems, in order to render them comprehensible to initiates alone: « In the manner of the ancient theologians, Orpheus interwove the mysteries of his doctrines with the texture of fables, and covered them with a poetic veil, in order that anyone reading his hymns would think them to contain nothing but the sheerest tales and trifles » (Pico, *On the Dignity of Man*; see Wind 1967: 18). It was from this immanence within Orphic poetry of divine verities, allegorically disguised, that according to Pico's commentary on the *Orphica*, its legendary miraculous powers derived. And more specifically, it was the presence of poetically occulted but transcendentally significant names that guaranteed the hymns' sway over nature and supernature: « The names of those Gods of whom Orpheus doth sing are not of deceiving devils ... but they are the names of natural and divine virtues » (Pico, Third Orphic Conclusion, quoted by Sir Walter Raleigh, *The History of the World*; see Walker 1953: 12).

The *Orphica* — like the *Hermetica* and the Cabala, to which it was married by the syncretists — appeared to endorse not merely a mystical but a directly magical conception of language, or of a language duly adapted to music and imbued with appropriate spiritual and theological force: « In natural magic », claims Pico in another Orphic Conclusion, « nothing is more efficacious than the Hymns of Orpheus if there be applied to them suitable music, and disposition of the soul, and the other circumstances known to the wise » (Quoted in Yates 1964: 78). The prospect offered is that of a triumphant *vis verborum* of the kind which Politian's Orpheus — like Ovid's before him — is shown exercizing both over terrestrial Nature and over the inhabitants of Hades. And the temptation to carry this doctrine to its logical « practical » conclusion, i.e. the lyre-accompanied incantation of Orphic hymns designed to secure marvellous « effects », was not resisted by Ficino, Pico and their fol-

lowers, so much so that French Platonic academies such as Baïf's *Académie de Poésie et de Musique* were officially dedicated to the Orphic project of an effect-producing marriage of words and music (see Yates 1947).

Orpheus's parallel literary and dramatic career confirms this mystical revival. Politian's Orpheus is the archetype of those shepherd-poets — gifted with a passionate eloquence that moves nature, human and other wise — who people the pastoral drama (« I have seen the rocks and the waves reply to my complaints from pity », announces Tasso's Aminta). And at the same time, the Orphic « effects » are upheld by poetic and rhetorical legislators throughout the sixteenth century as the highest and most glorious ideal to which the verbal arts can aspire: « the Oratour may leade his hearers which way he list, and draw them to what affection he will ... » (Peacham 1577: III, 5; see also, among English commentators, Wilson, Sidney and Puttenham on the Orphic model).

The Orphic revival, then, brought together a literary-dramatic, a musical poetic and a philosophical-mystical component under the all-comprehending auspices of a magical conception of the sign. Each of the three direct references to the Orphic myth in Shakespeare's comedies takes up one of these aspects. The dramatic and theatrical potential of Orpheus's violent death — as dramatized, for example, in Politian's play — is considered and dismissed by Theseus in *MND*, on the grounds that the topic is already outworn (thus indicating the extent of the existing dramatic heritage):

> *The.* (Reads) 'The riot of the tipsy Bacchanals,
> Tearing the Thracian singer in their rage'?
> That is an old device, and it was play'd
> When I from Thebes came last a conqueror. (5.1.48-51).

On the other hand, the still fresh potency of Orphic poetry, *sub specie musicae*, is eagerly recommended to the Duke of Verona in *TG*:

> *Proteus.* ... and frame some feeling line
> That may discover such integrity.

> For Orpheus' lute was strung with poets' sinews,
> Whose golden touch could soften steel and stones,
> Make tigers tame, and huge Leviathan
> Forsake unsounded deeps, to dance on sands. (3.2.75-80).

Proteus's advice — however bizarrely baroque its central musical metaphor — is in effect the stock rhapsody on the heady powers awaiting the suitably passionate poet-lover. A good deal more sober in tone, but richer in its doctrinal implications, is Lorenzo's reflection on the powers of music in the final scene of *MV*:

> *Lor.* ... therefore the poet
> Did feign that Orpheus drew trees, stones and floods,
> Since naught so stockish, hard and full of rage,
> But music for the time doth change his nature. (5.1.79 ff.).

What is suggestive about Lorenzo's otherwise unsurprising allusion is the quasi-philosophical context in which it occurs, the lunary meditation on universal harmony and the music of the spheres that represents the most unambiguously Platonic essay in Shakespeare:

> There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
> But in his motion like an angel sings,
> Still quiring to the young-ey'd cherubins;
> Such harmony is in immortal souls ... (5.1.60 ff.).

Now, apart from Plato's *Republic* itself, the most authoritative antecedent to Lorenzo's universal system of harmonious correspondences (rendered thoroughly familiar in the sixteenth century through innumerable rehashes) is Pico's *Heptaplus*, with its doctrine of sympathetic « vertical » relations between worlds: « Everything which is in the totality of worlds is also in each of them and none of them contains anything which is not to be found in each of the others ... whatever exists in the inferior world will also be found in the superior world, but in a more elevated form » (Garin ed. 1942: 188; quoted in Gombrich 1948: 168). And it is this doctrine which lies — as Gombrich has shown — behind the Neoplatonic conception of the sign:

« It is by virtue of this interrelated harmony that one object can signify another and that by contemplating a visible thing we can gain insight into the invisible world » (1948: 167-8). More specifically, it is such a « paradigmatic » system of sympathies that explains the Orphic effects, the music of the hymns being in harmony with that of the heavenly bodies and their poetry containing the disguised names of celestial virtues; the principle of trans-world harmony thus incorporates « a theory of language according to which the word is considered as a magical symbol that not only denotes objects but also exerts powers connected with those objects, because it contains their substance or essence. As in any kind of magic, all things are sympathetically linked, in vertical series through many levels from god to material things, and in horizontal ones on any given level » (Walker 1954: 231).

In the light of this only too familiar dogmatic heritage, Lorenzo's exposition takes on a pleasingly self-referential complexity. His reflection on the « effects » of Orphic music within a system of *harmonia universale* is itself accompanied, in best Orphic fashion, by harmonious music. It might thus be seen to imply an optimism regarding its own potential sway — the « enchanting » power of the very scene in progress — over the present theatrical auditors, however « stockish, hard, and full of rage » they may prove. Of course, this disguised declaration of dramaturgical self-confidence is not without its dangers, especially that of a painfully ironic distance (of a kind presumably experienced by the zealous Florentine and Parisian scholar-singers) between Orphic dogma and practice. Happily, the history of the comedy's theatrical fortunes confirms Lorenzo's optimism instead.

Neither in its musical nor in its linguistic guise is the myth — evidently enchanting in itself — of a nature- taming efficacy restricted to these direct Orphic allusions in the plays. While the doctrine of the sway of music over the passions receives its classic statement in the opening speech of *TN*, and a more burlesque expression in Jaques's exaggerated melancholic *furore* at the first suspicion of a note

in *AYLI*, it is the complementary possibility of a poetic — or simply locutionary — form of persuasive *vis* that is posed in *LLL* and *AWW*.

The chimera of an irresistible verbal magnetism is constantly present and fatally alluring to the academicians in *LLL*. The motive first appears in the ladies' initial eulogies to the scholars, prior to the latter's precipitous fall from grace. Rosaline's awe at Berowne's discursive charisma is particularly striking:

> ... Which his fair tongue (conceit's expositor)
> Delivers in such apt and gracious words
> That aged ears play truant at his tales,
> And younger hearings are quite ravished;
> So sweet and voluble is his discourse. (2.1.72-6).

It might be noted that the hyperbolic terms of Rosaline's praise are almost exactly those adopted by Sidney in his account of the poet's supreme and quasi-musical gift for persuasion through delight (where the Orphic, as well as the Horatian, paradigm is implicit): « he cometh to you with words set in delightful proportion, either enchanted with, or prepared for, the well enchanting skill of music; and with a tale forsooth he cometh unto you, with a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner » (1965 ed.: 113).

Berowne himself adapts the topic to characterize Boyet's charm with the ladies, attributing to him, somewhat sardonically, a curious form of flirtatious and infallible *lingua adamica* (musical to boot):

> This gallant pins the wenches on his sleeve;
> Had he been Adam, he had tempted Eve.
> A' can carve too, and lisp: ...
> nay, he can sing
> A mean most meanly, and, in ushering,
> Mend him who can: the ladies call him sweet; (5.2.321-9).

As for Armado — who is always promising marvellous locutionary feats (« I will tell thee wonders », etc.) — Navarre's metadiscursive sketch of him adjusts the model

still further; here we have Orpheus as Narcissus, at once divine source and transported receiver of his own harmonious verbal flow:

> A man in all the world's new fashion planted,
> That hath a mint of phrases in his brain;
> One who the music of his own vain tongue
> Doth ravish like enchanting harmony; (1.1.163-6).

If such notional « effects » seem to take us far from the supposed « theological » import of Orphic magic, nonetheless the more solemn mythological and semantic underpinnings of the cult do emerge in the comedy, namely in Berowne's spectacular metaphysical manifesto in 4.3. In the course of his impassioned and elaborate exhortation to his fellow-scholars in favour of Eros, Berowne produces a remarkably authoritative excursus on the inspirational sources of « divine » poetic eloquence:

> Love's tongue proves dainty Bacchus gross in taste.
> For valour, is not Love a Hercules,
> Still climbing trees in the Hesperides?
> Subtle as Sphinx, as sweet and musical
> As bright Apollo's lute, strung with his hair;
> And when Love speaks, the voice of all the gods
> Make heaven drowsy with the harmony.
> Never durst poet touch a pen to write
> Until his ink were temper'd with Love's sighs;
> O! then his lines would ravish savage ears,
> And plant in tyrants mild humility. (4.3.335-345).

Berowne's equating of the poetic with the erotic in the production — under the auspices of Apollonian music — of heaven-moving effects, has a firm enough basis in the tenets of the *prisca theologia*. Orpheus was upheld as the recipient of the divine Apollonian lyre, and indeed, in one tradition, as the son of Apollo himself (see Guthrie 1935: 27). The high standing among the theologians that Ficino attributed to him depended in part on his supposed embodiment of all four of the Platonic *furori* — the poetic, the Bacchic, the erotic (all present in Berowne's exposition), together with the prophetic (see Walker 1953: 100). As

Berowne suggests, however, it is Eros that rules over Orphic poetry, dedicated as it is to this the oldest of gods. Berowne's erotic poetics are thus doctrinally impeccable: « love », as Ficino states in his commentary on the *Symposium*, « is the Ruler of the Arts. Artists seek after and care for nothing but love » (1944 ed.: 150). What Berowne is proposing, therefore, is a cultivation of language under Eros that is at once an Orphic cult and a Herculean task, the very « love's labour » of the title; and this further allusion in his mythological *mélange* is perfectly coherent with the rest, one of Hercules's more memorable achievements having been precisely the Orpheus-like linking of his hearers « together by the eares in a chaine, to draw them and leade them euen as he listed. For his witte was so greate, his tongue so eloquente, and his experience suche, that ... euerye one was ... driuen to do that whiche he woulde » (Wilson 1553: Aii[r]).

In the wake of Berowne's eruditely mystical, or at least mystifying, performance (« Berowne would like », as Richard Cody puts it, « to be taken for an adept in poetic theology » (1969: 116)), Eros is officially sanctified as patron of the scholars' poetic and rhetorical labours (« *King*. Saint Cupid then! », a war-cry which is ironically echoed later by the Princess: « Saint Denis to Saint Cupid! » (5.2.87)). And as Berowne's earlier « erotic » monologue suggests, the most salient characteristic of Cupid as ruler over poetic language is his legendary blindness:

> This wimpled, whining, purblind, wayward boy,
> This signor junior, giant-dwarf, dan Cupid;
> Regent of love rhymes, lord of folded arms ... (3.1.174 ff.).

This again is perfectly in keeping with Berowne's ostentatiously advertized Orphic programme. The « mystery » of Blind Cupid was central to Neoplatonic Orphism, and indeed represented one of the most widely canvassed objects of the Platonists' more ardent philosophical speculations: « Love unites the intelligible intellect to the first and secret beauty by a certain life which is better than intelligence. The theologian of the Greeks [Orpheus] himself therefore

calls this love blind » (Ficino, quoting Proclus, *Opera*, 1562 ed.: 1908; see Wind 1967: 57). The putative profundity of the mystery lies in the paradox whereby the very blindness of Cupid assists the Platonic lover in reaching a more intense vision or insight: « It adds a precious seeing », as Berowne puts it (4.3.329). Erotic blindness, in going « beyond » the intellect permits the Orphic initiate by « closing the eyes of the soul, after this manner to become established in the unknown and occult unity of beings » (Proclus, transl. Taylor 1787: I, 79). As Edgar Wind has pointed out, « a mocking echo of the mystic phraseology » of this dogma is found in *MND*:

> Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind;
> And therefore is wing'd Cupid painted blind. (1.1.234-5).

In brief, Berowne's thesis is that the scholars' surrender to Eros amounts to anything but a renunciation of their original « occult » Academic aims; on the contrary, it represents a far profounder commitment to the cultivation of power-enhancing philosophy, in the form of the mystery of Blind Love. What changes is the linguistic field of the labours: no longer Navarre's abstruse texts but the ardent poetry and *amour courtois* of the Platonic lover, with, as their prize, a god-like eloquential efficacy. So much for the theory. The problem is, of course, that the amorous blindness governing the lords and their language is anything but the insight-bestowing and super-intellectual force recommended by Ficino, just as in practice their version of Orphism is banal sentimental compliment. And the result is the inevitable and humiliating defeat of their effect-seeking, the « loss » of their amorous labours which the play's title announces. As an ironical underlining of the debacle, the men are forced to recognize that any « effects » being wrought are those produced by the unravished ladies themselves and their ready wit:

> *Ber.* Here stand I, lady, dart thy skill at me;
> Bruise me with scorn, confound me with a flout,
> Thrust thy sharp wit quite through my ignorance
> Cut me to pieces with thy keen conceit. (5.2.396 ff.).

But then Orpheus's own end was scarcely more enviable.

In *AWW* the topic of the wonderfully gifted speaker able, in Samuel Daniel's words, to « moove, delight and sway the affections of men in what Scythian sorte soever [his speech] be disposed or uttered » (1925 ed.: 11-12), is closely related to the comedy's central thematic opposition between the old age and the new. Bertram's father, representative *par excellence* of the previous and glorious generation, is characterized in the King of France's reminiscence as, above all, a coercively imposing talker:

> Such a man
> Might be a copy to these younger times;
> Which, followed well, would demonstrate them now
> But goers backward. ...
> Would I were with him! He would always say —
> Methinks I hear him now; his plausive words
> He scatter'd not in ears, but grafted them
> To grow there and to bear — ... (1.2.45-55).

The implication is that this « grafting » power of persuasion has been lost along with the moral and cultural attributes of a past which, like all mythical golden ages, is recalled as an era of miraculous happenings. Lafew complains at the repudiation by the degenerate present of this old magic: « They say miracles are past; and we have our philosophical persons to make modern and familiar things supernatural and causeless ... » (2.3.1 ff.). It is, however, the very combination of magical powers with a startlingly « plausive » eloquence that survives in Helena, embodiment of the older values. And that these two aspects of Helena's inheritance are intimately linked is suggested in her first encounter with the King; it is, indeed, her attempt to convince him that she is the authentic recipient of her father's magical knowledge (« On's bed of death / Many receipts he gave me ... ») that first reveals her similarly quasi-supernatural verbal potency:

> *King.* Methinks in thee some blessed spirit doth speak
> His powerful sound within an organ weak;

> And what impossibility would slay
> In common sense, sense saves another way. (2.1.174-7).

Thereafter, the twin effects of Helena's magic — the medicinal and the rhetorical — unfold in parallel fashion. If her inherited healing powers are triumphantly affirmed in the King's immediate recovery, her old-world speaking powers are repeatedly confirmed by the auditors she compels to attend and respond:

> *Countess*: Ah, what sharp stings are in her mildest words! (3.4.18);
> *Lafew*: He lost a wife
> ... Whose words all ears took captive;
> Whose dear perfection hearts that scorn'd to serve
> Humbly call'd mistress. (5.3.15-19).

And while the comedy's magical *dea ex machina* dénoument is perceived immediately as a piece of visual conjuring (« *King.* Is there no exorcist / Beguiles the truer office of mine eyes? » (5.3.298-9), it is at the same time the victorious culmination of Helena's entire verbal campaign, the final effect of her persuasiveness:

> *Hel.* Will you be mine now you are doubly won?
> *Ber.* ... I'll love her dearly, ever, ever dearly ... (5.3.307-310).

In Shakespearean comedy, the miraculous word is wielded by Eurydice.

v) « *The Words of Mercury* »: *Hermetic Mysteries*

The text of *LLL*, as is only too well known, bears an enigmatic tag which in the 1598 Quarto appears to be a post-dramatic suffix, while in the 1623 Folio it is attributed to Armado as the play's closing statement: « The words of Mercury are harsh after the songs of Apollo ». Whatever its textual status, the motto has attracted a deal of attention over the years. It is usual, and probably logical, to read it as a comment on what has gone before, perhaps a summary of the play's metalinguistic moral. It can hardly

be said, however, that any very precise *object*-language or languages have been identified, giving more than a vague sense to the Apollonian « songs » or the harsh Mercurial « words » of the tag, whether the two terms be in opposition or in conjunction.

Now, « the songs of Apollo » seems a perfectly appertinent title or congruent epitheton for that optimistic Orphism which, as we have seen and albeit parodically, runs throughout the comedy as it ran throughout the Renaissance, since incantation accompanied by the Apollonian lyre was its purest and most literal expression. In this sense the second term in the motto might be understood as referring not to any actual songs in the comedy (there is only one, and that by way of a closing ceremony), but rather to all the would-be enchanting linguistic productions with which the play is replete.

As for the other presumably presiding linguistic deity and his harsh words, E. K. Chambers confidently denies his pertinence to the text proper: « Mercury has nothing to do with what precedes » (1930, Vol. I: 338). This judgment has been contested more recently by Anne Barton (1978) and J. M. Nosworthy (1979), both of whom, surely correctly, identify Mercury with the messenger Marcade, who reports the death of the King of France, thereby interrupting the reigning « Apollonian » festivities. Nevertheless, it might be objected that this does not fully answer Chambers's dismissal of the god and his relevance to the work, since his « what precedes » is presumably intended to refer to the play as a whole, and not merely to its ending. The issue, then, is whether it is possible to trace any more consistent or persistent aspects of the play and its language attributable to the patronage of Mercury, lending weight to Marcade's brief appearance and preciser significance to the metalanguage of the tag.

It is the comedy's « Academic » exordium — as with many of the semantic questions at issue — which provides the first hint of a definite « Mercurial » strain in the rhetorical proceedings. King Ferdinand, in inaugurating his Platonical garden, issues a hyperbolic pledge of ambiguous

referentiality: « Navarre shall be the wonder of the world ». (1.1.12) The grammatical subject of the King's brag may be understood either topographically, i.e. referring to the court that is about to gain international fame, or personally, referring narcissistically to the speaker himself, by means of the self-nomination device found frequently in Shakespeare (and baptized by Viswanathan « illeism with a difference » (1969)). This second and apparently less plausible reading is reinforced by a passage from Henry Helmes's Gray's Inn masque *Gesta Grayorum* (1594) — probable source of the play's Muscovite episode (see Bullough 1957, Vol. 1: 431-2) — which Navarre's boast and its context echo quite distinctly; in the passage in question the protagonist Prince Henry of Purpoole is advised by a counsellor to set up « a spacious, wonderful Garden » in which he can devote himself entirely to the study of philosophy: « Then when your Excellency shall have added depth of knowledge to the fierceness of spirits, and greatness of your Power, then indeed you shall lay a *Trismegistus*; and then, when all other Miracles and Wonders shall cease, by reason that you shall have discovered their natural Causes, you shall be left the only Miracle and *Wonder of the World* » (1688 ed.: 35; my italics).

The parallels between the two situations of discourse are quite extensive and highly suggestive, despite the fact that in *LLL* it is the King himself who has to exhort his followers to subscribe to his project. The two academic programmes as such, comprising an austere devotion to « living philosophy » in an enclosed garden context, are all but identical. And the end in view would also appear to be the same; Purpoole's counsellor advises the Prince to search out the hidden « natural causes » of things, while Navarre proposes a course of study into matters « which else we should not know » (the « things hid and barr'd ... from common sense » of Berowne's sarcastic gloss). In both cases what is promised to the academic devotees is not mere intellectual glory but prodigious powers, or indeed, in the case of *LLL*, outright apotheosis (« study's god-like recompense »).

Where the two texts differ is in the explicitness with which the miracle-achieving « philosophy » is described. Helmes's counsellor assures the Prince that he « shall lay a *Trismegistus* », a patent indication that the deep-cause-unearthing texts to which he should dedicate himself are the books of the *Hermetica*, the mystical and magical doctrines attributed in the Renaissance to Hermes Trismegistus (the « thrice greatest »), putative Egyptian divinity (cognate with Thoth) and *priscus theologus*. The specification is, in any case, almost superfluous, since the profound and miraculous philosophy of which the counsellor speaks was automatically identifiable by Helmes's academic audience with the notorious « deep » cult of Hermeticism. Helmes, indeed — and after him, Shakespeare — is clearly alluding to one of the most prestigious Platonizing texts of the period, Pico della Mirandola's Oration on the Dignity of Man, in which the figure of the miraculous *homo hermeticus* is invoked in the form of a quotation from the *Asclepius* (the most directly « magical » of the hermetic texts): « A great Miracle, Asclepius, is Man » (1942 ed.: 347). In his Oration, Pico recommends Hermetic magic as a means to the releasing of marvellous forces divinely concealed in the world, things hid and barred from common sense: « (*Mageia*), in calling forth into the light as if from their hidingplaces the powers scattered and sown in the world by the loving kindness of God, does not so much work wonders as diligently serve a wonder-working nature » (353).

In short, there is good reason to suppose a direct line of descent from Pico's Great Miracle to Navarre's wonder of the world, via Helmes's Purpoole, and that what is strongly implied in the King's invitation to discover those arcana « I am forbid to know » (Berowne) is an incitement to « lay a Trismegistus ». And this is no more nor less than one would expect of even the most precarious and notional of *académies françaises*, in whose curricula the *Hermetica* were but daily staple (see Yates 1947). Neither does such a conclusion presuppose on Shakespeare's part any very profound learning in the occult arts; the figure and works

of Hermes had long since passed, if in name only, into English literary culture, as a speech in Nashe's *Summer's Last Will and Testament* further testifies

> *Winter.* ... Till Hermes, secretary to the gods,
> Or Hermes Trismegistus, as some will,
> Weary with graving in blind characters,
> And figures of familiar beasts and plants,
> Invented letters to write withal.
> In them he penn'd the fables of the gods,
> The giants' war, and thousand tales besides.
> (1972 ed.: 185-6).

Nashe's description indicates that the step from the Egyptian Trismegistus to the Roman Mercury, by way of the Greek Hermes, is really no step at all: the three deities were regularly conjoined or simply confused in the Renaissance (Mercurius Trismegistus is the Latin form of the name used by Ficino and others). The composite figure produced by this conjunction is a copiously linguistic or semiotic divinity: messenger of the gods, patron of eloquence, of tidings, of commerce and of alchemical and magical signs, while, as Nashe's account illustrates, the main specific attribute that Trismegistus brings to the list, apart from his supposed authorship of the *Hermetica*, is a claim to the invention of writing itself. God of the litteral sign, deity of texts and their interpretation (or Hermeneutics, the science named after him): it is this graphic bias that made Hermes the ideal figurehead for the bookish Academicism initiated by Ficino, his first translator, and aspired to by Navarre (who sees as its end an appropriately epigraphic form of immortality « Let fame ... live register'd upon our brazen tombs »).

The conception of the linguistic sign espoused in the Hermetic books amply confirms that of the misread Plato, of the *Orphica* and of the *prisca theologia* in general: the *Pimander*, in particular, has as one of its metaphysical and theological underpinnings the notion of the Luminous Word and its universal powers. In this respect, Orphism and Hermetism, the songs of Apollo and the words of Mercury, are perfectly compatible in their mystical semantic premises,

as indeed Academic syncretism demanded. The difference, of course, is that while Orphism is essentially oral, bound to the efficacy of incantation, Hermetic magic is necessary graphic, drawing on the privileged relationship between the inscribed sign and its supramundane referent. Here the « national » character of the Egyptian Hermes does bear a precise significance. For the original script that he devised in which to pen the fables of the gods was not only generically hierographic but specifically hieroglyphic. And the hieroglyph was the paradigm for the semantic naturalists of a supra-conventional sign — halfway between the linguistic and the visual — able to capture in its ideographical iconicity the full force of its denotation (see Gombrich).

The extraordinary burgeoning of pious hieroglyphology that went hand-in-hand with Hermetism in sixteenth-century Europe, especially the cult of Horapollo and of Valeriano's *Hieroglyphica*, bears witness to the sway that the nostalgia for a natural and uncorrupted linguistic *icon simbolica* held over the times (see Giehlow 1915, Boas 1950). Even the vulgarized version of the cult, the profusion of emblems, impresse and devices during the second half of the century, still bore the traces of the hieratic semantics from which it issued, as such works as Bruno's *Degli eroici furori* and Abraham Franuce's tract *Insigium, armorum emblematum hieroglyphicorum ... explicatio* (1588) testify (on the mystical pretensions of emblems, see Praz 1939, Boas 1950).

An ardent conviction that pseudo-hieroglyphical *icones symbolicae* and emblems might encode the profoundest of Hermetic mysteries was commonplace (Gombrich 1948). Of all the possible objects of such encoding, nothing attracted greater admiration than the time-tested oxymoronic adage *festina lente* (« make haste slowly »), singled out on account of its ancientness — the Emperor Augustus adopted it as his motto — and because of its paradoxical form, in keeping with the mystagogic style. Even Erasmus, not given to pagan enthusiasms, found the maxim steeped « in the mysteries of ancient philosophy » (quoted in Wind 1967: 107). The iconographic variations on the maxim — beyond the famous Aldine emblem of the dolphin and

anchor — were virtually innumerable. A further index to the presence, however fragmentary and travestied, of the pagan mysteries in *LLL* is the maltreatment to which this most sacred of apophthegms is subjected in the play. It is, indeed, iconized in the encounters between the ingenious Moth and the slow Armado, the Butterfly and Crab of Augustus's device (and varied in Moth's exchanges with the rustic Costard: Butterfly and Crab-apple). Armado provides a patent signal to the allusion, as Edgar Wind has observed (1967: 108 ff), with his command to Moth to fetch Costard: « bring him festinately hither » (3.1.4-5); this heralds an elaborate travesty of a somewhat more *recherché* impresa for the paradox (described in Paolo Giovio's *Dialogo dell'imprese*, 1574: 80; see Wind: 108), namely the heavy lead ball made rapid when shot from a cannon:

Arm. The way is but short: away!
Moth. As swift as lead, sir.
Arm. The meaning, pretty ingenious?
Is not lead a metal heavy, dull, and slow?
Moth. *Minime*, honest master; or rather, master, no.
Arm. I say lead is slow.
Moth. You are too swift, sir,/to say so:
Is that lead slow which is fir'd from a gun?
(3.1.53-9).

The lepidopteral flutterings of Moth's swift invention are similarly held back by the crustacean denseness of the crabby Spaniard in an earlier debate on the same subject of festination:

Arm. ... And therefore apt, because quick.
Moth. Speak you this in my praise, master?
Arm. In thy condign praise.
Moth. I will praise an eel with the same praise.
Arm. What! that an eel is ingenious?
Moth. That an eel is quick. (1.2.23-8).

The joke here — apart from the obvious bawdy connotations of Moth's image — appears to lie in a further burlesque allusion to the slow-haste iconography, that is to the emblem devised by Erasmus himself for the « mystery »,

showing an eel entwined about an arrow (the device was borrowed by Alciati, whose emblem was in turn Englished by Whitney, 1586: 188). In Erasmus's device, of course, the eel (one of Horapollo's hieroglyphic beasts (Horapollo II 103; 1950 ed.: 108) represents *lentitudo*, restraining the swiftness of the arrow; Moth's reversal of the Erasmian symbolism is clearly intended as an oblique dig at his master's intellectual retardation.

The association of the oxymoronic and the enigmatic with the Hermetic is not accidental. One of the chief corollaries of Hermeticism on the Ficinian-Piconian model is a poetics of obscure encodement corresponding to the occultation of the mysteries themselves in the sacred texts: the slogan coined by Pico in the Oration is *editos... et non editos*, published and not published, indicating the simultaneous disclosure of the verities to the initiated and their concealment from the profane. A notorious apology for such a mystagogic, or at least, mystifying stylistics is found in the preface to George Chapman's genuinely obscure Hermetic poem *Ovid's Banquet of Sense*: « with that darknes [obscuritie] wil I still labour to be shaddowed: rich minerals are digd out of the bowels of the earth, not found in the superficies and dust of it » (1595: A2^{r}). The rhetorical means to the achievement of this strategic darkness was precisely the cultivation of the enigma and the paradox, bringing together unresolvable contrarieties in antithetical form. One of the great models here was the *serio ludere* of Nicolaus Cusanus (after Socrates): those quasi-magical « serious games » which « consisted in finding within common experience an unusual object endowed with the kind of contradictory attributes which are difficult to imagine united in the deity » (Wind: 222).

The pursuit of obscurity, of the enigma and of the paradox is conducted by most of Navarre's courtiers and hangers-on. Admiration for the *non editus*, expressed everywhere by the pedants (by Holofernes, for example, in his mockery of the profane Dull (4.2.13 ff.)), has its most emblematic and ridiculous issue in the clash between the mystifying Armado and the uninitiated Costard, in which

it is the concept of the enigma itself that proves too unpublished for the rustic:

Moth. A wonder, master! here's a costard broken in a shin!
Arm. Some enigma, some riddle: come, thy l'envoy, begin.
Cost. No egma, no riddle, no l'envoy; no salve in the mail, sir. O, sir, plantain, a plain plantain! (3.1.67-71).

And yet even the dull Dull manages a somewhat half-hearted essay in the enigmatic mode:

Dull. You two are book-men: can you tell me by your wit
What was a month old at Cain's birth, that's not five weeks old as yet. (4.2.33-4).

Naturally, the most serious exercises in *serio ludere* are reserved for the academicians proper, notably in the « overlooking » episode (4.3.), the play's central « doctrinal » moment. In the first part of the scene, Berowne hides in a tree to spy on his erring fellows, a situation which provokes from him an auto-ironical comment on his achievement of the promised apotheosis:

Ber. All hid, all hid; an old infant play
Like a demi-god here sit I in the sky. (4.3.75-6).

Berowne's position parodies, as his own observation underlines, the doctrine of the Concealed God, central to Cusanus's theory and practice of *serio ludere*, whose purpose, indeed, was to reflect the theological paradox of the deity's simultaneous presence and absence (Cusanus's thought, it might be noted, had been introduced into England by the arch Hermeticist Giordano Bruno). Once revealed to his shame-faced companions, Berowne maintains his moral superiority in mocking the King's infantile behaviour:

To see a King transformed to a gnat;
To see great Hercules whipping a gig. (163 f).

Berowne's antithetical image is in perfect accord with the « serious games » framework, since the whipping of a top

is one of Cusanus's main paradigms in *De possest* of the *vis mystica ludi*, the power of childish play (the top with its rotation and apparent stasis) to mirror the deepest of mystical contradictions.

The episode develops, after Berowne's abrupt fall from the godhead, into a display on his part of his adeptness in the paradox game, in attempting to express the divinity of his mistress through the yoking of outrageously contradictory propositions, as Navarre is quick to note:

> *Ber.* Is ebony like her? O wood divine! ...
> No face is fair that is not full so black.
> *King.* O paradox! Black is the badge of hell,
> The hue of dungeons and the school of night. (243 ff.).

It is in this context, then, that we find the probable allusion to the Raleigh-Chapman Platonic-Hermetic circle, the School of Night, that once troubled and intrigued commentators with its tantalizing hint of some doctrinal intent on Shakespeare's part (see Acheson 1885 and especially Yates 1934).

In any event, the serious games lead triumphantly to Berowne's long oration in favour of female beauty as the true mystery, the authentic object of « academic » devotion, proposing as his symbol of female divinity the eyes (the conceit is found in Bruno's *Degli eroici furori*, while Bruno in turn probably borrowed it from Cusanus or from Horapollo's *Hieroglyphica*, in both of which exemplary sources the eyes similarly symbolize the divine):

> *Ber.* From women's eyes this doctrine I derive:
> They are the ground, the books, the academes,
> From whence doth spring the true Promethean fire
> ... For where is any author in the world
> Teaches such beauty as a woman's eye?
> Learning is but an adjunct to ourself
> And where we are our learning likewise is:
> Then when ourselves we see in ladies' eyes,
> Do we not likewise see our learning there? (4.3.299 ff.).

Berowne's final paradox is that he draws upon the « adjuncts » of bookish philosophy in order to argue against it

(« How well he's read, to reason against reading! as Navarre puts it in the opening scene (1.1.94)). His plea in favour of Eros is explicitly pitched against Navarre's aspiration to Wonderhood through the secrets revealed in « forbidden » texts (i.e. the « leaden contemplation » and « slow arts » he scorns, 317, 320); but it is the repudiation itself, with its allusions to the Bacchic and Orphic mysteries (as well, of course, as the Erotic) and, not least, to the « Egyptian » riddling mode beloved to the Platonists (« Subtle as Sphinx », 338), that constitutes the culmination of the quasi-mystagogic vein in the comedy's language.

In the event, the frustration of the ex-academicians' erotic strategy is signalled by the sudden appearance of Hermes-Mercury himself, the thrice greatest (or « thrice-worthy gentleman » as Moth wittily baptizes the three-role-playing Holofernes of the pageant (5.1.34)) bringing news from the gods. The message he brings is of death, the final mystery, reminding us, as Nosworthy notes (109), that he is also the Psychopomp, leader of souls. Marcade's entry — cutting short the series of stage emblems that Jonson would have termed « court hieroglyphs »; for example, on the young Hercules with snakes in either hand (5.2.583 ff.), see Freeman 1948: 94) — is made all the more dramatic by the briefness of his message, curtailed even further by the Princess's anticipation:

> *Mar.* The King your father —
> *Prin.* Dead, for my life!
> *Mar.* Even so: my tale is told. (5.2.712 ff.).

There is clearly nothing *non editus* in the Mercurial style here, but Marcade's extreme laconicity is altogether appropriate to the doctrinal and iconographic tradition which represented Mercurius Trismegistus as eloquent but silent (in Achille Bocchi's *Symbolicae quaestiones* [1574, emblem lxiv] he is shown putting a forefinger to his lips), silence representing the furthest expression of the enigmatic. « Apollo inspires by his music », as Edgar Wind remarks, « poetic frenzy as well as poetic measure; Hermes, the god of eloquence, advises silence » (1967: 196). And silence, the

restraining of their eloquence, is precisely what the ladies advise the scholars to maintain for one year in order to demonstrate (*festina lente*) their maturity. (5.2.780 ff.).

If the tone of events after Marcade's mission grows, under the sign of Mercury, dark and austere (Berowne: « The scene begins to cloud » (714)) to the cost of the Apollonian gaiety the scholars have endeavoured to establish, it is surely another of the multiple ironies of the finale that the negative force which defeats them is the force that was to guarantee their glorification. In the end, the serious games become more serious than they had intended.

vi) *M.O.A.I.: On Malvolio's Tetragrammaton (With a Glance at Mistress Quickly's Garter)*

Where the change of tone that marks the ending of *LLL* is dramatically unexpected, the transformation of style and atmosphere in the final scene of *MWW* is perfectly vertiginous. Five acts of the unremittingly mundane are resolved in a masque-like fairy spectacle of ritual cleansing, led by a poetically pastoralizing Mistress Quickly as the unlikeliest of Fairy Queens. The fairies' task is to remind Falstaff of the moral responsibilities of the knighthood, a message which they emblematize or emblazon in a garland figuring the Garter and its ancient motto:

> *Quick.* Each fair instalment, coat, and sev'ral crest,
> With loyal blazon, evermore be blest;
> And nightly, meadow-fairies, look you sing,
> Like to the Garter's compass, in a ring:
> Th'expressure that it bears, green let it be,
> More fertile-fresh than all the field to see;
> And *Honi soit qui mal y pense* write
> In em'rald tufts, flowers purple, blue and white,
> Like sapphire, pearl, and rich embroidery
> Buckled below fair knighthood's bending knee:
> Fairies use flowers for their charactery. (5.5.64-73).

In spite of the normally gross worldliness of the Mistress of ceremonies, the fairies' natural-supernatural floral char-

actery — an authentic theatrical court hieroglyph serving as the « expressure » of a serious ethical precept — is the gravest and least ironical manifestation in the canon of that « mystical » graphism hinted at throughout *LLL* and occasionally in other comedies: in Julia's hypostasis of the « wounded » written names in *TG*; in Orlando's passionate tree-inscribing in *AYLI*; and, an episode that could scarcely be further removed in manner and function from the finale of *MWW*, the epistolary practical joke played against Malvolio in *TN*.

Malvolio, in what is in effect the central event of the comic subplot and the most memorable scene of the play, discovers a riddle-ridden *billet-doux* written and planted by the servant Maria, and in deciphering the letters of the letter searches first for clues as to the sender's identity (falling inevitable into the well-laid trap of the unwitting obscenity) « By my life, this is my lady's hand: these be her very C's, her U's, and her T's, and thus she makes her great P's » (2.5.87-90) — and then for some indication of the fortunate addressee of his lady's declarations of love:

> 'M.O.A.I. doth sway my life'. — Nay, but first let me see, let me see ... what should that alphabetical position portend? If I could make that resemble something in me! Softly! 'M.O.A.I.' — ... 'M' — Malvolio! Why, that begins my name! ... 'M' — But then there is no consonancy in the sequel; that suffers under probation: 'A' should follow, but 'O' does. ... And then 'I' comes behind. ... 'M.O.A.I.' This simulation is not as the former: and yet, to crush this a little, it would bow to me, for every one of those letters are in my name. (2.5.112 ff.).

Malvolio's decoding of the puzzle is carried out strictly according to the practical jokers' plan, and as such simply demontrates, as it is designed to, his monstrous narcissism. But the episode takes on a potential semantic thickness if seen in the light of certain contemporary theories and practices connected with the graphic sign, and in particular regarding the transcendent character of the character.

Graphomania, a sanguine faith in the calligraphic or, better still, typographic sign and its time-defeating fixity, was one of the acuter forms of semiotic credulity manifested

in esoteric circles: « Ex secretioris philosophiae principiis nesesse est confiteri », runs Pico's twenty-fourth Magical Conclusion, « plus posse characteres et figuras in opere Magico, que possit quaecumque qualitas materialis » (1486: 147). Agrippa is still more emphatic: « Et quicquid in mente, in voce, in verbo, in oratione, in sermone est, totum hoc, et omne etiam in scriptura est. Et sicut nihil quod mente concipitur, voce non exprimitur: sic nihil quod exprimitur, non etiam scribitur. Atque idcirco iubent magi in quo vis opere faciendas imprecationes et iscriptiones, quibus operans suum exprimat affectum ... » (1533: 145).

Such litteral-mindedness, while generalized (Agrippa, for example, insists upon the superior powers of writing *per se*), was not indiscriminate: it took as its privileged objects the Egyptian hieroglyph, naturally, and above all the characters of the *lingua sacratissima*, Hebrew. The doctrinal basis for the promotion of Hebrew above other languages in terms of its antiqueness and expressive purity was in the first instance, of course, the biblical account of Adam's original naming. But the more enthusiastic forms of Renaissance Hebraicism emphasized not so much the nominative intervention of Adam as the unmediated divine origins of the Hebrew alphabet, whose very formal and diacritical properties represent the forms of the created universe: « Prae omnibus vero linguarum notis Hebraeorum scriptura omnia sacratissima est in figuris characterum, punctis vocalium et apicibus accentum, veluti in materia, forma et spiritu consistens: in sede Dei, quod coelum est, siderum positione primum exarata, ad quorum figuram, ut testantur Hebraeorum magistri, sunt formatae ipsae literae mysteriorum coelestium plenissimae, cum per eorum figuram, et formam, et significata, tum per numeros in illis significatos, tum per eorundem variam colligantiae harmoniam ... » (Agrippa 1533: 147).

Nor were such wild re-elaborations of Genesis restricted to occult dogmatists. A particularly rich and « scientific » expression of the same alphabetical fancy is found in Alexander Top's grammatological tract *The Olive Leaf* (1603), in which « all Abces » are made to derive from the « hieroglyphs of

our first fathers » (note the « Egyptian » contamination), the Hebrew symbols, the number and form of which correspond to the first created phenomena, « Seeing that all thinges which the Lord wrought or commaunded in the first weeke, exceeded not the number of two and twentie. And ... every one of these severall *Hebrew* letters, should signifie or importe some speciall workmanshyp of the Lordes Creation » (Sig. B 2). In what amounts to an extraordinarily suggestive myth of the origin and infinity of semiosis, Top describes how God « signed off » each of his works by inscribing upon it the Hebrew sign which in turn signifies « sign »: « the Lord concluded every one of his actions or creatures, with this proper demonstration, *Eth*, which is taken for a Signe, Figure, Letter, Forme, or Marke; ... God created the figure, signe or letter of the Heavens &c. Or the very hieroglyphs of them, this worde beeing the singular of *Othoth*, which signifies Figures, Letters, Cause, Signes, or Tokens, of all sortes » (Sig. A 4). The sacred letter becomes the model and condition of all signification in the world.

The real appeal of this abecedarian piety to the syncretizing Platonists of the age was neither scientific nor theological, however. What fired their imaginations was rather the possibility of translating mystical alphabetism into efficacious magical operations « Nulla nomina ut significativa, et in quantum nomina sunt, singula et per se sumpta, in Magico opere virtutem hebere possunt, nisi sin Hebraica, vel inde prime derivata » (Pico, 1486: 147). The form of magic Pico is referring to, of course, is Cabalistic, the vulgarized « pratical » version of the mystical tradition inherited from medieval Spanish Jews. In practice, Cabalistic magic amounted to little more than the abusing of certain Rabbinical exegetical tools designed to decipher the texts of the Old Testament and the Torah, operations such as *gematria* (interchanging words), *notarikon* (acrostic reading) and, most appealing of all, *themurah* (anagrammatical transposition). In their magical application, such textual manipulations became means to invoke supernatural forces, and the greatest faith was invested in them, as the

German magus Johannes Reuchlin testifies: « Inde ad posteros alphabeticaria haec Cabala, id est, receptio transmigravit, per quam arcana divinarum maxima pandantur ... » (1494: 3150).

Behind the anagrams, acrostics and *ars combinatoria* lay the hope of divining sacred names occulted in the holy texts and thereby releasing the powers connected, for example, with the named angels ruling over celestial bodies. From the medieval Cabalists the magi inherited seventy-two names for such angels, together with ten names for the Sephiroth or emanantions of divine power, names for the Son and, holier still, the miraculous and ineffable tetragrammaton (*YHWH*), the name of God Himself. To this *verbum mirificum* was delegated the omnipotence of the divine bearer, diffused into each of the four characters: « Vivus siquidem est Deus, et vivi *DEI* vivum quoque *Nomen*, et vivi Nomini vivae quoque Literae: vivit Deus propter se, vivit Nomen eius propter ipsum, vivunt Literae propter Nomen ... » (Oswald Croll, 1608: 87).

In England, where the earliest news of Cabalism is probably Thomas More's reference to Pico's immersion in the « secret mysteries of the Hebrews » (Preface to Pico's Letters; 1890 ed.: a iii), the « practical » Cabala gained relatively little open following (Henry Howard commends it in his *Defensative* (See Blau 1944: 63); Everard Digby and John Dee appear to have subscribed to it (See Secret 1969: 229-230). Yet the notoriety of the sacred-name-divining transpositions of Hebrew letters was considerable in the latter part of the sixteenth-century. Reginald Scot's *Discovery of Witchraft* (1584, probable partial source for *MND*), for instance, in deploring « the prophanation of God's name », forbidden in the Commandments, takes as a peculiarly diabolical example thereof « the Cabalists [who] tooke upon them, by the ten names of God, and his angels, expressed in the Scriptures, to worke woonders » (1973 ed.: 175). A more detailed and less polemical account is given by William Camden, who in his Remains traces the history of the Cabala from the « litterall law » received by Moses and describes Cabalistic *modi operandi* employing « the sacred

names of God ... consisting of Alphabetary revolution, which they will have to be Anagrammatisme, by which they say *Marie* resolved made, *Our holie Mistris* » (1614: 169).

Camden's Anagrammatism leads us back to Malvolio and his letter. The anagrammatical procedure he hits upon in his decoding — « to crush this a little » — is, as Maria's antic demands, an absurd form of name-divination (« To whom should this be? »). And there is a hint in the « fustian riddle », as Fabian terms it — « M.O.A.I. doth sway my life » — that the name to be divined is indeed divine, or at least of supraterrestrial influence: the verb « sway » has precise astrological connotations, used « technically » to refer to the celestial bodies and their ascendancy over the earth.

Malvolio's transfiguration or « crushing » of the « alphabetical position » thus becomes a grotesque species of *themurah*, conducted, what is more, on an albeit debased tetragrammaton, complete with occult reference. The fact that the exegesis is successfully bent on identifying the hidden referent of the four-character « simulation » with the would-be all-swaying exegete himself emphatically confirms the premise of Maria's ploy, namely Malvolio's prodigious *amour propre*: « the best persuaded of himself, so crammed (as he thinks) with excellencies, that it is his grounds of faith that all that look on him love him: and on that vice in him will my revenge find notable cause to work » (2.3.149-153).

vii) *Syncretic Magic, or The Idea of The Theatre*

In a late sixteenth-century tract by Giulio Camillo, the various ingredients of that extraordinary doctrinal stew that went under the name of Neoplatonic syncretism — a dash of Orpheus, a splash of Hermes, a sprinkling of the Cabala, mixed in with the meatier dogmata of a Christianized Plato, of Plotinus and the rest — are brought together once more in roughly the usual quantities; what the *pasticcio* produces, however, is not the familiar philosophical

hash but an idea for or rather the idea of a theatre. The intuition underlying Camillo's *L'idea del theatro* (1579) is that the theatre, as playhouse and as stage display, represents a potentially ideal artistic expression of the mystical Platonic semantics and semiotics to which he subscribes, bringing together as it does iconic and linguistic signs in an unrivalled complementarity. Invoking the precepts of the « secretissimi theologi », the Cabalists, on the supercelestial spheres whose forces his magical theatre aspires to embody, Camillo fills the hypothetical playhouse with statues and icons of Apollo, Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, Hercules and other divine patrons; he compares to the power of such images that of well-proportioned poetic expression, which has a similarly important place in his imaginary creation: « I have read, I believe in Hermes Trismegistus, that in Egypt there were once certain sculptors of statues, so excellent that when they had brought some statues to perfect proportion these were found to be animated by angelic spirits, because such perfection could not exist without a soul. Similar to such statues I find words, for the power of composition, the aim of which is to maintain in proportions pleasing to the ear all the words that can dress human thought, proposing, postponing, interpreting. Such words, as soon as they are placed in proportion, become when uttered animated with harmony » (33-4).

For all its esoteric trappings, Camillo's idea of a magically « animated » theatrical art founded on the harmonious marriage of the visual and the verbal is no more than the motivating principle of every endeavour in the dramatic theatre. The fullest expression of the idea is found in *The Tempest* with its central metatheatrical trope of the magus as *metteur-en-scène* (and vice versa).

In this perspective, a certain semiotic animism, or faith in the sign and its capacity to be animated by its referent, may be equivalent to an optimism regarding the expressive plenitude of the dramatic representation itself. The supernatural wood and its natural names in *MND*; the magically iconic finales of *AYLI*, *AWW* and *MWW*; the anagrammatic

name-divination of *TN*; the unwitting enchantments of *CE* (« How can she thus call us by our names? / Unless it be by inspiration »; « I'll stop mine ears against the mermaid's song », etc.); the Orphic and Hermetic traces in *LLL*: ironical or in earnest, these versions of the transcendent sign in the comedies are also vivid metaphors for a dramaturgical commitment (itself at once earnest and ironically self-deflating) to the transformational powers of theatre itself, namely its ability to persuade the spectator that the set of bodies and other worldly sign-vehicles presented to him do indeed embody, for the duration of the spectacle, the properties of another sphere.

It is scarcely surprising that among these images of transcendence, it is the notion of *vis verborum*, of a triumphantly animate language, that emerges most frequently. For a dramaturgy dedicated principally to the word, the appeal of such a prospect is evident. As, indeed, is the significance of the graphic or textual bias of much of the semantic credulity in the plays. Navarre's belief in a world-conquering textuality is the hope that the dramatist, at his most optimistic, invests in his art. Even though it is more often than not accompanied by failure and humiliation in the comedies, faith in the word is implicit in their creation.

viii) *Foul Words, Foul Wind*

Comedy cannot, however, live by faith alone. It depends also and above all on a set of dramaturgic and rhetorical conventions (*fabula* and character types, plot complications, codified modes of exposition, etc.) which, however much they may have become « naturalized » over the ages, remain cognizable or recognizable as such. And these generic norms are in turn part of the global conventionality of dramatic theatre as a rule-bound cultural institution. A sober and agnostic Idea of the Theatre accepts that all of its constituent signs are necessarily subject to the mediation of this-worldly convention. In dialectical opposition to all the manifold forms, serious or parodic,

of cultivation, reification, deification or simple adoration of the word, there emerges in a number of comedies a pronounced vein of linguistic scepticism which has its own authoritative doctrinal backing in the contemporary debate on the sign. A brief overview of this alternative theoretical tradition will help define better the precise force of those moments of metalinguistic doubt, disgust or happy disrespect in the plays.

Semiotic, and especially linguistic conventionalism found patronage in the sixteenth century in a number of intellectual movements opposed for academic, ideological or gnoseological motives to the sanctification of the sign: Aristotelean scholasticism (or what was left of it); Protestant iconoclasm; the Catholic campaign against the occult arts; philosophical scepticism; and, at the end of the period, Baconian empiricism. For all these quite distinct schools of thought or polemic the classic source and weightiest authority for the conventionalist theory of language is Aristotle's « *ad placitum* » definition of meaning in the *De Interpretatione*, usually and misleadingly read as a « reply » to the *Cratylus*: « By a noun [or name] we mean a sound significant by convention, which has no reference to time, and of which no part is significant apart from the rest .... The limitation 'by convention' was introduced because nothing is by nature noun or name — it is only so when it becomes a symbol » (1941 ed.: 40). Aristotle's discussion of the name furnishes the basis for an authentically analytical semantics, however limited in scope: beyond the affirming of the « convention » principle, he insists on the mediating presence between name and object of a conceptual third term (« spoken words are the symbols of mental experience ») and further distinguishes meaning from truth, word meaning from propositional content, etc. Here, unmistakably, the question of signification is separated from the problem of reference, a divorce which is unthinkable in naturalistic notions of the name. Language may be studied, empirically and independently of what it represents, as an autonomous system of rules.

Non-mystical doctrines of the sign in the latter part

of the sixteenth century gained another prestigious point of reference, Sextus Empiricus's *Pyrrhoniarum Hypotypωseωm Libri Tres*, translated into Latin in 1562 and which, in addition to subscribing resolutely to the conventionalist view of signification — « the significance of names is based on conventions and not on nature (for otherwise all men, barbarians as well as Greeks, would understand all the things signified by the terms, besides the fact that it is in our power at any time to point out and signify the objects by any other names we may choose) » (1933 ed.: II Ch. XVIII) — provides precious information regarding Stoic theory. The Stoics' semiotic model — applied, that is, to the sign in general — adds to the triangular Aristotelian scheme (in their terms comprising the *semàinon*, or sign vehicle, *semainòmenon*, or signified concept, and *pragma*, the object) a fourth element, the *lekton*, or, roughly, sense as distinct from mental concept. This move further affirms the autonomy of symbolic systems, especially language, from the represented extra-semiotic universe, since the *lekton* resides in the relations among the sign vehicles themselves (Sextus Empiricus: Ibid.). The conjunction of so sophisticated an attitude towards signification with Sextu's sceptical Pyrrhonian metaphysics was of considerable importance to the development of linguistic scepticism in the later Renaissance.

Of the more recent philosophical schools espousing a rigorously analytical semantics, nominalism — against which, indeed, the Neoplatonists were in part reacting — survived in a somewhat etiolated form in the sixteenth-century universities (see Ashworth 1974: 4 ff.). The medieval nominalists — notably Abelard, Petrus Hispanus and, in the fourteenth century, William of Ockham — elaborated a complex and wide-based framework for the classification of *modi signandi*, employing a notable range of operative distinctions (those, for example, between absolute and connotative terms, univocal and equivocal terms, conventional and indexical signs, signs of the first and second intention, etc.). In an extreme form, as represented for instance by Roscelin, the nominalistic theory of universal

terms wished to reduce them to empty signs, mere *vox* or *flatus vocis*, a gesture which, inevitably, entered into circulation more readily than the intricate conceptual machinery of Ockham.

One of the direct heirs to this medieval philosophical tradition was Martin Luther, who had been taught by nominalist logicians at Erfurt. Something of the *via moderna* of nominalistic analysis is discernible in Luther's formidable demystification of sacramental symbols in his *De Captivitate Babylonica Ecclesiae* (1520). Luther allows divine status only to the word of Christ in the New Testament and to none of the signs employed in the liturgical rites: « Ex quibus intelligimus, in qualibet promissione dei proponi, verbum et signum, ut verbum intelligamus esse testamentum, signum vero esse sacramentum. Ut in Missa, verbum Christi est testamentum, panis et vinum sunt sacramentum. Atque ut maior vis sita est in verbo quam signo, ita maior in testamento quam sacramento, quia potest homo verbum seu testamentum habere et eo uti, absque seu sacramento » (1520: Sig. D i.).

Luther's iconoclasm served as a model for all later Protestant diatribes against idolatrous sign-worship in Catholic and other superstitious rituals. Elizabethan England provided a fair number, among them Reginald Scot's deriding of the « thousand consecrated or rather execrated things » of the Mass, together with the sundry « charmes, voices, images, characters, stones, plants, metals, herbes etc. (« There is », he complains, « great varietie hereof »). Scot's prime paradigm of the idolatrized sign is the word, whose sphere of operation, he insists, is limited to human intercourse and whose substantive presence is purely phonetic: « New qualities may be added by humane art, but no new substance can be made or created by man. ... For by the sound of words nothing cometh, nothing goeth, otherwise than God in nature hath ordained to be doone by ordinarie speech, or else by his speciall ordinance » (1584: 175). Scot's target here, the idea that any verbal formula, sacramental or esoteric, may exercise plastic power or executive influence over the physical state of affairs in

the world, is shared by the Puritan William Perkins, who, in a similarly generalized onslaught against the image (« A thing fained in the mind by imagination is an idol »), elaborates a more articulate lexiclasm. Perkins assails the lexical idol on two fronts, that of its merely vocal constitution (all speech is reduced to *flatus vocis*): « All words made and uttered by men, are in their owne nature but sounds framed by the tongue, of the breath that commeth from the lungs. And that which is only a bare sound, in all reason can have no virtue in it to cause a reall worke, muche less to produce a wonder... » (1608, Vol. III: 631); and that of the « at pleasure » human origins of meaning: « That which is in nature nothing but a bare signification, cannot serve to worke a wonder, and this is in the nature of all words; for as they be framed of mans breath they are naturall, but yet in regard of form and articulation they are artificiall and significant, and the use of them in every language is, to signifie that which the author there of intended; for the first signification of words, depended upon the will and pleasure of man that framed and invented them » (Ibid.).

Ironically, much the same arguments are rehearsed by Catholic writers in the Church's campaign against occult practices; indeed the vociferousness of the polemic (which contributed, among other achievements, to the condemnation and execution of Giordano Bruno in 1603) reflects in part the force of the Protestant accusation of idolatry. Among the early anti-magical polemicists was Pico's nephew Gianfranco, but the most sustained and lucidly-argued case is offered by the Jesuit Martin Del Rio in his *Disquisitiorum Magicorum Libri Sex*; Del Rio systematically dismantles the Neoplatonists' Hebraicism and Hermeticism, opposing to the principle of the propriety of names that of the arbitrary status of the sign: « quin et ipsa illa, quae naturam rei significant (qualia putantur, quae creaturis Adamus imposuit) haec nullum potuerunt a naturis rerum influxum recipere: quia res corporeae naturaliter nihil efficere possunt in id, quod corporis expers est, ut sunt nomina ... Nihil ergo tribuit energiae primus ille influxus coelestis.

Imposito et emere arbitraria denominatione, quid queat influere, nec Argus videat, quem ferunt fuisse oculatissimum » (1633: 52).

Idolatry of linguistic forms is likewise the original sin that the science of signs proposed by Francis Bacon in *The Advancement of Learning* (« This portion of knowledge, touching the *Notes of thinges*, and Cogitations in generall [that] I finde not enquired, but deficient ») has to purge, since it constitutes the single most intractable impediment to any serious empirical enquiry into symbolic systems of representation: « Here, therefore, is the first distemper of learning, when men study words and not matter; ... for words are but the images of matter; and except they have life of reason and invention, to fall in love with them is all one as to fall in love with a picture » (1605: 24-5). The inaugurating gesture of Bacon's scientific enterprise, logically, is the classification of the varieties of such Pygmalion-like errors, whereby certain vacuous lexical units are automatically taken to denote actual slices of the extra-linguistic domain: in particular, the « idols of the tribe » or abstract universals, and the « idols of the market place », popularly current terms (like « primum mobile ») signifying false concepts that, once lexically labelled, prove all but impossible to eradicate: « words are but the current tokens or marks of popular notions of things; which notions, if they be grossly and variably collected out of particulars, it is not the laborious examination either of consequence of arguments, or the truth of propositions, that can ever correct that error, being, as the physicians speak, in the first digestion » (1605: 126).

Bacon's preoccupation, then, is less with any credulous pretension to bestow executive capacity upon verbal forms than with the very real power that linguistic representation possesses to establish its own order of things and to seduce the soberest enquirer into accepting this universe of discourse as the actual economy of perceptible *prima materia*: « and though we think we govern our words and prescribe it well *loquendum ut vulgus sentiendum ut sapientes*, yet certain it is that words, as a tartar's bow, do shoot back

upon the understanding of the wisest and mightily entangle and pervert the judgment » (134). His unequivocal subscribing to the Aristotelian doctrine of the sign — with a degree of polite scorn for pseudo-philological searchers after the phonetic-semantic rightness of names — is thus instrumental to his critique of language as a cognitive tool (a critique which leads him to propose the invention of other symbols « competent to expresse cogitations », i.e. something akin to the notation of modern symbolic logic): « *Ad placitum* are the characters real before mentioned [ciphers, etc.] and words: although some have been willing by various enquiry, or rather by apt feigning to have derived imposition of names from reason and intendment; a speculation elegant, and, by reason it searcheth into antiquity, reverent; but sparingly mixed with truth and of small fruit » (137-8).

Although it has quite a different end in view, the Baconian critique of the sign shares certain positions with the two main currents of philosophical scepticism in the period. The major achievement of the « academic » sceptical mode (i.e. modelled on Cicero's *Academica*), Francesco Sanchez's impressively austere *Quod Nihil Scitur* (1581), takes the Socratic *aporia* — « Nec unum hoc scio, me nihil scire » — as the starting-point for an uncompromising deconstruction of man's epistemological pretensions, by means of a radical questioning of the linguistic bases of knowledge. All sciences are founded on definitions, which, instead of pointing outwards to the supposedly represented *res*, lead merely to other definitions, and so on in an infinite interpretative regressus that produces nothing but a closed infra-referential circuit: « Acue ingenium. Persequor, a nomine rem ducamus. Mihi enim omnis nominalis definitio est, et fere omnis quaestio. Explico. Rerum naturas cognoscere non possumus, ego saltem: si dicas, te bene, non contendam, falsam tamen est: cur enim tupotius? Et hinc nil scimus. Quod si non cognoscamus, quo pacto demonstrat. Da mihi unum. Non habes. Concludo ergo » (1581: 13).

« There's more adoe », as Sanchez's cousin Montaigne

puts the matter in John Florio's translation (1603), « to interpret interpretations than to interpret things. ... We doe but inter-glos ourselves » (636). Montaigne's « Pyrrhonian » mode of scepticism — closer to Sextus Empiricus in its anecdotal and aphoristic argumentative manner — embraces a thorough mistrust of language, not as a form of epistemological nihilism but, as likewise with Sanchez, by way of a fideistic plea for the leap of faith which alone, and not our vain pursuit of nomination, brings us to true knowledge: « There is both the name, and the thing: the name, is a voyce which noteth, and signifieth the thing: the name, is neither part of the thing nor of substance: it is a stranger-piece ioyned to the thing, and from it. God who in and by himself is all fulnesse, and the tipe of all perfection, cannot inwardly be augmented, or encreased: yet by his name be encreased and augmented, by the blessing and praise which we give unto exteriour workes. ... We are all hollow and emptie, and it is not with breath and words that we should fill our selves. We have neede of a more solide substance to repaire our selves » (359).

Montainge's exemplum of the treachery of language — apart from the self-perpetuating definitional chain, for which he shares Sanchez's disdain (« one word is changed for another word ») — is the instance of linguistic « propriety » *par excellence*, the personal name, which seems to promise a unique and intimate bond with the nominee but which instead proves an exemplary case of lexical promiscuity, yoking as it does a potentially limitless series of individuals under a single nominal unit: « Is it *Peter* or *William*. And what is that but a word for all mouths? or three or four dashes of a pen, first so easie to be varied, as I could willingly aske those, whom the honour of so many victories concerneth. ... they are dashes, and tricks of the pen common unto a thousand men. How many are there in all races or families both of one name and surname? And how many in divers families, races, ages, and countries? History has known three Socrates, five Platos,

eight Aristotles. ... Who letteth my horse boy to call himself Pompey the Great? » (150-1).

The particular disparagement reserved here for dashes and tricks of the pen is not casual: what for the linguistic mystics is the supreme vehicle of semiotic embodiment, the graphic sign, is for Montaigne the epitome of the detachment of language from the world. He is correspondingly contemptuous of texts and of the debilitating scholarship directed towards them: « The studie and plodding on bookes, is a languishing & weak kinde of motion, and which heateth or earnesteth nothing; wheareas conference doth both learne, teach and exercise at once » (553).

Montaigne's virile dismissal of name and book leads us back directly to the comedies, and specifically to Berowne's oration in first scene of *LLL* opposing Navarre's Academe. Berowne's reply begins precisely, *verbatim et literatim*, with exclamatory derision towards the weak and languishing « studie and plodding on bookes », capable only deviating the seeker form the truth:

> *Ber.* Why! all delights are vain, but that most vain
> Which with pain purchas'd doth inherit pain:
> As, painfully to pore upon a book
> To seek the light of truth; while truth the while
> Doth falsely blind the eyesight of his look: ...
> Small have continual plodders ever won,
> Save base authority form others' books. (1.1.72 ff.).

Berowne's rational anti-rationalist stand develops into the second most conspicuous avowal of linguistic scepticism in Shakespearean drama (after Juliet's « rose »), in the guise of an aphoristic « Pyrrhonian » scoffing at the idle proliferation of names bestowed *ad placitum* by the erudite:

> *Ber.* These earthly godfathers of heaven's lights,
> That give a name to every fixed star,
> Have no more profit of their shining nights
> Than those that walk and wot not what they are.
> Too much to know is to know nought but fame;
> And every godfather can give a name. (88 ff.).

As with all of Berowne's « doctrinal » positions, the tone here is ambiguous and the argument is immediately retracted as « barbarism »; and yet the move itself of disavowing Navarre's incipient Platonism through the demystification of the text and the name is acute and philosophically sound, and adds considerably to the play's metalinguistic dialectic (the more so since, as we shall see, his passing scepticism corresponds to the treatment that the word receives from the ladies).

An analogous polarity arises in *AWW*, in which, however, just as Helena's natural locutionary magic is presented without irony, so the counterposed deflation of the word — enacted by the King, chief beneficiary and admirer of Helena's powers — is unequivocally proposed in earnest. The King's fiercely nominalistic harangue arises by way of a moral rebuke to Bertram and his overvaluation of titular forms:

King. 'Tis only title thou disdain'st in her, the which
I can build up. Strange is it that our bloods,
Of colour, weight, and heat, pour'd all together,
Would quite confound distinction, yet stands off
In differences so mighty. If she be
All that is virtuous, save what thou dislik'st —
A poor physician's daughter — thou dislik'st
Of virtue for the name. But do not so. ...
Good alone
Is good, without a name; vileness is so:
The property by what it is should go,
Not by the title. ...
The mere word's a slave,
Debosh'd on every tomb, on every grave
A lying trophy, and as oft is dumb,
Where dust and damn'd oblivion is the tomb
Of honour'd bones indeed. (2.3.117 ff.).

The King's depreciation of the deboshed name (again the paradigm is graphic) is in a sense borne out by Bertram's own later behaviour, when his overprizing of social titles gives way to a devaluation of his marriage vows (an attitude that is figured metonymically in his association with Parolles, nominal and behavioural representative of empty verbal

forms). The point is underlined in the finale, when Helena, in response to the King's amazement at her magical reappearance, echoes his oration (and, by the way, Montaigne's Essay on Glory: « There is both the name and the thing... »):

King. Is there no exorcist
Beguiles the truer office of mine eyes?
Is't real that I see?
Hel. No, my good lord;
'Tis but the shadow of a wife you see;
The name and not the thing. (5.3.298-302).

Elsewhere, the *nomen est vox* disclaimer is good for a spirited quip, as in Jaques's affectation of aristocratic disregard for the *termini technici* of prosody:

Jaques. Come, more, another stanzo. Call you 'em stanzos?
Amiens. What you will Monsieur Jaques.
Jaques. Nay, I care not for their names, they owe me nothing. (2.5.16-20);

the jibe is later turned against him when he takes capricious exception to « Rosalind » (« at pleasure », as Orlando points out, does not necessarily mean at *his* pleasure):

Jaques. Rosalind is your love's name?
Orl. Yes, just.
Jaques. I do not like her name.
Orl. There was no thought of pleasing you when she was christened. (3.2.259-263).

In its proverbial « words are but wind » form, the gesture provides an irresistible occasion, not resisted in *CE*, for a resounding *turpis locutio* or, as Puttenham would have termed it (every godfather ...) « foule speeche ». The breath of the vowels — « All words (are) made ... of the breath that commeth of the lungs » (Perkins) — is readily transformable into the wind of the bowels, base *flatus vocis* into baser *flatus viscerarum*:

Eph. Dro. A man may break a word with you, sir, and words are but wind;

Ay, and break it in your face, so he break it not behind. (3.1.74-6).

For Beatrice in her somewhat politer version of the jest in *MA*, what commeth of the lungs is mere halitosis:

Bea. ... ere I go, let me go with what I came for, which is, with knowing what hath passes between you and Claudio.
Ben. Only foul words — and thereupon I will kiss thee.
Bea. Foul words is but foul wind, and foul wind is but foul breath, and foul breath is noisome — therefore I will part unkissed.
Ben. Thou hast frighted the word out of his right sense, so forcible is thy wit. (5.2.46-52).

Benedick's complaint at the wilful misinterpretation of his foul word « foul » draws attention to one of the predominant semantic principles of Shakespearean (and in general, Elizabethan) comedy: the frighting of the word out of its sense, on the basis of the contingency of the relationship between the two. That is to say, the conventional and arbitrary character of the sign is institutionalized in comic discourse, particularly in those forms of equivocation that exploit, as Benedick objects, the divergent senses of a single lexeme or the discordant senses of two or more homonymic or phonetically similar lexemes. The official vehicles of this « convention » are, naturally, the clowns, some of whom are perfectly articulate on their fulfilment of this function. Thus Feste in *TN* prefaces a definition of his deviating professional activity with a moral and sociolinguistic meditation on the constitutional semantic and ethical instability of the word that makes his licensed « corruption » possible:

Clown. You have said, sir. To see this age! A sentence is but a chev'ril glove to a good wit — how quickly the wrong side may be turned outward!
Viola. Nay, that's certain: they that dally nicely with words may quickly make them wanton.
Clown. I would therefore my sister had had no name, sir.
Viola. Why, man?
Clown. Why, sir, her name's a word, and to dally with that word might make my sister wanton. But indeed, words are very

rascals, since bonds disgraced them.
Viola. Thy reason, man?
Clown. Troth, sir, I can yield you none without words and words are grown so false, I am loath to prove reason with them. ...
Viola. Art thou not the Lady Olivia's fool?
Clown. No indeed sir, the Lady Olivia has no folly... I am indeed not her fool, but her corrupter of words. (3.1.11-37).

In practice, Feste is very sparing in the word-corrupting and sentence-turning to which he lays claim (belonging, like Touchstone and Lavatch, to the class of « logical » or dialectical later clowns). The true practitioners of the mode of wordplay that turns phonetic coincidence into semantic mutilation are the early clowns particularly Launce and Speed in *TG*, who are also capable of a certain « professional » awareness of what they are about:

Spe. How now, Signor Launce! What news with your mastership?
Lau. With my master's ship? Why, it is at sea.
Spe. Well, your old vice still: mistake the word. (3.1.277-280).

And yet the undisputed past masters or mistresses of linguistic contingency, of the accidental and arbitrary word-meaning bond, are not the official clowns but the aristocratic ladies in *LLL*, whose knowing pursuit of the homonymic pun and whose unrelenting juggling *ad extremum* with sense relations provide the most effective of responses to the multiform semantic naiveté affected by the scholars and pedants:

Boy. I was as willing to grapple as he was to board.
Kath. Two hot sheeps, marry!
Boy. And wherefore not ships?
No sheep, sweet lamb, unless we feed on your lips.
Kath. You sheep, and I pasture: shall that finish the jest?
Boy. So you grant pasture for me. (2.1.217 ff.);
Kath. ... a light heart lives long.
Ros. What's your dark meaning, mouse, of this light word?
Kath. A light condition in a beauty dark.
Ros. We need more light to find your meaning out.
Kath. You'll mar the light by taking it in snuff.
Therefore I'll darkle end the argument.

Ros. Look what you do, you do it still i' the dark.
Kath. So do not you, for you are a light wench.
Ros. Indeed I weigh not you, and therefore light. ...
Prin. Well bandied both; a set of wit well play'd. (5.2.18 ff.).

The meanings of light words may indeed be dark, but in the sets of semantic tennis so essential to Shakespearean comedy, they too are light enough to be tossed endlessly back and forth or simply carried off on the (*flatus vocis* or perhaps *spiritus comoediae*) wind.

Abbreviations for the comedies referred to in the text:

AWW	*All's Well that Ends Well*
AYLI	*As You Like It*
CE	*The Comedy of Errors*
LLL	*Love's Labour's Lost*
MA	*Much Ado about Nothing*
MM	*Measure for Measure*
MND	*A Midsummer Night's Dream*
MV	*The Merchant of Venice*
MWW	*The Merry Wives of Windsor*
TG	*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*
TN	*Twelfth Night*
TS	*The Taming of the Shrew*

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Agrippa von Nettesheim, Henry Cornelius, *De occulta philosophia libri tres*, Paris, 1567 (Agrippa von Nettesheim, 1533).

Anagnostopoulos, Georgios, « Plato's *Cratylus*: The Two Theories of the Correctness of Names », *Review of Metaphysics*, XXV, 4, 1972, pp. 691-736.

Aristotle, *De interpretatione*, Trans. E.M. Edghill, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. R. McKeon, New York, 1941.

Ashworth, E. J., *Language and Logic in the Post-Medieval Period*, Dardrecht, 1974.

Bacon, Francis, *The Twoo Bookes of Francis Bacon. Of the Prociencie and Aduancement of Learning, Diuine and Humane*, London, 1605.

Barton, Anne, « A New Source for *Love's Labour's Lost* », *Times Literary Supplement*, 24 November, 1978.

Blau, J. L., *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala in the Renaissance*, New York, 1944.

Bocchi, Achille, *Symbolicae quaestiones*, Rome, 1574.

Borgmann, Albert, *The Philosophy of Language: Historical Foundations and Contemporary Issues*, The Hague, 1974.

Bruno, Giordano, *The Heroic Frenzies, Trans.* P. E. Memmo Jr., Chapel Hill, 1964 (Bruno 1585).

Bullough, Geoffrey, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, Vol. 1, London, 1957.

Calderwood, James L., *Shakespearean Metadrama*, Minneapolis, 1971.

Camden, William, *Remaines concerning Britaine: But especially England, and the Inhabitants thereof. Their Languages, Names. Surnames. Allusions. Anagrammes. Armories. Monies. Empreses. Apparell. Artillarie. Wise Speeches. Proverbes. Poesies. Epitaphes.* London (Second edition), 1614.

Camillo, Giulio, *Discorso in materia del suo teatro*, Rome, 1579.

Carroll, William C., *The Great Feast of Language in Love's Labour's Lost*, Princeton, 1976.

Cassirer, Ernst, *The Platonic Renaissance in England*, Trans. J. P. Pettigrew, New York, 1959.

Chambers, Edmund K., *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems*, London, 1930.

Chapman, George, *Ovids Banquet of Sence. A Coronet for his Mistresse Philosophie, and his Amorous Zodiacke*, London, 1595.

Cody, Richard, *The Landscape of the Mind: Pastoralism and Platonic Theory in Tasso's Aminta and Shakespeare's Early Comedies*, Oxford, 1969.

Croll, Oswald, *Basilica chymica*, Geneva, 1643 (Croll, 1608).

Cusanus, Nicolaus (Nicholas of Cusa), *De visione Dei*, Trans. Giles Randall, *The Single Eye*, London, 1646 (Cusanus, 1453).

Del Rio, Martin, *Disquisitiorum magicorum libri sex*, Cologne, 1633.

Ficino, Marsilio, *Platonis atheniensis, philosophi summi ac peritus divini opera*, Basle, 1561.

Ficino, Marsilio, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, Columbia, Missouri, 1944.

Foucault, Michel, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, London, 1970.

Fraunce, Abraham, *Insignium, armorum, emblematum, hieroglyphicorum, et symbolorum, quae ab Italis imprese nominatur, explicatio*, London, 1588.

Frazer, James G., *The Golden Bough*, London, 1936.

Freeman, Rosemary, *English Emblem Books*, London, 1948.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Truth and Method*, New York, 1975.

Giovio Paolo, *Dialogo dell'imprese militari et amorose*, Rome, 1574.

Gombrich, E. H., « *Icones Symbolicae*: The Visual Image in Neo-Platonic Thought », *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XI, 1948, pp. 163-192.

Guthrie, W. K., *Orpheus and Greek Religion: A Study of the Orphic Movement*, London, 1935.

Helmes, Henry, *Gesta Grayorum: Or, the History of the High and Mighty Prince, Henry, Prince of Purpoole*, London, 1688 (Helmes, 1594).

Heraclitus, *The Cosmic Fragments*, ed. G. S. Kirk, Cambridge, 1970.

Horapollo, *The Hieroglyphics of Horapollo*, Trans. G. Boas, New York, 1950.

Huarte, Juan, *The Examination of Mens Wits*, Translated M. Camillo Camilli and Englished by R[ichard] C[arew], Gainesville, Florida, 1954 (Huarte, 1594).

Levin, Harry, « Shakespeare's Nomenclature », in *Essays on Shakespeare*, ed. G. W. Chapman, Princeton, 1965, pp. 59-90.

Levinson, Ronald B., « Language and the Cratylus: Four Questions », *Review of Metaphysics*, IX, 1, 1957, pp. 28-41.

Luther, Martin, *De captivitate babylonica ecclesiae*, Wittenberg, 1520.

Lyons, John, *Semantics*, London, 1977.

Mahood, M. M., *Shakespeare's Wordplay*, London, 1957.

Nosworthy, J. M., « The Importance of Being Marcade », *Shakespeare Survey*, 32, 1979, pp. 105-114.

Pachter, Henry M., *Paracelsus: Magic into Science*, New York, 1951.

Peacham, Henry, *The Garden of Eloquence*, London, 1577.

Perkins, William, « A Discourse of Witchraft », in *Works*, London, 1608.

Pico della Mirandola, Giovanni, *Conclusiones Nongentae*, 1532 (Pico della Mirandola, 1486).

Pico della Mirandola, Giovanni, *Heptaplus*, ed. Eugenio Garin, Florence, 1942 (Pico della Mirandola, 1489).

Pico della Mirandola, Giovanni, *Life and Letters* (Trans. Thomas More), London, 1890.

Pico della Mirandola, Giovanni, « On the Dignity of Man », *Journal of the History of Ideas*, III, 1942, pp. 347-357.

Plato, *Dialogues* (Trans. B. Jowett), Oxford 1953 (4th ed.).

Primaudaye, Pierre de la, *The French Academie* (Trans. T[homas] B[owes]), London, 1586.

Proclus, *Proclus on the Theology of Plato* (Trans. Thomas Taylor), London, 1787.

Puttenham, George, *The Arte of Englishe Poesie*, London, 1589.

Reuchlin, Johannes, *De arte cabalistica*, Basle, 1494.

Ryle, Gilbert, « The Theory of Meaning », in *British Philosophy in the Mid-Century*, ed. C. A. Mace, London, 1957.

Sanchez, Francesco, *Quod Nihil Scitur*, Rotterdam, 1581 (1649 ed.).

Scot, Reginald, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, Ed. B. Nicholson, Wakefield, 1973 (Scot, 1584).

Searle, John R., *Speech Acts*, Cambridge, 1969.

Secret, F., *Les kabbalistes chrétiens de la Renaissance*, Paris, 1969.

Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (Trans. R. G. Bury), London, 1933.

Sidney, Philip, *An Apologie for Poetrie*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd, London, 1965 (Sidney, 1595).

Top, Alexander, *The Olive Leaf*, ed. R. C. Alston, Menston, 1971 (Top, 1603).

Verstegen, Richard, *A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence: In antiquities. Concerning the Most Noble and Renowmed English Nation*, Antwerp, 1605.

Viswanathan, S., « 'Illeism with a Difference' in Certain Middle Plays of Shakespeare », *Shakespeare Quarterly*, XX, 4, 1969, pp. 407-415.

Walker, D. P., « Orpheus the Theologian and Renaissance Platonists », *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 16, 1953, pp. 100-120.

Walker, D. P., « The Prisca Theologia in France », *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 17, 1954, pp. 204-259.

Whitney, Geffrey, *A Choice of Emblemes and other Devises*, London, 1586.

Wilson, Thomas, *The Arte of Rhetorique, for the Use of All Suche as Are Studious of Eloquence*, London, 1553.

Wind, Edgar, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, Harmondsworth, 1967.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Philosophical Investigations*, Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, Oxford, 1953.

Woodward, William H., *Desiderius Erasmus concerning the Aim and Method of Education*, Cambridge, 1904.

Yates, Frances A., *A Study of Love's Labour's Lost*, Cambridge, 1934.

Yates, Frances A., *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century*, London, 1947.

Yates, Frances A., *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, London, 1964.

Yates, Frances A., *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, London, 1979.

L'ULTIMA MANIFESTAZIONE DEL CASO *COLERIDGE ON IMAGINATION* *

di
Patrizia Fusella

Quando, nel 1934, I. A. Richards decise di pubblicare *Coleridge on Imagination*, in cui discuteva in modo dettagliato quel suo discorso sulla fantasia che aveva costituito il trentaduesimo capitolo di *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) e che, per altro, era stato introdotto in forma embrionale in *Foundations of Aesthetics* (1922), non aveva certo previsto di causare ciò che a buon titolo si può definire oggi come « il caso *Coleridge on Imagination* »[1] negli scritti critici dedicati a Richards. Il volume del '34 ricevette, tra le altre, una feroce recensione da parte del polemico F. R. Leavis nelle pagine di *Scrutiny* (1935), fu poi oggetto di analisi da parte di J. C. Ransom il quale, nel '38, vi rintracciava i segni di un notevole e significativo mutamento nella visione dell'arte richardsiana e, nel '41, lo etichettava come scritto « transitional » di un autore affetto in principio (PLC) « dal male psicologico », già in via di

* Il presente articolo è parte del risultato di un progetto di ricerca sulla teoria critica di I. A. Richards (finanziamento M.P.I., 1980-81).

[1] Da ora in poi esso verrà indicato come il caso CI e i titoli dei volumi di Richards verranno così abbreviati: PLC per *Principles of Literary Criticism*; CI per *Coleridge on Imagination*; MM per *The Meaning of Meaning*. Le edizioni di questi volumi da me utilizzate sono tutte di Routledge & Kegan Paul (London) e rispettivamente del 1970, 1962, 1972.

guarigione nel '34 e completamente sanato nel '36 (*Philosophy of Rhetoric*) [2].

Fu quindi alla fine degli anni '30 che si parlò per la prima volta di « mutamento » e « transizione » nel pensiero di Richards e da allora la critica si è sentita impegnata a pronunciarsi a sfavore o a favore del mutamento e, in quest'ultimo caso, a qualificarlo o come « radicale » e « sostanziale » o come « formale » e « apparente », dando vita al caso C I il quale, dopo vicende alterne, con il passare dei decenni, si manifesta di nuovo oggi con *The Completest Mode*, studio su Richards e la continuità della critica inglese, effettuato da J. Needham [3].

Il mutamento sostanziale, prevalentemente rintracciato in C I, è stato presentato nei modi più diversi: come esistenza di due teorie della letteratura nelle opere di Richards [4], come rinuncia alla posizione per la quale i New Critics lo avevano attaccato [5], come abbandono di una visione positivista dell'arte per abbracciarne una romantica [6], come conversione a una visione vitalista della mente a discapito della precedente teorizzazione in termini meccanicisti [7], come ripudio delle proprie concezioni comportamentiste del linguaggio e della interpretazione [8], come avvicinamento alla posizione scettica di Husserl nei confronti del « einstellung » o, ciò che è lo stesso, come transizione dal naturalismo a una forma di soggettivismo [9].

[2] Cfr. J. C. Ransom, *The World's Body*, New York, London, C. Scribner's Sons, 1938 e *The New Criticism*, Norfolk, New Directions Press, 1941.

[3] J. Needham, *The Completest Mode*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1982; tale volume verrà indicato dalla abbreviazione CM.

[4] Cfr., ad esempio, M. Black, « Some Questions about Emotive Meaning », in *Philosophical Review*, 57, 1948, pp. 111-26; J. C. Ransom, *The New Criticism*, cit.; W. Empson, *The Structure of Complex Words*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1952; A. Tate, *On the Limits of Poetry, Selected Essays*, New York, Swallow Press & Wm. Morrow, 1960.

[5] E cioè la centralità del « feeling »; cfr., ad esempio, le opere già citate di Ransom e di Empson e W. K. Wimsatt Jr. & M. C. Beardsley, « The Affective Fallacy », in R. W. Stallman, *Critiques and Essays in Criticism, 1920-48*, New York, The Ronald Press, 1949, pp. 401-11.

[6] Cfr. R. Foster, *The New Romantics*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1962.

[7] Ibidem.

Tutte queste interpretazioni si sono succedute negli anni, caratterizzando la critica su I.A. Richards con tanta puntualità che ciascun decennio potrebbe essere descritto sulla base della maggiore o minore convinzione degli argomenti a favore e di quelli contrari alla tesi del mutamento. Gli anni '40 e '50 registrarono una tale vittoria dei fautori della conversione, del ripudio e del pentimento, che lo stesso Richards sentì il bisogno di pronunciarsi in proposito:

> And yet, in rereading *Principles* as Black's article has forced me to do, I am more impressed by its anticipations of my later views than by the occurrence of anything to retract. I changed my vocabulary and my metaphors somewhat, as he noticed, to present much the same views again [10].

Questa ed altre dichiarazioni dell'autore contribuirono a innescare un'inversione di tendenza e, negli anni '60 e '70, le voci contrarie al mutamento hanno superato di gran lunga quelle a favore [11]. Non tutti i critici di questo periodo, però, si sono pronunciati in modo convinto sulla

[8] Cfr. A. Tate, *The Man of Letters in the Modern World*, New York, Meridian Books, 1955.

[9] Cfr. D. O'Connell, « Poetry and the Natural Standpoint », in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 32, 1974, pp. 323-29.

[10] I. A. Richards, *Speculative Instruments*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1955, p. 53.

[11] Tra gli interventi a sfavore cfr., innanzitutto, W. H. N. Hotopf, *Language, Thought and Comprehension*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965 e G. E. Graff « The Later Richards and the New Criticism », in *Criticism*, IX, 1967, pp. 229-42; inoltre G. Cianci, *La scuola di Cambridge*, Bari, Adriatica Editrice, 1970; J. P. Schiller, *I. A. Richards' Theory of Literature*, New Haven, London, Yale University Press, 1969; C. Karnani, *Criticism, Aesthetics and Psychology*, New Delhi, Gulab Vazirani, 1977. Per gli interventi a favore del cambiamento cfr. R. Foster, *op. cit.* e D. O'Connell, *op. cit.*

coerenza dello sviluppo del pensiero di Richards; alcuni, tributando onori al ventennio precedente, hanno introdotto la tesi dei cambiamenti non sostanziali e, piuttosto che sottolineare la continuità delle varie elaborazioni teorico-critiche dell'autore e di interpretare le proposte posteriori a *Principles* come sue logiche espansioni e messe a punto, essi hanno preferito o vanificare l'ipotesi del mutamento in nome della « dialetticità » del pensiero e dell'opera di Richards [12], o situarsi in una posizione di compromesso a favore sia del mutamento che della continuità, denunciando le proprie difficoltà ad abbracciare senza riserve la nuova causa e contribuendo a mantenere in vita il caso C I. È questa la posizione di Schiller che così si pronuncia nel capitolo introduttivo del suo volume:

> I find both change and continuity in Richards' work. While I would agree with Richards that there has been a change in his mode of presenting similar ideas, I would add that the modes of presentation adopted in the earlier and later works have had crucial effects of their own. His use of the impulse theory to present his ideas in the early works had the effect of forcing him to certain conclusions not in keeping with the general trend of his thought [13].

La riduzione della « impulse theory » a mero « mode of presentation » delle idee nei primi lavori è, cioè, l'unico modo in cui questo autore si sente in grado di sostenere l'ipotesi della continuità e, d'altra parte, questa incertezza [14]

---

[12] È questa la posizione di C. Karnani il quale, pur affermando che PLC e CI « [...] are at the two opposite ends of the critical spectrum — the one written in an empiricist-rationalist vein, the other in mystico-introspective vein [...] », aggiunge: « In spite of this [...] there is an astonishing similarity between certain conclusions. [...] This is so because his approach has been that of a dialectician for whom truth emerges from the resolution of the two extremes. » (*op. cit.*, pp. 141-42).

[13] J. Schiller, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

[14] Essa viene inoltre tradita da questa dichiarazione: « [...] the change is not merely one of tone. Obvious demons of the early works, including Plato, have become idols of the later works. [...]

è probabilmente dovuta al fatto che Schiller non ha potuto utilizzare [15] il volume di Hotopf, il critico che ha meglio contribuito a spazzare il campo dalla tesi del mutamento dimostrando come essa, nel caso dei New Critics, fosse stata il prodotto di una serie ininterrotta di fraintendimenti più o meno gravi delle opere del primo Richards.

Che il voume di Hotopf sia ormai un classico degli studi del campo è fatto ormai da più parti riconosciuto, ma è anche mia impressione che la capacità di questo autore di interpretare Richards in modo così eccellente risieda innanzitutto nella sua libertà da preconcetti nel campo della teoria dell'arte e dell'estetica; non è un caso, cioè, che sia proprio da uno psicologo che ci viene la migliore lettura di Richards e in particolare di quel primo Richards che Ransom giudicava affetto dal « male » della psicologia. Credo, infatti, che la specializzazione disciplinare di Hotopf abbia valore determinante nella confutazione delle interpretazioni dei New Critics e della tesi del mutamento. Nel suo volume, gli elementi « apparentemente » equivoci del pensiero di Richards vengono presentati non come rinunce, abiure e converisoni, ma come sviluppi e miglioramenti di tematiche e problematiche appartenenti ad una teoria unica e coerente [16]; ciò è reso possibile dalla capacità di Hotopf di comprendere appieno il primo Richards e dall'attenzione che egli pone sia al contesto in cui quegli elementi compaiono [17], che a quello più ampio del rapporto tra le varie

---

The plausibility of any radical change is lessened, however, by Richards' own comments [...] » (Id., p. 15).

[15] La data della prefazione al volume di Schiller e la presenza, in esso, di una breve appendice dedicata all'opera di Hotopf, indicano che l'autore sia venuto a conoscenza di essa solo a lavoro ultimato.

[16] Cfr. W. H. N. Hotopf, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-68.

[17] La scarsa attenzione al contesto delle asserzioni di Richards è in molti casi determinante per rintracciare il cambiamento. Ciò viene, ad esempio, sottolineato da G. Graff: « It is only by removing the remark from its context that we can interpret it as marking a change in thinking. » (*op. cit.*, p. 234).

opere del canone richardsiano [18]; le sue osservazioni sono esemplari per sensibilità ed obiettività:

> [... Richards'] views did not change anything like as much as these statements [the New Critics'] suggest. He certainly dropped his belief that the emotional effect of words in poetry was independent of the senses in which the words were taken. But since, as we saw, he never regarded this as a *general* feature of poetry but only as an occasional one, this change is not as important as Ransom, or even Empson, made out. It is true he changed his view about poetry giving knowledge. But this did not mean he laid *less* emphasis upon emotion and feeling. It was a development, not an abandonment, of his early views, and was intimately tied up with his theory about increasing ordering of impulses as a result of artistic experience, a doctrine which [...] Tate and Ransom rejected as « mysterious » (in the pejorative sense) [...] [19].

Con l'inversione di tendenza determinata, come si è detto, dalle dichiarazioni di Richards, avvalorate quindi dalla interpretazione di Hotopf, il caso C I, dal '65 in poi presenta caratteristiche diverse, nel senso che, se non ci si pronuncia totalmente a sfavore del mutamento, ci si limita a parlare di cambiamenti di enfasi, di apparenti contraddizioni, di diversità nel tono, nello stile e nei modi in cui Richards presentò diverse formulazioni di una stessa teoria. Insomma, la tesi del mutamento radicale, che aveva caratterizzato gli anni '40 e' 50 viene solo di rado sostenuta [20] e, se si presenta C I come testo « transitional », questo aggettivo non assume più le colorazioni negative del-

[18] Si veda in particolare il paragrafo « The Relation of Richards' Books to One Another », pp. 210-14.

[19] W. H. N. Hotopf, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

[20] Lo stesso saggio di O'Connell, la cui tesi ho menzionato a proposito delle diversi formulazioni date al mutamento radicale, riflette questa diversità di atteggiamento e nella parte conclusiva sembra far propria l'idea del cambiamento di enfasi: « [...] he has *reduced* his expectations as to a satisfactory psychological explanation of poetry, and *heightened* his expectations of its providing a satisfactory order for modern consciousness. » (*op. cit.*, p. 238; il corsivo è mio).

l'incoerenza, del pentimento e della conversione che aveva una volta [21].

Il volume di Needham apre gli anni '80 del caso C I rispettando questi punti fissi solo in parte e riproponendo in certo qual modo gli antichi dubbi e il vecchio fantasma del mutamento significativo. Needham sembra infatti contrario all'idea di un mutamento radicale quando, in base al binomio « sense-feeling », rintraccia tre fasi nella elaborazione della teoria critica di Richards a seconda che l'enfasi del discorso cada in misura maggiore o minore su l'uno o l'altro dei due termini (I fase: feeling > sense; III fase: feeling < sense) o si suddivida equamente su entrambi (II fase: feeling = sense). A questo proposito egli si preoccupa costantemente di chiarire che la diversità tra le varie fasi è solo questione di enfasi — egli parla sempre e solo di « overstress », « neglect » e « overemphasis » — e costella il proprio discorso con dichiarazioni di questo tipo:

> That Richards, in his remarks on Hardy [...] is opening the way towards a *greater emphasis* on the importance of sense, and its relations with other aspects of meaning *does not infer that he is abandoning* the claim that poetry is non-referential. [...] Richards *never abandons* this position. What is open to change is his view of *the role played* by 'sense' [22].

Allo stesso tempo, però, nell'interpretare certi aspetti del pensiero di Richards, egli sembra ricalcare posizioni precedentemente assunte dai fautori del mutamento sostanziale: l'affermare che Richards abbandonò la terminologia

[21] Schiller e Hotopf, per esempio, si pronunciano rispettivamente così: « I agree that *Coleridge on Imagination* is a transitional work—not, however, one in which his ideas changed [...] » (*op. cit.*, p. 16); « *Coleridge on Imagination*, Richards' last book that is mainly on poetry, is transitional in the sense that it begins to be concerned with philosophy and prose, which largely took over in the last three major books » (*op. cit.*, p. 75).

[22] J. Needham, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-34 (il corsivo è mio).

comportamentista per descrivere l'attività mentale [23], o che egli mise da parte la teoria dell'equilibrio [24], e, ancora, il rintracciare due teorie poetiche in PLC [25], significa sostenere qualcosa di più che la mera diversità di enfasi sul « sense ». Ciò viene poi confermato dalla notevole parzialità con cui Needham interpreta PLC che lo porta a concludere che C I sia l'opera richardsiana più significativa per la critica letteraria ed è, pertanto, difficile non notare la somiglianza di queste sue posizioni con quelle dei New Critics. Il paragrafo conclusivo del discorso su Richards in CM mi sembra esemplare di questa posizione ambigua:

> This account of Richards has held that the period of his work that resulted in *Coleridge on Imagination* is the most fruitful for literary criticism. Here he avoids the extremes of the doctrine of 'equilibrium' with its overstress on feeling. [...] It is in the period from *Principles of Literary Criticism* to *Coleridge on Imagination* that he works most closely on poetry, and the latter book is the valuable culmination of this period [26].

La presentazione di C I come « culmination » dello stesso periodo cui appartiene PLC e l'affermazione che la differenza tra questi due volumi è solo una questione di « overstress » sul « feeling » negano la possibilità di mutamenti radicali e di transizioni. Al contrario, il giudizio di valore che accompagna il termine « culmination » e che si ripropone in « the extremes » della teoria dell'equilibrio, è una spia di quanto Needham, di fatto, condivida molte delle posizioni dei New Critics e, prime fra tutte, la predilezione per C I e l'interpretazione parziale di PLC.

Lo studio di Needham, in cui l'autore riprende ed amplia alcuni punti fondamentali della dissertazione per il

---

[23] Cfr. id., p. 35 e il paragrafo « Richards' 'stimulus/response' account replaced by a creative one », pp. 54-56.
[24] Id., p. 57.
[25] Id., pp. 22-34 (su questo problema ci soffermeremo a lungo più oltre).
[26] Id., p. 91.

suo dottorato e della sua recensione al volume di Schiller [27], è strutturato in opposizione a quest'ultimo e, laddove Schiller privilegia le elaborazioni richardsiane posteriori a C I e, partendo da questo interpreta quelle, Needham, prediligendo C I, finisce col leggere tutta l'opera richardsiana alla luce di esso e, specie nel caso del primo Richards, si preclude, in tal modo, la possibilità di comprenderlo appieno. In entrambi i casi si ha come risultato evidente che il Richards dei *Principles* non viene mai privilegiato e che C I è testo favorito o perché si ritiene che:

> *Coleridge* [...] suggest[s] a coherent and valuable theory of literature [which] needs to be amplified by material from other of Richards' works [...] [28]

e che quindi gli altri volumi vanno considerati solo per procurarsi i « dettagli » di essa, o perché si è convinti:

> ... that the idea of « interanimation », developed chiefly in *Coleridge on Imagination*, is his [Richards'] most useful contribution to thinking about the analysis of poetic language, and that both his earlier and later work is less satisfactory [29].

I motivi del favore accordato a C I vanno rintracciati nell'ambito più vasto delle preferenze e idiosincrasie nei confronti della teoria critica da parte degli autori di tale scelta. Nel caso di Needham essa è dettata da alcune convinzioni fondamentali facilmente rintracciabili nella « Introduction » di C.M. [30]: a) la critica fonda su un nucleo di principi essenziali — « common core of principles » —; b) le caratteristiche distintive e tipiche dei diversi periodi della storia della critica vanno considerate come « restatements of essentials » e non come cambiamenti radicali del « common core »; è pertanto fondamentale c) non accentuare, negli studi sulla critica, le caratteristiche distintive.

---

[27] Cfr. *Essays in Criticism*, XX, 1970, pp. 367-74.
[28] J. P. Schiller, *op. cit.*, p. VIII.
[29] J. Needham, CM, cit., p. 1.
[30] Cfr., in particolare, id., p. 2, p. 3, p. 14.

Inoltre, d) occorre privilegiare la critica applicata perché e) la teoria può troppo facilmente essere connessa alla filosofia, il che è un male.

Lo studio di Needham, naturalmente, rispecchia tutto il sistema delle sue convinzioni e la scelta di C I, come testo privilegiato, sembra riflettere proprio quelle più importanti. Essa, infatti, gli permette di far risaltare in primo piano uno dei principi che formano il « common core » — « the completest mode of utterance » o complessità del linguaggio poetico [31] — da un lato, circoscrivendo l'ampia proposta teorico-critica di Richards e, dall'altro, sfumando le sue caratteristiche distintive. Tutto ciò risulta in modo ancora più evidente se si considera che la scelta di C I implica, innanzitutto, lo scarto di PLC, opera altamente teorica in cui la filosofia — con quella sua branca che all'epoca andava attestandosi come scienza autonoma, la psicologia — è ampiamente presente e in cui, sembra opportuno notarlo, il principio della complessità del linguaggio poetico si fonde continuamente non solo con i restanti principi dell'impalcatura critica richardsiana, ma anche con la caratteristica distintiva che più le è propria, e cioè con l'approccio psicologico.

Insomma, la predilezione per C I è giustificata dalle intenzioni storiche di Needham, che nel suo volume, vuole rintracciare una linea di continuità tra I. A. Richards e la critica inglese; d'altro canto, come si vedrà più oltre, tale discorso sulla continuità è anche la causa principale della descrizione parziale e negativa che egli offre del primo

[31] La voce inglese proviene dal seguente passo in CI: « It is the privilege of poetry to preserve us from mistaking our notions either for things or for ourselves. Poetry is the completest mode of utterance. » (*op. cit.*, p. 163), che Needham utilizza come epigrafe del proprio volume e dal quale trae il suo titolo. La voce italiana, che sottolinea la centralità del termine « complessità » nella trattazione di Needham che lo sceglie quale comune denominatore delle varie proposte critiche da lui esaminate, starà quindi per il « completest mode » di Richards e per il « complex use of words », la « verbal complexity » e loro simili di Needham; v. oltre, pp. 123-24.

Richards. È prevalentemente per tale motivo che mi soffermerò sull'aspetto più strettamente storico di CM; è, infatti, un paradosso, ed è la prima cosa che si nota leggendo questo volume, che in un'opera tutta tesa a esorcizzare i conflitti tra critici diversi, Richards, come autore singolo, risulti particolarmente ricco di contrasti, opposizioni e conflitti.

La continuità tra I. A. Richards e la critica inglese viene attestata utilizzando il metodo della « storia delle idee » e cioè basandosi sull'interpretazione di alcuni concetti chiave — le « unit-ideas » di A. O. Lovejoy — relativi a quel principio essenziale che è la complessità del linguaggio poetico, i quali vengono messi a confronto per mostrare le somiglianze e le divergenze tra le proposte di alcuni dei maggiori esponenti della critica inglese. Gli autori esaminati nelle tre parti in cui si articola il volume sono Richards, Johnson, Leavis e Eliot. L'analisi tende a individuare i modi in cui ciascun autore da una parte contribuì a elaborare il « common core » e dall'altra si differenziò dalle elaborazioni precedenti. In tal modo essa risulta assai stimolante ed il lettore si trova al centro di un fitto intreccio di relazioni che lo aiutano a interpretare, correggere e analizzare ciascuna proposta critica, talvolta utilizzando tutte le restanti proposte, talaltra riferendosi solo ad alcune di esse. L'ordito di questo tessuto di relazioni è costituito dal nucleo di principi comuni; la trama è formata dalle caratteristiche distintive, che l'autore spesso non esita a definire « biases », o idiosincrasie, che pertanto vengono da lui interpretate prevalentemente in chiave negativa allo scopo di mantenere saldo il principio della complessità del linguaggio poetico e di dimostrare che questo non viene di fatto intaccato in modo radicale.

La continuità viene rintracciata innanzitutto tra Richards e Johnson mostrando la somiglianza tra il concetto di « interanimation » del primo e la dottrina della « propriety of diction » del XVIII secolo; entrambi infatti

... refer to the ideal of interconnectedness in poetic language [according to which] all the aspects of a given word should interconnect

to a high degree with all the aspects of the other words in the context [32].

Questo ideale di interrelazione viene poi rintracciato nel primo Eliot, che parlò di « meanings eingeschachtelt into meanings », e nel « complex use of language » teorizzato da Leavis. Strettamente connesso con il principio della complessità è quell'aspetto dell'esperienza estetica che nella critica moderna viene chiamato « realisation », un termine che

... is something of a pun, meaning both vivid presentation and conscious awareness of the experience [33].

Attraverso l'esame delle teorie di Richards e Johnson l'autore arriva alla conclusione che:

In Richards' formulation verbal complexity, or interanimation, is creativity, and in re-creating the experience which a poem presents, the reader is realising himself. In eighteenth-century terms, propriety of diction realises images which arouse emotion; to feel emotion in this way is an act of sympathy; sympathy is possible because human nature is, fundamentally, always the same; consequently, what we are realising is, in the end, ouselves [34].

Parte della teoria di Leavis viene interpretata in modo analogo ma, data la maggiore popolarità dell'autore, questa volta il discorso viene svolto a grandi linee e non è corredato del tipo di analisi dedicato a Richards e a Johnson. Needham sostiene e dimostra, poi, che mentre per questi tre autori il valore della poesia va rintracciato nella « realisation » e che ciò dipende direttamente dal modo in cui essi si pronunciarono sul linguaggio poetico, in Eliot la funzione morale dell'arte è affatto sconnessa dal principio della complessità che egli pure sostiene.

La continua tensione del discorso verso l'attenuazione dei conflitti e delle polemiche — scoperti o latenti — tra

[32] J. Needham, CM, cit., p. 2.
[33] Ibidem.
[34] Id., p. 115.

le varie proposte critiche costituisce, come si diceva, la caratteristica principale di CM, il cui contributo alla storia della critica è, come lo stesso autore dichiara, essenzialmente normativo [35]. Senza entrare nei dettagli di questo discorso mi preme rilevarne l'interesse che risiede innanzitutto nella sua volontà e capacità di migliorare il nostro senso della continuità della critica su cui, nel '55, si pronunciava R. Wellek:

Il nostro senso della continuità della tradizione critica può divenire più vivo se comprendiamo che i problemi che discutiamo oggi hanno una lunga storia e che non è necessario, perciò, partire dal nulla. Il fatto che la critica moderna non lo comprenda, e che ogni critico americano (e non soltanto americano) inventi il proprio personale vocabolario, i propri mutevoli termini [...] è l'ostacolo più serio alla diffusione, l'affermazione e la vittoria di una degnissima causa [36].

Il problema sollevato da Wellek è stato poi ripreso da molte delle storie della critica inglese e Needham stesso conclude il proprio volume ricordando le posizioni assunte da Tate e da Watson — l'uno a favore dell'opinione secondo cui i critici hanno discusso sempre e da sempre le stesse questioni, e l'altro sostenitore della totale assenza di continuità. Mi sembra che la soluzione di mezzo adottata da Needham — esistenza del cambiamento ma come « restatement of essentials » — e la sua analisi del principio della complessità del linguaggio poetico siano un valido contributo agli studi storici sulla critica, anche se, a livello teorico, metterei in chiaro che la continuità va considerata come un programma di ricerca dello storico, un modo in cui mettere ordine nel caos del materiale a sua disposizione e che essa non è una qualità immanente ai fatti studiati; come fa notare Gerschenkron:

Sempre ed in ogni caso, la continuità dev'essere concepita come uno strumento costruito dallo storico, e non come qualcosa che esi-

[35] Cfr. id., p. 14.
[36] R. Wellek, *Storia della critica moderna*, (I), Bologna, Il Mulino, 1958, p. 18.

ste obiettivamente e in modo costante nella realtà storica. Parlare di continuità significa formulare una domanda o una serie di domande da rivolgere al materiale empirico... È lo storico che, facendo astrazione dalle differenze e concentrando la propria attenzione sulle analogie, stabilisce la continuità degli avvenimenti nel lungo arco di decenni o di secoli carichi di eventi che sono privi, in sé, di qualsiasi relazione con il modello della continuità [37].

Senza dubbio, parlando di critici e non di « eventi », in certi casi, si potrà rintracciare una volontà e una consapevolezza nel voler proseguire una linea di discorso comune alla tradizione, cionondimeno lo storico potrà sempre scegliere di mettere in evidenza quel che cambia o quel che resta immutato.

Al di là di queste notazioni, se Needham si fosse limitato a tracciare soltanto questo suo discorso storico, non avrei nulla da eccepire e anzi, pur non avendo alcun dubbio che sia PLC l'opera richardsiana di maggior valore per la critica letteraria, accetterei anche la predilezione di Needham per C I, convinta, come sono, che esso permette di collegare Richards alla tradizione inglese in modo certamente più agevole e meno problematico. Il mio disaccordo profondo nasce, invece, dal fatto che Needham, fornendo anche la propria descrizione e interpretazione delle opere anteriori e posteriori a C I, non renda ragione al primo Richards e reintroduca, così, nel settore degli studi critici su questo autore, i vecchi sospetti nei confronti dell'evoluzione del suo pensiero che avevano popolato l'aria degli anni '40 e '50, che Hotopf aveva tentato di rinfrescare.

E così, potrà sembrare al lettore che questo mio discorso finalmente ritorni al caso C I dal quale, però, non si è mai allontanato: come ho già detto, ritengo che le incongruenze e incompatibilità rintracciate da Needham all'interno delle proposte richardsiane e i suoi fraintendimenti di alcuni elementi delle prime opere, siano strettamente connessi al discorso sulla continuità appena esposto.

---

[37] A. Gerschenkron, *La continuità storica*, Torino, Einaudi, 1976, p. 30.

Il metodo della « storia delle idee » che ben si presta a tracciare lo sviluppo di un concetto attraverso i secoli è, al contrario poco utile e, forse, controproducente, quando si vuole arrivare a cogliere la pienezza e la complessità dell'intero sistema teorico di un singolo autore. Questo limite del metodo utilizzato da Needham è stato, ad esempio, sottolineato da Wellek quando, nella introduzione alla sua *Storia della critica moderna*, discutendo una serie di problemi e di scelte che gli si erano posti durante l'elaborazione dell'opera, motivava l'approccio da lui utilizzato — la combinazione della « storia delle idee » con i metodi più tradizionali di descrizione e valutazione delle idee dei singoli autori esaminati — nel seguente modo:

... la grande virtù di tale metodo, la possibilità che porge di seguire agevolmente sequenze dialettiche e mutamenti di significato, è più che controbilanciata dalle sue manchevolezze. La pura « storia delle idee » non aiuta alla comprensione sinottica di sistemi teorici individuali, a volte messi insieme senza rigore e in contraddizione con se stessi, né serve a seguire lo sviluppo della individualità e della personalità, la peculiare disposizione e sensibilità del grande critico [38].

E Wimsatt e Brooks, dal canto loro, descrivendo la propria storia della critica letteraria, dichiarano:

... in a history of this sort the critical *idea* has priority over all other kinds of material... Hence it happens that we have attempted no complete account of any philosopher or literary man... By and large... we have preferred the idea in full bloom and have made no attempt to harmonize the smaller contradictions, real or apparent, which are always to be found in the canon of a prolific author [39].

Questi tre autori, dunque, pur operando scelte quasi opposte e preoccupandosi l'uno prevalentemente di rendere giustizia ai singoli sistemi teorici esaminati, e gli altri di for-

---

[38] R. Wellek, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

[39] W. K. Wimsatt Jr. & C. Brooks, *Literary Criticism. A Short History*, (I), London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970, pp. VII-VIII.

nire innanzitutto una serie di « narrative focuses on ideas »[40], hanno sottolineato, in tutti e due i casi, che « la storia delle idee », applicata alla critica, implica necessariamente la scelta di trascurare il singolo autore e di descriverne e interpretarne compiutamente le proposte.

Ora, l'operazione che Needham compie quando esamina il canone richardsiano consiste in una lettura incentrata sul concetto-chiave di « interanimation » elaborato in C I. Needham ne rintraccia il momento preparatorio in una serie di elementi del primo Richards, che egli colloca sotto la denominazione di « general theory of complessity », e il momento conclusivo e finale nell'idea di « activity » del Richards della terza fase; fin qui l'operazione è valida e interessante. Ma, un tal metodo di lettura che, in sintesi, equivale a leggere la produzione richardsiana alla luce di C I, procura che le singole opere non vengono rispettate e interpretate correttamente. Infatti, per quanto riguarda PLC [41], accade che Needham non riesce a far rientrare alcune componenti del discorso svolto in quel volume nella teoria generale della complessità e perciò ne postula una seconda — « hypnotic theory of poetry » —; queste due teorie vengono poi presentate come opposte e discordanti perché implicano un diverso grado di discriminazione degli stimoli; ciò fatto, egli conclude che PLC da un lato (con la teoria della complessità) preannuncia la « valuable culmination » raggiunta in C I, e dall'altro (con la teoria ipnotica) guarda indietro verso MM con la sua enfasi sul « feeling ». Tutto ciò è errato e inaccettabile e, come dicevo, credo derivi prevalentemente dal metodo di lettura di Needham il quale finisce con l'interpretare come contrasti e opposizioni del pensiero di Richards, i limiti della struttura che questo suo metodo impone a certi aspetti dell'opera richardsiana. Ma sarà bene, in questo caso, entrare nel det-

[40] Id., p. VIII.

[41] Poiché il caso CI storicamente riguarda PLC e CI, tralascerò l'ultimo Richards e il concetto di « activity » soffermandomi, quindi, solo sull'interpretazione che Needham dà di *Principles*.

taglio e dimostrare analiticamente l'errore compiuto dall'autore.

Nella sua interpretazione la « vigilanza » e « gli effetti ipnotici del metro », discussi da Richards in PLC, sono rispettivamente esemplari della teoria generale della complessità e della teoria ipnotica. La citazione di Richards cui Needham obietta è così riportata:

> [Metre works] not as Coleridge suggests, through the surprise element... but through the absence of surprise, through the lulling effects more than through the awakening. Many of the most characteristic symptoms of incipient hypnosis are present in a slight degree. Among these [are] susceptibility and vivacity of emotion, suggestibility, limitations of the field of attention and marked differences n the incidence of belief-feelings closely analogous to those which alcohol and nitrous oxide can induce... (PLC, 143) [42].

Il commento di Needham, subito dopo, è questo:

> The lulling process contrasts with the vigilance stressed elsewhere, unless one is to argue that what is produced by the poet's heightened vigilance in turn decreases the reader's vigilance [43].

Inizialmente non si riesce neppure a capire perché i vari sintomi del leggero stato di ipnosi siano incompatibili con uno stato acuto di vigilanza in cui, come Needham stesso cita a pag. 25, « the nervous system reacts to stimuli with highly adapted, discriminating and ordered responses ». In effetti, con un procedimento graduale e sotterraneo, questo termine che inizialmente (p. 25 appena riportata) viene presentato per quel che è, alla pagina seguente viene identificato con discriminazione degli stimoli (« a low level of discrimination of stimuli or a reduction of 'vigilance' »), da pagina 27 in poi viene accomunato con « awareness » (« This is indeed a low level of discrimination, and Richards clearly has in mind our conduct during our less aware moments. ») e, infine, a pagina 39, viene usato intercambia-

[42] J. Needham, CM, cit., p. 27.

[43] Ibidem.

bilmente con « awareness » (« the development of the view that sees poetry as involving a high degree of vigilance » diventa, the righe dopo, « the development of the view of poetry as postulating an increased degree of awareness »).

Prescindendo dal fatto che un simile modo di operare, presente in molta parte dell'analisi di *Principles* non può necessariamente rendere giustizia al pensiero di Richards in cui questi termini nè sono intercambiabili, nè hanno significati così labili, rispetto alla vigilanza esso ha l'effetto di svuotarla di parte del suo significato originario e tecnico e di renderla equivalente a « attenzione », « concentrazione e sforzo consapevole » a discriminare gli stimoli e a rispondere ad essi in modo non automatico. Infatti, riassumendo la sua interpretazione del modo in cui, secondo Richards, il poeta vive la propria esperienza e del motivo per cui ne può disporre in misura maggiore del normale, Needham scrive:

> His [the poet's] vigilance enabled him to receive an unusually wide variety of stimuli, or, in plain language, he was unusually attentive and receptive. This, it will be recalled, made him, also, unusually retentive of experience. That the response should be minute and detailed, and not automatic, is also the basis of the general account of complexity [...] [44].

Si notino l'aggettivo « attentive » e la connotazione « not automatic » della risposta e si pongano a confronto con questa asserzione di Richards che viene dopo la definizione di vigilanza come stato in cui il sistema nervoso reagisce con risposte appropriate, discriminanti e ordinate che, come si è detto, Needham cita a pagina 25:

> Whether we are considering the decerebrate preparation or the intact poet, the simplest automatism or the most highly conscious acts, what happens in a given stimulus situation varies with the vigilance of the appropriate portion of the nervous system [45].

[44] Id., p. 31.
[45] I. A. Richards, PLC, cit., p. 142.

Inoltre, H. Head, che coniò il termine vigilanza, nel descrivere la « purposive adaptation » e, cioè, il tipo di risposte fornite durante uno stato acuto di vigilanza, ritiene di dover chiarire che:

> Purposive adaptation is sometimes said to be a distinctive mark of mental activity. But if we analyse this mode of behaviour, its essential elements are found to a varying degree in reactions, whether conscious or not, from all parts of the central nervous system [46].

La vigilanza, pertanto, è rilevabile a diversi livelli del sistema nervoso, caratterizza le risposte dell'animale decerebrato e anche quelle automatiche; essa è insomma forte potenza neurale e alto grado di efficienza fisiologica, dote che caratterizza ogni tipo di attività mentale e ogni suo aspetto e che, perciò, non può essere definita, nel linguaggio comune, solo come attenzione a discriminare gli stimoli, nè come intenzionalità o consapevolezza.

E, d'altra parte, Richards, prima di introdurre questo termine della fisiologia, descrivendo il modo in cui il poeta vive la propria esperienza, lo chiama « understanding », ma sta bene attento a puntualizzare che:

> We must not take « understanding » in too specialized a sense here [...]. We are accustomed to make an artificial distinction between intellectual [...] and [...] emotional mental activities. To understand a situation in the sense here intended is not necessarily to reflect upon it, to inquire into its principles and consciouly distinguish its characters, but to respond to it as a whole, in a coherent way which allows its parts their due share and their proper independence in the response [47].

Ora, è proprio questo tipo di risposta che il leggero stato di ipnosi procurato dal metro serve a garantire. Il lettore, il cui grado di vigilanza — nel momento in cui legge — non è necessariamente alto, potrebbe infatti reagire alla

[46] H. Head, « The Conception of Mental and Nervous Energy » (II), in *British Journal of Psychology*, XIV, 1923, p. 138.
[47] I. A. Richards, PLC, cit., p. 141.

poesia senza accordare il dovuto spazio a tutti gli elementi, soffocandone alcuni e privilegiandone altri; egli, ad esempio, potrebbe leggerlo come se fosse un brano di prosa e non dare sufficiente spazio all'effetto sensoriale delle parole, egli potrebbe cioè reagire ad esse in maniera abbreviata, cogliendone subito e solo il senso letterale e senza fare arricchire la propria risposta degli effetti che esse danno come suoni. È infatti strano che Needham tagli la citazione di Richards sugli effetti del metro, senza includere tra i sintomi dell'ipnosi:

... and some degree of hyperaesthesia (*increased power of discriminating* sensations)... [48]

grazie alla quale:

... syllables, which in prose or in *vers libre* sound thin, tinny and flat, often gain an astonishing sonority and fullness even in verse which seems to possess no very subtle metrical structure [49].

Insomma, il poeta che decida di utilizzare il metro a scopi ipnotici — puntualizzazione che sarà bene fare dato che Richards la pone come premessa alla citazione cui Needham obietta — lo farà perché avrà necessità di incidere in modo molto diretto sulle emozioni del suo lettore [50] e di assicurarsi di governare la sua reazione momento per momento, mettendolo in uno stato in cui egli sia più suggestionabile, più pronto ad aderire con sentimenti di credenza e con emozioni vivaci, il poeta si garantisce la giustezza della reazione del lettore e la difende dalla possibile intrusione di elementi irrilevanti [51].

La coincidenza tra lo « understanding » del poeta, che possedendo la dote della vigilanza, inconsapevolmente reagisce ad una situazione pienamente, inglobando un numero

[48] Id., p. 110 (il corsivo è mio).
[49] Id., p. 110-11.
[50] Cfr. id., p. 112.
[51] Cfr. Ibidem.

di impulsi superiore al normale, e la fruizione estetica di una poesia che, attraverso gli effetti provocati dal metro e dagli altri mezzi formali, è governata in modo da fare includere tutti gli impulsi necessari, è dichiarata dallo stesso Richards:

The poet makes unconsciously a selection which outwits the force of habit; the impulses he awakens are freed, through the very means by which they are aroused, from the inhibitions that ordinary circumstances encourage; the irrelevant and the extraneous is excluded; and upon the resulting simplified but widened field of impulses he imposes an order which their greater plasticity allows them to accept. Almost always too the chief part of his work is done through those impulses which we have seen to be most uniform and regular, those which are aroused by what are called the 'formal elements' [52].

L'uso del metro a scopi ipnotici, pertanto, non potrà comportare una riduzione della vigilanza nel lettore; al contrario, esso, come gli altri mezzi formali, può rendere possibile che nella mente di questi si verifichi un'esperienza simile proprio a quella prodotta dalla vigilanza del poeta.

Se, dunque, non esiste opposizione tra vigilanza e effetti ipnotici del metro, le due teorie cui essi appartengono sono postulazioni non necessarie, nel senso che la vigilanza e il suo opposto potrebbero entrambi appartenere alla teoria della complessità o a quella ipnotica. Abbiamo già detto che per Needham esse sono opposte perché implicano un livello diverso di discriminazione degli stimoli e abbiamo già dimostrato che egli fa equivalere tale concetto alla vigilanza, da lui erroneamente interpretata come « attenzione »; pertanto la tesi per cui, in *Principles*, in contrapposizione a:

The ideas of 'complexity', 'impersonality', 'irony', and 'vigilance' [which] emphasise a high level of discrimination of stimuli [53].

esistono pure:

[...] important elements [...] which work in a contrary direction

[52] Id., p. 192.
[53] J. Needham, CM, cit., p. 26.

[and are] contained in the 'hypnotic theory' which involves a low level of discrimination of stimuli or a reduction of 'vigilance' [54]

dovrebbe, necessariamente, già risultare inaccettabile. Non sarà inutile, però, approfondire l'argomento. Tanto per cominciare, per quanto ci si sforzi, non si riesce a capire perché Needham introduca la discriminazione degli stimoli come elemento con cui rintracciare l'opposizione tra le due teorie. Needham cita questo lungo passo di Richards:

The extent to which any activity is conscious seems to depend very largely upon how complex and how novel it is. The primitive and in a sense natural outcome of stimulus is action; the more simple the situation with which the mind is engaged, the closer is the connection between the stimulus and some overt response in action, and in general the less rich and full is the consciousness attendant. A man walking over uneven ground, for example, makes without reflection or emotion a continuous adjustment of his steps to his footing; but let the ground become precipitous and, unless he is used to such places, both reflection and emotion will appear. The increased complexity of the situation and the greater delicacy and appropriateness of the movements required for convenience and safety, call forth far more complicated goings on in the mind. Besides his perception of the nature of the ground, the thought may occur that a false move would be perilous and difficult to retrieve. This, when accompanied by emotion, is called a 'realisation' of his situation. The adjustment to one another of varied impulses — to go forwards carefully, to lie down and grasp something with the hands, to go back, and so forth — and their co-ordination into useful behaviour alter the whole character of his experience [55].

lo riassume nel seguente modo:

The complexity of response produced by unfamiliarity creates a richer consciousness; when this is accompanied by emotion, a realisation of the experience occurs [56].

[54] Ibidem.
[55] Id., pp. 22-23.
[56] Id., p. 23.

e, poi, aggiunge che la prima cosa da mettere in evidenza è che:

[...] that account [...] supposes a high level of discrimination of stimuli [...] [57].

Ora, per quanto ovvia possa essere apparsa a Needham la relazione tra il brano di *Principles* e questo concetto della discriminazione è quanto meno strano e sospetto che egli non si degni neppure di illustrarla e che, proprio l'elemento basilare delle risposte complesse sul quale egli elabora la contrapposizione delle due teorie e, conseguentemente, la critica di PLC, non sia oggetto di analisi e di commento. Se poi, come credo, la ovvietà di questa relazione è stata rintracciata leggendo « the increased complexity of the situation » come situazione « esterna » all'individuo che, offrendo maggiori difficoltà, gli impone di prestare maggiore attenzione e di discriminare quindi stimoli, anche essi, « esterni », Needham, ricalcando il tipo di errore commesso con la vigilanza, si è limitato ad un'interpretazione molto superficiale di quel brano e non ha tenuto in debito conto i seguenti punti espressi in *Principles*:

1. Gli stimoli non provengono solo dall'ambiente che circonda l'individuo, ma anche dall'organismo dell'individuo stesso: « the nervous system is the means by which stimuli from the environment, or from within the body, result in appropriate behaviour »[58];
2. essi vengono ricevuti solo se servono a qualche bisogno dell'organismo: « of the possible stimuli which we might at any moment receive, only a few actually take effect. Which are received and which impulses ensue depends upon which of our interests is active »[59];

[57] Ibidem.
[58] I. A. Richards, PLC, cit., p. 65.
[59] Id., p. 66.

3. l'azione, comportamento o risposta non dipende solo dagli stimoli ma anche dai bisogni dell'organismo: « the form which the response to them [stimuli] takes depends only in part upon the nature of the stimulus, and much more upon what the organism 'wants', i.e. the state of equilibrium of its multifarious activities »[60].

Rintracciare nella discriminazione degli stimoli provenienti dall'esterno l'elemento caratterizzante delle risposte complesse significa decidere che il dover selezionare gli stimoli in base alle esigenze interne, il dover rispondere anche a stimoli interni e il dover soddisfare i propri bisogni non comportano complessità. E ciò è esattamente quel che Needham fa[61]. Egli infatti rintraccia le basi della teoria ipnotica proprio in quelle risposte che sono governate più dai bisogni dell'organismo che dagli stimoli esterni e, sostenendo che esse implicano un livello basso di discriminazione, le contrappone a quelle complesse e ai vari elementi della teoria di Richards che egli fa rientrare nella teoria generale della complessità. Riassumendo e citando parte del discorso di Richards, egli scrive:

In Chapter XI, 'A sketch for a Psychology', Richards says that 'experience has two sources which in different cases have very different importance' (PLC, 87). When we are responding to things in the outside world 'our behaviour in all probability will only be appropriate ... in so far as it is determined by the nature of the present and past stimuli that we have received from those things and things like them' (PLC, 87). When, however, we are 'satisfying our needs and desires a much less strict connection between stimulus and response is sufficient' (PLC, 87)[62].

[60] Ibidem.

[61] Una prima riprova di ciò va rintracciata nel fatto che, come si è visto, Needham non dà alcun peso alla iperestesia quando discute il metro; la «accresciuta capacità di *discriminare* le sensazioni», le quali, certo, non sono stimoli esterni, avrebbe dovuto fargli comprendere, invece, che l'attività discriminatoria non riguarda solo e necessariamente gli elementi della situazione esterna.

[62] J. Needham, CM, cit., p. 26.

La sua conclusione è questa:

This is indeed a low level of discrimination, and Richards clearly has in mind our conduct during our less aware moments. Yet this idea of a loose connection between stimulus and response, this inhibition of awareness for satisfaction of a need, heavily colours some areas of his discussion of poetry[63].

Needham, cioè, contrappone i due tipi di risposta eguagliando, questa volta, la minore connessione tra stimolo e risposta alla minore discriminazione degli stimoli; inoltre, avendo precedentemente fatto equivalere la discriminazione a « vigilance » e « awareness », conclude ora che se non c'è stretta connessione tra stimolo e risposta, non c'è discriminazione e non c'è « awareness »; poiché, poi, nella sua interpretazione la discriminazione e i suoi equivalenti caratterizzano le risposte complesse e gli elementi della teoria di Richards che egli colloca nella teoria della complessità (ad esempio, la vigilanza del poeta), egli postula la teoria ipnotica in cui fa rientrare quegli elementi che non necessitano la discriminazione (ad esempio, gli effetti ipnotici del metro) e le risposte governate prevalentemente dai bisogni dell'organismo. Il discorso di Needham può essere così riassunto in uno schema:

GENERAL THEORY OF COMPLEXITY	vs	HYPNOTIC THEORY
high level of discrimination of stimuli		low level of discrimination of stimuli
vigilance		reduction of vigilance
awareness		inhibition of awareness
strict connection between s. & r.		loose connection between s. & r.
responding to things in the outside world		satisfying needs and desires
the poet's vigilance		hypnotic effect of metre

Questo intero sistema è di fatto già stato messo in crisi con la dimostrazione della presenza della vigilanza anche

[63] Id., p. 27.

nelle risposte inconsce e automatiche, la qual cosa, date le equivalenze di Needham, significa che le due teorie non possono essere in opposizione rispetto alla discriminazione e simili e che non è necessario, quindi, postulare una « reduction of vigilance » per la « hypnotic theory »[64]; esso, poi, dimostra tutta la sua debolezza appena si ritorna al primo brano di *Principles* che Needham utilizza per introdurre la teoria generale della complessità e il concetto della discriminazione degli stimoli, in cui abbiamo letto che:

> The primitive and in a sense natural outcome of stimuli is action; *the more simple* the situation in which the mind is engaged, *the closer is the connection* between the stimulus and some overt response in action, and in general the less rich and full is the consciousness attendant [65].

È evidente che, con il suo modo di creare equivalenze e di usare intercambiabilmente concetti diversi, Needham contraddice la sua stessa interpretazione perché, se quel brano andava letto — come lui ha fatto — come una teorizzazione della complessità, allora le risposte complesse non implicherebbero una connessione « strict » tra stimolo e risposta, ma una « loose ».

C'è, poi, un'incoerenza anche più grave nel sistema interpretativo di Needham e consiste nell'affermare che la teoria ipnotica è connessa alla teoria dell'equilibrio e del valore:

> The 'hypnotic theory' is, through the assertion of the central importance of tied imagery, connected with the doctrine of equilibrium, and hence with the general theory of value [66].

---

[64] Si ricorderà che per Needham la base della teoria della complessità risiede nella non-automaticità delle risposte (v. sopra, p. 130), il che fa supporre che quelle della teoria ipnotica siano, invece, automatiche. Il mio schema si sarebbe potuto quindi arricchire anche delle due voci « complex answers » e « automatic answers »; poiché, però, l'autore non parla esplicitamente di risposte automatiche a proposito della teoria ipnotica, ho preferito non aggiungere tali voci.

[65] V. sopra, p. 134 (il corsivo è mio).

[66] J. Needham, CM, cit., p. 35.

Dato questo legame, essa è più importante della teoria della complessità:

> The 'hypnotic theory' is linked to the idea of equilibrium of opposed impulses and hence is promoted to a central place in *Principles of Literary Criticism* [67].

Ora, Needham ha certamente ragione nel far notare che tutto ciò che è collegato alla teoria del valore occupa un posto centrale in PLC, ma non si accorge del paradosso che sta sostenendo nello scegliere, fra le due teorie da lui postulate, *proprio* quella ipnotica.

La teoria del valore, riassunta dallo stesso Richards, è la seguente:

> What is good or valuable, we have said, is the exercise of impulses and the satisfaction of their appetencies. When we say that anything is good we mean that it satisfies, and by a good experience we mean one in which the impulses which make it are fulfilled and successful, adding as the necessary qualification that their exercise and satisfaction shall not interfere in any way with more important impulses. [...] The problem of morality, the problem of how we are to obtain the greatest possible value from life, becomes a problem of organization, both in the individual life and in the adjustment of individual lives to one another [...]. Without system, needless to say, values vanishes, since in a state of chaos important and trivial impulses alike are frustrated [68].

L'idea centrale è, dunque, quella della organizzazione, sistematizzazione e coordinamento degli impulsi; in base ad essa Richards descrive la mente:

> [...] a growing order is the principle of the mind [whose] function is to co-ordinate [...] [69]

l'individuo:

> No individual can live one minute without a very intricate and, so far as it goes, very perfect co-ordination of impulses [70].

---

[67] Id., p. 28.

[68] I. A. Richards, PLC, cit., p. 44.

[69] Id., p. 38.

[70] Id., p. 39.

le differenze tra stati mentali dotati di valore e non:

> These differences are differences in momentary organization, differences in precedence between rival possible systematizations [71].

e, come vedremo, molto più di tutto ciò.

Needham, dal canto suo, mette giustamente in evidenza, quando descrive la disponibilità dell'esperienza del poeta e la sua vigilanza, che:

> In Richards scheme, recall of a complex structure of impulses will be more frequent than that of a simple structure... But the complex structure must be *organized*: 'Experience which has this organized character, it is reasonable to suppose, has more chance of revival, is more available as a whole and in parts, than more confused experience' (PLC, 183). This organization depends on *vigilance*... [72].

Egli stesso, cioè, attira l'attenzione sullo stretto legame esistente tra la struttura complessa dell'esperienza, la sua organizzazione e la vigilanza; ma, questa organizzazione, in Richards, non è altro che la caratteristica delle esperienze di valore. Ciò risulta in modo esplicito e senza possibilità di equivoci dallo stesso capitolo da cui abbiamo appena citato il riassunto della teoria etica; rimandando al capitolo XXII che è appunto quello su « The Poet's Experience », Richards afferma:

> The artist is concerned with the record and perpetuation of the experiences which seem to him most worth having. For reasons which we shall consider in Chapter Twenty-two, he is also the man who is most likely to have experiences of value to record. [...] His experiences, those at least which give value to his work, represent conciliations of impulses which in most minds are still confused, intertrammelled and conflicting. His work is the ordering of what in most minds is disordered. [...] when he succeds, the value of what he has accomplished is found always in a more perfect organization [73].

---

[71] Id., p. 38.
[72] J. Needham, CM, cit., p. 25.
[73] I. A. Richards, PLC, cit., p. 46.

Se, quindi, le esperienze del poeta che sono dotate di valore, come tutte le esperienze di questo tipo, si caratterizzano per la loro organizzazione, Needham non può — da una parte — rilevare la stretta connessione esistente tra organizzazione e complessità, e — dall'altra — annettere la teoria ipnotica a quella del valore e il concetto di « organizzazione degli impulsi » avrebbe dovuto servirgli a rintracciare la esistenza di una sola teoria in *Principles*, l'unica in esso contenuta. L'elemento centrale di questa può e, forse, deve essere rintracciato nella teoria del valore la quale, con il concetto di organizzazione, riemerge nei momenti più significativi del discorso di Richards e nei tre elementi principali della sua teoria: le esperienze estetiche in generale, l'esperienza del poeta e quella del lettore; le prime:

> ... while admitting that such experiences can be distinguished, I shall be at pains to show that they are closely similar to many other experiences, that they differ chiefly in the connections between their constituents, and that they are only a further development, a finer organization of ordinary experiences, and not in the least a new and different kind of thing [74].

la seconda:

> The answer then, at least in part, to the problem of how the poet's experience is more than usually available to him is that it is, as he undergoes it, more than usually organized through his more than usual vigilance [75].

la terza:

> What is much more essential is the increased organization, the heightened power of combining all the several effects of formal elements into a single response, which the poet bestows. [...] It is in such resolution of a welter of disconnected impulses into a single ordered response that in all the arts imagination is most shown [...] [76]

---

[74] Id., p. 10.
[75] Id., p. 142.
[76] Id., p. 192-93.

La dimostrazione della non necessarietà della postulazione delle due teorie e della sua autocontraddizione dovrebbe, a questo punto, aver convinto della parzialità da parte di Needham nella interpretazione di *Principles* e far nutrire seri dubbi sull'idea che questo volume sia preparatorio alla « valuable culmination » raggiunta in C I. Infatti, non esistendo opposizione tra gli elementi della teoria della complessità e quelli della teoria ipnotica, ed essendo, quindi, imposibile sostenere che solo i primi preannuncino C I, si dovrebbe solo poter affermare che *Principles* assolva a questa funzione nella sua interezza.

Ma, come si è dimostrato, i motivi del favore di Needham per C I sono da un lato personali — i suoi assunti sulla teoria della critica —, dall'altro contingenti — il suo discorso sulla continuità — e, dall'altro ancora, logicamente necessari — le opposizioni e incoerenze che egli rintraccia in PLC gli impongono di non preferire tale volume — e, pertanto, c'è più di un motivo valido per non condividere la opinione di Needham sulla « valuable culmination ». In realtà ritengo che essa venga raggiunta in *Principles* e che sia questo il testo di Richards più significativo per la critica letteraria; C I, invece, va letto seguendo il suggerimento del suo autore e cioè, innanzitutto come:

> [...] a new estimate of Coleridge's theory in the light of a more adequate evaluation of emotive language [77].

la quale era stata a sua volta raggiunta in:

> *Principles of Literary Criticism* [that] endeavours to provide for the emotive function of language the same critical foundations as is here [MM] attempted for the symbolic [78].

Il pensiero di Richards in PLC e la sua evoluzione possono essere colti pienamente solo se ci si addentra nelle molteplici discipline cui egli attinse durante la sua carriera

[77] I.A. Richards, MM, cit., p. XIV (« Preface to the Fourth Edition »).
[78] Id., p. XII (« Preface to the Second Edition »).

e che Needham non sia incline a fare ciò, rispetto alla psicologia, ritengo di averlo dimostrato. Ciò viene inoltre tradito da affermazioni di questo tipo:

> An over-all view of Richards' work would... lead us to expect the essential interest, for a literary critic, to lie where I have placed it [from PLC to CI]. His initial interests were psychological, linguistic and philosophical, and these resume their central position in his later work, in which the other large interest is pedagogy [79].

Che la specificità « letteraria » dei modi del discorso in C I — con l'esplicito riferimento a un così grande esponente della tradizione — abbia su Needham l'effetto di rendergli questo volume più caro e più intellegibile, è pienamente accettabile; ciò a cui si obietta, invece, è il fatto che, pur includendo PLC nella fase richardsiana di maggiore interesse per la critica letteraria, egli lo consideri come un testo preparatorio, lo presenti in modo parziale e negativo e, in tal modo, contribuisca a mantenere in vita il caso C I, facendo in modo che in esso si possano addirittura scorgere tutti i sintomi di una recrudescenza.

[79] J. Needham, CM, cit., p. 91.

« ONE PART RECORD, TWO PARTS IDEOLOGY »[1]
IMAGES OF THE ENGLISH 'COUNTRYSIDE' IN THE SEVENTIES

by
Elizabeth Glass Immirzi

Yet there is a sense in which the idea of the enclosures, localised to just that period in which the Industrial Revolution was beginning, can shift our attention from the real history and become an element of that very powerful myth of modern England in which the transition from a rural to an industrial society is seen as a kind of fall, the true cause and origin of our social suffering and disorder. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this myth, in modern social thought. It is a main source for the structure of feeling which we began by examining: the perpetual retrospect to an 'organic' or 'natural' society. But it is also a main source for that last protecting illusion in the crisis of our own time: that it is not capitalism that is injuring us, but the more isolable, more evident system of urban industrialism [2].

In exploring the forms that some country themes have taken during the last ten years in a changing technological and historical context, we inevitably rely gratefully on Williams' *The Country and the City* which traces the complex and ever-shifting question of literary representations of the rural past, and their relationship to specific historical conjunctures with thoroughness, sensitivity and insight. This extract is fundamental. Williams is, however, forced to look elsewhere for rural literature in recent years, to the ex-colonies where it is able to provide an

[1] R. Williams, *The Country and the City*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1973, p. 261.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 96.

alternative voice and consciousness and where the countryside is the seat of struggle and tension rather than a symbolic currency in which other problems are expressed. He was also writing just before the spectre of the fuel crisis and the realisation of economic recession struck the industrialised countries.

More recently, Wiener analyses the relationship between the rural myth and the hostility that exists in Britain towards energy and commitment in industry [3]. From the second half of the 19th century onwards, the rural ethic appears in a series of unexpected economic, political and other places, as well as in literature, with the public schools being one of the main channels of diffusion of the middle-class unbusinesslike ideologies connected with the idea of landed ease.

> The often-hailed Victorian achievement, seen in this light, was Janus-faced. If society was transformed, with a minimum of violence, the extent of the transformation was more limited than it appeared to be. New economic forces did not tear the social fabric. Old values and patterns of behavior lived on within the new, whose character was then profoundly modified. The end result of the nineteenth-century transformation of Britain was indeed a peaceful accommodation, but one that entrenched premodern elements within the new society, and gave legitimacy to antimodern sentiments. The cultural and practical consequences would become clear only in the twentieth century [4].

We can perhaps compare the low status of engineering and technology in Britain, and the high status and level of knowledge that gardening and nature enjoy in Britain, with the reverse situation in Italy, where the middle classes are extremely reluctant to get their hands dirty, or indeed, know anything about plants, while industrialists and engineering are both prestigious. The cultural itinerary of the latter social reality must be equally complex.

---

[3] M. J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit*, Cambridge, University Press, 1981.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

In Britain, country books are as prominent as biography or science fiction in libraries and bookshops, with a host of cheap paperbacks flanking the more expensive beautifully photographed hardbacks and the large format paperbacks with a predominance of photographs printed on heavy shiny paper. They include reminiscences and diaries of the past, diaries of the natural and agricultural year, the accounts of journeys, information about farming or wildlife, literary atlases, and accounts of their struggles written by recent settlers, as well as the reprints of classic but long neglected rural writers like Hudson or Jefferies, or the collections of old photographs published by Batsford. The selection inevitably includes the book of the most recent 'country' television series [5].

In the midst of this abundant production, however, there is very little that we could straightforwardly call fiction, except the powerful and detailed fantasy epics of Richard Addams, which seem to be more related to Tolkien and children's animal fantasies. Postwar Britain has not produced any new rural or regional novelists to take the place of Mary Webb, the Powys family, Winifred Holtby, Francis Brett Young, or H. E. Bates, while A. G. Street seems to have been the most direct antecedent of current country writers, in his emphasis on practical agricultural and social detail [6]. The line between fiction and documentary is blurred enough, but it seems that concentration on the concrete details of country life excludes a priori any kind of personal or social conflict or turbulence, characters depicted in depth, analysed by anything more than a humorous veneer, or in fact most of the accepted repertoire of the novelist.

Present-day rural writing gives the deceptive appearance of keeping its feet firmly on the ground, and is thus forced to keep the expression of eternal rural truths to

---

[5] See appendix for a representative list of titles.

[6] G. Cavaliero, in *The Rural Tradition in the English Novel 1900-1939*, London, Macmillan, 1977, surveys the work of these authors, and many others, without succumbing to the rural myth.

odd meditatory moments, instead of relying on imagination and fully developed characterisation. In order to compare these two types of narrative expedient, we can take the intense and mysterious symbiosis between man and nature [7] which is a marked feature of early 20th century rural novels and the vehicle of a variety of needs and values. In *Wolf Solent*, J. C. Powys, writing from his American 'exile', uses natural imagery with much less panache than Lawrence, to explore psychological and sexual arguments. Life in London and symptoms of change like suburbs and aeroplanes form Powys negative reference points. Dorset signifies feeling, London, on the other hand, numbness, and work an alienating and humiliating necessity.

> Advancing up this lane hand in hand with his companion, Wolf felt his soul invaded by that particular kind of melancholy which emanates, at the end of a spring day, from all the elements of earth and water. It is a sadness unlike all others, and has perhaps some mysterious connection with the swift, sudden recognition, by myriads and myriads of growing things, of the strange fatality that pursues all earthly life, whether clothed in flesh or clothed in vegetable fibre. It is a sadness accentuated by grey skies, grey water, and grey horizons; but it does not seem to attain its most significant meaning until the pressure of the spring adds to these elemental wraiths the intense wistfulness of new young life [8].

Powys' hero experiences nightmares and trances in which strange and unearthly transformations take place, that today are only present in science fiction. However, the feeling of symbiosis between man and the earth is still to be found in rural non-fiction, reduced to the status of a diffuse 'special relationship', and when surrounded by

---

[7] « ... the personality of a man reacting upon the spirit of a place produces something which is neither the man nor the place, but fiercer and more beautiful than either. This third entity, born of the union, becomes a power and a haunting presence — non-human, non-material » M. Webb, *The Golden Arrow*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1928, p. 174.

[8] J. C. Powys, *Wolf Solent*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1961, p. 106.

a mass of concrete information and detail, seems somewhat anachronistic, as in this short excerpt from *Akenfield*.

> ... the atavistic thread whether he likes it or not, remains unbroken for the village man. It is both his advantage and his fetter, allowing him certain instincts, knowledge and emotions which can only be inherited through unbroken contact with the life of the earth itself [9].

Blythe's « atavistic thread » seems at odds with the direct and unfussy tone of most of the interviews with villagers he is presenting, because it is a residue of part of the rural myth that we find much earlier. It is all that remains of « the strange fatality that pursues all earthly life », « these elemental wraiths », and other almost supernatural manifestations.

The British penchant for non-fiction ties in with the current reluctance to be involved, as well as a thirst for information, which one suspects is used mechanically, absorbed to the extent to which it confirms previous information on the subject or follows a well known formula. Naturally, at the same time as providing as predictable a read for a winter evening or a commuter journey as Agatha Christie, non-fiction country writers also have to satisfy any specialists in their audience. Thus, it seems that in the pitching of an emotional level, stress and passion are to be avoided at all costs, while sentimentality combined with humour is a consistent ingredient.

In limiting our discussion of country themes to approximately the 1970s, we have excluded topics like the impatience with state intervention and the bureaucratic procedures which this involved, which was common during the '40s and '50s. An earlier and more aristocratic version of this which lingered on well after the '20s, when many of the large estates were broken up, or changed hands, was the intolerance of « crippling » death duties. Currently, these grumbles have been channelled towards Europe,

---

[9] R. Blythe, *Akenfield*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1969 (New York, Pantheon Books p. 18).

agriculture being the main sector where EEC coordination has been achieved. British farmers resent any regulation, in spite of the end of a century of low food prices wholly to their advantage, and in the age of agriculture as big business, like to preserve the image of the farmer doing his accounts on the kitchen table, fretting to get outside again. At a commonsense level, we remember chauvinistic press campaigns to 'save' King Edward potatoes from bureaucrats in Brussels, thus loading a disease-prone variety with all the traditional British virtues of fish-and-chip shops, just as the coming of fast food and a wider menu has forced many of them to change or close.

There are also a number of books on ecology and land use first published in the '60s, and reflecting a great faith in the reforming qualities of official institutions, which we have not dealt with. It seems, too, that many 'alternative' evocations of the rural past have had to wait until the '80s to be republished, and for their more realistic historical consciousness to gain a general circulation [10].

Generally speaking, we can separate country writers into two sorts; there are books written by farmers and others who were born in the country and have never left it, and those, who, somewhat less distinguishedly than their forerunners the Georgians [11], chose to move to the country,

---

[10] For instance, Fred Kitchen's *Brother to the Ox* (1939), now reprinted by Caliban, Horsham, Sussex, an autobiography of a worker who had left the land, and was able to see the past in a realistic perspective.

[11] By amalgamating the Georgian poets, we are ignoring their diversity, but they share an idealised pastoralism, coexisting with a rejection of urban values which for them had led to the catastrophe of the first world war, which cancelled the past. For example, in *'February Afternoon'*, the war experience is contrasted with the timelessness of birds following the plough, but Edward Thomas is not able to recall a happier rural past. We notice a tendency to view country people and activities, and the landscape, as eternal and static symbols, which at times overlay accurate observation.

> Tall nettles cover up, as they have done
> These many springs, the rusty harrow, the plough

often attempting to become self-sufficient in a relatively isolated place where land is poor and not particularly coveted, or on farms with a bad reputation. More than most, the writing produced by those who have retreated from a suburban life, hedged in, as they see it, by an obsession with consumption and the rat race, reflects a blindness towards the structural deficiencies of the present system. Their narrative is full of desperate struggles with nature, from overflowing rivers to runaway livestock, and machines which assunme vengeful personalities. All these disastrous situations are treated with humour, patience and affection, at least in retrospect. The attitude remains that despite all the hardship involved, the writer would not change places with anybody, and a glow of honest self-satisfaction spreads over the final pages, or the end of the chapter [12]. As well as the opportunity to describe a series of funny or grotesque adventures or situations, these writers seem to be determined to let their difficulties show their lack of privilege; in fact, these are the only writers whose map of social class is ambigous. All this, however, disguises the conclusion that they are indeed privileged, and that most people have to live near their work, and have no supplementary skills such as writing or broadcasting to help them out when they need it [13].

> Long worn out, and the roller made of stone:
> Only the elm butt tops the nettles now.

Like travellers who preferred their Roman ruins covered in ivy and weeds, Edward Thomas goes on to approve of the dereliction of the part of the farmyard he is describing, the result of many years of arable depression due to the cheap import of wheat.

[12] Cfr. J. Fussey, *Cows in the Corn*, E. West, *Hovel in the Hills*, J. Seymour, *I'm a Stranger here Myself*. See appendix for details.

[13] Self supporting communes and simple-lifers are inevitably the subject of comedy today, although the situation that has inspired them is grave enough. We are all aware of something comic and unnatural in our relationship to the land and its produce, and those who are brave enough to face the derision of their contemporaries by sticking to their principles are too removed from the mainstream of life to produce mainstream literature.

M. Drabble, *A Writer's Landscape in Literature*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1979, p. 98.

The tendency is for holdings on good land to become bigger and so the kind of farm on hill or marginal land that these new subsistence farmers usually acquire is smaller than average, and correspondingly unprofitable. Again, as a phenomenon of a traditional nature is becoming less important, its ideological essence is being celebrated and embalmed in country writing and iconography, and in a situation where balancing information about other kinds of farming and land ownership is sparse, we can see how images of humaneness, dedication, community and unchanging tradition on the family farm become dominant. Indeed, the motto of both those whose farming has been inherited, and those who develop the urge to farm or live in the country could well be « Small is Beautiful »[14], since the discussion of farming as a large-scale profitable industry like any other, often involving close links with the food processing giants or investment organizations is left to farmers who don't broadcast, or burst into print except perhaps in the *Farmer and Stockbreeder* or the *Farmer's Weekly*, Britain's bestselling agricultural magazines. It is never acknowledged that agriculture is capitalist, and the private ownership of land, except for unprofitable uplands owned by the National Trust, isn't questioned.

> « Land », Mr Saggamore said to me years ago,
> « is the honestest thing »[15].

These lacunae include a neglect of the problems involved in feeding a large urban population, and minimise the huge increase in agricultural production during recent years, which all the same, leaves Britain more dependent on imports than most other European countries. This is however partly due to Britain's unfavourable climate and the long established imperial practice of importing the products

[14] The title of the book by E. F. Schumacher, Chief Adviser to the National Coal Board, which became something of a catchphrase in 1973.

[15] H. Phelps, *Just Over Yonder*, (see appendix for details).

of warmer climates, whose use has since become widespread and regarded as essential.

All the ideological shifts in emphasis in country writing contribute to the construction of a false polarity between urban and rural life, which is illusory because for the relatively secure and well-off majority groups in the country, with their own transport and modern comforts, standards of living are no different from those in the town. Pensioners, the very poor, and the chronically sick are the groups which have become more isolated and neglected because of cuts in transport and services in recent years, and they would welcome the possibility of achieving some of the material comforts which are part of « urban » patterns of consumption either implicitly or explicitly criticised by most country writers.

> We were people who were trying to break away from industry-dominated society and form a new kind of society — a simpler, less materialistic, less polluting, less dangerous kind, in close touch with the soil [16].

'The soil' is always given a symbolic purifying role, with an extremely abstract, elevating connotation which seems remote from the work and vicissitudes actually described in the literature. Furthermore, the idea that we need purging morally and materially and that this can be achieved by moving to the country denies the possibility of even a minimum of human dignity to everyone else. The soil in this sense implies a whole series of face-to-face relationships with people and animals and an attention to the process of growing, and natural minutiae, which emerges, almost in defiance of modern agribusiness methods, and the reality of the farm worker who spends his whole working day alone with a machine or with twenty thousand broiler chickens.

> We, and others like us, were finding our whole way of life under

[16] J. Seymour, *I'm a Stranger here Myself*, p. 25 (see appendix for details).

threat. Get bigger or get out, was the message, a message becoming plainer with each succeeding year [17].

Thus, the emphasis on 'small'; small farms, small communities, and families who interact with each other, is a fundamental component of present rural ideologies, associated with tradition and stability, exactly as in descriptions of pre-war urban working class culture. Many of our writings are reminiscences, and as both Williams, in *The Country and the City*, and Hoggart in *The Uses of Literacy* suggest, the autobiographical factor is also important here, since the home world of children is small, and consists of informal relationships with family and neighbours, with whom they are often better acquainted than are their parents.

Even Blythe, in Akenfield, who never attempts to distract the reader from modern agriculture and its impact on individuals and on village life continually isolates village families, carriers of « the atavistic thread », as we saw previously, from recent settlers and town dwellers, putting them on a different level, as in fact many of the people he interwiewed also do. Above all, we notice this in the village nurse, the teacher and the magistrate, all institutional representatives, 'Them', or at best, ambiguous figures between 'Them' and 'Us', like Hoggart's general practitioner. Basically, this is class prejudice, however much we would like to think that the villager's

> own life and the life of the corn and fruit and creatures clocks along with the same fatalistic movement. Spring-birth, winter-death and in between the harvest [18].

From personal experience in a Cambridgeshire village school in the mid-sixties, I can confirm that country chil-

[17] H. Phelps, *Just Where We Belong*, p. 124 (see appendix). For a full discussion of recent trends in farming, land ownership and taxation, and their implications, which mostly militate against the small farmer (see H. Newby, *Green and Pleasant Land?*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979).

[18] R. Blythe, *Akenfield*, cit., p. 15.

dren were regarded as 'slow' or 'different' by both teachers and officialdom and I was told that until not long before, they were often sewn into their clothes for the winter. The progression from contented swain to village idiot is thus quite feasible.

Akenfield was immediately successfull when it was published in 1969, and has since become a film. Although it is apparently a collage from several Suffolk villages [19], it is presented as a series of in-depth interviews with the inhabitants of one village, and describes its economic activities and social relations through this vivid technique. It takes as much from journalism, literature, and community studies as from oral history, but without a great deal of searching and analysis. This is the new villager's vision of the village, in terms of what Blythe calls « the national village cult ». Luckily, the many and varied interviews which follow describe and document village life in the past and the present, and its hardships tensions and values sympathetically and fully, letting them emerge in their complexity.

> In Akenfield, evidence of the good life, a tall old church on the hillside, a pub selling the local brew, a pretty stream, a football pitch, a handsome square vicarage with a cedar of Lebanon shading it, a school with jars of tadpoles in the window, three shops with doorbells, a Tudor mansion, half a dozen farms and a lot of quaint cottages, is there for all to recognize. Akenfield, on the face of it, is the kind of place in which an Englishman has always felt it his right and duty to live. It is patently the real country, untouched and

[19] Paul Thompson is justly critical of Blythe's « avoidable defects », and his lack of rigourousness, but writes: « But if as a model for sociology or history, Akenfield has cut too many corners, it has proved indisputably successful in populazing a new form of rural literature, a cross between the interview documentary and the novel. Nor can there be any doubt that oral evidence constitutes its real strength.... Above all, it succeeds through the immediacy with which the spoken word confronts a reader with the presence of the people themselves » (*The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, Oxford, University Press, 1978, p. 79).

genuine. A holy place, when you have spent half your life abroad in the services. Its very sounds are formal, hieratic, larks, clocks, bees, tractors humming. Rarely the sound of the human voice. So powerful is this traditional view that many people are able to live in the centre of it for years and see nothing more [20].

In this passage, « the real country, untouched and genuine » is the key phrase which expresses these middle class, retired from the City or the Middle East, essentially propertied, ideologies of the country, which have become diffuse and dominant. 'Untouched' and its companions 'unspoilt' and 'unchanging' are almost always misleading, and likewise, 'genuine', another frequent and loaded adjective. W. M. Williams found in the early '60s that

'the land' is of great emotional and social importance to the farmers, but it represents to them a generalised relationship rather than a profound attachment to a single holding ... fifty five percent of the farms were acquired by their present occupiers or their families within the last twenty years, and sixty-nine percent in the last thirty years [21].

On the whole it is the newcomers and the visitors who wish to recreate an imagined stationary or even retrogressive environment, immune to external forces, which tends to protect their privileged status, and which in the past frequently meant hardship and humiliation for other, less fortunate groups.

Akenfield already hints at the powerful visual component of the attraction that villages have for the British middle class, a heritage from the eighteenth century picturesque mode that has appeared repeatedly since. Communications became better, so that it was possible for the gentry to actually live on their estates, the source of their wealth. Non-picturesque structures and inhabitants were despotically banished from sight. In *Akenfield*, there is an

[20] R. Blythe, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
[21] W. M. Williams, *Ashworthy. A West Country Village*, London, Routledge and. Kegan Paul, 1963, p. 31.

interview with a gardener, who, in his early days at work was not allowed to be seen from the big house, which obviously involved much inconvenience and huge detours. Apart from the lack of consideration for people, whatever their class, that this attitude showed, the idea of landscape separated from a working base became progressively reinforced, thus effectively fossilising commonsense aesthetic criteria in a dominant perspective.

Separating landscape from production leaves the way open for a confusion between past and present that could be avoided if real conditions were not ignored. For example, the disappearance of most of the elm trees in Britain has drastically altered the contours of Midland landscapes that were considered to have always been composed of fields with hedges punctuated by trees. Only recently have we realised that modern 'leafy' Warwickshire and 'high' Leicestershire were largely Georgian innovations. The following quotations, which are from different sources, diverge from consensual definitions of the past, in elaborating a landscape of depression and neglect, and explicitly considering the human consequences.

Much of the farm was all waste and ruin then. We used to graze sheep on the fields where the corn is now. When I was a shepherd lad I lay in these fields when they were all rough bracken and ling, so high that you could hardly see the sheep [22].

This is a farm worker in *Akenfield* vividly remembering the early '30s. The two following passages describe the same period, and were written by an agricultural journalist and a historian.

Lethargy returned, and the outward signs of rural poverty began to multiply: neglected houses, derelict cottages, ditches unmade — a landscape characterised by thin, permanent grass, poorly grazed, unwatered, unfenced, undrained and sour [23].

[22] R. Blyte, *op. cit.*, p. 96.
[23] T. Beresford, *We Plough the Fields: British Farming Today*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1975.

Elsewhere, behind the statistics of falling output and falling employment in agriculture lie the personal tragedies of individual families struggling against an increasing load of debt, slipping down the scale of respectable existence, until they disappeared from their farms and neighbourhoods to become one more item in the accounts of the poor law [24].

The following quotation illustrates the immediacy of *Akenfield* perfectly, and comes from an interview with an old farm worker who makes the difference between past and present conditions very clear.

I lived when other men could do what they liked with me. We feared so much. We even feared the weather! Today a farmer must pay for the week, whatever the weather. But we were always being sent home. We dreaded the rain; it washed our few shillings away [25].

In some way, the 'authors' of these four quotations all look at agriculture, and hence landscape, from a professional point of view, and are fully conscious of change. It is obviously not the case here, but occasionally one senses an almost masochistic quality in the details of past conditions and human subjection or degradation, a will to outdo one's rivals in depicting the unbeliievableness of the situation, seen in a present day context, which seems akin to the use of a sensational pivot in popular journalism. However, when ideology predominates over record, even that is obscured.

The '30s also saw the reconstitution of the union movement in agriculture, developments in technology and research, increased government organisation of farming and marketing, and a continuation of the profitable progress made in specialised sectors such as fruit farming, horticulture, and milk production. As in other aspects of British life, all these processes were accelerated by the

[24] E. H. Wetham, *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Vol. VIII 1914-1939*, Cambridge, University Press, 1978, p. 246.

[25] R. Blythe, *op. cit.*, p. 51. From approximately the same time that Edward Thomas was delighting in the « sweetness of a shower » in the derelict corner of the farmyard (see note 11).

coming of the second world war and the need to increase home food production massively. Looking at all these factors in terms of the loss of whatever was superseded seems to be a staple device in country writing, even if new methods are judged to be opportune.

The combine and its work were startling, obliterating a scene that had stretched back for centuries, of many toilers in the harvest field. Doing away with the age old ritual of stooking, the pitching of sheaves, the loading and unloading of waggons, the stacking and thatching and threshing. One day a field of standing golden ripe corn, the next a field of bare stubble [26].

We cannot blame either Breughel or Millet for the appropriation of their images and atmospheres and the way we are being deflected back in time. « Stretched back for centuries », « age old », « a scene », « a ritual », are all repetitions of stability and tradition which act directly, while old words like « stooking », « waggons » (horse-drawn) and « thatching » have a similar effect because they are no longer common, and they also bear the authority of specialised terminology. « Toilers » is downright biblical in its connotation, even if in this particular context we are likely to confuse it with gleaners. Old photographs of the Batsford variety, showing women in aprons and men in tied-in trousers and shirts, all bearing a prematurely aged and shadowy look of malnutrition, also spring to mind. In spite of a seemingly unlimited timespan, the writer does not mention reaping and binding, probably because machines had already eliminated the teams of workers who carried out these tasks in the nineteenth century. Threshing had also long been done by large stationary engines, brought by contractors, and not to be regreted, as the combination of oil, chaff and the noise rendered the work very unpleasant.

When writers look back to the remembered past, the most usual distance in time for memories of childhood and

[26] H. Phelps, *Just Across the Fields*, p. 36 (see appendix for details).

youth is thirty or forty years. Piloted oral evidence, obtained from older contributors naturally covers a wider timespan. Hence, to take a well-known example, Laurie Lee's *Cider With Rosie*[27] was published in 1959, but looks back to the '20s. Reminiscences published during the last ten years often describe the '40s and early '50s, with excursions into the '30s, a period when agriculture, and consequently country life, was changing rapidly. Of course there was still a huge gap between the farm worker's standard of living and that of his employer, and neither did the former reach that of the industrial worker, but things were improving, and better village services and mobility meant a great deal. As we notice in other spheres, recent years have also seen rural memories of community, cooperation and unforgetable episodes channelled through recollections of the second world war and the particular local resonances of the national experience, or at least, as it has been codified in retrospect. The importance of agriculture during the war gave an impetus to processes of renewal, and since then, it has been undergoing what has been termed by many, a second revolution in methods, organisation, productivity, and above all, self confidence.

Thus, complaints about farmers becoming processors rather than husbandmen, and an emphasis on the perceived cosiness of the past, reflect all these changes. We can, however detect a further turn of the screw for aspiring but landless farmers, and a reinforcement of the capitalist basis of agriculture in the sharp rise in land values from the sixties onwards, which has meant that farms either have to be inherited or bought as a regular investment and run by managers. Taxation tends to penalise rented land, and the demand for it far outstrips its availability, while the capital required in order to equip a farm, or the level of profit neccessary for borrowing it, results in steadily larger units, either owner-occupied, or rented, or a combination of both.

[27] L. Lee, *Cider With Rosie*, London, The Hogarth Press, 1959, (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1962).

Raymond Williams points out that the response to change or crisis which seeks a refuge in the past forms part of the « structure of feeling »[28] at any particular time, and that this type of regret is also echoed in an urban contest. Hence, not only do fears about the harmfulness, pollution, impersonality and monotony of large scale specialised farming, and the thirst for detailed information about old skills and customs come to mind, but also similar feelings that are expressed about industry, education, communications and many other aspects of modern life and social practices.

At an international level, during the '70s, the replacement of the Commonwealth by Europe became a reality, regarded as a loss of independence and prestige in many quarters, a situation which forced Britain to compare itself and be compared with other European countries directly, and usually unfavourably. The threat of deep economic trouble, the fuel crisis beginning in 1973, the atmosphere of uncertainty and the pessimistically envisaged future would tend to create a receptiveness for the reassurance of 'safe' values. The process took place against a background of inflation which caused a drop in standards of living and increased the taxation of lower incomes, and a feeling that Labour had abandoned its traditional supporters, and that anyway there was nothing to choose between both political parties. This mood of frustration and tension was accumulatively given a vocabulary by the scapegoat arguments underlined by those with access to the media, umbrella concepts like « violence », immigration « inner city decay » « militancy in the schools » « scroungers » « terrorists », and so on.

The popular media provide escapism into predictability and certainty. The characters depicted in rural writing are white, Anglosaxon and Protestant, the only exception that comes to mind being a humorous-sentimental book based on the 1940s experiences of employing an Italian prisoner-of-war on the farm. The asexuality of recent country writ-

[28] R. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

ing (animals are acceptable, while people are not) would also provide a refuge from what is seen as ever-increasing permissiveness. With the possible exception of the new survival and subsistence farmers, within the portrayal of the dominant ethnic-religious group the demarcation lines of social class are very clear. It seems perfectly fitting that the omnibus editions [29] of the Herriot vet book, and the film and television versions have titles taken from the hierachical hymn « All Things Bright and Beautiful », and that great deference is always paid to « the gaffer » on the farm.

Regretfully, however, we are not able to verify this hypothetical vision which relates to the social use and perception of country material whether read or seen on television, but there is a relevant series of developments and connections that have become more acute in recent years, and which could be described as the technical and organisational conjuncture.

The first is a consequence of the type of diversification of commercial interests that has become widespread in media organizations.

The concentration in the hands of a single corporation of publishing, cinema and television, has, as a consequence, the even narrower integration of these three fields. Movie-book tie-ins, or a TV series-book package, become highly profitable consecrated formulas. Movie or TV scripts can easily be turned into books, reversing the traditional pattern of making books into movies or serials. More generally this combination of interests inserts the norms of spectacle and sensationalism into the book market. The search for rapid profits stimulates the publication of what we can already call 'phony' books. The book is produced according to the rule of other media which impose their own dynamic on it [30].

The small companies that exist in some specialised fields in publishing, although often suffocating and paternalistic, tend to give editors a freer hand in following their profession-

[29] See appendix for details.

[30] A. Mattelart, *Multinationals and Communications Systems*, Hassocks, Harvester Press, 1978, p. 196.

al intuition. Large organizations, on the other hand, have an overall management which is several steps removed from production, and which generally gives more weight to 'scientific' market reserch than to the experience of editors and producers when making decisions. In these conditions, profit is an overriding motive. Editorial and production teams only working in London lose touch with the rest of the country very easily, and in some fields, the export market is a source of prestige and profit, and yet another curb on work that does not fit the traditional stereotypes.

The country phenomenon, however, derives more specific sustenance from the spread of colour television during the second half of the '70s, « new wide-angled possibilities »[31] and the growing practice of making many programmes and parts of programmes on location. This happened before colour television ownership became general in Britain because the added expense of working on location was offset by the huge and lucrative export business with North America, where a combination of the technically polished British programmes and green and traditional images of Britain sold well; and still does. Since the introduction of 625 lines by the BBC, and the early trasmissions in colour, the quality has improved, although not as much as it should have done, and the price of colour receivers has gone down drastically in real terms, together with their bulk. Added to this, a well-dosed succession of royal, cerimonial and sporting events helped undecided viewers to make the plunge, and the wide availability of renting made the introduction less abrupt for many. Hence, a variety of el-

[31] S. Hall, *Television as a Medium and its Relation to Culture*, SP No. 34, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 1975, p. 84.

In this paper, the observation that « ... in culture (though not in nature) colour is the language of photographic romanticism, black-and-white is the language of realism... . Colour did not determine the general draining of the documentary impulse from television drama and fiction, but it *underwrote*, at a technical level, a tendency already powerfully stimulated by other pressures... » (p. 84) is very pertinent to country themes.

ements, as well as a desire to exploit the medium in ways which were thought to be suitable, led to expensive settings, costume, and countryside.

Of all parts of the historical apparatus, indeed the electronic media are perhaps the most compelling and ubiqitous [32].

Indeterminate grey became an attractive or restful green, and carefully studied landscapes became part of the past, together with elaborate and accurate costumes and architectural details.

Most of the commonsense images of rural life are concerned with a complex cluster of imaginary values, synthesized over a long period, ideally situated in the immediate past, and about to vanish for good. They are conditioned by the huge negative presence of the conventional and equally deeply radicated images of urban life, today often transposed into a suburban key. For example, we often assume that the country is peaceful, the home of traditional community values, slow paced, conservative, and where a special relationship can be developed with nature. Work is liable to be thought of as pleasanter and less alienating than in an urban environment, although less remunerative. We could go on with this game for quite a time, but at this point its purpose is to show that these are all commonsense assumptions about country life which elude, or minimise any visual stage or purely aesthetic considerations. Colour television provides precisely this in a powerful and extremely persuasive way. In colour, the television picture automatically gains perspective and three-dimensionality, both as regards detail, and in distant views and landscape, which were previously either lost altogether, or in the latter case, reduced to vague greyish contours. Thus, we are gaining a visual connotation of country which is attractively structured by beautiful landscapes and quaint and dignified villages, which, if part of a representation

[32] Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies Popular Memory Group, *What do We Mean by Popular Memory?*, SP No. 67, p. 5.

of the past, has been purged of every contemporary clue. Naturally this is nothing new, but at the present time it seems particularly pervasive, a symptom of a historical and technological conjuncture serving to reinforce the dominant ideological panorama. Television colour has been accompanied by advances in techniques of colour printing, of which the Sunday colour supplements of the sixties were the first obvious manifestation of illustrated editorial material, going from the printed distillation of the television series of the original, to 'coffee-table' volumes, paper products *à la* Mondadori, calendars, guides and pamphlets [33].

Everyone is familiar with British Tourist Board brochures and advertisements depicting Cotswold villages, Scottish lochs, Cornish fishing villages, Yorkshire moors, and so on. If we exclude the specifically historic or « heritage » elements [34], which are an unambiguous recall of the past, we are left with the appealing impression that green landscapes (of the kind of emerald green that almost outdoes the Irish equivalents) and stone villages connotate Britain or Britainicity, to paraphrase Barthes [35], and that contrary to hearsay, the weather is usually good. Ordinary bad weather effects are often urban trappings. As a momentary contrast, in order to convey the idea more effectively, if one visualises the average town and other landscapes that figure in the film coverage of the news or news features, even in colour, they are most often predominantly brownish or grey, and the weather looks dreary. Cars and

[33] *The Country Diary of an Edwardian Lady*, an illustrated nature diary by Edith Holden, (see appendix) would be a good example of a visual message on a more adult level than Disney or Holly Hobbie being given an extensive book-calendar-notepaper-teatowel treatment.

[34] A public sense of the past, as distinct from private recollections, « 'our' history, or heritage, the story, traditions and legacy of 'the British People' » (*What Do We Mean By Popular Memory*, cit., p. 3).

[35] R. Barthes, *Rhetoric of the Image*, in *Image-Music-Text*, Fontana, London, 1977, Hill and Wang, New York, 1977, p. 35.

buses provide touches of colour, but as the landscape is usually purely incidental to the content of the programme, and immediacy is the most important factor, no great effort is made on the technical side. The composition of the image is made, in this case, with a 'busy' camera and from a standpoint which concerns people and events, not places.

Typically, the majority of landscapes where most people live and work, are not even considered as such, in fact, it seems unnatural to call them landscape, and we have to make a special effort to describe countless towns, suburbs and commuter villages as anything except the favoured 'anonymous'. These landscapes, and the familiar landscape of transport — motorways and railways — which the tourist crosses to reach the desired spot, are all unvalued vacuums, much less sought-after images of England, that have to be seen in macroscopic whorls and ridges from the air in order to gain aesthetic respectability.

The victory of the Southern Metaphor went together with the devaluation of both the locales of, and the qualities that had made, the industrial revolution. Such places and such characteristics became «provincial». Provincialism in twentieth-century Britain has not been simply a matter of remoteness from the capital city, as in France. It has been much more a question of remoteness from one approved style of life. Working-class and lower-middle-class suburbs might be provincial, whereas much of the countryside is not. Rural villages, or ancient cathedral towns that happen to be far from London, are not provincial. « Things that are rural or ancient », as Horne observed, « are at the very heart of southern English snobberies, even if they occur in the North. Provincialism is to live in or neare an industrial town to which the industrial revolution gave its significant modern form »[36].

Thus traditionally connotated landscapes have been selling all kinds of prestigious products, including of course, holidays (just as we are familiar with many stereotypes of landscape, we have an increased probability of actually seeing them), and in the process these images have been selling

[36] D. Horne, *God is an Englishman* (Sydney, Australia, 1969, pp. 22-23), quoted in M. J. Wiener, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

themselves, and have become autonomous. « the image no longer *illustrates* the words; it is now the words which, structurally, are parasitic on the image »[37]. Barthes goes on to say:

Formerly, the image illustrated the text (made it clearer); today, the test loads the image, burdening it with a culture, a moral, an imagination. Formerly, there was reduction from text to image; today, there is amplification from the one to the other[38].

Commonsense rhetoric is the 'convenience food' of our modes of expression and communication, in which many kinds of verbal clichés work towards an effortless and immediate classification of whatever is being referred to. It is tempting to suppose that visual clichés work in the same way, providing a stock of predigested images which, in Stuart Hall's words « produce *recognitions* of the world as we have already learned to appropriate it »[39]. Here, we are modifying or reinforcing a stock of images which can be evoked « in our mind's eye », to adopt a fitting expression, in response to the appropriate clue, which automatically suppresses alternative interpretations, and which, however, can safely accomodate other traditional commonsense definitions of Englishness or relate to them. For example, the television series of *Kilvert's Diary*[40] visually emphasises the traditional dominant images of sunlit woods and well kept cottage gardens in summer rather than the subordinate experience of poverty. Canon Girdlestone described West country farm labourers at the same time (the agricultural depression of the 1870s). They « did not live in the proper sense of the word, they merely didn't die »[41],

[37] R. Barthes, *The Photographic Message*, op. cit., p. 25.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 26.

[39] S. M. Hall, *The Determinations of Newsphotographs*, CCCS, University of Birmingham, *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, No. 3, p. 82.

[40] F. Kilvert, *Diary*, 1870-9, first published in 1938-40. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1977.

[41] Quoted in P. J. Perry, *British Farming in the Great Depression 1870-1914*, Newton Abbot, David and Charles, 1974, p. 126.

while Perry [42] states that it was a depression only as far as the agricultural capitalists were concerned because their previous prosperity had been based on « appallingly low wages ». The massive unemployment that resulted, with more than 300,000 workers out of a total of more than a million in 1871 leaving the land by the time of the 1901 census, led to an unkempt landscape of neglect, which lasted until the 1940s.

Most television productions rely on 'characters' and a photogenic poor that matches the landscape, but in a paper in *History Workshop Journal* on the series *Bread or Blood* (adapted from Hudson's A Shepherd's Life), Alan Howkins analyses an untypically realist production.

> The landscape in *Bread or Blood* figured in two ways. Firstly it was material. The shaping force it had on people's lives was not mystic, as in an animistic view, but real in terms of their lives and work. The images were those of rain, cold, mud, and the relationship with the landscape one of struggle, not passive acceptance of malevolent fate. Secondly, and perhaps more crucial in visual terms at least, as the dissociation between the *expected* beauty of the Wiltshire countryside ... and the unexpected beastliness of rural life ... painstaking reconstruction of rural life and labour was outstanding [43]:

The director of this series had previously been working on inner-city police serials, and not television classics, but there are very few similar exceptions to the rule, whatever the medium.

To return to a more typical best seller, the '70s have given us the series of books written by James Herriot [44], and published in paperback by Pan; his reminiscences of life as a Yorkshire vet. The place, the past and the present are inextricably related, due to a flash back technique and frequent comments which compare the past and present in the books, and in the television series, direct anchorage in an attractive and amusing past. The sense of Englishness

[42] *Idem.*

[43] A. Howkins, Bread or Blood, *History Workshop Journal*, 12, Autumn 1981, p. 179-80.

[44] See appendix for details.

is conveyed through a specific Yorkshireness, and the sentimental-humorous mixture is dosed in the right proportions in order to permit a huge popularity, world-wide sales, a film, television serials, the illustrated book of both, and the machine of the cultural industry mercilessly cashing in on ideologies regarding genuinity, honesty, and the rural freedoms of fresh air and space. As always, the spectre of the city, or the suburb, lurks in the background. The written version relies on 'characters' to portray Yorkshire qualities and idiosyncracies which have vanished with them. « They have been largely replaced by the new breed of highly knowledgeable young men whose skill has made British agriculture so efficient »[45]. This is another element in the fragmented response to change, that does not recognise that Britain relies heavily on imports, the profits go to fewer people, and that size and efficiency are in themselves, like patterns of community, no guarantee of change in the capitalist basis of agriculture and land ownership [46].

How does the physical environment, in written description, all visual manifestations, and even tourism, take on such a traditional aura? Taking Herriot as an example again, if we search diligently, we can sometimes find a paragraph describing the landscape, often as part of the mediative introduction or conclusion of an amusing or sentimental episode.

> ... I looked away down in the other direction from the house to the valley's mouth where the hills parted to give a glimpse of the plain below. And the endless wash of pale tints, the gold of the stubble, the dark smudges of wood, the mottled greens of the pasture land were like a perfect water colour. I found myself staring greedily as if for the first time at the scene which had so often lifted my heart, the great wide clean-blown face of Yorkshire [47].

[45] J. Herriot, *James Herriot's Yorkshire*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1979, p. 22.

[46] For a creative alternative view, see K. Mellanby, *Can Britain Feed Itself?*, London, Merlin Press, 1975.

[47] J. Herriot, *Vet in Harness*, London, Michael Joseph, 1974, Pan Books, 1975, p. 251.

We find that « so often » conveys permanency, familiarity, while « wash », « tints », « smudges » and « a perfect water-colour » elevate the landscape to art, and invest it with a 'high cultural' status. The last phrase emphasises health, freedom and space, and in this context, « Yorkshire » is given a strong emotive pull.

This kind of mediocre writing is bypassed completely in the television serials, although the sentiment remains, carried by the evocative intrusion of the landscape at every turn. It could have been rendered as a cross between a situation comedy series and the Archers, but the direct emphasis on the 1930s, combined with the expertly filmed appropriation of the setting almost gave it the guise of a television classic. It is this kind of country theme where the text takes us back to the past, and the visual manifestations emphasise unchanging qualities with not a hint of recent developments that give landscape its traditional connotations. Here we start to be concerned wiht the geography of retreat, as the only landscapes which can be read in this way, are those on the fringes of agriculture, encompassing unprofitable hill farms with very little arable land, or for instance, West Country areas where deep ditch and bank configurations make large-scale agriculture virtually impossible [48]. This sort of countryside has become important for recreation, but has little productive relevance, and the places which do produce food in large quantities do not coincide with the past-in-the-present image. Intensive or indoor farming methods, hedgeless fields and concrete bring us face to face with the reality we wish to avoid, and the fact that there is virtually no wilderness in Britain, however much we emphasise the dominant picture of comparatively underpopulated regions.

Luckily, people who flock to well-known places at weekends don't require an accurate picture of the past;

[48] In order to 'read' landscape, we cannot do without Hoskins, W. G., *The Making of the English Landscape*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1955, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1970.

present day trim white-painted villages (in the '30s and '40s, which form the meat of most recent reminiscences, they would have been green-and-custard or brown) are adaptable hybrids embodying the desired past picturesqueness and present tastes in recreation and retirement. As we have seen above, space in fact one of the images of the country most frequently cited, both by natives and by the new subsistence farmers, who generally have to find some activity like writing or broadcasting to survive (a skill available to them thanks to their privileged position). Most people need to live within reach of work, and cannot transfer themselves to the empty uplands. However, the urban constraint is not just imagined in terms of space, or in contrast to the country possibility of going for a considerable distance without meeting a soul, but also as materialism, consumerism, the rat race, and alienating work. Housing estates and the suburbs are especially scorned, and the newer they are, the uglier and more land-destructive they are considered. Newby [49] calls this « the conventional wisdom of rampant urban encroachment », and points out that 84.4% of land in Britain is either used for agriculture or forestry, the rate of conversion being one third less than in the '30s. The sense of retrenchment and preservation that accompanies these assumptions, is not unique to the country, as generally speaking, there seems to be a basic lack of confidence in newness, growth and progress, or in the future, values which enjoyed a consensual flourish in the postwar decades. One of the symptoms of depression is an inability to envisage the future, to look ahead, plan and decide, and on a national scale, this lack of self-confidence, though given a dangerous boost by the Falklands war, is one ingredient of an increasing insularity and defensiveness.

Images of Britain are becoming more and more restricted, excluding many different cultural realities, or misrepresenting them. As always, ideological processes

[49] H. Newby, *op. cit.*, p. 28-9.

involve simplification, and unspecified countryside corresponding to certain stereotypes forms the bread and butter of our visual assumptions, with which we are bombarded daily in our urban lairs. Unlike America's Niagara Falls, Monument Valley, or Grand Canyon, there are very few beauty spots in Britain that are as easily identifiable as Picadilly Circus and other places in London or connected with the monarchy, unless they also include a castle or a ruined abbey. Even then it is unlikely that many people could say which ruined abbey or castle was being reproduced on film or in a photograph. Thus, the most common type of landscape remains nameless, so we could refer to it as *genre*, and into this category we could put moors, hills, beaches, lochs, 'unspoilt' villages, and so on. We are not receptive to alternative versions, and as standard representations tend to be repetitive in the elements which are easily connotated, even famous landscapes merge into the genre level.

Landscape is less amenable to postcards and snapshots than beefeaters or London buses, but provides an omnipresent and less conscious vehicle for traditional ideologies. Once again, technical innovation has served served to mirror a tranquil, privileged country to a Britain that needs incentives to a common involvement and participation without aggressive demagogy.

We have tried to trace the common ideological core in some different media representations of rural Britain. The vastness of the argument underlines the exploratory nature of this first contribution.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank the Faculty of Sciences of the University of Lecce for having given me a sabbatical year in the English Department of the University of Boston, the Commission for Educational and Cultural Exchange between Italy and the United States for a travel grant, and above all, Harvard University for the use of its libraries.

APPENDIX

A representative selection of country writing published or republished in the 1970s.

Archer, F., *Under the Parish Lantern*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1969.
— *Muddy Boots and Sunday Suits*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1973.
— *When Village Bells Were Silent*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1975.
— *By Hook and by Crook*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1978.
— *When Adam was a boy*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1979.
Baldry, G., *The Rabbitskin Cap* (Boydell Press, 1939) (ed. L. Rider Haggard) Ipswich, The Norfolk Library, 1974.
Brill, E., *Life and Tradition on the Cotswolds*, London, J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd, 1973.
Bull, A., *Muck on my Boots*, Lavenham, Suffolk, Terence Dalton, 1976.
Creasey, J.S., *Victorian and Edwardian Country Life from Old Photographs*, London, Batsford, 1977.
Drabble, M., *A Writer's Britain: Landscape in Literature*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1979.
Fussey, J., *Cows in the Corn*, London, Paul Elek, 1978.
Gill, C. (ed.) *The Countryman's Britain*, (from *The Countryman*) Newton Abbot, Devon, David and Charles, 1976.
Grant, D., *White Goats and Black Bees*, London, Michael Joseph, 1975.
Harland, E.M., *No Halt at Sunset: The Diary of a Country Housewife*, Ipswich, The Boydell Press, 1974 (collection of a 1951 local newspaper column).
Harris, M., *Another Kind of Magic*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1971.
Hart, E., *The Hill Shepherd*, Newton Abbot, Devon, David and Charles, 1977.
Herriot, J., *If only They Could Talk*, London, Michael Joseph, 1970.
— *It Shouldn't Happen to a Vet*, London, Michael Joseph, 1972.
— *Let Sleeping Vets Lie*, London, Michael Joseph, 1973.
— *Vet in Harness*, London, Michael Joseph, 1974.
— *Vets Might Fly*, London, Michael, Joseph, 1976.
— *Vet in a Spin*, London, Michael Joseph (list incomplete). Paperback editions published by Pan. The first two went through 31 reprints between 1973 and 1978.

Herriot, J., (Omnibus editions) *All Creatures Great and Small.*
All Things Bright and Beautiful.
All Things Wise and Wonderful.
The Lord God Made Them All.

Herriot, J., *James Herriot's Yorkshire*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1979.

Holden, E., *The Country Diary of an Edwardian Lady*, London, Michael Joseph, Exeter, Webb and Bower, 1977 (went through 10 impressions in 12 months, is illustrated with the author's own water colours, and has been described as the least read best seller ever).

Hoskins, W.G., *English Landscapes: How to Read the Man-made Scenery of England*, London, BBC, 1973.

— *One Man's England*, London, BBC, 1976.

Hudson, W. H., *A Shepherd's Life* (first edition 1910), London, Macdonald Futura Publishers, 1979.

Kerridge, E., *The Farmers of Old England, London*, George Allen and Unwin, 1973.

Mead, H., *Inside the North York Moors*, Newton Abbot, Devon, David and Charles, 1978.

Morpurgo, M., *All Round the Year* (includes poems by Ted Hughes), London, John Murray, 1979.

Phelps, H., *Just Across the Fields*, London, Michael Joseph, 1976.

— *Just Over Yonder*, London, Michael Joseph, 1977.

— *Just Where We Belong*, London, Michael Joseph, 1978 (also *Just Around the Corner*, London, Michael Joseph).

Seymour, J., *I'm a Stranger Here Myself*, London, Faber and Faber, 1978.

— *The Countryside Explained*, London, Faber and Faber, 1977 (also *The Complete Book of Self-sufficiency*).

Thompson, J.W.M. (Peter Quince), *Country Life* (collection of articles from *The Spectator*), London, George Allen and Unwin, 1975.

Turnbull, J., *Owie Turtle — Please Shut the Gate: Diary of a Country Boy* (collection of articles from *The Lady*), Woodford Green, The Otter Press, 1975.

Vulliamy, L., *William Cobbett's Rural Rides Revisited: A Photographic Exploration*, London, Pierrot Publishing, 1977.

Wentworth Day, J., *Farming Adventure. A Thousand Miles through England on a Horse*, London, George G. Harrap, 1943, repub. East Ardsley, Wakefield, E.P. Publishing, 1975.

West, E., *Hovel in the Hills*, London, Faber and Faber, 1977.

— *Garden in the Hills*, London, Faber and Faber, 1980 (paperback editions, London, Corgi Books).

White, T.H., *England Have My Bones*, London, Collins, 1936, repub. London, Macdonald Futura Publishers, 1981.

Wilkin, J., *The Autobiography of an English Gamekeeper*, Chesham, Sporting and Leisure Press, 1892, Country Classic facsimile edition, 1976.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ashby, M.K., *The Changing English Village*, Kineton, Warwicks., The Roundwood Press, 1974.

Barthes, R., *Image - Music - Text*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1977 (also published by Fontana).

Beresford, T., *We Plough the Fields: British Farming Today*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1975.

Blythe, R., *Akenfield*, London, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1969.

Calder, A., *The People's War: Britain 1939-1945*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1969 (also Panther, 1971).

Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Popular Memory Group, *What do We Mean by Popular Memory?*, University of Birmingham, SP No 67, 1982.

Cavaliero, G., *The Rural Tradition in the English Novel 1900-1939*, London, Macmillan, 1977.

Coppock, J.T., *An Agricultural Atlas of England and Wales*, London, Faber and Faber, 1964, republished 1976.

Daiches, D., Flower, F., *Literary Landscapes of the British Isles: A Narrative Atlas*, London, Paddington Press, 1979, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981.

Hall, S.M., *The Determinations of Newsphotographs*, University of Birmingham, *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, No 3, 1972.

— *Television as a Medium and its Relation to Culture*, SP No. 34, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 1975.

Hoggart, R., *The Uses of Literacy*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1957 (also Penguin).

Hoskins, W.G., *The Making of the English Landscape*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1955, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1970.

Howkins, A., « Bread or Blood », in *History Workshop Journal*, 12, Autumn, 1981.

Kitchen, F., *Brother to the Ox. An Autobiography of an Agricultural Labourer*, 1939, republished Horsham, Sussex, Caliban, 1981.

Lee, L., *Cider With Rosie*, London, The Hogarth Press, 1959, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1962.

Mattelart, A., *Multinationals and Communications Systems*, Hassocks, Sussex, Harvester Press, 1978.

Mellanby, K., *Can Britain Feed Itself?*, London, Merlin Press, 1975.

Minchinton, W.E. (ed.) *Essays in Agrarian History*, Newton Abbot, Devon, David and Charles, 1974 (The British Agricultural History Society), vol. II.

Newby, H., *Green and Pleasant Land? Social Change in Rural England*, London, Hutchinson, 1979, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1980.
Orwin, C., Wetham, E., *History of British Agriculture, 1846-1914* (second ed.), Newton Abbot, Devon, David and Charles, 1971.
Perry, P.J., *British Farming in the Great Depression 1870-1914*, Newton Abbot, Devon, David and Charles, 1974.
Pevsner, N., *The Englishness of English Art*, London, The Architectura Press, 1956, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1974.
Samuel, R., (ed.) *Village Life and Labour*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975 (History Workshop series).
Saville, J., *Rural Depopulation in England and Wales 1851-1951*, London, Dartington Hall Studies in Rural Sociology, 1957.
Self, P. and Storing, H.J., *The State and the Farmer*, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1962.
Thompson, F., *Lark Rise to Candleford*, Oxford University Press, 1939-1943, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1973.
Thompson, P., *The Voice of the Past. Oral History*, Oxford, University Press, 1978.
Wetham, E.H., *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Vol. VIII, 1914-39*, Cambridge University Press, 1978.
Wiener, M.J., *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit*, Cambridge, University Press, 1981.
Williams, W.M., *A West Country Village: Ashworthy Family, Kinship and Land*, London, Dartington Hall Studies in Rural Sociology, and Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963.
Williams, R., *The Country and the City*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1973.

VIRGINIA WOOLF AND THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD [1]

by
John Mepham

> the moderns had never written anything one wanted to read about death, she thought
> (Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street) [2]

Life, Virginia Woolf thought, is tumultuous and confused. Emotions are unmanageable, experience fragmentary, memory startling and talk frustrating. We do not know who we are. Our bodies, our desires, our aspirations, our regrets buffet and tumble us in many different directions. We struggle to hold ourselves together. The novel, in particular the English Victorian and Edwardian novel, tried to construct something orderly out of this chaos. One of its most masterly devices for achieving this was that symbiotic pair, the narrator and the fictional character. The character might be full of ambiguity and conflict, struggle and incoherence, but there always stood close at hand and observing with a judicious eye that arbiter, the narrator. The narrator's authoritative pronouncements made things intelligible for the reader: the narrator summed up, defined, forced things to stand still under the weight of his language. This discourse (commentary, meta-language) is the one in which judgments are pronounced, explanations are prov-

[1] « The Burial of the Dead » is the title of the first section of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*.
[2] « Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street », DP, p. 23.

ided, praise and blame are apportioned, moral worth is estimated. The narrator's function is to say, 'This is what she really meant', 'This is what he was feeling', 'These are the real reasons why they acted so', 'This is how we are to interpret the event'. The narrator acts like Bernard's old nurse (in *The Waves* [3]) who turns the pages of the picture-book and stops and says 'Look. This is the truth'.

Virginia Woolf had a horror of this kind of judgment. There are many men in her novels who proudly and ludicrously reduce things to their kind of order: Mr Ramsay with his heroic effort to get from A to Z (in *To the Lighthouse*); Sir Hugh (in *Mrs Dalloway*) who writes letters to the *Times*, 'drafting sentiments in alphabetical order of the highest nobility' [4]. The most bitterly drawn portrait of the prosaic mind at its oppressive work is that of Sir William Bradshaw the psychiatrist in *Mrs Dalloway*. He pronounces Septimus Warren Smith mad and drives him to suicide. He cannot listen as Septimus tries to speak, for Septimus talks a kind of incipient poetry: 'He was attaching meanings to words of a symbolic kind. A serious symptom to be noted on the card' [5]. Sir William Bradshaw's confidence is a sinister and destructive power. It derives from 'his thirty years experience of these kinds of cases, and his infallible instinct, this is madness, this sense' [6]. Virginia Woolf was drawing directly on her own experience in writing these scenes [7].

What is remarkable is that there is only one passage in the whole of *Mrs Dalloway* in which a distinct narrative voice detaches itself from the consciousness of the fictional characters and intervenes to make an extended pronouncement

[3] W, p. 247.
[4] D, p. 122.
[5] D, p. 106.
[6] D, p. 110.
[7] See Roger Poole *The Unknown Virginia Woolf*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1978.

of its own [8]. It does so precisely in order to provide a commentary on Bradshaw and to pronounce a definite verdict on him: guilty. Guilty of deafness and blindness and the violation of personality. It is a novelist's revenge. He is subjected to his own treatment. The narrator exposes him in strikingly Nietzschean terms. What masquerades as a sense of proportion is revealed to be the will to power; what pretends to be scientific diagnosis is condemned as the crushing of Septimus' poetic imagination. The psychiatric interview is a battle between concept and metaphor in which the power is all on one side.

Prosaic judgment, whether by a psychiatrict or a narrator, is an attempt to freeze, to immobilise. It is a discourse in which questions receive answers, in which causes are identified, in which things stand still to have their proper names pinned upon them. It stifles any effort to find a language in which we might collect the fragments of our lives together [9]. In the words of Eliot's Prufrock (whose *Love Song* was, like Septimus' delirious writings, dedicated to a friend who had died in the Great War):

> And I have known the eyes already, known them all —
> The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
> And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
> When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
> Then how should I begin
> To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways? [10]

It is not fanciful to connect Virginia Woolf's rejection of the narrator and his posture of self-confident pronouncement with her scornful rejection (in *Three Guineas*) of male values as they are embodied in the judge, the psychiatrist and the military man with his glamorous uniform covering over his naked lust for power. They are all blind

[8] D, pp. 110-113.
[9] Cfr. « A Sketch of the Past », in MB, especially p. 72.
[10] T. S. Eliot, « The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock », *Collected Poems 1909-1935*, London, Faber and Faber, 1958, p. 13.

to the richness and the swiftness of our experience. For as Bernard says (in *The Waves*):

> It is a mistake, this extreme precision, this orderly and military progress; a convenience, a lie. There is always deep below it, even when we arrive punctually at the appointed time with our white waistcoats and polite formalities, a rushing stream of broken dreams, nursery rhymes, street cries, half-finished sentences and sights ... that rise and sink even as we hand a lady down to dinner [11].

Woolf rejected not only the distinction between character and narrator but also the traditional architecture of plot and story. She tried to find a method whereby this subterranean stream could be brought to the surface and displayed by a process of poetic enrichment rather than covered over with the ice of a narrator's presentation. The three novels, *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves* are built on one basic dramatic pattern, the pattern of shock and recovery. Most often the shock is bereavement (the deaths of Evans, Mrs Ramsay and Perceval). Sometimes it involves a slighter loss (Clarissa Dalloway's trauma is the painful recall of her lost raptures, her lost youth, her lost sexuality). We can appreciate how Woolf escapes from the constraints of traditional narrative values by looking at how this repeated pattern of trauma and recovery is depicted in her novels.

It is striking, for example, that death is never incorporated into plot and never functions as the termination of a story. In *Mrs Dalloway* it is not Evans' death that is the subject of narrative treatment, but Septimus' response to it. Mrs Ramsay's death, and also those of her children Prue and Andrew, are narrated in the 'Time Passes' section of *To the Lighthouse* as events of no greater significance than the falling of a leaf or the passing of a cloud. Perceval is central to *The Waves* but he is himself never directly presented, he exists only as an echo in the minds of his

[11] W, p. 219.

friends, and we learn of his death only from their reactions to it. In each case the crucial death takes place 'off-stage', away from the scene of the fiction. It is never directly dramatised as it is in the famous death-bed scenes in Dickens' novels, scenes which centre on the display of innocent virtue or the intensity of religious vision. Death is never the culmination of the action, the event around which closure is achieved, as it so often is in Elizabethan drama. Death is always an event in the lives of the living. It is in itself without sense and it renders the living speechless with grief or rage. It is pure contingency which can more or less permanently dislocate every construction which we put upon ourselves and the world, 'for there is neither rhyme nor reason when a drunk man staggers about with a club in his hand' [12].

Recovery from this shattering blow is not always possible. Septimus Warren Smith is incapacitated by Evans' death because he cannot assimilate it into any stable system of meaning. He is unbalanced and swings wildly from one extreme to another. Sometimes he exults in the discovery that every experience, however tiny, is filled to overflowing with meaning, with messages from the dead, with 'a great revelation'. At other times he despairs because 'it might be possible that the world itself is without meaning' [13]. He sees only two possibilities — meaning is everywhere or it is nowhere, our experience is full or it is empty; exultation or desolation. This way lies insanity. On what terms then is recovery possible?

Lily Briscoe, in *To the Lighthouse*, does not suffer from Septimus Warren Smith's delusions. She knows that 'the great revelation never comes' [14]. She grieves for Mrs Ramsay (whereas Septimus is unable to feel grief) but she knows that she cannot mourn directly in words, 'for how

[12] W, p. 228.
[13] D, p. 98.
[14] TL, p. 183.

could one express in words these emotions of the body?' [15]. Recovery is an indirect and inexpressible form of healing and we can detect the process at work in the text not so much in the direct speech of the characters as indirectly, in their rhetoric. Healing is like bringing the lips of wounded flesh back together, the covering over of a wound, suture. It can be seen as the repair of torn fabric. One moment in Clarissa Dalloway's struggle to recover her self-composure is captured in a remarkable vision of her relaxing her body and mind in the task of mending a torn silk dress.

> Quiet descended on her, calm, content, as her needle, drawing the silk smoothly to its gentle pause, collected the green folds together and attached them, very lightly to the belt. So on a summer's day waves collect, overbalance, and fall; collect and fall; and the whole world seems to be saying « that is all »... [16]

At a similar moment of peace after a storm of memory and regret Lily Briscoe looks out across the bay towards the lighthouse, her paroxysm of grief over:

> The sea without a stain on it, thought Lily Briscoe, still standing and looking out over the bay. The sea is stretched like silk across the bay. Distance had an extraordinary power; they had been swallowed up in it, she felt, they were gone for ever, they had become part of the nature of things. It was so calm; it was so quiet. The steamer itself had vanished, but the great scroll of smoke still hung in the air and dropped like a flag mournfully in valediction [17].

Recovering from grief involves recovering, calling back again, the dead. It is necessary to recall the dead in order to let them go. It is necessary to feel their presence within you before it is possible to release them to the earth. But it is also necessary to establish a distance from them, to externalise them and to say farewell to them. If the dead remain too close they stay to haunt us as Evans haunts

[15] TL, p. 202.
[16] D, p. 44.
[17] TL, p. 213.

Septimus, speaking to him from behind the bushes, walking towards him across the park. The burial of the dead, covering them over, is also a covering over of our wounds with a stretched and fragile skin, for life can now go on even though we can never be sure that they will not 'leap out on us at street corners, or in dreams' (*The Waves*) [18]. In mourning one closes around oneself a protective covering of incantation ('fear no more the heat of the sun' Clarissa Dalloway chants), one performs valedictory ceremonies, if one can find the right form of words.

Virginia Woolf's novels cover over surfaces with words, with the tension of poetry like stretched silk. They end with the sense of the completion of a rite. *To the Lighthouse* ends with Lily's painting achieving a kind of visual suture, a scar-like line in the centre covering the place where Mrs Ramsay had been. *Mrs Dalloway* ends with a similar gesture of closure. Clarissa has not been pinned down or judged, but she has somehow been captured in words. She has been *shown*: 'For there she was' [19]. As for *The Waves*, it was with great insight that a character in Cortazar's *Hopscotch* said that it is 'a cinerary piece of lace' [20], for it is like a fabric, a commemorative, decorated artifact. A cinerary vase was a sepulchral urn in which, in ancient times, were preserved the ashes of the dead.

In 1924, at the time when she was writing *Mrs Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf wrote an essay, 'On not Knowing Greek', in which she suggested that there is a connection between forms of mourning and forms of fiction. Her central idea was that it was possible for the Greeks to directly express intense emotion in poetic and dramatic language, whereas in our age we suffer in the stress of emotion from a separation between body and voice. As Lily Briscoe discovers at the height of her grief, 'Little words that broke

[18] W, p. 236.
[19] D, p. 215.
[20] Julio Cortazar, *Hopscotch*, New York, New American Library, 1967, p. 332.

up the thought and dismembered it said nothing. « About life, about death; about Mrs Ramsay » — no, she thought, one could say nothing to nobody. The urgency of the moment always missed its mark. Words fluttered sideways and struck the object inches too low' [21]. The Greeks could give voice to things directly which we can only approach fearfully and obliquely. 'It was safe for them to step into the thick of emotions which blind and bewilder an age like our own ... (They) could march straight up, with their eyes open; and thus fearlessly approached, emotions stand still and suffer themselves to be looked at' [22]. The Greeks (according to this version of them that Virginia Woolf writes) could safely speak emotions which are for us unmanageable and which leave us speechless. The system of public ceremonies, public myths and public values provided a stable framework of meaning within which the individual voice could be direct. The individual character could directly embody and express 'heroism itself, fidelity itself. The words of Sophocles' Electra are 'bare, mere cries of despair, joy, hate' [23].

For us, in contrast, since we live in the aftermath of the First World War, we cannot create characters as the embodiments of public virtue and vice, and we have no language in which to directly define our emotions. Our experience and our literature are based on indirectness and displacement. For this is 'the age of scepticism' [24] (*l'ère du soupçon*) and modern literature must be a matter of 'hints, repetitions, suggestions' [25]. The burial of the dead in Greek drama is the burial of heroes killed in battle. The Greeks could say what we cannot say, 'Yet being dead they have not died'. They could say, 'If to die nobly is the chief part of excellence, to us out of all men Fortune gave this lot'.

[21] TL, p. 202.
[22] « On not Knowing Greek », CE, vol. 1°, p. 10.
[23] *Ibid.*, p. 3.
[24] See « The Narrow Bridge of Art », CE, vol. 2°.
[25] *Ibidem.*

The public lament celebrates public heroic action. But for us, 'In the vast catastrophe of the European war our emotions had to be broken up for us, and put at an angle from us, before we could allow ourselves to feel them in poetry or fiction' [26].

It is precisely a symptom of desperate delusion in Septimus Warren Smith that he translates his friend Evans, dead in the War, into a Greek hero: 'The dead were in Thessaly, Evans sang, among the orchids' [27]. For being dead, Evans has not died, and Septimus hears this message, from an age remote from our own, that in mourning we are to celebrate life: 'A sparrow perched on the railing opposite chirped Septimus, Septimus, four or five times over and went on, drawing its notes out, to sing freshly and piercingly in Greek words how there is no crime and, joined by another sparrow, they sang in voices prolonged and piercing in Greek words, from trees in the meadow of life beyond a river where the dead walk, how there is no death' [28].

But for Virginia Woolf there are no heroes. She resolutely refused to celebrate the death of men in war, whether in her life or in her fiction. She would see no public virtue which inspired it as noble, nor any cause as glorious [29]. Public death is not at all more significant than are the 'anonymous' deaths of women. In *To the Lighthouse* Andrew Ramsay's death in the trenches is no more notable than the domestic deaths of his mother and sister. Perceval, in *The Waves*, dies as a young man in the service of Empire; he has a uniform and the prospect of a public career before him. Yet any temptation to romanticise his death that his

[26] « On not Knowing Greek », CE, vol. 1°, p. 10.
[27] D, p. 78.
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 28.
[29] See *Three Guineas* and also the memoire that Virginia Woolf wrote on the death of Julian Bell in the Spanish Civil war in 1937, which is printed as Appendix C to Quentin Bell's biography *Virginia Woolf* vol. 2°, London, Hogarth Press, 1972.

friends might feel is quickly dispelled. The pure nonsense of his death is that he fell from his horse in the mud.

The novel, Woolf wrote, is for the first time beginning to explore 'the dark country' of women's experience [30], and charting this territory will involve a reversal of values. Emphasis will fall on what has previously been thought to be trivial and insignificant. Certainly, in the exploration of this dark country in her novels things are viewed from a very particular angle. There is never any attempt to assimilate the experience of her characters into any grand socio-historical schemata or to incorporate it into psychological or philosophical discussion. By way of contrast, think of the death of Kurz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, a death which has imperialism as its context and Nietzsche's *Übermensch* as its philosophical shadow. When Aschenbach dies in *Death in Venice* it is with Plato on his mind, and one feels that the whole history of human culture is somehow implicated in his fate. When Stephen Daedalus resolves his youthful crises, in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and decides to leave Ireland, it is in order to forge in the smithy of his soul the unborn conscience of his race. Nothing so grand is ever forged in the souls of Virginia Woolf's characters. It is enough for them if they can pull together into some moment of temporary relief the fragments which they have shored against their ruin (the image is Eliot's, from *The Waste Land*).

When the dead are buried they are covered not with glory but with words. Perceval is mourned only in 'the little language'. None of his friends feels an impulse to redraw the map of European intellectual and cultural history. Bernard goes to the National Gallery to mourn alone, to find some comfort in the paintings.

> Behold, then, the blue madonna streaked with tears. This is my funeral service. We have no ceremonies, only private dirges and to

[30] « Women and Fiction », in CE, vol. 2º, p. 146.

> conclusions, only violent sensations, each separate. Nothing has been said that meets the case [31].

This, for Virginia Woolf, is the dark country: the burst of violent emotion, the private dirge [32]. What is discovered, and woven into the fabric of lament, is fragments of memory, snatches of conversation, haunting images, little tags of poetry or song. These are the materials from which the text is to be built: 'hints, repetitions, suggestions': or, again in Eliot's words, 'a heap of broken images' [33]. Bernard hums 'Come away, come away, death' under his breath as he walks down the street [34]. In moments of panic Woolf's characters conduct little private ceremonies of incantation. In the story 'The New Dress' Mabel finds herself chanting a phrase, and she

> repeated the phrase as if she were crossing herself, as if she were trying to find some spell to annul this pain, to make this agony endurable. Tags of Shakespeare, lines from books she had read ages ago, suddenly came to her when she was in agony, and she repeated them over and over again [35].

Little tags from Shakespeare are used by Woolf in *Mrs Dalloway* as foci around which feelings crystallise, and as the poetic points around which the text circulates. It is anchored in two points, in the rapture of Othello's 'if it were now to die, 'twere now to be most happy', and the very beautiful dirge from *Cymbeline*, magically soothing,

> Fear no more the heat o' the sun
> Nor the furious winter's rages

These is an important reversal of values revealed in Virginia Woolf's novels, for the shape that emerges is fun-

[31] W, p. 134.
[32] See especially « The Narrow Bridge of Art », in CE, vol. 2º.
[33] T. S. Eliot, « The Burial of the Dead », *The Waste Land*, cit., p. 61.
[34] W, p. 233. The song is from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.
[35] DP, p. 58.

damentally a poetic one. There is no framework of socio-historical, moral or psychological concepts. Everything is subordinated to poetry and to its mysterious healing power, to its power to draw together the echoes and fragments with which our experience reverberates. 'I am writing to a rhythm and not to a plot', she noted when she was writing *The Waves* [36]; she was writing prose based on 'metaphor, rhythm, repetition' [37]. She has no wish to debate, to convert, nor even to tell a story, but to write prose that is invested with the power of 'incantation and mystery, rhyme and metre' [38].

(The stories 'Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street' and 'The New Dress' are both in the short story sequence *Mrs Dalloway's Party* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1975). Many of Virginia Woolf's essays are relevant to the themes of this essay and especially the following: 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', 'Women and Fiction', 'The Narrow Bridge of Art', 'Impassioned Prose' and 'On not Knowing Greek').

Works by Virginia Woolf cited: Abbreviations

D *Mrs Dalloway*, Penguin, 1964,
DP *Mrs Dalloway's Party: A Short Story Sequence*, ed. Stella Mc Nichol, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975.
W *The Waves*, Penguin, 1964,
TL *To the Lighthouse*, Penguin, 1964.
MB *Moments of Being*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind, University of Sussex Press, 1976.
CE *Collected Essays*, ed. Leonard Woolf, in 4 vols., Chatto and Windus, 1967.
TG *Three Guineas*, Penguin, 1977.

---

[36] *The Diary of Virginia Woolf* ed. by Anne Oliver Bell, vol. 3°, p. 316, London, Hogarth Press, 1980.

[37] Letter to John Lehman, *The Sickle Side of the Moon, The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 5°, p. 422, ed. by Nigel Nicolson, London, Hogarth Press, 1979.

[38] « The Narrow Bridge of Art », in CE, vol. 2°, p. 226 and « De Quincey's Autobiography », in CE, vol. 4°.

GIOVANNA FRANCI, *La messa in scena del terrore. Il Romanzo Gotico inglese*, Ravenna, Longo, 1982, 154 pp.

È innegabile che la frequentazione del 'fantastico' caratterizzi gran parte della narrativa e della critica di questi ultimi anni. Da una parte si assiste alla produzione di una *fiction* di autori contemporanei, specie di area latino-americana (Borges, Cortazar, Marquez), a ristampe, a traduzioni e a scelte antologiche di testi ottocenteschi o primo-novecenteschi, in particolare in ambito anglo-americano (Dickens, Stevenson, James); dall'altra, si registra una fitta fioritura di studi teorici e di saggi su singoli narratori o filoni letterari (il romanzo gotico, la fantascienza, la narrativa per l'infanzia). Un momento importante del dibattito su questo versante è rappresentato dalla pubblicazione nel 1970 della *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* di T. Todorov. Sebbene già prima vari critici si fossero confrontati con questa problematica — da H. P. Lovercraft (1945) a P. G. Castex (1951) a L. Vax (1960) a R. Caillois (1965) —, di recente si sono moltiplicati gli studi di riflessione teorica nei quali si è cercato di giungere ad una definizione di questo genere che, per la sua stessa essenza ambigua, rischia di diventare una categoria onnicomprensiva perché poco specificante. Fra gli autori più interessanti vanno ricordati I. Bressière (1974), C. N. Manlove (1975), E. S. Rabkin (1976), H. Belevan (1976), S. Prickett (1979), Christine Brooke-Rose (1981) e Rosemary Jackson (1981). Infine, a riprova della popolarità del discorso critico sulla *fantasy* anche presso il mercato editoriale, è del settembre 1982 la pubblicazione della prima antologia di saggi sull'argomento, curata da R. C. Schlobin, *The Aesthetics of Fantasy Literature and Art* (University of Notre Dame Press and The Harvester Press).

In Italia il tentativo di tracciare uno statuto del fantastico è stato compiuto con esiti particolarmente significativi da Rosalba Campra (« Il fantastico: una isotopia della trasgressione », in *Strumenti critici*, 45, 1981, pp. 199-231) e da Vita Fortunati e Giovanna Franci (« Il fantastico: la letteratura come sintomo », in *Quaderni di Filologia Germanica della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia dell'Università di Bologna*, 1, 1980, pp .11-22).

Il discorso iniziato dalla Franci in quella sede ha trovato una naturale e quasi inevitabile continuazione nel recente volume che qui si segnala, nel quale viene studiato un filone narrativo che appartiene al 'fantastico' per eccellenza: il romanzo gotico.

Nelle prime pagine l'autrice rivendica il diritto di accostarsi a questo tipo di letteratura col gusto di chi ama lasciarsi prendere dal

fascino del racconto. Ed è senza dubbio — come avverte il risvolto della copertina — il « puro piacere della meraviglia e dell'orrore, del pittoresco e del *bric à brac*, che è piacere della lettura come viaggio fantastico nel mondo della parola e della *finzione* », ciò che ella vuole comunicare al lettore, riuscendovi appieno.

Ci si potrebbe innanzitutto chiedere se col termine 'romanzo' gotico l'A. intenda *novel* o *romance*, ma questa antica polemica è superata come falso problema basato su una pseudo-opposizione, perché il romanzo gotico « rientra nell'unico modo di produzione del racconto, dove finzione e artificio sono consapevolmente usati e risultano essere l'elemento unificante e fondante della narrativa » (p. 12).

Della vasta letteratura sull'argomento viene dato conto nella « Premessa » con precisi riferimenti alla controversia in sede critica e alle utili quanto arbitrarie tipologie proposte da vari studiosi; tipologie a cui, in definitiva, non riesce a sottrarsi nemmeno Giovanna Franci quando distingue nel romanzo gotico (cioè, fra il 1764 e il 1820, date di pubblicazione, rispettivamente, di *The Castle of Otranto* e di *Melmoth the Wanderer*) tre fasi, tre tappe di un unico percorso — l'antiquaria, l'onirica, la trasgressiva — a cui appartengono gli autori da lei scelti: H. Walpole, W. Beckford e M. G. Lewis.

Motivo ricorrente che l'A. individua in questo filone narrativo è il suo carattere 'spettacolare'. Del romanzo di Walpole scrive:

> Dal sogno alla « messa in scena » del sogno, alla sua formalizzazione. Il risultato è quello dello spettacolo per produrre stupore, accompagnato dal piacere di organizzare il materiale onirico nella forma del romanzo, che si accompagna al piacere del collezionare e dell'edificare (p. 34).

Se la letteratura è sempre *fiction*, nell'autore di romanzi gotici il gusto dell'artificio, la « distanza dandistica », è particolarmente consapevole — complice il lettore col quale l'autore stringe un « patto narrativo ». Così, in *The Castle of Otranto* il terrore non è il Terrore metafisico, ma è « finzione del terrore », e il castello è il luogo della finzione letteraria — un castello « di carta » come in uno scenario teatrale. Lo scambio fra vita e arte caratterizza non soltanto l'opera di questi scrittori ma — degni precursori dei decadenti — la loro stessa vita: Strawberry Hill e Fonthill Abbey sono insieme prodigi architettonici e metafore dell'arte. Costruire e scrivere significano per Walpole e per Beckford dare corpo ai loro sogni ma anche « suggerire un'analogia ben più complessa che investe tutta l'ideazione e la costruzione di un'opera d'arte e di *fiction* » (p. 69).

L'effetto spettacolare del romanzo gotico che emerge dalla drammatizzazione scenica della vicenda è efficacemente esemplificato dalla scena d'apertura di *The Monk*: una scena di massa — la folla che si accalca nella Chiesa dei Cappuccini, venuta a vedere il monaco

Ambrosio, « as at the first representation of a comedy », precisa Lewis. Questi, autore anche di drammi, riesce a fare un uso sapiente delle convenzioni teatrali; « ma qui la messa in scena è più complessa, l'operazione di travestimento e *disguise* più sottile e la capacità di visualizzazione si affida idealmente alle possibilità evocative della parola » (p. 115). In *The Monk*, romanzo dominato da due parole simboliche, *pride* e *lust*, in cui è inscritto il destino del protagonista, la scrittura è un'operazione trasgressiva. Se *The Castle of Otranto* celebra il collezionismo come trionfo dell'artificio, e in *Vathek* il sogno e il viaggio diventano elementi costitutivi del racconto, la cifra di *The Monk* è la messa in scena del desiderio. Per Lewis « l'introduzione del ... soprannaturale è un modo ... di rappresentare l'interdetto, di dar voce all'erotismo represso » (p. 129). Non a caso questo romanzo piacque tanto a Breton e ad Artaud (che premise una « Avvertenza » a *The Monk* e, traducendolo, lo riscrisse); la crudeltà del desiderio si fa qui violenza nel linguaggio. A questo punto G. Franci concorda con la tesi di chi, come le già citate R. Campra e R. Jackson, individua nella trasgressione a livello semantico, sintattico e verbale l'elemento caratterizzante del racconto fantastico (ma già Todorov aveva affermato che « la funzione del soprannaturale è di sottrarre il testo all'intervento della legge, e perciò di trasgredirla »).

Un bel libro, dunque, di gradevolissima lettura, a riprova dell'attualità del discorso sul romanzo gotico, sia nel senso della sensibilità gotica, intesa come espansione ed intensificazione della coscienza — è ciò che sostiene, ad es., in un saggio di recentissima pubblicazione Linda Bayer-Berenbaum (*The Gothic Imagination: Expansion in Literature and Art*, East Brunswick, N.J., Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 1982) —, sia per la centralità dei problemi di narratologia che un'analisi di questo tipo di romanzo necessariamente solleva.

MARIA TERESA CHIALANT

R. JACKSON, *Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion*, London, Methuen, 1981, VIII+211 pp.

Questo volume esce nella collana 'New Accents' diretta da T. Hawkes, collana che si prefigge di illustrare i criteri e i metodi di quelle discipline come la psicoanalisi, l'antropologia, la linguistica, la semiologia, che ormai da anni contribuiscono a rinnovare gli strumenti della ricerca letteraria e culturale ed a mettere a punto modelli interpretativi sempre più sofisticati e produttivi. L'intento programmatico è quello di presentare, discutere e vagliare la problematica di tali approcci e/o di nuovi campi di indagine quali la fantascienza o le sottoculture, per esempio, con lo scopo dichiarato di promuovere

un processo di rinnovamento all'interno del mondo accademico anglo-americano che, nel complesso, oppone tuttora delle forti resistenze nei confronti di nuove metodologie e contrasta ogni tentativo di ampliamento dell'area degli studi letterari.

Il saggio di R. Jackson offre i risultati di una ricerca teorica ed applicata che ha come oggetto di indagine la letteratura fantastica ed in particolare, come il sottotitolo esplicitamente indica, quei testi le cui strutture narrative operano con maggiore evidenza una funzione trasgressiva rispetto alle norme codificate della rappresentazione artistica del reale.

Nell'introduzione l'autrice sottolinea il carattere partigiano e limitativo degli studi sull'argomento di quei critici inglesi (W. H. Auden, C. S. Lewis e J. R. R. Tolkien) che hanno relegato la narrativa fantastica in una dimensione astorica e metafisica:

> Literature of the fantastic has been claimed as 'transcending' reality, 'escaping' the human condition and constructing superior alternate, 'secondary' worlds (p. 2).

In polemica con tali interpretazioni riduttive della critica di stampo umanistico-liberale, R. Jackson si prefigge di esaminare la produzione letteraria fantastica in connessione con i contesti sociali, politici e culturali per recuperarne lo spessore storico e ideologico. Comunque ella non si limita a condurre un'analisi sociologica, bensì integra tale approccio con i principi e i metodi dello strutturalismo e delle psicoanalisi. Alla discussione di questi problemi è dedicata la prima parte del volume, mentre la seconda è costituita dall'analisi — basata sui criteri interpretativi individuati nella sezione teorica — di opere scelte nell'ambito della tradizione della letteratura fantastica europea e nord-americana, a partire dal romanzo gotico fino ai giorni nostri.

In ambito teorico e metodologico R. Jackson riconosce la fondamentale importanza del ben noto saggio di T. Todorov *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (trad. it. *La letteratura fantastica*, Milano, Garzanti, 1977), uno studio seminale con il quale si confrontano tutti gli studiosi che partecipano al vivace dibattito in corso sulla narrativa fantastica. In *Fantasy* si adottano le categorie definitorie e le reti tematiche formulate dal critico russo, ma al contempo si propongono degli ampliamenti per quanto riguarda l'approccio metodologico. In prima istanza l'autrice intende sopperire alla mancanza da parte di Todorov di riferimenti alle formazioni culturali in cui si situano i testi letterari che permettano un'interpretazione valutativa dei temi e si accinge, quindi, ad integrare l'analisi degli apparati strutturali con lo studio delle tensioni delle forme narrative:

> ... my study tries to extend Todorov's investigation from being one limited to the *poetics* of the fantastic into one aware of the *politics* of its form (p. 6).

Va detto che il tono censorio dell'autrice risulta alquanto gratuito poiché, in effetti, Todorov non ha negato l'importanza dell'aspetto sintattico, né la validità del raccordo tra dati testuali ed extratestuali, bensì ha programmaticamente circoscritto il suo studio al livello semantico per rintracciare e sistematizzare le costanti tematiche strutturali presenti nelle opere esaminate al fine di elaborare un attendibile e rigoroso modello descrittivo del genere fantastico.

In secondo luogo R. Jackson si prefigge di indagare le implicazioni della dimensione inconscia della modalità fantastica tramite l'esame dei presupposti e dei criteri della psicoanalisi per estendere ed approfondire alcune enunciazioni formulate da Todorov in quella direzione. Ed in effetti tutti gli studiosi della letteratura fantastica che si distaccano da un approccio meramente strutturalista e formalista, attribuiscono primaria importanza alla metodologia critica psicoanalitica per indagare il terreno del fantastico poiché, in quanto espressione del desiderio, dà voce al 'rimosso' ed al 'perverso' per trasgredire ed oltrepassare la frontiera del reale. Lo stesso Todorov ha posto l'accento sulle connotazioni 'laiche' della narrativa fantastica moderna rilevando come in essa gli elementi demoniaci non si ascrivano più al magico o al sovrannaturale, bensì alla proiezione dei desideri e delle fobie del soggetto. Inoltre sistematizzando la tipologia del genere fantastico nelle due categorie dei temi dell'io e dei temi del tu, Todorov ha sottolineato come i primi corrispondano al sistema percezione-coscienza postulando un'analogia con la psicosi, mentre i secondi al sistema delle pulsioni inconsce, stabilendo un'analogia con la nevrosi. Ma in realtà il critico russo, nel discutere i procedimenti delle teorie psicoanalitiche nell'ambito letterario, più che auspicare una prospettiva di ricerca interdisciplinare, sembra impegnato a differenziare il suo metodo strutturalista dagli approcci psicoanalitici e ad evidenziare il pericolo di un meccanico biografismo che egli vede insito nelle analisi letterarie di Freud e dei suoi epigoni.

Nel capitolo intitolato « Psychoanalitical Perspectives » R. Jackson conduce una fruttuosa ricognizione nel campo delle teorie psicoanalitiche — soprattutto attraverso un'attenta esegesi degli scritti di Freud e di Lacan — per discutere quei princìpi ritenuti utili per vagliare le implicazioni ideologiche della letteratura fantastica:

> It seems to me that it is important, when dealing with a kind of literature which deals so repeatedly with unconscious material, not to ignore the ways in which that material re-presents the relations between ideology and the human subject (p. 61).

Attraverso la disamina delle categorie psicologiche del perturbante, dello stato di entropia, della metamorfosi, della frammentazione del soggetto e dello stadio dello specchio — che sono tutte modalità psichiche tipiche dell'universo fantastico —, l'autrice di *Fantasy* giunge alla meditata conclusione di stabilire che il carattere

controculturale della narrativa fantastica è da imputarsi non tanto e non solo alle infrazioni che vi hanno luogo a livello semantico con la trattazione di argomenti tabù, ma soprattutto al tentativo che vi si attua di violare l'ordine culturale 'naturale', erodendone o dissolvendone il linguaggio. Ne consegue che una più radicale funzione trasgressiva è operata da quei testi in cui, tramite la destrutturazione della sintassi narrativa, codificata dalla tradizione, si tenta di trasformare le relazioni tra l'ordine simbolico (o razionale) e il regno dell'immaginario (cfr. pp. 90-91).

Questo postulato — formulato principalmente sulla base delle elaborazioni teoriche della scuola francese di *Tel Quel* — costituisce, dunque, il criterio-guida adottato da R. Jackson per la selezione e valutazione dei testi analizzati nella seconda parte del volume. Il discorso diacronico è di così ampio respiro (si estende da Sade a Pynchon) che talvolta il collegamento tra i momenti congiunturali storico-culturali e i dati testuali risulta un po' schematico, ma non al punto da inficiare i risultati complessivi della ricerca, la quale — sempre condotta sul duplice piano semantico e sintattico — mette bene in luce quelle tensioni psicologiche e formali che rompono l'ordine 'naturale' delle categorie del tempo, dello spazio e dell'identità.

Uno dei temi che opera maggiormente tale frattura e che è tipico della narrativa fantastica moderna — a cominciare dai romanzi *Frankenstein* e *The Last Man* di Mary Shelley — è certamente, come rileva l'autrice, il tema del doppio. R. Jackson pertinentemente individua in *Frankenstein* l'antesignano della letteratura fantastica 'laica' poiché il tema del doppio vi è trattato in chiave anti-demoniaca in quanto l'ambigua identificazione tra il soggetto e l''altro' (si pensi come per molti Frankenstein è il mostro senza nome) permette di interiorizzare il caos, il grottesco, l'orrifico e di non espellerli come 'alterità'. Lasciando, quindi, indefinito il limite tra razionale e irrazionale, tra bene e male e non ricorrendo al sovrannaturale per esorcizzare il 'mostro', si mette in discussione, senza riabilitarlo, l'ordine culturale dominante.

Una diversa funzione del fantastico è, invece, individuata — nel capitolo intitolato « Fantastic Realism » — in quelle opere di romanzieri vittoriani quali C. Dickens, E. Gaskell, G. Eliot, H. James ed altri, in cui è presente una commistione tra modalità narrativa realistica e modalità fantastica. Quest'ultima, che in genere rappresenta e drammatizza le zone oscure della psiche e le 'deformità' sociali, è relegata in una posizione marginale e subordinata in modo tale da perdere la propria carica trasgressiva di fronte al carattere razionale e normativo della scrittura realistica. Ma non sempre tale esito può dirsi scontato: infatti in vari romanzi di Dickens, per esempio, la modalità fantastica se da un lato dovrebbe indurre il lettore a negare il mondo caotico ed orrifico, 'assente' dalla realtà della società borghese, dall'altra, paradossalmente, conferisce energia e vitalità proprio a quel mondo 'altro'.

Secondo R. Jackson — ed è questa l'interessante tesi del suo lavoro — il comune denominatore che qualifica come « literature of subversion » le opere da lei selezionate, nonostante il diverso grado di infrazione del reale, è costituito dal fatto che esse rappresentano ed esprimono « dissatisfaction and frustration with a cultural order which deflects or defeats desire, yet refuse to have recourse to compensatory, transcendental other-worlds (p. 180 ».

ADY MINEO

GIOVANNA MOCHI, *Le « cose cattive » di Henry James*, Parma, Pratiche Editrice, 1982.

Scriveva anni fa Antonio Prete in un saggio su Leopardi che il critico « ... attratto dal mondo di metafore ch'è il testo, sa che il solo modo per non restare prigionieri della lettera, per non perdersi nella materialità del significante, è trasformare il mondo di metafore in una metafora del mondo ». Ma cosa accade quando un testo — e parliamo de *Il giro di vite* di Henry James —, pur lusingando il lettore, pare sottrarsi a questo processo di meta-metaforizzazione?

Può accadere ad esempio che esso ingeneri un vero e proprio caso letterario o che « susciti uno straordinario proliferare di studi e di interpretazioni, che sembrano irresistibilmente richiamarsi e sconfessarsi l'un l'altra ». Dal desiderio di delineare proprio i molteplici tracciati critici che si sono accumulati nel tempo sul testo di James, nasce il libro di Giovanna Mochi — *Le « cose cattive » di Henry James* — che, come l'autrice dichiara nell'Introduzione, si offre come « ... un saggio non tanto su *Il giro di vite*, quanto sulla critica a *Il giro di vite* ». Necessità metacritica dunque, che si rivela, nel corso della lettura, quanto mai interessante nell'articolazione, raffinata e talvolta ironica, dei diversi modi di approccio al capolavoro jamesiano: una storia della critica che è anche e soprattutto una storia di come un piccolo testo possa sfidare (e beffare) grandi critici.

Già il racconto, tra il fintamente banale e lo smisuratamente inquietante si offre, nelle parole di Giovanna Mochi, come « un perfido giocattolo » che non cessa di attrarre e di stimolare irresistibilmente domande. Come un caleidoscopio il racconto si presta a molteplici *fabulae* e da ogni affabulazione (è la storia di due splendidi ma perversi bambini, è la storia delle allucinazioni di una governante, è la storia di colpe inespiabili, è la storia della storia della follia di una governante e di due bambini, è la storia...) affiora, più o meno esplicitamente, la metafora del mondo del lettore-interprete.

Vediamone alcune di queste interpretazioni, estrapolate tra quelle più significative riportate nel libro di Giovanna Mochi.

Molto interessante lo studio freudiano, pionieristico, di Edmund Wilson (1934), ripreso e approfondito poi da Harold Goddard (1957),

che legge il racconto, o meglio, le « visioni » della governante, come sintomi della sua incontestabile follia.

Sull'esistenza o meno dei fantasmi nel testo jamesiano (« i fantasmi ci sono, la governante è perfettamente sana » oppure « i fantasmi sono allucinazioni, la governante è nevrotica o addirittura pazza ») si sono scatenati critici, più o meno noti, alla ricerca spasmodica di prove, di tasselli con cui ricostruire questo diabolico *puzzle*.

Dagli anni '60 in poi, ermeneuti della levatura di Blanchot, Todorov, Mannoni, hanno proposto la loro ottica « metanarrativa », espungendo personaggi fantasmatici come Mr. Quint e Miss Jessel, e privilegiando quasi esclusivamente il livello enunciazionale. A questo punto, come sottolinea G. Mochi, « L'unica presenza, reale e non fantasmatica, sembra essere quella del discorso e della enunciazione, l'unica realtà quella della percezione, parallela, del personaggio e del lettore (...) e si ripercorre il testo non più alla ricerca di *cosa*, ma di *come* significa ».

Affascinanti, se vogliamo, ma non esaustive, le letture dei critici francesi sondano quel che di illeggibile, di indicibile possiede il racconto, alla ricerca di un piacere testuale che, paradossalmente, una qualsiasi soluzione vanificherebbe.

Alle interpretazioni talvolta forzate di certa critica francese l'autrice contrappone, sul finire del lungo saggio, la propria lettura ironizzando sottilmente (« È arrivato anche per me, finalmente, il momento di 'giocare' un po' con questo perfido giocattolo di Natale ») sul ruolo a cui non può (e non vuole) più sottrarsi.

Prendendo le distanze da chi « giocava » quasi esclusivamente sulle *assenze* dell'elegante rompicapo jamesiano (assenze di significato, di storia, di personaggi), l'autrice attua la propria « performance » leggendo il racconto come metafora teatrale in cui « *L'indicibile* è rappresentato, il mistero è messo in scena, il 'vuoto' di significati non viene enunciato, ma drammatizzato ».

Ripercorrendo il testo alla luce di questa metafora, rinforzata dall'andamento dialogico bruciante e sincopato del racconto, Giovanna Mochi ne focalizza l'aspetto fittizio di « messa in scena » di un *plot* (volutamente) assurdo e di « messa in scacco » di un lettore-spettatore intelligente.

La finezza dell'analisi di Giovanna Mochi consiste, a nostro avviso, nel non violare un testo che si configura come un esempio raffinato di sapienza stilistica, dove la parola, pur significando, schiva significati certi e lascia il lettore con un senso di impotenza che, alla fine del cammino critico, lo costringe a dire, come la governante del racconto, prostrato dal continuo riverbero di senso: « Ho cercato di fare del mio meglio, ma mi sento sfinito ».

SERENA CENNI

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS, *John Sherman; Dhoya*, introduzione di Pietro De Logu; traduzione e note di Dario Calimani, Torino, Einaudi, 1982, XXX+115 pp.

È destino che le prose di un grande poeta vengano lette dal fruitore ingenuo o esperto come chiavi interpretative del suo mondo poetico o come vie d'accesso alla sua scrittura maggiore. Questo accade fatalmente anche nel caso di *John Sherman* e di *Dhoya*, due racconti giovanili di William Butler Yeats che narrano, in chiavi diverse, la vicenda dell'artista come giovane nevrotizzato per trovarsi al bivio fra le varie possibili scelte di vita e di poetica: vicenda che si articola come pastiche mitico ricalcato sulle leggende celtiche, nel caso di *Dhoya*, e come breve romanzo intimistico di marca post-naturalistica in *John Sherman*. I due racconti vengono pubblicati in italiano per la prima volta, in questo agile volumetto del 'Centopagine' di Einaudi, a cura di Pietro De Logu e nella traduzione competente e accurata (forse talvolta troppo intransigente) di Dario Calimani. Lo stesso Pietro De Logu — che ha scritto con amore e acutezza l'ampio saggio introduttivo — pur proponendosi di farci apprezzare le qualità intrinseche dei due racconti di Yeats (« ... pochi sono i critici che gli hanno reso giustizia come narratore e prosatore... », p. V), ci guida di fatto lungo itinerari che riconducono, in ultima analisi, alla poesia del grande irlandese.

L'introduzione organizza armonicamente all'interno di un discorso organico e 'puntato' materiali ricchi e densi i quali testimoniano l'interesse tutt'altro che transitorio del De Logu per il grande poeta irlandese e la sua esperta competenza nella problematica yeatsiana. Dopo aver discusso la « genesi e pubblicazione » dei racconti egli ne illustra l'« elemento autobiografico » per poi trattare, con « l'"io" diviso », con « il gioco degli scacchi » e con « il giardino dell'Eden », i tre aspetti di *John Sherman* che possono ricondursi alle componenti fondamentali del mondo poetico di Yeats o meglio a quella sua complessa e combattuta interiorità che della sua poesia è matrice.

Una matrice fatta di opposizioni dialettiche che, a partire dal 1893, il poeta interpretò e articolò in varie chiavi — da quella esoterica a quella estetica e mitica — fino a elaborare quel complesso sistema epistemologico, autonomo e personalissimo, che fu capace di produrre il mondo simbolico che si enuncia nelle figure e nei ritmi della sua poesia.

In *John Sherman* e in *Dhoya* si ritrovano le complessità caratteriali, le ambiguità di una personalità complessa e combattuta e le nevrosi indotte da un ambiente mutevole e da una formazione schizofrenica. Tutti i dati elementari, insomma, che costituivano il granello di sabbia irritante e cruciale su cui si stratificarono poi nel tempo le falde di dottrina complesse e di teorie iniziatiche, provenienti dall'Occidente e dall'Oriente, le quali andarono a formare

quella perla strana e misteriosa che è la matrice del mondo poetico yeatsiano.

In *John Sherman* sono presenti le pulsioni antagonistiche dell'« Io » e della « Maschera » e il loro conflitto, che è anche conflitto fra fantasticheria e praticità, è simboleggiato nel gioco scorretto della partita a scacchi che il protagonista conduce contro se stesso. I due poli della tensione, che hanno la loro ubicazione geografica e culturale nella piccola città della provincia irlandese, luogo natale di Sherman (e di Yeats), e nella metropoli, plesso centrale del colonialismo e dell'utilitarismo dei dominatori britannici, trovano espressione personalizzata e allegorica nelle due donne — la soave Mary Carton e l'infida Margaret Leland — fra le quali il cuore del non più giovanissimo protagonista John Sherman esita fino a rischiare di perdere l'una e l'altra: Irlanda contro Inghilterra, fantasticheria contro praticità, poesia contro vita mondana; le opposizioni potrebbero moltiplicarsi ma è inutile enunciare l'intero paradigma.

Da quanto si è detto è palese che la natura di « mostri simbolici » (p. VII), che lo stesso autore aveva intravisto nella prima stesura del suo romanzo breve resistette agli emendamenti successivi pregiudicando la validità di ambienti e personaggi. Né meno evidente è il simbolismo nel « giardino dell'Eden » che esiste a Ballah (Sligo) e che invano il protagonista cerca di rigenerare a Londra; allegoria di quel mondo poetico che solo la madre-terra irlandese poteva nutrire.

Ancor più palesemente « mostro » e più esplicitamente « simbolico » e il gigante Dhoya che vive turbato da crisi ciclotimiche in un mondo ossianico, brancolando nella difficile ricerca di una figura femminile che lo tormenta e lo consola (la fantasia, la poesia) e osteggiato da un fantomatico avversario che alla fine lo batte in una fatale partita a scacchi sicché egli, in groppa a un nero destriero, si lancia nel mare d'Occidente.

C'è una caratteristica insolita che assimila questi due ingenui racconti: alludiamo alla culminazione lirica che, nell'uno e nell'altro, sembra costituire la vera ragion d'essere dell'intera narrazione. Dopo il primo combattimento fra Dhoya e l'avversario s'ode la voce della donna che scandisce i versi di un canto d'amore: « Pieno di stizza e triste è l'amor mio... », p. 64. Nel momento della massima tensione, quando John Sherman giunge alla decisione di fuggire da Londra per tornare a Ballah (Sligo), echeggiano fra le righe del racconto i presentimenti della celebre lirica « The Lake Isle of Innisfree ».

« Attardato da una calca sullo Strand, sentì nei pressi un piccolo gocciolìo... » (p. 65). John Sherman ode il tenue gorgogliare di una fontanina pubblicitaria il cui esile zampillo tiene in equilibrio una pallina. È la medesima situazione che Yeats racconta di se stesso nelle *Autobiographies* (così opportunamente citate da De Logu, « Introduzione », p. XI). Quel lieve suono di acque ricorda a Sherman e a Yeats « un'isoletta chiamata Innisfree... » (p. 65). È a questo punto che si ha la precisa impressione che l'intero romanzo sia stato scritto come recupero, tradotto in narrazione, della complessa esperienza emotiva che costituì la gestazione della grande lirica yeatsiana.

E in verità questa è la funzione che vorremmo si assumesse il pregevole volumetto einaudiano presso il lettore italiano: la funzione, dico, di costituire un percorso di accesso alla grande poesia di W. B. Yeats la quale non ha ancora trovato in Italia quel vasto apprezzamento e quella diffusione che sono premesse essenziali per la sua assimilazione nella nostra cultura.

F. Ferrara

E. Figes, *Sex and Subterfuge. Women Novelists to 1850*, London, Macmillan, 1982, 178 pp.

Rispetto ad altri settori della produzione intellettuale (filosofica, scientifica, politica, ecc.), la letteratura inglese inclusa nei cento anni circa che Eva Figes delimita come ambito della sua ricerca registra una crescente, anche se saltuaria, presenza femminile. All'interno della narrativa, la quantità e la qualità degli scritti di autrici di professione sono tali da far supporre che il romanzo sia stato il modo comunicativo prediletto dalle donne, scrittrici e lettrici, nel periodo in esame. L'emergenza di romanziere — spesso imitatrici dei modelli narrativi prevalenti e talvolta in aperta competizione e confronto con i grandi maestri del romanzo coevo, sempre più protese a rivendicare un'autonomia intellettuale e ad affermare la tendenza prettamente femminile all'autoesplorazione con la scelta di forme espressive particolari, quali l'autobiografia, la confessione, l'epistolario, ecc. — costituisce un fenomeno culturale assai rilevante per chiunque si accosti allo studio del romanzo inglese fra il 1750 e il 1850.

In questo suo libro E. Figes dimostra come possa essere necessaria e fruttuosa — in una prospettiva femminista — un'indagine sulla scrittura femminile che miri ad accertare se e in che misura questa narrativa — che è intesa come manifestazione del sentimento, dell'intuizione e dell'irrazionale — si differenzia da quella maschile che sembra prediligere (con la significativa eccezione di S. Richardson), anche con la scelta di un tipo di romanzo picaresco, di avventure e di impegno sociale la sfera pubblica dei fatti, il mondo esteriore delle azioni, l'universo dal quale la donna è esclusa.

La singolarità del fenomeno è di per sé una interessante chiave di lettura, indispensabile per spiegare lo spostamento metonimico da un modo retorico/mimetico ad uno psicologico/fantastico di rappresentazione dei personaggi del romanzo. Le scrittrici diven-

gono sempre più consapevoli della loro funzione di narratrici, indipendenti, non più costrette a celare la loro vera identità dietro l'anonimato o dietro pseudonimi maschili o, infine, ad atteggiarsi come se fossero uomini per conferire credibilità e *auctoritas* al racconto. La Figes individua proprio nella maggiore enfasi posta sull'area della rappresentazione psicologica/fantastica — che consentirebbe piena libertà ed autonomia alla donna scrittrice — un sistema composito di espedienti retorici e tematici particolarmente adatti al *gender* delle autrici e sicuramente praticabili all'interno della forma-romanzo. Determinante per tale scelta 'sentimentale' sarebbe stato l'influsso di un narratore come Richardson piuttosto che quello di romanzieri come Defoe, Fielding, Scott e altri, pur affermati, scrittori.

A prima vista si ha l'impressione che la posizione della Figes non sia molto distante da quella di gran parte degli studiosi della storia del romanzo. Il fatto è che Richardson si presta più di altri autori settecenteschi o ottocenteschi ad essere esplorato senza timore dalle donne romanziere: nei suoi scritti narrativi le autrici rinvengono procedimenti artistici più consoni alla loro femminilità che a loro spetta perfezionare; forse, l'aspetto più appariscente è costituito dalla qualità del tipo di rapporto 'materno' che Richardson intrattiene con i personaggi femminili e che gli consente di deporre il ruolo di narratore onnisciente per trasformarsi in personaggio. Un modo narrativo, questo, che si prospetta come decisamente inverso e contrapposto, ad esempio, a quello proposto da Defoe il quale trasforma il suo protagonista in autore onnisciente e 'paterno'.

Il romanzo di Richardson è particolarmente attraente perché crea l'illusione che il testo è un prodotto soggetto a continue revisioni, ad aggiunte, a interventi che ne mettano in luce il carattere di opera aperta a recepire le reazioni e le opinioni della critica e delle lettrici. In fondo, il rapporto che si instaura fra testo ed autore è analogo a quello che il Richardson sviluppa con il pubblico delle sue lettrici e con quello del circolo di donne sue amiche che solevano sedere in giardino attorno a lui mentre leggeva stralci dei suoi scritti: il destinatario ha la sensazione di non essere costretto dall'autore, bensì di possedere un certo grado di libertà e di poter in qualche modo influire sulla continua, quasi infinita, 'costruzione' del testo narrativo. Non c'è dubbio che, all'interno della « extended family » della cerchia delle sue amiche, Richardson mantenesse la posizione di patriarca che, consapevolmente o a sua insaputa, sfrutta le proprie abilità letterarie per rendere più saldo l'ascendente da esercitare sulle donne. Eppure, ciò cui egli dà vita è un tipo di alternativa alla famiglia patriarcale in cui ciò che più conta non è né il rapporto di parentela né quello legato al concetto di proprietà sessuale. La sensibilità è ciò che costituisce il carattere distintivo del mondo creato da Richardson; e la sensibilità che addita le donne come esperte delle ragioni di cuore, come le rappresentanti del sentimento, diviene anche l'espediente centrale, di matrice richardsoniana, cui le donne scrittrici accedono: la sensibilità consente loro infatti di riguadagnare, almeno parzialmente, l'opportunità di penetrare nella sfera pubblica. È su tale ambivalenza della sensibilità richardsoniana che puntano quelle autrici che aspirano all'emancipazione anche per le loro eroine (cfr. pp. 3-20).

Dopo aver indicato nei modelli narrativi richardsoniani gli esemplari cui si modellarono o con cui si confrontarono le autrici della seconda metà del secolo diciottesimo e del primo Ottocento (v. pp. 11-18, in particolare), Figes si dedica allo studio delle diverse forme di liberazione della scrittura femminile, che sviluppa — sia pure apologeticamente e facendo ricorso ai discorsi impliciti e all'uso di immagini che si manifestano come testimonianza della loro condizione allo stesso tempo che si pongono come sintomo di desideri quasi irrealizzabili — i suggerimenti di Richardson.

La ricerca della Figes è orientata verso l'individuazione degli ostacoli materiali, variamente sublimati in immagini metaforiche nei romanzi, di accesso e sviluppo autonomi della produzione letteraria femminile: tali ostacoli sono tutti riconducibili alla dicotomia uomo dominatore/donna dominata che, se è alla base della organizzazione della società, è anche alla base della complessa relazione, spesso ambigua e contraddittoria, tra il mondo della finzione narrativa maschile, egemonica, e quello della scrittura femminile, decisamente in posizione di sudditanza. Nel delineare tale quadro — che risente fortemente delle posizioni da lei espresse nel suo celebre *Patriarchal Attitudes* (1970), un libro in cui viene data descrizione della fitta rete di rapporti che si instaurano tra Cristianesimo, capitalismo, psicologia freudiana e condizioni di subordinazione della donna rispetto all'uomo patriarca — Figes non si limita ad indicare i pregiudizi di natura sociale e culturale che hanno contribuito all'emarginazione della donna anche dall'area della letteratura. E, del resto, questo tipo di indagine è stata già ampiamente e con successo svolta da studiose come E. Moers (*Literary Women*, 1977), o come E. Showalter (*A Literature of Their Own*, 1978) e M. Jacobus (*Women Writing and Writing about Women*, 1979), solo per citare alcuni nomi di spicco nel campo della critica femminista. Le ricerche di queste studiose lasciano tracce palesi nel volume della Figes, la quale, tuttavia, si concentra soprattutto ad enucleare la presenza di quelle tematiche e di quei modi narrativi cui le autrici dovettero ricorrere, loro malgrado, per poter rendere accettabili le loro creazioni narrative, violentando cioè la loro natura e le loro inclinazioni: il che viene letto, da una parte come passivo assenso alle leggi che i loro patriarchi (letterari e familiari) dettavano quasi come norme da praticare e nella scrittura e nella prassi quotidiana, e dall'altra come possibilità di evasione nel mondo fittizio dell'invenzione fantastica, dell'analisi psicologica difficilmente controllabile (cfr. il cap. 3, intitolato significativamente *Anxious*

Apologies). Di qui scaturisce la lettura ambigua di opere come quelle ascritte a F. Burney, J. Austen e M. Edgeworth autrici che vengono scelte dalla Figes come casi esemplari dei modi in cui il potere patriarcale può agire sulla donna. Le narratrici sopra menzionate sarebbero state costrette, dagli interventi patriarcali di padri troppo presi dal loro ruolo di educatori (Burney ed Edgeworth soprattutto) o da quelli interessati al mercato librario degli operatori dell'industria culturale (si pensi alle difficoltà finanziarie di Burney e Austen, in particolare), a rinunciare a modi di scrittura e a tematiche più consone alle loro esperienze dirette: cioè esse sarebbero state costrette a piegarsi ai suggerimenti dei patriarchi dominatori o avrebbero potuto far ricorso, semmai, all'uso dell'ironia (v. p. 23 su *Evelina* di F. Burney); per sfuggire a tali controlli e imposizioni esse avrebbero dovuto esprimersi con ambiguità concettuali notevoli (v. pp. 92-6 su J. Austen), avrebbero potuto tentare una nuova sperimentazione narrativa, 'anarchica' (v. p. 27 su *Castle Rackrent*, di M. Edgeworth), abbandonata subito dopo l'intervento del padre.

A mano a mano che si procede nell'Ottocento, osserva Figes, le scrittrici manifestano una consapevolezza sempre più chiara quanto al loro ruolo sociale, sentono sempre meno l'esigenza di far ricorso a pseudonimi maschili dietro i quali celare la loro identità di donne. È il caso, ad esempio di C. Brontë che scriveva amaramente al condiscendente Lewes nel 1859:

> I wish you did not think me a woman. I wish all reviewers believed « Currer Bell » to be a man; they would be more just to him [...]. I cannot, when I write, think always of myself and what you consider elegant and charming in femininity [...] [1].

Tale nitidezza di visione è anche appannaggio di autrici come E. Gaskell le quali non esitano a rivendicare indipendenza e originalità alla loro scrittura, che può anche consentire loro di penetrare nel mondo degli intrighi di classe e delle tensioni sociali (v. pp. 154-160).

Anche la scelta di specifici filoni narrativi è parte di tale acquisita consapevolezza, come dimostra chiaramente — secondo Figes, che per tale posizione non si differenzia molto dalle tesi di Moers — « the Gothic alternative »: « The Gothic alternative » è il titolo del capitolo quinto dedicato allo studio del romanzo gotico settecentesco e, soprattutto, di quello ottocentesco nelle versioni della Shelley e della E. Brontë. Il romanzo gotico — che sembra un genere molto popolare fra le narratrici — viene visto come la proiezione, sotto lo scudo protettivo della fantasia, del desiderio di libertà e

[1] In *The Brontes: Their Lives, Friendships and Correspondence*, ed. by T. J. Wise and J. A. Symington, London, Shakespeare Head, 1932, vol. III, p. 31.

di iniziativa personale e sessuale, che le autrici ormai avvertono come pressante e che non possono non comunicare al pubblico dei lettori: non è mera coincidenza che alle figure femminili da loro concepite venga concessa massima mobilità, spaziale e sociale, nel mondo perverso e fantastico del gotico (v. p. 61 e p. 69). Il genere gotico, versione femminile del genere picaresco, consente alle donne (scrittrici, personaggi e lettrici) di dar voce a tale esigenza di libertà ed autonomia.

Nel condurre l'analisi sui testi, Figes illustra le immagini dominanti e ricorrenti nel racconto femminile; fra queste, l'immagine della casa assume un valore emblematico in quanto viene a configurarsi come metafora della scrittura, di cui le donne sono padrone e prigioniere allo stesso tempo. Certo, se si segue lo sviluppo del romanzo scritto dalle donne fra il 1750 e il 1850, non si può non notare come questa immagine viene ad essere continuamente modificata e arricchita di connotati che possono essere interpretati solo in relazione alle situazioni congiunturali da cui scaturiscono. Così, nei romanzi d'amore e di costume a sfondo didascalico, la casa viene anelata come luogo di sicurezza e di prestigio sociale (p. 74), mentre nel romanzo gotico essa — sostituita come è da castelli o conventi, strabocchevoli di celle segrete e nascosti terrori — è presentata come luogo di incombente pericolo e di reclusione da cui le eroine devono fuggire ad ogni costo. In entrambi i casi, però, essa è vista come metaforica rappresentazione del potere maschile sia nel suo aspetto confortevole e consolatorio che in quello più sinistro (*ibidem*). Nelle opere di Charlotte e di Emily Brontë, poi, questa immagine subisce ulteriori trasformazioni: in *Jane Eyre* la casa di Rochester ha una duplice valenza: di giorno è lo spazio rassicurante in cui regnano l'amore e il conforto, quasi ad indicare che essa risponde alle più audaci aspirazioni di benessere e agio cui una governante sola, giovane e senza mezzi di sostentamento può tendere; di notte essa assume connotazioni terrificanti e diaboliche, rivelando così il suo valore simbolico di chiara repressione della sessualità della donna. Ma la sessualità femminile — suggerisce Figes —, benché imprigionata tra le pareti notturne dell'abitazione di Rochester, deve essere resa del tutto innocua e dovrà quindi essere distrutta e, al tempo stesso, purificata nel grandioso rituale dell'incendio. Solo così la futura felicità della protagonista potrà compiersi (v. p. 75 in particolare). In *Wuthering Heights*, poi, le due case che fanno da sfondo alla storia d'amore di Catherine e Heathcliff, sono intese come iconiche rappresentazioni della scissione emotiva/culturale propria del personaggio femminile: più in generale, esse stanno a rappresentare quella antiteticità, caratteristicamente ottocentesca, tra natura e civiltà nel cui scontro la donna è ormai coinvolta come soggetto (p. 141).

Nelle opere delle sorelle Brontë, della Gaskell e di altre narratrici del secolo diciannovesimo la Figes rinviene anche un tipo di

sensibilità che, pur essendo ancora traccia indelebile dell'influsso della sensibilità di marca richardsoniana, non è sintomo di 'ragionevolezza' e di condotta 'cristiana': essa indica insofferenza e ribellione contro un mondo sociale e narrativo che vorrebbe imporre alla donna ancora silenzio e accettazione dei canoni culturali e dei codici narrativi prevalenti. E tuttavia la Figes non può non mettere l'accento sulla riflessione che, fin dall'epoca di Wollstonecraft (la quale, come è noto, non aveva mancato di lanciare i suoi strali contro la sensibilità, soprattutto contro quella diffusa attraverso gli scritti di Rousseau) si era andata facendo strada fra le donne scrittrici: la sensibilità può anche costituire l'aspetto più attraente per la donna che si dedica alla elaborazione di romanzi; ma essa può anche rappresentare la trappola che imprigiona la donna che si vede così concessa la possibilità, aperta a lei più che all'uomo, di dominare quell'ambito del racconto, sospetto e anche spregevole perché 'femminile'. Conscie di ciò alcune autrici hanno apportato utili correzioni al romanzo, che è stato così defemminilizzato e recuperato appieno all'area del raccontare inteso non solo come confessione e come singolare esplorazione dei sentimenti e delle emozioni delle narratrici; in tale direzione vanno letti e apprezzati i suggerimenti avanzati da *Agnes Grey* (A. Brontë), da *Shirley* (C. Brontë) e, soprattutto, da *Mary Barton* (E. Gaskell). Nell'inserire i loro romanzi nei dibattiti sociali e umanitaristici in atto nella seconda metà dell'Ottocento, le autrici cercano nuovi stratagemmi e sotterfugi con cui possano sottrarsi al controllo e alla censura dei padri (v. il capitolo intitolato *The Broader View*): la creazione di un'eroina che funge da mediatrice nelle fratture economiche e culturali che dividono, straziandola, la società degli uomini è uno degli espedienti più interessanti, così come lo è quello che consente — attraverso la voce umanitaristica — l'ingresso in una sfera pubblica, quella del commento sociale fondato su valori umani. Scrive la Figes:

> When women did begin to comment on the social system in fiction their outlook was essentially humanist. Leaving aside isolated statements on the position of their own sex, which occur in the writings of all women, from Jane Austen to Mary Wollstonecraft, they tended to stand aside from and, indeed, distrust political systems and solutions and view the problems they described in terms of human relations, they tended to blame male behaviour, and see the solution in terms of the feminisation of society (p. 152).

Certo, non si può negare che la ricerca della Figes rappresenti un esempio di quella critica femminista che la Showalter definisce con il termine di 'gynocritics', il cui scopo prioritario dovrebbe essere quello di elaborare una sorta di poetica prettamente femminista, che consenta cioè di osservare la scrittura femminile in una prospettiva esclusivamente femminista. Tuttavia, c'è da chiedersi

se un tale approccio al testo scritto non risenta forse eccessivamente della parzialità con cui si guarda al romanzo, chiaramente suddiviso dalla Figes in maschile e femminile, pur con la eccezione di Richardson. C'è da chiedersi ad esempio fino a che punto possa essere accettabile la posizione di una studiosa come la Figes quando sostiene che il romanzo perdette la sua forma amorfa e la sua scarsa compattezza solo quando intervennero le autrici a rielaborarne forme, strutture, personaggi e a codificarne nuove intenzioni. Pare cioè azzardato liquidare come informe (v. l'introduzione) il grande romanzo del Settecento, sottovalutando le variegate proposte narrative di tutti quegli autori che, da Fielding e Smollett, a Sterne e Scott, se da un lato conferirono al romanzo dignità letteraria, d'altro lato già giungevano a metterne in discussione caratteristiche e funzioni. Tale frettolosa valutazione — che orienta l'intero discorso critico della Figes — va ovviamente rapportata all'ottica rigidamente femminista adottata; tuttavia, si ha l'impressione che l'analisi che ne deriva rischia di perdere mordente e funzione proprio a causa dell'angolazione cui è informata.

V. Barone