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Pablo Neruda

AMORES : MATILDE

I. *Los Amantes de Capri*

La isla sostiene en su centro el alma como una moneda que el tiempo y el viento limpiaron dejándola pura como almendra intacta y agreste cortada en la piel del zafiro y allí nuestro amor fue la torre invisible que tiembla en el humo, el orbe vacío detuvo su cola estrellada y la red con los peces del cielo porque los amantes de Capri cerraron los ojos y un ronco relámpago clavó en el silbante circuito marino al miedo que huyó desangrándose y herido de muerte como la amenaza de un pez espantoso por súbito arpón derrotado: y luego en la miel oceánica navega la estatua de proa, desnuda, enlazada por el incitante cíclo masculino.

II. *Descripción de Capri*

La viña en la roca, las grietas del musgo, los muros que enredan las enredaderas, los plintos de flor y de piedra: la isla es la cítara que fue colocada en la altura sonora y cuerda por cuerda la luz ensayó desde el día remoto su voz, el color de las letras del día, y de su fragante recinto volaba la aurora derribando el rocío y abriendo los ojos de Europa.

III. *Los Barcos*

Como en el mercado se tiran al saco carbón y cebollas, alcohol, parafina, papas, zanahorias, chuletas, aceite, naranjas, el barco es el vago desorden en donde cayeron melifluas robustas, hambrientos tahures, popes, mercaderes: a veces deciden mirar el océano que se ha detenido como un queso azul que amenaza con ojos espesos y el terror de lo inmóvil penetra en la frente de los pasajeros: cada hombre desea gastar los zapatos, los pies y los huesos, moverse en su horrible infinito hasta que ya no exista.
I. The Lovers of Capri

The island hoards at its center the spirit of lovers, like a coin scoured by wind and time’s passing, to its integral burnish, intact and uncouth as an almond, cut into the sapphire’s patina; there the invisible tower of our love trembled up through the smoke’s scintillation, a blank comet steadied its tail in the zodiac, like a netful of fish in the sky: because the eyes of the lovers of Capri were closed, a bolt had pinned down the ocean’s whistling periphery, all fear fled away, tracking blood in the wake of the menace, a sudden harpoon in the side of the seabeast of chaos; and at last, in ambrosial salt, the figurehead rose from the wave, a swimmer of nakedness, rapt in its masculine cyclone, and wreathed.

II. Description of Capri

The vine in the rock, fissures cut into musk, the walls laced with the web of the climber, the plinths in the stone and the flowers: the whole island waits like the frets of a zither in the sonorous altitudes, light moving wire over wire, improvising through daylight and distance the sound of its voice, the alphabet colors of daylight from whose fragrant enclaves dawn lifts itself skyward and flies, dropping dew on a world and opening the eyes of all Europe.

III. The Ships

All ends in the sack of the ship, like a marketplace: onions and coal, alcohol, paraffin, carrots, potatoes, oranges, meatchops and oil: the ship is an aimless disorder, a shakedown for whatever tumbles into its hold: the hale and mellifluous, the hand-to-mouth gambler, storekeepers, sometimes they stop to squint back at the custodial water looking cheezy and blue and opaque with a menace of eyes: a fear of the motionless bores through to the voyager’s fantasy. They would rather wear out their shoe-leather, whittle down their feet and their bones, keep on the move in infinity’s horror till nothing is left of it.
IV. *El Canto*

La torre del pan, la estructura que el arco construye en la altura
con la melodía elevando su fértil firmeza
y el pétalo duro del canto creciendo en la rosa,
así tu presencia y tu ausencia y el peso de tu cabellera,
el fresco calor de tu cuerpo de avena en la cama,
la piel victoriosa que tu primavera dispuso al costado
de mi corazón que golpeaba en la piedra del muro,
el firme contacto de trigo y de oro de tus asoleadas caderas,
tu voz derramando dulzura salvaje como una cascada,
tu boca que amó la presión de mis besos tardíos,
fue como si el día y la noche cortaran su nudo mostrando entreabierta
la puerta que une y separa a la luz de la sombra
y por la abertura asomara el distante dominio
que el hombre buscaba picando la piedra, la sombra, el vacío.

V. *La Chascona*

La piedra y los clavos, la tabla, la teja se unieron: he aquí levantada
la casa chascona con agua que corre escribiendo en su idioma,
las zarzas guardaban el sitio con su sanguinario ramaje
hasta que la escala y sus muros supieron tu nombre
y la flor encrespada, la vid y su alado zarcillo,

las hojas de higuera que como estandartes de razas remotas
cernían sus alas oscuras sobre tu cabeza,
el muro de azul victorioso, el ónix abstracto del suelo,
tus ojos, mis ojos, están derramados en roca y madera
por todo los sitios, los días febriles, la paz que construye,
y sigue ordenada la casa con tu transparencia.

Mi casa, tu casa, tu sueño en mis ojos, tu sangre siguiendo
el camino del cuerpo que duerme
como una paloma cerrada en sus alas inmóvil persigue su vuelo
y el tiempo recoge en su copa tu sueño y el mío
en la casa que apenas nació de las manos despiertas.
IV. The Song

The tower of bread, the device that the archway contrives out of altitude with melody moving aloft in its avid fecundity, the intransigent petals of song growing big in the rose — your presence and absence, the whole weight of your hair, the pure heats of your body like a pillar of grain in my bed, the victorious skin that your springtime aligned at my side while my heart beat below like a pulse in the stone of a wall, wheaten and gold in the power of its contacts, your sunburst of hips, and your voice flowing down in cascades of a vehement honey, your mouth turned in love for the gradual pressure of kisses — all seems to me now like the knot of the day and the night, cut through and showing the door that unites and divides light and shade, ajar on its hinges, and beyond it, in the spaces, a glimpse of that distant dominion man seeks his whole lifetime, hacking away at the stone and the dark and the void.

V. La Casa Chascona*

Boulder and nail, the plank and the tile are here joined: I have built out of water that writes all things down in its cursive calligraphy La Casa Chascona; I have planted the berry and blood of the thicket to keep watch on this place till its stairways and walls know you by name, till the flower crisping its petals, the vine, and the feathering tendrils, the figleaf like a heraldry raised on the alien life of a clan blossom like wings in the shadow that darkens your head: the walls of victorious blue, the abstract onyx of earth — your eyes and mine — here break on this rock and this timber in the name of all places and time’s fever and the peace we have won, to preside on a house’s successions in your person’s transparency.

Your house and mine, your dream in my eyes, your blood on the paths of the body asleep like a pigeon locked into its wings’ immobility and its flying momentum; time gathers your dream and mine in its cup for a house barely born to the world from the vigil of hands.

*Neruda’s house and estate in Isla Negra: “chasacona,” a word special to Chile, has the sense of “unkempt” or “disheveled.”
La noche encontrada por fin en la nave que tú construimos, 
la paz de madera olorosa que sigue con pájaros 
que sigue el susurro del viento perdido en las hojas 
y de las raíces que comen la paz suculenta del humus 
mientras sobreviene sobre mí dormida la luna del agua 
como una paloma del bosque del Sur que dirige el dominio 
de el cielo, del aire, del viento sombrío que te pertenece, 
dormida durmiendo en la casa que hicieron tus manos, 
delgada en el sueño, en el germen del humus nocturno 
y multiplicada en la sombra como el crecimiento del trigo.

Dorada, la tierra te dio la armadura del trigo, 
el color que los hornos cocieron con barro y delicia, 
la piel que no es blanca ni es negra ni roja ni verde 
que tiene el color de la arena, del pan, de la lluvia, 
del sol, de la pura madera, del viento, 
tu carne color de campana, color de alimento fragante, 
tu carne que forma la nave y encierra la ola!

De tantas delgadas estrellas que mi alma recoge en la noche 
recibo el rocío que el día convierte en ceniza 
y bebo la copa de estrellas difuntas llorando las lágrimas 
de todos los hombres, de los prisioneros, de los carceleros, 
y todas las manos me buscan mostrando una llaga, 
mostrando el dolor, el suplicio o la brusca esperanza 
y así sin que el cielo y la tierra me dejen tranquilo, 
así consumido por otros dolores que cambian de rostro. 
Recibo en el sol y en el día la estatua de tu claridad 
y en la sombra, en la luna, en el sueño, el racimo del reino, 
el contacto que induce a mi sangre a cantar en la muerte.

La miel, bienamada, la ilustre dulzura del viaje completo 
y aún, entre largos caminos, fundamos en Valparaíso una torre, 
por más que en tus pies encontré mis raíces perdidas 
tú y yo mantuvimos abierta la puerta del mar insepulto 
y así destinamos a la Sebastiana el deber de llamar los navíos 
y ver bajo el humo del puerto la rosa incitante, 
el camino cortado en el agua por el hombre y sus mercaderías.
Night brings us at last to the ship we have fashioned together, the repose of the sweet-smelling wood where a backwash of wind and birds lost to us, lives again in the leaves, the roots crop the succulent peace of the humus, and the moon climbs the water to accomplish my slumber,

the meridional dove of the forests whose dominion is heaven and air and the somnolent wind which commends you, a dreamer asleep in the house and the work of your hands — now so slight in your dream, in the seed of the humus’s midnight, yet multiplied there in the dark like a harvest of wheat.

Beloved and golden, earth gave you wheat’s armor, a color that ovens bake in the clay, with the sweets and enamels, that singular skin neither black, white, red, green, but hued like the sand, the bread-crust, the rain, the sun and the wind and the cut in the virginal timber, a flesh colored like bells, colored like savory grains, yet shaped by a ship’s keel and enclosed in a wave.

All that delicate light my soul gathered up from the stars, the gifts of the dew and the night, are transformed into ashes by day: I drink from a dead planet’s cup amidst weeping and tears, the tears of all men and their griefs: the prisoner’s tears and the jailer’s, all hands lifted up to me, showing the sore’s suppuration, woe or entreaty or importunate hope: no respite from heaven or earth —
one terror feeds on another and is changed in its turn.

There is only your clarity under the sun, day’s figurehead, the flowering branch of your kingdom in darkness, in the moon, in a dream, at whose touch my blood comes alive and sings in the kingdoms of death. The packed honeycomb, the radiant sweets of the consummate voyage, my darling: here, after long roadways we have planted a tower in Valparaiso:

here at your feet I send down the force of my roots’ restoration: together we open the seaport, unconfined, together we charge the Sebastiana to summon its navies and display in the smoke of the port the rose’s excitement, the lanes carved in water for the movement of men and commodities.
Pero azul y rosoado, roído y amargo entreabierto entre sus telarañas. 
he aquí, sosteniéndose en hilos, en uñas, en enredaderas, 
he aquí, victorioso, harapiento, color de campana y de miel, 
He aquí, bermondón y amarillo, purpúreo, plateado, violeta, 
sonbrío y alegre, secreto y abierto como una sandía 
el puerto y la puerta de Chile, el manto radiante de Valparaíso, 
el sonoro estupor de la lluvia en los cerros cargados de padecimientos 
el sol resbalando en la oscura mirada, en los ojos más bellos del mundo.

Yo te convidé a la alegria de un puerto agarrado a la furia del 
alto oleaje 
metido en el frío del último océano, viviendo en peligro, 
ermosa es la nave sombría, la luz vesperal de los meses antárticos, 
la nave de techo amaranto, el puñado de velas o casa o vidas 
que aquí se vistieron con trajes de honor y banderas 
y se sostuvieron cayéndose en el terremoto que abría y cerraba 
el infierno, 
tomándose al fin de la mano los hombres, los muros, las cosas, 
unidos y desvencijados en el estertor planetario.
Pink and blue, wormeaten and sour, swinging ajar on its filaments, looped on its threads and its thorns and its matted entanglements, triumphant and beggarly here, colored like bells or like honey, vermilion and yellow and purple, violet and silver, joyless or joyful, sealed or slashed open, like a melon, here is the port and the doorway to Chile, the bright cloak of Valparaiso, the sonorous stupor of rain on a saddle of hills like a sufferer's burden, sun vying with shade in the loveliest eyes in the world.

For you, all the furors and joys of a seaport that grapples the breakers' successions, drenched in the freeze of mid-ocean, acquainted with peril: comely, that vessel's sobriety; comely, the months of the vesperal light of antarctica, the ship roofed with amaranth, the hand's strength in our sails and our houses and lives, each arrayed in the cloths of its status, pennants displayed, intact in the pull of the vortices, earthquakes that open and shut their infernos, hand clasping hand in the harbors; walls, people, and artifacts joined in one body, atremble in muscle and bone, on a rattletrap planet.

tr. Ben Belitt
THE MOURNING NERUDA

Ben Belitt

The year 1961-1962 is notable in Neruda’s long chronicle of plenty for the publication of three volumes of verse, each differing from the other in form and subject matter, and all in marked contrast to the special rigors of the Sonnets which precede them: Las piedras de Chile (The Stones of Chile), Cantos ceremoniales (Ceremonial Songs), and Planos poderes (Full Powers). The Stones of Chile, which the poet with good reason calls his “flinty book,” not only follows the format of a volume by Pierre Seghers celebrating the stones of France, with photographs by Antonio Quintana, but, we are told in a preface, was “twenty years in my mind.” During these years, Neruda contemplated the coastland of Chile with its “portentous presences in stone,” which he later transformed “into a hoarse and soaking language, a jumble of watery cries and primordial intimations.” The result is a “memorial” which organizes Neruda’s lifelong fascination with the craggy, the teluric, and the metallurgical into a veritable Stonehenge of exact and monumental fantasy. The dimensions and intensities shift from poem to poem and image to image from gigantic evocations in the vein of his Macchu Picchu:

Rust stains the stone
orange, green seams
in the lodes of calcareous pace
batter the spray with their keys,
or the rose of the daybreak;
it is thus with the stones:
none can say
if they rise from the sea or return to it,
but the power
that startled the rocks
in the midst of existence
is certain: they fainted into immobility
and left a necropolis there.
A dead city without kitchens
or outcries... to pebbles for the passing delight of a child:

Diaphanous stones,
sleek stones,
little pebbles — all
veered
toward the humid dominions,
shunted below in the depths
where the sky re-emerges, and the sea
dies in the artichokes... the small teeth of amber,
raisins of honey and salt, watery peapods,
blue olives packing the waves,
almonds abandoned in sand...

to memorial cairns and barrows elegizing the metamorphoses and convulsions of geological time:

Only the music moved. Milk, feathers, skins,
numbers and smokes — nothing else was, neither night
nor the day, as the planets emerged from the music’s
eclipse to a rustle of music like drapery.
All at once hot and cold curdled into a drop,
the great press of the universe took form
in the lava, a mane in the ashes, dawn slithering down,
hardness transfigured itself into hardness
under the drizzle that once was a part of the sky,
as the diamond conceived its symmetrical frieze in the snow.

This is no mere programmatic picture-book of curiosities, however, ready-made for the sight-seer — a tourist’s guide to the stones of Chile as “house,” “harp,” “hairy ship,” “big table,” or a bestiary of playful petrefactions including a bull, an ox, a lion, a turtle, and three ducklings. It is a freehand lithography of time and the spirit.

In other hands, The Stones of Chile might well have turned into a marginal rather than residual book, a mineralized eschatology. What is remarkable is the speed and the certainty with which Neruda, work-
ing in sportive and approximate contexts — the profiles which distance and illusion confer on stone — divines a deeper subject twenty years in the making, like antediluvian artifacts in the “corings” of a geologist. The poet’s affections for wood, water, cereals, stars, shells, are already well-known staples of his substantive world, manifestations of his deep purchase on the “impure.” His essay on “oceanography,”1 with its spacy trajectory from the Pillars of Hercules to the krakens of Copenhagen and the narwhals of the North Sea, his conchologist’s passion for the artifacts of the sea-floor, his delight in plankton and the sea-horse (rendered doubly attractive by the Spaniard’s whimsical equivalent: “unicornio marino”) similarly confirm his passion for the oceanic. The Stones of Chile takes a titan’s step forward to fix them all in a massive assemblage of images, Medusan in its genius for turning to stone all it gazes upon.

The result, curiously enough, is not frozen Heraclitus or stopwatched Bergson, but a set of poems which yields to the imagination at every turn: which breathes, dissolves, nourishes like those visceral deposits secreted by the ambergris whale so often observed by the poet from his Isla Negra window.2 Nothing is less static or earthbound than the stones of Neruda’s Chile: by his “Great Rock Table” the “child that is truth in a dream / and the faith of the earth” waits “for his portion;” in his Harp, nothing moves but “a world’s lonely music / congealing and plunging and trying its changes;” his Ship sails placelessly through deaths and distances; and out of his Blind Statue, he “cut(s) through the stone / of my joy toward . . . the effigy shaped like myself,” devising “hands, fingers, eyes.” Caliban’s world of rock and primordial ooze is transformed into Ariel’s domain of light, speed, scintillations, island music, ether:

In the stripped stone
and the hairs of my head
airs move
from the rock and the wave.
Hour after hour, that changing of skins,
the salt in the light’s marination.

Despite the frequently “hoarse and soaking language,” the “jumble of watery cries and primordial intimations,” the impact of the volume is neither sodden nor wooden. Its contour remains, as should be, sculptural,

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2Ibid., p. 1825. “In this way, the green whale (Bachianetas glaucus) en route to the South Pacific and the warm islands facing my windows in Isla Negra, gets his nourishment.”
mobile, diaphanous: "weddings of time and the amethyst," "marriages of snow and the sea" which mirror "the heart’s whole transparency / in / the boulder / the water."

By contrast, the Ceremonial Songs, also dated 1961, is a more diverse work than either the book of sonnets or the book of stones. The title at once directs us to a difference of tempo, scale, intonation. In opting for the "ceremonial," certainly, Neruda is removing himself from the "general" — a designation he was happy to claim for that heroic compendium embracing fifteen volumes and 568 pages in the original edition published in 1950 (Canto general). Since the poet himself does not dwell on the "ceremonial" factor as such, one is left to deduce its attributes from a scrutiny of the constituent songs: their content, their form, the whole ambiance of the "ceremonious" inflection. One notes, first of all, that it is a book which deals in sequences, concatenations, trains of poems, rather than "taciturn castles" ³ of stone or "little houses of fourteen planks": ⁴ it is a book of long poems — the longest in 22 sections and the shortest in 4—of a decidedly meditative and exploratory cast. The subjects fall readily into four general categories: commemorative pieces devoted to literary and historical personages (Manuela Sáens, lover of Simon Bolivar, de Lautréamont); seasonal pieces, embracing midsummer and the rainy season; landscapes (Spain, Cádiz, the cordilleras of Chile, the ocean); and introspective pieces like "Cataclysm" and "Party’s End," in which the poet contemplates his world, his person, and his scruples with a characteristic rotation or circuilation of the troubled matters it contemplates.

The range of Ceremonial Songs, then, is ambitious: there is no attempt on the poet’s part to mitigate the gravity and duration of his inductive labors. On the contrary, it seems to be one of the shaping criteria of the "ceremonial" that it aggrandizes and solemnizes whatever it touches. To be "ceremonious," apparently, is to be formal, speculative, unhurried: to build more and more time into the unfolding of the mind’s apprehension of itself. In the realm of content, it is also, clearly, to celebrate and to elegize. However diversely the subject veers from persons to places, and from places to the things which embody them, the unity of mood, temper, tone, throughout the Ceremonial Songs — a kind of spiritual seepage — remains inviolable to the end.

At first reading, the persisting factor is felt to be a pervasive melan-

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⁴Ibid., "A Matilde Urrutia," p. 1649: i.e., the sonnets of One Hundred Love Sonnets.
choly; but successive re-readings fix the melancholy as profoundly elegiac in origin. Only by adding the elegiac weight of the Ceremonial Songs to the cosmic and erotic melancholy of the sonnets and the book of stones, can one begin to intimate the distinguishing cachet of the later poetry of Pablo Neruda. What remains to be noted in the whole vista of the late Neruda, from its whimsical inklings in Estravagario to the processional densities of La Barcarola, is the de-ideologizing of his subject and its nervy containment in immediate acts of the poet’s mind: his increasing reluctance to terminate existing doubts by rational acts of the will. It is this that imparts to all the hopes, apprehensions, positional assurances of the poet their penumbral melancholy. And it becomes the task of “ceremony” to mediate between melancholia and the world, summoning up what is left of the old dispensation and casting out despair by re-imagining the real in existential rather than ideological terms.

In short, the “ceremonial” songs serve notice that we have to do with a mourning Neruda, a “poeta enlutado”: not in the pusillanimous guise which Neruda rejects both for himself and a perishing world (“The stones do not mope!”) but the mourning once deemed “becoming” to Electra, orphaned exemplar of the world’s kinship. Certainly it would be a disservice to suggest that the “mourning Neruda,” like the “music-practicing Socrates,” is not sustained and consoled at every turn by political particulars which, in the striker’s militant parlance of the ‘30’s, organize in the midst of mourning. Indeed, nothing is more apparent in the spectrum of Neruda’s labors as poet and humanist than the energizing genius of both his melancholy and his empirical anguish. On the other hand, the abiding presence of the poeta enlutado — to which he testifies everywhere without guile or reservation — is equally apparent as a constant of his imaginative sensibility. If, in 1924, he begins with a ratio of “twenty love poems” to “one desperate song,” the evidence of his work throughout the three Residencias makes it clear that the desperate song was actually unending, and determined the “surrealistic” displacements wrought by his pre-revolutionary acedia (“It so happens I’m tired of just being a man.”) And if, as Luis Monguió has suggested, the emergent politics of Neruda turns the world’s melancholy into a celebration in which “every song is a love song,” the seminal reciprocities of love and melancholy remain significant.

5The Birth of Tragedy, Friedrich Nietzsche, tr. Francis Golffing, Doubleday Anchor A81, 1956, p. 90.

A sampling of the progressions of the most ingratiating of the pieces will serve to illustrate both the tactics and the dynamics of the "ceremonial": "Party's End" — the terminal poem of the book as a whole. To all intents and purposes, the occasion of this vortical poem in thirteen parts is scenic and seasonal: the "first rains of March," the seacoasts of Isla Negra, and the omnipresent changes of the Ocean. Underneath this amalgam, however, like a tidal force under a breaker, a deeper theme asserts itself: the confrontation of renewable nature with unrenewable man. It manifests itself first in the motif which gives the poem its ironically lackadaisical title: the theme of "fiesta." By "fiesta," it appears, Neruda intends the gregarious drive that assembles, celebrates, and eventually disperses all things — not merely the single "reveler," but the corporate being of his "words and mouths," the "roads" by which he materializes and disappears. By Section 2, the poet has accomplished a kind of symbiotic fusion of the Season, the Man, and the Festival, into a single aspect of the world's temporality.

The motifs of seasonal rain and the sea return in Section 3, "exploding in salt," ebbing, delaying, "leaving only a glare on the sea," and are churned into a "spray" of eschatological wonderment. On the one hand, the "submerged things" of the universe ask: "Where are we going?" and on the other, the algae riding the currents ask: "What am I?" They are answered by "wave after wave after wave," with Heraclitean enigmas: "One rhythm creates and destroys and continues: / truth lies in the bitter mobility."

The word "bitter" ("amargo movimiento") is a clue to the encompassing melancholy that thereafter seeps into the matrix of the piece and turns all into an elegiac meditation on the efficacy of human exertion — the people, footprints, dead papers, "transportation expenses" ("gastos de transportes") of man's efforts to match the unkillable being of the world with acts of the will and imagination. Here the weariness of the poet is such that he asks for a suspension, if not indeed a liquidation, of the inhabited world: inhabited poems, inhabited beaches, inhabited time, where the "habitable" is construed as the "distinguishing mark" of individual initiative: "for a moment let no living creature enter my verse." For the first time since the Residencias of his youth, Neruda, looking away from causes, factions, ideological commitments, into the void where the crystal expands, the rocks climb the silence, and the ocean "destroys itself," utters that heresy of all engaged protagonists: "It so happens I'm tired of just being a man." A more haunting issue, apparently, has presented itself with his returning acedia: it is the "marring of energy," and the miracle by which "the ocean destroys itself without marring its energy." The quantitative anguish of
things is summed up by Neruda in another outcry, which measures the inadequacy of a world in which “our fathers in patches and hand-me-downs . . . entered the warehouses as one entered a terrible temple;” the consumer’s outcry of How much?

We live out our lifetimes asking: How much?
seeing How much? in the eyes of our mothers and fathers,
their mouths and their hands: this and that
for How much? How much for the earth, for a kilo of bread,
for the windfall of grapes, for the shoes on our feet.
How much, mister, How much does it take...

Thus, a third of the way into a shifting and many-sided poem, the back-lash of baffled intentionality reasserts itself in political and polemical terms. A new insistence on expedient protestation — on “the whithers and wherefores / wherever it pleases me — from the throne to the oil-slick / that bloodies the world,” mounting as the “grains of my anger grew greater,” turns the purchaser’s How much? into the prophet’s and the revolutionary’s How long? There follows another turn of the poet’s imagination as a new assault of personal choice on the inequalities of the human condition flows into the voids and pockets of his initial melancholy. It is this systole-diastole of his meditative patterns that is the distinctive mark of the “mourning and organizing” Neruda. Indeed, he seems to breathe like a sponge on the ocean floor of his exacerbated discomfiture. He absorbs doubts, contradictions, passing flotsam in the great baths of ricocheting images and uneasy afterthoughts which he inhabits, rocking in the play of altering pressures, volumes, thermal densities, speeds. No one has written more vividly than Neruda of the thermodynamics and psychology of the deep-sea diver (See “Ode to A Diver”); and somewhere, at the critical depths which break or sustain the human violator of the oceanic and the subterranean, Neruda has known how to place the rational balances which turn chaos into meditative order.

The result is an elegiac poem not unlike the Elegien of Rilke in both the discontinuities of its empirical search for hard answers, its preoccupcation with “the dead with the delicate faces,” the “preciously dead,” and its insistence on “clarity,” joy, a strenuous humanism which asks nothing of “angels” in its pursuit of the heart’s fears and

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7 For bilingual rendering, see Selected Poems of Pablo Neruda, Evergreen E364, Grove Press, pp. 226-233.

8 Cf. Neruda’s “Los muertos de rostro tierno,” “Los más amados muertos,” with Rilke’s “den jugendlich Toten” (Die Sechste Elegie) and the dead lovers of Die Erste Elegie.
the spirit's intimations. It differs from Rilke's "ceremonial" amalgam of melancholy, skepticism, and temporal love, of course, in its *visceralization* of thought — its commingling of thought with "the thorn's languages / the bite of the obdurate fish / the chill of the latitudes / the blood on the coral / the night of the whale" — and its pendulum backswing toward "men." The "Engel-nicht — Menschen-nicht" ("Not men, not angels") of Rilke's impasse, glimpsed only briefly in Section 4, is promptly exchanged for "the brutal imperative . . . that makes warriors of us, gives us the stance / and inflection of fighters," as Neruda crosses his "bridge of commitment" (lo que hicimos) into the "pride of a lifetime" and its "organized splendor" (el esplendor organizado).

If the accomplishment of Neruda in "Party's End," however, were merely tactical and ideological, one might well prefer to sweep backward to the derogated Rilke for truer confrontations of the human condition. The triumph of "Party's End," however, is that its oceanic circulations stay nowhere for long, are not positional. The day sought by Neruda, in the end, is neither paradisal nor ideological: it is an "expendable day," "a day bringing oranges," rather than a day of reckoning — though some hint of the social dream clings to the afterthought: "the day / that is ours if we are there to retrieve it again." At the close of the poem, the "white spindrift," the "ungratified cup of the sky," the "watery autumn" move in again, and with them, the obdurate mobilities of a poet who remains "just as I was / with my doubts, with my debts, / with my loves / having a whole sea to myself." Apparently, it has been enough to "come back," to touch his "palms to the land," to "have built what I could / out of natural stone, like a native, open-handed," to "have worked with my reason, unreason, my caprices,/ my fury and poise." No longer "deracinate" (sin mis raices) as man, as poet, as Chilean, clouded and luminous by turns, Neruda can now . . . say: "Pablo is back again," stripping myself
down in the light
and dropping my hands in the sea,
until all is transparent again
there under the earth, and my sleep can be tranquil.

This re-distillation of serenity clings to the whole of Neruda's *Plenos poderes* (1962), imparting to each of the thirty-six poems that unmistakable "fullness of power" to which its title bears witness. Weary "neither of being nor of non-being," still "puzzling over origins," professing his old "debts to minerality," yet wavering "as between two

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lost channels under water,” the poet “forges keys,” “looks for locks,”
opens “broken doors,” pierces “windows out to living.” What was plain-
tive or suspended in the Ceremonial Songs brightens in the up-beat of
re-examined commitment, for which Neruda’s distinguishing word is
“deberes”: obligations, and its ancillary variations in deber: ought,
should, must, owe. Thus, in the introductory poem entitled “Deberes
del poeta” (The Poet’s Obligations), his concern is less with possibility
than with necessity — the imperatives freely imagined and professed
by the poet, to which Yeats gave the name of “responsibilities.” The
options subsumed under the “responsible” are at once explicit and
mysterious: “I must hear and preserve without respite / the watery
lament of my consciousness,” “I must feel the blow of hard water /
and gather it back in a cup of eternity,” “I must encounter the absent,”
I must tell, I must leave, journey, protect, become, be, eat, and possess.
Elsewhere, the poet alludes to the “responsibility of the minute-hand,”
the accumulation of “persons and chores,” the “the imperious necessity
for vigilance,” “lonely sweetness and obligations,” “mineral obligations,”
and “obligations intact in the spume.” These, the poet explains, are
compelled upon him “not by law or caprice, / but by chains:
new way was a chain”: he calls for “caution: let us guard the order of
this ode,” but his mood is blithe: “I am happy with the mountainous
debts / I took on ... the rigid demand on myself of watchfulness / the
impulse to stay myself, myself alone ... my life has been / a singing
between chance and resiliency.”

Side by side with the theme of resiliency (la dureza, la dura reali-
dad), goes a theme of pureza, purity, as both a measure of the poet’s
effectiveness and a reward of his happy “obligation.” A table of varia-
tions would include not only a multitude of passing allusions — pure
waves, pure lines, pure towers, pure waters, pure bodies, pure hearts,
pure feet, pure salts — and their variants in claro (clear lessons, clear
capitals, clear vigilance, as well as “clarities” that are smiling, cruel,
and erect) but entire poems like Para lavar a un niño (For Washing A
Child) and Oda para planchar (Ode on Ironing). All, says the poet,
must be cleansed, washed, whitened, made clear: as in a Keatsian
dream of “pure ablation round earth’s human shores,” the land’s
outline is washed by the salt (sal que lava la linea) and the land’s edge
washes the world (La linea lava el mundo). Not only does Neruda in-
volve “a time to walk clean” in the name of the newly-washed infant,
and insist on “ironing out” the whiteness of the sea itself (hay que
planchar el mar de su blancura); in the end poetry itself is made white:
(la poesia es blanca).

Thus, between dureza and pureza (resiliency and purity) and
deberes and poderes (obligations and powers) the poet “writes (his) book about what I am” (escribo un libro de lo que soy) with stunning mastery of all the themes which embody a total identity. The “mourning carpenter” (enlutado carpintero) of Estravagario10 and the Sonnets is still there, “attending the casket, tearless,/ someone who stayed nameless to the end / and called himself metal or wood”: he contributes two of the volumes, eulogies, one addressed to the dead “C.O.S.C.” and the other, to the nine-and-a-half year old “little astronaut” whose “burning car” touches “Aldabarán, mysterious stone,” and “crosses a life line.” The old preoccupations with the lost and remembered of a poet bemused by the sacramental character of all change are found again in poems like “The Past” (Pasado); and the old melancholy “To Sadness” (A la tristeza): “For a moment, for / a brief life-span,/ cut off my light, let me / feel / miserable and lost.” So, too are the dead, “the poor dead” (Al difunto pobre), the people (El pueblo), the nights and the flora of Isla Negra (Alstroemeria, La noche de Isla Negra), farewells (Adioses), births (Los nacimientos), ocean, water, sea, planet, tower, bird — each lending new force to that fullness of power by virtue of which a master of chiaroscuro “in the full light of day” paradoxically “still walks in shadow.”

10Thus, his elegy on the death of his Peruvian contemporary, César Vallejo, identified only by the initial “V.”, begins: “I mourn a dead friend / like myself, a good carpenter.”
Günter Grass

VERMONT

Zum Beispiel Grün. In sich zerstritten Grün. Grün kriecht bergan, erobert seinen Markt; so billig sind geweiße Häuser hier zu haben.

Wer sich dies ausgedacht, dem fällt zum Beispiel immer neues Grün in Raten ein, der wiederholt sich nie.

Geräte ruhen, grünlich überwunden, dabei war Rost ihr rötster Beschluss, der eisern vorlag, nun als Schrott zu haben.

Wir schlugen Feuerschneisen, doch es wuchs das neue Grün viel schneller als und grüner als zum Beispiel Rot.


Ich war mal in Vermont, dort ist es grün...
Günter Grass

VERMONT

For instance green. A green at odds with green. Green creeps uphill and wins itself a market; here houses painted white go for a song.

Whoever thought this up discovers new green for instance in perpetual installments, never repeats himself.

Tools lie around, all greenly overcome though rust had been their reddest resolution, iron when formed, now to be bought as scrap.

We burned our way through woods, but the new green grew far too fast, much faster than and greener than for instance red.

When this same green is broken up. For instance autumn: the woods put on their head adornments and migrate.

Once I was in Vermont, there it is green. . .
Günter Grass

ZWISCHEN GREISE GESTELLT

Wie sie mit neunzig noch lügen
und ihren Tod vertagen,
bis er Legende wird.

In die fleckigen Hände
frühaufstehender Greise
wurde die Welt gelegt.

Die vielgefältete Macht
und der Faltenwurf alter Haut
verachten die Glätte.

Wir, zwischen Greise gestellt,
kaufen die Nägel knapp,
und überleben uns bald.

Wir wachsen nicht nach.

Hart, weise und gültig
daüern sie in Askese
und überleben uns bald.
Günter Grass

PLACED AMID OLD MEN

How at ninety they lie
and put off their dying
till it's a legend.

Into the mottled hands
of old men who rise early
the world was laid.

Their many times folded power
and the folds of old skin
despise what is smooth.

Placed amid old men, we
bite our nails till they're spare,
we make no new growth.

Hard, wise and kind
they last ascetically
and soon will outlive us.

tr. Michael Hamburger


Ich wandte meinen Blick jetzt zum ersten Mal von der Friedhofsmauer ab und musterte die Häuser des Dorfes. Breit, reich und verschlos-
When they called my name I got out. They had stopped in a village to buy black olives. The man who had begun to tell a joke finished it before they got out of the vehicle. Softly, gently I edged myself forward out of the dark at the back. Someone had called my name. “One day a certain lieutenant came...” the story began. I had not remembered any more. And even their voices and their laughter faded. They had gone off down to the shore of the lake and the road was empty.

Although the winter sun was setting, reddening the sky, everything seemed to me to be bright and I was almost dazzled. I was standing near the war memorial, a red lion lay motionless beside me near the churchyard wall. One little snowflake had settled on his head. A cold wind from the lake blew sleet in my face.

The country around was entirely unknown to me. So too were the islets spread like medals on the water, and the village — how strange it all was. Moreover, in spite of the ice-cold clarity of the visibility, it was quickly growing dark. I looked down at myself. I was in uniform, the walking-out uniform of the warm Sunday afternoons in the capital. I could make out my medals — the cross surmounted by a crown, awarded for bravery; I put my hand on my belt, making sure I was wearing my bayonet. In my coat pocket I felt an object: it was a small packet with a rubber band round it, wrapped in bright green paper; it contained visiting cards with my name on them. When one took up a new posting, one had to leave these cards on paying obligatory calls.

Only now did I turn my face away from the wall of the churchyard to survey the houses in the village. Big, prosperous and almost


Der Platz vor der Kirchhofsmauer ist jetzt leer, der Wagen mit den drei Leuten ist verschwunden. Wind, Schnee und Eis verwehen schon die Radspuren. Ich wüsste gerne wenigstens den Witz wieder, aus
forbidding they were, standing there before me with gaily painted doors
and windows. Far off I heard a girl’s voice call, and two children ran
past me with a toboggan. I sighed and entered the churchyard. On new
postings I always made a point of visiting the local churchyard. But
here I discerned no name I knew and soon left. And amongst the few
people I encountered in the street, and there weren’t many of them, I
saw no acquaintances or colleagues, and I returned to the village.

At the first house I came to, which had a large figure of St. George
over the door, I gave one short ring; hardly waiting for an answer I
threw my first card through the letter box. At the next houses nobody
answered either. Even at the inn not a soul appeared, not even a servant
girl. That made me think for a minute. Perhaps it was not customary
there for anyone to ring, I thought (what else can one do at inn doors
that are closed?); but I rejected the thought when, after a while, I still
received no reply. I began to get rid of my cards quickly.

By the time I got down to the lake I had only a very few left. The
sailing club was closed and so I decided not to leave any cards there. And
even at the houses of the fisherfolk and at the villas with big rambling
gardens and iced-up landing-jetties half hidden in the shrubbery I pon­
dered a while whether I should bother about leaving any. Well, I did
bother but felt gradually that I might just as well have thrown my
cards into the reeds, for not a single soul opened a door to me at any
house that I called at. That could have been of course mere tact. But
when I remembered that I had as yet done nothing about a lodging for
the night, I became uneasy. And that wasn’t the only reason. When I
came up from the lake again, walking in the dusk towards the church,
the sound of my boots echoed loudly on the road. I began to think that
this could be more than just a matter of politeness or tact. The fact that
no one heard me and that — I refrain from thinking this thought to its
logical conclusion — that one of us, either the village or myself, does
not perhaps exist.

But why then should I be carrying visiting cards? Why was I in
uniform? I dare not allow myself to become uneasy and I must be
rather careful with my last visiting cards, perhaps I can pop one in at
the vet’s, one at the laundry and another at the presbytery — why
on earth should I have come to this god-forsaken village, if not to get
rid of my cards before nightfall? The space in front of the churchyard
wall is empty, and the vehicle with its three occupants has disappeared.
The wheel marks are gradually being blown away by the wind or cov­
ered by snow and ice. I wish I could remember the joke which started
all this, but I just can’t remember it any more. I’ve always been bad at

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Aber ich frage mich auch, ob dieser Witz wichtig genug war, um jemanden auf diese Weise preiszugeben, um ihn auszuliefern an ein fremdes Dorf an einem fremden See mit fremden Inseln, und an ein Heldendenkmal aus einem späteren Krieg. Ob er nicht besser verschwiegen worden wäre und mich in Frieden gelassen hätte? Auch in Anbetracht des Eisregens, von dem gleich zu vermuten war, dass er immer stärker würde. Ich hätte besser feldmässige Änderung angelegt, aber auch das war in dem Witz nicht vorgesehen.


Ich stehe hier an der Kirchhofsmauer und die Nacht bricht herein.
remembering jokes. I can’t even remember which of the men told it —
was it the chap in the back seat or was it one of the other two? Empti-
ness, nothing; here I stand in the fine, icy rain which has just started,
in the street of what I take to be a Bavarian village by a largish lake,
near a war memorial, a red lion with a cap of snow on his head, and I
just can’t remember. Standing alone here at the close of a year — I
don’t even know which one — I feel so ridiculous. The names of the
fallen, inscribed in gilt lettering on the stone slab below the lion on the
memorial, are of those killed in a different war. I have now distributed
the last of my cards.

I really don’t understand myself. Wouldn’t it have been more im-
portant to try to remember how it all started, and to know perhaps
where I might be able to return? It seems almost certain that I have
behaved as was expected of me in this joke which I have now forgotten.

But I wonder, too, if this joke was important enough to sacrifice
someone in this way, to abandon him to a strange village beside a strange
lake dotted with strange islands, and to a strange war memorial for a
war from a later war. Would it not have been better not to tell the
joke at all and to have left me in peace? Particularly in view of the
sleet which threatened to fall even heavier. I would have done better
to put on battle dress, but that, too, was all part of the joke.

The colours of the figures on the houses are gradually melting into
the growing darkness, and the lion on the memorial is looking blacker.
Quite likely I do also and so is the braid on my walking-out uniform.
I do wish the car with the three others would come back, because I am
feeling really cold now. But while I feel colder and colder I find I can
set my mind at rest. They surely can’t leave me here forever, in this
dark village with its brightly-coloured but closed doors.

If only one single one had opened to me I would have told myself
that the others and their car would never return. But, as not a single
doors was opened to me, and as the sleet gets worse and worse, and the wet
stays on the walls, and even as the lion was swallowed up by the dark,
I tell myself: they must surely come back again. I don’t know them,
but they must know me. I shall not be able to find them, but they will
find me. They will take me to supper in their warm house. I think they
were really serious about their joke.

And here I stand by the churchyard wall, and night falls.

tr. James Alldrige
Richard Eberhart

THE TOMB BY THE SEA
WITH CARS GOING BY

There is a white elegance of stately colonnades
In a shimmer of abrupt, inviolable nature
Where time looks out from white mystery
Across the blue waters and incests of day.

My marvel and your marvel, here sweet youth
Plays among green trees with classic step.
Here carved in stone the great judgments stand,
While through the park cars wind and rewind

Sinuous and serpentine. They are our days!
Who would look to the blue sparkles of the sea,
That open enchantment of the imagination,
For bounty; who but those with hearts of boys

Can stand to pare that vision with white colonnades?
The quick serpent riding on the rocks
Bears our wills along with screech and hiss,
In blue distance what possible ecstasies?

While man, the master of misuse and chance,
Dreaming of classic step, and future being,
Hurls onward in his envying hopes
Helpless ongoing, in the dooms of his dreams.
Richard Eberhart

CLIFF

Through years of valiant schemes and dreams
He struggled to the top; vice-president now
Of a large advertising company of New York.
His father had been football coach at Town.
He tussled life like a bulldog with a bone.
He married a blond tall woman from the South
And now they had three children growing up.

In ice-blue waters of a Maine July
A line became fouled in the propeller
And rudder of the cruiser; probably wound
Around the propeller shaft before the engine stopped.
Cliff answered the call for help, stripped
To white trunks, went over the side and under
To see what he could do where others failed.

He went down under the vessel twenty times
If he went once. He could not be kept up.
Massed, cold blue water quickly blued his lips
But he would dive down, after a breathing space,
Again, and again. Others were good for once
Or twice, but Cliff would not give up, tantalized
To sullen fascination before the difficult.

We’d pull him up, after prolonged exertion,
Saying, "Cliff, Cliff, stay up, you’ll have a heart attack.”
But he attacked the undersides once more,
Disdaining advice in tenacious drives and dives.
After an hour and a half he freed the line,
He shook a bone-white smile at us, threw high
His hands, and sailed away, and married a Greek woman.
Aestheticism to Modernism: Fulfillment or Revolution

Morse Peckham

A number of years ago I published an article with the title, “Modern Art, the Triumph of Romanticism.” The only thing about the essay that I can still accept is the title. Today the notion is widespread, though perhaps not yet a platitude, that the breakthrough into the Modern styles of the various arts was in the direct line of the kind of artistic and philosophical values that originated in the years on either side of 1800, and that modern art was the first true fulfillment of those ideals. To be sure, among the members of a generation older even than my own, within the circle of the New Critics and their immediate followers, the prevailing idea of the 1920’s, 1930’s, and 1940’s, that modern literature was a revolution against Victorian values, still obtains; but the New Critics are beginning to look old-fashioned, even a little quaint. In the study of music, painting, and architecture, however, the feeling that the Modern styles, those that originated towards the end of the first decade of this century, were a realization of the Romantic program seems to be increasingly common. Even in the early 1920’s Schönberg changed his mind about the music of Mahler, which, when he was engaged in his own reorganization of musical composition he found totally unacceptable. Once his new style had been achieved, he was able to see not only the great value and beauty of Mahler’s music, but its historical importance, even to himself.

Yet in this conception of stylistic history there lurks a very considerable problem. It comes out in Henry-Russell Hitchcock’s judgement that Art Nouveau was the first Modern style. For reasons I shall take
up later, I believe this decision to be in error. Nevertheless, it has the
virtue of suggesting that from Art Nouveau to Modernism there was a
continuity, that they were not separated by a revolutionary break; yet
it tends to gloss over the strikingly different character of the two styles.
To be sure, there was continuity, but the break was so great that like
the Mahler-Schönberg break, the new style had the effect of so com­
pletely eclipsing its immediate predecessor that the latter was almost
forgotten. Of course, the Mahler revival began earlier than the Art
Nouveau revival, but I think the reason for that was that nineteenth-
century music never suffered the almost complete rejection by advanced
taste that the other nineteenth-century arts did. In painting there was
a partial exception. French Impressionism and Post-Impressionism were
assimilated, by much the same kind of mistaken categorization as Hitch­
cock’s, to the Modern styles and their emergence, and as a consequence
of that judgement, Impressionism was torn out of its historical context
and made to seem a kind of cultural sport, quite unrelated to what was
going on in the other arts and in other countries at the same time. Mod­
er painting was made to seem to begin with the Impressionists, just as
in the history of English poetry, Hopkins, because he did not become
widely known until the 1920’s, was called a Modern poet. A few schol­
ars, at any rate, are beginning to see how thoroughly Hopkins was of
his time, how assimilable his style is to that of Swinburne and Brow­
ing, partly because he learned most of his stylistic devices from them,
while what he was saying was, actually, considerably less advanced,
farther from any truly modern or twentieth-century orientation.

So then, both a stylistic continuity and a discontinuity from the
late nineteenth-century styles to the Modern styles have been discerned,
and this antimony demands some kind of explanation and analysis.

My approach to these problems, as I have outlined it in Man’s
Rage for Chaos (Philadelphia, 1965) leads me to the judgement that art
is best understood as the deposit or consequence of a particular kind or
category of human behavior. The advantage of this approach is that it
makes it possible to assimilate art to other kinds of human behavior and
to understand the work of art as the product of decisions made by the
artist. These decisions, like any decisions of the past, no matter how
recent—a minute ago or thousands of years ago—are inaccessible, for
several reasons; for one thing, statements that purportedly refer to de­
cisions are historical statements, and since the past is empirically in­
accessible, such statements are constructs; that is, considered as instruc­
tions or sets of instructions, they cannot tell us how to locate the
phenomenally perceptible, but only how to construct other statements
that may, or may not, successfully instruct us how to locate something
in the world before us. So a statement that Booth shot Lincoln can, at best, instruct us to look for accounts in newspapers and other documents which, by yet another construct, we postulate as having been contemporary in origin with the actual shooting. Or statements that the eighteenth-century Virginian style in dishes had such-and-such characteristics can instruct us to formulate other statements, based on other constructs, that instruct us to excavate Williamsburg.

For another thing, a decision, even one made, we think, right before our eyes, or made by ourselves, is inaccessible. It occurs in the mind, and “mind” is a semantic bridge by which we cross the abyss of absolute ignorance that lies between stimulus and response. The only empirical phenomenon that “decision” tells us to look for is a certain class of sentences or a class or classes of non-verbal behavior. By metaphor we then apply the word to what in the “mind” we think was, somehow or other, responsible for such verbal or non-verbal behavior. Thus statements that purportedly give accounts of decisions are necessarily historical constructs and metaphorical inferences. This does not mean that they are valid, or particularly invalid. It merely means that they are language, that all statements are necessarily metaphysical, that is, without any necessary or immanent tie or any other kind of relation to the non-semiotic world. It is always wise, and, in any discourse, sooner or later, necessary to remind ourselves of that fact, and particularly in historical discourse always to keep in the foreground the awareness that we are dealing not with the empirical world but with linguistic constructs. To do this is to be aware that one’s construct is inevitably controlled by something inaccessible and discussable only in metaphor, our “decisions,” or “intentions,” or “purposes,” or “interests,” or “will,” all of which, like “decision” itself, are metaphorical ways of talking about the inaccessible content of the “mind,” a dirty word, to be sure, but one we can scarcely get along without.

From this point of view it is easy to understand why in discussing the movement from late-nineteenth-century styles to Modern styles various critics and historians should have found both continuity and discontinuity. Whichever you find depends upon your interests. That is, there is no reason for quarrelling over whether continuity or discontinuity is present, or which is the more important. Obviously, both are present and both are important, and the relative importance of either depends upon one’s “point of view”—a very apparent metaphor. Rather, what is needed is a satisfactory explanation of why continuity can be found between such radically different styles, and why at the same time there should be a discontinuity. The question will then arise whether or not both the continuity and the discontinuity can be seen as
arising from the pressure of the same cultural values upon the decision-making processes of the individuals responsible for the appearance of the new styles.

Here assimilating artistic behavior to the rest of human behavior becomes particularly advantageous. One of the glossiest words in the vocabulary of the critic and historian of the arts is "creativity." Few words have the power so thoroughly to stun people into the suspension of thought. Indeed, the explanation for this lies, historically, in the emergence in the Enlightenment of the notion of original genius and the transformation by the early Romantics of that word and a group of related terms—"genius," "imagination," "poetry," "art" itself—into a set of terms which ascribed to individuals and works attributes which have paralyzed most thinking on the subject ever since. The whole complex is packaged pretty well in the notion of the Artist as World-Redeemer, an idea most conspicuous in the German Romantic tradition but found equally well in other countries, though rarely in such grandiose terminology. But if we look coolly at "creativity," both the word and the psychic attribute it is alleged to refer to, we can, as our temperatures drop, substitute for it the term "innovation." The initial advantage of this word is that it enables us to look at the products or consequences of human endeavour, rather than to imagine that we are examining the psychic factor responsible for certain features of such products and consequences, something we cannot possibly do. Innovation emerges easily enough when we place a series of similar products or consequences in chronological order. It is then apparent that innovation is the norm of human behavior. One reason is simply behavioral drift, the fact that it is virtually impossible for any human being to learn any behavior pattern with such precision that he can reproduce it exactly, no matter how hard he may try, and we rarely try very hard. Another reason is that any behavior pattern is always inadequate when applied to a particular, or existential, situation, since it is, to use another metaphor, "designed" to meet the demands of a category of situations. In art, furthermore, for reasons which I have discussed in Man's Rage for Chaos, but cannot go into here, innovation is peculiarly valued, though that valuation varies with the cultural level: the higher the level, the greater the value ascribed to innovation. For this reason "creativity" has tended to be peculiarly identified with artistic behavior, though once the notion had been firmly established it was extended to other categories of human behavior, principally within this century. Thus "creativity" may be defined as "culturally valued innovation."

In art history an example may be found in Malevich's assertion that Picasso's early Cubism was "academic" painting, a surprising term
when one first encounters it. He was referring to the continuity, to the fact that for all his innovations, Picasso was still painting human figures and still-lifes, like any academic painter. What Malevich did, in fact, was to abstract from Cubism the innovative characteristics and put them to work in their own right. But we can also see that the configurations he used and the way he combined them could themselves be seen as continuous with what had always been done in art. Indeed, Malevich himself asserted that he had discovered the true universals of art; that claim is exaggerated, but it is nevertheless true that what he did was universal in the sense that it is discoverable in all the human art that we know about. The point is that he could not have been innovative in his way had Picasso not been innovative within the academic tradition.

The assimilation of creativity to innovation, therefore, makes it possible to understand that those who find continuity between late nineteenth-century styles and Modern styles and those who discern discontinuity are both correct, and that Hitchcock is both right and wrong in seeing Art Nouveau as the first Modern style. The real problem emerges with the construction of an explanation for the innovative features of the Modern styles. In constructing such an explanation we attempt to examine the forces in the cultural situation which could conceivably—in our present inadequate comprehension of human behavior and cultural history—be responsible for that particular kind of innovation and for its force and degree. On the one hand there are those that would claim that the innovative characteristics of Modernism can best be explained by proposing a set of cultural forces radically, revolutionarily different from the forces of Romanticism in its late-nineteenth-century condition. And on the other there are those who would claim that the forces behind the innovative behavior were continuous with and a further and unavoidable development of the cultural forces which we call Romantic, or at least late-nineteenth-century.

Certainly at first glance the innovations introduced into the various arts in the period 1912-1966 are so extraordinary—"creative" to such a high degree—that it seems impossible that their relation to the immediately preceding stage could be other than revolutionary. And this certainly seems to be the most common notion and until recently the dominating one, in spite of certain partial exceptions. It is not difficult to see why; the immediately preceding period was that of the "nineties," of the languorously twining first stage of Art Nouveau and the rich mosaic-like pattern of its angular second stage. It is the period for which the term "decadence" is commonly used. It is the period in which "aestheticism" is felt to have been in its most powerfully debilitating stage. In music, the work of Delius and Mahler has been seen as
a prophetic lament for the death of European culture; Debussy and Delius have been judged spineless, "impressionistic," wandering, formless; Mahler has been called neurotic, self-indulgent, marked by the inflation and desperation of declining styles; and similar judgements have been made of Schönberg's "over-ripe" *Gurre-Lieder.* The fate of Oscar Wilde is felt to be the symbolic essence of a whole period; and the brutal and ugly contemporaneous attacks of Max Nordau, though they have been rejected as a defilement of art and a betrayal of culture, have had, it seems probable, a lasting effect on the usual conception of the period and the most common judgements of the value of its art. The depressing stories of the English poets of the nineties, even the early death of Beardsley, for which he can scarcely be said to have been responsible, are vaguely felt to be the consequence of their miserably mismanaged, self-indulgent, and decadent lives. Perhaps the continuing popularity of *La Bohème* has something to do with its revelation that to live like that naturally results in such an early death as Mimi's—such an unhealthy life!—and after all the artists we see cavorting about the stage are not very talented; the world would be better off, and so would they, if they all became bank clerks. If we move back to the years before the nineties, such dominating figures emerge as Páter, whose Marius is usually considered a pallid English Des Esseintes who, like an Oxford don, could be decadent only about religion and either youths or little girls.

Yeats is, from this point of view, the key and illuminating figure, for he began as they did, but he had the courage—though perhaps he was not very intelligent—to repudiate that whole way of life and art and to see that "there is more enterprise in going naked," though possibly there is no particularly courageous nudity in a belief in the occult. But that, to be sure, was only a hangover from the nineties, an embarrassment that a little ingenuity can explain away.

In short, I believe that I am not setting up a straw man if I assert that the usual picture of the period from, in England, the emergence of Swinburne, and in France, the emergence of Gustave Moreau and Verlaine, is one of relaxation of nerve, self-indulgence always hinting in the direction of sexual perversity, and often enough arriving there, remoteness, an unrealistic worship of art for its own sake, of a commitment to Aestheticism as a strategy for escape from a real world which these artists did not have the courage or manliness to face, an escape which often enough involved a return to the more sensate rituals and forms of religion, especially if they were anti-intellectual and mystic in the worst of the many senses of that word. The general conception comes out sharply in the argument as to whether *A Rebours* is to be tak-
en as a serious presentation of Aestheticism in its most extreme form, or as a satire of it. Those who insist on the latter interpretation seem to base their judgement on the conviction that nobody could possibly take such an attitude seriously. Only in Mallarmé’s version of Aestheticism, I gather, can modern literary criticism find an exemplar which transcends the limitations of its period; and the other day I came upon the judgement that even he was, at times, sentimental. In the same way the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist painters are felt to have transcended their period, the art of which was headed for a cul-de-sac and a deserved oblivion, because they prepared the way for Modernism, just as, according to Hitchcock and others, we can now see that the same proposition holds for Art Nouveau. This revisionism has been possible, and even required, because all kinds of affinities have now been noticed between Art Nouveau and the Post-Impressionists.

There were, then a few St. Johns in the wilderness of Aestheticism, a few who saw that late Romantic culture was decadent and doomed, or at least a few who can be seen, with some justification, from that point of view. But I believe with Hegel that nobody is ahead of his time. When we assert this of some figure or some work or group of works, we have merely confessed that such men and works have escaped the categorical net we have woven to catch their period. Nevertheless, even of this kind of useless proposition some sense can be made if we look at behavior instead of works, and if we perceive behavior in its historical-cultural context as problem-solving activity. Then it is by no means pointless to assert that of the various individuals in the same situation some will see the problem before others, some will be aware of the inadequacy of the orientations of their culture before others are. Thus we can give some content to the “individual ahead of his time.” He has seen the problem before others and has discovered or made a step towards the solution which later becomes more general, and ultimately widespread. There are, after all, plenty of individuals in our society who have never even discerned any problems that postdate 1600, and are still asserting that the problems of the 16th century are not really problems. The question about the relation of late Romantic art to Modern art thus can be put more sharply. Was the problem with which the Aesthetics and Decadents were struggling the same problem as that with which the Moderns were engaged, or was their problem and their solution one which the Moderns had transcended? Were the Moderns exposing themselves, perhaps, to a wholly different set of problems? And if so, were they problems which had emerged because their predecessors had found solutions to their own problems which time had shown to be untenable? As I have suggested, I think the most common answer has
been that the Moderns were engaged in a new set of problems because the solutions of their predecessors, and indeed their problems, had been revealed to be invalid, even, to use a word fashionable at least until recently, inauthentic.

But this most common answer presents difficulties and problems of its own. Schönberg, Picasso, Matisse, Joyce, Stein, and the other heroes of Modernism were, for the most part and particularly the very first to make the breakthrough, by no means young revolutionaries. They were stylistically well-established men in their early middle age with an impressive body of achievement behind them in the very style which they transcended or broke away from or revolted against, however one may wish to put it. In the eyes of the knowledgeable, they were already successful artists of great, perhaps the first, importance. After their breakthrough they did not repudiate their early works. In fact, Schönberg completed the scoring of the *Gurre-Lieder* without re-writing it, and in later years thought well enough of it to re-arrange it in a more practicable form. Nor did Joyce repudiate the stories of *Dubliners* after he had written *Ulysses*, or even *Finnegan’s Wake*, nor did Stein repudiate her early stories. Joyce, in fact, continued to write poetry in a pre-Modern manner, in a very definitely late-Romantic or nineties manner. There was nothing, it would seem, of the kind of destruction of his youthful works which Brahms performed when he left Hamburg for Vienna. There seems to have been no such repudiation. Even after Yeats decided there was more enterprise in going naked, he continued to publish collected editions which included his clothed works, and though he revised them, he did not change their style. Those who insist that a revolution was involved, rather than a fulfillment, must find these facts somewhat embarassing; and if this position is to be taken, an explanation must be offered about the nature of the decisions responsible for the Modern styles, and about the cultural forces—the problems, and the available orientations for perceiving them and coming to grips with them—which lay behind the decisions. To put it perhaps too baldly, the thing that needs to be explained is how it was that men who had grown up in, had been trained in, and had been successful in the late Romantic styles and the cultural values that lay behind them, could have suddenly and, though unknown to each other, almost simultaneously started responding to an entirely new set of cultural values. Their failure to repudiate their earlier works is not decisive, but is certainly highly suggestive. It is obviously not enough to say that they suddenly evolved or were influenced by Modern cultural values, because that is simply to categorize their new styles and to extend tautologically the attributes of their styles to their decisions and their cultural values. It is, in short,
to say precisely nothing. The cultural dynamics of the situation need badly to be explained.

So far I have attempted merely to understand the problem more precisely: was the emergence of Modernism a revolt against the Romantic program, which had become moribund, or was it a fulfillment of that program, which was still viable—more viable than ever—and more sharply understood in the period immediately preceding the Modern breakthrough? It is apparent from what I have said about the usual conception of Aestheticism and Decadence and Art Nouveau that if the latter answer is to be accepted, then there is something radically wrong with that conception of late Romanticism, and it needs to be thoroughly overhauled.

Of crucial importance at this point is Yeats' famous remark about the fascination of what is difficult. For years I have had this phrase hurled at me by one critic or another, and always with the implication not only that I certainly ought to be very impressed, but also that it was remarkably original of Yeats to have uttered it and that it contains the secret of the Modern and marks him off sharply from his immediate predecessors. Perhaps it does; that is the problem. But it certainly does not mark him off from his ultimate sources in the Romantics of the period from 1795 to 1830. The more I study the early Romantics, the more heroic I find them. I have referred to the Romantic program, and this I think is a better term than the Romantic "attitudes" or "beliefs." A belief is usually seen, it would appear, as an expression of what is in the believer's mind, but such an attitude, of course, is quite untenable. Looked at coolly, a statement of belief is a set of directions designed to control one's activities, and possibly the activities of others. It is a program. The notion of the Romantic attitudes or beliefs arrests them in time, but if we think of the Romantic program a dynamic element is introduced, one which, hopefully, will mesh with the particular cultural dynamics we are seeking.

The Romantic program, then, was nothing if not heroic. Perhaps it was so heroic, so utterly beyond any hope of achievement that it was comic. But then, the genuine hero is always on the verge of the comic. That is why the atmosphere of tragedy must always be so portentous, why even the humor in tragedy must be extravagant, a little, or entirely, mad. Nevertheless, in the first decade of the century Schleiermacher said that any program for man must be impossible of achievement, for only an unachievable goal can bring out man's powers to the full, so that we can know what they are. The program of the Romantic artist was certainly heroic, and certainly impossible of achievement, for the Romantic artist took upon himself the task of the redemption of humani-
ty, that is, of introducing value into human existence. Just as later Feuerbach could insist that every man is and must be his own Christ, so the Romantic artist took upon himself the burden of Christ, the burden of world-redemption. It comes out in Coleridge's conception of the poetic imagination, which, in one form or another, is to be found deeply embedded in the romantic tradition, right down to the present. The power to make sense out of experience, which is the imagination, is given to every man, but it is given to the poet above all, and to the highest degree, not in spite of the fact that he subjects the world to the demands of the profoundest human needs, but because of it. And this is the introduction of value by the creation of the Self. That this Coleridgean conception involved logical and semantic confusions which have invalidated literary criticism ever since is beside the point. The significant factor is that to be fascinated with such a program is to be fascinated with what is difficult.

But this is not all, nor the sole source of the difficulty in the Romantic program. The case of Blake is to the point. Let me be frank; Blake as man, thinker, poet, artist, and engraver I detest. Whatever I say about him is biased, but I am no more biased, I think, than those who admire his performance of these various roles. He did not, to my mind, become more than a failed Romantic. That is, he saw the problem; the Enlightenment dissolved beneath him, but he retreated in fear to an early 16th-century position. If the Romantic program was deeply committed to the fascination of what is difficult, the Enlightenment program was deeply committed to the fascination of what is easy, a program which led to an ideal even more hopelessly unattainable than that of the Romantics. Blake certainly saw this, and reacted against it in an initially Romantic direction. But, as he said, he had to have a system, and a system is what he soon had, a closed system. The Enlightenment, as Blake clearly saw, had as its aim to dissolve the subject into the object. Blake's system was merely a return to a late medieval and early Renaissance determination, as Northrop Frye tells us, "to destroy the antithesis of subject and object." As a contrast, consider a genuine Romantic, Hegel, commonly, and perhaps vulgarly, identified as the most devoted of system-builders. Yet even if he was—and this is doubtful—what a difference between his system and Blake's! His aim was not to build a system but to discover the true method of philosophy, the one philosophy. And he was convinced that once it had been discovered, its practice would reveal that it was continuously self-transforming, and self-transcending. He did not claim that philosophy ended with him. He merely claimed that his position presented the most advanced form of this endlessly self-transforming and self-transcending philosophizing
available within the historical limitations of his own time. That is, far from collapsing subject into object, as the Enlightenment wished, or object into subject, as the regressive Blake wished, he proposed that the only way out was to maintain an eternal and irresolvable tension between subject and object. Far from being undercut by his own principles, he used his own principles to undercut himself. That Blakeian itch for finality the Romantic Freud has taught at least some of us—not that others had not tried before—is the mark of childishness.

Here then is the heart of the Romantic fascination for what is difficult. It was not merely the introduction of value into the world; it was the determination to introduce it in such a way that the Self would never be threatened by the fusion of subject and object in either direction. That in turn meant that any final statement of value in the form of a belief must be undercut and transcended (aufgehoben, as Hegel put it) as soon as it was arrived at. Thus the ultimate difficulty which fascinated the Romantic was to maintain the tension between subject and object. Psychologically, it meant that the individual must always keep himself under extreme pressure, and that as an artist he must work under the guidance of the most cruel and demanding rules he could devise (the notion that Romantic art is formless is one of the silliest ever to have been introduced into the immense body of critical platitudes.) The history of the culturally emergent styles of the nineteenth century is one of steadily mounting pressure. It led in the 1880's to Browning's Parleyings, that ambiguous, equivocating, and Wittgensteinian study of the word "truth." Within the next twenty years it had produced the symphonies of Mahler. Each of these vast works stretches out and coils and returns upon itself and shudders and writhes like a huge snake struggling to cast its dead skin. To call them neurotic touches just enough of their character to miss the point. To call them shapeless betrays an inability to grasp a large-scale plan.

From this point of view it is possible to understand Yeats a little better, whose transformation occurred in the decade of the last Mahler symphonies. It was perhaps unfortunate that so tender and weak a mind as his ever encountered so brutal, so powerful, so egocentric, and so half-educated a mind as Blake's. Apparently what appealed to him most was the concealed and veiled presentation of Blake's doctrine, not the doctrine itself, which he probably never understood. The appeal was the same that led him to Theosophy and the comic fantasy of the dictation of A Vision. That late-nineteenth-century interest in the occult, in Rosicrucianism, in Alchemy, in Satanism, in all forms of bad and non-European mysticism is embarrassing. Such a betrayal of European culture seems hard to comprehend, and harder to forgive. The basic
character of Romanticism is an uncompromising tough-mindedness, and all this seems like a collapse of the Romantic program, unless we take as our clue the necessity for the Romantic to devise strategies for putting himself under pressure and for steadily increasing that pressure. It is not entirely a safe thing to do. A little bad luck, a few bad choices, with drugs, or alcohol, or mysticism, or religion, and the individual can be destroyed, either literally or psychically, by being squeezed by a greater pressure than he can endure out of the Romantic program into some intellectual backwater, as Blake was. It was a risk Yeats ran often enough, yet never quite fatally. For always before him, as Frank Kermode has shown, was the image of the dance, the dance that is the dancer, a nearly perfect emblem of the kind of self-imposed pressure and discipline the Romantic tradition is always seeking strategies to achieve. One has the impression that the European artists of the late nineteenth century who became involved with experiments in everything from the occult to traditional Catholicism were never quite serious, were always toying with these matters, never quite committing themselves. The reason for this ultimate failure of commitment seems to be that they were not really seeking for finality, in spite of what they occasionally may have said, but were actually interested in exploring these esoteric areas of human experience as possible sources for strategies of self-imposed pressure. Their immediate aim, as Professor John Lester has shown, was ecstasy, a key word in the period before the breakthrough into Modernity.

Strategies for maintaining pressure, lest the Self's endless task of introducing value into the world be extinguished by the finality of collapse of subject into object, or object into subject—this perhaps is the key to Aestheticism. Several years ago (in Beyond the Tragic Vision, New York, 1962) I proposed that for that term be substituted “Stylist.” A justification for this proposal will, I think, help illuminate the problem at hand. By the end of the 1850's a number of the most advanced individuals had come to the realization that the superficial aspect of the Romantic program—the redemption of the world and the redemption of the personality—could not possibly be achieved. The difficult thing now became keeping up the pressure without the aid of either of these goals, even as heuristic and unrealizable aims. They came to be seen not as the heart of the Romantic problem, but only temporarily valuable devices; but once a faith is perceived as a strategy, though it is possible to maintain it in that status, it is difficult; and sooner or later the question arises as to whether or not it might be better to do without it. If that next step is taken, what was once a faith becomes an illusion. This process was implicit in the dynamics of the Romantic program, as
we have seen; sooner or later it was bound to move to the foreground, as it had, for the advanced Romantic, by the end of the 1850's.

A new problem now arose. With the abandonment of the superficial aspect of the Romantic program, there was also lost a moral imperative, which, by the logic of the cultural situation, was now perceived as easy, rather than difficult. Moreover, such a loss left the Self and its creation of value absolutely exposed, with neither transcendental justification nor protection against the non-Romantic society and the culture, from which the Romantic was alienated because it was engaged in the quest for finality by the destruction of antithesis between subject and object. A functional substitute for faith was obviously needed, a substitute which would be metaphysically neutral; it would not commit the individual to any illusory goal, nor would it leave him defenseless. The answer lay in the commitment to style in its own right.

The psychological process can be understood if we conceive it in the terms of neurosis and psychosis, or, to use a more recent term, the progression of dysfunctional behavior. It seems reasonably obvious that one of the symptoms of breakdown of ordinary functions, one of the ways, perhaps the most important way or even the only way, we can tell that a personality is disintegrating, is that its behavior becomes increasingly stylized, that is, more limited and less flexible in its responses and more repetitive. It becomes formalized. The behavioral pattern is applied almost indifferently to an increasing variety of situations without correction or adaptation. On the other hand, these dysfunctional symptoms can be seen just as well as functional strategies to prevent further disintegration, and for the majority of those people classified as neurotic, such strategies are successful. Dr. Johnson's compulsion to touch everything was a strategy for holding himself together. Indeed, in this sense, we are all neurotic, for the personality is always threatened with disintegration, precisely because none of our behavior patterns are perfectly prepared to meet any actual situation with total adequacy. Further, from the inside of the neurotic and psychotic looking out, one of the indications to himself that something is wrong is that he becomes aware of differences between his faiths, his programs, and those of the bulk of the individuals in the society around him. His strategy for holding himself together in the face of this discrepancy, which is so disturbing, is either to adopt the position that their faiths are valid and his are not, or vice versa.

I do not wish to suggest for a moment that the Romantic was neurotic, or, in the sense suggested, any more neurotic than is the norm. On the contrary, from his point of view, from the modern point of view, he was less neurotic. What the Romantic did from the beginning of his
history was to engage deliberately and rationally in a process which the severe neurotic and psychotic adopts because he has no choice. The Romantic responded to a cultural crisis and a cultural problem, but in doing so he necessarily entered upon and exposed himself to the psychological process characteristic of disintegrating personalities. This is why his behavior so frequently has a superficial resemblance to the behavior of the mildly disturbed and even the insane. A striking instance of this appears in the art of the Aesthetic movement, or as I prefer to call it, Stylistism. An examination of the art of the disturbed and the insane shows clearly that as functional breakdown proceeds and one strategy after another is discovered to be inviable, their art becomes increasingly stylized, that is, both formally and semantically over-determined, or less flexible. That is particularly evident in the case of schizophrenics who have had artistic training. As each strategy is abandoned, the next, and more regressive, strategy becomes more desperate, both more limited and more violent. More energy flows into a narrower range of behavior. And precisely that formal and semantic over-determination is the characteristic of the art of Stylistism. Swinburne’s poetic style is an easily comprehensible example, but the style of the mature Monet, of Cézanne, of Debussy, is just as much to the point. The most striking instance of all the style of late Stylistism, Art Nouveau.

However, the strategies of the Romantic Stylist differed in both their origin and their function from the superficially similar styles of progressively dysfunctional personalities. Unlike these individuals, the Stylist saw the faiths both of his non-Romantic cultural and social environment and of his own Romantic tradition as invalid. He was not faced with an either/or choice, as is the dysfunctional personality, but with a both/and rejection. Furthermore, the strategies of the dysfunctional are designed to relieve the pressures from what he perceives either as a disintegrating personality or as a disintegrating socio-cultural environment. But the Stylist strategy was, of course, designed to increase pressure. The one is interested in a body of rules that will protect him, that will enable him to maintain what functional processes he still has control of; but the other was interested in a body of rules that would force him into an entirely new position. Robert Schmutzler has pointed out that the practice of Art Nouveau was accompanied in its practitioners by a desire to discover a wholly new form of life. The artistic activities of the Stylists were designed as defenses within which they could work out, obscurely and with great difficulty, a new Romantic program, nothing less than self-transformation by self-transcendence. Nietzsche, the greatest stylist of them all, summed it up in his famous “transvaluation of all values.” Thus, paralleling the explorations into the possibilities
of religious occultism was a similar interest in other culturally transcendened possibilities, particularly a superficial interest in Naturism (to distinguish it from Naturalism, which is pre-Stylist) of an Enlightenment character. That is, some of the propositions of religion and of the Enlightenment were adopted for strategic purposes; the same things were said, but for a different reason. This Stylistic Naturism was, as is to be expected, particularly an English mode of Stylist, found in Meredith, whose verbal style was almost as difficult as Browning's, and whose Naturism, as in "The Woods of Westermain," had the Romantic attribute of difficulty rather than the Enlightenment attribute of ease and the psychologically comfortable: "Enter these enchanted woods, ye who dare." This Naturistic mode of Stylist continued into the novels of E. M. Forster and of D. H. Lawrence, and the poetry of John Masefield; but it was also found in Germany, as in certain Youth Movements of the time, and the German form of Art Nouveau is commonly known as Jugendstil. Browning himself, whose later poetry is notoriously difficult, even impenetrable, and has been most unjustly neglected as a consequence, when asked why he wrote in so difficult a style, replied that it was to warn people off his property who did not belong there. The defensive aspect of Stylist comes out better in this remark than in any other I know of.

An examination of Pre-Raphaelitism will serve to make my position clearer. The Pre-Raphaelitism of the 1850's was of course of quite a different character from the work of the period after 1860, which, confusingly, goes under the same name, that of the later Rossetti, Morris, Burne-Jones, and so on. The earlier belonged to the Pre-Stylist and Post-Transcendental stage of Romanticism, which I have called Objectism, to indicate the naked exposure of the Self to the non-Romantic world without any defenses at all. The dangerous and self-destructive aspect of Objectism comes out in that original Pre-Raphaelite program, which required such exact transliteration of phenomenal appearance that, to be blunt, no painter could possibly make a living at it; and that the early Pre-Raphaelites rapidly acquired a market is now well-known. Further, current studies of Victorian painting show that they were by no means alone in undertaking this program; other English painters with no connection with them were pursuing the same goals. The corresponding French style, the naturalism of Courbet and the Impressionism of Manet, was economically much more efficient. Some of the Pre-Raphaelites continued to paint as they had begun, notably William Holman Hunt, but the other leaders, for the most part, entered upon a Stylist program. The poetry of Rossetti, rather than his painting, shows most clearly the character of this cultural transformation, particularly
The House of Life. It is not surprising that this should be so. The weakness of the first stage of Pre-Raphaelite painting, and even, though to a lesser degree, the second, was that unlike Courbet and Manet, the English painters continued, in spite of their protestations, to organize their paintings according to the academic tradition established by Raphael himself and the other painters of the High Renaissance. Semantically, their art was genuinely innovative, but formally it was not. This is probably why their painting has lost its popularity, while the various corresponding stages of Impressionism (for there was an Objectist and a Stylist impressionism, as well) have not.

The House of Life, however, is considerably more innovative. For one thing, it is characterised by an extraordinary concentration. The first necessity for good poetry, Rossetti said, is fundamental brain-work. Consequently it is marked by a difficulty, that is, a semantic over-determination, which was paralleled in English poetry only by Browning’s Sordello and by the work he was beginning to do while The House of Life, for the most part, was being written, the 1860’s and the 1870’s. It is, however, the general plan which is most illuminating for an understanding of Stylistism. It is divided into two parts, “Youth and Change” and “Change and Fate,” but the overriding subject of the first is Love, and of the second, Art. The first is, in itself, a fascinating exploration of eroticism, but an eroticism presented not for erotic purposes. We live in an interpreted world, and part of that world, perhaps to all of us the most significant part, is to be found inside our own skins. The internal environment of forces which can never be completely mastered or understood, any more than the external environment, includes the sexual drive. Eroticism is the interpretation of that drive, which has to be interpreted as every other force and phenomenon has to be. What is the significance of that interpretation to the Self, with its task of creating value? What unique set of value-laden interests are manifest in these erotic interpretations of sexuality?

The second part uses art as the first uses eroticism. In the Romantic tradition, as we have seen, the imagination is the instrument that makes sense out of experience, or more melodramatically, creates the world; and that art is the prime instrument and manifestation of the imagination is a virtually unquestioned doctrine not only of the Romantic artist but also of the Romantic critic and often enough of the Romantic philosopher. (It is the most common conception of art to be found today, though, to my mind, pretty nonsensical.) Love, then, is the instrument of the Self, or the imagination, that introduces values into the internal world, and Art is its complement for the external world. Thus, late in the century, in a somewhat vulgar and, except for
the music, non-Stylistic setting, Tosca lives for art and lives for love. But Rossetti presents both Love and Art as failing in their prescribed tasks, only death offering blessedly a flower in a fountain, finality. That is to say, there is no finality in life, nor is there any resolution of the necessarily conflicting claims of Art and Love. Both are means for placing the individual under the extremest pressure, and the pressure is redoubled by the power of each to reveal the inadequacy of the other. Thus each pulls the Self, the imagination, in opposite directions and threatens it constantly with disintegration. Over and over again, during this period, one finds style used, not as the neurotic does, to decrease the threat of disintegration, but on the contrary, to increase it. It is for reasons such as these that I find it meaningful to say that Stylistism (or Aestheticism) does not abandon the heroic tradition of Romanticism for escapism or self-indulgence. On the contrary, it seems to me more heroic than its predecessors, because it does not parade its heroism, but disguises it behind an elaborate defense of the sumptuously beautiful, or sometimes the perversely repellent. Rossetti's work brings to the foreground a theme which had been introduced but not fully developed earlier in the century, the theme of the doppelgänger. Rossetti, however, does not treat it emblematically, but psychologically, thus developing it into one of the most remarkable themes of Stylistism, a self-imposed and controlled schizophrenia. Dorian Gray and Jekyll-Hyde are subsequent instances, and some have professed, I think correctly, to perceive the same kind of thing going on in the symphonies of Mahler.

The perverse itself was an equally important theme during the period, and in English literature also dates from the 1860's, Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon*, and above all others, his *Poems and Ballads*. At times one thinks that the latter work must have been written after Krafft-Ebing, Swinburne presents so many forms of erotic perversity and in "The Triumph of Time" analyzes their psychological origins with such care and penetration. The theme of the book is really Baudelaire's "Hypocrite lecteur,—mon semblable,—mon frère!" It is the open admission, and even assertion, of the polyperverse character of the erotic manifestation of the imagination. This is, no doubt, why it is continuously downgraded as poetry and denied all intellectual content, why it has been treated as an expression of Swinburne's perverse erotic personality, rather than as what it really was, an exploration of what is found in all humans and what, hitherto, had been carefully concealed both from ourselves and from others. I know of no one who has been willing to admit that Swinburne let the cat out of the bag so early in the game. Indeed, deeper than this bringing into light the perverse and hidden, was Swinburne's profounder aim, the exploration of the nature
of the psychological bondage that makes a genuine transformation and transvaluation of the Self impossible. After these poems he went on to explore those forces in the religious and social and political worlds responsible for a similar failure in public life. Like Rossetti, he puts himself under the extremest possible pressure in both the internal and external environments. (Our dishonesty about pornography and politics makes his work still more than pertinent.) Looked at this way, Swinburne’s use of the sexually perverse, a strategy in which innumerable authors and painters were to follow him, can be seen as a manifestation of the program responsible for the exploration of the religious occult and naturism.

This brings us back once again to Art Nouveau. Whatever one thinks of its charms or failures as a style, its significance in cultural history can scarcely be exaggerated. It was the culmination and the ineluctable consequence of the Stylist program. What it set out to do was to create a style that would be viable in all areas of artistic behavior, that would be a fusion of all styles in European culture (it is historically self-conscious in the Hegelian manner to an almost super-Hegelian degree), and that at the same time would transform and transvaluate those styles into something absolutely novel. The example of Beardsley makes the psychological process involved understandable. He stripped away nearly everything from drawing except the line, itself controlled by a highly restricted range of possibilities, and the patch of black and white. Again, not the result is to be considered, but the character of the decision of which the result was the consequence. And that decision was an heroic self-limitation combined with the fantastic productivity so characteristic of the Romantic artist, and the sheer hard, continuous work and application responsible for it. Historically, the most important matter was the stripping away. It must be conceived behaviorally; that is, the artist deliberately altered and transcended the behavioral patterns in which he had been so highly trained. That deliberate stripping away made Beardsley the most significant Art Nouveau artist, as many people recognized at the time, for what was to follow as a prelude to the breakthrough to Modernism was precisely that stripping away, that unlearning of carefully learned behavioral processes and patterns. It is an astonishing—and heroic—going against the grain. It can be seen in the behavior of the Fauvists, for example, but it can be seen just as well in philosophy, as in G.E. Moore’s “The Refutation of Idealism” (1903). The artist’s aim was the transformation of the European stylistic tradition, that is the transformation of the artist’s behavior, of his decision-making processes, and the philosopher’s aim was not very different.
This is the great achievement of Art Nouveau; it makes it not a minor episode in the history of art but a major and necessary step in the cultural dynamics of the Romantic tradition. I have said that the obscure and difficult and half-realized program of the Stylists was self-transformation by self-transcendence. What does this mean when we ask what such a proposition tells us to look for? If not the process itself of decision-making, certainly the decisions themselves of individuals can be examined. Decision-making is one of the many areas of human behavior which we are just beginning to explore, but it may be that here is exactly what the Romantics were talking about when they spoke of the Self, and of the introduction of value into the world, or of the imagination as the instrument of the will. In any event, we can say with some certainty that there are styles of decision-making, visiting one’s astrologer or psychoanalyst, praying, summoning every nerve to make decisions quickly, or summoning every nerve to postpone them. If that is the case, then the Romantic intuition that in art lay the redemptive key may have not been so far off, in a way, for, since artistic style shows a higher rate of change than any other mode of human behavior, decision-making is most easily observable in art; and further, since art is irresponsible, since neither artistic production nor artistic perception demands manipulation of the environment to one’s own benefit, or requires adaptation to the non-artistic environment, it is the perfect instrument for the exploration of the character and strategies of decision-making. Hence it is also the perfect medium for experimentation in decision-making, since, as the Stylists themselves were the first to realize, the specific intellectual and moral content of art (“Art for art’s sake,” that is, art can do something nothing else can do) is a matter of indifference, at least if one is alienated and seeking strategies for self-transformation and self-transcendence. Hence, also, it is an area of behavior in which it is least dangerous to apply the maximum pressure upon oneself. Even philosophy does not offer the opportunities for irresponsibility that art does. (Or one can say just as well, for responsibility, for the Romantic nothing is so irresponsible as conventional moral responsibility of a non-Romantic kind.)

Thus the appearance of Art Nouveau upon the scene was a sign that the pressure which the Stylist was seeking strategies to achieve had very nearly reached the necessary degree. One can feel in the art that immediately followed, in the music of Scriabin and Mahler, for example, almost tangibly the struggle to break through into a new mode of being. When the pressure was enough, the lid blew off, and the Modern styles emerged, not in an embryonic form, or only briefly, but almost at once in maturity. Modern art does not develop as previous
styles have. In the sense in which Art Nouveau is still a style, Modern art has no style at all; it is a bewildering and marvelous succession and simultaneity of styles, a happy chaos of modes of decision-making. For something genuinely new had emerged. Up to this time the Romantic had explored decision-making, the Self, the introduction of value into the world, from within. With the coming of Modern art he transcended it. The parallel with what Hegel hoped to do for philosophy is striking and exact; not philosophy within the bounds of philosophy, but metaphilosophy, philosophy from above. Thus for Modernism the aim is not the mere continuation of artistic behavior in the European tradition, but controlling artistic behavior, that is controlling decision-making from above and outside of it. The hierarchy of understanding and reason which Kant set up is achieved by the behavior of the Modern artist. This is why no culture has ever shown a stylistic discontinuity so abrupt and so historically divisive as that achieved by the first generation of Moderns. It is why Modern art, in an odd way, is about itself, has as its subject the decision-making process of making a painting. It is for this reason that I think Hitchcock and others are in error when they call Art Nouveau the first modern architectural style, or Impressionism the beginning of modern painting, or Hopkins the first modern English poet. They all live on the other side of the breakthrough in the years immediately preceding the first World War. But given the program of the original Romantics, and the revised Romantic program of the Stylists, who invented a new mode of Romantic heroicism, they were “logically necessary” strategies for encompassing that breakthrough into the comprehension of the very principle of self-transformation, which is Modernism.
Giuseppe Ungaretti

O NOTTE
Dall’ampia ansia dell’alba
Svelata alberatura.
Dolorosi risvegli.
Foglie, sorelle foglie,
Vi ascolto nel lamento.
Autunni,
Moribonde dolcezze.
O gioventú,
Passata è appena l’ora del distacco.
Cieli alti della gioventú,
Libero slancio.
E già sono deserto.
Perso in questa curva malinconia.
Ma la notte sperde le lontananze.
Oceanici silenzi,
Astrali nidi d’illusione,
O notte.

AGONIA
Morire come le allodole assetate
sul miraggio
O come la quaglia
passato il mare
nei primi cespugli
perche’ di volare
non ha piu’ voglia
Ma non vivere di lamento
come un cardellino accecato
Giuseppe Ungaretti

O NIGHT
Dawn's vast anxiety
Unveils trees.
Painful wakenings.
Leaves, sister leaves,
I listen to your lament.
Autumns,
Agonizing charm.
O youth,
The breaking hour is hardly over.
Tall skies of youth,
Free animus.
And now I am deserted.
Lost in this melancholy curve.
But night disperses distances.
Oceanic silences,
Astral nests of illusion.
O night.

AGONY
To die like thirsty larks
at edge of mirage
Or like the quail
crossing the sea
in the first bushes
no longer willing
to continue its flight
But never to live on lament
like the little blinded finch
Giuseppe Ungaretti

TRASFIGURAZIONE

Sto
addossato a un tumulo
di fieno bronzato

Un acre spasimo
scoppia e brulica
dia solchi grassi

Ben nato mi sento
di gente di terra

Mi sento negli occhi
attenti alle fasi
del cielo
dell’uomo rugato
come la scorza
dei gelsi che pota

Mi sento
nei visi infantili
come un frutto rosato
rovente
fra gli alberi spogli

Come una nuvola
mi filtro
nel sole

Mi sento diffuso
in un bacio
che mi consuma
e mi calma
Giuseppe Ungaretti

TRANSITION

I
lean on a mound
of bronzed hay

A bitter spasm
breaks forth swarming
from fat furrows

I am proud
of my rural descent

In eyes
of the wrinkled old man
attentive to sky
changes
I feel like the peel
of mulberries he prunes.

In faces of children
I feel
like a roseate fruit
burning
among naked trees

I screen
the sun
like a cloud

I melt
in a kiss
that consumes
and calms me
Giuseppe Ungaretti

SILENZIO

Conosco una città
che ogni giorno s’empie di sole
e tutto è rapito in quel momento

Me ne sono andato una sera

Nel cuore durava il limio
delle cicale

Dal bastimento
verniciato di bianco
ho visto
la mia città sparire
lasciando
un poco
un abbraccio di lumi nell’aria torbida
sospesi
Giuseppe Ungaretti

SILENCE

I know a city
that fills with sun every day
all things rapt in that moment

One night I went away

The cicadas’ shrill drone lingered
in my heart

From the white
painted boat
I saw
my city disappear
leaving
for a moment
an embrace of lamps suspended
in murky air.

tr. Dora M. Pettinella
Yves Bonnefoy

LE DIALOGUE D’ANGOISSE ET DE DESIR

I

J'imagine souvent, au-dessus de moi,
Un visage sacrificiel, dont les rayons
Sont comme un champ de terre labourée.
Les lèvres et les yeux sont souriants,
Le front est morne, un bruit de mer lassant et sourd.
Je lui dis : Sois ma force, et sa lumière augmente,
Il domine un pays de guerre au petit jour
Et tout un fleuve qui rassure par méandres
Cette terre saisie fertilisée.

Et je m'étonne alors qu'il ait fallu
Ce temps, et cette peine. Car les fruits
Régnaienl déjà dans l'arbre. Et le soleil
Illuminait déjà le pays du soir.
Je regarde les hauts plateaux où je puis vivre,
Cette main qui retient une autre main rocheuse,
Cette respiration d'absence qui soulève
Les masses d'un labour d'automne inachevé.

II

Et je pense à Coré l'absente; qui a pris
Dans ses mains le coeur noir étincelant des fleurs
Et qui tomba, buvant le noir, l'irrévéluée,
Sur le pré de lumière — et d'ombre. Je comprends
Yves Bonnefoy

THE DIALOGUE OF ANGUISH AND DESIRE

I

Often I imagine, up above me,
A sacrificial face, whose rays
Are like a field of ploughed up earth.
Its lips and eyes are smiling,
Its brow is clouded, a sea noise tiring and deep.
I say to it: Be my force, and its light increases,
It dominates a country of war at dawn
And a river which calms by meanderings
This seized and quickened earth.

And I wonder now why all this time was needed,
And all this trouble. For the fruits
Reigned already in the tree. And the sun
Lit up already the country of evening.
I see the high plateaux where I can live,
This hand which holds another hand of rock,
This respiration of absence which raises
The masses of unfinished autumn ploughing.

II

And I think of Koré the Absent; who took
The glittering black heart of the flowers in her hands
And who, unrevealed, fell, drinking blackness,
On the meadow of light — and shadow. I understand
Cette faute, la mort. Asphodèles, jasmins
Sont de notre pays. Des rives d'eau
Peu profonde et limpide et verte y font frémir
L'ombre du cœur du monde... Mais oui, prends.
La faute de la fleur coupée nous est remise,
Toute l'âme se voûte autour d'un dire simple,
La grisaille se perd dans le fruit mûr.

Le fer des mots de guerre se dissipe
Dans l'heureuse matière sans retour.

III

Oui, c'est cela.
Un éblouissement dans les mots anciens.
L'étagement
De toute notre vie au loin comme une mer
Heureuse, éclairée par une arme d'eau vive.

Nous n'avons plus besoin
D'images déchirantes pour aimer.
Cet arbre nous suffit, là-bas, qui, par lumière,
Se délie de soi-même et ne sait plus
Que le nom presque dit d'un dieu presque incarné.

Et tout ce haut pays que l'Un très proche brûle,

Et ce crépi d'un mur que le temps simple touche
De ses mains sans tristesse, et qui ont mesuré.

IV

Et toi,
Et c'est là mon orgueil,
O moins à contre-jour, ô mieux aimée,
Qui ne m'es plus étrangère. Nous avons grandi, je le sais,
Dans les mêmes jardins obscurs. Nous avons bu
La même eau difficile sous les arbres.
Le même ange sévère t'a menacée.

Et nos pas sont les mêmes, se déprenant
Des ronces de l'enfance oubliée et des mêmes
Imprécations impures.

V

Imagine qu'un soir
La lumière s'attarde sur la terre,
That sin, death. Jasmines, asphodels
Belong in our land. Shores of water
Limpid, green and not too deep make the shadow
Of the heart of the world tremble there ... Why, yes. Take.
The sin of the cut flower is forgiven us,
The soul is all arched round some simple words,
The grey shading is lost in the ripe fruit.
The iron of the words of war disappears
In the joyous matter of no return.

III

Yes, it's that.
A dazzle in the ancient words.
The crests
Of our whole life in the distance like a joyous
Sea, made clear by a sword of living water.

We no longer need
Agonizing images in order to love.
That tree over there suffices us, which, through light,
Passes beyond itself and knows no more
Than the nearly said name of a nearly incarnate god.

And all this high country the One, rising, burns,
And this wall's rough plaster that time, simply, touches
With its hands of no sadness, that have measured.

IV

Oh you,
And my pride is there,
Who are less in your own light, better loved,
Who are strange to me no longer. We have grown, I know,
In the same dark gardens. We have drunk
The same difficult water under the trees.
The same severe angel has menaced you.

And our steps are the same, freeing themselves
From the brambles of forgettable childhood
And from the same impure imprecations.

V

Imagine one evening
Light is late over the land,
Ouvrant ses mains d'orage et donatrices, dont
La paume est notre lieu et d'angoisse et d'espoir.
Imagine que la lumière soit victime
Pour le salut d'un lieu mortel et sous un dieu
Certes distant et noir. L'après-midi
A été pourpre et d'un trait simple. Imaginer
S'est déchiré dans le miroir, tournant vers nous
Sa face souriante d'argent clair.
Et nous avons vieilli un peu. Et le bonheur
A mûri ses fruits clairs en d'absentes ramures.
Est-ce là un pays plus proche, mon eau pure?
Ces chemins que tu vas dans d'ingrates paroles
Vont-ils sur une rive à jamais ta demeure
"Au loin" prendre musique, "au soir" se dénouer?

VI

O de ton aile de terre et d'ombre éveille-nous,
Ange vaste comme la terre, et porte-nous
Ici, au même endroit de la terre mortelle,
Pour un commencement. Les fruits anciens
Soient notre faim et notre soif enfin calmées.
Le feu soit notre feu. Et l'attente se change
En ce proche destin, cette heure, ce séjour.

Le fer, blé absolu,
Ayant germé dans la jachère de nos gestes,
De nos malédictions, de nos mains pures,
Êtant tombé en grains qui ont accueilli l'or
D'un temps, comme le cercle des astres proches,
Et bienveillant et nul,

Ici, où nous allons,
Où nous avons appris l'universel langage,

Ouvre-toi, parle-nous, déchire-toi,
Couronne incendiée, battement clair,
Ambre du cœur solaire.
Opening its proferred hands of storm, whose
Palm is our place of hope and of anguish.
Imagine that the light be sacrificed
To save a mortal place, and under a god
Far-off, no doubt, and dark. The afternoon
Has been purple and simply drawn. Imaginings
Have torn in the mirror, turning their bright
Silver smiling face towards us.
And we have grown a little older. And happiness
Has ripened its bright fruits in absent branches.
Is a nearer land there, my pure water?
Are these roads you go along in barren words
To become, on a shore then your home forever,
Music “in the distance”, pass through “in the evening”?

VI
Oh with your wing of earth and shadows wake us
Angel vast as the earth, and bear us
Here, to the same part of the mortal earth,
For a beginning. May the ancient fruits
Be our thirst and hunger, now assuaged.
The fire be our fire. And the waiting turns
Into this hour, this stay, and this near fate.
Iron, ultimate seed,
That sprang up in the fallow of our gestures,
Our curses, our pure hands,
That fell apart in grains which welcomed the gold
Of Time which, like the circle of near stars,
Is both beneficent and vain,

Here, where we are walking,
Where we learned the universal language,

Open, speak to us, tear yourself apart,
Burning crown, heart’s luminous beating,
Sun’s amber.

tr. Anthony Rudolf
THE WRITER, ORDINARY LANGUAGE
AND THE LANGUAGE OF CALCULUS

By Walter Höllerer

Have you ever noticed how writers talk about their work? There is always something painful, phony, always covering up — coping out —: prolixity is used as a barricade. Then comes the skinniness of the sentences, the way they break up at the end. The blindness. The take-offs which never make it. The most savage of assertions retains, in its context, always the shadow of being a question, — or it overdoes its certainty so much that it is — against its wishes — irony.

Despite this, and indeed because of it, these remarks seem to me not unimportant. Someone describes something, and you find, if you look, that what has been described is the describer himself. The way he dresses, his gestures — these all belong to his own system of symbols, they are a part of his semiological approach to things — just as is the way he forms his sentences. His concepts cannot be separated from the way he moves — from the behaviour out of which they were set down. And so because of this, if you listen carefully, you see something more surprising and incisive than once again the same old sortings out of the past and forecasts of the future.

Notice the lengths to which exactitude is pushed! Let me give an example of what I mean. I prefer to use this type of example — namely those writers’ demonstrations of virtuoso proficiency — writers who are open to self-deception and who nevertheless flamboyantly display their own carefully walled-in and protected insights, — I prefer these when I talk about contemporary literature, to those who have already subjugated literature into generalizations and overviews, into their own
world views. It is only when you compare this with what an author actually masters or does not master in his writing that you begin to approach the primary questions of contemporary literature. They are decided not at literary conventions, but are posed in the writer's own mind and in the actual act of writing.

Despite all differences of literary traditions, of social background or individual sensitivity one thing remains central: a writer discovers the hard fact that ordinary language exists, and with total equality, alongside the artificial languages of the various calculi, — and further, that each creates its very own real effects and meaning.

In ordinary language, that is in colloquial language, and in those information carrying and cohesive mass media the things which happen every day find their expression. But, this same everyday life is influenced and formed in no less measure by the formalized language of the various calculi.

Both types of language coexist only because of common qualities; because there is a basic language structure to language in which both ordinary language and the language of calculus are contained. The writer, regardless of his native language, tries to express this. Often he uses apparently the simplest of everyday speech which, however, at times in a single sentence or else in a succession of sentences does show his own concerns and his position. This incorporating of a writer's concerns into language is harder to do with formalized language than with less rigid, less adamant phrases: and this is so because the basic structure of language is not one of successiveness and cohesion but rather a paradox of contradictions and most haphazard connections.

The tools the author uses are composition and style. He does not give you a picture of the world which surrounds him — the world which is perceptible, a quiet and self-contained picture of some milieu or other —. He also cannot be satisfied with imitating or using words or letters from the formulae of mathematics. What he does instead, if he wants to avoid peripheries, is to show us the world in terms of how both languages — ordinary and formalized — depend mutually one on the other. Whatever he sees turns his attention in that direction; he himself is part of this world built of contradictions, he is constantly running up against it; he reacts to his views of it with apparent uninvolved, with eagerness, with fury, with hope, with always the wish to change things for the future.

When I contend that today it is the writer, and he alone, who has the possibility, in writing, in his publicly expressed poetics, of letting us see the cohesion and contradiction of all the various contemporary symbol systems, my reason for doing it is my observation that the
author does not write, at least not exclusively, as a specialist. If he were advised to imitate strictly scientific, specialized methods it would be false advice, because it is precisely that which would rob him of doing what I stated. He finds his own ways either by using grammar or by discarding it. From Jarry to Kafka, from Kafka to Brecht writers have used the most diverse of methods, and today they are still using the most varied of approaches. They are searching constantly for some symbol that will hit exactly the spot on a vast number of contradictory chiffre systems. It is here that the finest of modern literature is to be seen — not in the rehashing of historical concepts, but in the writers' contentions against them.

It is when you begin to sound the depths of language structure that you see a significant departure point for the poetics of writing, — most likely the most important one for realistic writing. I do think that we have to call literature realistic when it makes you conscious of what does and can happen. Every detail of what here and now can be seen and tasted seems to be caught too by the models which the calculi erect and which cannot be tasted and seen. You notice a split which emphatically forces the writer back to the sensual without reasserting in him his original trust of the senses.

As the corollary to this last point, the writer who proceeds from the abstractly formal structures of calculus in turn becomes forced to reckon with the relation between everyday language and the language of the calculi. Certainly these experiences are evidenced, for example, in the poems of Gustafsson and Heissenbüttel and in Kurt Schwitters' prose where they have been assimilated and treated in irony. They allow these particular writers to avoid being fashionable and dogmatic.

All this lets us see that the phrase “basic language structure” does not mean an elemental language with an unchanging meaning, not a mystical substratum of language which is constant and to which the poet alone, as a prophet, has access — it does not mean Hamann's “Language of the angels.” The points of departure toward all language chiffres alter; they expand and they contract; — and the writer, in his search for the perfect phrase, constantly collides with the “incredibly vexing mixture of one’s own desire to act and one’s recourse to the language apparatus already in existence” (Rühmkorf). Because language, the most complex form of social behaviour, is so inseparable from fashions, customs, rites — what I am saying here is not a treatise on language. The fact that these remarks lead toward remonstrations against already established systems and order is a characterization, most of all, of poems and essays of the times. But I am not confining myself to texts of this sort. Beckett's novels, which clearly mirror the
problems of ordinary language and its relation to the calculi, were described as anti-social at a Vienna Congress of Critics. The description ran: “I feel here a tendency toward the anti-social and that worries me, I cannot accept it, I don’t find anything to be happy about in it.” It is rare that such opposition is stated more sympathetically. The opponent is disconcerted by literature. And with that he offers the proof that “antisocial literature” can have social consequences. Who would like to characterize these consequences as damaging? To question firmly entrenched positions is inhuman but human action. The all too great security of the reader, and especially of reader in particular who is able to wield power, is no less a danger than is doubt in oneself.

Writers have now by and large assumed attack against the same rehashings of the same old things, against a language which is simply corroborative. They have not been inhibited by precepts, by stifling programs, nor have they been impeded by tightly defined theses of Realism and Classicism. They further have not been strangled by a concept which has been pasted on them and which has made them angry: avantgarde. I know of no writer who thinks that this military expression is of value. — In place of such inapplicable alternatives as avantgarde and tradition it is popular to use replacement terms (equally inapplicable to a description of what literature is) like harmony as equivalent to classic, chaos as synonymous with avantgarde — these concepts seeming necessary or unavoidable. Or again there is the opposition of social literature (that is a literature of order) with anti-social literature (literature of disorder) ... The contribution of present writers does not consist in using such complementary and contradictory concepts. They have been pointing out a world whose contours were just about visible, whose linguistic, poetic, social and political form demands more and more to be etched out. Gunar Ekelöf’s words: “Our habits are often our worst enemies” are most relevant in this context. Our new habits, should they turn into dogma, would be no less a hindrance than the old ones.

Modern literature began and still begins in the sphere of contradiction and irreconcilable opposites, in other words in incongruity. According to Voznesensky “It (literature) starts where there is pain, it is there where man is in pain, where a people suffers.” The beginnings of modern literature already show these incisive notions. Theodor W. Adorno called one essay “Die Wunde Heine.” And what Francis Ponge calls the “shamelessness” with which contemporary writers handle language in order to smash through the barriers of concepts and formulae, their dissension from obeying the traditional ways of picturing things, their moving away from Euclidean geometry — all this too
speaks of a general breaking off and of break-through. Considerations such as these provoked counter demands for self-analysis. In reply to the shamelessness and unscrupulousness of shaping prose and poetry forms we have the position of those who say; if possible manage with the tools we have; do not throw them away too thoughtlessly; work with them a little more.

All this is going on now in the middle of an industry which fabricates consciousness. In this industry there is one question which we must ask. Does not the end of all possible innovation, the elimination of secrets and mystery lead the writer to the conclusion that he best abandon literature and hold forth on the impossibility of writing? That is an hypothesis which is not far from being acceptable. Yet apart from the fact that such a position would withhold from the writer the possibility of arguing successfully against himself, — an author never lives in stages of finality. He sees himself in impure and mixed situations containing many elements. He thrives on that. He does not live only in the literary world which cannot be judged by a tight concept of art which is built from a closed aesthetic theory. What is literary stretches from children's verses to advertising. He is a part of all this. It is not possible to come up with an alibi through sheer fabrication of ideals or simple lack of vision.

He searches for words, writes sentences. “When should I stop? When is a differentiation exact enough?” He is not concerned with the use of the word avantgarde. What does concern him is to approach today without the inhibitions of the past.

tr. Geoffrey Brogan
THE STRUCTURES OF WALLACE STEVENS' IMAGINATION

MICHEL BENAMOU

Before speaking concretely of the imagination of Wallace Stevens and following its evolution through his poems, it may be well to consider some rather important truisms. Here are three:

1. Symbolic structure is at the root of all thought. Images have their own logic and there can be no question of classifying them according to pragmatic copies of perception, but according to the motivation axes of the imagination. This motivation is found to be either cultural or psychological. Wallace Stevens offers a special interest in these researches because he did "poematize" his own imagination. For him, "Poetry is the subject of the poem."

2. The psychological motivation is summarized in these words: poetry creates the poet. By his images, by the new forms which he invents, he accomplishes a self-creation, at times a self-cure. This is what Wallace Stevens means when he says: "Poetry is a cure of the mind."

3. The cultural motivation is ambiguous because the poet gives more, perhaps, to his age than he receives. He assimilates such images as he can use for his own metamorphosis. At the same time he creates history, at least cultural history, by his writing. History does not explain the imagination, since history itself has to be imagined. But the creative power of the image extends from the poet to the public. "Poetry helps men to live their lives."

2 We are risking the neologism because the poetic act is not a poeticisation of that which is already a poem. The world can be poeticized, but poetry is poematized.
4 It is necessary to distinguish historical myth from existential reality, as Durand did in his treatise (*op. cit.* pp. 421, 424).
Of these three definitions of poetry, the second especially (the idea of self-transformation) will help us to understand the function of Stevens' images. As for their structure, we will rely on comments which Stevens made in certain very clear passages, like this extract from "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction."

Two things of opposite nature seem to depend
On one another, as man depends
On a woman, day on night, the imagined
On the real. This is the origin of change.
Winter and Spring, cold copulars, embrace
And forth the particulars of rapture come.

Music falls on the silence like a sense,
A passion that we feel, not understand.
Morning and afternoon are clasped together.

And North and South are an intrinsic couple
And sun and rain a plural, like two lovers
That walk away as one in the greenest body.

Behind each word is concealed a familiar symbol: the masculine sun, the feminine rain (or moon), Florida and Connecticut, the seasons, the color green, etc... Thus, in Stevens, the poems constantly make reference to one another, so that the total of the collection has a greater effect than its parts. We are not mystified, therefore, by this confrontation between the great classes of images which form the usual constellation in the poetry of Stevens, namely:

```
man    woman
day    night
sun    rain
silence music
winter spring
morning afternoon
north south
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Equally well-known is the aesthetic equation: nocturnal woman equals reality, diurnal man equals imagination. What matters here is that the aesthetic also depends upon the imaginary world; what interests us is the sexual metaphor uniting these two worlds in order to produce a third more complete and greener world. The words "change", "rapture", "intrinsic couple", "plural", and "greenest body" also constellate and form a third structure. Our hypothesis (underscored by the hypo-
theoretical verb “seem”) sees in this text a self-realization, a precious portent for re-reading the work in its chronological development.

For the like of us lovers of poetry the first quality of *Harmonium* has been a joyous, sensual, and lucid incarnation. Suzanne bathing in “Peter Quince at the Clavier” recalls the warm and verdant atmosphere of Tintoretto. “A poet looks at the world as a man looks at a woman” (O.P. 165). Stevens definitely does not begin with the ascetic nudity of a snow man, but with the more hedonistic nudity of a beautiful woman. Yet the green color of the scene, the very substance of happiness, sustains a natural bond between beauty and death.

   The body dies: the body’s beauty lives.
   So evenings die, in their green going. . . (C.P. 92)

Here the imagination of Wallace Stevens is already showing its vivid roots: the biographical facts confirm that from 1915 on Stevens was obsessed with death.

   “Sunday Morning” presents a conflict of images as much as one of ideas. In the pictorial composition a bright image of this world alternates with a dark image of the other world. The dyptich of the first stanza will be reversed in the last. The image of the oranges and of the green cockatoo will finally overcome the invasion of the sepulchral lake. No mythical image of paradise persists as long as the memory of an acutely experienced ephemeral impression, like that of green April grass. This is the central paradox of “Sunday Morning” and all of *Harmonium*: perishable sensuality increases earthly happiness. Surely, like the “Waste Land” of T.S. Eliot, this poem of 1915 is already a graveyard of myths. But all its bright images compose a garden of earth poetry. This sets a difference between the two imaginations: T.S. Eliot and his cemetery, Wallace Stevens and his garden.

   How is this secular myth of the incarnation embodied?

   Death is the mother of beauty, mystical,
   Within whose burning bosom we devise
   Our earthly mothers waiting, sleeplessly. (C.P. 69)

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5 Nothing could be more wrong than to take “The Snow Man” as a “point of departure for the luxuriant cycle of the seasons in *Harmonium*” (Macksey, in *The Act of the Mind*, Johns Hopkins Press, 1965, p. 195). The first moment in Stevens’ perception is not the unmediated vision of a winter world. Besides, as Northrop Frye put it, “art begins with the world we make, not the world we see” (*The Educated Imagination*, p. 23).


7 Cf. a letter to Harriet Monroe of 1915.
Having become feminine, instead of the idiomatic masculine, Death receives the attributes of Hecate: the willow, the fruits, and the leaves of the great underworld mother. Of course Stevens rejects this myth like all the others. His rejection of repose in the warm intimacy of the bosom he indicated by sleeplessly; he knows that this maternal death owes us life: we devise our earthly mother; he places earthly and mystical in opposition. The archetype of the bosom here inverts the significance of the tomb. Everything in “Sunday Morning” that pertains to the body, to vegetation, to color, to nourishment, produces an appeasing and euphemizing effect. The descent of the doves, so slow, so undulating, breaks the final fall; the image of the island simultaneously signifies solitude and involution; thus the ambiguity of the poem is the very ambiguity of the maternal archetype: life and death, terror and beauty.

The majority of the poems of Harmonium follow this example; the burning candle at night, the grave of Badroulladour, the death of a soldier in autumn, the moon, “mother of pathos and pity”, the feminine night, “fragrant and supple”, and many others carry us into a nocturnal constellation where the diurnal poems, “The Snow Man” or “Gubbinal” appear as aberrant stars. The organizing nuclei of this symbolism constellate between them: mother-death-beauty invokes death-controlled night-color and death-controlled night-music. Mother-vegetation-Florida and mother-boat-vessel are linked by the exoticism of night voyages. We shall study only two of these symbols: the moon and Florida.

Stevens inherited from the romantic and post-romantic traditions the notion that the moon was a mother symbol. Coleridge intoned:

Mild splendour of the various-vested Night!
Mother of wildly working visions!

and Jules Laforgue parodied the salutation to the Virgin:

Je te salue, Vierge des Nuits, pleine de glace . . .

Thus Stevens puts himself in the line of those famous lunologists by addressing his yearly couplet to the night star, mother of Jesus and protector of the poets:

The moon is mother of pathos and pity . . . (C.P. 107)

But in 1922 Stevens becomes aware of an evolution. In his long self-analyzing poem “The Comedian as the Letter C” he sketches the two great axes of his imagination: one upward diurnal movement and one downward nocturnal movement.

Thus he conceived his voyaging to be
An up and down between two elements,
A fluctuation between sun and moon,
A sally into gold and crimson forms,
As on this voyage, out of goblinry,
And then retirement like a turning back
And sinking down to the indulgences
That in the moonlight have their habitude. (C.P. 35)

It is important to notice beyond the anti-romantic attitude, the precise language of psychological regression. Now Stevens considers the descent toward the Mother-moon dangerous. She is not the concrete star of the nocturnal sky but the dweller of a comfortable hollow laying her trap (thus “indulgence” turns into “seductions” and “retirement” into “backward lapses”). Here we have the first evidence that Stevens relates the moon to the feminine part of his unconscious and personified Self, almost a Jungian anima. (Sol and Luna are already present in the alchemist’s notion of conscious and unconscious personifications). The fact that the moon is down in us and not up in the sky with the sun, explains the fact that Stevens, like the alchemists, does not make a clear distinction between luna and terra, which are both symbolic terms of the descent into the mother. But what is the meaning of the sequestered “bride” who appeared thirteen lines before the above quoted passage? The sequestered bride appears in another poem written in 1922, “O Florida Venereal Soil”. Stevens invokes Florida in the form of three different, almost numinous, women. First of all he addresses a funereal Venus who establishes the link between beauty and death in a horrible way. The title suggests simultaneously sensuality and dirt, a theme which is then taken up in convulvulus, lasciviously, insatiable, tormenting. The death theme is supported by the words buzzards, undertaker, and corpses, if we remember “that one of the most consistent traits of Eros is his carrying his brother Thanatos behind him.” (Marie Bonaparte, Chronos Eros Thanatos p. 120); to this frightening Venus Stevens would prefer the ravished bride, Persephone, enthroned as an idol in the depths of the night. Through her tiara she can be identified both as the bride of the preceding poem and as the muse, “sister, mother and divine love” of “To the One of Fictive Music.” Finally the last stanza completes the archetypal character of the triple Hecate.

Donna, donna, dark,
Stooping in indigo gown
And cloudy constellations,
Conceal yourself or disclose
Fewest things to the lover—
A hand that bears a thick-leaved fruit,
A pungent bloom against your shade. (C.P. 48)
A wonderful prayer in which Stevens cites the sensual ions which give protection against anxiety, fruits and flowers only. Aestheticism and the euphemisation of death are the two sides of the poetic talisman.

If we can draw conclusions from the analysis we have just presented, it seems that Florida offers Stevens a rich symbol of the different faces of his unconscious. This interpretation attributes a considerable importance to the poem “Farewell to Florida” which begins the second period of his work. The 1935 edition of Ideas of Order, opened on a “curiously fatigued” poem, “Sailing after Lunch”, in which the symbol of the boat allowed Stevens to make a rare confessional remark:

My old boat goes round on a crutch  
And does not get under way... (C.P. 120)

In 1936 Stevens purposely replaced this symbol of a paralyzed libido by a high ship at full speed. Stevens had just gone through a crisis and overcome it.

Between 1914 and 1924 Stevens had published on an average ten poems yearly. In 1925, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30 not a single publication. At the end of these six years of silence Stevens’ metaphors have changed almost radically. He is a transformed man who writes “Farewell to Florida.” A crisis must have taken place. The analysis of the second period of Stevens’ imaginative creation which goes from 1932 to 1942 supports this hypothesis.

A ship under way, the shedding of a serpent’s skin which is an old image of renovation, darkness, fog, the violence of waves, all these elements indicate a difficult but complete transformation. The tone has changed. The images have suffered a profound conversion, and the antithetical structure of the poem marshals them into two hostile columns:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>South</th>
<th>North</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the mother moon</td>
<td>men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vegetation</td>
<td>dirt without leaves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>permanent summer</td>
<td>winter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nature</td>
<td>the city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>music</td>
<td>chaos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>death</td>
<td>energy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Surely in 1922 and 1923 already two poems of Harmonium8 had ex-

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9 “The Comedian as the Letter C” and “Sea Surface full of Clouds.”
pressed disgust for the South and an aspiration towards the North. But now the evolution seems to have come to an irreversible end. It is no longer a question of swaying between moon and sun but an attempt to free oneself of the paralyzing feminine presences which the moon symbolizes: *Her mind has bound me round. . . Her mind will never speak to me again.* Stevens feared some danger of death. It comes through in the words *sepulchral south, trees like bones, ashen ground.* The word *wilderness* even suggests a particular horror of sea weeds. Charles Mauron says somewhere: “dans sa tentative d’auto-creation, l’artiste risque plus ou moins la folie. Ses rapports avec la folie sont ceux du marin avec la mer”. . . But at the same time the sailor needs the ocean. Stevens does not get away from the ocean, since it would mean to abandon poetry. He only changes his direction. He says farewell to the feminine unconscious and enters the world of the mass man where men are just like the waves of the ocean. This transition from the feminine night realm of the image to the masculine day brings about an atmosphere hitherto unfelt in the world of *Harmonium*, the sense of purity and impurity.¹⁰ *Slime* repeats twice Stevens’ desire for purification and askesis. The innocent sensuality of *Harmonium* has given way to a male will.

Stevens’ new inspiration results from a double reality and calls for a two-fold motivation. First of all we have the carnal and psychic fatigue of a man at the turning point of his life. The Nomad Exquisite has become a slightly queer [note I mean a homo!] Anglais Mort à Florence:

> A little less returned for him each spring. *(C.P. 148)*

Jung characterized the turning point of man’s life as a partial feminization through the invasion of the unconscious. Jung says: “Most of the time the conscious self rebels against the power of the unconscious and fights its demands.” Against the threat of the triple Hecate, Stevens creates a hero who assumes all the attributes of solar virility. The feminine image is displaced by the masculine instance of the self. However, a metamorphosis does not destroy all the previous forms. So the singer of Key West is indeed a woman. But her function, the cosmogonic act of putting the world in order, links the images of the poem to the great archetype of King and demiurge.

> Mastered the night and portioned out the sea,
> Fixing emblazoned zones and fiery poles,
> Arranging, deepening, enchanting night. *(C.P. 130)*

¹⁰ I owe a great debt to Charles Mauron for helping me to disengage these psychological notions from the poem. His conversations about the triple figure of the goddess of Death, Hecate, were also most revealing to me.
Stevens invokes a rage for order, a logical and magical mind which separates and cuts clear a masculine spirit of "Keener demarcations, ghostlier sounds."

In order to know how the new images of Stevens make him a new Self, it is necessary to go into the poems of the thirties. The central symbol of "Some Friends from Pascagoula" is the eagle of majesty: it joins the lions, the bulls, cocks and swans which compose, for Stevens, a whole bestiary of the sun. The eagle, traditional messenger of the will from above, groups of the marvels of ascensional psychism: dazzling wings, nobility, igneous atmosphere, morning air, fiery and purified. Light, purity, fire, and language constellate and give to the poem its powerful imaginative unity. Let us add all the sound patterns: the unusual rime, the incantatory effect of the verse beginning on a strong accent with the imperative of "to tell," the ritual of evocation, primitive like some jazz rhythms:

Tell me more of the eagle, Cotton
And you, black Sly,
Tell me how he descended
Out of the morning sky.

* * *

Here was a sovereign sight,
Fit for a kinky clan,
Tell me again of the point
At which the flight began. (C.P. 127)

Why does Stevens expect these images of nobility from Southern Negroes? The answer may be found by juxtaposition of this poem with "Lions in Sweden." Only the primitive still seems capable of feeling the sovereignty of a heroic image.

The cultural motivation of Stevens' hero draws its richness from the poverty of the imagination in North America, intensified by the Great Depression of 1929. Poem XXX of The Man with the Blue Guitar offers a clear purpose to the poet. He will take the man of the street, "A-cock at the cross-piece on a pole / Supporting heavy cables, slung / Through Oxidia, banal suburb," and he will make a hero of him, and even a god, since he wishes to equate Oxidia, town of oxides, with Olympia, the divine residence. But if the spiritual need of his age determined a poet to create images satisfying that need, what then explains the fact that Stevens was the only one among the poets of the thirties to rehabilitate the heroic man? (This fact is documented in a book by Joseph Warren Beach, Obsessive Images in the Poetry of the 1930's)
The answer is perhaps related more to Stevens’ personal need than to the demands of society. At the right moment, however, Stevens was able to engage his liberated creative energy in the mêlée of the thirties. In this sombre atmosphere the poetic miracle happened: the emergence of a solar world, luminous, blue, airy and heroic, penetrated by hygienic vision, a world in which poetry exerts a purifying askesis, a great power of abstraction, antithesis, and denudement.

The ideological concept of “Montrachet-le-Jardin” can be summarized in one clear statement, which can be applied to this phase of his poetry. “Man must become the hero of his world.” (C.P. 261) But the image of the hero is more confused in this poem than in “Asides on the Oboe” which was written in 1940:

The prologues are over. It is a question, now, Of final belief. So, say that final belief Must be in a fiction. It is time to choose. That obsolete fiction of the wide river in An empty land; the gods that Boucher killed; The metal heroes that time granulates — The philosophers’ man alone still walks in dew, Still by the sea-side mutters milky lines Concerning an immaculate imagery. (C.P. 250-51)

Stevens’ hero is the abstract man, then, the philosophical man? Perhaps. Yet beyond the ideas, one must revive and feel all the power inherent in the images. Indeed we find the glass globe in Schopenhauer, where according to Frank Doggett it means pure consciousness. But had not Schopenhauer himself taken up a dream of those other “philosophers,” the alchemists, who called filius philosophorum the quintessential product of their quest? Their artificial anthropos or glorious body conferred the incorruptibility and the transparence of glass during the last operative phase surnamed albedo, albatio, or whitening. The purified body emerged while wet from that permanent water of the philosophers, ros marinus or sea-dew, always associated with the symbolism of birth. This helps us understand the obscure allusions: “dew,” “seaside,” and “immaculate.” This kind of rapprochement is even more justified since the alchemistic quest pursued the same spiritual goal as the reverie of Stephens. The purpose was, Jung tells us in Mysterium Coniunctionis, to attain a state of psychic integration. The union of the unconscious was projected on the chemistry of metals, personified by the conjunction of the Sun and Moon, and morally realized by the conciliation of the opposites, good and evil. This is the journey taken by Stevens’ imagination:
How was it with the central man? Did we
Find peace? We found the sum of men. We found
If we found the central evil, the central good. (C.P. 251)

For Stevens, the diamond globe symbolized the goal of the poetic quest, the supreme fiction projected with the faith of the alchemist in his Great Work, but projected merely, and not yet accomplished in 1942, when Stevens indicated his direction in Notes toward a Supreme Fiction.

It is in this long programmatic poem that the mysterious bride reappears from her sequestration during the heroic phase of 1931 to 1942. Through its repetition in the last part of the work, the marriage with a symbolic woman takes on all of the aspects of a personal myth in Stevens. It is a series of epiphanies, in the course of which a usually abstract giant unites, or seeks to unite with a carnal bride. Here she no longer has the disturbing character of Hecate; she is a vestal prepared for a form of ritual union. The first *hieros-gamos* is here, before the immensely absent effigy of Ozymandias, popularized by Shelley's sonnet on the Nile:

On her trip around the world, Nanzia Nunzio
Confronted Ozymandias. She went
Alone and like a vestal long-prepared.

I am the woman stripped more nakedly
Than nakedness, standing before an inflexible
Order, saying I am the contemplated spouse — (C.P. 395)

Nakedness is a limit. The woman so bared is not Suzanne bathing, but a symbol of reality, a paradisical image of integrity.

Then Ozymandias said the spouse, the bride
Is never naked. A fictive covering,
Weaves always glistening from the heart and mind (C.P. 396)

In other words, two opposites are necessary in order to accomplish plenitude: spirit and reality, man and virgin earth:

There was a mystic marriage in Catawba
At noon it was on the midday of the year
Between a great captain and the maiden Bawda
And Bawda loved the captain as she loved the sun (C.P. 401)

11 The latency of the clandestine bride was however broken by brief apparitions, for example in "The Sense of the Sleight-of-hand-Man" (130 cf. Eliade, *Images et Symboles*) ritual nakedness is an equivalent of integration and plenitude.
The limerick celebrates the sensuality of the Earth-Wife:

Fat girl, terrestrial, my summer, my night (C.P. 406)

Yet another superimposition and we shall hold the whole symbolic network. The rehabilitation of the nocturnal woman of Harmonium is made complete in the prothalamium of a magnificent poem written in 1948, "A Primitive like an Orb". The orb is the geometric figure of perfection, inscribed in the title, developed by strophic form, the repetitive movement, by the words themselves:

With these they celebrate the central poem,
The fulfillment of fulfillments, in opulent,
Last terms, the largest, bulging with more...

It is
as if the central poem became the world,
And the world the central poem, each one the mate
Of the other, as if summer was a spouse,
Espoused each morning, each long afternoon,
And the mate of summer: her mirror and her look,
Her only place and person, a self of her
That speaks, denouncing separate selves, both one. (C.P. 441)

The mirror symbol was already present in "Asides on the Oboe" where it represented the heroic Self. ("The glass with a voice"). We have the following structure:

central poem       world
mirror            summer
hero              spouse
(masculine self)   (feminine self)

The poem celebrates the marriage of the ascetic self with the sensual lover — a reunion of the masculine consciousness with the feminine unconsciousness. But the exultation of these images and the joy and the élan with which they are taken up again and again should not obscure the fact of the as if which modifies everything. (The as if is used more than a hundred times in Stevens). It is a constant concern of his to integrate the different aspects of the personality. The wedding of Sol and Luna has to be repeated constantly:

It is a giant always that is evolved

...And the giant ever changing, living in change (C.P. 442)

Stevens characterizes his third imaginative period with the word change; it is a cyclical power of renovation which alters in an important manner the symbolism of the center already found in his poetry. For
Stevens the center is not the *mandala* of absolute rest in a mother’s lap; it is the never-ending marriage of Ulysses and Penelope, and it is never achieved.

The center that he sought was a state of mind
And the Orient and the Occident embrace
To form that weather’s appropriate people
The rosy men and the women of the rose. (*O.P.* 112)

The rose represents the traditional symbol of the unified personality. But Stevens sees it in the sexual metamorphosis, which is the union of two beings and the duality of the same consciousness. Did he cure his divided soul? Did he build a new self from new images?

Three types of poems are in his last book, *The Rock* (1954): The ones which celebrate the possible epiphany, the chymical wedding of Sol and Luna as in “The Hermitage at the Center,” those which admit a failure as in the “The Plain Sense of Things”:

A fantastic effort has failed (*C.P.* 502)

And poems which constantly affirm the necessity to look for a center, the most representative of which are “The World as Meditation” and “To an Old Philosopher in Rome.” The symbols of this quest form a circular constellation; the rock on which the four seasons descend, the river which does not run anywhere, the planet turning on its axis. A center without solidity, a faith without a foyer, hope without illusion, such are the objects of his quest. He wrote this confession to Sister Bernetta:

I do seek a center and expect to go on seeking it,
I don’t say that I shall not find it as that
I do not expect to find it.
It is the great necessity even without specific identification.12

Stevens searched for nothing less or more than the divine in man: neither anthropomorphism nor transcendence. Measured by its own definitions, his poetry achieved success: it protected him from the obsession of death, raised in him the heroic strength which times of strife required, and finally gave him the glimpse of a central repose.13

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12 Many thanks to Sister Bernetta Quinn for sending me the text of this letter which was later published (*The Letters of Wallace Stevens*, ed. by Holly Stevens, Knopf 1966, p. 584).

13 This is the English translation of a lecture delivered in 1966 at the University of Bordeaux and on its campus at Pau, France.
Michael Bullock

TWO DAYS IN THE LIFE
AND DEATH OF A RIVER

1

Black river laden with leaves
flow easy
round the island where the dead
wait to be wakened tomorrow,
where leafless willows dangle bare boughs
in water that whispers as it passes
lost messages to no one,
to an empty sky
and mud stirring
at the bottom of the river.

Boat sway at your moorings,
tower hoist your flag and remind us
that the stars reflected
on the rocking water
are lights that the birds stole
from your lonely turrets.

This boat that rocks among the rustling reeds
carries a heart between the oars and tackle.
This heart awash in sad black water
burns still with hot blood in its hidden centre.
Wrapped in dead leaves
and caught on a hook and line
it dangled for centuries
from a stone pier green with weeds.

Waterbirds from the marshes, from the island in the river,
carry this heart to a distant garden,
place it by a cedar on a bed of needles,
let the flowers look
as the new sun warms it,
teach it to fly
so that in the morning
it may take wing
to a far-off country —

a country where the rivers
are yellow and the boats
sway paper lanterns
in the evening mist.

2

River, encircle the island twice,
feel with your fingers
the stone walls round its banks,
let your fish nuzzle
the crevices between,
and seek the jewels that fell into your stream.

There was a ruby
that flashed a burning red;
there was an emerald
green as your waving reeds.
Now they lie lost
deep in your muddy bed,
their fires put out,
but not forever —
only till the sunlight
catches them again.

3

Bird, return,
the willow is waiting.
Its branch has been empty
since the day you left.
It leans out sadly
over the water,
seeking your reflection
homing from the sky.
The sky is a vast
expanse of water:
the bird will drown
if no branch comes drifting.

4
Black river, your islands
and your trees are empty.
Your fish take wing
and your birds are diving.
The heart in your boat
has rocked itself to sleep.
But when morning comes
it will soar and leave you
to journey alone
to a far-off country.

Night falls amidst
the moaning of the wind
and mist veils
the sad face of the river.

5
This morning I woke and the river was dry,
black mud like rock engraved with a chisel,
black snails crawling in search of water
and fish outstretched on deathbeds of stones.

The boat slumped sideways waiting to be firewood,
the heart a shrivelled starfish on the dry cords,
wingless and lost to the distant garden,
ever to fly to the far-off country
where the rivers are yellow
and the lanterns are burning.

The island was turning slowly to dust
and the trees collapsing, leaning and falling
to lie flat where they fell on the waterless mud.

This was the morning when the knotted wind
blew in a circle round the dying island.

The jewels were there, but lacking all lustre —
dusty pebbles to throw at a cat.
Karl Krolow

SCHATTEN IN DER LUFT

Schatten in der Luft: Gespenster
Aus blauer Uniform wie grosse Schmetterlinge.

Die Träume sind gekleidet mit Verdacht:
Prähistorische Faune,
Die nüchtern wurden an der Gegenwart
Der luftigen Ereignisse.

Schatten von oben: wenig sicher wie
Montagsgedanken; und der Sonntag war
Voll Vogelfedern, heller Mädchenhandschuh.

Das sanfte Wasser Himmel: einmal badeten
In ihm geschlossne Augen, viele Blätter.
Nun aber
Ist Kälte da, Geruch
Von Einsamkeit. Kein Goldfisch schwimmt
Im Glas des Mittags mehr.

Luft voller Schatten! Und der Marmor
Vergangenen Fleisches fröstelt.
Eine schwarze Fahne
— Schlaf ohne Traum —
Entrollt sich und fließt langsam über Schultern.
Karl Krolow

SHADOWS IN THE AIR

Shadows in the air: ghosts
Out of blue uniforms like great butterflies.

Dreams are clad with suspicion:
Prehistoric fauns
That grew sober on the presence
Of the airy events.

Shadows from above: rather uncertain like
Monday’s thoughts; and Sunday was
Full of birds’ feathers, a light-coloured girl’s glove.

The gentle water sky: once there bathed in it
closed eyes, many leaves.
But now
Cold is here, the smell
Of loneliness. No goldfish now
Swims in the glass of noon.

Air full of shadows! And the marble
Of past flesh shivers.
A black banner
— Sleep without dream —
Unrolls and flows slowly over shoulders.
Karl Krolow

KRANKES WETTER

Die Luft ist ein geschwärztes Grab,
Spuren Atlantik drin.
Augen toter Schiffer sehen
nach einem Blau aus,
das es nicht mehr gibt.

Es sind jetzt schlechte Zeiten
für Kristalle.

Kein Ton mehr
in zerbrochenen Muscheln.

Die Unordnung ist gross
am Himmel. Die Geräusche
des Sterbens kommen aus Zimmern,
die der Wind durch ihre Fenster raubte.

Kabeljauköpfe bluten
überall im Land.
SICK WEATHER

The air is a blackened grave, 
traces of the Atlantic in it. 
Eyes of dead seamen 
look out for a blue 
that no longer exists. 
These are bad times 
for crystals. 
No sound now 
in shattered shells. 

The confusion is great 
in the sky. The sounds 
of dying come from rooms 
that the wind robbed through their windows. 
Cods’ heads are bleeding 
all over the land.
Karl Krolow

KINDHEIT

Kerzenlicht in einer Flasche: Kindheit.

Das Herz des Dunkels glühte als Holzkohle.

In der Flussmündung riefen die Schiffe einander bei Namen bis die Nacht vorüber war.

Ein Traum erschien als Galionsfigur an der Zimmerdecke.

Laub, grüner Gazeschleier. Ich war eine Wassertaube, die sich verflogen hatte und über der Weser klagte, dem grauen, schlagenden Butt.
Karl Krolow

CHILDHOOD

Candlelight in a bottle:
Childhood.

The heart of the darkness glowed
as charcoal.

At the mouth of the river
the ships called one another
by name
till the night was over.

A dream appeared
as the figurehead of a galleon
on the ceiling.

Leaves, green veil of gauze.
I was a water-dove
that had lost its way
and was wailing over the Weser,
that gray, flapping flounder.

tr. Michael Bullock
Michael Hamburger

LOACH

Loam, slimy loam, embodied, shaped,
Articulate in him. The strength, the softness.
His delicate eye draws light to riverbeds,
Through water draws our weather.

In gravel, mud, he lurks,
Gravel-coloured for safety,
Streamlined only to shoot
Back into mud or merge
In gravel, motionless, lurking.

Low he forages, late,
His radar whiskers alive
To a burrowing worm's commotion,
Tomorrow's thunder;
Advances bounding, prods
And worries a quiet pasture,
Munches athwart, in a cloud.

More than loam, at times he must rise,
His need, his weakness, richly to breathe;
Will rest on weeds, inconspicuous,
But, worse, gulp air, blow bubbles aft,
Expose a belly naked and pale, transparent.
Stickleback, minnow
Gape at his wriggling, uncertain
Whether to nibble or flee.

Perch can swallow him whole.
IN PHILISTIA
(Thoughts after a public reading of new verse)

"To affirm the affirmative". Yes.
With a lean or a fat smirk
To confirm: that's how we are, human.
Not to shirk nappies,
Knowingly to acknowledge
I know what you know:
That people may laugh or vomit
In face of their dead,
Lovers may bore each other,
The bomb is the bomb.

Tedious economy:
Those pennies they drop in our hats
We spin and jingle for them,
They thank us for showing them pennies.

Not sapiens, though, but quaerens
(Excuse the presumption of Latin)
They walk when we are not looking,
We walk when oblivious of them.
EPITAFIO PARA UN POETA

Antes de que las nieblas descendieran a tu cuerpo
mucho antes del grumo de vacilación en los ojos de tu máscara
antes de la muerte de tus hijos primeros y de los bajos fondos
antes de haber equivocado la tristeza y la penuria
y el grito salvaje en el candor de un hombre
antes de haber murmurado la descolación sobre los puentes
y lo espurio de la cópula tras la ventana sin vidrios

casi cuando tus lagos eran soles
y los niños eran palabras en el aire
y los días eran la sombra de lo fácil

cuando la eternidad no era la muerte exacta que buscábamos
ni el polvo era más verosímil que el recuerdo
ni el dolor era nuestra crueldad de ser divinos

entonces cuando se pudo haber dicho todo impunemente
y la risa como una flor de pétalos cayendo

entonces cuando no debías más que la muerte de un poema
eras tuyo y no mío y no te había perdido
HOMERO ARIDJIS

EPITAPH FOR A POET

Before the mists descended on your body
long before hesitations clotted in the eyes of your mask
before the death of your first sons and the lower depths
before a confusion of sadness and destitution
and the savage cry in the frankness of a man
before having murmured of desolation on the bridges
and the falsity of a cupola through the window that had no glass

almost when your lakes were suns
and the children were words in the air
and the days were the shadow of what was easy

when eternity was not the exact death we were looking for
nor the dust more likely than memory
nor sorrow our cruelty for being divine

then when all could have been said with impunity
and laughter like a flower of petals falling

then when you owed nothing but the death of a poem
you were your own and not mine and I had not lost you

tr. JOHN FREDERICK NIMS
"Nearly twenty-five years have passed since these translations were begun," writes Michael Hamburger in the Preface (p. ix) of his very fine collection of translations of Hölderlin's poetry, in which he expressly considers his work "to be finished at last" (loc. cit.). It seems doubly appropriate to take a look at what virtually amounts to a chapter in the reception of Hölderlin's work in the English-speaking world (earlier this year, imprints of the volume under review appeared all but simultaneously in London and in Toronto).

All the ancillary material in this generous volume—a scholarly Preface, Introduction, Bibliography, Notes, Indices—is arranged so as to help even the least initiated to find his way into a difficult subject. That the task of communicating the mature Hölderlin's sense of poetic language places a considerable burden of linguistic perceptivity and agility on the English translator, is realized by no one better than Hamburger himself. In his long prefatory essay (pp. ix-xviii) as in the translations, he is strongly preoccupied with translation not as a mode of poetic imitation (in the sense practiced, for example, by Robert Lowell or Ezra Pound), but as a form of essentially selfless service to the reputation of the translated poet. A poet in his own right, Hamburger is anxious to treat Hölderlin's work "as a phenomenon different in kind from anything I could ever produce" (p. xii). He succeeds more often than not. Excluding what the Preface names "the apprentice work" (p. xvii), that is, all the poems from Denkendorf and Maul-
bromn, the rhymed philosophical “hymns” of the first Tübingen period, and (more questionably) early hexameter poems from Frankfurt like “Die Eichbäume” and “An den Aether” (Beissner, I, Part I, 201, 204-205), Hamburger concentrates his definitive collection on the best poetry of Hölderlin’s mature years, including the long period of the poet’s mental eclipse (i.e., on the total span 1797-1843). Under seven principal headings the volume offers translations, with the original texts printed en face, of: a large number of the first mature Odes and Epigrams (pp. 21-71), all of the important Later Odes (pp. 72-209), selected Hexameters and Elegies (pp. 211-261), two later versions of the fragmentary verse play Der Tod des Empedokles (pp. 263-366), the complete series of the Late Hymns (pp. 367-501), many of the Late Hymnic Fragments (pp. 503-569), and selected poems from the period of Hölderlin’s madness (pp. 571-605). Of these sections, undoubtedly the highest concentration of successful translations will be found in the sections of the Later Odes and of the Hexameters and Elegies (the latter a solid achievement). With commanding artistic intelligence, Hamburger seems to recognize early that the question of a translator’s poetic intuition and eventual conquest of Hölderlin’s visionary realm is in no small way a question of mastery over the limited number of metres, full at first, vestigial later, that the poet permits himself (at the full stage reducing, in an overwhelming way, to two patterns, the Alcaic strophe and the elegiac distich). And mastery here means not only a steadily increasing neuromuscular skill with the metres, be this ever so arresting in its development, for example, in the Odes, but also an ability to suggest at least some of the complex of rhythms in which the encounter of language with metre is realized. As rhythmic thrust is to an extent encouraged by the given metre, it seems relevant to the translator that the Alcaic metre is a much more dynamic pattern, and one permitting a greater degree of corresponding rhythmic freedom, than the Asclepiadean. Within either metric scheme the translator would be interested in stressing crucial rhythmic elements, whether these, in the original, contribute to a sharpening of the metrical outline or to a blurring of it (or, another matter, to an acceleration or a retardation of the thrust). In one contrastive rhythmic feature I have looked at, the presence or absence of punctuation at the caesurae in the first two lines of either stanza pattern, I found that Hamburger underscores, and even exaggerates, Hölderlin’s rhythmic tendency. In 29 Alcaic and 17 Asclepiadean odes considered, it was found that Hamburger either maintains or severely lowers the frequency of the congruence of punctuation with caesura for the Alcaics (in 25, or 87 per cent, of the texts), while in the Asclepiadean examples, he almost equally often either matches or
raises Hölderlin’s frequencies (in 14 poems, or 82 per cent of the time). These results are significant if it is assumed that punctuation slows the reader down, while its absence has the opposite effect. Whether or not this is a fully conscious process in the translator (and it need not be), its reality for the user of the Michigan Hölderlin seems difficult to deny. One especially interesting confirmation of Hamburger’s efficiency in communicating his poet’s intentions here comes in what may almost be regarded as a laboratory experiment. The early epigrammatic ode “Menschenbeifall” (p. 46), which in the original is in Asclepiadeans, is translated by Hamburger into Alcaics. This liberty enables him to decide whether to maintain or to reduce the frequency of congruence between caesura and punctuation, and he chooses the latter course. Not only is it true that in the English version (p. 47) no punctuation at the caesurae occurs after line 1. It may be equally significant that the occurrence of the caesura in the four full lines of the ode, lines 1, 2, 5, and 6, represents a prosodic progression in this poem away from metre and toward rhythm, as indicated below (the caesurae are marked by “”):

1 Has love hallowed, “ filled : with punctuation
2 With lovelier life? Then “ why : against punctuation
5 The crowd likes best what “ sells : against clause boundary
6 And loud-mouthed force a- “ lone : against word boundary

That Hamburger is interested in achieving strong rhythm, as well as a strong impression of the original metres, in the Odes, can be felt also through a sensitive impressionistic reading of the poems under the first two headings in the volume. It seems clear, as Hamburger also states in his Preface, that he is satisfied with this concerted effort with a body of poems unique in German literature, only if he is able to suggest Hölderlin’s own gesetzlicher Kalkül in the Odes, that is, at least “something of their peculiar dynamism, their peculiar stillness, brought about by the tension between a strict form and an impulse beating against it like Hölderlin’s rivers against their banks” (p. x). With time this impulse grows ever stronger. I assume it is partly for this reason that Hamburger follows with scrupulous care every minute place of revision in the original, here from some of the Epigrammatic Odes to their mature, worked-out counterparts, from poems like “Lebenslauf” (p. 42), “Die Heimath” (p. 48), “Das Unverzeihliche” (p. 54), “An die Deutschen” (p. 58), “An unsre grossen Dichter” (p. 68) to late texts, “Lebenslauf” (p. 148), “Die Heimath” (p. 142), “Die Liebe” (pp. 144-146), “An die Deutschen” (pp. 122-126), “Dichterberuf” (pp. 172-176), respectively. Perceptivity as well as judgment are enlisted jointly also in texts where in the original some lines or portions of lines are left unwritten and visually broken, as for example in “Palinodie”
(p. 102), where at the beginning and end Hölderlin leaves two three-line stanzas, or in “Rousseau” (pp. 128-130), where in three of the stanzas, 5, 6, and 7, there occur broken lines. In the former instance, and very sensibly, Hamburger does not attempt to “fill in” the stanzas in question, but leaves them in their incomplete state; in the latter-named poem, a felicitous syntactic break encourages the translator to leave the lacuna intact in stanza 5 (“So be content! [lacuna] the tree outgrows / His native soil”), while in the remaining two passages, the lacunae are filled in. This practice becomes objectionable in stanza 7 (p. 131, top), where an eagerness to clarify the poet’s presumed meaning forces the translator to capitulate on matters of form; although the requisite eleven syllables are present, it is very difficult to read “You lived! and your crest too, though but once, yours too” as a convincing opener in an Alcaic stanza without the metrical makeshift of the italicized word your. In an even more systematic way, metre and rhythm refuse to function in the translation of the Asclepiadean ode “Heidelberg” (pp. 133-135), although an echo, a suggestion, a feeling for the original intention are certainly retained even here. In all, despite the fact that the actual chronology of Hamburger’s translations is not available, I cannot resist a speculation that he, like Hölderlin, must have begun at least in the area of the epigrammatic pieces and worked his way up to the stage of the master odes, to poems like “The Poet’s Vocation” (pp. 173-177, an especially fine, tender-tense, passage here is stanzas 5-10 inclusive), “Voice of the People, Second Version” (pp. 179-183), “The Blind Singer” (pp. 185-187), “Chiron” (pp. 189-191). Some of these late poems are printed in the present collection for the first time; for a comparison, see Hamburger’s earlier collection of verse translations of Hölderlin’s poetry (New York: Pantheon Books, 1952).

Comparable in conviction and success are Hamburger’s renderings of unfortunately all too few of the great hexameter poems and of the Late Elegies. Of the straight hexameter poems, only “Der Archipelagus” is offered, although it in itself is a considerable feat (on the omission of hexameter poems from the Frankfurt period, see above); of the Elegies, “Menons Klagen um Diotima,” “Brod und Wein,” and “Heimkunft” receive expert interpretations, and these are surely Hölderlin’s own three finest poems in this form. Although, as if in preparation for the Pindaric division of the Late Hymns, Hölderlin, perfectly in harmony with his subject matter, divides his texts into logical and solemn progressions of groups of three stanzas each, the Elegies are tense, one might say, chiefly in their spirit, and always somewhat beneath the stratum of the linguistic structures. They do not as yet have the rhetorical tension of the Hymns, nor any more the rhythmic struggle of the Odes.
What is proper to the Elegies, whether the poet mourn or celebrate in them, is smooth, harmonious hexameter language, and Hamburger has both the will and the gift to make the dactylic metre work in English (see also his remarks in the Preface, p. xvi). He succeeds here unequivocally, both as a servant of his poet and as an artist in his own right (and one wonders whether these two modes of success are really separable in the work of a master translator). Hölderlin's intent comes through in all three of his major Töne, or stances, moods: the idealistic, in mourning (“Bread and Wine,” stanza 7, p. 251):

Always waiting, and what to do or to say in the meantime
I don’t know, and who wants poets at all in lean years?

the heroic, in strong definition (loc. cit., stanza 8):

Bread is a fruit of the Earth, yet touched by the blessing of sunlight,
From the thundering god issues the gladness of wine.

the naive, in the joy of sensation (“Homecoming,” stanza 3, p. 257):

Meanwhile the lake gently rocked me,
Calmly the boatman sat, praising the weather, the breeze.
Out on the level lake one impulse of joy had enlivened
All the sails,

Despite the impressive compass of “Der Archipelagus,” I would name the three elegies as the more convincing accomplishment, if only because J. B. Leishman’s “The Archipelago” (in Selected Poems of Friedrich Hölderlin, 2nd ed. [London, 1954], pp. 135-149) competes with Hamburger’s too strongly even now, and because of the relatively high incidence of metrically imperfect lines in the latter (e.g., p. 227, line 10, “For the Heavenly like to repose on a human heart that can feel them;” which contains one metron too many).

Two important shortcomings of Hamburger’s translations might be considered briefly, with the hope that the translator may have the opportunity to reconsider some of his solutions: (1) the rather frequent use of syntactic inversion, inimical to the nature of English, (2) some concrete failures to reflect the techniques Hölderlin employs, especially in the Late Hymns (pp. 367-501). Hamburger may have a point that “the structure and syntax of [the] late poems are deliberately designed to run counter to the structure and syntax of discursive statement” (p. xiii). Resulting ambiguity and sense of mystery are clearly reflected in poems like “Friedensfeier,” line 13 (p. 433) or “Der Einzige,” stanza 5 (p. 449), but Hamburger begins much earlier than this, and uses
especially syntactic inversion for a variety of reasons. For example, in the early ode “To the Germans” (p. 59), it is metre, rather than syntax, that makes him write, in line 2, “Brave and mighty he feels up on his rocking horse” for “Auf dem Rosse von Holz muthig und gross sich dünkt.” Minimal adjustment in wording would preserve both the metre and the “horse + child” sequence in the original (as opposed to the translator’s “child + horse” sequence, which cancels the important emphasis in the epigram); I suggest: “Up on his rocking horse feels he is brave and big.” In the longer ode, “Go Down, Then, Lovely Sun . . .” (p. 115), I cannot see the point of the mannered word order of Hamburger’s two opening lines, “Go down, then, lovely sun, for but little they / Regarded you, nor, holy one, knew your worth,” when with a little more alert listening, for both diction and rhythm, the lines could read naturally: “Go down, then, lovely sun, they regarded you / But little; they did not know you, holy one” (notably few of Hamburger’s actual words need be altered). Examples could be multiplied from almost every portion of the book. Hamburger’s most important successes come with free and natural English; one very fine example of this comes in line 4 of the late ode “Blödigkeit” (“Timidness,” pp. 204-205), where the paratactic “Baar in’s Leben, und sorge nicht!” springs into speech: “Step right into the thick of life!”

What the Late Hymns in English suffer from most is a noticeable lack of the tension and roughness of the originals. Hölderlin’s widely discussed structural principle of *harte Fügung*, “austere structuring,” in which the poet emulates Pindaric idiom, is consistent and basic in this body of controlled free verse. The poet sets the words firmly apart, makes the sounds clash, and thus brings out the individual words in high relief against the backdrop of syntax. Perhaps the most famous example of this practice is the opening of the hymn “Patmos”: “Nah ist / Und schwer zu fassen der Gott” (p. 462), where the tension and the difficulty of the utterance could not be more intimately connected with the difficulty of the thought expressed. Hamburger’s word-for-word equivalent, “Near is / And difficult to grasp, the God” does not begin to suggest the struggle so vividly present in the original. This can be approximated, but only if the visual shapes the translator insists on preserving are sacrificed and the aural shape of the line is brought into relief. If the English line is to *sound* difficult, it must not be lacking in consonants at points corresponding to places where the German line is slowed down: first in place of the glottal stops preceding “ist” and “Und,” later at other points of word juncture. Here I would like to suggest a rendition that may seem far from the original in vocabulary, but I believe very close to the poet’s intent: “Up close, / That hard to hold fast, is God.”
Two other idiomatic features in the Hymns where the translator experiences difficulty are enjambement, where a closer approximation of the original shapes is again often possible (cf. only stanza 4 of “Der Rhein” [p. 411] with its 1952 version [p. 199]), and the long compounds, where exact reproduction in English of expressions like “fernhindämmernden” (“Die Wanderung,” p. 396) seems next to impossible (here I like Hamburger’s “distantly glimmering,” p. 397). One point of interpretation: I do not believe that the “Knecht” in “Patmos,” stanza 12 (p. 472, Hamburger’s “I, a servant,” p. 473) refers to the poet, but rather to a “lackey,” or unworthy person, given to travestying the God’s portrait (on this, see my article in MLR, LXI, 630-631).

In the remaining three sections of the volume, The Death of Empedocles (pp. 263-366, here offered in English for the first time), the Late Fragments (pp. 503-569), and the poems of Hölderlin’s madness (pp. 571-605), Hamburger again offers generally excellent work. Although no section of an undertaking of this magnitude is without flaw, it would clearly be both ungracious and pedantic to dwell on errors in Hamburger’s Empedocles at the expense of emphasizing the striking beauty of the whole translation. Passages such as (p. 347):

> And as that snow up there on Etna’s peak  
> Grows warm in sunlight, gleams and melts away,  
> And loosened from the mountain billows down  
> And the glad bow of Iris, the bright-blossoming,  
> Flexed, rises up where those quick billows fall,  
> So from my heart it billows and pours down,  
> And dies away, what time heaped up for me,

are here far nearer to being the rule than the exception. The section on “Fragments of Other Hymns” (Some of it very recent work; see also Tri-Quarterly, Number Six, pp. 21-24) again contains pieces of uniformly high quality. Hamburger’s ability in the genre of the hymnic fragment may be sensed already in the later, fragmentary, versions of “Patmos” (pp. 481-483). As the most sensible chronological view of Hölderlin’s work has stressed the continuity, rather than any break, between the Late Hymns and the Hymnic Fragments, so it is possible that the translator himself has kept learning more about this mode of singing. Especially readable are “For When the Grape-Vine’s Sap . . .” (p. 513), “On Fallow Foliage . . .” (p. 515), and “At One Time I Questioned the Muse . . .” (pp. 537-539), also “The Eagle” (pp. 541-543), which makes up in puzzling simplicity and silence what the thematically related Widmungsexemplar of “Patmos” lacks in tension and energy. In the concluding portion of the book, “Poems of His Madness,” again
I cannot help a feeling that readers will be grateful for inclusion of the best-known, as well as most important, poems from this period: for the ode “If from the Distance” (pp. 573-575, a Rollengedicht in which Susette Gontard speaks to Hölderlin), “To Zimmer,” p. 589, “Autumn,” p. 595, and finally the Hölderlin-like but spurious prose poem “In Lovely Blueness” (“In lieblicher Bläue,” pp. 600-605).

In Hölderlin’s own spirit, a negative-positive judgment best sums up the reviewer’s impression of Hamburger’s offering. Although, in both typography and overall design, Hamburger’s large and handsome bilingual volume suggests the external appearance of Friedrich Beissner’s Stuttgarter Hölderlin-Ausgabe, it must be stressed that the former is no more to be regarded as an unalterable and final English translation than the latter may be considered a ne varietur among critical editions of the poet’s work. The Michigan Hölderlin is neither “proper and somewhat nerveless” (see the review by Francis Golffing on Hamburger’s 1952 collection, Partisan Review, XX [1953], 428), nor the last word on its subject, but a strong preliminary to something we still do not have: an edition of Hölderlin’s works and letters in English, comparable to the recent Pléiade edition in French (ed. Philippe Jaccottet, Paris, 1967). To Hamburger must go our thanks for his having brought so much of Hölderlin closer to a cultivated English reading public. Now it is up to other energetic poet-translators to bring to a completion the very considerable body of work that is still in need of like attention.

Emery E. George
HANGER STOUT, AWAKE!

by Jack Matthews. 151 pages.
Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. $3.95.

HANGER STOUT, AWAKE! grows out of the soil of the “land of the ancient kings” country of southern Ohio. Jack Matthews has spent his life there, he knows that country better than anyone I know; but, more important, he believes in it as matrix. He chooses it, and, therefore, isn’t its victim. This is no regional book in the ordinary sense of the adjective: that is, the work of an author cannibalized by immediate landscapes, and often, personal history. Nor is it old-fashioned or unmodern because it gives no obvious nod to Grass, Lind, Borges, or Robbe-Grillet in novelistics.

I think “modern,” “where it’s at,” where we’re “at” in form and value, begins with Cézanne busy extracting pure forms from fairly representational landscapes. Thereafter, art of the studio succeeds art of the field. HANGER is the imprint of Matthews’ imagination upon a landscape and not the reverse. This conclusion of chapter fifteen puts it perfectly:

Also I liked to do what Rigolo was doing, I mean filing down through the rust of an old piece of metal, and through the old paint too, until you came to the shiny metal itself, which is just beautiful it is so smooth and bright. And I like to think it has been there all the time underneath the rust and the dull old paint which people are always talking about as being so ugly.

Clyde Stout is an eighteen year old gas station attendant who acquires the handle “Hanger” through his inordinate prowess at a new American sport: free-hanging. His career as hanger begins as Clyde is changing a tire for one Mr. Comisky, a rich (and according to the locals, crazy) gambler from the next town. Comisky watches Clyde gash his hand on a tire rack. Comisky also notices that Clyde is lean, light, wiry, and very strong in hands, arms, and shoulders. His high threshold of pain and his strength make Clyde a natural as free-hanger. Comisky offers Clyde five bucks if he can hang from the grease-rack for two minutes. He grips the grease-rack, they hoist him up, and he wins the money.

I told Leo here, that boy has it. Strong hands and a high threshold of pain.
Is that all it takes? Pete asked, looking interested, even though he didn't know no more about what this Mr. Comisky was talking about than me.

That's right, Mr. Comisky said, getting real serious. The thing that brings most men down off that bar they're hanging from isn't a loss of strength. No sir. You know what it is?

Pete shook his head.

It's pain, Mr. Comisky said. It's the pain they get in their shoulders. Because the shoulder wasn't meant to stand up under the strain of that constant kind of pulling. Not only that, the blood goes out of the arms. Also the head after awhile, and I've seen boys have hallucinations when they are free hanging from a bar. Yes sir.

Did you have any hallucinations, Clyde? Pete ask me.

I shook my head no, and Bo Thompson, who just come in from filling a '63 Dart with regular, said, How can you tell with Clyde there?

The narrative, housed within Hanger’s diary, begins with his meeting Mr. Comisky and concludes with the main-event: Hanger hangs against (from a tree) Bert Wilderman, a champion free-hanger from Detroit.

Hanger Stout is a brand new breed of hero or anti-hero, and I'm unable to choose between the terms. He’s almost antithetical to the classic over-reacher: the obsessed or possessed figure who plows this or that human order until he is himself buried in the furrows. He takes consciousness, epiphany, vision, hallucination, call it what you will: the thing that drives driven men, as it comes. He is quite happy to practice free-hanging from the grease-rack between servicing cars at the gas station. If HANGER STOUT, AWAKE! participates in the Bildungsroman tradition (and I think it does in its original way), Hanger never passes beyond the camel stage of Nietzsche’s “Three Metamorphoses.” His free-hanging does bring him to vision, to something like existential consciousness, but not to nihilism,

I wondered what the poet, Mr. Karaji, would do if he had a vision like the one I had that afternoon.

and this impingement of aesthetics upon his ethics in no way rearranges Hanger’s moral boundaries. Nothing here of Rilke’s “You must change your life.” This is a new face in modern literature.

In an automobile graveyard of human possibilities, using all the strengths of realism and none of its cliches, Jack Matthews presents a deeply original novel. I think it tremendous.

J. Michael Yates
Whoever invented the phrase that characterizes the Germans as a nation of poets and thinkers could hardly imagine what silly prejudice he had suggested to those Germans. To this day it has been customary in German-speaking countries to draw a neat line between a "poet" and a "writer," between "poetry" meaning verse, fiction, and drama, and the vulgar product "literature" applicable to any other form of written communication. It is a strange distinction. Are poets not supposed to think? The question sounds absurd, but its madness turns to reason if we pause to reflect on the course of German poetry during the last two centuries. It is roughly the period between Klopstock and Rilke which was ruled by the concept of "naive" poetry as being superior—because more "original"—to its reflexive, intellectual counterpart called sentimentalisch by Schiller. Herder’s and Goethe’s storm and stress prim­itivism had characteristically carried the day in their skirmish with Schiller, single theoretician of literature in Germany prior to Gottfried Benn and Bertolt Brecht worthy of any mention. Since the issue had become an either-or question, the Germans opted for the irrational bias.

This is not to say that German poetry of that period consistently eschewed rational argument, or that it was necessarily always bad poetry. Yet the fact that, in contrast to English and American, and later also French, poetry, it created its own atmosphere of ahistoric and non-realistic euphoria, simply cannot be overlooked. One is almost forced to conclude that German poets flatly abneged the profane disillusionment of critical thought as far as their proper business was concerned, in order to devote themselves unhampered to an ideal of "pure" art that was as immaterial as it was undynamic. This attitude served to seal off very effectively any access to insights about the theoretical and technical problems in poetry. If anything helps to underline the ingrained suspicion of German poetry toward theory and critical analysis, it is the conspicuous absence in the 19th and 20th century of an
inclusive Poetik that would have rivalled the philosophical awareness and perspicuity of the time.

Where would we find a German Coleridge or a German Keats proposing an entire esthetics in the nutshell of a few opening lines to a long narrative poem? There are no counterparts to Emily Dickinson, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and Marianne Moore in German poetry apart from those two antagonistic outsiders, Benn and Brecht; and the German poet who might claim, with Wallace Stevens, “Anything is beautiful / if you say it is” never materialized. There is a difference between the two literary traditions not unlike that between Chinese and Japanese poetry. While the former likes to indulge in the emotional reactions to the experience of the senses, the latter presents that experience, being at the same time more direct in its statement and yet, in a detached way, more critical. The lack of hard substantiality occurs not only in German poetry, but indeed in the entire imaginative realm of German art from 1750 to 1950. Since the early days of Romanticism, poets and painters were at heart amateur philosophers holding fast to the myth of a divine message of salvation. Thus it was not out of the ordinary that they would hurriedly withdraw from the sordid milieu of the cancer ward into which they had willy-nilly stumbled after the last two wars once there was again a chance of a decent escape. Having duly performed their “rubble verse,” they rushed back to wholesome nature and to fresh conquests of the parnassus of the imagination.

Meanwhile the conviction had grown in Germany that a) art cannot be appreciated critically and that b) the artist, creating in a state of divine frenzy, was least of all in a position to comprehend and pass judgment on his work. Both these arguments offered an easy pretext to German poets for skirting the strict self-discipline of artists of earlier epochs. Faint traces of a change in the views on the nature of poetry that have manifested themselves in the last decade are only now permitting the unorthodox enterprise of the German poet Hilde Domin who recently published a book entitled Double Interpretations: the contemporary poem between author and reader. The fact that she succeeded in asking 31 poets to discuss one of their poems chosen by as many critics whose names were not revealed to them, and who in turn gave their own interpretation independently, equals indeed a small revolution in German literary quarters.

There have been attempts by individual authors to flout the myth of divine inspiration and to explain the creative process in terms of semantic and phonetic composition that can—given a certain measure of intelligence, experience, and general sympathy—be retraced with fair results by any person. But even such minor authorities as Hans Bender
and Hans Magnus Enzensberger found it expedient to use the reputation (and also some of the methods) of Brecht as a bulwark to shield off the surge of public indignation against their nefarious activities that came not unexpectedly from critical quarters. The myth of the poem now being somewhat deflated, it was time to subject the poem to corresponding treatment; as a result he finds, in Hilde Domin's book, his place among his critics as a kind of primus inter pares. Although this may not sound very revolutionary to English and American ears, it is noteworthy in the context of German literary tradition.

*Double Interpretations* promises to offer its readers a twofold acceleration for their comprehension of its choice of poems. There is first the reasoned opinion of the critic, followed next by whatever light the individual author is able or willing to shed on his poem. That is not in all instances very much, for the poems were chosen exclusively by the critics (whom the authors did not know when writing their own appraisals). Critics are human, having their inexplicable foibles that will tempt them occasionally to project more into a poem than there is reason to be. Thus we have thirty-one representative living (at least when the book was being prepared) poets speaking about poems that are not always representative of their true achievement—poems that sometimes are simply mediocre. This unpleasant circumstance is perhaps to blame for the fact that some of them—e.g. Hans Arp, Ingeborg Bachmann, Günther Eich, Günter Grass, Christine Levant, and Nelly Sachs—did not feel up to their task, refusing in more or less polite words to comply.

Generally though the authors have tried bravely to enter into the game. There occur failures, of course. There is a group of interpretations that are really reports on how the poems came to be written; and there is yet another group which for lack of a better term might perhaps be called metaphysical introductions: general apologies aiming rather at defending the particular philosophy expounded in a poem than at elucidating the poem itself. And where, as in Max Bense's essay, extreme methods come to meet, it is in the purely theoretical point of intersecting parallels; in other words, Bense's "explications" remain just as inaccessible to the bona fide reader as his poem. Scattered between the misses and near failures finally remain some autocritiques of high calibre which indicate that at least a few contemporary German poets have outstripped the shadow of tradition, closing the gap that existed between them and their colleagues abroad for a number of generations.

But what about the critics? As readers, they remain after all apart from the authors; the barrier that separates them from the latter is one
of distance—distance from the poem. The poet stands at the center of the chalk circle; whatever may have happened since he composed his poem, he will always be on intimate terms with it: too close indeed in order to view it in cool reason. The critic, on the other hand, standing barred outside the circle, has at his disposal the whole advantage of distance; yet he cannot appreciate it, for what he sadly lacks is the intimacy of the poet's emotional presence. The problem is one of mutual approach—across the dividing line, and this is the true purpose of Hilde Domin's book: to test what happens when readers and poets reach their respective limits, facing each other in the pursuit of their opposite course.

The rather large number of contributors to the volume and its focus on a central theme suggests, not detailed comments on individual performances, but a discussion of the editor's thesis as it is presented in a lengthy preface combining the qualities of credo, critique, and manifesto. As a trained scientist who rather late in her career discovered her literary talents, Hilde Domin turned to questions of poetic theory after several volumes of poetry that contrast sharply with the verbosity so often found in German verse. *Nur eine Rose als Stütze* (But a rose for support, 1959), *Rückkehr der Schiffe* (Return of the boats, 1962), and *Hier* (Here, 1964) impress precisely by their archaic simplicity that elevates economy of means to the levels of majestic dignity and urgent appeal. Not engaged, beyond the point of insistent humanity, in any particular cause or subject matter, she is naturally in a favorable position to carry out the scheme of her book which is, to establish a sort of guide in the search for a modern *Poetik*.

What is the task of a poem, and how can it fulfill the task? Wallace Stevens said, "it has to find what will suffice." Suffice—for whom, or what? Suffice reality? Whose reality then? For there is also our reader, entering the picture at the poet's side; between the two, time becomes an obvious dimension in the poem. Whereas in the reader's imagination the poem grows word by word, coming to a temporary stop at the end of the last line before being subjected to fresh attempts of interpretation and comprehension, it has become a finished thing to the poet. For him it is, in Hilde Domin's words, "monument." Yet it is both aspects that belong in the poem though they may seem to contradict each other relentlessly: the reader's and the poet's, both equally "real."

On the other hand, there is the "frozen" moment of recognition left by the poet in his poem. How is it to be turned to life once again, so that the reader may experience it in its original state? This can only be achieved, Hilde Domin argues, through a corresponding "breath"
of creation: when the reader finds a way of identifying himself emo-
tionally with the substance of the poem—hard as that may prove in our
century of private, hermetic verse. He must be prepared for the condi-
tions of the present; prepared to accept the fact that reason and emotion
tend to go different ways in modern poetry reflecting our disparate reali-
ty. As it is the poet's task to force the disparate elements into a co-
herent pattern, it becomes the reader's responsibility not to let the
fragile union be shattered into a brutal polarity.

This of course brings to mind the well-established concepts of ten-
sion and balance. What matters here is that they are understood as
functional necessities that must not be reduced or dissolved in the in-
terpretation of a poem. Hence the former aim of the reader, to "under-
stand" the poem by translating it into a factual situation, turns out to
be dangerously destructive. Instead of the analytic method, assimilation
and integration are called for: the whole province of the poem must, in
an act of pseudo-creation, be reassembled by the reader at the mere
touch of its words, as a crystal will form in a saturated chemical solu-
tion when another single grain is added. It is only the poet who sees the
poem as "mounument"; for the reader it remains crude matter up to
the moment of crystallization. And there is no telling what pattern the
crystal will form. It need not at all be an exact replica of the author's
but may be one of a million kaleidoscopic views possible according to
the laws of probability. There is the poem, but it has no one "meaning."
It will therefore never date, never be finished, but live on as long as
there is a reader to re-create it.

It might be interesting at this point to compare Hilde Domin's
thesis with the concepts of a young French poet. Denis Roche, one of
the principal members of the Tel Quel group, has defined the poem
as a straight line of entry. "At the very moment when it is regarded
and perceived, it should assail and overwhelm the reader in the same
fashion as when it succeeded in making its author write it down." This
is to say, there is no understanding of the poem. It is rather, as Michel
Deguy who might be described as Hilde Domin's younger French coun-
terpart maintains, "a calligramme of the secret configuration of our
existence."

The discovery in poetry of such function points rather clearly in
the direction of a new poetics that could easily accomodate, at the
same time, the work of doughty experimentalists like Max Bense or
Eugen Gomringer, and the most fragile lines of Nelly Sachs or Peter
Huchel, using examples from contemporary German poetry. That po-
etics should make it easier for a poet to regard his poem as his own
optimal expression of a latent question, but it should at the same time

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make him aware, too, that the poem he had in mind when he wrote his lines is only one of many possibilities of which none is better than the next one. In having made this clear, Hilde Domin has not at last rendered her contributors a genuine service by meeting the argument that, since the interpretations of poets and critics differ occasionally quite conspicuously, either must have neglected his business, well in advance. Certainly no one has abused any poem, for contemporary poems cannot be abused: they do not employ an incontestable, universal language. The conditions of life which they reflect are ambiguous, leaving us ignorant and confused. The critics’ task has become difficult in a different way. Whereas a poet must more and more act as his own critic, the critic on his part has to meet the poet half-way on the territory of creative imagination. And the reader is no longer safe in his passive rôle: the dialectic of poetry is a lesson that must be learned.

Kurt Opitz
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