OTHELLO: THE TRAGEDY OF AN INSUFFICIENT LOVE

ROBERT HERRICK'S "UNIFIED VISION"

AND ITS PLACE IN EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY POETRY

PATRICK WHITE'S FOUR PLAYS IN THE LIGHT OF HIS NOVELS:

SOME STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS

by

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ABSTRACTS

OTHELLO: THE TRAGEDY OF AN INSUFFICIENT LOVE

Othello is primarily a domestic tragedy in which Shakespeare seems to be examining closely, and in mature terms, the complexities of physical and spiritual love. This paper attempts a reading of the play which reveals the inadequacy of the relationship between Othello and Desdemona.

The play's structure, historical background, and a close examination of the text reveals that Othello's deception by Iago is made possible partly because of Othello's blindly altruistic conception of love in the form of an idealised Desdemona, but mainly because of his own feeling of physical insufficiency. This insufficiency is ironic in that Othello was probably thought of in Elizabethan times as a lusty Moor, yet there is some evidence to suggest that his physical relationship with Desdemona may have been deficient.

Iago's dramatic function is that of a catalyst working on Othello's feelings of inadequacy. This unleashes the murderous sexual jealousy which eventually leads Othello to destroy Desdemona by "satisfying" her in death.

ROBERT HERRICK'S "UNIFIED VISION"

AND ITS PLACE IN EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY POETRY

Individual poets in this period have suffered from the critical desire to categorise them into various groups or "schools." Until recently, Robert Herrick's poetry has been
considered as the charming and uncomplicated verse of a member of a "school." Consequently he has been evaluated as a quite minor poet of limited talent, a mere follower of Ben Jonson.

This paper attempts to show the depth and breadth of his "unified vision" in *Hesperides* and *His Noble Numbers* and the individual manner in which his poetry assimilates and draws together in one organic body of verse, the traditions of the previous era of poetry and the influences of his contemporaries. It maintains that Herrick's poetry is the product of an intellectual and artistic integrity which is uniquely individual. It also suggests that this verse displays a higher degree of poetic ability than has been previously thought.

**PATRICK WHITE'S FOUR PLAYS IN THE LIGHT OF HIS NOVELS:**

**SOME STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS**

This paper attempts to clarify the problems faced by Patrick White the novelist in his *Four Plays*. It suggests three interrelated reasons for the critical difficulties which the plays present, the first being that as a novelist, White does not always succeed in objectifying his artistic control over the plays. The result is that some aspects of the novelist appear in the plays. In particular, some characters appear as novelist-commentators within the play in order to manipulate the action, and to attempt to guide the audience's reaction to the play as a whole.
Closely related to this aspect of the plays is White's philosophical viewpoint. Present in both his novels and his plays as dominant themes, it supposes a conception of the human condition very close to that of the Theatre of the Absurd. Yet the dramatic presentation of this viewpoint is to some degree dissipated because of White's reliance upon a modified, "well-made" play, and other naturalistic conventions. The use of the novelist-commentator also detracts from the effectiveness of the plays.

As a result of this attempt to portray an impersonal and malevolent universe in a traditional dramatic form, White is obliged to resort at times to artificial stage techniques, instead of finding a new and vital dramatic method of presenting his ideas.
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PAPER I.

OTHELLO: THE TRAGEDY OF AN INSUFFICIENT LOVE
No one could doubt that *Othello* is a sex-drenched play and that it is basically about love, spiritual and idealistic, physical and animal. Although much has been written about the character of Iago and his importance in the play, it is important to remember that the focal point of *Othello* is the relationship between Othello and Desdemona. This is not to deny Iago considerable depth as a character, but his main structural function is that of a perceptive force working through Othello to destroy both Othello and Desdemona.

It is also important that *Othello* is primarily a domestic tragedy centred in the inadequacy of a marriage. In previous plays Shakespeare has been content to use marriage in a simple romantic way, often as a binding force in the conclusion of the basic comic plot. The idealised romanticism and obvious psychology of *Romeo and Juliet*, the easy frolic
of Hal and Kate in *Henry V* and the playful marriage game in *The Merchant of Venice* become much more involved in *Troilus and Cressida*. In *Troilus and Cressida* sexuality becomes more overt, and the romantic screen disappears.

In *Othello*, however, it seems that Shakespeare is coming to a more mature realisation of the inherent complexities of marital relationships, and in this play more than in others, Shakespeare examines very closely the delicate balance between physical and spiritual love. It is my intention here to suggest a reading of *Othello* which shows that Iago succeeds mainly because of the imperfect love relationship between Othello and Desdemona.

Shakespeare examines three very important aspects of a love relationship in this play. These aspects do not exist in isolation but are intertwined into the organic structure of the play. The loftiest theme is that of spiritual love, expressed in the heroic speeches of the warrior Othello and in Shakespeare's creation of the "divine Desdemona."

Closely connected with this spiritual level and in fact a part of it, is the courtly love relationship between Othello and Desdemona. It is not the traditional medieval courtly love but more akin to the sixteenth century Spenserian concept of love and marriage as evidenced in *The Faerie Queene*. Cassio fits into this area in so far as he pays courtly homage to Desdemona. In Othello's eyes, though, Cassio appears to be the traditional courtly lover who seeks love outside of marriage. Roderigo is also a traditional
courtly would-be-adulterer. However Cassio seems to have a foot in both this camp and the third camp.

The third and most important aspect of love is that of animal sexuality, physical and materialistic lust. It is an inversion of the values of courtly love and a satiric denunciation of its pretensions. It is also counterpoised with spiritual love and succeeds in exposing the deficiencies of idealistic love. It also achieves the destruction of those characters who rely solely upon it. This is the world of Iago's realism, and the basis, in a large sense, for criticism of the other two themes. Within this world Othello finds himself deficient and is finally destroyed.

The manner in which these themes are interwoven in the play is analogous to the weaving of a fabric in black and white. It reveals Shakespeare's recognition of the coexistence of good and evil side by side and within all men, and in this way may be a pointer to the use of images of black and white and light and darkness within the play. The warp upon which the fabric of Othello depends is of black thread suggesting the physical, lustful and materialistic. Climbing out of this solid base is the fragile white thread, the weft of spirituality and altruism. To Shakespeare, the master weaver, no fabric is complete without both warp and weft just as no life or love is complete without ideals based on a satisfactory physical basis. It is this lack of physical sufficiency and overweight of unrealistic spirituality in the relationship between Othello and Desdemona upon
which Shakespeare works to produce the ironic tragedy of Othello.

The spiritual love between Othello and Desdemona has close connections with the courtly love tradition of extolling the virtues of a lover. Othello's speeches to the Senate have poise, nobility and an apparently disarming honesty. His speech requesting that Desdemona be allowed to accompany him to Cyprus,

Your voices, Lords: beseech you, let her will
Have a free way; I therefore beg it not
To please the palate of my appetite,
Nor to comply with heat, the young affects
In my defunct, and proper satisfaction,
But to be free and bounteous of her mind. 1
(I.iii.260-5)

suggests on one level of meaning a totally spiritual marriage of true minds. Othello's description of the growth of their love,

She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd
And I lov'd her that she did pity them.
(I.iii.167-8)

appears on the surface level to have the most idealistic foundations. This same abstract quality of love appears in Desdemona's description of her love for Othello,

I saw Othello's visage in his mind,
And to his honours, and to his valiant parts
Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate.
(I.iii.252-4)

The use of "consecrate" adds even more spirituality to her love. Desdemona's idealism also wins our admiration in that she forsakes family, position and friends to marry, according to Brabantio "with what she feared to look on?" (I.iii.98).
Upon their arrival in Cyprus, Othello again speaks in abstractions,

My soul hath her content so absolute,  
That not another comfort, like to this  
Succeeds in unknown fate. (II.i.191-3)

Desdemona's reply is appropriately addressed to the "heavens" with which she is often associated in the play, "The heavens forbid / But that our loves and comforts should increase" (II.i.193-4). It is apparent that while Desdemona loves the image of a "warrior," Othello has abstracted out of the living and real Desdemona a virginal idol to worship.

More of the development of this divine nature of Desdemona is made through Cassio. He speaks of her in terms which are typical of the excesses of a courtly lover in one sense. However, his speeches raise Desdemona to divinity and complement Othello's deification of his wife. Cassio says of Desdemona,

That paragon's description, and wild frame:  
One that excels the quirks of blazoning pens,  
And in the essential vesture of creation  
Does bear all excellency . . . (II.i.61-5)

It is also worth noting that Cassio's description of the tempestuous sea, winds and rocks which allow Desdemona safe passage to Cyprus is completed, extravagantly, with the words "divine Desdemona."

Tempests themselves, high seas, and howling sounds,  
The gutter'd rocks, and congregated sands,  
Traitors ensteep'd, to clog the guiltless keel,  
As having sense of beauty, do omit  
Their common natures, letting go safely by  
The divine Desdemona. (II.i.68-73)

The effect of what appears to be simply courtly exaggeration
has a deeper significance when we remember the fact that, mythologically speaking, Venus, the goddess of love, arose out of the waves at Cyprus, just as Desdemona emerges from a tempest to land on Cyprus. Othello's address to her, "O my fair warrior!" is connotative of something like a Mars-Venus relationship between the two. Further associating Othello and Desdemona with Gods is Cassio's speech,

\[
\ldots \text{Great Jove, Othello guard,} \\
\text{And swell his sail with thine own powerful breath} \\
\text{That he may bless this bay with his tall ship,} \\
\text{And swiftly come to Desdemona's arms. (II.1.77-80)}
\]

Throughout the play there are also constant references to Desdemona's whiteness, used as symbols of purity and divinity. Iago speaks of her as a "white ewe" and talks of turning her "virtue to pitch." To Brabantio, Cassio and Iago she is "fair" and "virtuous," and Roderigo equates her incorruptibility as above that of a "votarist." Here she is associated with Diana.

In Othello's speeches Desdemona's spiritual quality is enlarged. If we accept the more logical Q2 reading of line 392 in Act III, Scene 3,\(^3\)

\[
\ldots \text{[her] name that was as fresh} \\
\text{As Dian's visage, is now begrim'd, and black} \\
\text{As mine own face} \ldots \quad \text{(III.iii.392-4)}
\]

Desdemona becomes associated with Diana the goddess of Chastity and of the moon. Later, Othello refers to the sleeping Desdemona in terms which suggest his concept of her as something close to a Goddess,
... that whiter skin of hers than snow,
And smooth, as monumental alabaster ...
(V.ii.4-5)

The reference to her skin as "monumental alabaster" suggests to Othello that in her sleep Desdemona resembles the pure white stone statue of a Goddess. Again in line 11, Othello speaks of her as "excelling nature" and associates her with the god Prometheus,

Thou cunning pattern of excelling nature,
I know not where is that Promethean heat
That can thy light relume: ...
(V.ii.11-3)

Emilia also helps to build this picture of the untouched "divine Desdemona,"

... O, the more angel she,
And you the blacker devil!
(V.ii.182-3)

and in, "O, she was heavenly true" (V.ii.136) Othello completes the association of Desdemona with the "heavens" in Act V, in these lines,

... O ill starred wench,
Pale as thy smock, when shall we meet at count,
This look of thine will hurt my soul from heaven.
(V.ii.273-5)

and,

Whip me, you devils,
From the possession of this heavenly sight, ...
(V.ii.278-9)

Contrasting with Desdemona's "heavenly" associations are Iago's connections with the devil. The third scene in Act III in which Iago and Othello kneel to vow vengeance conjures up a picture of the Black Mass. Iago's tempting of Othello certainly reminds us of the devil and his total lack of goodness is demonic. Iago is also called a "viper," with all its
associations with the Garden of Eden, and a "hellish villain." Othello is seen by Emilia as touched with this evil. He is a "black devil." Furthermore the association of Iago with hell as a "demi-devil" is reinforced by Othello's statement to Iago, "If that thou be' st a devil, I cannot kill thee" (V.ii.288). In fact Othello only succeeds in wounding Iago, "I bleed sir, but not kill'd" (V.ii.289).

While it is possible to agree to some extent with Lawrence J. Ross,¹ that Othello has a spiritual battle with the tempting devil in the form of Iago, it is not, I think, Shakespeare's intention in Othello, to precisely delineate the spiritual themes. It is too much of a simplification to attempt to equate Iago with Satan, Othello with God or Adam, and Desdemona with Christ or Eve. While hints of some of this symbolism may be employed in the play, Shakespeare's Othello moves artistically at several levels simultaneously, and the existence of this "higher" plane is important but not the whole story. Othello is much more than the simple morality play in disguise which some critics would have us believe it is.

At another level in Othello, and interfused to a large extent with the spiritual level that we have been dealing with, is Shakespeare's treatment of courtly love. It would not be correct to say that Shakespeare is intentionally creating typical courtly lovers, but it seems that he is deliberately idealising the love of Othello and Desdemona through hints of divinity, touches of spirituality and the
introduction of some aspects of the altruism of courtly love.

Roderigo, for example, seems representative of the traditional courtly lover in his attempts to seduce Desdemona. He is the desperate lover who is prepared to kill himself when his love seems hopeless.

Rod. I will incontinently drown myself.
Iago. Well, if thou doest, I shall never love thee after it. Why thou silly gentleman?
Rod. It is silliness to live, when to live is a torment; . . . (I.iii.305-7)

However, his wave of idealism breaks on the cold rock of Iago's cynicism. Through Roderigo courtly love pretensions are made to look ridiculous. He is tricked out of all his material possessions, never so much as speaks to Desdemona and in the end is callously murdered by Iago.

Cassio also has a place in the schemata of courtly love. In Othello's eyes he appears to be the traditional cuckold, but more important, it is his courtly gallantry towards Desdemona upon her arrival in Cyprus which leads Iago to conceive his plot. Cassio excuses his behaviour to Iago on the grounds of courtesy,

Let it not gall your patience, good Iago, That I extend my manners; 'tis my breeding That gives me this bold show of courtesy. Kissing her (II.197-9)

Roderigo sees Cassio's behaviour as the actions of a "gallant." Iago does not,

Rod. I cannot believe that in her, she's full of most blest condition.
Iago. Blest fig's end! The wine she drinks is made of grapes: if she had been blest, she would never have lov'd the Moor. Didst thou not see her paddle with the palm of his hand?
Rod. Yes, but that was but courtesy. (II.1.247-53)

These lines also demonstrate several important points made previously; the concept of the idealised Desdemona, "she's full of most blest condition," Roderigo's strong affinity with the courtly love tradition, and Iago's realism. Iago's reference to "the wine she drinks is made of grapes" seems a clear demonstration of his refusal to accept the "divine Desdemona."

It is also significant to the central point of the play that once Othello is convinced that Cassio has committed adultery with Desdemona, his revenge is wreaked directly on Desdemona and only obliquely and in secrecy, through Iago, on Cassio. One might expect Othello the warrior to revenge himself openly and personally on his supposed rival. Such an action would have been expected and accepted in England.

"The killing of an adulterer in Renaissance England was considered an act of manslaughter which would almost certainly be pardoned," and in Italy, "Revenge for adultery, by the murder of both wife and adulterer, was tolerated in the early laws of every European country . . . In Italy, in particular, the betrayal of a husband's honour was a justified cause for murder, accepted by public opinion and condoned by law." Shakespeare then is intentionally focussing our attention on the relationship between Othello and Desdemona.

We know that medieval courtly love accepted sexual unions without marriage, but the later courtly love of the sixteenth century held marriage as the acceptable end.
relationship between Othello and Desdemona is representative of this later Spenserian courtly love tradition, for, in some minor ways, Desdemona seems similar to Britomart of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. Britomart is Chastity, the warrior lover who believes the rightful end to love is marriage. Desdemona is repeatedly referred to as a warrior and she, like Britomart, leaves home to follow her warrior lover. Furthermore Desdemona too is prepared to guard her honour. She is appalled at Emilia's loose attitude towards adultery,

**Em.** . . . who would not make her husband a cuckold to make him a monarch? I should venture purgatory for it.  
**Des.** Beshrew me, if I would do such a wrong For the whole world. (IV.iii.74-8)  

She also sets for Othello the high standards of chivalric generosity,

. . . When I have a suit Wherein I mean to touch your love indeed, It shall be full of poise and difficulty And fearful to be granted. (III.iii.81-4)  

Although the irony of this speech is evident, this suggests the difficult task set the courtly lover by his lady in order to test his love. Othello's reply is typical of the humility with which a courtly lover accepts his love's slightest whims, "I will deny thee nothing" (III.iii.85). Othello's earlier speech also seems to reflect the exaggerated attitude of the courtly lover, and in an ironic way, echoes Roderigo's sentiments, "If it were now to die / 'Twere now to be most happy" (II.i.189-90). However, as a courtly lover, or any kind of lover for that matter, Othello is deficient for ideally he should not question Desdemona's fidelity, "It is
meete the Courtier beare vere greate reverence towards women, and a discretee and courteous person ought never to touch their honestie neither in jest, nor in good earnest." In effect it appears that both Othello and Desdemona are playing the part of courtly lovers, half-convinced that they really are. In many ways, Othello's idealism seems a kind of sublimation or rationalisation of his deficiencies. Desdemona, though, is more in touch with reality than Othello. Upon her arrival in Cyprus she bandies words with Iago on subjects which border on the obscene. She obviously enjoys the attention and the repartee, yet she is anxious to show her concern over Othello at the same time,

Des. What wouldst thou write of me, if thou shouldst praise me?
Iago. O gentle lady, do not put me to it, For I am nothing, if not critical.
Des. Come on, assay . . . there's one gone to harbour?
Iago. Ay, madam.
Des. I am not merry, but I do beguile the thing I am, by seeming otherwise:
Come, how wouldst thou praise me? (II.1.117-24)

And in contrast to Othello she has a sensible attitude towards men, "nay we must think / Men are not gods;" (III.iv.145-6) whereas Othello literally and figuratively can only see things in either black or white. Just as Roderigo and Cassio become the dupes of Iago because of the blindness to reality inherent in courtly love, so Othello is destroyed in part by an idealism which prevents him from attaining a balanced view of love.

Othello's blackness is, in a way, symbolic of the blindness of his perception. As he says, "Certain, men should be
what they seem" (III.i.132). Consequently Desdemona is either the whitest essence of chastity or the blackest of lustful devils. He cannot perceive goodness (white) in apparent evil or evil (black) in apparent goodness. Nor does he appreciate the necessity for physical lust in love. In this way the recurring images of black and white fortify the play by parallelling Othello's perception and the blindness of idealism in the other characters. In the same way the images reinforce the white spiritual idealism of the play as opposed to Iago's black world of animalism and realism. But there are more interesting aspects of Othello's colour than this.

The question of Othello's colour has aroused much critical comment. Coleridge found it difficult to accept the fact that Desdemona could love a negro, "It would be something monstrous to conceive this beautiful Venetian girl falling in love with a veritable negro. It would argue a disproportionateness, a want of balance in Desdemona, which Shakespeare does not appear to have in the least contemplated." Coleridge is of course forgetting that Shakespeare knew enough about what he was doing to have this occurrence shock her father, Brabantio, so much that he died. We can, I suppose, explain this marriage by saying that Shakespeare wants us to admire Desdemona for her bravery in ignoring social barriers and racial prejudice in marrying the Moor. This may suit the twentieth century more than it does the sixteenth. However, a lady from Maryland unconsciously drops a hint as to a possible answer to Shakespeare's use of a black man as a hero,
"In studying the play of Othello, I have always imagined its hero a white man. It is true the dramatist paints him black, but this shade does not suit the man. It is a stage decoration which my taste discards; a fault of colour from an artistic point of view. I have, therefore, as I before stated in my readings of this play, dispensed with it. Shakespeare was too correct a delineator of human nature to have coloured Othello black, if he had personally acquainted himself with the idiosyncrasies of the African race."¹² We might shrewdly guess that one of the "idiosyncracies of the African race" which bothered Miss Preston was their supposed excessive virility. Even if we did not know that this belief was current in Shakespeare's time we could well deduce it from the references to Othello as a "Barbary horse" or Roderigo's description of Desdemona in "the gross clasps of a lascivious Moor."

We also know that there were negroes in London at least five years before Othello is supposed to have been written, "There is however positive evidence that Negroes were living in London five years before the Court performance of Othello in 1604. An assessment of "Straungers" in the parish of All Hallows, Barking, Tower Ward, recorded under the date 1 October 41 Elizabeth 1599, which is preserved in the Public Record Office (E.179/146/390) shows the following: Clare a Negra at Widdow $\text{tokes}\? x$ poll viij$d$ M[ajry] a Negra at Richard Woodes per poll viij$d$."¹³ Eldred Jones points out that in Elizabethan times, there was an "almost automatic
association of Moors with sexuality . . ."¹⁴ Waterman's 1555 Edition of *The Fardle of Facoins conteining the auncient maners, customs and laives of the peoples enhabiting the two partes of the earth called Affricke and Asie* refers to the Icthiophagi, who, after their meals "falle uppon their women, even as they come to hande without any choyse . . .."¹⁵ It is not surprising then that dark people were considered extremely lusty and that this was, "what by the mid-sixteenth century had become part of popular lore, namely that the nearer the sun people lived, the more hot-blooded they tended to be."¹⁶ It also seems pertinent to ask why Shakespeare chose to use a black man as his hero in a play which explores the nature of love and sexual jealousy. Apart from the answer that his source had a Moor as the main character and that the exotic novelty of far off places and people would be attractive to an audience it seems to me that Shakespeare saw far greater potential in Othello the Moor than this.

It is my suggestion that *Othello* is a mature, ironic play about love and sexuality. To put it rather too simply, Othello's colour and its association with virility, combined with the many hints dropped in the structure and language of the play, are indications of Shakespeare's deliberate creation of the paradoxical and coldly ironic situation of a supposedly virile man who cannot satisfy his newly married wife. The hero is further handicapped in this situation by an idealistic outlook. Because of these factors, Othello's sexual inadequacy is the basis for his overwhelmingly
irrational jealousy and this insufficiency combined with blind altruism makes it much easier for him to believe Iago.

Stoll's argument, "Othello believes a person whom he does not love or really know and has no right reason to trust, to the point of disbelieving persons whom he loves and has every reason to trust"\textsuperscript{17} misses the point just as M.R. Ridley does. Ridley claims that Othello has known Iago for a long time and has seen proof of his honesty in battle.\textsuperscript{18} Othello, according to Ridley, has had only a brief acquaintance with Desdemona and, "He has had no chance to 'know her' really or otherwise, and therefore has no reason to trust her."\textsuperscript{19} Both writers appear to forget that Othello's trust or mistrust of Desdemona is not based on reason but on sexual jealousy which is as irrational an emotion as one can find. It is my contention that Othello's trust of Iago is based on Othello's sexual deficiency and because of the feelings aroused by this sense of sexual inferiority it is much easier for him to think that Cassio has "satisfied" Desdemona. It is important dramatically that in the conversation held between Iago and Cassio in Act I, Scene 3, Iago fails utterly to bring any suspicion whatsoever about Desdemona into Cassio's mind,

\begin{quote}
Cas. She is a most exquisite lady.
Iago. And I'll warrant her full of game.
Cas. Indeed she is a most fresh and delicate creature.
Iago. What an eye she has! methinks it sounds a parley of provocation.
Cas. An inviting eye, and yet methinks right modest.
\end{quote}

(I.iii.17-23)

Cassio does not fall into Iago's animal world, although
his relations with Bianca would make us think that despite his pretensions and speech, he is far less removed from physical reality than Othello. It could be argued that Cassio has no reason to suspect Desdemona, but it is interesting to note that he is easily tricked by Iago into drinking too much. Cassio we know is sexually sufficient. Othello we suspect is not. Cassio rejects Iago's insinuations, Othello builds upon them from his own storehouse of feelings of sexual inferiority. A close study of the text reveals this.

Othello's speeches before the Duke have often been cited as examples of the nobility of his love for Desdemona. In part they are, but there is a plain statement of something much more important here as well. In these lines,

\[
\begin{align*}
\ldots \quad & I \text{ therefore beg it not} \\
& \text{To please the palate of my appetite,} \\
& \text{Nor to comply with heat, the young affects} \\
& \text{In my defunct, and proper satisfaction} \\
& \text{But to be free and bounteous of her mind; \ldots} \\
& (I.iii.261-5)
\end{align*}
\]

Othello appears to be saying that he is not requesting Desdemona's company on Cyprus for any other reason than a marriage of true minds. Yet the "young affects in my defunct" implies that this is about all the "satisfaction" Othello can expect.

Partridge points out that "affects" means "sexual desire"\textsuperscript{20} and the O.E.D. meaning of "defunct" is simply "having ceased to live, deceased, dead." Shakespeare used this word in a similar sense in Henry V, IV.i.line 21, "The Organs, though defunct and dead before." It seems possible that Othello is declaring himself impotent. When we consider
this it is interesting to note that Othello speaks of having been captured, and of "some distressed stroke / That my youth suff'r'd:" (I.iii.157-8). It was a well known story in England that travellers captured abroad were likely to be castrated. L.E. Pearson writes in *Elizabethans at Home* concerning impediments to marriage, "... later, Gouge in Of Domesticall Duties added details about the impediment of impotence. He specified such kinds as frigidity, an incurable contagious disease, and castration accidental or present at birth. The Mohammedan practice of castrating Christians taken at sea or in enemy territory was cause for one of the terrors suffered by English parents when their sons travelled abroad. Gouge had this in mind."21 Othello we know is a Christian. Perhaps Shakespeare had this in mind.

At any rate, the irony of the situation is evident. Here is a negro, supposedly more virile than an ordinary man, married to a beautiful young woman whom he cannot satisfy physically, or at the very least, thinks he cannot satisfy. Othello's mention of "proper satisfaction" introduces this theme which is later played upon by Iago. The word "satisfaction" itself has the implication of the "sating of sexual desire."22

Apart from Othello's own statement concerning his virility, his attitude towards his newly married wife strikes a discord. He seems too willing to leave Desdemona at home while he goes to Cyprus,
I crave fit disposition for my wife,
Due reference of place, and exhibition,
With such accommodation and resort
As levels with her breeding.

(I.iii.236-9)

This seems strange behaviour for a newly wed man. Othello also seems just a little too anxious to prove to the Duke that he will not let his marriage interfere with his execution of the war. It is almost as if he is avoiding the physical aspects of love. He speaks derogatorily of love,

... no, when light-wing'd toys,
And feather'd Cupid, foils with wanton dullness
My speculative and active instruments,
That my disports corrupt and taint my business, ...

(I.iii.268-71)

Othello's associations of sensual love with "light-wing'd toys" seems unusual and his contempt for physical love seems evident in his use of the words "disports," "corrupt" and "taint." Desdemona is much more concerned about the marriage in its entirety,

... if I be left behind,
A moth of peace, and he go to war,
The rites for which I love him are bereft me.

(I.iii.255-7)

The word "rites" clashes with Othello's previous statements concerning sensual love. Partridge points out the sexual implications of this word, and no doubt this is involved. But Desdemona is probably considering other ceremonial facets of the marriage as well.

Again when the Duke orders Othello to leave for Cyprus immediately, the contrast in Desdemona's attitude is plainly made,
Duke. . . . you must hence tonight.
Des. Tonight, my lord?
Duke. This night
Othello. With all my heart.  
(I.iii.277-8)

Othello's answer "With all my heart" seems to indicate an eagerness to be separated from Desdemona on their wedding night which cannot easily be explained as simply a desire to obey commands. Rather it appears that Othello is fearful of sexual relations.

Shakespeare also uses structure subtly to make his point in this play. Act I is constructed so that the love of Othello and Desdemona is balanced between the two conversations involving Iago and Roderigo. In both of these meetings Iago's animal sexuality is strongly conveyed. In the first meeting he employs gross animal images to incite Brabantio,

I am one, sir, that comes to tell you, your daughter, and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs.  
(I.i.115-7)

and in the last part of Act I, Iago recreates a carnal materialistic atmosphere with the introduction of the theme of buying love, "put money in your purse." Where he is present, love is "merely a lust of the blood."

Sandwiched in between this world of lust and animality is the seemingly ineffectual if brave and idealistic love of Othello and Desdemona. There are similar examples of this balance throughout the play. It is as if Shakespeare is structurally parodying the love between Othello and Desdemona. In this way and in others, altruistic love is criticised from the other pole of animal lust.
The double time scheme also has relevance to this reading. We are told that prior to their departure the newly-married couple have only an hour,

Come Desdemona, I have but an hour
Of love, of worldly matters, and direction
To spend with thee; we must obey the time.
(I.iii.298-300)

and apart from Othello's unusual eagerness to leave for Cyprus immediately, it is a strange coincidence that Desdemona travels to Cyprus not with Othello, or with Cassio, but with Iago. It may be that Shakespeare is separating Cassio from Desdemona so that her chastity will be obvious from the viewpoint of time and opportunity, but why separate her from Othello during the voyage? If she is meant to leave after Othello because of her packing or some such domestic affair, why does Shakespeare have her arrive before Othello on Cyprus? It may be that Shakespeare is merely using a dramatic trick to build up suspense in the audience by placing Desdemona in the hands of a character the audience already knows is evil. But this strikes me as too deep a play for tricks of that kind. I must conclude that Shakespeare is deliberately making Othello avoid consummating the marriage. It is also of course a chance for deep irony, in Brabantio's words,

Look to her Moor, have a quick eye to see:
She has deceiv'd her father, may do thee.
(I.iii.292-3)

and Othello's, "My life upon her faith" (I.iii.294).

On the first night in Cyprus, Shakespeare applies the short time scheme, mentioning the time deliberately in several places. In Act II, Scene iii, we are told that there
is to be "full liberty from this present hour of five, till the bell hath tol'd eleven." Within a space of twenty odd lines it has become "not yet ten o'clock" and Othello and Desdemona go off to bed. Within a very short stage time Othello reappears with drawn sword followed soon after by Desdemona. Within another very brief stage time, Iago remarks "by the mass 'tis morning" and a few lines later the general sends the Clown to get rid of the musicians playing under his windows,

But, masters, here's money for you, and the general so likes your music, that he desires you, of all loves, to make no more noise with it.

(III.i.11-3)

The association by the Clown of the traditional music-making on the morning after a wedding with sexuality appears in,

Why, masters, ha' your instruments been at Naples that they speak i' the nose thus? (III.i.3-4)

In this context, "nose" is a slang word for penis. The implication is that the "noses" have caught venereal disease. This was commonly known as the Neopolitan disease. This slang use of the word "noses" in the sense of penis is echoed several times by Othello later in the play. The Clown also talks of "tails," another colloquial Elizabethan term for penis.

While this brief scene may be simply for the groundlings, it has the effect of surrounding Othello's love for Desdemona with the physical fact of love. It is also part of the rapid time scheme employed in the first night in Cyprus, which is supposedly the first wedding night too. Othello and Desdemona are disturbed by the brawl late at night and by the
musicians very early in the morning. Shakespeare seems to be hurrying the first night of the wedding, and interrupting it on two occasions. Perhaps his reason is to drop a hint that the marriage had no chance to be consummated. We are given some proof of this later when Desdemona speaks to Emilia about the wedding sheets.

However at this stage, (the beginning of Act III), Othello seems to have undergone a subtle change even before Iago begins to poison his mind. It is possible that Othello's sexual inferiority shows itself in his precipitous dismissal of Cassio without a proper hearing. This action occurs very soon after he has left the stage with Desdemona. In the brawl scene Othello appears to have lost the self-control and moderation which characterised his confrontation with Brabantio and the Senate. Othello's self-assured speech to Brabantio when faced with violence,

Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust 'em;
Good signior, you shall more command with years
Than with your weapons. (I.i.59-60)

contrasts most significantly with his own violent behaviour on Cyprus, "now by heaven / My blood begins my safer guides to rule" (II.ii.195-8). Othello seems glad at the opportunity to display his prowess at arms,

. . . Zounds, if I stir,
Or do but lift this arm, the best of you
Shall sink in my rebuke. (II.iii.188-90)

This suggests the behaviour of a man welcoming the chance to prove himself adequate in one field when his inadequacy in
another is bothering him. The way is now clear for Iago to work on Othello.

Iago has already realised the difference between Othello's protestations of love and his physical capabilities,

```
His soul is so unfetter'd to her love,
That she may make, unmake, do what she list,
Even as her appetite shall play the god
With his weak function.                    (II.iii.336-9)
```

Iago's description of Othello's "weak function" adds more weight to the case. Elizabethan use of "function" meant "activity, hence virility or potency."\(^{26}\) The implication seems clearly that Othello will be unable to satisfy Desdemona physically because of his weak potency. There may also have been an earlier hint about this from Iago when he was talking to Desdemona about changing "the cod's head for the salmon's tail." Partridge's comments on this line are some help,

```
... a difficult phrase, even when we remember that "cod's head" probably refers to codpiece and that probably it is therefore = penis (the head of the cod or scrotum), and that "salmon's tail" probably = pudend (cf. fish q.v., and see "tail," l.). A woman does not change, i.e. exchange, the former for the latter; she exchanges the latter for the former: the pun demands that, "change ... for" = "put ... in the place of," hence "put ... in." -- Occasionally it is almost impossible to determine the exact sense of Shakespeare's sexual witticism -- but the subtlety and highly developed nature of his sexuality being incontrovertible, we should be ignorant--and stupid--to think that there is no sexual witticism.\(^{27}\)
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It may be possible that Iago is mocking Desdemona for accepting a bad bargain in Othello. That is, Iago may be hinting that Othello's "cod head," as the appearance only of great virility, is no better than a "salmon's tail," or female
genitals to Desdemona. The degree of credibility to be placed in Iago's statements needs examination.

It could be argued that Iago cannot be believed because he himself suspects Othello of committing adultery with Emilia. However, Iago's main cause for hatred is his loss of promotion. His other motive is based purely on rumour, as he says,

\[\ldots \text{I hate the Moor,}
\]
\[\text{And it is thought abroad, that 'twixt my sheets}
\]
\[\text{He's done my office; I know not if't be true . . . .}
\]
\[\text{Yet I, for mere suspicion in that kind,}
\]
\[\text{Will do, as if for surety: . . .} \quad (I.iii.384-8)\]

Earlier, he says of himself, "oft my jealousy / Shapes faults that are not" (III.iii.151-2). Furthermore, in this play of darkness, Othello, Roderigo, Emilia, Cassio and Desdemona are all "blind." Iago's motivations may in a way be obscure but he is the only one who sees through the outward appearances to the cold reality of a situation. We can, I think, believe most of what he says for this reason. Besides, the word "honest" as applied to Iago has less of moral overtones than overtones of worldly wisdom. Honesty in this sense is "perception" or the ability to see through facades. It is this quality in Iago which Othello admires, and it is this ability which enables Iago to work on Othello's sexual impotence and finally destroy him.

Iago begins to work on Othello immediately after the first disturbed wedding night in Cyprus. Subtly he insinuates suggestions of dishonour and cuckoldry,

\[0, \text{beware jealousy}
\]
\[\text{It is the green-ey'd monster, which doth mock} \]
That meat it feeds on. That cuckold lives in bliss,
Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger; . . .
(III.iii.169-72)

and what might be considered a subtle innuendo,

Though it be fit that Cassio have his place,
For sure he fills it up with great ability, . . .
(III.iii.250-1)

which Othello appears to echo,

I had rather be a toad,
And live upon the vapour in a dungeon,
Than keep a corner in a thing I love,
For others' uses: . . . (III.iii.274-7)

In grandiloquent speech, Othello retreats psychologically
from the field of physical love into the world of idealism,
the world of the warrior,

O now for ever
Farewell the tranquil mind, farewell content:
Farewell the plumed troop, and the big wars,
That makes ambition virtue: . . . (III.iii.353-6)

But Iago presses reality in on Othello, repeating the need
for "satisfaction,"

Oth. . . . would I were satisfied!
Iago. I see, sir, you are eaten up with passion,
I do repent me that I put it to you,
You would be satisfied.
Oth. Would, nay, I will.
Iago. And nay, but, how, how satisfied, my lord.
(III.iii.396-400)

The word "satisfaction" or "to satisfy" often has the imp-
lication in Shakespeare of "the sating of sexual desire."28
Iago continues in this manner, introducing the animal syn-
onyms for lechery, most probably using them in contrast with
Othello's inadequacy,

Where's satisfaction?
It is impossible you should see this,
Were they as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys,
As salt as wolves, in pride; and fools as gross
As ignorance made drunk: but yet I say,
If imputation and strong circumstances,
Which lead directly to the door of truth,
Will give you satisfaction, you may ha't.

(III.iii.407-14)

The handkerchief, "spotted with strawberries," which are symbols of lust, is to Othello more a proof of Desdemona's physical needs which Othello cannot satisfy than a proof of her actual guilt. Her moist hand is again, I think, similar proof to Othello of unsatisfied sexual desire rather than guilt. Desdemona's comment on Cassio, reiterating as it does the concept of "satisfaction" and "adequacy,"

Des. Come, come.
You'll never meet a more sufficient man, . . .

(III.iv.88)

is itself an intolerable insult to Othello's sense of sexual inadequacy. Later when Iago speaks of Cassio again,

For I will make him tell the tale anew,
Where, how, how oft, how long ago, and when,
He has, and is again to cope your wife.

(IV.i.84-6)

the word "cope" is quite important. Partridge makes note of it, "to deal satisfactorily—indeed successfully with . . . it = coit with (a woman)." Iago is again working on Othello by reiterating Cassio's sexual adequacy, the potency of the "proper man" which Othello knows and feels he is not. Cassio's virility again enters into Othello's mind when he is in hiding watching Iago talk to Cassio. Othello says,

I see that nose of yours, but not that dog I shall throw't to.

(IV.1.140)

Ridley's comment here again misses the point, "slitting or cutting off the nose was a recognised form of punishment or
revenge; but I do not see the point of Othello's not seeing the dog.  

30 Othello's response to the situation is nothing as mild as slitting Cassio's nose, "Oth. [Advancing] How shall I murder him, Iago?" (IV.1.166). Besides the word "nose" used here is common Elizabethan slang for penis.  

Othello is talking about emasculating Cassio, and it is significant that his revenge centres on jealousy of Cassio's virility. Othello has mentioned "nose" previously in, "noses, ears and lips. Is't possible? --Confess?" (IV.1.42). The slang meaning of "nose" we know, but "lips" and "ears" both have possible sexual connotations, "ears" with "the implication of copulation" and "lips," "to kiss intimately or cognate with L. labium." Othello's jealousy we have seen is based on the conviction of his own inadequacy and his fear that Cassio has sexually satisfied his wife. This is reinforced to some extent by Othello's desire to emasculate Cassio, and in his preoccupation with the slang word "noses." But there seems even more evidence to support the fact of Othello's love being inadequate on the physical level.

As has been mentioned, the first wedding night on Cyprus is subjected to a telescoping of time and two interruptions. Desdemona's comment to Emilia,

\[\ldots\ \text{may we must think}\]

\[\text{Men are not gods;} \]
\[\text{Nor of them look for such observances} \]
\[\text{As fits the bridal.} \quad (\text{III. iv. 145-8})\]

supports to some extent the theory that the marriage was not consummated. Desdemona is excusing men as capable of frailty
and therefore ignoring that which is customary for a wedding. The O.E.D. defines "observances," as "an act performed in accordance with prescribed usage; customary rite or ceremony, an obligatory practice." We know that Desdemona was eager to accompany Othello to Cyprus for the "observances,"

... if I be left behind
A moth of peace, and he go to war,
The rites for which I love him are bereft me,...

(I.iii.255-7)

and that "rites" include the sexual implications of a marriage union. It may well be that in the passage cited previously, Desdemona is excusing Othello's unwillingness or inability to consummate the marriage.

Furthermore when Desdemona orders Emilia, "prithee, tonight / Lay on my bed our wedding sheets; remember,"

(IV.ii.107) Desdemona has just been accused by Othello of being a "whore." There seem to be two reasons for Desdemona to make this request. She may intend to show Othello that night the blood-stained proof of her virginity of the previous night. This seems unlikely in a woman of Desdemona's refinement, and in effect would prove little. The alternative reason seems to be that Desdemona is trying to remind Othello in a feminine way, by displaying spotless sheets, that she is still a virgin, that Othello has not yet broken her hymen and that his accusations of adultery are therefore patently false. It is far more likely, considering the kind of woman Shakespeare has created in Desdemona that the latter case is true. That the wedding sheets are important to Desdemona is made plain in her use of the word "remember" at the
end of the line. Emilia makes it plain that they have been placed on the bed, "I have laid those sheets you bade me on the bed" (IV.iii.22). Desdemona's reply is a dreadful foreshadowing of events to come,

If I do die before thee, prithee shroud me
In one of those same sheets. (IV.iii.24-5)

Shakespeare is preparing us for the final consummation by focussing our attention on the bridal bed.

Another difficult aspect of the relationship between Othello and Desdemona is his command,

Get you to bed, o' the instant I will be return'd, forthwith, dispatch your attendant there . . . look it be done. (IV.iii.7-8)

Desdemona repeats this to Emilia,

He hath commanded me to go to bed,
And bade me to dismiss you. (IV.iii.13-4)

The surprise in Emilia's reply, "Dismiss me?" tends to suggest that Emilia is accustomed to staying with Desdemona. On rare occasions on the first night of a wedding between Princes, Kings occasionally stayed in the bedchamber while the marriage was fulfilled. Apparently James I did this on one occasion:

Attendance at the Elizabethan nuptial couch may seem shocking to the present age, but it was often of grave importance to powerful families seeking to strengthen their alliance. When the son of the great Essex was married to Frances Howard before he left for the tour of the Continent to complete his education, King James I and his queen were so concerned about the completion of the union that they remained in the bridal chamber till they were sure the marriage had been consummated. This practice had not been unusual at a marriage uniting two great families.
It is more probable that Emilia's surprise on the second night, on being dismissed, is meant to indicate that she is used to sleeping in the same room as Desdemona, as her lady-in-waiting, without Othello being present. Emilia then, knows well that Desdemona is "chaste," in more than the sense of being true to her marriage.

Shakespeare gives us one other possible hint that Desdemona is still a virgin, and that she believes the second night on Cyprus to be intended for the wedding night. Desdemona's command to Emilia, "Prithee unpin me," may be a hint of her expectation. She repeats the request a few lines later,

\[
\text{Emil. Shall I fetch your nightgown?}
\]
\[
\text{Des. No, unpin me here.}
\]

(IV.iii.34)

As an Elizabethan bride prepared herself for the wedding bed, she and the bridesmaids, "... took great care to throw away any pins she had worn during the day: these meant bad luck for the bride or a bridesmaid who kept one."\textsuperscript{34} Perhaps Desdemona is exercising such caution before what she supposes will be her wedding night.

Despite Desdemona's attempts to show her innocence through the wedding sheets, Othello's erotic jealousy will listen to no reason,

\[
\text{That she with Cassio hath the act of shame}
\]
\[
\text{A thousand times committed;...}
\]

(V.ii.212-3)

The "thousand times" is patently impossible, a gross exaggeration which reflects Othello's deep sense of sexual
insecurity. Emilia's earlier questions have pointed out the physical impossibility of this, "who keeps her company? / What place, what time, what form, what likelihood?" (IV.ii.139-40) but Othello, torn between the two poles of lofty ideals and sexual inferiority has lost all touch with reality, and more blind than ever, cannot see the obvious.

Act V is replete with the words "kill" and "die." Deeds of evil are done in the darkness and it seems that the white thread of idealism is disintegrating. The ironic impact of Iago entering with a light upon the scene of the attempted assassination of Cassio confirms this. It is important to note that in this scene, Cassio is symbolically emasculated, "My leg is cut in two" (V.i.73). It is also symbolic that before suffocating Desdemona, Othello puts out the "light" of Desdemona, "Put out the light, and then put out the light" (V.ii.7). The white thread of altruistic love is destroyed by the blackness of sexuality.

But the main impact of Elizabethan slang for "kill and die" as synonyms for the sexual act occurs in the scene where Othello "kills" Desdemona, both literally and figuratively. Othello kisses Desdemona before he "kills" himself.

I kiss'd thee ere I kill'd thee
no way but this
Killing myself, to die upon a kiss.
[Falls on the bed, and dies]
(V.iii.359-60)

There is no escaping the deep symbolism of this. Othello "satisfies" Desdemona by suffocation. In this way, death and the physical act of sexuality become fused into one.
Significantly, there is no bloodshed. In this symbolic and dreadfully ironic manner the marriage is finally consummated—both Othello and Desdemona "die" finally on their marriage bed. The fragile glass of altruistic love shatters on the sheer fact of sexuality. The tragic irony of the insufficient man is complete.
NOTES

1 This quotation and all other quotations are taken from Othello, Arden edition, (ed.) M.R. Ridley (London, 1966).

2 One does not have to "believe" in archetypal criticism to see the significance of say, the whale in Moby Dick or any of the multitudinous connections which the colour white has with Deities in general.

3 It seems more logical to accept the Q2 reading of Othello's speech in line 392.

   ... her name, that was as fresh
   As Dian's visage, is now begrim'd, and black
   As mine own face: ...

   than the Arden reading,

   ... my name, that was as fresh
   As Dian's visage, is now begrim'd, and black
   As mine own face: ...

The comparison in the Arden edition of Othello's name to a feminine Goddess of Chastity seems strange, just as it seems unlikely for Othello to relate the begriming of his name to his face. Furthermore, Othello in this context is talking of Desdemona's honour not his own. Apart from that, M.R. Ridley's reasons for leaving "my name" in the Arden edition seem based upon intuition. They are actually contradicted by the note that follows, "I see little justification for accepting Q2's 'her name' as most edd. have done. Othello is maddened by her befoulment of his own honour; it is that which will not endure, and which only revenge will clear. But Q2's reading is quite tolerable, and it is true that later Othello does show himself moved by the stain on Desdemona's name as well as on his own." (p. 117)


5 In some respects Roderigo's failure to achieve satisfaction with Desdemona and his deception by Iago mainly because of his blind idealism, is an ironic comment on Othello, who himself fails to achieve the same thing under similar circumstances.


7 Ibid., p. 159.


NOTES (cont.)

10 The recurring use of the dichotomous colours of black and white, angels and animals would suggest the paradox of the human sexual situation as seen in Sonnet 144.


15 Quoted in ibid., p. 8.

16 ibid.


19 ibid.


22 Partridge, p. 182.


24 Partridge, p. 152.

25 ibid., p. 159. (Ridley misses this and consequently the whole meaning).

26 ibid., p. 201.

27 ibid., p. 118.

28 ibid., pp. 85-6.

29 ibid., p. 182.

30 ibid., p. 94.
NOTES (cont.)

32 Partridge, p. 152.
33 Pearson, p. 359.
34 ibid., p. 358.
A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


PAPER II.

ROBERT HERRICK'S "UNIFIED VISION"

AND ITS PLACE IN EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY POETRY
Any reader who wishes to have a clear conception of seventeenth century poetry runs immediately into difficulties. Previous classifications into various stylistic or historical categories face him with various "schools," all of which are valid to only a small degree.

The term "Elizabethan," for example, is sometimes used to include the period up until 1642 as well as Elizabeth's reign. Edward Luce-Smith's 1965 edition of *The Penguin Book of Elizabethan Verse* sees fit to exclude Wyatt and Surrey and to include Shakespeare, Spenser, Jonson and Donne. This controversial selection is justified on the grounds that the word Elizabethan is no criterion for style; "In fact, there is no homogeneous Elizabethan style." It is also interesting that Herrick is omitted completely, though for reasons I shall try to show later in this paper, he draws together into one poetic style many of the influences pervading this larger era.

Another popular and traditional literary distinction
made about earlier seventeenth century poetry is to divide
the writers into supposedly characteristic groups such as
"Metaphysical," "Cavalier" and "Puritan" and to decide that
this era ended with the "Augustan" age. While this may be
useful it is simplistic enough to be grossly misleading. The
distinction between "Cavalier" and "Metaphysical" becomes
difficult when we realise that most supposed "Cavalier"
poets were quite strongly influenced by Donne. Sir John
Suckling's poem, "Out upon it. I have loved,"

    Out upon it. I have loved
    Three whole days together
    And am like to love three more,
    If it prove fair weather

has an obvious debt to Donne in say, "Song," or "Woman's
Constancy," not merely in the tone of cynical libertinism,
but in the startling opening line and its dramatic yet con-
versational voice. Yet both Donne and Suckling in this inst-
ance look even further back to Juvenal's satiric comments on
women's constancy for the true base of their poems.

In terms of the "Puritan" school of poetry, Milton
does not seem to form a focal point for a distinctive group
of poets, and Marvell, whom we could suggest is perhaps in
political sympathy, a "Puritan," combines a "Cavalier" polish
with a deeply "Metaphysical sensibility."2 Similarly, while
the term "Augustan" seems more useful in determining a partic-
ular kind of poetic, it is important to remember that Dryden,
the most important figure in the establishment of English
neo-Classicism, wrote his first poetry in a derivative
"Metaphysical" style, and that he was for some time at least a contemporary of both Marvell and Traherne, whose writings continued to show to some extent the influence of Donne and the seventeenth century religious verse tradition.

The term "Metaphysical" style is also misleading and seems most applicable in its plainest sense to Donne. While it does characterise "the vital, living, thinking and feeling poet employing all of his 'unified sensibility,,'" in view of the influence of continental thought, its application to religious poets like Crashaw and Vaughan is less accurate than perhaps the title "Meditative poets."³

Further confusion arises from the conception of earlier seventeenth-century poetry as that of various schools. Though the influence of Donne and Jonson was very great, Douglas Bush's caution is worth remembering, "The dichotomy is sound enough to be useful and false enough to be troublesome." It is possible to make a valid distinction between the "strong line" of Donne and the "plain line" of Jonson but, although there may be a case for a rough grouping of poets along these lines, the most important aspect of all this large degree of cross-fertilisation which occurred between all the poets of this age. Important too is the reaction of individual poets to the writings of their contemporaries, and also the manner in which they personally assimilated the important poetic precedents of the Renaissance tradition. Even those poets greatly influenced by Spenser felt the intellectual and spiritual ferment of the last stages of the Renaissance and
broke to some extent with Spenser's serene, controlled style and incorporated some of the restless desire to deal directly with the perplexing reality of their times.

Donne and Herbert, for example, built new, stronger forms upon the traditional sonnet and madrigal in order to express an individual reliance on living experience. Jonson and Herrick moved towards a different modification of the inherited Renaissance tradition which, though still personal, built a stricter yet refined classicism into their poetry. If it is possible at all to generalise about post-Renaissance poetry before Milton and Dryden it is in the individual quality of the particular poet's reaction to those influences which he had inherited, and to those influences which surrounded him during his writing life. All of them were influenced by their contemporaries to some extent. In common too, they had an age which was greatly aware of the paradoxical and complex nature of real experience, and they utilised the poetic weapon of intelligence or "wit" in their attempts at coming to grips with it. In "wit," both deeply serious and lightly frivolous, is contained the sensual and striking "concettismo" of Crashaw, the epigrams and neat phrasing of Jonson and Herrick, and the paradoxes, intellectual ingenuities and puns of Donne and Herbert. It was, "a whole mode of vision in which individual emotional and spiritual experience is viewed in the light of infinite and total reality, and is judged and measured without being rejected."^5

It is in this capacity to keep in hand an all inclusive
totality of vision, developed from an assimilation of past traditions, influenced by the work of contemporary poets, modified by an ironic "wit," and yet uniquely individual, which places Robert Herrick significantly in this age.

Some facts about Herrick's life are important for a full understanding of his position in the context of seventeenth century poetry. He was born in 1591 in London, the son of a goldsmith who is rumoured to have committed suicide in 1592. From 1607 until 1613 Herrick was apprenticed to his wealthy uncle, Sir William Herrick, a prosperous London goldsmith.

In 1613 Herrick left London for Cambridge where he took his B.A. in 1617 and his M.A. in 1620. Between 1617 and 1629 it seems likely that he lived in London, associating with Ben Jonson and "The Tribe of Ben."

He was ordained in 1623 and in 1627 went as personal chaplain to the Duke of Buckingham on the expedition to the island of Rhe. In 1629 Herrick became the vicar of Dean Prior in the diocese of Exeter where he remained until he was turned out by the Puritans in 1647. Apparently the years between 1647 and the Restoration when he returned to Dean Prior, were spent mainly in London. Hesperides, which included the Noble Numbers, was published in 1648.

Perhaps the three most important aspects of this brief biographical note are Herrick's attendance at Cambridge, his association with Jonson and the courtiers and wits who gathered around this famous figure, and the many years he spent at the country vicarage of Dean Prior with his faithful
housekeeper, Prue, and assorted animals including a pig he is reported to have taught to drink out of a tankard. 10

From his years of study at Cambridge came the influence of the ancient Roman writer, Anacreon, Catullus, Horace, Tibullus, Propertius, Ovid, and Martial, reinforced, no doubt, by the influence of the learned Ben Jonson.

The extent of this dual influence on Herrick's verse has been thoroughly explored by Aiken, 11 among others, and it is obviously outside the scope of this paper to deal in any great detail with particular references. However, it is evident that the English poet was thoroughly conversant with the work of all the Augustan Elegists. Influence of each individual, as well as traditions of the school as a whole, may be traced in Herrick's lines. As to the relative importance of the influence of the respective Elegists: one hundred thirty-four Latin parallels are cited in this chapter; of these seventy-three are from Tibullus, thirty-eight from Propertius, seventeen from Ovid, and six from Catullus. 12

The preponderance of the influence of Tibullus on Herrick may well be due to their common interest in country life, 13 and in part to Herrick's own associations with the pastoral life in Dean Prior. In Herrick's To live merrily and to trust to Good Verses, Tibullus takes pride of place in the list of great Roman writers to whom he is drinking the traditional toast. In fact, Herrick utilises a translation from Ovid's Amores concerning Tibullus to develop the poem,

Behold, Tibullus lies
Here burnt, whose small return
Of ashes, scarce suffice
To fill a little Urne.
In the final lines, Herrick reiterates the classical tenet that,

... onely Numbers sweet,
With endless life are crown'd.  

This poem contains several references to Ovid and Martial and its didactic nature is well in the classical tradition.

However, it would be incorrect to give credit to anyone else but Ben Jonson for the dominant influence in Herrick's poetry. Following Jonson's lead, Herrick's poems display the "ageless virtues of clarity, unity, symmetry, and proportions." 

Generally speaking, Herrick follows Jonson's lead in the reaction against the writings of the Petrarchan lyricists of Elizabethan England. Both Jonson and Herrick differ from Donne in their preference for the restrained classical phrase and posture rather than the use of colloquial language and startling images. Another important difference is their self-sufficiency: while Donne is engaging in the violent and exciting process of self-examination and analysis, Jonson and Herrick assume an urbane self-knowledge, and consequently the position of poet-teacher. Like Jonson, Herrick treated the ancients as guidelines and incorporated their wisdom and craftsmanship into his poetry, while retaining those characteristic traits which are essentially his own. Among them we could list the fusion of classical learning and English folklore, the fusion of pagan and Christian ethics, a fanciful lyric talent, a delicacy of touch and a richness of diction, and a delight in spring and youth. All of these are assimilated into one unified vision of the relationship between Man,
Nature and the Seasons. Yet the manner in which Herrick went about describing this unified vision owes a large debt to Jonson's influence.

It is of some significance too, that "while Herrick praised very few English poets, he bestowed a number of tributes on Jonson." It is not difficult to see that it was Jonson's precept and example that led Herrick to the study and imitation of the Greek and Roman lyric, that taught him structural form and precision of style, and that inspired him with his fastidious sense of artistic treatment. He expresses his allegiance to the Master in His Prayer to Ben Jonson,

When I a Verse shall make,  
Know I have praid thee,  
For old Religions sake  
Saint Ben to aide me . . .

Here, "Saint Ben" is a typical integration of classical and religious thought, as is his reference to Jonson as the "rare Arch-poet" in Upon Ben Jonson. Epigram.

In An Ode for Him, Herrick's veneration of Jonson as a teacher and guide is stated unmistakably,

My Ben  
Or come agen:  
Or send to us  
Thy wits great over-plus  
But teach us yet  
Wisely to husband it . . . .

Although both poets owe their poetic standards to a larger tradition, Herricks epigrams reflect the Jonsonian concept of poetry as essentially ethical. Most of them are didactic in one form or another, preaching moderation,
Let Moderation on thy passions waite
Who loves too much, too much the lov'd will hate.

and acceptance of one's lot,

Who with a little cannot be content,
Endures an everlasting punishment.

They promote a sophisticated, restrained attitude towards life,

'Tis no discomfort in the world to fall,
When the great Crack not crushes one, but all

and delight in the pithy comment, stated plainly,

Little you are; for Womans sake be proud;
For my sake next, (though little) be not loud.

and sometimes bawdy,

Scobble for Whoredom whips his wife; and cryes,
He'll slit her nose; But blubb'ring, she replyes,
Good Sir, make no more cuts i'th'outward skin,
One slit's enough to let Adultry in.21

Again, while the carpe diem theme has its roots in a
larger tradition, Jonson's Song to Celia, while dramatically
ironic, has its counterparts in Herrick's To the Virgins, to
make much of time,

Gather ye Rosebuds while ye may,
Old Time is still a'flyng
And this same flower that smiles today,
Tomorrow will be dying.22

And although Catullus is the base for Jonson's To the same,

Kisse, and score up wealthy summer
On my lips, thus hardly sundred,
While you breath. First give a hundred,
Then a thousand, then another
Hundred, then unto the tother
Adde a thousand, and so more ... 23

Herrick's To Anthea, works upon the same theme,

Give me a kisse, and to that kisse a score;
Then to that twenty, adde an hundred more;
A thousand to that hundred; so kisse on,
To make that thousand up a million.
Treble that million, and when that is done,
Let's kisse afresh, as when we first begun.

Perhaps a closer relationship between the two poets is seen in Jonson's The Houre-glasse,

Doe but consider this small dust,
Here running in the Glasse.
By Atomes mov'd;
Could you beleeeve, that this
The body was
Of one that lov'd?

And in his Mistris flame, playing like a flye,
Turn'd to cinders by her eye?
Yes; and in death as life unblest,
To have exprest,
Even ashes of lovers find no rest.

and Herrick's The Houre-glasse,

That Houre-glasse, which there ye see
With Water fill'd, (Sirs, credit me)
The humour was, (as I have read)
But lovers tears unchristalled.
Which, as they drop by drop doe passe
From the upper to the under-glasse,
Do in a trickling manner tell,
(By many a watrie syllable)
That lovers tears in life-time shed,
Do restless run when they are dead.

Both poems work on the same basic image, but where Herrick's figure is the more fanciful, and even less serious, Jonson's poem aims more at the moral lesson to be drawn from the situation. While Herrick's diction in,

Which, as they drop by drop doe passe
From the upper to the under-glasse

is perhaps more successful in creating the impression of tears dropping, and his lines move, in general, more smoothly than Jonson's, Herrick's poem has less of the weight of intellectual and ethical earnestness seen in the Jonson poem.24

In Herrick's The Christian Militant, we find the same
combination of stoicism, Christian faith, and rational self-sufficiency,

That weanes one face (like heaven) and never showes
A change, when Fortune either comes, or goes:
That keepes his own strong guard, in the despight
Of what can hurt by day, or harme by night:
That takes and redelivers every stroake
Of Chance, (as made up all of rock, and oake:)
That sighs at others death; smiles at his own
as we do in Jonson's, To the World,

No, I doe know, that I was borne
To age, misfortune, sickness, griefe.
But I will bear these, with that scognie,
As shall not need thy false reliefs.

Both of these poems appeal to an ideal of human dignity
and civilised behaviour which is their legacy from the urban-
ity of the classical writers. But whereas this "tone" along
with a refined and plain style is the dominant feature of Jon-
son's work, Herrick built upon this base a distinctively indivi-
dual talent, lyrical, sensuous, beautiful and yet incorporat-
ing a great deal of thought.

While it is pointless to undervalue the wealth of assim-
ilated classicism in Herrick's verse, it is useful to remember
that these ideas were modified by the attitudes of a rational
Church of England clergyman of the time, and expanded to
include the English countryside and man's peculiar relation-
ship with this natural world. In this regard, Herrick looks
back to Spenser and the pastoral tradition. His poetry incor-
porates the folk-lore of the English countryside and the pagan
rituals upon which they are based, moulding and modifying it
to his own individual poetic talent.

All of the poems in Hesperides demonstrate this three-in-
one conception of the world. In the numerous flower poems, for example, the flowers exist as symbols of the connection between life and time, between beauty and decay and between birth and death in the life cycle of nature.

In another sense, this viewpoint is a deepened consciousness of the *carpe diem* theme. It is a systematic philosophy which involves a wider awareness of the implications of "eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die." Yet, for all this, Herrick's approach to this "vision" is a simple one. As Rollin says, "Herrick makes his approach to the abstract and supernatural through the natural and commonplace." In *A Meditation for His Mistresse*, the flowers, like young women are subject to nature's raw destructive powers,

You are a lovely July-flower,
Yet one rude wind, or ruffling shower,
Will force you hence, (and in an houre)

You are a sparkling Rose i' th'bud,
Yet lost, ere that chast flesh and blood
Can shew where you or grew, or stood.

As commonplace objects, the "July-flowers" and the "Rose" reflect the larger world view and an awareness of the "naturalness" of death. The flowers are not "victims of the natural cycle; their falling to earth is as necessary as their flourishing." Yet the poem is also an affirmation of life, of the value of loveliness and the beauty of flesh.

There is, in most of the poems in *Hesperides*, an underlying tension between the physical inevitability of death and the affirmation of existence in drinking, friendship, natural beauty, love, sensuality and of the rituals which attend
these positive life-values. In this way there exists a thematic pattern of unity within Hesperides.

Walton is quite incorrect when he says that, "... the Metaphysical manner is beyond Herrick's powers of imagination," and that "Herrick is a poet of a Charmingly fanciful but simple sensibility."²⁹ Herrick's thought is often distilled, and the surface level is misleading. He often uses one word, like "liquefaction" in,

When as in silks my Julia goes  
Then, then (me thinks) how sweetly flowes  
That liquefaction of her clothes  
to imply a wealth of meaning.

In this poem Julia's clothes merge liquidly with her body and her sensual movements, fluid like those of a fish,³⁰ attract the poet's eye. However, in the next stanza,

Next when I cast mine eyes and see  
That brave Vibration each way free;  
O how that glittering taketh me.  
the poet, using fishing terminology,"cast mine eyes," is ironically taken or hooked by the vibrating, glittering lure of Julia's body.³¹ The submerged metaphor makes the poem much more involved than its simple surface appearance. Also, in Upon Electra's Taeares,

Upon her cheekes she wept, and from these showers  
Sprang up a sweet Nativity of flowers,  
Herrick employs one word, "Nativity," with all its associative wealth, to transform a simple statement into one with startling implications. Even a simple epigram,

Putrefaction is the end  
Of all that Nature doth entend
carries considerable weight. Apart from that, the great poetic talent which produces such beautifully limpid and simple lyrics as, To the Virgins to make much of Time, and To Daffodils,

Faire Daffadills, we weep to see
You haste away so soone;
As yet the early-rising Sun
Has not attained his Noone.
Stay, stay,
Until the hasting day
Has run
But to the Even-song
And having pray'd together, we
Will goe with you along.

with their implications of the transience of life is not the work of a slight poet. As Musgrove and Gilbert have pointed out, Herrick inherits a unified vision of the relationship between God, man and the natural world. Although "that vision is present chiefly in suggestion and overtone" in essence it is the same vision as Donne's: that hierarchical cosmology inherited from the middle ages which expounded the interrelationship of all things. In this medieval, philosophical sense, Herrick is a "Metaphysical."

In The Argument of his Book, Herrick is not merely cataloguing those objects of his poetic attention in Hesperides. As Musgrove points out: "There is deliberate progression in this poem; it is itself a microcosm." The poem moves from the natural things, "I sing of Brooks, of Blossomes, Birds and Bowers:" to the very seasons which Control the life Cycle of the objects in question, "Of April, May, of June, and July-flowers." The poem then moves to Man's celebrations of the
seasonal life-cycle, "I sing of May-poles, Hock-carts, wassails, Wakes," which include the celebration of Spring, "Maypoles," the Harvest-home, "Hock-carts," the festive drinking celebrating a successful year, and the hint of the last ceremony of the season and of life itself in "wakes."

Following this, the next line celebrates human regeneration, and the ceremonies which accompany it, "Of Bride-grooms, Brides, and of their Bridall-cakes." The poem then enlarges its microcosmic scope to include human emotions, "Youth," and "Love." The "cleanly-Wentonesse" is also important. At first sight it appears a contradiction. Essentially though, Herrick is implying that sensual love is natural and therefore "clean." We encounter more of this apparent paradox in later poems like Corinna. Next are the life-giving dews and rains of the physical heavens, and the balms, oils, spices and ambergris which symbolise the spiritual world. The line, "I sing of Times transhifting; and I write" is particularly important. It implies the universal analogy, the "parallels and correspondences between men's lives, daily and annual events, and the church calendar, on the one hand, and universal history and the divine story on the other." The poem then moves on to discuss the beginning of things, symbolised in the "Roses" and "Lillies," the realm of the imagination, as in the fairies, "The Court of Mab, and of the Fairie-King" and it concludes on a Christian note by writing of "Hell," and singing, "Of Heaven, and [hoping] to have it after all."

Thus the poem in microcosm explains the subject-matter of
Hesperides. Herrick's field will be the whole of existence.

We could, I suppose, be surprised like Moorman at this seemingly unorthodox union of pagan and Christian beliefs, "... there was in Herrick a curious strain of paganism which accords none too well with his duties as a Christian priest," yet Herrick accommodates both sets of beliefs in many poems with no sense of the incompatibility of the two, just as he intermingles the ideal and the real without any apparent degree of incongruity. This consistent analogising is again seen in Corinna's going a Maying, where the carpe diem theme is given a specifically English setting, and related, implicitly, to the life-cycle. Scholarship has pointed out that this poem has its base in many traditions, the "invitation-to-love," the "pastoral," and the ceremonial poem. The poem suggests haste and its opening lines,

Get up, get up, for shame, the Blooming Morne
Upon her wings presents the god unshorne

are reminiscent of the startling and colloquial opening of many of Donne's poems. In other ways it reminds the reader of those characteristics of the "metaphysical" poem in its display of serious "wit," its argumentative quality and its dramatic presentation of life, love and death. However, the real success of the poem comes from the brilliant manner in which Herrick blends diverse traditional elements with contemporary thought and poetic practice and yet stamps the poem with his own artistic individuality.

The first two lines, for example, balance the dramatic, Donnean opening with a Spenserial idealised personification,
"The Blooming Morne," and a classical identification of the sun god Apollo, "the god unshorne."

Corinna is exhorted not only to enjoy the particular festivity but to participate in life and in the joys of youth. Consequently, "... tis sin, / Nay, profanation to keep in."

May Day, originally a pagan festival, has become also a religious service,"... the Birds have Mattens seyd, / And sung their thankfull Hymnes: ..." Corinna is, "To come forth, like the Spring-time, fresh and greene;" for like all creatures she must participate in the life-cycle, "Corinna, like them, (the "budding" boys and girls) is subject to nature, and to the claims of nature; and the season of spring-time cannot, and ought not, to be denied."<sup>40</sup> Although the poem is essentially a joyous one, there is in the background the hint of mortality, reinforcing the necessity for haste, even in this "harmless follie,"

Come let us goe, while we are in our prime; And take the harmless follie of the time. We shall grow old apace and die Before we know our liberty. Our life is short; and our dayes run As fast away as do's the Sunne: ... .

Again in this poem Herrick interrelates natural things and their counterparts in the human sphere in a ceremonial tribute to life itself. The flowers weep and genuflect, the birds say matins, and the "boys" and "Girls" are themselves "budding flowers." In this poem and in many others, "Herrick's view of nature is a sacramental one, just as G.M. Hopkins' was."<sup>41</sup> It differs significantly in that Herrick fuses the classical
tradition of the bucolic with English folk-lore in a total apprehension of God as revealed in all aspects of existence. It is religious, then, in a manner peculiar to Herrick and modified by his vision of ceremony as integral to religion.

In To a Bed of Tulips, the relationship between the flowers and the virgins is stated as "sister-hoods," and in The Funeral Rite of the Rose, the dying rose is sanctified by the "Holy Sisters" who sing a "sacred Dirge."

In The Cruel Maid, Herrick associates the flowers with innocence, and youth which must decay,

The Lillie will not long endure;  
Nor the Snow continue pure;  
The Rose, the Violet, one day  
See, both these Lady-flowers decay;  
And you must fade, as well as they.  

In these poems and others, Herrick appears to be hinting of a divine analogy between flowers and youth. This divine relationship is made a little clearer in, A Christmas Caroll, sung to the King in the Presence at White-Hall, where Herrick writes,

We see Him come, and know him ours,  
Who with His sunshine, and His showers,  
Tunes all the patient ground to flowers.  

and in the epigram, The Virgin Mary,

To work a wonder, God would have her shown,  
At once, a Bud, and yet a Rose full-blowne.

Yet these remain hints of a larger order, and although we might agree with Musgrove that "Because the physical world is not merely the physical world, because it is interpenetrated by other forms of life, because a plant is also a girl
and a star and a jewel and sometimes Christ himself, the imaginative suggestions of the poetry (except in those poems which do not claim to be more than the trivia of a mundane day) possess a richness, a multiplicity of wealth which both fascinates and illuminates; it would be a mistake to try and read Herrick like William Blake. That he was a more "serious" poet than many critics have thought, and that he had an inherited "medieval" or "metaphysical" conception of the divine whole of creation seems obvious. Yet he was not a mystic. The nature of the majority of poems in his Noble Numbers will not support this case, although in the poems this "unified vision" is apparent.

Another important aspect of Herrick's work is the conception of the relationship between Nature and Art. It is an aesthetic and philosophical understanding which informs much of his poetry.

In the background of his work exists an orthodox acceptance of the "fallen" state of the world. For Herrick, there were two things to be accepted from this state. He is assured of eternal life as a perfect life, and he is also able to create a perfect world out of the flawed universe through his poetry. In his pastoral poetry,

There is hope in the cycle of nature and in poetry. The meadows may die but they are born again; the fairy land may fade, but the poem that contains it may endure. The Sacred Grove reflects a world in flux, but is itself static - a world where Nature can be heightened and made permanent by Art.

Nature and Art then must coexist, Art as the qualifying
control over the wilder excesses of Nature. In this manner Art becomes the perfection of Nature, in terms of human beings as well as the whole physical world. Thus "Dean-bourn" is to Herrick the rudeness and "warty incivility" of Nature unmodified by Art. It is meant also to imply the Devonshire people. Yet, of course, it is not possible for Art to exist without Nature.

In *Delight in Disorder* the aesthetic principle is clarified. On the surface this is a simple poem yet implied in, 

A sweet disorder in the dress  
Kindles in clothes a wantonness  
A lawn about the shoulders thrown  
Into a fine distraction

is a compromise between complete Art and complete Nature. This is, of course, typical of Herrick's desire for moderation in all things. The "sweet disorder" is a carefully cultivated effect where Nature or complete neatness is made more attractive by a studied artfulness. Similarly, the "fine distraction" of "A lawn about the shoulders" is a carefully achieved improvement by Art upon Nature, or the natural straightforward manner of wearing a scarf. Finally, Herrick states that, 

... a wild civility  
Do more bewitch me, than when art  
Is too precise in every part.

The "wild civility" is that combination of Nature and Art, superior to "rudeness" as well as to precise Art, which leads to a perfected World. This aesthetic principle of moderation is carried over into his *Noble Numbers*, and accounts perhaps in part for their lack of fervour and considered simplicity.
The amiable fusion of classical and Christian beliefs seen in Hesperides is continued in Herrick's Noble Numbers. Despite the implicit rejection of His Prayer,

For those my unbaptized Rhimes,
Writ in my wild unhallowed Times;
For every sentence, clause and word,
That's not inlaid with Thee, (my Lord)
Forgive me God, and blot each line
Out of my Book, that is not thine,

he probably wrote his religious verse contemporaneously with his secular poems. Many of the poems lack the vitality of Hesperides and often appear as poetic formalities. Many of them are didactic epigrams, summing up neatly, a homely Christian truth,

God is Jehovam Call'd; which name of His
Implies or Essence, or the He that Is.

His religious faith seems singularly complacent. In His Litanie, to the Holy Spirit, Herrick can joke about the Doctor,

When the artless Doctor sees
No one hope, but of his Fees
And his skill runs on the lees;
Sweet Spirit comfort me.

and his ability,

When his Potion and his Pill,
His, or none, or little skill,
Meet for nothing, but to kill;
Sweet Spirit comfort me.

and although he writes of "Furies in a shoule" the "Tempter" pursuing him, and "flame and hellish cries" there is little of the immediacy of religious experience of other religious poets of this age.47

Herrick, of course, had acquaintance with other
devotional verse, and the process of this cross-fertilisation common in this age is overt. In To Finde God, Herrick employs the "impossibility theme" assuming the role of a Christian metaphysician,

Weigh me the Fire; or, canst thou find
A way to measure out the Wind;
Distinguish all those Floods that are Mixt in that wetrie Theater;

and using the impossibility of measuring the four elements, fire, air, water, and earth, to build up to the impossibility of any comprehension of the Almighty,

This if thou canst; then show me Him That rides the glorious Cherubim.

In Upon Time, there is possibly a trace of George Herbert's influence, and in The Summe and the Satisfaction, Herrick uses the common figure of the debt paid by Christ,

Christ having paid, I nothing owe: For, this is sure, the Debt is dead By law, the Bond once cancelled.

The use of legal terminology, debts, and the tolling bell is common to the devotional verse of both Donne and Herbert.

In The Bellman, Herrick employs these terms in his own simple but effective style,

With my lantern, and my light, And the tinkling of the bell, Thus I walk, and this I tell: Death and dreadfulness call on To the general session; To whose dismal bar, we there All accounts must come to clear. Scores of sins we've made here many, Wiped out few, God knows, if any. Rise ye debtors then, and fall To make payment, while I call.

Herrick also tries his hand at a poem shaped in the form
of a cross, but he has little of Herbert's ability in this kind of work. However, just as Herbert in the Superliminare introduces the classical warning of "procul profani est," "Avoid, Profanenesse; come not here:" Herrick, in Another New-Yeeres Gift, or Song for the Circumcision, does the same,

Hence, hence prophane, and none appears
With anything unhallowed, here: . . .

In the beginning of The Temple, Herbert employs the Perirrhanterium, or the ritual sprinkling or cleansing with water of the Greeks and Romans. Herrick also incorporates this supposedly pagan ritual in the first New-Yeeres Gift,

Cast Holy Water all about
And have a care no fire goes out
But 'cense the porch, and place throughout.

Although it would be difficult to estimate the importance of Herbert's The Temple on Herrick's His Noble Numbers, their common ground in the unadorned lyric style and the simplicity of their faiths suggests a strong compatibility. However, it is unlikely that they moved in the same literary circles. Herrick's connections with London, Ben Jonson and Devonshire are quite distant physically and socially from Herbert and Cambridge, Nicholas Ferrar and Little Gidding.

Perhaps the most effective of Herrick's simpler poems in His Noble Numbers, is his calm statement of faith in his Creed,

I do believe, that die I must,
And be return'd from out my dust:
I do believe, that when I rise,
Christ I shall see, with these same eyes:
I do believe, that I must come,
With others, to the dreadful Doome:
I do believe, the bad must goe
From thence, to everlasting woe:
I do believe, the good, and I,
Shall live with Him eternally:
I do believe, I shall inherit
Heaven, by Christ's mercie, not my merit;
I do believe, the One in Three,
And Three in perfect Unities
Lastly, that Jesus is a Deed
of Gift from God: And here's my Creed.

Yet the simplicity of this poem is somewhat misleading. It
is unwise to assume that Herrick's religious poetry is only
naive, simplistic or emotionally childlike. In To finde God,
we can see evidence of metaphysical thought, and in other
poems the fusion of classical pagan and Christian beliefs sim-
ilar to those found in Herbert's work. His Noble Numbers are
not only unified by a style and mode of thought which is
uniquely Herrick's, but by the underlying theme of the quest
for God, as exemplified in God not to be comprehended.

'Tis hard to finde God, but to comprehend
Him, as He is, is labour without end.

Yet it is true that Herrick's religious verse has none of
the passionate intensity of Donne, or the emotional and sens-
ual fervour of Crashaw. Nor does it have the intellectual
apprehension of Herbert or the mysticism of Vaughan. To
Herrick, God was not a vengeful Yahweh, or a Supreme Being
that one struggled to perceive in intellectual terms but an
accepted fact present in everyday terms and commonplace
activities. This is best seen in A Thanksgiving to God for
His House, where God is present in satisfying and providing
the minutiae of existence. It is a personal prayer of thank-
giving, a conventional Christian exercise yet it incorporates
the Epicurean ideal of few needs and modest want providing the self-sufficiency of freedom. 148

Lord, Thou has given me a cell wherein to dwell
A little house, whose humble roof
Is weather-proof;
Under the spars of which I lie
Both soft and dry;

The humble bucolic setting and the satisfaction with God's provisions is marked. God is also a protector through the night,

Where Thou, my chamber for toward,
Hast set a guard
Of harmless thoughts, to watch and keep
Me while I sleep.

and Herrick returns these blessings with Christian humility and hospitality to the poor,

Low is my porch, as is my fate,
Both void of state;
And yet the threshold of my door
Is worn by the poor
Who thither come and freely get.

Herrick's faith assumes that all things are blessings from God, and shows the modesty of his requests in a list of simple wares,

Like as my parlor, so my hall
And kitchen's small
A little buttery, and therein
A little bin,
Which keeps my little loaf of bread
Unchipped, unflead;

Yet God gives not only physical and spiritual satisfaction but the delight of being alive,

'Tis Thou that crowns my glittering hearth
With guiltless mirth,
And qu'ist me wassail bowls to drink,
Spiced to the brink.

It is not difficult to relate this concept in a religious
poem to Herrick's affirmation of life as expressed in Hesperides. The religious and the secular, it appears, interlock in all his poetry in a ceremonial tribute to God who is the essence of life. The poem moves next into a pastoral setting, and the implication of seasonal renewal is strong,

Lord, 'tis Thy plenty-dropping hand
That soils my land,
And giv'st me, for my bushel sown,
Twice ten for one;
Thou mak' st my teeming hens to lay
Her egg each day;
Besides my healthful ewes to bear
Me twins each year

Finally, Herrick concludes that in return for these many blessings he must, "render for my part / A thankful heart."

It is this combination of Neo-Epicurean concepts of the good life with the sense of man's ultimate relationship with God through the seasons which particularises Herrick's poetry. Ritual and ceremony for Herrick are integral with religious feeling and consequently Corinna's going a Maying is a religious poem, differing only in degree from those of his Noble Numbers. Together then, Hesperides and Noble Numbers constitute a total point of view in which diverse and apparently conflicting philosophies and styles are melded into an unified vision. It is unfortunate that many critics have failed to realise the consistency of Herrick's vision of life, but, as T.S. Eliot says, we tend to

... praise a poet, upon those aspects of his work in which he least resembles anyone else. In these aspects or parts of his work we pretend to find what is individual, what is the peculiar essence of the man. We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors,
especially his immediate predecessors. To approach Herrick from this critical viewpoint is to miss the most important asset of his poetry, his capacity to learn from, assimilate, and recreate in his own terms and in reference to his times the important fruits of the past culture. As T.S. Eliot says, it is possible that "we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously."

Herrick's poetry then reflects a measured intellectual and emotional attitude to the complex forces which were in vogue during his lifetime. Life and art are fused in an assimilation of Renaissance humanism, Christian doctrine and metaphysics, folk-lore and classical literature. Yet all are touched with the individual talent which controlled and utilised this variety of contrasting forces into poetry which was sometimes of the highest order.
NOTES


3 I am referring here to Louis Martz's work, The Poetry of Meditation (Yale, 1962).


5 Witherspoon and Warnke, p. 709.

6 Bush, p. 115.

7 ibid.

8 ibid.

9 ibid.

10 ibid., p. 117.


12 ibid., p. 82.

13 ibid., p. 83.


This traditional notion of poetry as the only thing which endures is repeated in His Poetrie his Pillar,

Behold this living stone
I reare for me,
Ne'r to be thrown
Downe, envious Time by thee.

and other poems. It assumes considerable importance in Hesperides.

15 Herrick puns on Ovid's name, Naso. For other references, see J. Max Patrick, p. 116.

16 Bush, p. 111.

NOTES (cont.)

18 Bush, p. 115.
19 Moorman, p. 171.
20 The epigrams are probably based on those of Martial.
22 One important difference between the two poems is the manner in which Herrick relates youth to Spring and flowers. This will be dealt with later.
24 Jonson's line structure may well be employed for this purpose.
25 Ben Jonson, op. cit., p. 49.
27 ibid., p. 46.
28 "cleanly-wantonesse" see section on The Argument of His Book.
30 "Fish" in these times had many sexual overtones such as female genitals, a loose woman, etc., see E. Partridge, Shakespeare's Bawdy, N.Y., 1960. Perhaps the poem refers to the attraction of Julia's fluidity in the fullest sense. In Corinna there are also sexual overtones.
31 Rollin, p. 87.
34 Bush, op. cit., p. 118.
35 Musgrove, op. cit., p. 5.
36 The Complete Poems, p. 11.
37 Moorman, p. 156.
NOTES (cont.)

38 Both Cleanth Brooks in The Well Wrought Urn, and S. Musgrove in The Universe of Robert Herrick, give much more detailed explanations than the scope of this paper can afford.

39 Rollin, op. cit., p. 96.


42 On Julia's Recovery, for example.

43 Musgrove is referring here to the "Rose of Sharon," from To His Saviour, a Child; a Present by a Child,

Go pretty child, and beare this Flower
Unto thy little Saviour;
And tell Him by that Bud now blown
He is the Rose of Sharon known . . .

44 Musgrove, p. 31.

45 In some ways he is closer to Neo-Stoicism but this philosophy is informed by Christian humanism and amplified by the affirmation of naturalism. Moderation is perhaps the single most important tenet of his philosophy.


47 It is of interest perhaps that, apart from an aside concerning Herrick's "Litany" on page 137, Martz ignores Herrick's religious verse in his book, The Poetry of Meditation, although Herrick's, His Anthem, to Christ on the Crosse, has a distinct tripartite structure, as has An Ode, or Psalme, to God. Of course, these are traditional structures not necessarily reliant upon meditative traditions.

48 Rollin, p. 71.


50 Ibid., p. 22.
A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


PAPER III.

PATRICK WHITE'S FOUR PLAYS IN THE LIGHT OF HIS NOVELS:

SOME STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS
It may come as a surprise to some people, that Patrick White, best known as a novelist, and with such successes in this field as *Voss*, *The Tree of Man* and *The Aunt's Story*, should turn his attention to writing plays. The reasons for this are open to speculation. Perhaps the dramatic art appeared as a challenge - a new kind of creative discipline in which he could express more readily his artistic drive.

However, from all accounts he has been constantly interested in the theatre, for he was writing revue sketches for a short time in pre-war London for Herbert Farjeon.\(^1\) Also of significance is the fact that *The Ham Funeral* was written in 1947, at an early stage in White's career as a writer.\(^2\) It is, then, less surprising that they were written than that they are as successful as they are if we consider the absolute authority which a writer has in terms of a novel and the more objective control, by comparison, which a playwright must exercise over a play.
The main critical problem in approaching White's plays seems to concentrate in the area of structure. It appears that the plays have confused some critics because of three important and interrelated difficulties. First of all, the informing philosophy of the plays is one which is very close to the Absurdist conception of the human condition. Most of his novels are also concerned with an existential viewpoint and these beliefs enter into the plays. However it seems that White is content to use a modified "formula" play to convey these ideas. A third and further complication arises from the fact that White the novelist is unwilling to change totally into White the playwright. Because of this, some aspects of his artistic position as a novelist enter into the dramatic form of the plays.

There are occasions in all of the Four Plays by Patrick White where it is possible to sense that the creator is loath to let his creation live of its own accord. In fact, White is opposed to the director-oriented plays which carve a play to suit a particular production, "It is no secret that he (White) is more reluctant than most writers for the theatre to alter a play script once it has achieved a form with which he is satisfied."4

In his novels as in his plays, White is deeply concerned with structure. Part of the uncomfortable nature of White's later novels is the impressionistic manner in which he shifts suddenly, building in what appears at first to be a series of disjointed parts. This is largely a result of his keen
awareness of the fragmentary and inchoate nature of existence and of the irrational universe in which man lives. The reader, as the audience, must constantly make the effort to relate and interpret the fragments into the broad outline of the whole. In the late novels, White demands an increasing, sensitive attention from his readers, and in his plays, in particular, The Ham Funeral, the audience must be prepared to accept movements in and out of various moods. The scene with the two old ladies is a case in point. While it may be classified as an interlude and bears some vague relation to the rest of the play in the reference to the dead foetus, it is more distracting than advantageous to the play as a whole. It is an excursion, it seems into the philosophy of the theatre of the absurd which draws the audience for a brief moment into something close to the irrational humour and horror of an existential universe.

But although the play is concerned with the Young Man's realisation of his alienation, the total context of this brief scene is within a play which approximates naturalism at many points. The audience is drawn into an irrational world and then returned to a play which for the most part relies on the standard practices of the well-made play. The switch would, I think, confuse most audiences, because this demand for critical viewing depends for its success on a highly sophisticated audience. It is plain that White believes in the artistic integrity of the play's structure.
He is quite ready to adjust lines that actors find difficulty in speaking, or to make small adjustments to the flow of a scene; but he resists firmly any attempt by a producer to make drastic cuts or rearrangements. White does not see the actual writing of plays as a cooperative task, though he is clearly fascinated, as any true playwright must be, by the mechanics of translating written words into speech and action.5

This, of course, is a fundamental problem, but this technique obviously legislates against the best possible chances for a play's success in the theater. In the prologue to The Ham Funeral, the Young Man tells us that the play is "a piece about eels,"6 and if the audience did not recognise that this is one of White's favorite images of life, of the blind, physical, twisting and intertwining of humanity in a search of a purpose, we could search in vain throughout the rest of the play for its significance. There is also something quite self-consciously defensive about the Young Man's stern pronouncement to the audience concerning the play. "Probably a number of you are wondering by now whether this is your kind of play. I am sorry to have to announce the management won't refund any money. You must simply sit it out, and see whether you can't recognize some of the forms that will squirm before you in this mad, muddy mess of eels." (p. 15).

If it is an attempt at "alienation" in the style of the prologue to Brecht's The Caucasian Chalk Circle, it has limited success. The audience is committed to follow the action through the focus of the Young Man, and his comments on aspects of the situation detach him in part from the situation, while the audience remains largely subject to the Young Man's
interpretations. In one sense the Young Man is the novelist weighing the events for the audience and debating their implications. Yet in other ways he is obviously an unreliable leader for an audience to follow. His aestheticism, for example, seems forced,

> When I was a boy, I mooned about in a garden.
> I tried to fit words to the sounds of nature and the shape of lilacs, (p. 21)

in contrast with the landlady's colloquial reference to him on the next line as having "a screw loose." At yet another point early in the play, the Young Man asks himself, "Am I the chorus to this play?" (p. 28) Unfortunately for the audience, his answers not only fail to clarify his situation but offer yet another difficult reference, "No one ever cursed the chorus. Serpents only slither from the sea to strangle those who are big enough." (p. 28), unless the audience grasps the fact that this play is a dramatic attempt at a Kunstlerroman in which the theme is the struggle of the artist for his self-hood. Most of the Young Man's longer speeches are an attempt to explain himself to the audience, and while the play has some aspects of dramatic naturalism, it is clear that White intends us to leave the naturalism and listen to this duality of the main character. The audience is asked to listen to the Young Man as both chorus and artistic viewpoint, commenting at one time on the meaning of the play, and at another time directing our emotional responses towards his artistic development. The result is somewhat confusing. Furthermore, to a large degree, the play is not "dramatic" in
the sense that the characters are engaged with each other in a clash of motive with motive, but "dramatic" in the existence of a relationship between the Young Man and the audience. At times even this is tenuous. The play is more like a novel in that the tension and the action tend to be internalised within the Young Man. But instead of dramatising this internal action, White tends to rely too much upon the Young Man's soliloquies to communicate this conflict.

As a play, The Ham Funeral has affinities with the form of a novel. Wayne Booth points out that the novel seeks "realism of presentation" in a world in which reality is becoming "more and more ambiguous, relativistic, and mobile." Consequently, it sacrifices "something of the realism of assessment of other genres." Particularly in drama, this ambiguity needs simplification.

Some of the difficulty in following the gist of The Ham Funeral is a result of this novelist-dramatist ambivalence in the author. The play's complications and apparent paradoxes are those of a novelist who has not yet developed the refining process necessary for drama. As Wayne Booth says,

A play is likely to depend for its success on a consensus established immediately and without reflection; without some sort of community gathered together in one spot, the theatre cannot survive, and even the most disturbing plays are almost always built upon easily grasped, commonly accepted norms, in contrast with the complex and troubling values of much fiction. What is more, any unintentional ambiguities the playwright may leave on his play are to some extent removed by a good production; each director imposes his interpretation by defining, with his unnumerable
devices of production, the potentially ambiguous elements.11

White, as has been noted, objects to the interference of a producer. Unfortunately The Ham Funeral certainly suffers from a surfeit of ambiguities.

It is interesting to note the close relationships between The Ham Funeral vis-a-vis White's development as an artist, and James Joyce's comments on the relation of an artist to his materials, as expounded by Stephen in Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. In the lyric, the relationship is immediate, "The simplest verbal gesture"12 uttered by a man, "more conscious of the instant of emotion than of himself as feeling emotion." "The simplest epical form is seen emerging out of lyrical literature when the artist prolongs and broods upon himself as the centre of an epical event."13

For Stephen Dedalus, if not Joyce, the dramatic form "is reached when the personality of the artist, having passed into the narration, arrives at the stage where "the vitality which has flowed and eddied round each person fills every person with such vital force that he or she assumes a proper and intangible aesthetic life."14 The artist's personality is "impersonalised" and "refines itself out of existence."15

Despite the possibility that Joyce was employing a degree of irony in giving these aesthetic principles to Stephen Dedalus,16 the general point, I think, holds true. White may not have, at the time of writing The Ham Funeral, arrived at that stage of artistic development necessary for creating a play in complete and unadulterated dramatic form.
While it is necessary in all literature that a writer avoid the familiar and repetitive pattern of a supposed genre, the totally novel form will be unintelligible—is indeed unthinkable. The genre represents, so to speak, a sum of aesthetic devices at hand, available to the writer, and already intelligible to the reader (audience). The good writer partly conforms to the genre as it exists, partly stretches it.17

White's plays represent this struggle to unify form and context.

A novelist entering the field of drama must make certain radical changes in his approach. He faces the problem of a limitation of time and space, for although a novel can order and integrate vast areas of experience, simplifying problems of communication by modifying comments, a play must work without the author's overt presence. It must find "short cuts to the imagination"18 in order to exist. White faced this problem in his adaptation of A Cheery Soul and his solutions were not always effective.

In a play, the dramatist must employ a more direct sensibility because he does not have the opportunity for leisurely exposition or a philosophical description of a state of consciousness. The play must grow from the ground up and the state of consciousness must come alive on the stage. The economy of this dramatic vitality is of great importance in that a character is "dramatized impulse" rather than "a dossier of observed fact."19 If there is one key deficiency in White's plays it is in this area.

Perhaps one of the reasons is that to a large extent he
is moving philosophically towards the position of the Theatre of the Absurd without being able to break through the superstructure of naturalist theatre. As his novels, his plays are deeply concerned with an existential universe within which neither logic, nor the intellect or emotions will prevail. Yet the plays rely largely upon naturalistic conventions, with a few imaginative tricks to convey the dominant theme of an absurd human condition. In a sense they examine new problems with old techniques - the new wine cannot be contained in the old bottles.

There is some evidence to show that White was aware of the difficulties he was facing in The Ham Funeral. In the programme notes on its first production in 1961, White writes, "It is not a naturalistic play. The chief problem was how to project a highly introspective character on the stage without impairing dramatic progress." This is difficulty enough when the play largely depends upon the Young Man for its success. His role is a complex one demanding the dramatic presentation of a somewhat priggish, embryonic aesthete. With that role come all the dangers involved of alienating the audience's sympathy for him. White's solutions,

\[\text{I have tried to overcome this, partly through the conflict between The Young Man and those human symbols Mr. and Mrs. Lusty, the figures in the basement with whom he wrestles in his attempt to come to terms with life, partly through the dialogues between the Young Man and his anima, the Girl in the room opposite.}\]

need examination. The play's staging is some help. Physically, the Young Man moves between the upper levels on the
stage, representing the Ideal, and the lower level or basement, representing the animal and instinctual. The tension within the Young Man is thus spatially paralleled by the physical appearance of the stage. The Girl in the upper level, as Jungian "soul-image" or "anima" and the Young Man carry on a conversation, it is true, but their dialogue is a discussion of "ideas," and diverse ones at that.

At other times it seems that White is seduced by the fine turn of phrase, the "poetic" or "literary" statement, to the detriment of the dramatic immediacy of the play.

Girl . . . the bough raps out the answer on the window. It is even in the basement . . . . where the landlord's teeth have left their bite in the stale crust, and potato peelings are oracles to those who learn how to read them. (p.32)

Fourth Relative . . . the nettle is silent that screeched in the gritty wind. (p. 59).

The audience would, I think, understandably, lose its way in these largely metaphysical statements,

Young Man. Once I almost wrote a play, in which the situations were too subtle to express. Girl. (ironical) But the attitudes were your own, and would have given you endless pleasure. (p. 55)

Yet the girl, or alter-ego, forces the Young Man back down to the basement, to the reality of life and its basic drives.

Young Man (to Girl) You, too! You're forcing me back to the dead landlord . . . tying them to me . . . like a great weight. (p. 55-6) At this stage, the Young Man is not prepared to stand alone in a universe which he in incapable of comprehending.
The moral education of the Young Man must create in him a new awareness of the life around him. White attempts to do this by building tension between the Young Man's artistic pretensions and his avowed ignorance of life, "The answer is either tremendously simple, or tremendously involved. But either way, it's something I still fail to grasp." (p. 21)

The "answer" is not within the realms of the Jungian "soul-image" to answer, but in the intuitive understanding of the landlord. Significantly, the landlord is part of the lower animality, yet transcends this by his intuitive understanding of its nature. But even here White detaches the Young Man from the play, for the Young Man's comments exist both for himself and the audience.

Young Man Is this a tragedy? Or is it two fat people in a basement turning on each other? (p. 27)

In this scene the landlady is talking to Will Lusty but he is talking to no one in particular, and the Young Man, like a chorus or a novelist-commentator, speaks at odds with both the others.

Landlady I can taste the whelks! I can hear the flares! You can see right inside of a person by the light of acetylene flares.

Landlord I sit 'here, I am content. Life, at last, is wherever a man 'appens to be. This 'ouse is life. I watch it fill with light, an' darken. These are my days and nights. The solid 'house spreadin' above my head. Only once in a while I remember the naked bodies . . . Knotting together . . . killing themselves . . and one another . . . Bloody deluded!

Young Man He's a sensitive beast, this landlord, inside his underclothes and I disliked him. I loathed him. I was almost afraid. Perhaps this is why. (p. 27)
Also in this section important aspects of the characters' different attitudes towards life are brought out clearly; Alma Lusty's physicality, Will Lusty's contented and intuitive mysticism, and the Young Man's shrinking self-concern.

Even though the landlord gives the answer to the Young Man's questions,

Landlord (laughing in his throat, speaking not particularly to his wife, spreading his hand on the table-top) This table is love . . if you can get to know it . . . (p. 27)

It is only after the landlord's death that the Young Man realises his responsibility to understand for himself.

Young Man (appalled) It depends on me! (in revolt) Me! (p. 36)

From this point in the play the landlady's physicality is accentuated. The relatives who attend the ham funeral are strange impressionistic creatures, figments, as White says, "of the conscience with its multiple forebodings." In one sense they are reminiscent of the kinds of type figure prevalent in the theatre of the Absurd. They enlarge upon Alma Lusty's past and reinforce Will Lusty's belief that "a human bein' must purge 'imself of 'is own evil." (p. 49) The Young Man in sententious and the landlady's moods and outbursts isolate her from the understanding of either the relatives or the Young Man. Paradoxically the Young Man becomes for Alma Lusty alternately her past lover and her dead son. Her love for both of these projections is uniformly physical. Motivated by an innate drive for reproduction which she misunderstands as "love," Alma Lusty unwittingly forces upon the
Young Man a realisation of the impersonal and apparently meaningless cycle of birth, copulation and death to which he is subject.

During the landlady's desperate attempts to communicate with the Young Man through the flesh, his cry of, "I saw your face," (p. 63) repeated three times is indicative of his realisation that he personally is involved in the physical world, and that, "... for the first time, one face emerges from the crowd. Now, for the first time he cannot play the onlooker but is actually involved in another's needs. His cry is that of an invaded selfhood." Also implied is the Young Man's realisation of feminine sexuality. "I saw your face. It was horrible!" (p. 63)

After the Young Man's sexual encounter with the landlady, he rejects the flesh as inadequate, but his spiritual virginity has been lost and as the girl tells him, "On many future occasions you'll wrestle with the figures in the basement..." (p. 69) In understanding and forgiving Mrs. Lusty, the Young Man further realises that his poetic philosophy of self-concern in the form of the girl must be faced. Breaking down the Girl's door, he finds only a spray of lilac, the last remnant of "the pale exquisite verses of adolescence" (p. 70).

However, at this important dramatic point, the audience is again called upon to listen to a soliloquy by the Young Man which examines the situation in Narcissistic terms, thereby losing some of the impact previously made. The
commentator intrudes. The appearance next of the real Girl, that is, Phyllis Pither, the pale, catarrhal and real inhabitant of the Girl's room then switches the audience back to the main train of the play's thought. The Young Man, now compassionate, and with some understanding of his own alienation is prepared to leave. Scenes 9 and 10, in which the Young Man leaves, have an impressive and delicate touch. The Young Man is composed, and the character of Mrs. Lusty comes to life on the stage with great vitality. It is churlish and a little puritannical to suggest that, "If Mrs. Lusty, slobbering among her cockroaches, represents the life the Young Man is required to accept, what, one wants to protest, is there to revere, why should anyone want it on these terms?"25

White is simply stating that the flesh is merely the flesh, alluring or horrible, and must be accepted for itself. Mrs. Lusty's life does have a quality of love and warmth, estranged as it is in an impersonal and pointless existence, and it is important that she is not, like the Relatives and the Girl, a symbolic figure. White's point is precisely that the flesh is not symbolic and to argue as Thelma Herring does,

At a purely symbolic level one cannot impeach the moral that the Young Man must come to terms with the flesh; but at a symbolic level one would expect the flesh to be made a little more alluring,26

is to miss the point entirely.

However, this is one of the difficulties of The Ham
Funeral which seems to demand study rather than performance. Although the set visually presents the difference between the rarefied atmosphere of the upper layers and the hot undergrowth of the lower layers there is a danger that the main protagonist will not succeed in developing sufficient tension between the two in any meaningful dramatic manner other than in wordy self-contemplation and commentary. Of course, the play is partly about the pretentious speech of the embryonic poet, and White at times contrasts the Young Man's speech with one of his earthier characters in order to deflate the Young Man's pseudo-prophetic commentaries. But the fault remains.

In The Season at Sarsaparilla, the novelist still remains in the play in the character of Roy, the schoolteacher. He is an artist-manque trapped in the Procustean bed of suburban mediocrity and embittered by it. The absurdity of existence in "Sarsaparilla" pervades the whole play and is lightened by no spark of understanding or hint of change. Despite his philosophic viewpoint, the play is structurally "well-made." All of the other characters are given naturalistic speech, but Roy interrupts the action too frequently to act as the mouthpiece of the author.

The comments of the schoolteacher become the interruption with the result that we tend to wince whenever he comes forward to address the audience. White has here, I think, underestimated his audience or perhaps his own powers of naturalistic exposition, for each of the schoolteacher's direct comments appear redundant: they tell us what we have already understood with perfect clarity from the action.27
Like the Young Man, he is part chorus, part novelist-commentator, reflecting on the commonplace activities of the three families, "as a teacher, a shadowy participant in them, as an artist and observer; and as a young man affected by them."  

Yet White is too much of an artist to leave Roy merely as a chronic commentator, standing "against the proscenium arch in his characteristic attitude for observing." (p. 173) The schoolteacher's pretensions are ironically exposed in his attitude and behaviour concerning Julia's death. Julia pinpoints his character,

*Julia* (coldly) I have never given myself. Any more than you have ventured down . . . off the fence . . . into life. (p. 144)

He too belongs to this mediocre setting of stifled emotions. The best he can offer in terms of personal involvement is money.

*Roy* (calling) *Julia!* If you're short in any way . . . (p. 144)

With the rest of his characters, White succeeds brilliantly in capturing the tepid and pointless nature of Australian lower middle-class existence. Even Judy Pogson, the pleasant young girl who studies the violin at the conservatorium, lacks the courage to strive for excellence and her pseudo-intellectualism falls easily into a promise of mundanity with Roy the postal clerk, who brings volumes of Gibbon as courting gifts. The three households are immersed in "the deadly aphorism of mediocrity by which Sarsaparillans rule their lives."  

Niceness, "Well that's the way it is
(sententious) Girl've got to learn to be nice, then they marry some nice man. And have a lot of little babies," (p. 124) normality, "I've never known anybody who wasn't normal. Without they were real dills," (p. 88) and a hundred other mindless, stifling platitudes which form the mediocre fabric of this society. The philosophical step from this play to Waiting for Godot seems minimal. Structurally, the difference between the two plays is enormous.

As in the other plays, the set is also important. White employs the three houses side by side, and their inhabitants, as a commentary on each other. Mavis' "dumb cow" fertility contrasts with Nola's frustrated sterility, the nightsoil balances Rosedale, yet essentially all the inhabitants live purposelessly. The women, trapped in their individual houses, chorus their enslavement in a manner which reveals their character, as well as their mutual estrangement.

Mavis  Food, food . . .
Gertie  . . . food is always the question . . .
Nola  . . . meals to shove in front of men
Gertie  Steak, chops, chops, steak . . .
Nola  Meat is a must for men . . . with the juice running out . . and a nice piece of fat to get their tongues around.
Mavis  Eggs are livery in the end.
Gertie  I always say: Educate them in daintiness. A nice spaghetti on toast. Or beans. All this meat! Daintiness pays . . .

Whereas in The Ham Funeral stage space is used to supplement physically the inner confusion of the Young Man, in The Season at Sarsaparilla, the three sets are on the same level of meaningless existence.

Paralleling the emasculated emotions and eviscerated
natural rhythms of the human beings in Sarsaparilla, is the background of real nature in the form of the bitch and its attendant dogs. In this particular aspect of the play, White's satire is directed largely at Girlie Pogson and the frigid conformity which she imposes on life. But Mavis, too, concurs with this when she, "takes young Pippy in hand, swathing her inquiring mind in Sarsaparillan cotton wool: 'Big girls don't talk about things like that.'" (p. 123)  

Although successful in painting a broad picture of this society and its typical attitudes, the actual focus of the play is a little confusing. It seems to lose something in intensity by its distribution of effects over so many characters. A novel could conceivably handle this many in a spectrum of human existence. The play spends its vitality on diverse points. We could perhaps see Nola Boyle as the touchstone to the whole play though not Roy Childs, whose role as a commentator detaches him from the action. However, the character who draws most of the threads together is Pippy. It is she who realises White's main theme, that life is pointless subjection to oppressive continuity.

Pippy (nursing her head) But its gunna begin again. (Clive and Girlie look at her aghast)
Clive and Girlie (together) When?
Pippy In six months time
Girlie (almost crying) But it shouldn't be allowed!
Pippy Every six months. For ever and ever.
(p. 125-6)  

Significantly, Pippy is the only character who moves from one house to another.
Unlike Roy, who necessary experience has embittered, Pippy brings an innocence to her observations which removes all bitterness from her first experience of White's conception of the "Life Force." Dramatically, she relates the title of the play, "Season," to the pursuit of the bitch by the pack of dogs, and its human counterparts in the three houses. Mrs. Pogson creates an artificial facade of "niceness" against the "Life Force," which is destroyed in Pippy by her observation of Nola Boyle and Rowley Masson behaving with animal sexuality. However, even Mrs. Knott's baby does not reintegrate for Pippy, a universe which signifies chaos.

In the birth of Mavis' child the natural world intrudes into the sterility of Sarsaparilla. But, apart from Pippy and Nola Boyle the rest of Sarsaparilla sees the birth in terms of "niceness." Whether there is "acceptance and assurance" about the continuity of life and whether the play is a "celebration" of this continuity is debatable. Pippy's statement "Over, and over, and over. For ever, and ever, and ever. That's nature!" (p. 176) reveals an understanding of larger proportions than simply the bitch's season of heat, or the child's birth. Here, White is referring to the terrible energy of his conception of the life force which consumes as it creates. It is represented in the character of Alma Lusty of The Ham Funeral which, paradoxically, destroys in its drive to fulfil itself.

In The Season at Sarsaparilla, Nola Boyle, like Alma
Lusty, is a frustrated representative of White's "Life Force," middle aged and childless. Her adultery with Rowley Masson is the central action of the play but its significance is not immediately clear. It would perhaps be simplistic to equate Nola with the bitch, and Rowley Masson with the dogs whose responsibilities end with the sexual act, but the relationship seems logical. Nola Boyle stands apart from the other women in the play in that her sexual responses are more akin to that of the natural world. Girlie, Judy and Mavis are entirely Sarsaparillan, and Julia's Sarsaparillan guilt leads her to kill herself because of her pregnancy. Nola's guilt is that of Sarsaparilla but her explanation of it,

(After a pause, choking, running her hands down her flanks). It's this blasted body. It's put together wrong. If your hips was to work different . . . or there were'it none of those pulses in your throat (looking up at the Pogson house, bitterly) I bet some women aren't all that good. They just haven't got the kind of glands it takes to make a person go to the pack. (p. 150)

leads away from the suburban hypermorality to an understanding of individual sensuality, of the demands of the flesh in opposition to the Rosedale morality of Girlie Pogson.

White emphasises this point by counterpoising the seduction in the Boyle household with the activities of the bitch and the pack under the Pogson house. Nola, like the bitch, "has never really liked men. She only needed them." (p. 128)

Similarly, Nola and the bitch are trapped physically by the innate characteristics of their natural sexuality,

Nola  Are you going to get out of Ernie's house tonight?
Masson (getting up, looking at her straight)
No . . . (p. 128)

Pippy's comments follow immediately and relate to both the bitch and Nola,

Pippy (watching activities under Pogson house)
It happened then . . . She's all . . . caught up . . . (p. 128)

The inevitability of this situation is made quite pointedly. Just as the bitch cannot or will not escape from the dogs, neither has Nola the will to resist the physical presence of Masson.

Rowley Masson appears superficially to be a satirical caricature of the Australian "digger," and his relationship with Ernie, the sentimental rubbish of Australian "mateship." White exposes his shallowness and the facade of this "mateship" relationship, but he goes a little further, associating Masson with the pack of dogs, as irresponsible and selfish sexuality. While Masson is a free agent, with no ties with Sarsaparillan suburbia, ironically, he has not real ties with life itself.

Nola, on the other hand, is beset by a self-destructive honesty which Masson cannot understand. She leaves obvious evidence of their adultery for Ernie to find upon his return from his night-soil job. However, Ernie, like Will Lusty, has learnt to accept the mutual hopelessness of their situation. However the play does not suggest that there will be a significant alteration in either of these two characters.

The dialogue between the three characters facing each
other the next morning is brilliant. Here White the novelist is the equal of Pinter in producing the few numbed commonplace which illustrate the unspoken and deep emotions involved. The dramatic eloquence of this scene is astounding. It moves from naturalism to individual reverie and back with great ease. It is perhaps here, against the background of other Sarsaparillan inadequacies, that White's main point is made in this play. That is, that humanity is utterly subject to the inescapable, impersonal cyclic processes of living which have the potential for destruction in its drive for creation. Nor is there any escape from it behind facades, or by physically detaching oneself from it. As Roy says, at the end of the play, "You can't shed your skin . . . even if it itches like hell! (p. 177).

In *A Cheery Soul*, White forsakes for the first time the novelist commentator as a character, but he is replaced by various groups of people and choruses who comment. Developed as this play is, from the short story in *The Burnt Ones*, the play employs these choruses as a substitute for the internal monologues which dominate the corresponding parts of the story. But in the play they are more incantatory than reflective and more technical jugglery than organic.

While the short story succeeds in developing the past conflict between Miss Docker and Miss Lillie, in a series of leaps into the memories of both characters, the play's attempt lacks its depth. Although the chorus "questions and comments on the staged flashback of Mrs. Lillie's marriage" it cannot
do the job of the author. As Burrows says, "The prior existence of the story accounts for these devices. It does not justify them." 36

But there is a major dramatic fault in this play which derives from the story. While we can accept the movement from the Custance's house in the short story, its dramatization splits the play structurally into two parts. Although Act I is important, perhaps, in establishing Miss Docker on the stage, the audience must be confused to see the last of the Custances after Act I is completed. The manner in which Act I ends, would also tend to make the audience see it as a totality, such is the finality of the Custance's rejection of Miss Docker.

The following Acts constitute virtually another play. The naturalism of the First Act dissolves into expressionism in which the present and the past intertwine with fact and fantasy. Much of this is confusing because of an inadequate exposition in the beginning. But the swift change after one act of naturalistic drama into a strange mixture of dream, fantasy and reality would confuse an audience. White's reasons are plain. He was trying to recreate dramatically the past history of the relationship between Miss Docker and Miss Lillie. In the short story this was possible. Attempting to do the same thing in the same sequence as a play, White does not succeed. The difference is not simply between the story and the play. This particular section of A Cheery Soul pinpoints the different approach necessary for drama.
There are other aspects of the story which gain from visual dramatic presentation.

In Act I, Miss Docker is seen as a fuller "militant virtue" than she is in the story. The mutton shanks in the story merely testify to Miss Docker's charity, but in the play the dialogue twists the context around to where Miss Docker is implying that Mrs. Custance is uncharitable. Mrs. Custance realises much earlier the degree of intrusion which Miss Docker represents. The last scene also gains in impact from its stage presentation, though the forms of the chorus tend to get in the way, distracting the audience to some degree from Miss Docker's final humiliation.

Despite all this, the play is not as bad as Argyle would have us believe. Although its surface is comic, its deeper vision is ironically dark. Superficially, Miss Docker exemplifies the sin of the do-gooder whose "militant virtue" (p. 258) leads her to destroy victim after victim. She is the embodiment of the externals of charity without its spirit and is thus destructive. She is incapable of true charity, in the Christian sense, because she has never experienced love herself. Nor has it ever crossed her mind that the recipients of love must be willing, "I could breathe love into the dead ... if they was only willing ...". (p. 260)

There is sinister potential in Miss Docker despite the humor which attends her. She is symbolic of a Christianity which has lost contact with spiritual life and has substituted the Girlie Pogson, Sarsaparillan concepts of selfish goodness.
The Custances escape her with minor wounds, but we are shown her destructive power in the Old Ladies Home, and in the destruction of the sincere, struggling young clergyman, Mr. Wakeman. In the Church scene, the juxtaposition of Mr. Wakeman's "if I am shortly to be judged, O Lord," with Miss Docker's "If I am about to judge, O Lord," (p. 255) reveals Miss Docker's terrifying lack of self-knowledge of her total lack of deep compassionate understanding. Although much of this scene is a parody of a religious service, and amusing, Miss Docker dominates it with her terrifying self-righteousness. She is a creature of surfaces and external trappings who is so blinded by good works that she fails to see that she is spiritually dead. In this sense she is a sympathetic character. She is as lost a soul as the people she destroys. But she perpetrates horrors. Even when Wake- man desperately attempts to save Miss Docker, and thus himself, her interruptions are about the externals but nevertheless destroy the intrinsic and spiritual. In many ways, A Cheery Soul is a modern Morality play, with a theme of the sin of superficial love.

Mr. Wakeman's symbolic murder at Miss Docker's hands can be extremely successful apparently, although there seems a good likelihood of its degenerating into melodrama or even farce. But despite Mrs. Wakeman's accusations, "Miss Docker, you have killed my saint. (with an effort) Only time will show whether you have killed my God as well," (p. 260). Miss Docker is only confused by the inability of those around her
to see her righteousness. While her employment of useful knowledge on how to polish a car, how to manage plants, colds, and rosebushes, and how to nurse sick people is comic, there are serious implications in the manner in which she earnestly pursues her good works. It is possible to see in her the symbolic force of a malevolent universe. Philanthropy without charity is destruction. In the end she is judged for this. Only in the last scene when she extends her help to a dog and is rejected does she begin to see that she has been judged. As the swagman says when Miss Docker asks him why a dog should wet her leg, "That's somethun you should of asked the dawg." (p. 263) Despite her recognition of judgment, Miss Docker, broken but not destroyed, gives a shilling to a Swaggie, and carries on.

In Night on a Bald Mountain, White moves away from the experimentation of A Cheery Soul into a more naturalistic vein. Again, however, there is an inherent tension between philosophic content and dramatic form. His characters are trapped incommunicado in a meaningless universe yet their suffering is portrayed in terms of something close to a "formula" play. As in the other plays, White employs two levels on the stage as a commentary on each other. In Act One, Sword and Denis are on the lower level, and Sword is rejecting with cold ferocity the poetry sent him by adolescents in the hope of his warm human understanding. At the same time, on the higher level Miriam, by contrast, is trying to create a warm human relationship with Stella. The physical situation
heightens the dramatic tension between Sword and Miriam, and
emphasises the positive character of Stella, in relation to
the dead lost souls which surround her. In this play, White
is able to get by without employing much of the novelist-
commentator who kept interfering with his other plays, though
Craig and Mrs. Sibley act at times in this capacity. Their
importance otherwise is minimal.

This play also emphasises the Absurdist tenet of the
inadequacy of language as a means of human communication. In
the other plays language has failed to break through the bar-
riers of individual isolation. In Night on a Bald Mountain
White demonstrates the capacity of language to destroy.
Ironically, it is Sword, the Professor of English who performs
this function.

The conflict of the play revolves around the anguished
marriage of Miriam to Hugo Sword. Sword's name is symbolic
of his precise rationalism and cold callousness. He is a
frustrated poet and like most of White's intellectuals, a
sterile and destructive force. In Sword, White's satire is
almost Swiftian. The play examines in retrospect the prog-
ress of their marriage, which Sword's puritanical asceticism
has turned into mutual sadism. Miriam retains a residue of
her once warm and passionate nature.

In the scene where Miriam grasps her husband's hand in
a plea for compassion his rejection of her is singularly
cold-blooded,

*Sword* You are over-exciting yourself, Miriam,
(goes toward door) You are at your best when you are less excited.

and his last question is horrifying ironic.

(at the door) Is there anything you need?

Miriam (desperately) No. (p. 299)

Both Sword and Miriam grasp at Stella, their hired nurse, in an attempt to thaw their frigidity in her human warmth. As her name suggests she is of the stars, of the idealistic world from which the Swords have fallen. For both of them she represents another chance. Their attempts to warm themselves at her flame of life are unsuccessful and Sword in frustration at his rejection of her, employs the ultimate weapon of rational abstraction on her attachment to her father, dirtying it with his own puritan disgust of sexuality.

But despite the hints about her death in the first scene, and the more subtle allusions in her dreams, the incest motif seems insufficiently developed. It is difficult to accept the motivation for Stella's death. After establishing her as a warm yet eminently sensible girl in her relationships with all the characters, White appears to manipulate her fall over the cliff. Here the division within the play between the philosophical conception of a malevolent universe and the demands of naturalistic structure come into open conflict.

Despite her obvious revulsion at Sword's perversion of her love for her father, her suicide jars for,

Stella is a sacrifice, true, but the play fails to convince one of the need for sacrifice. The gods, like the pit, are insufficiently offended, even by a late suggestion of psychological incest.
The Sword's decision to try again after their "sacrifice" of an innocent also lacks conviction, despite White's attempts to convey their attainment of self-knowledge.

On the periphery of this main conflict, and entering it as a contrast to the sterility within the house is one of White's "illuminati," the old goat-woman, Miss Quodling. Her presence is of considerable importance to the impact of the play. Like Arthur Brown in The Solid Mandala White associates her with the totality and wholeness of marbles and apples. These represent her intuitive understanding of life. In some ways this play moves closer to the themes of White's novels, with its references to "White's highly idiosyncratic mysticism of the commonplace," its "Gothic" souls, (Sword and Voss have some similarities), and its depiction of partly-grotesque but quintessentialy human characters like Miss Quodling, whose existence close to nature becomes a dominant theme in White's work.

Miss Quodling begins the play in an impressive aubade, written in language which captures the colloquial richness and vitality of Australian speech,

Mornun . . . I love it even when it skins yer! Oh yes, it can hurt! . . . When the ice crackes underfoot . . and the scrub tears the scabs off yer knuckles . . and the spider's webs are spun again . . first of all . . out of dew . . . its to remind that life begins at dawn. Bald Mountain! (p. 272)

Her rejection of civilized life is complete,

In the end you can't trust anythin' but goats and silence (p. 272)
and in the light of the sophisticated savagery and dry ster-
ility found in Sword's house, Miss Quodling convinces com-
pletely. Yet her structural relation to the play is mainly
thematically. She exists as a commentator on the main action, and
because of this, she is yet another example of White using
quasi-fictional techniques in order to establish a philosophical basis for the play.

Stella is directly involved in the action of the play. She is another one of White's "illuminati," who, like Will Lusty, for example, sees into the intrinsic nature of things.
"Oh table--chair, for instance. Or that jug. Even the ugly things have a kind of truth if you look at them long enough" (p. 329). But she has not yet suffered enough to have arrived at the stage of Miss Quodling's knowledge of life. Miss Quod-
ling recognises in Stella a kindred soul, "You're good. You're kind. You're as good as a sound apple. But some-
body's gunna cut into you as sure as sure." (p. 275) The
symbolic significance of "cut" is, of course, the Swords, but
on a larger plane, it is the warning of one to whom suffering has bequeathed understanding. Stella has yet to learn this.

White balances Miss Quodling and her rejection of life with Stella's unsuccessful participation in it. In the end, the play points grimly to the fact that neither isolation nor innocent participation can prevent the suffering and destruction brought about by humanity's inescapable subjection to experience in an absurd universe. Stella kills herself, and even Miss Quodling's stronghold is invaded, for her beloved
goat Dolores dies the same way.

The theme of White's poetic vision is displayed in all four plays. White is concerned with the individual's contact with experience and with the results of suffering. He sees man as a lost being searching for a rapport with himself and the universe, faced with the implacable and unavoidable necessity of dealing with an impersonal cyclic process of which he is a part.

White's conception of the inadequacy of language in communicating meaningfully, as exemplified in Sword, the Young Man, Mr. Wakeman, Miss Docker, and Miss Quodling, seems to place him philosophically with the Absurdists. His depiction of a universe where his characters live pointless lives in suffering also adds force to this argument. If in the end, all we can trust is "goats and silence" on Bald Mountain then the dramatist is faced with finding a suitable form to convey this. However, White's plays often rely on novelist's tricks, on verbosity, on a dramatic naturalism with frills, and on dialogue which not only doesn't enable his characters to fully communicate with each other, but also does not become the vital dramatic experience which brings a play to life.

In The Ham Funeral White comes closest to unifying the division between what he wants to say and the form in which he is working. The Season at Sarsaparilla has the background for a play of great importance, but its reliance on the formula for a "well-made" play and its distribution of impact over the large number of characters dissipates some of its
effect. *A Cheery Soul* is the least successful, and demonstrates the difficulty of transposition from one genre to another. In his last play, the grand scheme bogs down finally in verbosity and White's reliance on the same formula which betrayed his other plays.

It is not that White is unimaginative or that his plays are unsuccessful. On the contrary there are times when he is a brilliant, inventive dramatist. The point is that form and content are inseparable and must be combined, particularly in drama, for full integrity and artistic success.
NOTES

1 Roger Covell, "Patrick White's Plays," Quadrant, no. 29, 1964, p. 7. The text of White's other play, Return to Abyssinia, written in London just before 1946 has supposedly been lost. It was produced for a short season at the Boltons Theatre in London.


3 Patrick White, Four Plays, (London, 1965)

4 Covell, p. 8.

5 ibid., p. 8.

6 Patrick White, Four Plays (London, 1965) p. 15. This quotation and all others are taken from this edition.

7 Wayne Booth in The Rhetoric of Fiction (University of Chicago, 1967) makes useful points on this subject on p. 162.

8 ibid., p. 387.

9 ibid., p. 387.

10 ibid., p. 387.

11 ibid., p. 387.


13 ibid., p. 214.

14 ibid., p. 215.

15 ibid., p. 215. This theory is of course derived from Plato and Aristotle. Rene Wellek and Austin Warren in Theory of Literature, (N.Y., 1956) make similar points.


17 Wellek and Warren, p. 235.

NOTES (cont.)


20 quoted in op. cit. Osborne, p. 96.

21 ibid., p. 96.

22 White makes frequent use of the revelation which an intuitive understanding of inanimate or natural objects can bring. In the Tree of Man, Stan Parker is such a character, so is Bob Quigley in the same novel and Arthur Brown's marbles are "mandalas" and have this effect in The Solid Mandala.

23 Osborne, p. 96.


26 ibid., p. 226.


29 Burrows, p. 160.


31 Covell, p. 11.

32 Argyle, p. 92.

33 The dogs also disappear when the analogous situation is finished.

34 Patrick White, The Burnt Ones, (London, 1964)


36 Burrows, p. 164.

37 Argyle, p. 100.

38 Covell, p. 11.


40 Burrows, p. 167.
A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


