

Features

Religion and Literature

The contributors to this religion and literature feature have interpreted both terms liberally to present us with a stimulating and varied set of papers. The first three pieces focus on Australian works: Elaine Lindsay looks at Barbara Hanrahan and her works as expressions of personal spirituality; Peter Bentley discussed the portrayal of clergy characters in the works of Peter Carey in the light of recent Australian studies of masculinity; John Foulcher illustrates from the work of several post-War poets the strong, conservative, often explicitly christian nature of modern Australian poetry. In a deeply insightful piece, John Wren-Lewis theorises on the religious significance of detective fiction. The two final pieces concentrate on religion in Eastern literature; Tony Johns considers impediments in the Western world which have disguised the literature of the Qur'an; Garry Trompf looks at the treatment of the Divine Woman in Eastern literature.

Barbara Hanrahan: Eyeing God

Elaine Lindsay

*'I have always felt close to a Spiritual presence - I call that Presence God. God and Bleeding Jesus and Mary with her flaming heart garlanded with flowers are important to me - I am fond of them. . . I have always felt close to God. I have a strong belief in what I do - I have always known I was meant to live the life that I do. It would have been wicked - evil - if I had tried to do otherwise, to escape my responsibility to my talents.'*¹

It's rare to find contemporary Australian writers talking about their relationship with God and the moral dimensions of their life and art. But then Barbara Han-

rahan (1939-91) is - or was - unusual: a writer, printmaker and painter for whom art and writing were a religion and who dedicated her life to their service.

No hint of piety though. In her prints it is sex which binds together ornamental flourishes and personal anguish, while her 'fantastic' novels are meditations on evil and corruption, her biographical fictions maintain the heroism of common lives, and her 'autobiographical fictions'² contain disarmingly frank accounts of coming to terms with puberty, social expectations and the demands of art. Han-

rahan's sense of religion, too, is individualistic, on the surface a child-like mish-mash of folk-Catholic imagery and Protestant Sunday-school stories but underneath there is an almost mystical awareness of the omnipresent mystery of God.

Why this interest in Barbara Hanrahan? I believe that women's experiences have been largely ignored in popular constructions of Australian spirituality and that much-published writers like Hanrahan, Thea Astley, Helen Garner and Elizabeth Jolley do have things to say which are different from things said by Marcus Clarke, Henry Lawson, Patrick White, Randolph Stow and David Malouf. I also suspect that because women were for so long denied an active intellectual role in the organised Christian church, their views on religion and spirituality might well be less orthodox than those of many men, forefronting experience rather than theory. In the interests of remedial scholarship I'm in the process of examining the work of women writers, including Barbara Hanrahan, to see what they say - and signify - regarding contemporary Australian spirituality.

What is emerging from my examination of the writers is a distinctive theology which promotes relations with one's neighbours and the immediate landscape as being of primary importance - the emphasis is on getting along with each other here and now and if traditional Christian morality needs to be put aside out of respect for the needs of people, so be it. To generalise further, the practical is more important than the theoretical, morality and ethics are not absolute, the body and nature partake of the sacred, healing is preferred to purification, and God cannot be confined by sectarianism and dogma. Most of these are tenets of feminist theol-

ogy, although fiction writers are not generally thought of as theologians and many would not claim to be practising any formal religion.

With regard to Barbara Hanrahan's fifteen published books and over four hundred prints and paintings, what contributions has she made to Australian literature and religion, creativity and Australian spirituality? The luxuriant detail and vibrant colours of much of her art strikes one first, and conveys an overwhelming joy in creation and fecundity which is carried through into her writing. Amidst the flowers, insects, plants, birds, animals, sun, moon, stars and humans of the prints gazes the unblinking eye of God³ - an image which, intended or not, recurs as one peers at life in the books, often from the viewpoint of the child-narrator who sees all but does not judge, valuing everything equally in its strange richness.

As suggested above, Hanrahan's writing can be divided into three different types and each makes its own contribution to contemporary spirituality. Her fascination with the small, whether it takes the form of flowers, animals or human lives judged insignificant by those in power, is spread throughout all her work but the celebration of the common, of lives obscurely great, is strongest in the biographical fiction, that is, in *Annie Magdalene* (1986), *Dream People* (1987), *A Chelsea Girl* (1988), *Flawless Jade* (1989), and *Good Night, Mr Moon* (1992). In giving people the opportunity to tell their own lives Hanrahan enables them to structure their own meaning and to claim a place in history. In highlighting the rituals of everyday she shows how the simplest lives, by virtue of their simplicity, can have the deepest religious significance.

There is a strong sense of evil which is felt primarily in the clutch of novels published between 1977 and 1982, that is *The Albatross Muff*, *Where the Queens All Strayed*, *The Peach Groves*, *The Frangipani Gardens* and *Dove*. Evil is not necessarily a principle which exists in its own right, but a set of false values which infects children as they are progressively conditioned by society and move away from the spiritual values of existence.

In the novels the working of evil, falsehood and hypocrisy in society are explored through abstract, symbolic characters set within rich natural landscapes. A more realistic approach is taken in Hanrahan's autobiographical fictions, *The Scent of Eucalyptus* (1973), *Kewpie Doll* (1984), *Iris in Her Garden* (1991), *Michael and Me and the Sun* (1992) and the partly-autobiographical novel *Sea-Green* (1974). Here the focus is on a flesh and blood person, the narrator, and her questioning of what is true and false in society. The way to personal integration is seen to be the pursuit of the true; in Hanrahan's case this necessitated her choice of art over marriage and family. To have ignored the claims of creativity would have been wicked. Art practice became a religious ritual, a form of contemplative prayer in which 'If I put my head down and work long enough it's like meditating. You become so engrossed that you escape your mind and become unaware of time'.⁴

Hanrahan's special contribution to spirituality in Australian women's fiction is her sanctification of the creative process, the product and producer. Given the importance of the link between creativity and the sacred to the theological reading of literature written by women of serious intent, it is of interest to see how Hanra-

han manifested it in her autobiographical writing and her life.

In the narrator of the autobiographical fictions we find a person who recognises the existence of a power or mystery greater than herself and who believes she has been given a set of talents and has been called upon to use them. Responding to this call involves intensive self-examination, doubt and struggle against its demands, culminating in a deep division between the spiritual and social selves. This 'dark night of the soul' is alleviated and the divided self is unified only when the overwhelming claim of the spiritual is recognised and life is restructured to give it pre-eminence. But it is important to note that the social self is not rejected but harnessed, for it is the interaction, the friction, between the two selves that sparks the creative work.

If the above were a job description, it would attract applications from monks, mystics and saints. Indeed in interviews Hanrahan speaks of art as a religious quest, citing William Blake, whose 'spiritual world was with him all the time, there wasn't any difference between that world and this'. That was to her an ideal state.⁵ But in her autobiographical writing she does not talk of herself as one who has such knowledge, for none of the autobiographies go beyond her early years in London when she was studying at Art School and still trying to find and value her real self. *Sea-Green* takes us furthest, that is, into 1972, by which time she had had exhibitions of her prints in Adelaide, Sydney, London and Florence and *The Scent of Eucalyptus* had been accepted for publication by Chatto and Windus. None of this success is mentioned, either here or in any other book. It is the years of struggle and division before she was accepted as an artist and writer which are re-

counted on multiple occasions from 1973 until her death.

Why was it so important to Hanrahan to keep telling this story?

After all, the facts are not particularly remarkable. She was born in Adelaide in 1939 of a Catholic father and a Protestant mother. Her father died twelve months later and she was brought up in a household of women - Ronda her mother who was a commercial artist, Iris her grandmother who tended her as if she were her own daughter, and her mongol great-aunt Reece. She was educated at Thebarton Primary School and Thebarton Girls' Technical School where she was channelled into the commercial stream. In 1954 Ronda remarried and in 1955 the family moved to Oaklands Park. Hanrahan decided she wanted to be a commercial artist but, as there were no positions available at John Martin's where her mother worked, she ended up as a typist in the Mail Order department - briefly.

In April 1955 Hanrahan returned to school to study for her Leaving Certificate and then went on to a three year Art Teaching course at the Adelaide Teachers' College. In 1963, after working out her teaching bond, she sailed for London to study at the Central School of Art. Lack of money forced her home in 1964 but in 1965 she was back at the Central School. In 1966 she began living with sculptor Jo Steele in London and had her first one-woman exhibition in Adelaide. She started writing seriously in 1971 and two years later her first book was published. From then on she maintained two careers, artist and writer, and she and Steele divided their time between London and Adelaide. In 1984 she was discovered to have cancer, which was surgically removed. She embarked upon a strict regime of meditation and diet and

continued working on her art and writing almost until her death in December 1991.

Hanrahan does not treat the years 1972-91 autobiographically and apparently she had no intention of writing publicly about them. If and when her private journals are published we may be privy to a view of the successful female artist and writer, but the years of struggle were regarded by her as more important, the core of her myth.

For Hanrahan had a strong myth-making impulse and it is in the selection and framing of facts in the autobiographical books that we see this at work. The myth, a venerable one, is that of the artist finding her own voice, which in Hanrahan can be likened to the spiritual person achieving enlightenment. From *The Scent of Eucalyptus* on, she clearly constructs her life in terms of the search for wholeness. Even as a child, she perceives the existence of two worlds, the interior world symbolised by the house and garden at Thebarton, and the exterior, represented by conformity and materialism. Drawn naturally to the former, she develops a social self to survive in the latter.

But the lure of the ordinary - a job, marriage and children - is seductive and the pressure to conform increases once she reaches puberty, when gender roles are more clearly defined. Even her family, who are motivated by love, encourage her to settle down, a betrayal which is compounded by her mother's second marriage and the sale of the Thebarton house. *The Scent of Eucalyptus* ends at this point, with the teenage narrator unable to reconcile her two warring selves and literally expelled from the Garden. She carries with her knowledge of the dualities of life and an almost religious awe for the mystery of being as expressed in nature, but as yet she has no means of articulat-

ing her feelings or of establishing her own place in the world.

In *Kewpie Doll* the narrator, now at Teachers' College, is still off-balance and displaced, particularly in relation to men, some of whom ignore her while others want to marry her. None, however, accept her for what she is, an independent person who wants something more than conventional domesticity. It is the discovery of the work of Beardsley, Gauguin, Van Gogh and Toulouse-Lautrec that opens a new garden of delights: art offers an escape from loneliness and a reason for being. Suddenly her life takes on direction - the dream of studying art in London. It should be noted, though, that she has little choice for it is as though art has chosen her, not the other way around. As with all divine gifts 'I hate it sometimes, it makes my life hard, possesses me, nothing is easy'⁶.

Hanrahan's last book, *Michael and Me and the Sun*, is more openly autobiographical than the previous books and covers the period 1963-64 when she was in London studying at the Central School of Art. While Jerome had visions of naked women dancing before him, Hanrahan, as she confronts art and sexuality, pictures sharp-toothed bare-breasted women with wavy pubic hair and the occasional male displaying a rampant penis. In sex she finds something to weld together her romantic dreams and the anguish she experiences in the exterior world, something which relates her art to the 1960s' culture in which she is living. Sex is not confined to her prints either, as she finally disposes of her virginity - an act which, despite the anti-climactic description, does seem to make her more at home in her own body and less vulnerable to men.

In *Michael and Me and the Sun* we see Hanrahan changed by her London experience; she knows she is an artist and her talents have been recognised, she has survived by herself away from the certitudes of Adelaide, and she has found that the world does have a place for her. She can travel comfortably between the Garden and the commercial world and draw sustenance from both, even as questions of identity, sexuality, good and evil will continue to provide the substance of her art. At the end it is clear that integration of the self does not eradicate contradictions, doubts or shadows but incorporates them into a living whole and that this is essential for personal, artistic and spiritual health.

One can understand why Hanrahan constantly returned to this formative period: not only was she reassuring herself of the artistic and moral rightness of the life she was committed to but, through associating with and retelling of the story of spiritual enlightenment, she was also claiming her own place in that tradition which celebrates the religious nature of art.

The work of writing was approached with humility by Hanrahan. It did not come easily to her but the need to write, arising out of her deepest emotions, could not be denied. She did not like to think of herself as a writer and tried to become anonymous when writing 'so there's just a relationship between me and the book'⁷. In writing she put away consciousness of the self and allowed 'the worlds and the atmospheres and the people who move amongst them take control'⁸. Writing required a return to innocence and an awareness of the 'huge other world that lies behind and all about the small everyday existence'⁹ - it is not difficult to draw comparisons between this transcendence

of the personal and meditation, wherein one ceases to be aware of the self and is united with the greater mystery.

Hanrahan may also have been reluctant to adopt the title of writer because of the status she accorded those writers who devoted their lives to their work and who were not afraid to reveal themselves in their writing. She needed a pantheon of heroes from whom she could draw spiritual nourishment. To claim to be a writer would be to presume equality with Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield and D H Lawrence when it was appropriate for her to be making 'holy pilgrimages' to the places with which they were associated.

Barbara Hanrahan's religious sense could never be described as conventional. To read her work as an expression of spirituality is to realise the limitations of the traditional markers of religious content in Australian literature. There is no place in Hanrahan's books for ideas such as the desert God of the Scriptures, existential despair, the longing for the heroic, and salvation through human misery. What she offers is unashamed reflection upon aspects of life which many would prefer to keep hidden, showing them to be essential to our humanity. With her puritan streak she exposes the materialist values of society and warns against the evil that follows in their wake. In exalting the humble, the meek and the outsider she insists upon the presence of the sacred in the ordinary and broadens our national narratives to include the domestic and the feminine. The delight she takes in her earthly paradise gardens bespeaks the holiness of nature and reassures us that God is in the world.

Hanrahan's call is to be true to the inner self, the child who retains its innocent directness of vision, for this is the source of creativity and truth - the spark of holi-

ness or the God within, if one were to speak theologically. And from God's continuing presence it is possible to conclude, as she does, that death is not the final event but a passing through of the spirit to another level of existence, the mystery which cannot be pinned down by man-made images.

Notes

1. Barbara Hanrahan, personal notes, undated. My thanks to Jo Steele for access to them and for the opportunity to talk about Barbara Hanrahan. The opinions in this article, however, are my own.
2. I use this term because, although Hanrahan sometimes refers to this writing as autobiographical, the 'facts' do not always correlate between one book and the next. Of course this may be because further information has come to light between volumes. Her publishers have listed these books either as autobiographies or as novels and in all of them the narrator is unnamed, except in two stories in *Iris in Her Garden* where she is called Barbara. In a sense all autobiography is fiction, because of the selectivity involved in the act of telling.
3. 1964 lithograph 'The Eye of God'; 1974 linocut 'The Eye of God'; 1988 linocut 'Sun and Moon and the Eye of God'. The eye is suggested in other motives Hanrahan regularly employs such as sunflowers and hearts.
4. Interview with Elsebeth Gabel Austin in *Kunapipi* VII, 2 and 3 (1985), p. 158. Writing is a different sort of experience, for the mind is always critically engaged.
5. Austin interview, op. cit., p. 158.
6. *Kewpie Doll*, p. 149.
7. Interview with Candida Baker in Candida Baker, ed., *Yacker II*, Woollahra: Pan Books, 1986, p. 76.
8. Interview compiled by Rosemary Sorensen, *Australian Book Review* 116 (November 1989), p. 10.
9. Austin interview op. cit., p. 153.

Peter Carey and the 'New/Old (clergy) Man'.

Peter Bentley

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The male characters in Peter Carey's writings have been characterised as 'new male' types. These males are supposed to reflect the contemporary themes of growing equality between males and females and a growing male awareness about sensitive issues and concerns. These 'new males' however are not the only characters depicted in Carey's writings - in many ways the characters are quite stereotyped and present a curious mixture of the 'old male' in a new dress. This is especially true for some of the very interesting 'old' clergymen types in *Oscar and Lucinda*¹.

It is the purpose of this article to examine the clergy characters in two of Carey's novels and to comment on the stereotyping of clergy in these novels and in Australian society, particularly noting any perceived link to the stereotype of the 'old male' and the 'new male' character, in relation to the stereotype of the male Australian character.

The two Carey books are *Bliss* and *Oscar and Lucinda*. *Bliss* only contains a peripheral character, while *Oscar and Lucinda* contains the major title character of Oscar and several minor characters.

a) Clergy Stereotypes

The English Anglican clergyman in Australia

Most Australian based denominations in the nineteenth century were Australian in name only. Like the country itself, the denominations retained and fostered links

with the home countries. To ensure continuity with a certain type of Presbyterian minister, John Dunmore Lang selected candidates from Scotland. Similarly, the Church of England (in Australia, as it was officially known in Australia until 1981) chose men from England to supply its growing parishes. Bishop Frederic Barker was the Anglican Bishop during the actual period referred to in *Oscar and Lucinda*. Barker provided the evangelical foundation for the Diocese of Sydney. It is important to note that Oscar came from the evangelical tradition in England.

It has also been noted that even though the Anglicans in Sydney had an Anglican training college, (Moore Theological College established in 1856) they 'could not provide even a majority of the clerical force required for the effective running of the Diocese'. Consequently, Barker 'recruited from similar institutions in England'². 'In England, there was a general over-supply of clergy. Every year in the 1870s, more than 700 deacons were made, the great majority of them Oxford or Cambridge graduates'³. Oscar could have been one of these graduates, he had attended Oriel College.

Of course, not all the graduates were interested in going to what was perceived as a dead-end location like New South Wales, even if they could not get an appointment in England. For many of Oscar's real-life peers, the attraction of New South Wales was the prospect of evangelical service. This was so for the first resident clergyman in Australia, Richard

Johnson, an evangelical burdened by the weight of the souls of a whole nation.

The challenge in Australia was to promote the gospel to the convicts, the free people and perhaps the native inhabitants. Oscar summed up all these parts in one phrase. His desire was 'to bring the word of Christ to New South Wales' (p.182).

Oscar's ideal however, received a prophetic blow while he was on his way to New South Wales. One of his fellow passengers, Mr Borrodaile (who it seemed could talk on any topic, even if he knew nothing about it!) tells Oscar that 'clergy were needed in New South Wales, that there were whole areas, dubbed "parishes", on the government maps, where the people grew up godless, the children never saw a school, and the blasphemies and curses were shocking even to a man of world like himself' (p.235). He also warned Oscar away from any service to the blacks. This would waste his time because they were people with a 'total absence of religious belief' (p.235). On arrival in Sydney, Oscar finds that mission work is definitely not a possibility, the Bishop has other plans. He sends him to Randwick to sort out the people who have strayed too far from his conception of the Anglican faith.

As well as the high idealists, there were of course, those clergy who had settled into New South Wales and established more or less a continued clerical environment similar to that of England. Lucinda's friend, The Reverend Dennis Hasset, the 'handsome vicar' of All Saints', Woollahra is an example of this type. The Reverend Mr Hasset was not interested in the saving of souls and seemed to have little interest in the dire straits in which the convicts were portrayed.

For Oscar, the corruption and fallenness of New South Wales were the essence of

his attraction. He did not want just an ordinary clerical life, to him it was essential that evangelical faith meant risk-taking. To go to New South Wales meant gambling with life. Faith in God is a wager, 'we must stake everything on the unprovable fact of His existence' (p.261). He had exhausted any opportunities in England, there was nothing of any significance or importance left, only a new venture provided the possibility of tackling the highest stakes.

The Australian clergyman

Oscar and Lucinda does not contain any Australian-born clergy, primarily because of the period in which it is set. In contrast, *Bliss* contains the incidental but fascinating character of the Reverend Des.

On first meeting Des in this novel, we are immediately struck by his informality. He attempts to make a joke and introduces himself to Harry Joy as Des. There is no room for titles in the land of equals. Des is described as having 'rough hands' and a rugged looking face. He lived by the code of 4Ps - 'Prying, Preaching, Praying, and Pissing-off-when you're-not-wanted' (p.43).

Des is not a man of ideas and intellect (though he has studied religion). He is more at home talking 'to men in sales yards and paddocks, in pubs or at the football' (p.43). Harry provides him with too much of challenge. Des is portrayed as a minister unable to talk about intimate things like death and Hell. This is depicted as ironic, especially to Harry, who expects a minister to be seriously interested in Hell at least.

The character of Des is first that of an Australian male and secondly a clergyman. He is too much the 'ocker' to fit the stereotype of a real clergyman. There is no pretension or overt spirituality. He at-

tracts 'slanginess'. Like the stereotype of the Australian male, he has a 'proper disregard for sartorial elegance' (p.43) Des has come from the bush, where men have basically good souls which do not need any saving. One is reminded of Henry Lawson's poem of *The Christ of the Never*.

Des is essentially a good bloke who enjoys mixing with other good blokes and talking about the football. This stereotype is quite removed from the reality of most contemporary Australian clergymen. According to a recent survey of clergy in Australia most clergy do not have any significant interaction with the society outside their church membership⁴. Clergy are not at the pubs and football fields, and if they are at a worldly function, it is usually for the purposes of evangelism - to take people out of the secular society into that of the church. Des is the opposite, he is more at home in the secular society and less so in the world of overt spirituality.

The Liberal

The Reverend Dennis Hasset provides an excellent example of the stereotype of the nineteenth century liberal clergyman. He does not believe in the miracles of the Old Testament (a blanket statement indeed!), has different views on the virgin birth, rejects the doctrine of verbal inspiration and accepts evolution (p.276).

Though, Mr Hasset is also a believer in the necessity of a church building for matters of faith, this would not place him with those who can be termed traditionalists - people who would normally hold to matters of orthodox faith, but who also hold as a matter of faith, an acceptance of the authority, historical faith and practice of the institutional church, especially represented by the faithful gathered in consecrated buildings, rather than a commonly held evangelical assumption that the

church is a gathering of Christian people (the invisible gathering), who have no real need for a church building.

The liberal category would also include the Reverend Des, though Des hardly has any traditionalist leanings. He is a very contemporary example of the liberal stereotype. He is the liberal tolerant Aussie, who does not want to offend anyone. He believes in the God of Mateship, the God of G'day and Doing Good to Your Neighbour. He cannot cope with Harry's question about Hell and seems only able to tell Harry that 'This is the twentieth century, not the Middle Ages' (p.45). He does not have any conception of the doctrine of atonement. The sacrifice of Jesus is made real for him and other Australians by reference to more contemporary events like Simpson and his Donkey. Des is (perhaps unfairly) relegated in Harry's mind to the category of new age believer - people who really have seen flying saucers. He cannot tell Harry what to believe, because he does not know what he believes himself (pp.45-47).

The Conservative Evangelical

Oscar can be included in this category, however, though Carey draws Oscar as a conservative clergyman, he also provides us with some startling inconsistencies. Some examples are Oscar's attitude to gambling and the scene on board the ship concerning Lucinda's confession. Wardley-Fish (Oscar's gambling partner) first noted that Oscar was 'of a very literal and Evangelical persuasion' (p.106). He concluded that Oscar would have been opposed to gambling since 'Evangelicals were always most upset by gambling' (p.106). Oscar was termed a literalist because unlike the Reverend Dennis Hasset, he did believe in the Old Testament mir-

acles and also those of the New Testament.

One direct contrast to the conservative evangelical character of Oscar is the Reverend Mr Nelson, the minister at Gulgong who is criticised because of his Anglican vestments - they are 'ostentatious' (p.92). This view betrays a common stereotype of evangelicals. A belief that evangelicals are opposed to clerical garments because they believe them to be 'popish', worldly, useless, and a barrier to the presentation of the gospel to the ordinary informal Australian.

The other area usually associated with conservative evangelicals is that of pronouncement on matters of sexuality (unfortunately this is especially so today because of the active involvement of certain prominent members of fundamentalist and evangelical circles in the regular breach of their pronouncements!).

In *Oscar and Lucinda*, the Reverend Mr Dight highlights the moral stance of the clergy by preaching against the people who have been depicted as fornicators (Oscar and Lucinda) for daring to attend church on Christmas day 'this holiest of days' (p.406).

The Hypocrite

Here Oscar makes another entrance, though surely some of his inconsistencies can be explained as the result of a confusing and deprived background. Oscar was brought up in an environment of a fundamentalist Christian sect. Later he became the holder of an evangelical faith, yet he gambled, murdered another man (who he must believe is created in the image of God like himself) and near the end of the novel engaged in a 'one night stand'.

Gambling has usually been condemned by evangelicals. Recent moves toward establishing casinos in Victoria and New South Wales have witnessed a con-

certed resistance by evangelical groups. Though there has been Catholic opposition to casinos as well, this has been on a different level. Catholics have had to argue that there is substantial difference between a 'little flutter' at the local club or racetrack, and a large casino. Evangelicals however have been able to lump all gambling in the same basket.

Oscar's gambling is related to his literalistic faith. Rather than being 'upset', Oscar had no guilt at all. He knew that God would give him money at the races and thereby ease the dreadful burden that the Strattons had placed upon themselves. Now they would be released. God would do this just as he had told Moses to divide the land between the tribes of Israel: 'According to the lot shall the possession thereof be divided between the many and the few' (p.117). God would help to pay for Oscar's training and the Strattons (the English clergyman and his wife who had guided Oscar to his calling) would be relieved. Later, Oscar argued that gambling was the way God provided for him 'to accumulate money in order to dare the formless terrors of the ocean, to bring the word of Christ to New South Wales' (p.182).

In many ways, Oscar's attitude to gambling has more in common with the Catholic tradition, than with evangelical Protestantism. Patrick O'Farrell records an incident in 1923 where 'Bishop Phelan of Sale declared it (gambling) to be 'approved by God, Who ordered Moses to distribute the promised land to the twelve tribes by means of a lottery...'⁵.

In *Two Flies Up A Wall*, the historian Ken Inglis is quoted recounting a joke he heard in 1959:

During a civic funeral at St Andrew's Cathedral in Sydney, Cardinal Gilroy says to the Anglican Archbishop, Dr Mowll (an evangeli-

cal): "You really should make better parking arrangements for these shows. The police have just ordered my car to be towed away." Mowll to Gilroy: "Hm. Last time I was over at your cathedral, I came out to find my car had gone. Your lot had raffled it."⁶

Certainly, Oscar's favourite form of gambling, betting at the race track has greater connections with Catholicism than with evangelicalism. John Dunmore Lang 'thought that the three never-failing accompaniments of advancing civilisation were a racecourse, a public house and a gaol. The first two, he considered, led inevitably and inexorably to the third'⁷. Though you may find evangelical 'sporting chaplains', it is hard to conceive of an evangelical actually blessing the horse racing fraternity.

The Impractical Clergyman (or practically useless!)

Oscar succeeds here as well, though most of the clergy portrayed in Carey novels are not depicted as practical people. Lucinda comments about Oscar 'He was not manually dextrous, that much was obvious ... He was ungainly, made bony angles, would hurt himself badly should he have ever needed to work in a glass-works'(p.353). Later mention is made of his 'thin milk-white arms' (p.359). Oscar was made for books and ideas.

The Reverend Dennis also comes in for Lucinda's criticism. It is with him in mind that it is commented 'She did not think of clergymen as practical people'. They had a certain 'uselessness' about them (p.143).

b) The Male and Patriarchy in Australia

In the Western tradition, patriarchy is usually seen to come from the time of the

patriarchal fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (B.C. 1900 - 1600). The head of the family was the man. He led the worship, rituals and directed and dominated the lives of everyone, especially the women⁸.

Reflections about the role and nature of masculinity and patriarchy in Australia have provided a constant stream of writing and debate. For most of this century the representation of the Australian male has been linked with the idea of mateship. Mateship and the bush myth have been key elements in some attempts to forge a national Australian consciousness. Russel Ward has been one of the key interpreter of these themes, even though he has now attempted to distance himself from the actual truth of their presentation⁹.

Notwithstanding the debate about the extent to which Ward and others really believe in the legend, the essence of Ward's book, *The Australian Legend*, is that Australia is a man's country. It is a place of legendary character. Men who give up their lives for their mates (like Simpson), who defend their right to a place in the bush and it seems preferred the company of other men to any women (though they would of course be able to relate to women if necessary). Men who like to have a drink, a flutter on the horses and a to 'have a go' at pretension. One commentator on religion in Australian society has noted that this typified Australian male 'despised the wowsers who wanted to take away these pleasures, and the clergy who seemed, by and large, less than manly'¹⁰.

More contemporary writers than Ward have noted the dominance of the male in Australian society. Australian society has a reputation for being patriarchal. Ronald Conway notes however, that Australia (White Australia) 'began mainly as a society of alienated males'¹¹.

Conway has elaborated on the nature of Australian masculinity, particularly reflecting on the physicality of the Australian male and the impact of competitive sport (pp.24, 61)¹². Conway is mainly interested in the state of the male today, but illustrates his works with reference to the stereotypes of previous years. He notes the impact of the bush legend in Australia, but prefers to draw a separate conclusion.

'The gut-forms of mateship once celebrated by Henry Lawson and C J Dennis have been replaced by a contemporary would-be virtuous distancing from direct contact by ideology spouted on behalf of this or that allegedly wronged social group ... Worst of all, even the clergyman may be turned into a humanist tout, invoking obscure barely relevant Old Testament tags on behalf of collectivist causes, meanwhile individual souls remain sealed books and group agitation has replaced the search for eternal light'¹³.

In his writing, Conway provides an excellent example of the stereotyped interpretation of the male in Australian society. His male is lacking in intellectual, emotional and spiritual dimensions¹⁴.

What are the similarities and differences in Australia between clergy stereotypes and 'old male' and 'new male' stereotypes?

The 'old male'.

For the 'old male', it seems that the differences are highlighted with respect to the clergy. Clergy were not depicted as physical workers, toilers of the bush. Compare the description of Harry in *My Brilliant Career*:

*... he was a distinguished-looking man, and particularly so among these hard-worked farmer-selectors, on whose careworn features the cruel effects of the drought were leaving additional worry ... air of physical lordliness ... of the easy sunburnt squatter type of sweldom ... a man who is a man, utterly free from the least suspicion of effeminacy, and is capable of earning his bread by the sweat of his brow - with an arm ready and willing to save in an accident.*¹⁵.

- with the description of Oscar by Lucinda - 'He was not manually dextrous, that much was obvious' (p.353). Oscar was not a physical worker. The clergy were intellectual and hopefully spiritual. They were at odds with the physical Australian, who may have had a spiritual dimension, but did not present it in the established institutional manner.

One of the continuing points of debate is the nature of the relationship of women and men. Even though Oscar was not a manly man, he was still a man and thus was accepted in some of the company where even a manly woman found herself unwelcome. 'Fellowship' or interaction in the environment of the glassworks was denied to Lucinda as a woman, but opened to Oscar as the man in the house. The society of nineteenth century Australia contained many areas in which only men entered.

One critical link with the 'old male' is gambling. When distinctions are made concerning differences between the clergy and 'ordinary people' one difference usually noted is the attitude of clergy toward gambling. As I have already noted, in general, Protestant clergy are placed in the 'wowsers' category - people opposed to even the idea of a 'friendly flutter'. Though the term wowsers is used in *Oscar and Lucinda* (actually whether this word would have been in common use

age during the period indicated in the novel is another question) in the context of gambling, generally it fosters conception of a rather different picture to the stereotype of the clerical anti-gambling figure. Oscar in fact becomes a gambler of great distinction and passion. He fits the stereotype of the 'average Australian' who would gamble on anything that moves. The existence and extent of gambling in Australian society is critical to Oscar's easy transfer from England where he had established his habit (but where it had been mainly conducted in the 'gentlemanly' arena of horse racing). Though Oscar thought that he was free of the habit, the new unrestrained environment of 'sinful' Sydney soon enabled him to embark again and also in new ways.

The depth of gambling in Australian society has been encapsulated in the social history/commentary *Two Flies Up A Wall - The Australian Passion for Gambling* by Peter Charlton. As I have already noted, Charlton also comments on the (usual) substantial opposition from Christian elements to gambling initiatives¹⁶.

When defined as a clergyman, Oscar is clearly unwelcome. At the Chinatown gambling haunt, his 'exposure' as a clergyman by Lucinda is enough to end the game because of the fear of a Royal Commission. (p.301) However previously his 'disguise' enabled him to join in. In Ross Terrill's reflections on *The Australians*, he writes about his experience at the Melbourne Cup. 'As we pick our way through the champagne bottles and beercans, I recall Billy Graham's remark "Melbourne is one of the most moral cities in the world." Here at the Melbourne Cup the 'two great cross-class religions of Australia, horse-racing and beer, ... conjoin'¹⁷. Oscar really is an exception. You would

find few evangelical clergyman worshipping at the racetrack or hotel.

Sexuality is also a strong feature of the depiction of clergy. It has already been noted that the sexual history of white Australia had an impact on the development of early attitudes. Clergy were in a special position with regard to sexuality. In the nineteenth century, clergy were stereotyped as the safe men; you could board your daughter with a clergyman without fear. The asexual clergy figures in *The Getting of Wisdom* illustrate this point. Either they married and deemed to be beyond lustful stages or unmarried and of course celibate (usually in the Roman Catholic tradition).

The 'new male'.

The 'new male' is closer to the stereotypes of the clergyman than the 'old male'. The main clergy characters in *Oscar and Lucinda* are depicted as having better relationships with women than with men. Reverend Dennis Hasset notes that 'It had not taken him long to discover that the women were by far the most interesting of the two sexes in the colony' (p.140). Hasset is exiled to a far flung corner because of the potential scandal he has created through his relationship with Lucinda and because of his unorthodox beliefs. The church is depicted as being unable to deal with diversity in sexual roles and relationships.

The 'new male' must be able to relate to women in an intimate way, without patronising. Oscar does not have any pretensions about his manliness. He is vulnerable - sexually, intellectually and spiritually. Because he is vulnerable he is removed from the church (essentially he is castrated by the church for his gambling). He can no longer be the protector of patriarchy.

Oscar is quite at home doing 'women's work' (house cleaning), more so than with any type of work associated with men in this period. He is described as a 'passionate man, an enthusiastic man, who would plunge into the jungle of ideas (pp. 359-60).

This representation is quite a contrast to the stereotype presented by Ronald Conway.

Both these clergymen (Oscar and Dennis) develop different attitudes about women because they relate to them in circumstances which are alien to most men. They also react against the treatment they receive from the institutional church. Clergymen like Oscar are normally the dominant representatives for the church and usually they are near the top of patriarchal societies like Australia. Dominant figures rarely suffer negative discrimination, so the actions of the church against Oscar help males to understand the discriminatory practices which have usually been directed toward women.

Many contemporary clergyman are like Oscar in their experience of women, but the main difference is that they are still very much part of the institutional church. They have links with the 'old man' and with the 'new man'. Some are developing more links in common with the 'old men', while others are moving further into new relationships, directions which may take them out of the institutional church, just like Oscar. In contemporary Australia, sex boundaries have been increasingly broken down and some denominations ordain women, but if a man still wants to have a distinctive occupation then there is no better place than most of the institutional churches¹⁸.

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A Field All Foreground: An Introduction to Australian Religious Poetry

John Foulcher

There seems always to have been a strong connection between religious sentiment and poetry written in this country. Especially in reading poetry written this century, it seems that religion - and Christianity in particular - has made its presence felt in far more obvious ways in our poetry than it has in either modern English or American poetry. Yes, of course there are the great religious writers of those cultures - Eliot, Auden, and the early Robert Lowell - but English and American poetry since World War II seems largely characterised by a bleaker, more amorphous spirituality.

When we turn to Australia, a strong and quite conservative Christian conviction tends to inform the work of many of our more important poets, such as Les Murray, James McAuley and Francis Webb; and even in the work of many poets who would not openly claim to be 'religious' we find a concern with the spiritual life which is neither superficial nor ironical.

Trying to find reasons for this development is an interesting but ultimately inconclusive pursuit. There are many possible explanations, none of which is singly satisfying. But my purpose is not to explore the reasons for the growth of religious poetry in Australia; rather, it is to eclectically introduce a few of the more influential figures in this development, and as well a few I particularly like.

It would be more thorough to start with colonial poetry, but I intend to concentrate on the general post-war period.

In this era, possibly the most interesting christian poets are James McAuley and Francis Webb. Although both poets are quite conventionally Catholic, their lives and poetry are markedly different. McAuley's poetic is highly conservative, as indicated by his involvement with the notorious 'Ern Malley' hoax of 1944, but his religious poetry shows a gentler, less aggressive side, though the form and order of the poetry underlie the surety of his convictions. On many occasions he made hid feelings on the purpose of poetry clear, as in these lines from "To Any Poet":

*Take salt upon your tongue.
And do not feed the heart
With sorrow, darkness or lies:
These are the death of art.*

*Living is a thirst for joy;
That is what art rehearses.*

Thus McAuley's religious poetry act as an impetus for faith and joy, though he admits in "Pieta" that 'Clean wounds, but terrible/Are those made with the Cross'; and in "Time Out of Mind" he confides, 'Only those joys that lie/Closest to despair/Are mine to hold on by'. Perhaps more typical is the sentiment behind these exaggerated lines from "To the Holy Spirit":

*Engender, upon our souls your sacred rhythm:
inspire
The trembling breath of the flute, the exultant
cosmic psalm,
The dance that breaks into flower beneath the*

*storm-voiced mountain;
Array in your dazzling intricate plumage the
swaying choir.*

McAuley's clarity of diction, evocative yet precise imagery, and insistence on rigid metrical patterns situate him firmly in the 'reactionary' camp of recent Australian poetry.

More difficult to categorise was Francis Webb, who was initially encouraged by the dogged anti-modernists, Norman Lindsay and Douglas Stewart, yet whose poetry often reflects an obscurity which seems more at home with the modernists still reeling from the Ern Malley incident. And although his contemporaries - such as Rosemary Dobson, David Campbell, and Vincent Buckley - claimed him to be one of the great Australian poets, he was poetically and personally, always an outsider.

Webb's initially successful poems were intricate explorations of figures from Australian mythology, Ben Boyd and Ludwig Leichhardt. What drew him to them was their ambiguity, their mystery; both had enormous impact on the development of white Australian mentality, yet both were, in a sense, failures. It was this determination to find national roots - possibly originating in his own unsettled childhood - that eventually led Webb to seek out a more universal source of truth in Catholicism, a search clearly and beautifully demonstrated in his long poem about St Francis of Assisi, "The Canticle".

In his namesake, Webb finds a human model for the all-accepting love of God, and a means of grace in the context of his own form of leprosy, the schizophrenia that saw him institutionalised intermittently throughout the last twenty years of his life. The poems from this period are poetically and spiritually unique. Con-

sider, for instance, these lines from "Derelict Church":

*The immemorial shape is as persistent as rain
Ghosts of bells chatter as from the sea
Out of memory slides home this gaping wreck
Still seaworthy, hallowed and functional.*

And his last published poem, when many thought him completely unfit to write again, indicates such a depth of compassion, pain, and spiritual understanding. The poem, "Lament of St Maria Goretti", involves a monologue from the Italian girl of the title who was canonised in 1902 after being stabbed to death resisting rape. How skilfully Webb interweaves his own situation, his mental instability and that of his father, into these lines from the poem, where Maria shares her agony with her friend Teresa:

*Teresa, it is easier now. But the chloroform
Comes like a stiletto to our gasping void:
Sometimes you look lovely swimming there be-
side me
While chloroform unravels the holy lines of
your face,
I take you into my hands to remould you,
shape you.
But the pain, the pain ...
See Teresa, my father Luigi is coming
Out of the cemetery (but the chloroform
holds) shouldering away
The earth. He touches his little Cross with his
lips,
I am crying, and a flight of birds bangs like a
rosary,
He is smiling, but the chloroform will dissolve
him ...*

Always in Webb's poetry, God is the hope for the pain that lies at the heart of each human being; if it were not for his faith, he would easily totter into despair. Yet Christianity for Webb is never mere

consolation: it is the foundation for all significant experience, however ambiguous.

The next generation of poetry in Australia was also to be influenced by two writers of basically Catholic persuasion, yet with far different tonal quality - Les Murray, and to a lesser extent, Bruce Dawe. Both writers tackle common situations in common language, trying to express 'the holiness of ordinary things', as Les Murray once put it. In his homage to ordinary suburban life, "Homo Suburbien-sis", for instance, Dawe considers 'One constant in a world of variables/ - a man alone in the evening in his patch of vegetables', a man who offers up a prayer which is 'Not much but as much as any man can offer/ - time, pain, love, hate, age, war, death, laughter, fever'.

Even football becomes a holy thing for Dawe: in "Life-Cycle", he compares the rituals of attendance at a football match with a lifetime's church rituals and attendance, until finally the aged see 'in the six-foot recruit from Eaglehawk their hope of salvation'. And, in reverse, in "A Good Friday Was Had By All" - though a monologue by one of the officiating soldiers - Dawe approaches Christ's crucifixion as if it were just another everyday occurrence:

*You men there, keep those women back
and God Almighty he laid down
on the crossed timber and old Silenus
my offsider looked at me as if to say
nice work for soldiers, your mind's not your
own
once you sign that dotted line Ave Caesar
and all that malarky Imperator Rex*

*Orders is orders, I said after it was over
nothing personal you understand - we had a
drill-sergeant once thought he was God but
he wasn't
a patch on you.*

For Les Murray, God has left his fingerprints on even the most mundane details of creation: it is this belief in the significance of everyday life that marks Murray off from many of his contemporaries, and links him with the egalitarian roots of Australian poetry.

Murray for me has written some of the most profoundly Australian insights into what it means to be Christian. There are too many poems of such quality to delve into here, but four indicate something of the range and power of Murray's spirituality. In "One in a Lifetime, Snow", an old farmer, 'a man of farm and fact' who thought the land (and life) utterly predictable, finds it snowing on his farm as it has never done before. He concludes,

*that even he
might not have seen the end
of reality ...*

*Then, turning, he tiptoed in
to a bedroom, smiled,
and wakened a murmuring child
and another child.*

For Murray, life is inexhaustible; we must never desert the child within us who is open to life's wonder and surprise. This becomes a far more directly spiritual experience in "An Absolutely Ordinary Rainbow", as a man in the middle of a peak-hour Sydney street discovers within himself the ability to weep. According to Murray, the poem began as a joke, but was soon overwhelmed with the conviction that urban Australians had lost the ability to perceive the humanity within them; whether initially dismissive or quiz-zical, each member of the crowd is eventually subsumed by

*the man who weeps ..., and cries out
of his writhen face and ordinary body*

*not words, but grief, not messages, but sorrow,
hard as the earth, sheer, present as the sea.*

And so mesmerised, they wish to transform the man into a messiah; finally, 'Evading believers, he hurries off down Pitt Street'.

In Murray's most personal and moving poems, "Three Poems in Memory of My Mother, Miriam Murray née Arnall", the poet reflects on the tragic consequences of a doctor's action in refusing to send an ambulance to Murray's critically ill mother. 'It's nothing, dear', Murray postulates the elitist doctor confiding to his wife, 'just some excited hillbilly'. Earlier in the sequence, Murray recalls taking, as a child, a block of ice to his mother in summer:

*But you don't remember.
A doorstep of numbed creek water the colour
of tears
but you don't remember.
I will have to die before you remember.*

And later, in "The Steel" he concludes,

*The poor man's anger is a prayer
for equities Time cannot hold
and steel grows from our mother's grace.
Justice is the people's otherworld.*

Perhaps Murray's most direct statement of his spirituality comes in a more contemplative poem, "Equanimity". The poem begins with a walk through suburban streets, a discussion of the various qualities of light that the day presents, and the things illuminated, things that lead the poet to suggest 'human order has at heart/an equanimity'; this is a place 'where all are, in short, off the high comparative horse/of their identity'. So equanimity is the equivalent of "An Absolutely Ordinary Rainbow"'s weeping

except that it is quieter, more evanescent and composed. And, of course, 'all holiness speaks from it'. Ultimately it is

*a field all foreground, and equally all background,
like a painting of equality. Of infinite detailed extent
like God's attention. Where nothing is diminished by perspective.*

This is Murray's clearest vision of God: He is utterly tasteless, doesn't deal in values and worth, but holds everyone and everything as sacred. Thus Murray synthesises a distinctly Australian sense of egalitarianism with mystical spirituality; his place as Australia's foremost poet is without question, but perhaps, also, he is one of our finest religious thinkers.

And so to the present age. A figure as significant as Murray cannot help but leave a wake of writers who, while neither lesser nor imitators, have been profoundly influenced by his world view: Robert Harris, Jeff Guess, Robert Gray (whose spirituality is Zen Buddhist) spring to mind, but possibly the most interesting in this context are Kevin Hart and Andrew Lansdown.

Lansdown is in many ways a successor to James McAuley: his territory is joy, and his spirituality is conservative, yet his approach to poetry is decidedly Protestant. His poems celebrate the natural world, and convey a tense excitement in doing so. Yet in all his books, almost as a code to interpret nature and experience, there is at least one poem which constitutes a statement of faith. His first book, *Counterpoise*, concludes with a sonnet, "Behind the Veil", in which he considers his grandparents approaching the end of life; although 'they are lonely in the shadow of death', they are 'at peace, hop-

ing for the face/Of Jesus Christ our Saviour'. And in the final poem of his next book, *Waking and Always*, he considers the intricacy of his infant daughter's eyelids and concludes that 'I do not believe your eyelids/or the dreams above which they flutter/are accidental'; rather, 'Your spirit is the wick of Yahweh, /your body, the wax of His make and moulding'.

Kevin Hart, on the other hand, is no one's successor; at least not in this country. His poetry has a European quality: it is stately, elevated, and contemplative. It deals in ideas and concepts, but is more mystical, more like prayer than the work of any other Australian poet. In "The Stone's Prayer", for example, the stone begins,

*Father, I praise you
for the wideness of this Earth, and for the sky
arched forever over me,
for the sharp rain and the scraping wind
that have carved me from the mountain
and made me smooth as a child's faith.*

In contrast to Lansdown's poetry, God in Hart's writing is not the substance of creation but an unnamable power that transcends the physical universe. As the poet puts it in "Facing the Pacific at Night", from Hart's most recent book, *Peniel*:

*The ocean moves quietly within your ear
and flashes in your eyes: the silent place
outside the world we know is here and now,
between two thoughts, a child that does not
grow,
a silence undressing words, a nameless love.*

Yet Hart's God is not impersonal; He is sensed as infinite but, almost incongruously, is always touching us, as part of the finite world. In "Praying for the Dead", the most important icons in the church are 'the simple crosses/pointing downwards'.

So the art of religious poetry is alive and well in this country. As I've suggested, even in the works of poets who may balk at being called 'religious' - such as A D Hope, Gwen Harwood, Geoff Page, Judith Wright, Tom Shapcott, Peter Porter, Philip Salom, Mark O'Connor, Robert Anderson and others - we find a serious concern with religious concepts and symbols.

Perhaps ultimately we should be looking to our poet rather than our theological colleges for the most complete statements of Australian spirituality. They, after all, are finding a language for the truths we can't put into words.

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Adam, Eve and Agatha Christie: Detective Stories as Post-Darwinian Myths of Original Sin

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The longest running play in human history is now well into its forty-first year on the London stage. Agatha Christie's detective thriller *The Mousetrap* has now become almost a British National Monument. When I went to its opening night to see the young Richard Attenborough playing the detective, we were still only just emerging from the shadows of World War Two. The possibility that forty years on I'd be in Australia wasn't in my mind then, but even more remote was the thought that the play could still be going near the end of the century. And I don't think the idea had crossed anyone else's mind either; Agatha Christie herself, interviewed on the then phenomenal occasion of the play's tenth anniversary, said she'd expected a run of no more than three months and was greatly buoyed by the assurance of impresario Peter (now Sir Peter) Saunders that it was good for at least a year!

In fact the extraordinary success of this rather ordinary well-made play is itself something of a mystery, and the detective in me has been stimulated to investigate the reasons. In doing so, I've been led into some rather deep waters of the human psyche, regions where psychology overlaps with anthropology and even theology, and into some insights about the underlying forces that make detective stories so fascinating, especially, it seems, to people with religious interests. For it is not only English vicars who are notori-

ously 'whodunit' fans: Jiddu Krishnamurti, who read practically nothing else, delighted in them, as did Carl Jung, who read almost everything else. Religious thinkers have also been prominent among producers of the genre: G K Chesterton, Dorothy L Sayers and Father Ronald Knox were co-founders, with Christie, of London's famous Detection Club in the 1930s. And after Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot, and Miss Marple, probably the most famous of all fictional detectives is a priest - Chesterton's Father Brown, who latterly has been joined on the shelf by several other persons of the cloth, such as Harry Kimmelman's Rabbi Small and Brother William of Baskerville in Umberto Eco's *Name of the Rose*.

Reflecting on these latter points, I began to sense something more than coincidence in the fact that the whodunit is a fairly new literary phenomenon. Tales of good defeating evil after a struggle are probably as old as humanity, but until the second half of the nineteenth century, the age of Poe, Wilkie Collins, and Conan Doyle, there were hardly any stories in which the struggle took the form of a mystery, with the unmasking of a hidden villain at the climax. The ascendancy of detective fiction as we know it coincides with the post-Darwinian period when religious belief was declining sharply among the literate Western public. The detective emerged as a saviour-image as people began to lose faith in those more

traditional saviours, the holy man, the righteous ruler, and the knight in shining armour. And stories about evil as a mystery became popular as ancient myths about the so-called 'problem of evil' began to seem discredited.

While public debate on 'science versus religion' revolved around issues like the conflict between new discoveries and the literal truth on Bible-stories, the real cause, we now know, went deeper. Few serious thinkers in the Judeo-Christian-Muslim tradition have ever been overmuch concerned with the literal truth of the Adam and Eve myth or the six-day timetable for creation, and the same holds for myths of origin in other religious traditions. The primary reference for all such ideas has always been to the felt existential human situation, and that was what science in general, and Darwinian science in particular, seemed to have changed in a radical way, by undermining the notion of harmony as the basic characteristic of reality, for which metaphors like *Tao* or Divine Purpose could be appropriate expressions, and replacing it with the principle of 'nature red in tooth and claw'. Human destructiveness needs no explanation if we are simply children of a universal struggle for survival: the only problem of evil in that case is the practical one of preventing the struggle from making life intolerable, and the best hope for doing that seemed to lie in developing the faculty of intellect, which was apparently where the wish for something better had entered the picture in the first place.

But evidently the feeling of something evil as something out of tune with the general nature of things and requiring explanation wouldn't go away, for there grew up in the West this new addiction for stories in which an act of violence shatters a previously harmonious scene, causing

waves of conflict and suspicion to spread everywhere until the new style saviour-figure, the detective, brings to bear a special kind of intelligence in ferreting out where the violence came from.

Is this just a case of an outdated habit of thought lingering on in a form of popular entertainment, like the myth of the Evil Demiurge surviving as the Daemon King of pantomime? I think there is much more to it than that, for three reasons. In the first place, science itself has now shown, with the study of dreams, that while the expression of thoughts and feelings in dramatic form may be an older form of mentation than rational analysis, it is in no way outdated; on the contrary, it is the basic mode of all mental activity, underlying rational analysis itself, so we are well advised to pay attention to its collective manifestations. Secondly, evidence had emerged from biological science during recent decades to indicate that the popular perception of nature as essentially red in tooth and claw was a gross over-reaction to Darwin's discoveries, a failure to see the wood for the trees. And thirdly, there are good philosophical grounds for believing this to have been the case, for if there is no problem about how evil originates, then the human mind's desire for something better than constant struggle for survival becomes itself a problem; where does it come from, if tooth and claw are nature's basic reality?

Darwin was not, after all, the first to observe the ubiquity of conflict and violence in the organic world - it was every bit as obvious to anyone with half an eye in earlier cultures as to us today, and probably more so, since urban life has never been really sheltered from nature until quite recently. When earlier culture assumed harmony underlying the conflict,

and expressed that assumption in various kinds of theistic image, is because elementary logic dictates that unless something like this were the case, nothing would ever survive at all - and Darwin as a naturalist took this as much for granted as any theologian, even if he were a little more tentative about the use of theistic imagery. In fact it would be fair to say that biological science has provided massive confirmation for what was earlier just a commonsense assumption, by using microscopes and, in more recent times, cine-cameras and a plethora of other instruments, to uncover in minute detail the astonishing built-in mechanisms which limit the expression of competitive and destructive urges throughout the sub-human biosphere, curbing them so that they are always ultimately contained by harmony. And the specific contribution of evolutionary theory, of which Darwin is the archetypal representative, has actually been to extend our understanding of this principle into the time-dimension, by showing how conflict and competition serve development by selecting the strongest and most flexible strains for breeding. In the years since World War II biologists themselves in growing numbers have begun to articulate this thought, a notable example being the work here in Australia of Professor Charles Birch, which recently won him the prestigious Templeton Prize and is very clearly set out in his excellent book *On Purpose*.

Now this means there is something very odd, almost un-natural, about our human species, where aggression and competitive greed continually shatter harmony, between individuals, between tribes and nations, and between us and the rest of the biosphere. Something has been going wrong throughout recorded history, so that the best efforts of holy men, well-

meaning rulers, and knights in shining armour to contain the destructive urges always come unstuck. To paraphrase a famous declaration of St Paul, the human mind dreams of harmonies more wonderful - more gentle and loving - than the rough but powerful balances of the animal kingdom, yet in practice human intelligence again and again finds itself sidetracked into the service of greed, aggression, and even cruelty, such as would shame any animal. And here too, science has served to make explicit something which formerly could only be intuited in a general way; the 'unnaturalness' of human nature, which was formerly expressed in myths about a primordial Fall, has today become inescapable, as the cumulative results of our intelligence threaten to destroy our species altogether, and maybe even the whole planet.

When I was young, the nuclear arms race was just beginning to make these dangers apparent, most scientists and most religious folk alike thought in terms of humanity's 'higher ideals' battling with 'lower animal instincts', but we know now that if our instincts were really animal the drives towards harmony would always contain the destructive ones. It is at the level of mind or spirit itself that something goes wrong, and I believe it's a gut realisation of this fact that finds expression in the popularity of detective fiction, where in all the best stories the harmony-shattering act of violence is tracked down to a source quite unexpected by the society concerned; the hidden villain turns out to be someone who, until the denouement, is considered beyond suspicion. True, in the very early days of the genre this feature was by no means universal: in fact one famous classic, Poe's *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, is a perfect expression of the belief that our

troubles spring from animal instincts getting out of rational control - the murders are eventually traced to an escaped savage ape! But as the art-form developed, the main focus came to be on the author's skill in finding ingenious ways to keep the villain above suspicion until the end, and the Detection Club even drew up rules about it. On the hypothesis I have been developing here, this can be seen as something more than a need to tickle the reader's crossword-solving faculty: it is also the refinement of a new mythological form relevant to our modern understanding of humanity's great existential problem.

And against this background, the extraordinary success of *The Mousetrap* would imply that it contains some particularly acute, nerve-touching insight about the origin of evil in the human psyche, and I believe this to be indeed the case. For the play gives a very special twist to the 'least likely suspect' theme, a twist anticipated occasionally in earlier stories (for example, in more than one by G K Chesterton), but never (to my knowledge) before put into drama form, the mode which appeals most directly to the mythopoeic imagination. After all these years of exposure on the London stage, I don't think I shall be giving away any secret by mentioning what that twist is. At the end of *The Mousetrap* the detective himself, the young policeman who appears as the protector of the innocent and the guardian of law and order, turns out to be the murderer. And here I find a clear echo of a theme expressed in different ways in many of the world's ancient Fall myths, but most clearly in the one which, more than any other, has exercised emotional appeal across many different cultures - the biblical story in which the Loss of Eden comes about because of a 'snaky'

temptation to assume a divine role of moral guardianship, 'knowing good and evil'.

I would translate this as a diagnosis that the responsibility for humanity's destructiveness lies with the very clear element in the psyche that purports to aim at harmony, the moral impulse - not that it is too weak, as conventional social wisdom assumes, but that it usurps power and tries to control all other impulses by judging and repressing. On the other side of the coin, egoistic, aggressive and destructive urges become really dangerous and outrageous precisely when they are moralised and amplified by righteous indignation. The Inquisition really did think they were saving souls, and while mere greed or ambition would never lead any sane person to plunge the world into nuclear winter, a holy war might easily do so.

'Better to rule in Hell than to serve in Heaven' were words which Milton put into the mouth of Satan himself. His poem followed much christian tradition in linking the biblical story of Paradise lost with yet another ancient myth, giving it in the process a definite whodunit flavour of its own by suggesting that the serpent was just a disguise for the cosmic Mr Big - Lucifer, the Archangel of Light who subverts humanity in the course of trying to usurp the role of God. The moral impulse, or 'conscience', could indeed be described as the angel (ie messenger) of light in the human psyche, and this myth unmasks its constant tendency to get above itself and rule the roost instead of simply serving life.

The Mousetrap doesn't attempt to pursue the story into these depths: its villain simply gets killed at the end, much as in most other whodunits. But Chesterton did take that extra step: Father Brown never sought punishment or death for his vil-

lains, but unmasked them only as a first step in trying to redeem them.

The ending of any detective story after the unmasking of the villain is inevitably something of an anticlimax, and in my view one of Blake's most powerful insights was that the unmasking of the Great Originator of Sin in human life brings something of the same feeling. Like the Wizard of Oz, pretension is the essence of Lucifer's power in the world and in the psyche: unmasked, he becomes something of a joke:

*Truly, my Satan, thou art but a Dunce,
And does not know the Garment from the Man.
Every Harlot was a Virgin once,
Nor canst thou ever change Kate into Nan.*

*Tho' thou art Worship'd by the Names Divine
Of Jesus and Jehovah, thou art still
The Son of Morn in weary Night's decline,
The lost Traveller's Dream under the Hill.*

Perhaps that was what Chesterton was getting at, in a different idiom, when he said that if humanity were to be sufficiently struck with a sense of humour, we would find ourselves automatically fulfilling the Sermon on the Mount. And perhaps too it's why the murderer's motivation in *The Name of the Rose* is suppression of humour. So do join me as a detective buff, for the sheer fun of it - and do go to see *The Mousetrap* if you're in London - it's fun even if you know the end.

The Qur'an: Some Literary Perspectives

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The literary qualities of a book that has inspired a community of faith may be open, closed or somewhere in between to individuals outside that community.

In the English speaking world, the literary dimension of the 1611 Authorised Version of the Bible enjoys universal recognition. Alongside it, English versions of a number of scriptures of religious traditions that have had their origin and flowering outside the traditional territories of Christendom have also found a niche in the English literary tradition, through translations or transmutations by scholars and poets. The Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads, and a number of Chinese and Japanese Buddhist texts are well-known examples. Such works may in the first place have been the preserve of scholars

such as Max Muller, but through the enthusiasm they inspired among subgroups that espoused them, they have been diffused among wider audiences, and so found a way into the symbolic and mythic resources of the broad tradition of English literature, to be exploited by such writers as Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Edith Sitwell and Arthur Waley.

This, in itself is not surprising. A measure of the stature of a sacred book is the degree to which its humanistic content and spiritual values can be made to speak across the dogmatic frontiers of the religious tradition it has inspired to those of others faiths or none, and thus gain recognition as part of the literary and moral heritage of humankind, in a secular, religiously neutral environment.

The Qur'an is not yet widely perceived as such a book, and has hardly found a place among popular religious 'classics', at least among non-Muslims. Victor Gollancz's famous anthology *A Year of Grace Passages: chosen and arranged to express a mood about God and man*¹, a mile-stone among anthologies of ecumenical readings, although admittedly compiled in a very different world from that of 1993, contains no passage from the Qur'an.

Despite the fact that for Muslims, the literary character of the Qur'an is proof of its authenticity, none of the various English renderings of it currently available would be likely to make a reader's choice of spiritual reading on the basis of its literary or even spiritual appeal, to take on a desert island, although such a list might well include the Bhagavad Gita, the Psalms, or the Lotus Sutra.

Yet given the fact that much of the Qur'an is a presentation of the prophetic themes, the eschatology, and elements of the Wisdom tradition that are so central to the Bible, and Arabic and Hebrew are related languages, there is something of a paradox in the fact that no translation of the Qur'an to date has entered the canon of English literature in a way even remotely comparable to that of the Hebrew Bible through the Authorised Version.

There is a further paradox in that the Bible has a position as a secular phenomenon without reference to its role as a compilation of the sacred texts of Judaism and Christianity. As such it is an object of secular study in Universities in relation to a number of disciplines such as literature, archaeology and history. Courses on the Bible as Literature are popular. Indeed it is not only studied as literature, but in literature, out of recognition of the fact that its central themes are encoded in the flow-

ering of English literature from the time of Chaucer to the present day. A major agent of this flowering is the AV, but one of many, which include poetry, drama, music and the visual arts. Yet the magical cadences of the AV were to leave an indelible mark on the development of English style after the Reformation, when the reading aloud of Scripture became the centre piece of public worship in the reformed churches.

In this flowering, the central themes of the Bible have become universalistic reference points in literature for a whole range of human experience and predicaments. Any innocent person before the law may be seen as Christ before Pilate; any rich person rejecting the poor a model of Dives and Lazarus; any popular leader confronting a tyrant as Moses before Pharaoh. The problem of undeserved suffering may be seen in the context of the undeserved suffering and patience of Job; loss of a state of happiness and prosperity, the hope of re-instatement and return, and the whole complex of emotions relating to guilt and atonement may all be seen against the account in Genesis of the sin of Adam and loss of Eden. Thus according to one's perspective, the great themes of the Bible may thus be seen revealed in secular garb, or individual secular events a transcendental penumbra when seen against the universalistic salvation history set down in the stories presented in the Bible. Many would not be alien to the Qur'an.

The Bible of course is not the only such source in English for such reference points. The great classics of Homer, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Socrates, the heroes and heroines of Greek drama, stories such as the death of Socrates in Plato's *Phaedo*, and to a lesser degree, a number of the themes, motifs and concepts of the

religions of India known through translations of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, all have their role. Could one conceive an English rendering of the Qur'an making an analogous contribution to the symbolic and mythic enrichment of English, playing a part in its own way in the development of English, given the pluralising processes now at work in English speaking cultures, diversifying and adding to its cultural reference points, playing a wider secular role in addition to its more narrowly focussed religious function among Muslims? One could argue that the ground is already being laid for such a development, albeit in a perverse way with the heightened awareness of the Qur'an and things Islamic as a result of events following the publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* in 1988.

To put it differently, is an understanding of what for Muslims is the Qur'anic miracle, dependent solely on the light of faith and the genius of the Arabic language and thus a mystery impenetrable to the non-Muslim, or is it possible by means of a English rendering to establish an awareness of it as a literary phenomenon according to secular criteria that can fecundate a wider informed appreciation of it beyond the community of Islam.

It must be acknowledged that the impediments to the Qur'an speaking to the non-Muslim world are many. Among them is the popular perception of the kind of book it is. The Qur'an is usually seen as the Muslim counterpart of the Bible. In a sense this is true, but the way in which it is an authority is different. The Bible is a library, its compilation extends over a millennium, and reflects the work of a number of authors and editors. For Christians, the ultimate revelation is the person of Jesus, the books of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments are a path to Him.

For Muslims, on the other hand, it is the book, the Qur'an that is the ultimate revelation. It is a collection of pericopes issuing from his lips over about 22 years, arranged into book form. It is a book not by Muhammad, but one revealed to him, a book that is a source of moral law and mystical insight and an authoritative guide to social and religious life, a book that has immediate universalistic implications.

For Muslims, its proof is its unsurpassable literary brilliance. It is the supreme model of the art of literature. It is the direct word of God, the pages of which it is printed are sacred, as though infused with holiness by the printing on the paper of the Arabic letters that represent its sounds, and so give a local habitation to its universe of significances.

But this apart, the Qur'an presents a number of particular difficulties to the non-Muslim non-Arabist who seeks to gain a human understanding of what it contains as a literary phenomenon that can command respect in secular terms, that is to say anyone who brings to it simply a human concern to understand its prose sense, the moral and spiritual values and legal provisions that teach inspire and regulate the lives of Muslims, a book that has its own distinctive voice to add to the achievements of human spirituality.

Among these difficulties is that it appears to lack any principle of order that meets the expectations of the general reader. It comprises 114 chapters. These chapters, apart from the first, are arranged in decreasing order of length. Although the shorter chapters may consist of a single pericope and be thematically simple, the longer ones contain material on a wide range of themes and topics: lyrical and devotional passages relating to the power of God and the wonders of the Uni-

verse, poetic incantations introducing warnings of the resurrection and last judgement, denunciations of polytheism and injustice, pleas for compassion for the poor and down-trodden, stories of the Judaic prophets and prophets of Arabian provenance; prescriptions relating to ritual, family and criminal law, reproaches to Muhammad for personal weaknesses, comfort or grief and pain, and solutions to his personal problems and crises of leadership.

Another derives from the semantic structure of Arabic which is radically different from that of English in a way that makes it difficult for an English equivalent in many cases to express fully the connotations of any given Arabic word. A simple example is the word Islam itself. Its root SLM in Arabic has the overall sense of being sound, healthy, at peace. This sense is present in the word form 'Islam'. Islam is usually rendered in English as 'submission'. This is correct as far as it goes, but other dimensions of the word, the overtones that are so distinctive of it in Arabic relating to physical and spiritual health and being at peace, are absent. The English word 'submission' then only expresses one element of the semantic bundle implicit in the Arabic word Islam, and represents an impoverishment of its meaning.

A third difficulty is that the Qur'an is a transcription of the spoken word. It is difficult to grasp its sense without the intonation of the spoken word. Essentially it is oral in character, its expression being often naturalistic, (although not necessarily natural speech) and a concomitant of this orality is a markedly allusive and elliptical style. As in any oral, communicative use of language, the subject matter of the allusions, and the completed sense of the ellipses were present in the minds of

the companions of Muhammad, the first hearers of the Qur'anic revelation. These, then, although not present on the printed page, are integral to the text, preserved in and transmitted by the Muslim community. Without them, levels of meaning and resonance would often be lost.

Then there is its multi-voiced dramatic character. The Qur'an is the spoken word, not simply in the sense that it consists of the utterances of a single speaker, God, for God speaks not with one but many voices: thus it contains a number of voices: Sometimes it is God Himself who speaks, either as Law-giver or omniscient narrator; sometimes Muhammad, speaking as God directs him, sometimes the individual characters in the stories the Qur'an presents, such as Moses and Pharaoh, sometimes the *ipsissima verba* of those who scoff at Muhammad and his message, sometimes soliloquies, expressive of awe and praise of God and His wonders.

This dramatic and poly-vocal character of the Book is not well served by the printing convention of dividing the text only by verse numbers. In order to grasp the character of the Book and the movement of its dramatic episodes, an English reader needs the visual support and guide that patterns of indentation provide to facilitate recognition of the contrasting voices of the *dramatis personae* within the dramatic structure of the pericope.

Earlier I referred to common areas between the Qur'an and the Bible. Paradoxically, this overlap, the common ground between the two scriptures, is a hindrance rather than a help to appreciation and sympathetic response on the part of the non-Muslim. For example, it is difficult to read the Qur'anic chapter of Joseph without a haunting shadow of the Genesis telling of the story of Joseph behind it, or the

Qur'anic stories of Moses, without that of the Genesis Moses stories behind them. Since the rhetorical form of the presentation in each case is different, the Genesis version tending to the narrative, the Qur'anic to the dramatic, and the Qur'anic tellings often including Talmudic episodes absent from the Torah, and omitting others familiar to readers of the Old Testament, it is difficult to avoid a disturbing sense that the Qur'anic version is somehow askew, deviating from what has been perceived as a norm. Such areas of difficulty serve to explain why the Qur'an in English has made so little impact on its host language.

How then can the non-Muslim relate both to the universality and the literary dimension of the Qur'an, and recognise it as a literary as well as a deeply personal religious document, vibrant with human emotion, and so respond to the archetypal and cosmic character of its imagery, heaven and earth, night and day, sun and moon.

At one level, simply to put this question might be seen as confirmation of the traditional Muslim view that the Qur'an is untranslatable, at least in the sense that no rendering of the Book in another language is the Qur'an, or can have the authority of the Qur'an. This, however, is not the point at issue. Here, we are speaking of the possibility of a rendering that communicates something of its prose sense, and style in a way that goes beyond a sequence of verbal equivalents, glosses and paraphrases and has at least a qualified literary impact in its own right, even if it is not the Qur'an. Aspirant translators have devised a number of techniques to present its content. Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, a British convert to Islam, produced a rendering that he called *The Meaning of Glorious Qur'an*², de-

signedly based on the rhythms and cadences of the AV, to take advantage of its timeless splendour in presenting a dignified and resonant account of the Qur'an. As a piece of English, unfortunately, it makes little impact, and is hardly more memorable than *The Book of Mormon* which itself seeks to take advantage of the so-called biblical style of which the AV is the supreme exemplar.

One of the reasons for the inadequacy of Pickthall's version is that although the Qur'an represents the spoken word, if not necessarily the spoken language of its day, the language of the AV despite its 'orality' is not thereby an effective medium of translation. Orality in fact, is a word with a number of meanings. And the orality of the AV with its measured cadences, designed to resound through the columns of a cathedral nave is rather different to the orality of the Qur'an which includes naturalistic directness, abruptness, dramatic pauses and silences that characterise the great set piece dramatic exchanges of the Qur'an.

There are a number of other renderings. One of the most authoritative is that of Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*³ in which Arberry on the basis of an analysis of the rhythms of the Qur'an, attempts to create a Qur'anic English. But given that reference points in English that might allow the Qur'anic words and images to resonate are few, the result stylistically is little better than idiosyncratic in an Edwardian kind of way, suggesting more quaintness than strength in the original.

An essential point of departure for any attempt to present the Qur'an in English is a recognition of its role in maintaining the identity of the Muslim community over centuries and across continents. The Qur'an, is of course the basic charter of the great edifice of Islamic Jurisprudence.

But in addition to its role as a source of Law, the Qur'an has a function which is literary in the fullest sense of the word, that is to populate the *imaginaire*⁴ of Muslim communities with a shared set of symbols, images and culture heroes.

The Qur'an draws much of its imagery from the world of nature and the heavens in much the same way as do the Psalms and Wisdom literature. This needs to be emphasised. Although there is only one quotation from the Psalms in the Qur'an, identified as such by the Qur'an itself [sura 21 (al-Anbiyā' - The Prophets):105]

We wrote in the Psalms after [the revelation of] the Torah 'My righteous servants are to inherit the earth',

close enough indeed to Psalm 37:29, 'The just shall inherit the earth' - there are numerous passages which present the imagery and spirit of the psalms, and the yearnings of the psalmist, all of which serve to shape the religious attitude of Muslims. In such passages, although the words are familiar, the Qur'anic presentation of the ideas has a pulse, a movement, a force, which gives it an identity in its own right.

A striking example is in sura 2 (Baqara - the Cow):164

*In the fashioning of the heavens and the earth,
in the contrast between day and night;
in the ships that ply the sea
bearing what is to benefit to man;
in the water God sends down from the sky
by which to quicken the dead earth,
populating it with beasts of every kind;
in His disposing of the winds
and in the clouds set between heaven and
earth,
are signs for those who understand.*

God's cosmic power in ordering the heavens is set out in a number of passages. One such is in sura 13 (al-Ra'd - Thunder):2-3.

*It is God who raised the heavens
[supported] without any pillar
- you behold them! -
then took His place on the throne.
He sets the sun and moon [in their places]
Each of them moves according to its set time.
He disposes of all things
He sets out His signs
to assure you you will meet your Lord.
It is He who stretched out the earth
He placed in it the rivers and mountains
and of every fruit He set in it two species,
He covers Day with night.
In this are signs for those who understand.*

This cosmic hymn of praise is echoed in sura 31 (Luqman):10

*He fashioned the Heavens
-you behold them! -
[supported] without any pillar
He has set in the earth mountains [to hold it
fast]
lest it move [beneath your feet].
He has populated it with beasts of every kind.
We have sent down upon it water from the sky
and made to grow from it
plants beautiful of every kind.*

The dramatic shift from the third to the first person is characteristic of Qur'anic style as much as it is that of the Psalms. Such passages of the Qur'an have a hymnic character, and appear designed for liturgical usage. It should never be forgotten that the Qur'an is the apotheosis of the Word as liturgy. This same hymnic character is exemplified in Psalm 104, which tells of God founding the earth on its base, to stand firm from age to age (vv 5-6); of how from His dwellings He waters the hills, how the earth drinks it of his

gift, of how He makes the grass grow for the cattle, and the plants to serve man's needs (vv13-14); of how He made the moon to mark the months, and the sun to know the time of its setting (v19); of how at the rising of the sunMan goes forth to his work, to labour till evening falls(v22-23).

Such examples show convincingly that we are in a closely related spiritual world. Similar echoes may be perceived in a number of other passages, such as those that see God's power in the fecundity of nature. For example in sura 80 ('Abasa - He frowned):24

*Let man consider the nourishment [given him]!
We have poured down the rain in abundance
We break open the earth
and make spring from it grain
and grapes and clover
olives and date palms
gardens planted thick with trees
fruit and [other gifts of the earth
for yourselves and your livestock.*

Or in verses that have to do with the marvels of the sea, as in sura 55(al-Ra mân - The Merciful):19-28 which is punctuated by the refrain 'So which of your Lord's blessings do you both deny', in a way similar to that in which the refrain 'For His great love has no end', punctuates Psalm 135.

*He has set loose the two seas[of fresh and salt water]
They meet
yet between them a barrier remains,
they do not overwhelm the one the other
- So which of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?
From them come forth pearls and coral
- So which of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?
His are the ships towering on the sea like*

*mountains
- So which of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?
Every one on the earth is to perish
Yet the Face of your Lord will remain
Your Lord endued with Might and Honour
- So which of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?*

The image of the two great masses of water, fresh and salt, which although meeting, maintain their separate identities is of one great power, a power enhanced by the naming of their precious products, pearl and coral, and the vivid picture of the ships viewed from the shore, perhaps against the setting sun, standing up like mountains.

There are further passages of wonderfully sustained metaphors concerning what lies between the heavens and the earth, as in sura 24(al-Nur - Light):41-43 which have a close counterpart in Psalm 76, which tells (vv18-19) of the clouds pouring down the rain, the skies sending forth their voice, the thunder rolling round the sky, and His flashes lighting up the world.

*Do you not see how everything in the heavens and on earth
praises God, and the birds on outstretched wing.
Each knows the prayer and praise it should give
and God sees what they do.
God has dominion over the heavens and the earth
and to Him they shall return.
Do you not see how God drives the clouds
and how they billow up?
Then you the rain pour down from the midst of them
and when they are heaped up like mountains
He sends out of them hail
It strikes and it misses whom He pleases
The brilliance of His lighting*

*almost blinds them.
Heaven and earth will come to an end.*

One passage, apocalyptic in its vision is in sura 39 (al-Zumar-The Troops):67-69.

*They do not give God His true due!
On the Day of Resurrection
the whole world will be His grasp
and the heavens rolled up in His right hand.
Praised and exalted is He above the partners
they ascribe to Him.
When the trumpet is sounded
those in the heavens and on earth will fall
prostrate
except such as God wills.
Then when the trumpet sounds a second time
behold! all will stand in expectation.
The earth will shine with the light of its Lord
as the Book is laid open
and the prophets and the martyrs are brought
in witness.
[Mankind] is to be judged in truth,
and none shall be wronged.*

The coming of Judgement Day is represented more dramatically in sura 81(al-Takwir - The Folding up):1-14.

*When the sun is folded up
and the stars are darkened!
When the mountains are moved
and the camels neglected!
When the beasts are gathered together
and the oceans convulsed!
When the souls are assembled
and the female infant buried alive is asked
for what sin she was slain!
When the pages are spread out
and the skies are opened
When Hell is set ablaze
and the Garden brought nigh
each one will know what he has done.*

The dramatic build up of the passage in a series of strong rhythmic pulses, with one dramatic pause created by the unex-

pected appearance of the female child accusing her murderers among the signs of the coming Day of Judgement, moves on to a climax of electrifying power.

'Each one will know what he has done' because Man has a special responsibility and vocation in the order of creation. The passage testifying to this deserves a place in any anthology of spiritual reading. It is sura 33(al-A zâb - the Confederates):72

*We offered the trust to the heavens and the earth
and the mountains
and they refused to accept it
they feared it.
Man however accepted to bear it
and he accepted it
Man, who is sinful and foolish!*

Man yearns for God, again in the same phraseology one encounters in the psalms: Time and again the faithful are exhorted to seek the face of God.

Muhammad is urged in sura 18(al-Kahf - the Cave):28

*Be steadfast, together with those calling on
their Lord
morning and evening,
longing for His face.*

Man is close to God, and God close to man. This is the image of magical sounding words in sura 2 (al-Baqara - The Cow):186.

*If My servants ask you of Me
[tell them] I am near
I answer the cry of the one who calls
if he calls on Me.
So let them respond to Me
and trust in Me
and so follow the straight path.*

Finally there is the mystical vision of God as light, - and God in psalm 104:2 is described as wrapped in light as a robe - in sura 24 (al-Nur- Light):

*God is the light of the heavens and the earth
His light may be compared to a niche
in which is set a lamp
the lamp is within a glass
the glass like a radiant star.
The lamp is lit [from the oil]
of a blessed olive tree of neither east nor west.
its oil would radiate light
even without fire having touched it,
Light upon light!
God guides to His light whomever He wills
He speaks in similitudes to human kind
He knows all things.*

Such passages, presented in as clear and uncluttered a way as I can render them, give some idea of literary style of the Qur'an's presentation of the spiritual universe in which Muslims live. But equally important in the *imaginaire* that the Qur'an provides to those who live in its world is its presentation of a tradition of culture heroes, the stories it tells of the prophets who preceded Muhammad, of Adam, Abraham, Noah, Moses and others who have no canonical, exemplary or normative role in the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

It is the Qur'anic presentation of these stories that establishes the structure of a universalistic salvation history and provides a historical dimension to the vocation and message of Muhammad. It provides the impulse to a constant retelling of them, and in so doing establishes the context in which the entire structure of Islamic jurisprudence has its justification and indeed inevitability. Indeed such retellings unite the Muslim community across its myriad cultural diversities, generating numerous 'novels of holiness' at

every spiritual level, not only in Arabic, but in every language of the non-Arab Muslim world from Swahili to Turkish, from Persian to Malay, inspired by the Qur'anic presentation.

The centrality of story-telling in the Qur'an is often overlooked by non-muslim students of Islam, even by Arabists for much the same reasons as the Qur'an itself may make little appeal: in part because of the internal arrangement of the book, in part because of the rhetoric of their presentation, and in part because the literary *imaginaire* of those living in the European tradition is so dominated by the Biblical presentation of such stories. It is such factors that often obscure how central to its genius the stories it tells are, and in what resides the genius of its story-telling.

Yet within Islam, and *a fortiori* within the muslim exegetic tradition, the situation is different. Devout muslims, and especially the great exegetes live the Book and the stories that it tells with an extraordinary intensity. Its words and phrases literally possess them, and they identify with the characters and the situations of the stories that it has to tell.

One of the great scenes in Qur'anic story-telling occurs in sura 12, the Chapter of Joseph.

Joseph's brothers, on Joseph's insistence have taken Benjamin to Egypt with them despite Jacob's reluctance to let him go. The king's cup has been found in Benjamin's saddle-pack, and he has been held in Egypt, in prison for all his brothers know. They return to Canaan without him, and tell their father what has happened. Jacob's reaction is given in sura 12 (Yusuf-Joseph): 84

*He turned away from them and said
How I grieve for Joseph*

*His eyes were white with sorrow,
and he was overwhelmed with grief.*

Jacob has been told of the loss of second son, and he responds with the name of a son that he had lost years before: 'How I grieve for Joseph!' The psychology of Jacob's response is profound. He is told of the loss of one son, and in his exclamation of grief he utters the name of one lost many years before.

The great exegete Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d.1209) takes up this point, and asks why hearing of the loss of Benjamin should have re-awakened and even deepened his grief for Joseph lost so many years before? His answer is that a new grief intensifies an old and deeply buried grief, and a wound that falls on the site of an old wound makes the earlier wound all the more painful. To illustrate his reply he refers to an elegy written in 634 - six hundred years before - by the poet Mutammim b. Nuwayrah whose brother Malik was killed in battle.

The poet is reproached for weeping tears of blood, on passing through a cemetery, and is asked: Do you weep at every grave you see? He replies: Sorrow but adds to sorrow, so let me be, for every grave here is the grave of my brother Malik. When a new grief falls upon an old grief, it is as though the scar is torn off an old wound, which then bleeds afresh⁵.

These lines of poetry show the deep personal response in Razi's experience of the Qur'anic text, and how in the light of his own experience, he highlights the emotional impact of the Qur'anic scene through reference to intense expressions of grief in poetry - not in such a way as to put the Qur'an on the same level as any other work of literature, but rather to show how Mutammim's literary expres-

sion of a new grief bringing back the experience of an old one demonstrates the validity and appositeness of this scene in the Qur'anic story.

Nevertheless it must be recognised that the Qur'anic mode of story-telling may at first be disorienting to those not familiar with it. Its stories are presented in a sequence of vivid scenes, compact and full of tension, played out by dramatic dialogue. The relationship between such scenes is often to be inferred; there may appear to be gaps or silences that the hearer has to fill from his or her imagination; events that are part of the motivation of the movement of the story are only alluded to, dialogue is often elliptic, and names are rarely used of names to identify the *dramatis personae* in any episode. In the Qur'anic story of Joseph, for example, the only names mentioned in the action of the story are those of Joseph himself, and - parenthetically - that of Jacob.

A possible point of departure for a literary appreciation of this kind of story-telling lies in Erich Auerbach's essay 'Odysseus' Scar'. Having contrasted the rhetoric of exposition of an episode from the *Odyssey* with that of the account in Genesis of God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his son (Genesis 22:1-14), Auerbach remarks that in the latter 'there is the externalisation of only so much of the phenomena as is necessary for the purpose of the narrative, all else is left in obscurity; the decisive points of the narrative alone are emphasised, what lies between in non-existent; time and place are undefined and call for interpretation; thoughts and feeling remain unexpressed, are only suggested by the silence and the fragmentary speeches'⁶. In writing in these terms of this episode of Genesis, he has made remarks that are equally applica-

ble to the Quranic style of story -telling. In the presentation of Qur'anic narratives there are the same kind of silences within and between episodes, as Auerbach has uncovered in this Abraham story.

Thus in coming to terms with the literary character of Qur'anic story-telling, one must realise that its silences are as much part of its rhetoric as its words. Yet these silences are not empty; they contain much that in Auerbach's words 'is to be externalised'. Such silences are, as it were, caskets in which a variety of stories and significances lie hidden; waiting to be discovered.

Such a perspective offers a more than positive approach to the genius of Qur'an story-telling. In the light of it, it is fruitful to consider the story told in sura 18 (al-Kahf-the Cave):60-82 of the meeting of Moses with a mysterious figure usually identified in the Muslim tradition as Khidr. It has the advantage that there is no Biblical counterpart that might overshadow it. The rendering makes use of indentation to make clear visually the distinction between the role of narrative and dialogue in carrying the story.

*[Tell them, Muhammad, of] when Moses said
to his servant
I will not cease [my seeking] until I reach
the confluence of the two seas,
though I search for endless years.
But when they reached the confluence of [the
two seas],
they had forgotten their fish.
It had taken its course,
and was swimming unhindered in the sea.
After they had passed that place
Moses said to his servant
Bring out our provisions
Our journey has wearied us
The servant replied
Did you realise [what happened]
when we sheltered by that rock?*

*I forgot [to tell you about] the fish.
It due to Satan alone
Satan who made me forget to mention it.
Marvellously, it took its course in the sea.
Moses said
That was the place we were seeking.
So they turned back,
retracing their footsteps.
There they met one of Our servants,
one to whom we had shown Our mercy,
one to whom we had taught the knowledge
Ours to give.
Moses said to him:
May I follow you
so that you can teach me
a right understanding
of what you have been taught?
He replied
You will not be able to bear with me patiently,
for how can you bear patiently
with what you do not fully understand?
He said
If God so wills, you will find me patient.
I will not disobey you in anything.
He replied
Then if you follow me, do not ask me the rea-
son
for anything I do before I explain it to you.
So they set out [on their journey].
But while they were on board a ship,
he made a hole in it.
Moses said
Did you make a hole in it
to drown those on board?
You have done a terrible thing
He replied
Did I not say that you would not
be able to bear with me patiently?
Moses said
Do not punish me for my forgetting.
Do not impose on me a burden
too difficult for me to bear.
So they set out again.
Then they met a young man, and he killed him.
Moses said
Have you killed an innocent
without even the excuse of retaliation?
You have done an evil thing.
He replied*

*Did I not say you would be unable
to bear with me patiently?*

Moses said

*If I question you again after this,
be my companion no longer.*

*You will have had cause from me [to leave
me].*

So the two of them set out again.

*Then they came to a village
and asked the people in it for food,
but these refused them hospitality.*

*Then they saw in [in the village]
a wall on the point of collapse,
and he shored it up.*

Moses said

*If you had wished,
you could have earned
a wage for that.*

He replied

*This is the parting of the ways
between you and me.*

*Now I will tell you the meaning
of what you could not bear with patiently.*

*As for the ship, it belonged to some poor men
who worked at sea, and I wished to damage it
because behind them was a king seizing every
[sea-worthy] ship by force.*

*As for the youth,
his parents were devout believers
and we feared that he would burden them
with arrogance and unbelief
so we prayed that their Lord would give them
in place of him one better than he,
more virtuous and more faithful.*

*As for the wall, it belonged
to two orphan boys in the village.
Beneath it was a treasure chest
belonging to them both.*

*Their father was a righteous man,
so your Lord desired that they should
come of age and discover their treasure
as a blessing from your Lord
I did not do it of my own accord.*

*Thus is the meaning of what
you could not bear with patiently.*

The story is intriguing even though it makes use of a motif common in folklore, the promise of a service or knowl-

edge subject to a condition. It has no direct relationship with the preceding pericope in the Qur'an, (verses 56-59) which has to do with those who reject the teaching of Muhammad, those over whose hearts a veil is cast; it avers that those against whom a threat has been pronounced will find no refuge other than with God, and that former communities like them have been destroyed.

Despite its length, the only name mentioned is that of Moses, a name packed with resonances that could be expected to attract attention. But apart from curiosity about who the other participants might be, the story raises hosts of questions: Where was Moses when the story opens, and who was his servant? What is the object of his search, a thing or a person? How long had he been on this search, and what motivated him to undertake it? What is the confluence of the two seas, and what are these seas? How long did it take them to reach this confluence, how did they find their way there? What was this fish of theirs, why should it be (or not be) swimming in the sea, what is its role in the story? What was the place they had passed; what the rock they sheltered by? How did the fish disappear, and why should Satan have intervened to make the servant forget to tell Moses that it had taken its course in the sea? How did Moses know that the rock where this happened was the place that they sought? How far back did they have to retrace their footsteps? Who was the servant God Himself had taught they met there? What was special about him?

Such questions, the silences they represent, cry out to be filled. And the manner of their filling is part of the fascination of the story, - as is the case with many Qur'anic stories - for whenever the story is read or heard, all the answers to these

questions attend it. Invisible, they have been built into the narrative, and are heard with the ear of the mind.

Qur'anic exegetes from the earliest times have transmitted the traditions that have grown up around the story, externalising what is hidden and supplying answers to all these unknowns. To the questions why was Moses engaged in a search, what or whom was he searching for, and who was accompanying him on his search, they reply: Moses had been guilty of vanity. He thought that there was no one in the world wiser than he. God told him that there was indeed such a one and that he would find him at the confluence of the two seas. Moses was to set out with his servant Joshua; they were to take a salted fish in a basket as part of their provisions for the journey. Where they lost the salted fish, that was the place they were seeking. Moses thereupon set out with his servant Joshua following these instructions. What were the two seas? The Greek and the Persian. How did they lose the fish, how did it come to be swimming unhindered in the sea? At the confluence of the two seas was a rock, and beside the rock was a pool of the water of life. While Joshua was performing his ablutions with this water to perform the ritual prayer, some of it splashed on this salted fish. It was restored to life and swam away. Why did they continue their journey? They did not realise that this was the place they were seeking. Moses did not realise that the fish had gone, and Satan made Joshua forget to tell him.

Accordingly they had continued their journey. Night fell and they rested. They opened the basket and found the fish was missing. Joshua's memory returned. He told Moses what had happened at the rock. Moses then realised that the rock

was the place he had been looking for. They retraced their foot-steps, and at the rock Moses met the person identified as Khidr. This haggadic tradition as it may be called elaborates numerous episodes about him - his place and date of birth, how he became immortal, why his name means 'the Green One' and much else besides. At this point Joshua disappears from the story, and interest is focussed on the dialogue between Moses and Khidr.

It hardly needs saying how skilfully the traditions woven around the first part of the narrative fill in all the gaps left by the Qur'an's silences. To the second part, the dialogue between Moses and Khidr is attributed a wide range of significances from that of a simple midrash - make no decision on what is known only in part, to a symbolic presentation of profound mystical insights which derive from the psychological shock that Moses receives from discovering that all his legalistic judgements concerning al-Khidr's actions had been mistaken, a shock which opened his eyes to the new and infinite mystical perspectives that had been revealed to Khidr, far transcending the legalistic knowledge revealed to him, Moses.

Not all of the Qur'an is susceptible of presentation to the non-Muslim world in this way. Its legal provisions, its highly allusive treatment of events in Muhammad's personal life, the problems the pains and uncertainties that he faced, his response to crises of leadership, while all integral parts of the book require too much annotation to be discussed in an essay such as this, although within the context of the Qur'an with the understanding of it carried by the muslim community, it is not perceived as marginal to the text as it might appear in an English rendering. Perhaps a conclusion to be drawn from this observation is simply that study of

the Qur'an presents in an archetypal way almost the centrality of the relation between text and context, a central issue in literary studies. What can text without external commentary communicate; to whom does it communicate meaning and how? What is present and what is missing?

The aspects of the Qur'an presented in this essay vernacularised into the local languages of the Muslim world, have generated not only re-tellings but have created vernacular literatures notably in the Indian sub-continent. This attempt to consider some of them from a secular perspective may serve to show something of their literary character and the universalistic potential of their appeal.

The Qur'an is a book that presents special problems to the non-Muslim who seeks to gain a human understanding of what it contains: that is to say anyone who brings to it simply a human concern to understand its prose sense, the moral and spiritual values and the legal provision that teach inspire and regulate the lives of Muslims; the book which is to Muslims the direct word of God, the pages of which are sacred, as though infused with holiness by the printing on the paper of the Arabic letters that represent

its sounds, and so give a local habitation to its universe of significances.

The reader, wishing to learn something of the religion of Islam from it by taking it to read, as he might take one of the Gospels, The Bhagavad Gita or the life of Gautama Buddha for the same purpose - to read without the commitment of belief, yet suspending disbelief - simply to share in that part of the human heritage it expresses - will soon stop in bewilderment. Some parts certainly make sense, even if, for some reason, in English, they make little impact. Then, unexpectedly, there may come some line or phrase that is inspiringly beautiful.

Notes

1. Victor Gollanz, London 1950.
2. State of New York Press, Albany 1976 (numerous reprints)
3. A.J. Arberry *The Koran Interpreted* Allen and Unwin, London 1955 (numerous reprints).
4. I am indebted to the monumental study of Tabari by Dr C. Gilliot O.P. of the University of Lyons for the use of this term.
5. Fakr al-Din al-Razi *al-Tafsir al-Kabir* Dar al-kutub al-'ilmiyya Tehran No date Vol.18 pp192-3.
6. Eric Auerbach *Mimesis The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Princeton University Press, New Jersey 1974 pp.11-12

The Divine Indian Woman

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On Salman Rushdie, The Satanic Verses. (1988) Consortium, Dover, 1992 PB edn., viii + 547pp; and Andrew Harvey, *Hidden Journey: a Spiritual Awakening.* Bloomsbury, London, 1991, HB, vii + 253pp.

It is bemusing! Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* has now been released in paperback, after three years in its expensive form, and yet beside the plethora of diatribes about 'the issue' (as to whether Rushdie should have the freedom to publish such a work or not) and also various accolades to his creative genius, little has been written in any serious vein about the novel's religious themes¹. On close inspection Rushdie's literary 'bombshell' touches on very many aspects of religious life and belief, often with the most remarkable critical penetration, though sometimes in playful satire (as in the bizarre reincarnations of his two main characters, Gibreel and Salahuddin), and it is not only Islam that receives his treatments². His work addresses religion in a more general, generic sense; for all the banality, salaciousness and 'commodity fetishism' of its characters - in fact through them - the book turns out to be about the biggest questions: 'Is there a God? Is there a Devil?' (p.21). If most of the novel is about the inauthenticity of Indian life in the emigré quarters of London or the international entertainment circuitry within India itself, this baring of naked truth is because humanity always has 'another chance' in spite of 'wrong-doing, weakness, guilt'³. Out of the novel's outrageous dreams - that so upset the Islamic community - issue deep truths about retributive urges that humans have projected on to God, and which turn out corresponding to the pursuit of 'sweet revenge' in everyday life⁴. As the awakening stuttering Indian film producer S.S. Sisodia puts it succinctly for Rushdie's own reflections,

fact is,....religious fafaith, which encodes the highest ass ass aspirations of human race, is now, in our cocountry, the servant of the low-

est instincts, and God is the creature of evil (p.518).

The great centrepiece of *The Satanic Verses*, though, sits somewhat tangentially to the main narrations about the entangled fortunes of Gibreel and Salahuddin, and should certainly not be neglected by students of religion. It is the brilliantly told story of the 'butterfly woman' Ayesha, who emerges as the prophetess-healer of a kind of Muslim 'millenarian movement'. In the isolated Indian village of Titilpur, the rich *zamin-dar* Mirza Saeed Akhtar spies the delicate form of a village girl methodically eating from the prolific host of local butterflies. In that every process she fell convulsing in an epileptic fit, with Mirza Saeed rushing to save her and to place her limp body in bed beside his sleeping wife.

Such hospitality heralded heartburn. The girl Ayesha was already well known in the village for her strange solitariness, and at nineteen she returned from a long absence with snow hair and in transparent beauty, a pure naked form clothed only in butterflies who is acclaimed the 'true successor' of the old local saint Bibiji. Successfully diagnosing that Mirza's childless wife has breast cancer, she then turns every local despair into grand expectations of salvation by announcing a *hajj* to Mecca - with the promise that the waves of the Arabian Sea would part and let the pilgrims walk safely along the ocean floor.

Exasperated at the influence Ayesha has over both his wife and mother-in-law, Mirza hurls the challenge of his atheism at the prophetess, and threatens to join the pilgrimage to end its 'insanity'. Over two hundred pages later the novelist rejoins the procession as it wends its hot and weary way toward the sea, facing *en*

route a barrage of anti-sectarian catch-cries against the 'butterfly witch' in a drought-stricken mining town. Mirza had followed the band of pilgrim stalwarts in his air-conditioned Mercedes-Benz. An unbearably hot Mrs. Qureishi, his plump mother-in-law 'thinking constantly about parties and soft cushions', wheedled her way in beside him; yet when the heavens opened with an enormous downpour and Ayesha seemed to have brought 'the waters of retribution' on the disbelieving miners, Mirza abandons his car and joins in amazement the doughty band of Titlipur survivors. His rebellious, vengeful quest to discredit the butterfly woman is pursued up until the moment of entering the ocean itself, only to be followed by his own enthusiastic plunges behind the other pilgrims as each one subsides into the all-consuming waters. Those few who were later rescued, including Mirza, found themselves being interviewed by the authorities, and one Mohammed Din, *sarpanch* of Titlipur, reported how he saw with his own eyes 'the sea divide, like hair being combed', and his own wife safely moving forward 'along the ocean-floor, among the dying fish'⁵.

Rushdie carries us along a knife-edge to the bitter end of a processional dialectic between belief and doubt with this remarkable tale of spiritual exodus. The expectations work like an Indian rope-trick and somehow hold; the unswerving commitment manifests with psychological - and literary - effectiveness in the prophetess' retributive imprecations against all detractors⁶. The combination of cynicism and poignancy in the telling of this story is clearly the narrational high-point of the novel, but read either way it is highly sensitive material, as a possible critique of Muslim eschatology in general or as too favourable to one obscure form

of Islamic fanaticism in particular. It is not enough for Rushdie to cover himself with a quiet sympathy toward popular religion, warning through one Bhupen (by p. 537) that we might be 'guilty of elitism, of imposing our world-view on the masses' if we write 'in such a way as to pre-judge such beliefs as in 'some way deluded or false'. No; the story of the butterfly woman is eventually located palpably as one among a number of Gibreel's dreams, in which he even enters as her probable inspirer, and possible seducer; and the author thus eludes the role of judge, and any putative charge of irreverence, by enshrouding his religious questioning in the creative dream-mind of his main character, of a Gibreel who is heading toward a more decided madness and suicide. Rushdie can later apologise unequivocally by declaring 'the mystical revelatory experience' to be 'quite clearly a genuine one'; he can remain the Muslim he sometimes, or always, or on second thoughts (after being accused of blasphemy and targeted by assassins) wanted to be⁷.

Andrew Harvey's travels with another Indian divine woman issue in the most personal autobiographical reminiscences, and in quite another genre. If Rushdie's novel weaves its complex semantic and colloquial tapestries, almost reaching Joycean playfulness with the riches of English, poet Harvey writes with a beautiful and evocative simplicity. Well known for his other, Tibetan quest in *A Journey in Ladakh* (1983)⁸, here we find Harvey, a former Oxford don, curiously cast under the spell of gentle Mother Meera, an obscure claimant to Divine Motherhood from Pondicherry. 'There she sat', as he found her in a simple room on a sunlit afternoon,

*a seventeen-year-old girl, surrounded by no ritual paraphernalia, offering neither discourses nor speeches, only her presence, her touch, her gaze*⁹.

As the spiritual awakening unfolds, nowhere in modern literature does one find such an extraordinary exposure of inward feelings and personal religious experiences, strung out on a self-reflective string, and hung openly in spite of anticipated academic scorn, right up to his all-encompassing moments of *samadhi*. Yet once again readers will find themselves suspended on a tight-rope above each scenario, caught between charitable empathy and cynical voyeurism. Harvey has to resolve his worsening homosexual relations, and one wonders whether it is more his discovery of so satisfactory, indeed perfected mother that does this than 'genuine' spiritual experiences¹⁰. In their frequent interviews, these lengthening when Mother Meera moves to the rather drab environment of Thalheim in Germany, we sense about Harvey not only that he speaks very much more than Meera (or Ma) but that he is soliciting a small host of responses from her that he already wants to hear¹¹. Yet each fine detail is so preciously preserved that the work is perhaps more ardently transparent than any other yet.

A dramatic storm signals Ma's cosmic presence in all things; trees and fields give off her white light; a full moon suddenly burning 'alone in the sky' becomes 'absolutely, unmistakably' 'Her eye' (p.128. cf. pp. 71, 204) Experiences of insight and ecstasy recur upon each other until Harvey sheds all his rational inhibitions and human strivings, both together, and lets her transmute 'sexual into divine desire'.

I could strip myself of that effort and dive into Her, naked, ignorant of everything but the lucid rapture she was giving me, free as a scraped fish bone of idea and past (p.162, cf. p149).

And when at last she takes him 'closer still into her intimacy' and they sit on the sofa together 'for a long time in tender silence' (pp. 212, 232), she has already accepted his worship as

the Force that can unify the world... the Force that is creating the new evolution... come down to us as a tender, simple Indian girl

with Divine Light streaming from her face - until the mundanely interruptive ring of a telephone (pp. 194-5)¹².

Of 'The Mother' (Shri Mataji Nirmala Devi) so many more have heard (though serious studies of the Sahaja Yoga community she founded are in short supply)¹³; many will have heard about India and widespread cults focussing on Mahakali or Shakti, or on the marriage of Minakshi to Shiva as celebrated by Tamils¹⁴; but who, it will be asked, is Mother Meera? This 'New Light', in Harvey's evocations, the Avatar who is Lord of the evolutionary spiral of history as Sri Aurobindo intended it, the 'eternal acting out in time the truth of Eternity' in 'a time of crisis'¹⁵. And, as if wanting to answer before the question is posed, Harvey's soul-baring work acts as her revealer to the wide world.

At this point, however, the reader is left being asked to believe more in Harvey than Ma, or to ponder whether the less noisy Ma has become more the articulate rhetorically inventive, evocative, mysticising Harvey. The autobiography acts like a dream and we awake from it, suspended, wondering about reality or that such personal reality can be real outside a

deeper subjectivity. And meanwhile yet another Indian divine woman remains an enigma. Thus remain all avatars or founders (if she emerges as such) who say so little and let others say too much. But at least, I suppose, she is not likely to be leading a weary band of pilgrims to any 'parting of the Arabian Sea'.

Notes

1. Although here I should note A.H. Johns' article 'Notes on Islamic Elements in *Satanic Verses*', in this present journal 2/1 (1989), pp. 5ff., and foreshadow D. Lawton's forthcoming monograph *Blasphemy* with Rushdie being discussed in the last chapter. Note also G.C. Spivak, 'Reading *The Satanic Verses*', in *Public Culture* 2/1 (1989), pp. 79ff., with S.J.D. Green, 'Beyond the Satanic Verses', in *Encounter* June 1990, pp. 12ff.; and for the best of press discussions about various issues impinging on religion as well as censorship by violence, P. Bilimoria, 'Fifth Column', in *The Age Monthly Review* (Melbourne) Oct., 1989, pp. 12f.; J.I Brito M., 'El Exilio de Salman Rushdie', in *El Mercurio* (Santiago de Chile) 5 Jan. 1992, p. D8. For an earlier essay on censorship by Rushdie himself, see his *Imaginary Homelands: essays in criticism 1981-1991*, London, 1992 edn., pp. 37ff.
2. The most unbelievable developments in *The Satanic Verses* (hereafter SV), however, involving reincarnation, form the background to the final and tragic conflict between the two major characters (esp. ch. IX,1). *Inter alia* on Hindu themes, esp. I,2
3. SV, p.546 (concluding the novel), cf. esp. pp. 35-9, 172-84, 264, 272, 285-7, 314, 346, 457-60, 512-20 on exposures of baseness and inauthenticity.
4. Esp. pp. 115-24 (on Muhammed [as Mahound]); 205-216 (a clear enough allusion to the Ayatollah Khomeini); 359-94 (Muhammed again). For important passages on retribution, esp. pp.194, 216, 424, 482 and see pp. 393, 499 (whence the allusion above).
5. SV, pp. 494, 504 (quotations), cf. pp.473 ff.
6. Cf. H. Desroche, *Sociologie de l'espérance*, Paris, 1973, pp. 1-3; G.W. Trompf, 'Introduction', in Trompf (ed.) *Cargo Cults and Millenarian Movements* (Religion and Society 29), Berlin, 1990, pp. 8-9, 13.
7. SV, pp.488, 492 where the Ayesha story most obviously emerges as part of a dream, cf. also p. 211 (before pp. 216 ff. and esp. 226), 226, 234 (on Gibreel's close involvement with Ayesha). See also pp.544-6, cf. Rushdie's *In Good Faith*, London [1990], p.17 (quotation).
8. PB by Flamingo, London, 1984.
9. *Hidden Journey* (hereafter HJ), p.33
10. See esp. pp. 59, 150, 164.
11. See esp. pp. 81-2, 86-8, 103-6, 133-7.
12. Cf. esp E. Carpenter, *Oh What a Blow That Phantom Gave Me!* St. Albans, 1976, pp. 11-13.
13. There is a lengthy, somewhat overly philosophical response in G. de Kalbermatten's *The Advent*, Bombay, 1979. Here I can also foreshadow M. Holmes' forthcoming *Sahaja Culture*.
14. eg M. Comans, 'Swami Vivekananda and the Formation of the Ramakrishna Movement' (Masters thesis, University of Sydney), Sydney, 1980; W. P. Harman. *The Sacred Marriage of Hindu Goddess*. Delhi, 1992.
15. Note, on Aurobindo, HA, pp 236-9, cf. pp 190-1 134 for quotations and above allusions.

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