

## ABSTRACT

### THE UNBOWED BULL: A STRUCTURAL ANALOGY IN HEMINGWAY'S ACROSS THE RIVER AND INTO THE TREES

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Across the River and Into the Trees has generally been regarded as Ernest Hemingway's least successful novel. This prejudice dates from its publication in 1950, and its initial reception was responsible for producing the contemporary suspicion and concern that Hemingway's creative and technical talents were finally exhausted. Even sympathetic reviewers seemed mildly embarrassed by the book and quickly acknowledged that it represented both a failure in intent and realization.

This paper will trace the novel's history from inception, outline its initial critical reception, review several prominent interpretations and, finally, will advance and develop the idea that the novel evolves as a taut and carefully ordained ritual that unfolds according to the dictates and pace of the classical Spanish bull-fight. It will attempt to substantiate my belief that Across the River and Into the Trees is a finely orchestrated work that reflects the conscious control and mastery of a writer who was in charge of both his faculties and his craft.

## INTRODUCTION

With the completion of For Whom the Bell Tolls in the fall of 1940, Ernest Hemingway was free once again to contemplate the implications of a world reduced to international conflict. Hemingway had sensed the inevitability of war and his journalistic work of the late 1930's was marked by both a conscious private concern and an unrestricted political pessimism as to the course of European diplomacy.

Although he had never visited the Orient, Hemingway's interest in America's role as a supporter of Chiang Kai-Shek's resistance to the Japanese prompted him to accept an investigative assignment with the New York paper PM in January of 1941. His evaluation, filed after six months, firmly warned that Japan could pose a serious threat to United States holdings and security, if ever Britain's strategic dominance were to weaken in South East Asia.

Within six months the attack on Pearl Harbor confirmed Hemingway's gravest reservations and, with the dangerous and dramatic shift in power and equilibrium, the United States finally and irrevocably rallied around a unanimous and concerted decision to intervene militarily.

Hemingway's personal commitment resembled formal

enlistment. At his own individual expense, he equipped his beloved motor launch "Pilar" as a patrol boat for United States Naval Intelligence and, from his home in Cuba, cruised Caribbean waters in search of German submarines until the spring of 1944.

Rumours of an imminent and decisive allied strike into France motivated Hemingway to accept accreditation as a war correspondent for Collier's Magazine and on D-Day he waded ashore to accompany American troops in their push through Normandy towards Paris.

While the war offered Hemingway an obvious outlet for his physical energies, it would have been impossible for him to ignore the potential artistic implications of his involvement. His direct participation was, in fact, as much conditioned by the opportunity to gather new material and experience as it was by his characteristic need to pursue and record violent activity of any kind.

It is not necessary to analyze the motives behind the peculiar patterns of Hemingway's personal lifestyle, nor his relish for the hunt, the bulls; and the great game-fish which gained the author as much notoriety as did his prose. These obsessions have already been exposed to much scrutiny and conjecture. It is sufficient to realize that these pursuits were the effective stimuli which triggered in Hemingway a

creative urge to transform all that he had witnessed into a tightly-edited and emotionally-controlled prose dedicated to exploring the thematic enigmas of life, love and death.

Hemingway's commission as a war correspondent correlated to legwork of the hardest kind. His communiqués were brief and succinct, reflecting the honest restriction of limited personal experience, but they also carefully alluded to a greater vision and intimated that the author was calmly awaiting the opportunity for withdrawal and the prolonged period of concentration necessary to transform his journalistic impressions into reflective literary expression. Hemingway's artistic sense of anticipation provides a vivid aside in his factual account of the D-Day landing in Voyage to Victory:

The story of all the teamwork behind that has to be written, but to get all that in would take a book, and this is simply the account of how it was in the L.C.V.(P) on the day we stormed Fox Green Beach.<sup>1</sup>

In retrospect, it is easy to understand the mood of expectancy generated by Hemingway's return to New York in March 1945 and his declaration that he was leaving for Cuba to begin work on a novel dedicated to the battles which had recently been fought.

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<sup>1</sup> William White, By-Line: Ernest Hemingway (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 321.

The first indication of any progress came only in 1948 when Cosmopolitan Magazine dispatched rookie-reporter A. E. Hotchner to negotiate Hemingway's consent to write an article entitled "The Future of Literature." The author accepted \$15,000. advance money but decided six months later to substitute two stories for the analysis. Cosmopolitan agreed to the new arrangement and subsequently increased payment to \$25,000. Hemingway hinted in a telephone conversation to Hotchner that something new was slowly nearing completion:

"About the two stories, agreement is--deadline end of December and I deliver two stories or give back the dough, right? Wrote one story after you left but I think it is too rough for Cosmopolitan so I better save it for the book."

"What book?"

"New book of short stories. Or a book of new short stories--take your pick."<sup>2</sup>

With at least a temporary income assured, Hemingway and his fourth wife, Mary, eagerly planned a vacation in Northern Italy. The author's reception in Venice was most gratifying. Surrounded by warm friends and the memories of his youth, Hemingway was able to enjoy a period of relaxation that extended into November when he retired to Torcello, presumably to resume his writing. He wintered in Cortina and from Christmas to

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<sup>2</sup> A. E. Hotchner, Papa Hemingway (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1967), p. 21.

February of the new year he worked steadily until an eye-infection forced him to enter hospital. It was there that Hemingway first suggested to Hotchner that one of his short stories had the potential of becoming a novel:

The surprise was that Ernest had started one of the Cosmopolitan-promised stories, originally entitled "A Short Story," when he was hospitalized in Italy; he said he had started it to pay for his imminent funeral expenses. As he improved, however, the story grew until it gave every indication of becoming a novel. Ernest was calling it Across the River and Into the Trees. "All of my books started as short stories," he said. "I never sat down to write a novel."<sup>3</sup>

Hemingway returned to Cuba in the summer of 1949 and it was evident that he was enthusiastic about the progress of his current novel:

"Been jamming hard," he said on one occasion. "Blackdog [Hemingway's dog] is tired too. He'll be glad when the book is over and so will I. But by Christ, I'll miss it for awhile. Just wrote a goddam wonder chapter, the man says modestly. Got it all, to break your heart, into two pages."<sup>4</sup>

Hemingway's intensity was not completely literary for he also astutely inquired about the book's possible retail value:

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<sup>3</sup> Hotchner, Papa Hemingway, p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

"About the monies, please advise me. We ought to make a contract before it is finished. It is really the best book I have written, I think, but I am prejudiced, of course."<sup>5</sup>

By November, Hemingway had decided on a vacation in Paris and, while on his stopover in New York, agreed to be the subject of a New Yorker 'Profile'. The article, by Lillian Ross, is interesting in many respects, especially in that it previewed Hemingway's emotions about his still unpublished novel: "She's better book than 'Farewell'," Hemingway said. "I think this is best one, but you are always prejudiced, I guess. Especially if you want to be champion."<sup>6</sup> Hemingway then reproached Miss Ross for asking if the book was different from the others:

"What do you think?" he said after a moment.  
 "You don't expect me to write 'The Farewell to Arms Boys in Addis Abba', do you? Or 'The Farewell To Arms Boys Take a Gunboat'?"<sup>7</sup>

Although Hemingway was undoubtedly teasing Miss Ross throughout the interview, he characteristically avoided any serious attempts at either explaining or clarifying his

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<sup>5</sup> Hotchner, Papa Hemingway, p. 24.

<sup>6</sup> Robert P. Weeks, Hemingway: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1964), p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

literary intentions. The infamous interview did little to enhance Hemingway's personal reputation and the semi-literate pose he had affected held him up to considerable ridicule. The entire New Yorker piece was an unfortunate and regrettable experience. It generated an uneasy and negative current that was to critically influence the atmosphere immediately preceding the publication of Hemingway's latest novel.



## CHAPTER I

After a five-month serialized run in Cosmopolitan, Across the River and Into the Trees was finally published on September 7, 1950 and was at once accorded a decidedly antagonistic reception. The initial newspaper reviews of such personal friends as John O'Hara and Charles Poore were guardedly favourable in a sentimental way, although Malcolm Cowley could not conceal a bitter sense of disappointment: "This is not the big novel for which his public has been waiting and on which Ernest Hemingway has been working at intervals for the last ten years."<sup>1</sup> Maxwell Geismar openly rejected the novel and cautiously advanced the idea that Hemingway's inspiration and talent had thinned to the point of jeopardizing his literary career:

This is an unfortunate novel and unpleasant to review for anyone who respects Hemingway's talent and achievement. It is not only Hemingway's worst novel; it is a synthesis of everything that is bad in his previous work and it throws a doubtful light on the future.<sup>2</sup>

A sampling of the wide range of contemporary critical

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<sup>1</sup> Robert O. Stephens, Ernest Hemingway: The Critical Reception (Burt Franklin and Co. Ltd., 1977), p. 298.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 294.

opinions generated by the novel clearly indicates that it had heavily disappointed a majority. Consequently, Evelyn Waugh was prompted to attempt a concerted and generous evaluation of the reasons: "For the most part, it seems critics have indicated disapproval, some with derisive glee and others with a pretense of pity. The reception seems to be the culmination of a long campaign to show that Hemingway is finished."<sup>3</sup>

Waugh was deeply concerned with the issues of personalities involved in criticism and his analysis questioned whether the book was being judged solely on its inherent artistic merits or whether its rejection was symptomatic of the ill-will often directed at Hemingway himself:

The faults as well as the merits of this book have been evident in Hemingway from the first. One wonders why critics have decided now to make such a concerted attack. Undoubtedly, the portrait of Hemingway in the New Yorker a few months ago by a female reporter did much to show him making a complete and not very lovable ass of himself. Before that he had disappointed all those who had expected him to write the Modern War Epic. After he described Socialist atrocities, certified the presence of Russians in Madrid and made comic spectacles of Marty and La Pasionara, he was on the wrong side of the Socialist barricades. At the same time, his sense of superiority to Americans and American urban commercial developments and his

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<sup>3</sup> Stephens, Ernest Hemingway, p. 322.

sense of inferiority to Europeans pleased no one. And his interest in the technicalities of every trade but his own, combined with his nausea for the talk of other writers, left him with few friends among his fellow writers.<sup>4</sup>

This balanced opinion was supported by William Faulkner but neither man's insight could stem the development of a revisionist spirit among critics which openly chose to question and debate the value of anything Hemingway had ever written. The general feeling among the disparagers of Hemingway was that the novel represented a major fraud and because of what they took to be its counterfeit nature, they felt it their duty to re-examine and appraise all that had been produced before 1950. While Henry Ludecke muttered that "in the face of this new turn in his art, final judgment about Hemingway must be suspended,"<sup>5</sup> J. W. Beach best summarized the contemporary dilemma by stating that the book had caused

. . . a great deal of embarrassment to the many eminent critics and a large body of readers who have whole-heartedly admired him and defended him against all those who challenged his perfection as an artist. He is making it necessary for them to pass his earlier work in review in the light of his latest performance and satisfy themselves whether the

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<sup>4</sup> Stephens, Ernest Hemingway, p. 322.

<sup>5</sup> Carlos Baker, Hemingway and his Critics (New York: Hillard Wang, 1961), p. 215.

faintly disagreeable odor that emanates from Across the River and Into the Trees is an evidence of decay already present in the work they have admired so much, or simply an accidental feature of a story turned out in a moment of weakness.<sup>6</sup>

At first, Hemingway seemed almost indifferent to the arguments surrounding his novel; controversy was conducive to increased sales and he manifested his apparent disinterest by removing himself from all discussions. He said that he refused to read any reviews on Across the River because he believed them to be "about as interesting and constructive as reading other people's laundry lists."<sup>7</sup>

Hemingway's casual lack of interest gradually gave way to a curt defensiveness that curiously echoed De Gaulle's famous war-time speech from exile in England to the French Resistance Movement: "One battle doesn't make a campaign but critics treat one book, good or bad, like a whole goddam war."<sup>8</sup>

He refused to admit that he had written a bad novel and, in conversation with A. E. Hotchner, he devised a simple mathematical analogy to explain how most critics had missed the central point of his latest work:

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<sup>6</sup> Baker, Hemingway and his Critics, p. 227.

<sup>7</sup> Hotchner, Papa Hemingway, p. 74.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

"I have never learned anything from the critics. In this book I moved from calculus, having started with straight math, then moved to geometry, then algebra; and the next time out it will be trigonometry. If they don't understand that, to hell with them."<sup>9</sup>

Hemingway's suggestion that his novel represents a complicated progression of his artistic skills is most provocative in its intimation that the book harbours and contains a deeper and more significant meaning than first attributed to it. Although such staunch Hemingway supporters as Carlos Baker and Stewart Sanderson were to begin deeper inquiries into the novel, their reserved approval indicates that both writers substantially regarded the book as a singularly unfortunate and minor production.

Sanderson regretted that the novel had been weakened by the author's inability to fix or maintain an essential distance between his own personality and that of his hero. However, in comparing the book to Thomas Mann's Death in Venice, he found that Hemingway had raised important questions concerning the need for age and experience to teach youth and innocence the importance of facing life with courage and fortitude. Ultimately, Sanderson viewed the book as thematically continuing

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<sup>9</sup> Hotchner, Papa Hemingway, p. 75.

the expansion of Hemingway's vision and interpretation of man's moral role set against a backdrop of the author's finest descriptive writing:

Hemingway has finally made clear the meaning of his heroic code, in an uneven novel whose defects are redeemed by the elegaic, nostalgic evocation of Venice as the winter wind whips the waves around her ancient beauty.<sup>10</sup>

Carlos Baker was rather less impressed by the novel's message than he was by its construction and symbolic intent. He believed that its "intrinsic form was that of a prose poem, with a remarkably complex emotional structure, on the theme of the three ages of man."<sup>11</sup>

The life story of Colonel Cantwell contains a rubric of the course of time. First is the youth who thinks that life will be better than it is. Then comes the man of experience who finds that it is sometimes--or often--worse than he had anticipated. Finally there is the man who reaches the age and status when death may come at any time through causes that are generally called natural.<sup>12</sup>

Baker also invokes the spectre of Mann's story as a point of reference and comparison:

They have in common the subject of youth contemplated by age. The emotional sense of innocence looking to and longing for experience

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<sup>10</sup> Stewart Sanderson, Hemingway (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), p. 111.

<sup>11</sup> Carlos Baker, Hemingway: The Writer as Artist (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963), p. 264.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 266.

(this is more marked in Hemingway than in Mann), and the object of exploring the nature and power of imaginative illusion.<sup>13</sup>

Baker believes that the book "represents the recollection of things past in a state of imaginative hypertension almost the equivalent of a spell."<sup>14</sup> He uses this framework to explain Cantwell's preoccupation with his past and his almost neurotic conscious concern for doing things correctly because "the emotional hypertension of the recognized approach of death gives every observed detail of remaining life a special sharpened value."<sup>15</sup> The Colonel is obsessed with his memories because each one is a symbolic reminder "of certain milestones in his youthful experience."<sup>16</sup> Baker then reads symbolic meaning into almost every aspect of the Colonel's awareness. He sees the winds, tides, motor-boats, gondolas, canals and surrounding mountains as essential and integral pillars upon which the novel is supported. He attributes a special importance to Renata, the nineteen-year old heroine, and the Colonel's constant companion. He sees her as "the figurative image of the

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<sup>13</sup> Baker, Hemingway: The Writer as Artist, p. 267.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 274.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 275.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 278.

Colonel's past youth, still living in the vision-city he once saw from a distance when he fought for Italy on the plains of the Veneto long ago."<sup>17</sup>

Baker concludes that the novel is an effective exercise in summing up a lifetime of experience for a receptive audience and an important step in an individual's attempt to accept death in a dignified and composed manner. Baker insists that the Colonel was successful in realizing all three ambitions because he had "the marked ability to combine a mature intellectual toughness and resilience with a deeply felt love for the world extant. He faces with courage and equanimity the evils which surround him and are even inside him."<sup>18</sup>

Despite an elaborate defense, Baker does not consider Across the River and Into the Trees as a major novel, nor does he believe that Hemingway intended it to be. Rather, he views it as an "elegaic love-lyric,"<sup>19</sup> dedicated to the tender intent of releasing the Colonel's finer emotions before he is overtaken by death. While Baker's analysis is careful and resourceful, there remains more to Across the River and Into the Trees

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<sup>17</sup> Baker, Hemingway: The Writer as Artist, p. 283.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 287.



than his assessment allows.

Although the possibility has never before been alluded to, I believe that the novel's structural character effectively mirrors and reproduces the action, the passion and the conclusion of an ancient and powerful drama remote from the world of literature. In essence, the novel represents a taut and carefully orchestrated ritual unfolding according to a predetermined tempo and pace and vindicates the conscious control and mystery of an artist who was thoroughly in charge of both his faculties and his craft.

## CHAPTER II

In order to clarify the assumption of a parallel structure inherent in Across the River and Into the Trees, it will be necessary to examine Hemingway's technical study of the bullfight, entitled Death in the Afternoon, to discover certain important thematic considerations which will effectively link the patterns evident in Across the River and Into the Trees to the form and ritual which sustain the classic Spanish Corrida.

I should like to suggest that the novel and its division into highly emotionally charged segments corresponding to the activities of Cantwell's last three days reflect the carefully planned and executed stages or acts in the precisely ordained and skillfully performed bullfight, and that Hemingway exerted a subtle and yet calculated and convincing control over his material so that it might develop and conform according to an ancient and powerful formula.

Hemingway studied the bullfight and its personalities for a number of years before giving his impressions organized expression. His investigation confirmed that the spectacle was neither an equal contest nor a sport, but rather a tragedy in which there was "danger to the man but certain death for

the animal."<sup>1</sup>

Hemingway's curiosity and respect for the bull prompted a lengthy analysis of its background. He discovered that each animal represented a distinct personality and was the result of generations of careful breeding and genetic planning:

The bravery of a truly brave bull is something unearthly and unbelievable. This bravery is not merely viciousness, ill-temper, and the panic-bred courage of a cornered animal. The bull is a fighting animal and where the fighting strain has been kept pure and all cowardice bred out he becomes often, when not fighting, the quietest and most peaceful acting in repose, of any animal.<sup>2</sup>

Specific purpose and science collaborate to guarantee that the bull would be "a wild animal whose greatest pleasure was combat"<sup>3</sup> and, since the bravery of the bull was "the primal root of the whole Spanish bullfight,"<sup>4</sup> his behaviour deserved total scrutiny. Tradition dictated that the bull's presence in the ring be divided into three specific acts, each with its distinct character, atmosphere and significance. The first was the "trial of lances" or the "suerte de varas"<sup>5</sup> which

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<sup>1</sup> Ernest Hemingway, Death in the Afternoon (New York: Charles Scribner's Son, 1932), p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

pitted the bull and his intuitive and natural reactions to the horse-mounted threat of the picadors who share the ring with him. It is in this first confrontation with the lances that the bull's courage, aggressiveness and fighting tendencies were carefully analyzed by the anxious matador hoping to gain strategic insight so as to minimize his own risk once his fateful presence was summoned:

It is in the first act that the bull comes out in full possession of all his faculties, confident, fast, vicious and conquering. All his victories are in the first act. At the end of the first act he has apparently won. He has cleared the ring of the mounted men and is alone.<sup>6</sup>

The illusion is strictly temporary, for the second act, defined as "that of the banderillas,"<sup>7</sup> is destined "to complete the work of slowing up the bull and regulating the carriage of the head which has been begun by the picadors; so that his attack will be slower, but surer and better directed."<sup>8</sup>

Hemingway noted that the drama was short as "the president of the bullfight changes the act after three or at most four pics of banderillas have been placed."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Hemingway, Death in the Afternoon, p. 98.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

As Hemingway summarized the drama in its totality, "the first act is the trial, the second act is the sentencing and the third the execution."<sup>10</sup> The final act is divided into three particular scenes, beginning with "the brindis or salutation of the president and the dedication or toasting of the bull, either to him or to some other person by the matador."<sup>11</sup>

After the matador has acquitted himself of this honorary formality, he begins his work with the maleta or the scarlet-  
serge draped stick with which he is supposed to master the bull and prepare him for the kill, while amazing the audience with the grace and audacity of his style. This second phase of the finale finds the bull, already weakened by the pics and the banderillas, coming under the domination of the matador's carefully executed passes until the inevitable moment when proper technique dictates that a single sword thrust high up between the shoulders should sever the bull's aorta and kill him instantly.

The power and emotional impact of the spectacle is generated and determined by the exhibition of the bull's courage and by the degree of talent, risk and composure which the

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<sup>10</sup> Hemingway, Death in the Afternoon, p. 98.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

matador displays in meeting the challenge. Death in the Afternoon offers a wealth of information concerning the finer points and glorious moments of the pageant's long history, but only an understanding of the salient features of the confrontation itself is necessary to establish a pattern against which to parallel the essential similarities evident in the ordering of the bullfight and the last three days in the life of Colonel Richard Cantwell, hero of Across the River and Into the Trees.

### CHAPTER III

The idea of form remains a consistently interesting factor in criticism devoted to Hemingway. Carlos Baker maintains that the novel had been composed to geometrically mirror the unity of a closed circle. It is true that the novel begins and ends on the same day, with the intermittent action of the two other complete days symmetrically interposed between the opening and the conclusion of the book. However, this rather common flashback device is not what is responsible for the inner complexity of Across the River and Into the Trees. While Hemingway did not explicitly reveal his intentions with regard to the book, this chapter will specifically attempt to demonstrate how the author methodically captured the tempo, suspense and levels of excitement peculiar to the form and ritual of the bullfight.

It is curious to note in Hemingway's discussion of the first act of the bullfight, known as the 'suerte de varas', the attention devoted to explaining the multiple meanings of the word 'suerte'. Hemingway recognized the powerful suggestive effect of the word and meticulously catalogued its diverse connotations, realizing that it was a powerful linguistic cue that could trigger a significant number of reactions and

responses. He interpreted its meaning as "chance, hazard, lots, fortune, luck, good luck, haphazard, state, condition, fate, doom, destiny, kind, sort; species, manner, mode, way, skillful manoeuvre, trick, feat, juggle and piece of ground separated by landmark."<sup>1</sup> Essentially, the words and the dimensions they suggest can be regrouped under three specific or distinct headings effectively relating to fate or destiny, technique or style and, finally, geographic locale.

It is also interesting to note that the plot of Across the River and Into the Trees is predicated upon the same three major focal points. Initially, there is the concern for Cantwell's health, which has fated and conditioned him to the prospect of a premature death. Such a fortune, in turn, motivates an obsessive need to justify and prove the validity of a particularly disciplined moral code that has been responsible for guiding and influencing a tightly militarized lifestyle. Framing this dramatic and intense exercise in self-vindication is Cantwell's earthy and native-like love for Venice and the surrounding Northern Italian countryside to whose defense he had devoted his life and career as a professional soldier.

Just as the initial phase of the 'suerte de varas' is

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<sup>1</sup> Hemingway, Death in the Afternoon, p. 96.



dedicated to revealing the fighting bull's character, so is the first phase of the novel devoted to detailing the important character traits of its central figure.

Colonel Richard Cantwell is introduced as being "fifty and a Colonel of Infantry in the Army of the United States and to pass a physical examination that he had to take the day before he came down to Venice for this shoot, he had taken enough mannitol hexanitrate to, well he did not quite know what to-- to pass he said to himself."<sup>2</sup>

Rather than face involuntary retirement, the Colonel had taken drugs in order to camouflage the external symptoms of his heart condition, although his passing of the mandatory medical examination was due to the fact that the attending physician was a personal friend and an uneasy accomplice to the fraud.

With his position and rank in active service thus temporarily guaranteed, he then thoughtfully prepared for a weekend of duck hunting with Italian civilian friends.

The motor trip to Venice in the sole company of the army chauffeur, Jackson, provides further insight into the Colonel's character and is a remarkably haunting illustration of the saddening failure of two men attempting to communicate

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<sup>2</sup> Hemingway, Across the River and Into the Trees, p. 8.

with each other from world of experience and interests remotely apart. As a conscript, Jackson shared little in common with the Colonel and viewed his induction as a form of bondage which kept him unhappy and far from home. The presence of the amateur soldier nettles the proud professional, for Cantwell's entire adult life has been focused upon the demands of a military career and an ex-patriate's love for adopted soil. The Colonel demonstrates a low tolerance for Jackson's innocuous questions, preferring to allow the drive through familiar territory to induce an atmosphere of nostalgia devoted to Cantwell's experience as a raw Lieutenant during the First World War:

It looks quite differently now, he thought. I suppose it is because the distances are all changed. Everything is much smaller when you are older, then, too, the roads are better now and there is no dust. The only times I used to ride through it was in a camion, the rest of the times we walked. I suppose what I looked for then, was patches of shade when we fell out, and wells in farm yards. And ditches, too, he thought. I certainly looked for plenty of ditches.<sup>3</sup>

Cantwell is also committed to a certain territorial imperative and claims Venice as his real home. His attachment to the Northern Italian city was born of a sentiment of service and is reminiscent of the affection Othello experienced for the

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<sup>3</sup> Hemingway, Across the River and Into the Trees, p. 12.

same city, and of John Hawkwood's loyal service as a soldier of fortune to fourteenth-century Florence:

It is my city, though, because I fought for it when I was a boy, and now that I am half a hundred years old, they know I fought for it and am part owner and they treat me well.<sup>4</sup>

Just as the picadors emerge to aggravate the bull from a quiet and watchful defense of a particular area of the arena so as its reactions may be judged, so do the seemingly simple scenes devoted to Cantwell's relationship with his doctor and driver reveal much about the Colonel's internal conflict and the personal resources he has remaining to rely upon. The Colonel considers that his prime strength is a form of resolve which he loosely defined as toughness:

And what is a tough boy, he asked himself. You use it so loosely you should be able to define it. I suppose it is a man who will make his play and then backs it up.<sup>5</sup>

Cantwell does not extend this to conclude that he personifies the concept of soldier-hero for "the Colonel did not believe in heroes,"<sup>6</sup> however he would easily have agreed that he had always attempted to honor a military tradition that had

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<sup>4</sup> Hemingway, Across the River and Into the Trees, p. 26.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

evolved within Napoleon's elite corps.

In Wellington's Army there was no such thing as a typical soldier, but in Napoleon's there was: one could truthfully say that Captain Robinaux was typical, and so his failings have a special significance. Robinaux multiplied by 70,000 was the strength of Napoleon's army. He was thirty-one, and had served in the army since he was twenty, an amiable man, fond of a glass of wine, a good companion; perhaps a little too precise in his thoughts and not very imaginative--but too long service in any army might make a man like that.<sup>7</sup>

While Cantwell might have been readily assimilated and welcomed into such an assembly, approaching death has quickened his sensitivities and from deep within grew an urgent need to acquit ancient debts and to establish a personal monument to the collective sorrows he had witnessed as a young soldier.

The Colonel's concern for his past and his relation to the battlefields of the north are made explicit in a moving scene which details a spectre-haunted pilgrimage to the sight of an earlier wounding: "A few weeks ago he had gone through Fossalta and had gone out along the sunken road to find the place where he had been hit, out on the river bank."<sup>8</sup>

He had undertaken the journey to honour fallen comrades

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<sup>7</sup> David Howarth, Waterloo (Glasgow: Fontana Books, 1972), p. 61.

<sup>8</sup> Hemingway, Across the River and Into the Trees, p. 17.

and to commemorate the ever-vivid horror of his most frightening wartime experiences. To celebrate his survival, the Colonel fashioned a strange monument by digging a hole, defecating and burying with this symbol of waste a ten-thousand lira note as interest on the sparing of his life:

It is fine now, he thought. It has merde, money, blood; look how that grass grows; and the iron's in the earth along with Gino's leg, both of Randolfo's legs and my right kneecap. It's a wonderful monument. It has everything. Fertility, money, blood and iron. Sounds like a nation. Where fertility, money, blood and iron is, there is the fatherland.<sup>9</sup>

It is obvious that strong parallels exist between Hemingway's personal woundings as an ambulance driver in the First World War and those of Cantwell. However, the scene is not essentially relevant for its biographical data, but because it emphasizes man's enduring and primitive need and urge to immortalize individual experience. The episode is thus psychologically interesting and artistically valid for it indicates the range of the Colonel's sensitivities and because it explains the subsequent basis for the enduring friendships he has maintained through adult life and why he is so close to the Maitre d' who works at the Hotel Gritti in Venice.

He advanced smilingly, lovingly, and yet conspiratorially, since they both shared many secrets, and he extended his hand,

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<sup>9</sup> Hemingway, Across the River and into the Trees, p. 18.

which was a big, long, strong, spatular fingered hand; well kept as was becoming, as well as necessary, to his position, and the Colonel extended his own hand, which had been shot through twice, and was slightly misshapen. Thus contact was made between two old inhabitants of the Veneto, both men, and brothers in their membership in the human race, the only club that either one paid his dues to, and brothers, too, in their love of an old country, much fought over, and always triumphed in defeat, which they had both defended in their youth.<sup>10</sup>

Their relationship dates from the First World War when the Maitre D' had served as a Sergeant for the young American Lieutenant. While the two men had grown to regard themselves as spiritual equals, a strange sense of the ancient hierarchy continued to pervade their conversation. Time and separate fortunes had tended to strain the magic of their thirty-year old memories and the Maitre D' longed to keep their relationship simple and comprehensible:

But when the Colonel became a general officer again, as he had once been, and thought in terms that were as far beyond him as calculus is distant from a man who has only the knowledge of arithmetic; then he was not at home, and their contact was strained, and he wished the Colonel would return to things they both knew together when they were a lieutenant and a sergeant.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Hemingway, Across the River and Into the Trees, p. 55.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

It is interesting to note the international symbolism used to describe the distance time and experience had placed between the two men. Curiously enough, Hemingway was to use similar language in explaining the overall importance of Across the River and Into the Trees within the canon of his work.

Neither man deliberately wishes to admit that they now have little in common so they mutually consent to relive the past through the rituals of a secret order entitled "El Ordine Militar, Nobile y Espirituoso de los Caballeros de Brusadelli."<sup>12</sup> Membership in this select, satiric group is restricted to those who had fought for Italy and despise the draft-dodger and war-profiteers who had exploited commercial influence and circumstance for safety and gain. Just as the pasturing fighting bulls lapse into peaceful serenity while in the midst of their herd groups, the Colonel and the Maitre D' relax in the security of their mutually accorded sense of esteem and worth:

He only loved people, he thought, who had fought or been mutilated. Other people were fine and you liked them and were good friends; but you only felt true tenderness and love for those who had been there and had received the castigation that everyone receives who goes there long enough, so I'm a sucker for crips, he thought, drinking the unwanted drink.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Hemingway, Across the River and Into the Trees, p. 56.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

The Maitre D' exercises a soothing effect on the Colonel, his own basic decency reminding Cantwell of his own need and responsibility to be generous and gentle:

I try always to be just, but I am brusque and I am brutal, and it is not that I have erected the defense against brown-nosing my superiors and brown-nosing the world. I should be a better man with less wild boar blood in the small time which remains.<sup>14</sup>

Up to Cantwell's arrival at his hotel, the novel operates in the narrative mode, spatially exploring the environment and the events which had influenced the Colonel in his formative years. The initial phase of the book is basically one-dimensional, providing the reader with an opportunity to assess Cantwell's strengths and weaknesses. Across the River and Into the Trees might have continued as a linear study of one man's attempts to formulate value judgments on himself and the world about him, just as Stephen Crane had done with The Red Badge of Courage. However, Hemingway chooses to interject the thematic consideration of a strange and curious love affair between the Colonel and a nineteen-year old Italian Countess named Renata. Structurally, the girl's introduction represents the debut of the novel's second act and the book takes on an added dimension and interest.

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<sup>14</sup> Hemingway, Across the River and Into the Trees, p. 65.



Renata is ultimately the novel's great orchestrator, the guest of honour or honorary lady president for whose benefit all subsequent action is dedicated. Her presence and departure signal the changing acts of the drama. At her signal Cantwell had come to Venice; it would be through her quiet concern and gentle coaxing that he would find peace and ultimately the grace of an accepted death. Her presence is critical to the development of the novel, and yet she represents one of the elements most commonly criticized by those who find her pliantly unreal and unbelievable as a character.

It has often been complained that Hemingway had great difficulty in dealing with love relationships because his female characters were rather more like fantasy-figures than real-life women. They have been viewed as pale and unrealized reflections of their male counterparts exuding neither personal conviction nor color. Critical reaction to Renata has generally been similarly unflattering, although a search for a living model did generate considerable speculation, given the general biographical tone of the entire novel.

In 1965, the Italian magazine Epoca featured an article entitled "I Am Hemingway's Renata,"<sup>15</sup> under the by-line of one

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<sup>15</sup> Hotchner, Papa Hemingway, p. 194.

Adriana Ivancich. The story suggested that Hemingway had modelled his heroine after Adriana after having enjoyed a brief period of infatuation with the girl during the winter holiday spent in Italy in 1949. Mary Hemingway's recollections in How It Was certainly confirm Hemingway's interest in the girl and that she could easily have served as the heroine's physical likeness. Adriana reportedly told Hemingway that she found Renata implausible and inconsistent:

"As for Renata, no, a girl with that grace and family tradition, and so young as well, does not sneak out of the house to have amorous rendezvous and gulp one martini after another, as if they were cherries. No, she was full of contradictions. She was not real."<sup>16</sup>

The author responded by stating that Renata was actually a composite figure:

You are too different to understand, but I assure you that girls like that do exist. What is more, in Renata there is not one woman only, but four different women whom I have actually met.<sup>17</sup>

While the idea of a teen-age girlfriend conducting her affairs with a rather avant-garde freedom suggests a number of interesting questions, the basic assumption behind the relationship clearly indicates a case of spiritual affinities

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<sup>16</sup> Hotchner, Papa Hemingway, p. 194.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

transcending age. In one of the more careful observations made on the relationship, Delbert Wylder claims that the conversations between Cantwell and Renata are part of a carefully executed exercise in double significance. It is Wylder's thesis that Renata was actually pregnant at the time of the Colonel's visit to Venice and their mutual concern was for the child's future now that it was definitely expected:

They stood there and kissed each other true.  
 "I have a disappointment for you, Richard," she said. "I have a disappointment about everything." She said it as a flat statement and it came to the Colonel in the same way as a message came from one of three battalions, when the battalion commander spoke the absolute truth and told you the worst.

"You are positive?"

"Yes."

"My poor Daughter," he said.

Now there was nothing dark about the word and she was his Daughter, truly and he pitied her.<sup>18</sup>

Cantwell despairs for her knowing that she will have to face her humiliation alone:

"How is your mother?" he asked lovingly.

"She is very well. She does not receive and she sees no one because of her sorrows."

"Do you think she would mind if we had a baby?"

"I don't know. She is very intelligent, you know. But I would have to marry someone, I suppose. I don't really want to."

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<sup>18</sup> Hemingway, Across the River and Into the Trees, p. 110.

"We could be married."

"No," she said. "I thought it over, and I thought we should not. It is just a decision as the one about crying."<sup>19</sup>

Wylder completes his unique interpretation by postulating Alvarito, Cantwell's host for the duck hunt, as the father designate, and bases his final theory on the supposition that the two men are actually discussing Renata and not Venice in their parting dialogue:

"I'm sorry you came so far for so few ducks."

"I always love the shoot," the Colonel said.

"And I love Venice."

The Baron Alvarito looked away and spread his hands towards the fire. "Yes," he said, "We all love Venice. Perhaps you do the best of all."

The Colonel made no small talk on this but said, "I love Venice as you know."

"Yes, I know," the Baron said. He looked at nothing.<sup>20</sup>

Wylder concludes that Hemingway had constructed a subtle and ingeniously interesting sub-plot of tremendous impact and consequence and had coolly hidden it away beneath the more obvious problems of Cantwell's emotional dilemma.

The second act of the bullfight is devoted to the careful planting of a number of banderillas in the bull's neck in order to weaken the shoulder muscles and to regulate the carriage

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<sup>19</sup> Hemingway, Across the River and Into the Trees, p. 93.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 301.

of the bull's head. Although the wounds are not mortal, they place the bull at a distinct disadvantage and become a tiring source of discomfort and aggravation. In a like manner, the Colonel is forced to deal with a number of unpleasant memories and associations, the first concerning his ex-wife. The Colonel is painfully and judgmentally succinct in his evaluation of his failed marriage and again, the parallels between fiction and Hemingway's own experience with his third wife, Martha Gellhorn, are obvious. The Colonel attributes his marital difficulties to the fact that his wife "was an ambitious woman and I was away too much."<sup>21</sup> Renata probes deeper into the wound, attempting to reapportion guilt by evaluating motive: "You mean she went away from ambition, when you were only away from duty?"<sup>22</sup> Renata's use of the words 'only' and 'duty' subtly shifts responsibility away from the Colonel and he quickly exploits the advantage: "Sure," the Colonel said and remembered as unbitingly as he could. "She had more ambition than Napoleon and about the talent of the average High School Valedictorian."<sup>23</sup> The intensity of Cantwell's undisguised

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<sup>21</sup> Hemingway, Across the River and Into the Trees, p. 212.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

bitterness trembles throughout his emotional scar tissue but gradually subsides into a numbed and startingly indifference:

"You wouldn't tell her about us, so she could write about it?"

"No. I told her about things once, and she wrote about them. But that was in another country and besides the wench is dead."<sup>24</sup>

Breach of faith is a cardinal sin in Cantwell's code and error invokes quick excommunication:

"Is she really dead?"

"Deader than Phoebus the Phoenician. But she doesn't know it yet."

"What would you do if we were together in the Piazza and you saw her?"

"I'd look straight through her to show her how dead she was."<sup>25</sup>

Granted the slanted and one-sided nature of Cantwell's story, Renata's gentle provocations provide the Colonel with a receptive audience and the opportunity to forever dismiss his ex-wife from his mind and warm him to the remaining task of discussing other circumstances and events which had troubled his conscience and his career.

Although Hemingway had purposely returned from Europe to begin work on an epic war novel, it is evident that little of this intent was captured in Across the River and Into the

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<sup>24</sup> Hemingway, Across the River and Into the Trees, p. 213.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Trees. The military writing in the second phase of the book is essentially rambling and cursory. Thematically, the war-time nightmares which constantly haunt Cantwell's subconscious represent a second wave of banderillas that oppress and tire the Colonel. Renata gently persuades the Colonel to discuss their implications in an attempt to draw him towards a final peace.

"I think, perhaps, you exaggerate. I don't believe you made many wrong decisions."

"Not many," the Colonel said. "But enough. Three is plenty in my trade, and I made all three."

"I'd like to know about them."

"They'd bore you," the Colonel told her.

"They beat the hell out of me to remember them. So what would they do to some outsider?"

"Am I an outsider?"

"No. You're my true love. My last and only and true love."<sup>26</sup>

Unlike Krebs in "Soldiers Home"<sup>27</sup> who retreats into a post-war bunker of silence, Cantwell allows himself to criticize and condemn those political and military superiors whose horrible miscalculations and errors were to blame for the untenable orders which eventually led to his loss of command. The Colonel may have had to endure demotion, shame and professional disgrace, but his personal sense of honour and justice dictate that events be placed in a proper perspective so that

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<sup>26</sup> Hemingway, Across the River and Into the Trees, p. 94.

<sup>27</sup> Hemingway, The Short Stories, p. 143.

Renata could understand what he had endured. In order to divorce the concept of war from the realm of theory, Cantwell deliberately describes it at its lowest and grossest level:

Then there was one other thing, I remember. We had put an awful lot of white phosphorous on the town before we got in for good, or whatever you would call it. That was the first time I ever saw a German dog eating a wasted German Kraut. Later on I saw a cat working on him too.<sup>28</sup>

However, Cantwell has no illusions that his listing of atrocities could ever impede or stop the threat of war: "How many could you tell like that? Plenty, and what good would they do? You could tell a thousand and they would not prevent war."<sup>29</sup> Consequently, Cantwell stoically accepts his burden of responsibility, concedes his errors and failures, and realistically assumes that he in no way can ever change or alter the course of human politics. "'They're dead', he said. 'And I can hang and rattle'."<sup>30</sup>

At one level Renata represents, as Baker suggests, uninitiated youth being informed and educated by the voice of experience and authority. However, her role in the long

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<sup>28</sup> Hemingway, Across the River and Into the Trees, p. 257.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 258.



dream-like narrative devoted to cataloguing Cantwell's memories takes on a special active significance when, during a difficult and emotionally bleeding encounter, the girl senses the despair in Cantwell's tone and gently coaxes him toward total release with a startling and perceptive declaration that indicates the extent and necessity of her involvement with the Colonel:

"Don't you see you need to tell me things to purge your bitterness?"

"I know I tell them to you."

"Don't you know I want you to die with the grace of a happy death?"<sup>31</sup>

The process of granting the Colonel the grace of a happy death is the prime thematic concern of the novel's second act. In it the Colonel is purged and cleansed of all bitterness and his bravery and integrity saluted and confirmed. Unlike a Frederick Henry who could only curse the strange and terrible irony of losing his love when he needed it most, Richard Cantwell echoes Robert Jordan's sentiments in submitting to the sad inevitability of his own death while toasting the girl as the single best piece of luck he had ever enjoyed:

What a damn wonderful girl and what am I doing here anyway? It is wicked. She is your last true and only love, he thought, and that's not evil. It is only unfortunate. No, he thought, it is damned fortunate and you are very fortunate.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Hemingway, Across the River and Into the Trees, p. 240.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

Inevitably their relationship remains a mystery and Cantwell interprets it as something resembling a miracle to be accepted by faith:

But how could she love a sad son of a bitch like you?

I do not know, he thought truly, I do not know.

He did not know among other things that the girl loved him because he had never been sad one waking morning in his life; attack or no attack. He had experienced anguish and sorrow. But he had never been sad in the morning.<sup>33</sup>

He had loved her with a decided tenderness and without any illusions of possessing her: "I want you Daughter. But I don't want to own you. I know it, the girl said. And that's one more reason why I love you."<sup>34</sup>

It was all the luck he would ever enjoy but it was enough to comfort him for the final act dedicated to the inevitable drama of the kill. The Colonel feels it approaching and considers his possible options:

You going to run as a Christian? You might give it an honest try. She would like you better that way. Or would she? I don't know, he said frankly. I honest to Christ don't know. Maybe I will get Christian toward the end.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Hemingway, Across the River and Into the Trees, p. 289.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 291.

He does not. Instead, it remains only for the surly and indifferent guide to lead the old bull through a final series of mocking passes with the maleta in the quietly underwritten passages devoted to Cantwell's last hunt in the icy swamps north of Venice. It is mesmerizing to see Cantwell follow the arc and flow of his own shotgun while silently being stalked by the spectre of death himself. The episode is rich in tension and emotion, and the Colonel's instinctive awareness allows him the final realization that this has indeed been his last hunt. At its conclusion he carefully seeks out his host and makes final arrangements for the return of Renata's portrait:

In case of any unforeseen contingencies  
would you ask her to have the portrait  
picked up at the Gritti.

Yes My Colonel.

That's all, I guess.

Good-bye my Colonel.<sup>36</sup>

The Colonel leaves the lodge but his intuition and instincts instruct the driver to follow a branch road rather than the main one leading back to Trieste. Isolated in the back seat of his staff car, he awaits the end and offers this final resumé of his life:

Now take it easy, the Colonel said to himself. Any further concern you may have is about yourself and that is just a luxury.

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<sup>36</sup> Hemingway, Across the River and Into the Trees, p. 304.

You are no longer of any real use to the Army of the United States, that has been made quite clear. You have said good-bye to your girl and she has said good-bye to you. That is certainly simple.<sup>37</sup>

The final death scene is quick and serene. In Death in the Afternoon, Hemingway reported that bulls were

. . . not killed properly by a sword thrust in the heart. The sword is not long enough to reach the heart, if driven in where it should go high up between the shoulder blades. It goes past the vertebrae between the top of the ribs and, if it kills instantly, cuts the aorta.<sup>38</sup>

Hemingway emphasized the importance of doing this cleanly for "to kill a bull in his neck or his flank, which he cannot defend is assassination."<sup>39</sup> Cantwell is afforded the mercy of the clean sweep of the sword and, in his dignified dying, confirms Hemingway's belief that while life may destroy the individual, it can never defeat him.

Hemingway had begun his investigation of personal responses to the enigmas of life and death in the Nick Adams stories and developed his observations through three generations of novels. In essence, Richard Cantwell represents the final

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<sup>37</sup> Hemingway, Across the River and Into the Trees, p. 306.

<sup>38</sup> Hemingway, Death in the Afternoon, p. 235.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 246.

link in the long evolutionary study of the code-hero. In many respects the novel is a disappointing conclusion; however, it does contain enough speculative interest to warrant a closer and more sympathetic re-evaluation.

In concluding Death in the Afternoon, Hemingway sentimentally acknowledges that time and circumstance had slowly changed and modified the places and personalities he had so conscientiously laboured to detail and describe. He also admits that he would liked to contain more of the flavour and intensity of the experiences which had stimulated his writing. Modesty required an artistic apology; the same apology, in fact, that might be offered in defense of Across the River and Into the Trees:

No. It is not enough of a book, but still there were a few things to be said. There were a few practical things to be said.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Hemingway, Death in the Afternoon, p. 298.

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## ABSTRACT

### THE SPIRITUAL AFFINITIES OF THOMAS CARLYLE AND OSCAR WILDE

Ross Lemke

Thomas Carlyle and Oscar Wilde may well represent the philosophic and artistic extremes of the wide spectrum of personalities which characterize Victorian literature.

While fundamentally opposed and incompatible in terms of philosophy and moral values, the lives of both men are similar in terms of one important and qualifiable unifying factor. Although the immediate and underlying causes were essentially different, both Thomas Carlyle and Oscar Wilde experienced the trauma of a severe emotional or spiritual breakdown and depression at a critical juncture in their careers.

A close examination of the two men's spiritual autobiographies reveals a remarkable degree of similarity in the nature of the concepts and ideas conceived and debated during the lonely interlude devoted to re-establishing a lost sense of spiritual equilibrium. It will be the purpose of this paper to develop the hypothesis that for a brief period of time, the gyres of the two men's thoughts were to span generations, reduce differences, to intersect and, finally, like distant mirrors, to reflect a brilliant vision of man's duties and responsibilities in his quest for personal growth.



## INTRODUCTION

In a letter of petition addressed to the Home Secretary on July 2, 1896, Oscar Wilde carefully catalogued the factors contributing to his emotional distress as a prisoner in Reading Gaol. He concluded his painful summary with a specific request for some twenty-five volumes by different English and French authors as a solace for his enforced solitude. The revelation that Thomas Carlyle's spiritual autobiography Sartor Resartus appeared on the list and was one of the books eventually approved is one of the more fascinating facts of nineteenth-century literary minutiae.<sup>1</sup>

Initially, nothing about the two men regarded in biographical isolation would tend to suggest either a common intellectual ground or the possibility of ethical or philosophic sympathy. Although it is known that Wilde enjoyed working behind a desk which had once belonged to Carlyle,<sup>2</sup> this tenuous and weak material bond in no realistic way consciously symbolized or represented a spiritual sense of affinity or continuity.

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<sup>1</sup> Rupert-Hart Davis, The Letters of Oscar Wilde (London: Rupert Hart Davis Ltd., 1962), p. 405.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Fido, Oscar Wilde (New York: Viking Press, 1972), p. 76.

However, Wilde's selection of Sartor Resartus does provide an interesting focal point for examining the lives and opinions of two seemingly diametrically opposed personalities and intellects who emerged from distinctly different backgrounds to become acclaimed and influential literary voices and public figures.

Despite the obvious differences and contrasts which distinguished their separate philosophies, their lives were marked by an important and qualifiable unifying factor.

Although the immediate and underlying causes were fundamentally different, both men experienced the trauma of a period of severe emotional stress and depression at critical junctions in their careers. As sensitive individuals, both were impelled to investigate and analyse the causes and consequences of their problems and as artists, both reacted by presenting distinctly sincere and incisive literary interpretations of their findings.

A close examination of the two men's spiritual autobiographies reveals a remarkable degree of similarity in the nature of the concepts and ideas conceived and debated during the lonely interlude devoted to re-establishing a lost sense of personal equilibrium. It is in the substance of their conclusions about moral accountability and personal responsibility that the divergence in their outlook disappears.

Although the unity of vision achieved through the interpretation of personal experience was certainly never consciously intended, it will be the purpose of this paper to develop the hypothesis that for a brief period of time, the gyres of the two men's thoughts were to span generations, reduce differences, to intersect and finally, like distant mirrors, to reflect a brilliant vision of man's duties and responsibilities in his quest for personal growth.

The remainder of this paper will be structurally divided to attain two goals. The first will be concerned with summarizing the lives and major contribution of the two artists, counterpointing their similarities and differences, and in giving their respective breakdowns a biographical context. The second will focus on analyzing in greater detail the cause and effect factors of their emotional crises as discussed in Thomas Carlyle's Sartor Resartus and in the original version of Oscar Wilde's long letter to Lord Alfred Douglas, later to be known after its edited publication by Robert Ross in 1905 as De Profundis, to effectively conclude that, despite their disparate natures, both men shared a certain spiritual affinity.

## CHAPTER I

Little about Thomas Carlyle's early years would tend to suggest that he was destined to become one of Britain's foremost social commentators or her greatest voice of stern moral protest. Born in Ecclefechan, Scotland, in 1795, Carlyle was solidly educated in the stoic virtues of his Calvinist father and fared well enough in school to be sent to the University of Edinburgh at the age of fourteen to study for the ministry.

Carlyle maintained a frugal existence in an atmosphere he thoroughly disliked and anxiously witnessed the erosion of his religious faith through the pressure of contemporary intellectual scepticism. At the conclusion of his five-year undergraduate program, Carlyle decided to postpone his entry into divinity school and instead opted for an interim career as a teacher of mathematics.

The five years following this decision were intensely difficult and confusing. Dissatisfied with teaching but unable to commit himself to the ministry, Carlyle briefly studied law before turning to tutoring and the writing of articles for the Edinburgh Review as a means of earning a meager living.

It was undoubtedly the unhappiest interlude of his life. The totally unexpected challenge to his religious faith combined with his lack of personal direction to effect a chilling transformation upon his already sober disposition. Unable to remedy or alter his depressed condition, Carlyle endured a lonely period of frustration and uncertainty that could be generally characterized as representing his most acute emotional or spiritual crisis.

It was not before 1821 that Carlyle finally began to emerge from his lengthy depression. The translation of German idealist thinkers such as Goethe had inspired his imagination and courage while his romantic association with Jane Welsh warmed his emotions through an extended courtship which became an important and enduring relationship after their marriage in 1826.

After an interlude in Edinburgh, Carlyle and his wife returned to the quiet and simplicity of country living in Craigenputtock. Carlyle's nervous health improved immeasurably in the six years he was to spend in virtual self-exile and it was during this retreat from society that he read voraciously, meditated, and patiently crafted his analytical perceptions into a remarkably distinctive prose style.

Although Carlyle was hampered in his research by the lack of a great library, he continued to write articles on.

German literature while his wife managed their modest income and attempted to make their home as hospitable as possible.

Carlyle's talents drew the attention of other influential and reform-minded contributors to the Edinburgh Review and his name circulated as a possible replacement for Lord Jeffrey who was about to step down as its editor. Denied serious consideration because of his inflexibility and independence of political thought, Carlyle submitted a vital essay entitled the Signs of the Times in 1829 as a scathing attack on the popular concept of a philosophy of progress.

As a social critic Carlyle deplored the contemporary predilection for empirical investigation into the cause and effect aspect of the universe. His disapproval was based on the suspicion that scientific curiosity was more intensely interested in the visible and material than in the underlying spiritual nature of the universe. He described his generation as being overly concerned with the physics of life:

Were we required to characterize this age of ours by any single epithet, we should be tempted to call it, not an Heroical, Devotional, Philosophical, or Moral Age but above all others, the Mechanical Age.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Shelston, ed., Thomas Carlyle's Selected Writings (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 64.

The scientific emphasis which was being translated into industrial progress was also found to be responsible for certain troubling changes in basic attitudes:

Men are grown mechanical in head and heart, as well as in hand. They have lost faith in individual endeavour, and in natural force, of any kind. Not for internal perfection but for external combinations and arrangements, for institutions, constitutions--for Mechanism of one sort or other, do they hope and struggle. Their whole efforts, attachments, opinions, turn on mechanism and are of a mechanical character.<sup>2</sup>

Carlyle was particularly sensitive to the dangers which accompanied a growing loss of traditional religious faith and questioned the shift in values necessitated by a preference for the physical and material over the spiritual:

This is not a religious age. Only the material, the immediately practical, not the divine and spiritual, is important to us. The infinite, absolute character of Virtue has passed into a finite conditional one; it is no longer a worship of the Beautiful and Good; but a calculation of the Profitable. Worship, indeed, in any sense, is not recognized among us, or is mechanically explained into Fear of pain or Hope of Pleasure. Our true duty is mechanism.<sup>3</sup>

Carlyle was no believer in utilitarian ethics. He regretted that man had come to be guided by tangible and

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<sup>2</sup> Shelston, Thomas Carlyle's Selected Writings, p. 67.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

"material considerations"<sup>4</sup> rather than that which was "inward and spiritual":<sup>5</sup>

Self-denial, the parent of all virtue, in any true sense of that word, has perhaps seldom been rarer: so rare is it, that the most, even in their abstract speculations, regard its existence as a chimera.<sup>6</sup>

However, as a realist, Carlyle could not deny that progress offered some important and worthwhile benefits:

Doubtless this age also is advancing. Its very unrest, its ceaseless activity, its discontent contains matter of promise. Knowledge, education are opening the eyes of the humblest; are increasing the number of thinking minds without limit. This is as it should be; for not in turning back, not in resisting, but only in resolutely struggling forward does our life consist.<sup>7</sup>

While Carlyle was concerned with a general lack of interest in spiritual matters, he was also worried about Britain's social climate and suspicious of political attempts to legislate a new order. Rather than trusting the process to various groups or factions of society, Carlyle advocated that effective change could only be the result of a sincere

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<sup>4</sup> Shelston, Thomas Carlyle's Selected Writings, p. 81.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 83.



and personal form of behaviour modification:

To reform a world, to reform a nation, no wise man will undertake; and all but foolish men know, that the only solid, though a far slower reformation, is what each begins and perfects on himself.<sup>8</sup>

Although Carlyle wrote, without publishing, his marvelous and complex spiritual autobiography Sartor Resartus and conceived the idea for a historical analysis of the French Revolution while in Craigenputtock, he realized that his career would stagnate unless he gained greater national exposure.

In 1834, Carlyle established himself in London and his home grew to become the center of a talented and brilliant group with its host dominating the tone and intensity of conversation and debate. The critical acclaim accorded Carlyle's work on the French Revolution guaranteed his success and position of eminence among contemporary thinkers by 1837.

While Signs of the Times was a sensitive and clearly expressed critique of contemporary life, a long pamphlet entitled Chartism, published in 1839, demonstrates Carlyle's inexorable shift to the right in his political philosophy and indicates his growing fascination with the concept of a

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<sup>8</sup> Shelston, Thomas Carlyle's Selected Writings, p. 85.


national purpose under the supervision and direction of a wise and talented leader.

The theme of recognizing and choosing the competent and proper leader was to dominate much of Carlyle's future work and his lectures On Heroes and Hero Worship (1840), Past and Present (1843), and the Latter Day Pamphlets (1850) demonstrate the author's considered opinion that democracy was an inappropriate system, that the majority needed to be coerced and led, and that all people had the duty and responsibility to work.

Although Carlyle's views became more authoritarian and distasteful in tone and premise, they were based on the very real fear that the country was in a state of decline and that difficult choices had to be made and implemented if revolutionary conditions were to be averted and stability maintained.

As a social analyst and comentator, Carlyle defies easy definition. Although his tendencies were conservative, his independent and uncompromising spirit kept him fundamentally unaligned with any major political party during his four-decade period of pre-eminence and influence.

Carlyle's opinions were primarily based on direct observation of contemporary tempers and trends. They were also influenced by his reading and interpretation of historic cycles and events. His strength and power of expression lay in the ability to extend the metaphor of his own problems to encompass



those of society.

Although Carlyle was to know his greatest success in London after 1834, it was the previous six years spent in Craigenputtock that had allowed him the time to discover the great interests and themes that were to dominate his life-work.

The interlude is also important in that it provided Carlyle with the occasion to come to terms with his past, to understand the kind of man he had been and was in the process of becoming. Essentially it represents the concluding chapter of a drama which had begun with Carlyle's loss of religious faith and period of emotional despondency as a young man.

The mystical experience and conversion of Leith Walk forever altered Carlyle's destiny and the causes, consequences and details of that adventure were finally recorded in July of 1831 when Carlyle completed his satiric, spiritual autobiography entitled Sartor Resartus.

## CHAPTER II.

Although Sartor Resartus was slow to find a publisher and had to undergo a brutal serialization in Fraser's Magazine (November 1833-August 1834)<sup>1</sup> before it finally was published as a book in England in 1840, it represents Carlyle's longest and most imaginative composition of the time spent in Craigenputtock.

The book was the product of almost a decade of reflection and introspection and despite its semi-comic tone, was intended to instruct and guide rather than entertain or amuse.

Through the guise of a fictionalized literary translator and editor, Carlyle expounded the ideas of one Professor Diogenes Teufelsdröckh and conducted a continued attack on a mechanistic society and current social doctrines which he had begun in Signs of the Times.

The unifying idea of the book is its clothes metaphor, a device once used by Swift in his Tale of the Tub,<sup>2</sup> and one

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<sup>1</sup> Gerry H. Brooks, The Rhetorical Form of Carlyle's Sartor Resartus (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1972), p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Emery Neff, Carlyle (New York: Russell and Russell, 1932), p. 123.

which Carlyle adapted to explain that the material world was mere clothing for the spiritual and that institutions were but cloth which must be periodically cast off and replaced by an ever-changing and evolving society.

Sartor Resartus is divided into three books. The first deals with the incredible delivery of Teufelsdröckh's manuscript to England, the genesis of the professor's philosophy and the grand scope of its implications. The second book describes the childhood and education of the founding Diogenes and the various difficulties he experienced in commencing a worthwhile career. It details a romantic but unconsummated relationship, the wonderings and sorrows of the rejected lover, the ultimate loss of hope and belief, and finally, a mystical experience and conversion which restored the disappointed philosopher's spirit and morale. The third book is a careful examination of contemporary institutions and of the atmosphere which surrounded the debate over the First Reform Bill. Carlyle was aware that political change was imminent, but he rejected the concept of representative government and laissez-faire economics as suitable means to achieving a desired end. Carlyle concluded his political vision with a wistful hope that one day the world would be ruled by an aristocracy of ability and by true heroes.

While the significance and interpretation of Carlyle's

clothes philosophy has attracted and generated a great deal of critical attention, this chapter will substantially be involved with examining the biographical elements of Sartor Resartus' second book in order to establish the importance of Carlyle's unexpected depression and the consequences of his miraculous recovery as described through the experience of Carlyle's persona, Diogenes Teufelsdröckh:

The brilliant description of the spiritual crisis and conversion is an historical document of European significance, paralleling similar accounts in Goethe's Die Wahlverwandtschaften and Wahreit, Wordsworth's Prelude and Tennyson's In Memoriam.<sup>3</sup>

Although the origins of Carlyle's hero are absurd, Teufelsdröckh's childhood is described as reasonably contented until he gradually became aware of the "mystery of Existence"<sup>4</sup> and found his life threatened by a vague and undefined form of uneasiness:

Among the rainbow colours that glowed on my horizon, lay even in childhood a dark ring of Care, as yet no thicker than a thread, and often quite overshadowed: yet always it reappeared, nay ever waxing broader and

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<sup>3</sup> Neff, Carlyle, p. 124.

<sup>4</sup> W. H. Hudson, ed., Sartor Resartus, On Heroes and Hero Worship (New York: Everyman's Library, 1964), p. 73.

broader; till in after-years it almost over-shadowed my whole canopy, and threatened to engulf me in final night.<sup>5</sup>

In a most interesting book entitled Mr. Carlyle, My Patient,<sup>6</sup> James Halliday, a psychiatrist as well as a critic, offers an intriguing medical and psychological profile of the author based on a clinical interpretation of Sartor Resartus and other biographical evidence.

Halliday's psychosomatic analysis reveals that Thomas Carlyle grew up remote from the common concerns of most young boys and that his childhood was a strained and constant exercise in responding to a strong maternal influence. Although Carlyle was fascinated by his father, he lacked demonstrable proof of paternal affection and so deferred to his discipline out of awe and respect.

Family life made certain constraints and inconveniences inevitable and the young boy found his wishes coming into active conflict with parental authority: "I was forbid much: wishes in any measure bold I had to renounce; everywhere a strict bond of Obedience inflexibly held me down."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Hudson, Sartor Resartus, On Heroes, p. 74.

<sup>6</sup> James Halliday, Mr. Carlyle, My Patient (London: Heinemann Medical Books, 1949).

<sup>7</sup> Hudson, Sartor Resartus, On Heroes, p. 74.

The boy chose to comply and in obedience discovered his primary basis for a system of morality:

Obedience is our universal duty and destiny; wherein whoso will not bend must break; too early and too thoroughly we cannot be trained to know that Would, in this world of ours, is as mere zero to Should, and for most part as the smallest of fraction even to Shall, Hereby was laid for me the basis of worldly Discretion, nay, of Morality itself.<sup>8</sup>

In his early and impressionable years, Diogenes learned the simple tenets of Christian faith, although he took little notice of what he was formally taught at school. He did become, however, an insatiable reader and stored his knowledge away as a "living pabulum, tolerably nutritive for a mind as yet so peptic."<sup>9</sup>

The tone of Teufelsdröckh's memories significantly changes with his account of entering school, where among indifferent strangers he was to feel "quite orphaned and alone."<sup>10</sup> Persecuted by classmates for his "passive and superior attitudes,"<sup>11</sup> he confessed that except for personal reading, his

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<sup>8</sup> Hudson, Sartor Resartus, On Heroes, p. 75.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>11</sup> Halliday, Mr. Carlyle, My Patient, p. 23.



time spent in school was "utterly wasted"<sup>12</sup> in the presence of "hide-bound Pedants"<sup>13</sup> who professed to be his teachers.

His entry into university at the age of fourteen proved to be even less rewarding an experience than grammar school. J. A. Froude's biography of Carlyle provides a remarkable account of the nature of university life at that period and of the inconveniences and difficulties that young scholars were expected to overcome. Although Carlyle was almost totally inexperienced he faced the formidable responsibilities of registering at the university, finding lodgings and adjusting to a simple and frugal existence while diligently applying himself to his studies.

Teufelsdröckh found the university structure "mechanical,"<sup>14</sup> the surrounding city "full of smoke and sin,"<sup>15</sup> and his professors offering little except talk about "Progress of the Species":<sup>16</sup> "It is my painful duty to say that, out of England and Spain, ours was the worst of all hitherto discovered universities."<sup>17</sup> Ill at ease and disappointed,

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<sup>12</sup> Halliday, Mr. Carlyle, My Patient, p. 79.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>14</sup> Sartor Resartus, On Heroes and Hero Worship, p. 84.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

Teufelsdröckh sought evasion through private "thinking and reading."<sup>18</sup> In interpreting Teufelsdröckh's experiences for Carlyle's, Halliday attributes the obvious difficulty in forming close personal relationships during this period to "the frustration of his [Carlyle's] phase of social preparation in boyhood"<sup>19</sup> and characterizes Carlyle's behaviour as "isolated and over-independent."<sup>20</sup>

Through his reading, Teufelsdröckh or Carlyle, founded the basis of a future literary life, but it also prompted a slow and disturbing disruption of his religious beliefs.

Halliday explains the growth of doubt in Carlyle's mind in the following manner:

Tom's loss of faith in the Christian revelation was probably motivated by early apprehension against the mother for it was she who had taught him the story of Jesus, but his emerging reluctance to become a minister was probably related to his hostility to his father. Yet it was this same father who with considerable sacrifice had borne the cost of the university education and had done so in the belief and hope that his son would one day occupy the pulpit.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Sartor Resartus, On Heroes and Hero Worship, p. 87.

<sup>19</sup> Halliday, Mr. Carlyle, My Patient, p. 29.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

Life was rendered even more unpleasant by the lack of "practical" guidance, want of sympathy, want of money"<sup>22</sup> and, more importantly, by the "want of hope":<sup>23</sup>

. . . all this in the fervid season of youth, so exaggerated in imagining, so boundless in desires, yet here so poor in means--do we not see a strong incipient spirit oppressed and overloaded from without and from within; the fire of genius struggling-up among fuel-wood of the greenest, and as yet with more of bitter vapour than of clear flame?<sup>24</sup>

Teufelsdröckh's misery was eased through a friendship with one "Herr Towgood,"<sup>25</sup> an obvious reference to Edward Irving, a colleague at a school in Kirkcaldy where Carlyle taught mathematics. Although the two men became close friends, often travelling together, there is no evidence to support Halliday's hypothesis that they were mutually prepared for a homosexual relationship. Indeed, Carlyle finally began his entry into mixed society as a potential suitor of one of Irving's ex-pupils named Margaret Gordon and later referred to by Teufelsdröckh as Blumine.

Irving offered understanding and a fine library and through his encouragement, Carlyle began to realize that he

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22 Sartor Resartus, On Heroes and Hero Worship, p. 88.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

could accomplish great things if ever he could master the problems of "getting under way."<sup>26</sup> He allows Teufelsdröckh to explain his difficulty in the following manner:

But the hardest problems were ever this first: to find by study of yourself, and of the ground you stand on, what your combined inward and outward Capability specially is. For, alas, our young soul is all budding with Capabilities, and we see not yet which is the main and true one.<sup>27</sup>

When Irving announced that he was leaving Kirkcaldy, in the fall of 1818, to assume clerical duties in Edinburgh, Carlyle decided to follow his friend and gain a livelihood as a tutor. Teufelsdröckh referred to such work as "bread-and-water wages"<sup>28</sup> although his spiritual and reflective nature underwent a slow seasoning:

A strange contradiction lay in me; and I as yet knew not the solution of it; knew not that spiritual music can spring only from discords set in harmony; that but for Evil there were no Good, as victory is only possible by battle.<sup>29</sup>

Misunderstood and disliked by his contemporaries for a supposedly hard and indifferent nature, Teufelsdröckh's

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<sup>26</sup> Sartor Resartus, On Heroes and Hero Worship, p. 91.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

protective mantle was to disappear when he first experienced the warmth of an emotional relationship with an attractive woman named Blumine:

"As for our young Forlorn," continues Teufelsdröckh, evidently warning himself, "in his secluded way of life, and with his glowing Fantasy, the more fiery that it burnt under cover, as in a reverberating furnace, his feeling towards the Queens of this Earth was, and indeed is, altogether unspeakable. A visible Divinity dwelt in them; to our young Friend all women were holy, were heavenly."<sup>30</sup>

Her presence caused doubt to depart and "Life bloomed-up with happiness and hope":<sup>31</sup>

The past, then, was all a haggard dream;  
he had been in the Garden of Eden, then,  
and could not discern it! But lo now!  
The black walls of his prison melt away;  
the captive is alive, is free.<sup>32</sup>

Unfortunately the buoyancy induced by their closeness and Teufelsdröckh's intention to shape his thoughts of love into an action was quickly deflated when his poverty precluded any possibility of marriage. Their final and touching farewell triggered Teufelsdröckh's immediate crash into despair:

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<sup>30</sup> Sartor Resartus, On Heroes and Hero Worship, p. 102.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

Thick curtains of Night rushed over his soul, as rose the immeasurable Crash of Doom; and through the ruins as of a shivered Universe was he falling, falling, towards the Abyss.<sup>33</sup>

Having to either "Establish himself in Bedlam; begin writing Satanic Poetry; or blow-out his brains,"<sup>34</sup> Teufelsdrockh undertook a long pilgrimage and journey which gradually unified his wandering physical being with the timeless and universal:

He gazed over those stupendous masses with wonder, almost with longing desire; never till this hour had he known Nature, that she was One, that she was his Mother and divine. And as the ruddy glow was fading into clearness in the sky, and the Sun had now departed, a murmur of Eternity and Immensity, of Death and of Life, stole through his soul; and he felt as if Death and Life were one, as if the Earth were not dead, as if the Spirit of the Earth had its throne in that splendour, and his own spirit were therewith holding communion.<sup>35</sup>

Despite this sense of unity, Teufelsdrockh's life continued to be a "dark labyrinth"<sup>36</sup> of hopeless obscurity and unspeakable confusion and he was endlessly driven and hounded

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<sup>33</sup> Sartor Resartus, On Heroes and Hero Worship, p. 112.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

by the spectre of his own shadow in the manner of "the modern Wandering Jew."<sup>37</sup>

In retrospect, Teufelsdröckh could appreciate that his sick days were but a "period of transition"<sup>38</sup> and that the "mad fermentation"<sup>39</sup> of his thought would one day give way to a "clearer product."<sup>40</sup> However, during the period of his affliction he remained "quite shut-out from Hope"<sup>41</sup> and troubled by the fact that "Doubt had darkened into Unbelief."<sup>42</sup> This was perhaps the most serious of emotional ailments, for above all things Teufelsdröckh believed that "for man's well-being, Faith is properly the one thing needful,"<sup>43</sup> and that "the loss of his religious Belief was the loss of everything."<sup>44</sup> Teufelsdröckh sadly confesses that all of his other disappointments would have been bearable had not this essential "life-

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<sup>37</sup> Sartor Resartus, On Heroes and Hero Worship, p. 122.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

warmth"<sup>45</sup> been withdrawn.

Sustained only by an irrepressible love of truth and an undeniable urge to discover a purpose, Teufelsdröckh lived in a "strange isolation"<sup>46</sup> remote from temptation in a world of mystery and without sense:

To me the Universe was all void of Life, of Purpose, of Volition, even of Hostility: it was one huge, dead, immeasurable Steam-engine, rolling on, in its dead indifference to grind me limb from limb. O, the vast, gloomy, solitary Golgotha, and Mill of Death! Why was the Living banished thither, companionless, conscious? Why, if there is no Devil; nay, unless the Devil is your God?<sup>47</sup>

Rejecting suicide, Teufelsdröckh experienced a protracted "Death-agony"<sup>48</sup> in which the "Heavens and the Earth were but boundless jaws of a devouring monster"<sup>49</sup> until the fateful day of his walk along "the dirty little Rue Saint-Thomas de l'Enfer."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Sartor Resartus, Heroes and Hero Worship, p. 122.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.



Abruptly his life was to change, and the turning point of his dilemma came in a rush of thought and a curious response to an extremely simple question:

What art thou afraid of? Wherefore, like a coward, dost thou forever pip and whimper, and go cowering and trembling? Despicable biped! what is the sum-total of the worst that lies before thee? Death? Well, Death; and say the pangs of Tophet too, and all that the Devil and Man may, will or can do against thee! Hast thou not a heart; canst thou not suffer whatsoever it be; and, as a Child of Freedom, though outcast, trample Tophet itself under thy feet, while it consumes thee? Let it come, then; I will meet it and defy it! <sup>51</sup>

It was the long-awaited moment of confrontation between self and circumstance and the decisive key in Teufelsdröckh's attempt to re-establish a personal sense of equilibrium and purpose in his life:

And as I so thought, there rushed like a stream of fire over my whole sole; and I shook base Fear away from me forever. I was strong, of unknown strength; a spirit, almost a god. Ever from that time, the temper of my misery was changed: not Fear or whining Sorrow was it, but Indignation and grim fire-eyed Defiance. <sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Sartor Resartus, Heroes and Hero Worship, p. p. 127.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

Although this critical moment is generally acknowledged to have taken place in Edinburgh in June of 1822,<sup>53</sup> opinion is divided as to its ultimate significance. Halliday offers a complex psychological interpretation of the Fire Baptism and concludes that it symbolically represented Carlyle's partial acceptance and resolution of the troubling subconscious problems posed by his relationship with his father.<sup>54</sup> While Halliday does not agree that the event turned Carlyle into a mature adult, he does conclude that it was a significant occurrence which allowed the author's personality and talents to evolve tremendously.<sup>55</sup>

Ian Campbell's book Thomas Carlyle advances the idea that the event was not really a spiritual rebirth but rather a realization on Carlyle's part that "the world will not necessarily all be in his favour, and that in a particularly hostile, or at least unfavourable universe, he will have to fight for progress":<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Halliday, Mr. Carlyle, My Patient, p. 65.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>56</sup> Ian Campbell, Thomas Carlyle (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1974), p. 43.

In short, he is not looking for removal of suffering. He is facing up to the probability of having to live with it, and of having to accept the fact.<sup>57</sup>

Teufelsdröckh called his moment of protest and re-assertion the "most important transaction in life"<sup>58</sup> and defined it as his "spiritual New-birth Baphometric Fire Baptism"<sup>59</sup> from which time on he began to be a man.

Despite his new-found confidence, Teufelsdröckh conceded that he was still a "Nothing"<sup>60</sup> but proudly proclaimed that he had at last arrived at the "Centre of Indifference,"<sup>61</sup> through which "whoso travels from the Negative Pole to the Positive must necessarily pass."<sup>62</sup>

Teufelsdröckh did not regard his past sorrows with either bitterness or regret. Rather, he viewed his long period of tribulation as vital and necessary to the evolution of his character:

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57 Campbell, Thomas Carlyle, p. 43.

58 Sartor Resartus, Heroes and Hero Worship, p. 128.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid., p. 138.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid.

Name it as we choose: with or without visible Devil, whether in the natural Desert of rocks and sands, or in the populous moral Desert of selfishness and baseness, --to such Temptations are we all called. Unhappy if we are not!<sup>63</sup>

In persevering and achieving a significant moral victory, Teufelsdröckh compares his trial to Christ's temptation in the wilderness and views it as a necessary prelude to his own "Apostolic work."<sup>64</sup>

In awakening to a "new Heaven and a new Faith,"<sup>65</sup> Teufelsdröckh postulated "Annihilation of Self"<sup>66</sup> as the first preliminary moral act and discovered, to his immense relief, that "the Universe is not dead and demoniacal, a charnel house with spectres; but god-like, and my Father's!"<sup>67</sup>

Freed from self-concern, Teufelsdröckh was then able to cast a sympathetic eye upon his fellow man and to speak out against "self-conceit"<sup>68</sup> and the claims of idle vanity. In prescribing to the happiness of his contemporaries, Teufelsdröckh suggests the following formula:

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<sup>63</sup> Sartor Resartus, Heroes and Hero Worship, p. 139.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

"So true is it, what I then say, that the Fraction of Life can be increased in value not so much by increasing your Numerator as by lessening your Denominator. Nay, unless my Algebra deceive me, Unity itself divided by Zero will give Infinity. Make thy claim of wages a few, then; thou hast the world under thy feet. Well did the Wisest of our time write: It is only with Renunciation (Entsagen) that Life, properly speaking, can be said to begin."<sup>69</sup>

He urges men to "Close thy Byron, open thy Goethe"<sup>70</sup> and to seek blessedness rather than happiness as an end-goal: "Love not Pleasure; love God. This is the Everlasting Yea, wherein all contradiction is solved: wherein whoso walks and works, it is well with him."<sup>71</sup>

Teufelsdröckh also realized that "Conviction, were it never so excellent, is worthless till it convert itself into Conduct"<sup>72</sup> and so exhorted man to "Do the Duty which lies nearest thee":<sup>73</sup>

Fool! the Ideal is in thyself, the impediment too is in thyself; thy Condition is but the stuff thou art to shape that same Ideal out of: what matters whether such

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<sup>69</sup> Sartor Resartus, Heroes and Hero Worship, p. 144.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

stuff be of this sort or that, so the Form  
 thou give it be heroic, be poetic? O thou  
 that pinest in the imprisonment of the  
 Actual, and criest bitterly to the gods  
 for a Kingdom wherein to rule and create,  
 know this of truth: the thing thou seekest  
 is already with thee, "here or nowhere,"  
 could thou only see!<sup>74</sup>

Convinced of the necessity to create something,  
 Teufelsdröckh emerged into a fresh new world, prepared to  
 defeat chaos:

I too could now say to myself: Be no longer  
 a Chaos, but a World, or even Worldkin.  
 Produce! Produce! Were it but the pitifull-  
 est infinitesimal fraction of a Product, pro-  
 duce it, in God's name! 'Tis the utmost thou  
 hast in thee: out with it, then, Up, up!  
 Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with  
 thy whole might. Work while it is called  
 Today; for the Night cometh, wherein no man  
 can work.<sup>75</sup>

With this, Teufelsdröckh concludes his spiritual odys-  
 sey, having journeyed through the successive stages of "Growth,  
 Entanglement, Unbelief, and almost Reprobation, into a certain  
 clearer state of what he himself seems to consider as Con-  
 version"<sup>76</sup> and emerges prepared to begin his life work as a  
 philosopher developing a critique against materialism.

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<sup>74</sup> Sartor Resartus, Heroes and Hero Worship, p. 148.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

### CHAPTER III

Oscar Wilde was born and educated in an atmosphere that had little in common with the background of Thomas Carlyle. His father was a competent Dublin physician of dubious moral and slovenly personal habits, while his mother enjoyed and maintained the role of a would-be poet and romantic Irish nationalist. Unlike Carlyle's family, Wilde's was very well known to polite society and as a young boy he was allowed to mingle with important family guests and develop a life-long talent for intelligent and witty conversation.

Like Carlyle, Wilde experienced a great deal of difficulty in his early relations with boys of his own age and his lack of talent in sports and physical clumsiness made him far less popular than his older brother William.

Generally uninterested in science and mathematics, Wilde found grammar school to be essentially boring, although he did find relief in poetry and the classics. His budding intellect and prodigious memory eventually merited a scholarship to Trinity College, Dublin, in 1871. Unlike Carlyle, Wilde excelled at his studies, despite an innately lazy nature, and won a number of awards which culminated with a

financial grant to attend Magdalen College in 1876.<sup>1</sup>

While Thomas Carlyle was to experience a totally unexpected and profoundly troubling loss of religious faith while at University, Oscar Wilde seemed deliberately committed to aggravating and baiting the religious authorities at Oxford. His serious education was motivated by John Ruskin and Walter Pater. Unlike the "hide-bound pedants" of Carlyle's experience, the visions of two sensitive Oxford dons awoke what was already latent in Wilde's nature and rather than finding university a disruptive and confusing experience, Wilde discovered his talents for rhetoric and creative writing. He adopted the pose of an aesthete, considered converting to Roman Catholicism, visited Italy and Greece and enjoyed a mild summer flirtation with one Florence Balcombe, a striking Irish beauty who was to eventually marry Bram Stoker.

In 1876, Wilde's father died, plunging the family into a precarious financial position. Wilde resolved to complete his degree although he was to realize that "the highest reputation within the university was won by making some sort of

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<sup>1</sup> Hesketh Pearson, Oscar Wilde: His Life and Wit, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper and Bros., 1946), p. 29.



name outside it."<sup>2</sup> By 1879, Wilde had wrung the last of possible student honours from Oxford and decided to leave in order to establish himself as a public figure. Unlike Thomas Carlyle who was to experience a cold and lonely period of anxious introspection in the years which followed his graduation, Wilde emerged totally confident, a determined extrovert decided upon tasting "the fruit of all the trees in the garden of the world."<sup>3</sup>

Without attempting to imitate the intensely complicated analysis of Thomas Carlyle as effected by James Halliday, Hesketh Pearson does offer a simple and interesting characterization of Wilde's personality at the time of his leaving Oxford:

The main oddity in his composition can be described in a sentence: half of him, the emotional half, never developed beyond adolescence; the other half, the intellectual half, was well developed at an age when those about him had hardly begun to think for themselves, and reached maturity at an age when his talented contemporaries were still trying to find their feet. Thus we shall always see him

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Fido, Oscar Wilde (New York: Viking Press, 1972), p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Rupert Hart-Davis, The Letters of Oscar Wilde (London: Rupert Hart Davis Ltd., 1962), p. 475.

as an exceptionally brilliant undergraduate, half boy, half genius, which he remained to the end of his days, the curious contrast becoming more and more marked with the continued development of his intellectual powers.<sup>4</sup>

Upon his arrival in London, Wilde contentedly began to effect his entry into literary and theatrical society although he had not as yet found a suitable source of income. His debut as a poet and dramatist was relatively inauspicious although his bizarre mannerisms and flamboyant style finally attracted an offer to deliver a series of lectures on art in cities where Gilbert and Sullivan's Patience was to be performed in America.

Wilde's theme was "The English Renaissance" and his talks specifically dealt with nineteenth-century English art. Wilde spent all of 1881 in the United States propounding his argument that art should not concern itself with social or moral problems but with beauty for its own sake. His lectures received mixed reviews but he was generally regarded as a social success and, in 1882, he returned to England with a modest profit and a great deal of publicity.

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<sup>4</sup> Pearson, Oscar Wilde, p. 37.

In order to expand upon his growing reputation, Wilde moved to Paris in order to meet and court the favour of a number of French literary celebrities. His temperament was perfectly matched to enjoy the decadent in literature, which meant "an intense self-consciousness, a restless curiosity, an over-subtizing refinement upon refinement and a spiritual and moral perversity."<sup>5</sup> Unlike Carlyle who deeply mistrusted and cautioned against the pleasure-principle, Wilde actively pursued and gained a growing notoriety for his eccentric and private indulgences. Although the French never knew quite how to characterize Wilde, his stay in Paris was deeply satisfying and he was to be remembered as "a virtuoso animated by the glorious feeling of mental vigour and the anticipation of approaching success."<sup>6</sup>

Upon returning to England, Wilde continued to deliver a number of public lectures, supervised the first rehearsals of his play Vera, and enjoyed a honeymoon in Paris after his marriage to Constance Lloyd in May of 1884.

A lack of money made the couple's early life difficult and Wilde was reduced to applying for an "Inspectorship of

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<sup>5</sup> Fido, Oscar Wilde, p. 62.

<sup>6</sup> Boris Brasol, Oscar Wilde: The Man--the Artist--the Martyr (New York: Octagon Books, 1975).

Schools."<sup>7</sup> Fortunately, Wilde was not obliged to follow Carlyle's unhappy path through education and, in the spring of 1885, he obtained a job as a book-reviewer for The Pall Mall Gazette. In 1887, he became editor of The Woman's World and endured the drudgery of office routine until his resignation in 1889.<sup>8</sup>

During this interval, Wilde mingled with the aristocracy and his urbane charm and witty conversation made him a popular figure at society dinners and week-ends:

Nothing at all resembling his conversation had been heard before. The great talkers of the past were more limited in their appeal, too anxious to appropriate the conversation and steer it in the direction of their choice, and most of them were accused of grave social defects by someone or other. Dean Swift was caustic and inclined to be quarrelsome; Doctor Johnson was dogmatic and occasionally shouted people down; Coleridge was pure monologist, unadaptable, and had no humour; Macaulay was too informative and self-assertive; Carlyle was verbose and denunciatory.<sup>9</sup>

Although Wilde had fathered two sons by 1886, he was increasingly involved in homosexual relationships with a variety of young men and had taken to referring to his

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<sup>7</sup> Pearson, Oscar Wilde, p. 106.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 183.

activities as "feasting with panthers."<sup>10</sup> It was the later revelation of his appetites which was to alienate the public support of his upper class associates and to plunge him into the most abysmal state of loneliness and despair.

Artistically, the years between 1889-95 were Wilde's most productive and successful. He not only established himself as a writer of essays and prose fiction, but also became one of England's most amusing and applauded playwrights. Public acclaim and interest guaranteed Wilde a certain prosperity and his association with the Rhymers' Club provided him with a discreet and private influence over a generation of younger poets and writers. Ideally, Wilde should have been moving into a period of buoyant maturity; however, his personal habits began to acquire "a stigma of vulgarism; his attitude toward society became arrogant and reckless; the Wainwright philosophy, which up to that time was but a hidden complex, now invaded his consciousness; self-adoration reached the point of megalomania"<sup>11</sup> and "the whole clinical picture of Oscar Wilde in the 'nineties"<sup>12</sup> was one of "conspicuous madness."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Fido, Oscar Wilde, p. 79.

<sup>11</sup> Brasol, Oscar Wilde, p. 211.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

In his study, Oscar Wilde: The Man--the Artist--the Martyr, Boris Brasol offers a distinctly unpleasant view of the writer in the ten years which preceded his ruinous trial in 1895:

In those days, two morbid impulses--vanity and intemperance--working in sinister union drove Wilde to his ultimate ruin. . . . The mere notoriety which he had acquired in the early 'eighties no longer satisfied him; now he craved for fame and thunderous applause, for glamorous triumphs and glittering success.<sup>14</sup>

Brasol also suggests that if Wilde had confined his sexual adventures to the company of lower class individuals, he might have avoided the subsequent scandal which his involvement with Lord Alfred Douglas was to incur.

The two men became inseparable companions after their introduction in 1891 but their intimacy disgusted and angered the Marquess of Queensbury who openly accused Wilde of being a sodomite. Wilde chose to repudiate the allegation and, in an ill-advised moment, he charged his friend's father with libel. Cautious opinions could not convince Wilde to drop his case and, on March 2, 1895,<sup>15</sup> the matter went to court.

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<sup>14</sup> Brasol, Oscar Wilde, p. 213.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 253.

Although Wilde's performance in his own behalf was brilliant, "his doom was predestined by the fact that everybody in London was convinced of his 'guilt.'"<sup>16</sup> The Marquess of Queensbury was to gain acquittal of the charges and, in turn, was to launch legal action against Wilde.

Rather than quietly leave the country, Wilde remained to stand trial himself. Ironically, Wilde was forced to endure his greatest period of humiliation in the same year as both The Ideal Husband and The Importance of Being Earnest were to run concurrently and receive great favour from London audiences. Before 1895 was over, Wilde's name would be removed from all publicity concerning his plays.

The consequences of Wilde's decision to stand trial were devastating. Not only did he have to face the horror of a two-year jail sentence, but also the loss of a bewildered wife who eventually changed her name and fled with her sons to Europe. The vindictive Marquess of Queensbury, unmollified by his victory, then sought to seize the last of Wilde's assets and to force his adversary into total bankruptcy.

However horrible prison was to be, it inevitably became the final catalyst in provoking a strange and radical change in

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<sup>16</sup> Brasol, Oscar Wilde, p. 263.

Wilde's perceptions and outlook. Like Carlyle, Wilde was forced to endure a lonely period of emotional isolation and to come to see his life and his fortunes in terms never before necessary. The yoke of prison was heavy, but its weight bowed Wilde's head so that, for a period of two years, he was to regard his life with an uncharacteristic humbleness and modesty. While prison effected a radical change in outlook, it could not effectively alter Wilde's personality. Despite the best of intentions, he was to renew old friendships and habits after his release and to continue his familiar lifestyle while in self-imposed exile in France. His last years were creatively depressing. Aside from The Ballad of Reading Gaol, he was to publish nothing of worth. He became a café habitué, constantly impoverished and ill, until he finally died as a Catholic convert in Paris in 1900.



## CHAPTER IV

Although a number of competent critics such as Hesketh Pearson discuss with great detail and varying degrees of compassionate insight the fall of Oscar Wilde, the most interesting analysis of its causes and consequences is provided by the author himself.

After Wilde's resignation from the Women's World in 1889, he began the most satisfying and productive phase of his life. His essay On the Decay of Lying was published in the same year and in it he argued that he had been attempting to extend the aesthetics of art into the conduct of his own life:

Some spend this interval in listlessness; some in high passions--the wisest in art and song . . . for art comes to you professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately for Wilde, as the quality of his written thought evolved in the years between 1889-95 his personal fortunes were to degenerate after beginning a close relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas, a strangely perverse young man with a decidedly strange temperament and a vindictive father. Wilde

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<sup>1</sup> Oscar Wilde, De Profundis and Other Writings, ed. Hesketh Pearson (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 86.

was later to acknowledge, in De Profundis, that he had spent too much time with people who enjoyed his celebrity but who ultimately distracted him from his work.

As a self-indulgent man, Wilde easily gravitated towards living for the moment and cultivating his undergraduate desire to taste of all the trees in the garden. Unlike Carlyle who advocated looking beyond the material world, Wilde revelled in the tangible and the delicious and could express a belief that "nothing can cure the soul but the senses."<sup>2</sup>

This is not to suggest that Wilde was either of aimless appetite or a brutal sensualist, imploring men to become irresponsible samplers of the joys of the material world. His thinking was still objective enough to realize that complex moral questions could be raised over a hedonistic philosophy and he chose to explore the problem in his novel The Picture of Dorian Gray, published in Lippincott's Monthly Magazine in April of 1890, and finally in book form in June of 1891.<sup>3</sup>

Neither Wilde's technique nor inspiration were particularly original. Other nineteenth-century authors, such as

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<sup>2</sup> Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray (Paris: Charles Carrington, 1908), p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> Boris Brasol, Oscar Wilde: The Man--the Artist--the Martyr (New York: Octagon Books, 1975), p. 347.

perfectly. When he can do so without exercising restraint on others, or suffering it ever, and his activities are all pleasurable to him, he will be saner, healthier, more civilized, more himself. Pleasure is nature's test, her sign of approval. When man is happy he is in harmony with himself and his environment.<sup>19</sup>

For all his speculation and insight into the nature of man and his moral responsibilities, Wilde suffered from the inability to heed his own advice. Unlike Carlyle who experienced his greatest unhappiness through no wish or fault of his own,<sup>20</sup> Wilde distinctly brought his own troubles upon himself. He was to acknowledge this painful realization and to discuss its implications in a long letter addressed to Lord Alfred Douglas and composed between January and March 1897, while Wilde was completing his prison sentence in Reading Prison.

Initially, the letter began with the didactic intent of teaching Lord Alfred Douglas the errors of his ways and reminding him of the terrible responsibility he shared in precipitating Wilde's ruin. Wilde had been angered and concerned by his young friend's seeming indifference to his plight, but was even more concerned by the fact that his frustration was poisoning his entire outlook.

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<sup>19</sup> De Profundis and Other Writings, p. 53.

Prison had provided Wilde with the time to analyse his life and to place its different phases into perspective. In coming to terms with himself, Wilde found peace and felt compelled to urge his friend to undertake the same process of self-examination:

The real fool, such as the gods mock or mar,  
is he who does not know himself. I was such  
a one too long. You have been such a one  
too long. Be so no more. Do not be afraid.<sup>20</sup>

Wilde's magnanimity extended to accepting the entire blame for his predicament but he was perceptive enough to know that his slavish relationship with Douglas was primarily the source of his troubles. Although Wilde had advocated the joys of the artistic life in the Decay of Lying, he had allowed his own work to be neglected through the pursuit of shallow pleasures:

While you were with me you were the absolute ruin of my Art, and in allowing you to stand persistently between Art and myself I give to myself shame and blame in the fullest degree.<sup>21</sup>

Not only had Wilde's weakness and his incompatible intellectual attachment to his young friend provided nothing

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<sup>20</sup> Rupert Hart-Davis, The Letters of Oscar Wilde (London: Rupert Hart Davis Ltd., 1962), p. 425.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 427.

for Wilde's creative imagination, the young aristocrat's extravagant and demanding tastes had provoked Wilde's financial ruin. Wilde's indictment includes a long list of expenses and concludes quite sadly that Douglas had simply worn him down:

It was the triumph of the smaller over the bigger nature. It was the case of that tyranny of the weak over the strong which somewhere in one of my plays I describe as being "the only tyranny that lasts."<sup>22</sup>

Wilde's tragic compulsion was that he could neither control nor relinquish the strange fascination exerted upon him by Douglas: "In your case, one had either to give up to you or to give you up. There was no other alternative."<sup>23</sup>

It is appalling to read about the indignities and unpleasant scenes which characterized the two men's stormy relationship but even sadder to realize that Wilde did not possess the will-power necessary to sever their ties.

Although prison provided him with the time for painful reflection, Wilde did not regret the suffering incurred by his memories:

Suffering--curious as it may sound to you--is the means by which we exist, because it is the only means by which we become conscious

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<sup>22</sup> Davis, The Letters of Oscar Wilde, p. 429.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

of existing; and the remembrance of suffering in the past is necessary to us as the warrant, the evidence, of our continued identity.<sup>24</sup>

Whatever his faults, Wilde was not a vindictive individual and he endeavoured to argue from a position of love rather than hate. He knew only too well that it was because of the ill-feeling between a father and his son that he was behind bars:

Remember how and why I am here, at this very moment. Do you think I am here on account of my relation with the witnesses on my trial? My relation, real or supposed, with people of that kind were matters of no interest to either the Government or Society. They knew nothing of them, and cared less. I am here for having tried to put your father into prison. My attempt failed of course. My own counsel threw up their briefs. Your father completely turned the tables on me, and had me in prison, has me there still. That is why there is contempt felt for me. That is why people despise me. That is why I have to serve out every day, every hour, every minute of my dreadful imprisonment. That is why my petitions have been refused.<sup>25</sup>

Wilde cautioned his friend that hatred equalled "the Eternal Negation"<sup>26</sup> and that it killed everything except itself. Unwilling to become another sacrifice, Wilde attempted

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<sup>24</sup> Davis, The Letters of Oscar Wilde, p. 435.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 456.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 450.

to maintain a balanced and loving view of the world, although he found his suffering to be "one long moment":<sup>27</sup>

We cannot divide it by seasons. We can only record its moods, and chronicle their return. With us time itself does not progress. It revolves. It seems to circle round one centre of pain. The paralysing immobility of a life, every circumstance of which is regulated after an unchangeable pattern, so that we eat and drink and walk and lie down and pray, or kneel at least for prayer, according to the inflexible laws of an iron formula: this immobile quality, that makes each dreadful day in the very minutest detail like its brother, seems to communicate itself to those external forces the very essence of whose existence is ceaseless change.<sup>28</sup>

While Carlyle experienced a mystical, spiritual re-birth and moved on to a centre of indifference, Wilde attempted to effect the same progression by imitating the Ancient Mariner, seeking expiation and release through forgiveness:

And the end of it all is that I have got to forgive you. I must do so. I don't write this letter to put bitterness into your heart, but to pluck it out of mine. For my own sake I must forgive you.<sup>29</sup>

Unlike Carlyle who had enjoyed no success previous to his dark night of the soul, Wilde was keenly aware of the loss his ruin had caused:

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<sup>27</sup> Davis, The Letters of Oscar Wilde, p. 457.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 465.

The gods had given me almost everything. I had genius, a distinguished name, high social position, brilliancy, intellectual daring: I made art a philosophy, and philosophy an art: I altered the minds of men and the colours of things: there was nothing I said or did that did not make people wonder:<sup>30</sup>

He was also aware, as had been Carlyle, that a dramatic change was required if ever he was to regain his lost position of power and prestige. Carlyle advocated self-renunciation as the necessary first step. Wilde admitted humility: "There is only one thing for me now, absolute Humility: just as there is only one thing for you, absolute Humility also. You had better come down into the dust and learn it beside me."<sup>31</sup>

Wilde had consistently argued that the aim of life was development in his essay The Soul of Man Under Socialism, and in his letter to Douglas he reiterated his intention to begin a fresh start:

I am far more of an individualist than I ever was. Nothing seems to me of the smallest value except what one gets out of oneself. My nature is seeking a fresh mode of self-realisation. That is all I am concerned with. And the first thing that I have got to do is to free myself from any possible bitterness of feeling against you.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Davis, The Letters of Oscar Wilde, p. 466.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 467.



Ironically, the impetus was to come from his suffering, just as Carlyle had used the recovery from his own unhappiness as the motive-force for his own success: "For the secret of life is suffering. It is what is hidden behind everything."<sup>33</sup>

This should not be interpreted as a confession that Wilde regretted, or wished to renounce his past ways. Rather it was a confident declaration of an intent to change supported by a number of carefully considered reasons:

I don't regret for a single moment having lived for pleasure. I did it to the full, as one should do everything that one does to the full. There was no pleasure I did not experience. I threw the pearl of my soul into a cup of wine, I went down the primrose path to the sound of flutes. I lived on honeycomb. But to have continued the same life would have been wrong because it would have been limiting. I had to pass on. The other half of the garden had its secrets for me also.<sup>34</sup>

Like Carlyle, Wilde was intensely interested in becoming more of an individualist. He had failed once because he had not asserted himself enough. The time had come for him to truly be himself:

People used to say of me that I was too individualistic. I must be far more of an individualist than I ever was. I

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<sup>33</sup> Davis, The Letters of Oscar Wilde, p. 473.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 491.

must get far more out of myself than I ever got, and ask far less of the world than I ever asked. Indeed my ruin came, not from too great individualism of life, but from too little.<sup>35</sup>

Like Carlyle, Wilde was concerned with putting his life and soul into a balance and harmony with an underlying spiritual reality upon which the visible, material world was predicated:

Still, I am conscious now that behind all this Beauty, satisfying though it be, there is some Spirit hidden of which the painted forms and shapes are but modes of manifestation, and it is with this Spirit that I desire to become in harmony.<sup>36</sup>

However, upon his release from prison Wilde somehow forgot the best of his prison-induced intentions, resumed contact with Douglas, and began a rather sad and unproductive period of self-exile in France. Unlike Carlyle who viewed his emotional crisis as a significant event in his life and his recovery as the turning point in his career, Wilde never seemed able to apply the hard-earned knowledge or experience of prison to initiate either a modification of his habits or to stimulate his artistic talents.

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<sup>35</sup> Davis, The Letters of Oscar Wilde, p. 491.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 509.

Unlike Carlyle whose life prospered after his youthful depression, Wilde's collapsed. He was never able to accomplish the noble goals he had established for himself during the two months he was engaged in writing the long letter to Lord Alfred Douglas. He honoured his appointment with self in Reading Prison but, unlike Carlyle, could not respect his commitment to the principles and conditions he had visualized himself capable and worthy of attaining.

Sartor Resartus and De Profundis remain haunting reminders of what was gained and lost by the efforts of their respective authors.

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ABSTRACT

ADDISON, STEELE AND HOGARTH AS THE  
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ADJUDICATORS OF MORAL STANDARDS AND VALUES

Ross Lemke

Although their keen powers of observation and acute sense of social awareness were applied to different media, the works of Joseph Addison, Richard Steele and William Hogarth readily blend to present a vivid verbal and pictorial representation of early eighteenth century English life.

As perceptive and reliable witnesses of the current scene, all three offer fascinating and invaluable insight and testimony into popular concerns and their careful rendering of topical events represents history of the most immediate and vital nature.

The purpose of this paper will be to examine the three men's measure of their society through an analysis of The Spectator and the principal cycle paintings produced by Hogarth before 1745, in an attempt to reveal and correlate the remarkable similarities and thematic parallels which link three of the early eighteenth century's greatest adjudicators of contemporary moral standards and values.

## INTRODUCTION

Although their keen powers of observation and acute sense of social awareness were applied to different media, the works of Joseph Addison, Richard Steele and William Hogarth readily blend to present a vivid verbal and pictorial representation of early eighteenth-century life.

Donald F. Bond acknowledges their relevance in the introduction to his five-volume edition of The Spectator by quoting the considered judgment of George Sherburn:

If one wishes to know what the Eighteenth-century Londoner and his environment looked like, the best source of information is the painting and engravings of William Hogarth; if one wishes to know what the Eighteenth-century Londoner thought about, no one can do better than to read The Spectator: it both conditioned and freshened the minds of its readers, and it was read throughout the century.<sup>1</sup>

Technically, the three were not contemporaries in terms of production as Hogarth was twenty-five years younger than both Addison and Steele. However, no study of Britain's social and political evolution through the early decades of the eighteenth century and into the period of Parliamentary politics, as practised by Sir Robert Walpole, would be complete.

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<sup>1</sup> Donald F. Bond, ed., The Spectator, Vol. I (Oxford, 1965), p. xiii.



without a consideration of the commentary of these three men.

Their work offers fascinating and valuable insight into topical issues and is qualified by a remarkable social conscience which motivated each artist to consciously attune his sensitivities and discipline his talents to observe and record the quality of life and quantity of folly which characterized the times.

The purpose of this paper will be to examine the three men's measure of their society. When considering Addison and Steele, the most obvious and gratifying source is Donald F. Bond's Oxford edition of The Spectator, that marvellous successor to Steele's Tatler, which featured one of journalism's most remarkable and prolific associations.

Because The Spectator began publication on Thursday, 1 March 1711 and ran daily until Saturday, 6 December 1712, it would be impossible within a limited context to deal with the breadth and scope of the authors' interests in their entirety. Organization demands that certain restrictions be imposed and this paper will be concerned with the issues raised in the first four months of the paper's operation. This choice has been motivated by two factors. First, a great amount of critical energy and interpretative skill has already been expended on dealing with the significance of Sir Roger de Coverly and the other members of his club as the most memorable

fictional characters of The Spectator. Because the lovable and slightly eccentric and bumbling country squire is generally acknowledged as one of literature's most famous creations, any further commentary risks being redundant. The second factor is my intention to tie in and associate the work of William Hogarth to specific areas of interest raised in The Spectator, especially with regard to such issues as contemporary entertainment, marriage and social pretense.

Although Hogarth was but thirteen when The Spectator began publication, his father's coffeehouse "with its conversation (Latin and otherwise) and piles of newspapers, its placards and great variety of Londoners"<sup>2</sup> proved to be a stimulating environment and he grew up with more than a casual interest in the ebb and flow of the daily scene:

During these formative years, from sixteen to twenty, Hogarth must have soaked up more than the technique of engraving coats of arms. There can have been few more alert observers of London life: and he embarked upon his apprenticeship in the year Queen Anne died and the Hanoverians arrived from Germany; the Tories went into exile, retirement, or prison, and the Whigs emerged triumphant. It seems almost certain that, despite apprentice rules, he spent a great deal of time at the theatre; and at printshops, book-stalls, and generally around London, surveying

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<sup>2</sup> Ronald Paulson, Hogarth: His Life, Art, and Times, abridged ed. (Yale Univ. Press, 1974), p. 4.

and mentally and physically recording the sights. He may have already begun his practice of memorizing the forms of what he saw or catching them in outline upon his fingernail.<sup>3</sup>

Inevitably, Hogarth's intuitive moral concern combined with a finely trained artistic talent to make him a worthy successor to the great satirists of the period and his power and influence were to extend into the age of Johnson.

It will thus be the concern of subsequent chapters to examine The Spectator and the principal paintings produced by Hogarth before 1745, in an attempt to reveal and correlate the remarkable similarities and thematic parallels which link three of the period's greatest adjudicators of contemporary moral standards and values.

The discussion will focus on the first one hundred issues of The Spectator and will concentrate on the issues of entertainment and manners. The subsequent analysis of Hogarth's paintings will be restricted to those which reflect a parallel concern in order that the artist's respective visions may be effectively compared and counterpointed.

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<sup>3</sup> Paulson, Hogarth, p. 15.

## CHAPTER I

After pursuing divergent careers in the diplomatic service and the military following their respective educations at Oxford, Addison and Steele finally consolidated their mutual interest in journalism by launching a joint venture known as The Spectator.

As its first number explained, it was to be a daily journal featuring the enlightened and speculative commentary of a reflective and rational "Spectator of Mankind." The paper's persona confessed to having approached life as a "looker-on" and promised to maintain his detachment from worldly practicalities and politics, while concerning himself with publishing "a sheet-full of Thoughts every Morning, for the Benefit of my Contemporaries."

The dominant descriptive tone used by Addison to introduce his commentator evokes images of a silent and reflectively calm individual. As an unharried and disinterested bystander, the spectator espoused political neutrality, although Addison and Steele were later to allow their restrained Whig principles to emerge to humorously mock and satirize Tory personalities and opinions:

I never espoused any Party with Violence, and am resolved to observe an exact Neutrality between the Whigs and Tories, unless I shall be forced to declare my self by the Hostilities of either side. In short, I have acted in all the parts of my Life as a Looker-on, which is the Character I intend to preserve in this Paper.<sup>1</sup>

Given the consciously apolitical and credible views of The Spectator's persona, Addison calculated that within two weeks of publication the paper had attained a reading public of 6,000 and in Spectator No. 10, he carefully re-iterated the journal's purpose:

Since I have raised to myself so great an Audience, I shall spare no Pains to make their Instruction agreeable, and their Diversion careful: For which Reasons I shall endeavour to enliven Morality with Wit, and to temper Wit with Morality, that my Readers may, if possible both ways find their Account in the Speculation of the Day.

While Addison acknowledged in the same essay that his didactic intent was to save his readers from "that desperate State of Vice and Folly into which the Age is fallen,"<sup>2</sup> Spectator No. 5 specifically focused on contemporary tastes as reflected in the current state of the Opera.

Both Addison and Steele were to argue for the primacy

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<sup>1</sup> Spectator, No. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Spectator, No. 10.

of nature and reason as aesthetic considerations and in their quest for simplicity, they found it necessary to satirize the popular practice of erecting elaborate sets and of seeking out undue and extreme degrees of realism in the overall production:

An Opera may be allowed to be extravagantly lavish in its Decorations, as its only Design is to gratify the Senses, and keep up an indolent Attention in the Audience. Common Sense however requires, that there should be nothing in the Scenes and Machines which may appear Childish and Absurd.<sup>3</sup>

To emphasize his point, Addison attended an opera which featured the use of live birds in its background, and then recounted with evident glee and satisfaction the inevitable confusion and consternation which the birds' ill-timed appearance incurred.

Aside from expressing a direct and primary concern over the lack of judgment which had provoked the ludicrous spectacle, Addison's amusing anecdote neatly ridiculed the excesses of all foreign influences on the English stage and subtly advanced the sentiment which would eventually argue for the development of a purer and more distinctly British form of entertainment.

Because The Spectator was an extended, running commentary on the current scene, it was normal that particular

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<sup>3</sup> Spectator, No. 5.

subjects or topics of interest be re-visited. In Spectator No. 13, Addison satirized the ill-conceived notion of presenting an on-stage struggle between a principal actor and a costumed lion. Initially, Addison toyed with the gullibility of those who naively believed the lions to be real and to represent a living sacrifice, but he concluded his article by seriously questioning the intelligence of those individuals who seemed to think such effects should even be necessary. "Audiences have often been reproached by Writers for the Coarseness of their Taste, but our present Grievance does not seem to be the Want of a good Taste, but of Common Sense."

In Spectator No. 14, Steele followed up Addison's attacks by publishing four letters unanimously condemning The Spectator's dissatisfaction with the state of the performing arts. The first letter was apparently written by an actor who was currently portraying the lion and, while it was at best a simplistic exercise in self-defense, the casual remark that the actor had been a fox-hunter, links the actor to the Tories and undoubtedly gave Steele's Whig readers an added cause for amusement. The second letter is truly hilarious. It was written by the under-sexton of St. Paul's to protest the seductive appeal of a puppet-show in the vicinity of the Cathedral, for his parishioners were being lured away from

services, thus denying him his living as Church usher.

While there is always the suspicion, that Steele may have composed some of the readers' letters to suit his own purposes, the vast majority were genuine, although it must be expected that Steele judiciously chose examples that would effectively counterpoint his satiric intentions.

Because the question of entertainment and specifically the Opera occupied so much of Addison and Steele's attention in the early months of The Spectator's operation, it was only natural that the authors attempt to explain the art form's intrinsic appeal. It was in keeping with their own incredulity that they did so in a humorous and satiric manner. Addison thus devoted Spectator No. 18 to a discussion of the appeal of the Italian Opera:

It is my Design in this Paper to deliver down to Posterity a faithful Account of the Italian Opera, and of the gradual Progress which has been made upon the English Stage: For there is no Question but our Grand-children will be very curious to know the Reason why their Forefathers used to sit together like an Audience of Foreigners in their own Country, and to hear Whole Plays acted before them in a Tongue which They did not understand.

Addison carefully unravelled each thread in the strange tapestry of the foreign art form and found each subsequent stitch to be equally confusing. Translation of Italian lyrics into English had only produced ludicrous and incongruous



musical results. The compromise solution of singing some parts in Italian and others in English produced even greater unintended comic effects. Inevitably, the entire production reverted back to Italian, a move which Addison judged to be necessary so as to relieve the audience "entirely of the Fatigue of Thinking."

In Spectator No. 22, Steele painfully acknowledged Addison's concern for the low level to which popular theatre had descended:

The Understanding is dismissed from our Entertainments. Our Mirth is the Laughter of Fools, and our Admiration the Wonder of Idiots; else such improbable, monstrous, and incoherent Dreams could not go off as they do, not only without the utmost scorn and Contempt, but even with the loudest Applause and Approbation.

Addison supported this highly critical judgment and, by way of salvation, advocated a return to the source and strength of English inspiration which he believed to lie in the tragic form as expressed in English blank verse. In Spectator No. 39, he confessed that he found tragedy to represent "the Noblest Production of Human Nature" but that contemporary dramatists had failed to elevate their subject matter above the realm of the insignificant or inconsequential:

Since I am upon this subject, I must observe that our English Poets have succeeded much better in the Stile, than in the Sentiments of their Tragedies. Their Language is very often Noble and Sonorous, but the sense either very trifling or very common . . . For my own part, I prefer a noble Sentiment that is depressed with homely Language, infinitely before a Vulgar one that is blown up with all the Sound and Energy of expression.

Addison's appeal is for a return to an interest in the excellence of thought and for the clarity and brilliance of the English language.

Steele collaborated in Spectator No. 51 to argue that current plays were confusing and corrupting moral attitudes and standards by pandering to low tastes and appetites. Steele scorned unimaginative writers with contempt, stating that "no one ever writ Bawdry for any other Reason but Dearth of Invention." His disgust for smut, the lascivious glance and gesture concludes with a plea to consider the positive results a change in emphasis could effect:

If Men of Wit, who think fit to write for the Stage, instead of this pitiful way of giving Delight, would turn their Thoughts upon raising it from good natural Impulses as are in the Audience, but are Choked up by Vice and Luxury. They would not only please, but befriend us at the same time.

It is interesting to note how Addison and Steele allowed their cause to develop from a sardonic, light-hearted

mockery of foreign influences towards a vigorous and spiritually compelling challenge to reawaken the English artist to his responsibilities and potential. Their serious belief in the twin concepts of professional integrity and national purpose was reflected in the quality and thematic consideration of their own work. Their concern was to have a rippling effect and their simple aesthetic based on common sense and basic decency was to deeply influence William Hogarth as he subsequently developed into the nation's greatest visual satirist.

Hogarth's demanding apprenticeship had made him a skilled technician but his vital imagination refused to allow him to become either a slavish imitator or a contented illustrator of books. Instead, Hogarth's ambition lay in "attracting the attention of the general public."<sup>4</sup> The bursting of the South Sea Bubble in 1720 provided a dynamic first opportunity to exercise a natural talent for visual satire and to demonstrate a relentless moral indignation over the causes and consequences of greed and unscrupulous business practices.

Although Hogarth fancied himself as a budding writer-artist and "a satirist in the tradition of the great Augustans,"<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Paulson, Hogarth, p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

he recognized his limitations as a painter and turned to academic training in order to enhance the quality of his productions.

Thus, Hogarth became a serious student of art and worked to improve his composition of the human figure and to understand the complexities of allegorical history painting. His ideal during this period was Sir James Thornhill, a courtier who had risen to become England's foremost decorative history painter.

While the two men's antecedents were different, both shared Addison and Steele's concern for the plight of the native artist, and Hogarth admired the fact that Thornhill had been able to wrest such important contracts as the painting of the Greenwich Hospital and the Cupola of St. Paul's from the ambitions of foreign competitors. Both Thornhill and Hogarth rejected the popularity of Italian influences in art, but neither could effectively resist the political and economic implications of a new aesthetic order under the guidance of Burlington from slowly superceding the tastes which had made Thornhill the favourite of the aristocratic patron seeking a great painting rendered in a grand, traditional style.

Hogarth's concern for the future of the English artist and his personal sympathy for the deposed Thornhill provoked a spirited defense which was to gain the young artist the

public recognition he had been struggling to attain. In February 1723/24 Hogarth produced a print entitled The Bad Taste of the Town and it instantly became a cause célèbre which was "eagerly bought up, pirated, and reissued."<sup>6</sup>

Unlike Addison and Steele who cautiously refrained from openly attributing guilt, Hogarth deliberately accused and indicted those whom he felt responsible for England's declining interest in taste and decency.

This one satire ridiculed not only masquerades, operas, and pantomimes but ignorant "connoisseurs" as well: at the center--clearly equated with these false tastes--was the gate of Burlington House, that Italian palace transplanted to the middle of Eighteenth century London; and Burlington Gate was surmounted by a statue of William Kent and Gay's allusion to him as a Raphael dramatized in the figures of Michelangelo and Raphael as slaves at his feet. The implication was that Burlington House was the very citadel of bad taste in London.<sup>7</sup>

Hogarth regarded the powerful appeal which popular forms of amusement exerted upon the contemporary imagination with a great deal of apprehension. As a concerned artist, he shared Addison and Steele's doubts about the intellectual and moral value of current tastes and, in passing judgment in The Bad Taste of the Town, he ventured an opinion concerning the

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<sup>6</sup> Paulson, Hogarth, p. 42.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

inevitable consequences the nation would face if its citizens continued in their misinformed and misguided ways.

Hogarth's print stresses the magnitude of the crowds willing to push and surge under the watchful eye of armed guards to gain entrance to an afternoon of vacuous entertainment. As a diligent observer of the London scene, Hogarth made topical allusions to the drawing power of one Isaac Faukes, a "sleight-of-hand artist,"<sup>8</sup> who through aristocratic patronage had risen to great prominence. Although he was later to work in collaboration with John Rich, Hogarth also commented upon the immense popularity of this celebrated mime and found it unfortunate that England's serious dramatists were being replaced by a theatre of lightness and whimsy.

Hogarth was constantly alert to the loss of England's cultural heritage, and his print is a powerful warning that the country had far more to lose than to gain in its pursuit of mindless pleasures.

In his bitter denunciation, Hogarth condemns the aristocracy and the court for their patronage and their deliberate encouragement of the fads of foreign influence for

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<sup>8</sup> Paulson, Hogarth, p. 44.

his print is not so much "aimed at the delusive quality of these entertainments that The Spectator emphasized"<sup>9</sup> as it was "with the relationship of the nobility as patrons and the crowd."<sup>10</sup> Inherent in Hogarth's message is the idea that it is part of their duty to set a good example for those who would follow and imitate their tastes.

Although Hogarth shared Addison and Steele's concern for the national welfare, his visual satire differs significantly in style and method from his predecessors' carefully considered prose. As W. A. Speck points out in his book Swift, "satire traditionally takes two forms: it can either ridicule or punish its victims. One seeks to laugh, the other to lash men out of their follies and vices."<sup>11</sup>

Addison and Steele greatly preferred the former course. Their work is a masterful blend of subtle and gentle good humour, relying heavily on the readers' powers of inference and sensitivity to draw the necessary moral conclusions from their highly suggestive narrative commentaries. By constantly balancing the opinions of their persona against those of

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<sup>9</sup> Paulson, Hogarth, p. 45.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>11</sup> W. A. Speck, Swift (New York: Arco Publishing Co. .

The Spectator's readers, Addison and Steele were able to reveal the inconsistencies which existed between the "ideal and reality."<sup>12</sup>

Hogarth's pictures do not function in quite the same restrained fashion. His conclusions are inevitably more harsh and deliberately venomous. Rather than relying on allusions, Hogarth specifically identified his victims and gave them faces that his audience would easily recognize. This audacious directness made him both popular and feared for his blunt honesty indicated an unquibbling sense of justice which could inspire applause as quickly as it could induce humiliating discomfort. Hogarth's sense of humor was at best grim and, as a satirist, he differed from Addison and Steele in that he always instinctively went for the jugular rather than the ankles.

As Paulson points out, The Bad Taste of the Town united "in one image all the aesthetic follies of the time that had previously been attacked separately."<sup>13</sup> It gained Hogarth a considerable public following and "as a satirist he was now a known force on the London scene."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Speck, Swift, p. 37.

<sup>13</sup> Paulson, Hogarth, p. 45.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 47.



Satire was a form that was much appreciated in the 1720's; Hogarth came upon the scene at just the right moment, when the tradition of Butler, Dryden, Swift, Pope, and Gay had reached its ultimate position and prepared the public for a graphic satirist of comparable stature. Hogarth filled that need.<sup>15</sup>

If The Bad Taste of the Town provided Hogarth with an outlet for a personal sense of mission as a satirist, his work commemorating John Gay's Beggar's Opera offered him the perfect opportunity to hone and develop the complementary power of his artistic talents:

Hogarth was, as his earlier prints attest, an avid theatergoer. In his writings he constantly takes his examples from the theater, most often from Shakespeare but also from Ben Jonson and from contemporaries like Henry Fielding. But besides enjoying the theater, he recognized the stage as a useful compositional unit for the sort of graphic scene that interested him and a source of expressive faces, their drama heightened by greasepaint and theatrical lighting.<sup>16</sup>

Attracted by the success of Gay's amusing satire and parody of contemporary operas, Hogarth attempted to recapture the drama of one of its more important scenes and which he was subsequently to offer to the theatrical producer John Rich.

The first version of Act III, Scene II of The Beggar's

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<sup>15</sup> Paulson, Hogarth, p. 47.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

Opera exudes a fascinating primitive power. The prison back-drop is heavy and oppressive in its menace. There is an effective immediacy between the players and their intimacy to the spectators sharing the stage. The faces of all the participants are remarkably expressive and reminiscent of isolated examples of individual portrait paintings. Hogarth effectively captured the drama of opening night from the perspective of all the participants, but subsequent modifications began to emphasize the interesting relationships and interactions developing among members of a less and less captivated audience.

Strangely enough, Hogarth did not feel compelled to develop a personal moral cycle to complement or parallel Gay's satiric intent. Unlike Addison and Steele, who used the opera to make important satiric statements about common sense and aesthetics, Hogarth seemed content to paint variations of one particular theme in order to heighten mastery of different techniques. He freely experimented with atmosphere, allowing it to evolve from the stark and oppressive menace of painting No. 1 to the dreamy, idealized scenery of painting No. 5. Hogarth also moved his characters around, allowing himself the liberty of working with different group settings and individual portraits, while learning to better organize and heighten the interest and drama of his compositions. Paulson qualifies this

vigorous period of experimentation as totally responsible for allowing Hogarth to develop "in little more than a year's time from a groping, primitive painter to one unexcelled in pure technique by any other English painter of the eighteenth century."<sup>17</sup>

Aside from providing Hogarth with the opportunity to sharpen his artistic talents, the satiric content of his painting of Act III, Scene II of The Beggar's Opera continues and refines the judgmental tendencies Hogarth had initiated with The Bad Taste of the Town.

Ostensibly, the painting features an imprisoned Captain Macheath attempting to decide between his two wives while they plead for his life to their respective fathers cast in the roles of a prison warden and a fence. However, close examination of all aspects of the picture reveals that it is significantly more than a mere rendering of one particularly dramatic moment in the opera's evolution.

In his book The Art of Hogarth, Ronald Paulson offers an intriguing explanation of the painting's hidden meaning. He explains that the members of the audience are in fact the very "models for the sort of behaviour they are witnessing,

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<sup>17</sup> Paulson, Hogarth, p. 78.

and are themselves involved in the same sort of subterfuge.<sup>18</sup>  
Paulson reinforces his speculations by noting that the Latin inscription above the prison bars translates as "even as in a mirror"<sup>19</sup> and notes that the colors of the actors' costumes ironically corresponds to the ones worn by their counterparts in the audience. Paulson thus concludes that the actress Lavinia Fenton, portraying Polly Peachum, was playing to her real-life<sup>0</sup> love, the Duke of Bolton, and that Lockit's brown suit associated his conduct to one Sir Robert Tagg and Macheath's salmon jacket linked him to a certain Major Paunceford all seen clearly to the right of the picture.<sup>20</sup>

Although these facts are not readily self-evident to modern viewers, an awareness of such details makes Hogarth's pictorial gossip all the more delicious and reveals to what extent contemporaries could appreciate how well Hogarth had learned to excel at both "a highly intellectualized satire and pure painting."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ronald Paulson, The Art of Hogarth (London: Phaidon Press, 1975), p. 84.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>21</sup> Paulson, Hogarth: His Life, Art and Times, p.82.

## CHAPTER II

Aside from assessing the content and intellectual worth of popular entertainment, The Spectator was also concerned with examining the complex question of personal and social interaction and the overriding code of behaviour which the authors defined as manners.

Spectator No. 6 allows Sir Roger de Coverley to establish the hypothesis that to "polish our Understandings and neglect our Manners is of all Things the most inexcusable." Steele's argument rested on the belief that "Reason should govern Passion" and that wit and learning should always be subjected to the dictates of good taste:

Nature and Reason direct one thing, Passion and Humour another: to follow the Dictates of the two latter is going into a Road that is both endless and intricate; when we pursue the other, our Passage is delightful, and what we aim at easily attainable.

Unfortunately, Steele was forced to conclude that England had abandoned the logical course. While he found it to be a "polite nation," he lamented that "the Affectation of being gay and in fashion has very near eaten up our good Sense and our Religion" and was reduced in his summary to urging the English to respect and obey the moral tenets which they instinctively and intuitively knew to be right.

Steele's exhortation provoked an immediate response and Spectator No. 8 featured two letters which commiserated with the nation's moral health. While The Spectator's avowed purpose was to expose vice, the letters reflect clever evidence of a satiric intent at work on two levels.

The first letter attacks the extent of public lewdness and licentiousness from the point of view of an uprighteous and indignant member of a Society for the Reformation of Manners. While the author's remarks are steeped in research and detail, they exude a curious vicarious and prurient interest in the passions being assailed. One is left to speculate whether or not Addison himself was more than casually bemused by the author's outrage. The letter's description of the popularity of contemporary Masquerades relates to Hogarth's vision of the long lineups straining to gain access to such assemblies which he painted in The Bad Taste of the Town.

The second letter vividly counterpoints the expectations and fantasies against the bitter deception of an individual who had attended a masquerade as a hunter, only to emerge as a victim. He issues a warning which Addison promised to investigate, but it is impossible to miss the unspoken intimation that sexual escapades would always claim fools and that The Spectator had little real sympathy for the wounded pride

of the stalker captured in his own snare.

Although Hogarth had used The Bad Taste of the Town to express an opinion on the state of English manners, The Harlot's Progress was his earliest attempt to compose a moral allegory on the theme of vanity and self-gratification. At the narrative level, the first print features the arrival of a young farm girl from Kent expecting to be met by her "Loving Cosen in Tems Street." Unfortunately, she is greeted by a syphilitic-pocked old bawd working as a procuress for an aristocrat skulking with his hired hand in a darkened doorway. The viewer's interest in this rather traditional theme of seductive promises is heightened by the fact that Hogarth continues his habit of giving his characters real-life resemblances. Thus, contemporaries would readily have recognized Elizabeth Needham as the bawd and Colonel Francis Charteris, a convicted but pardoned rapist, as her employer.<sup>1</sup> The implication that the nobility and the underworld heavily relied on one another would not have been lost. While Hogarth demonstrated that the aristocracy was hardly a suitable social model, he was hardly any kinder towards the Church. In a cunning aside, he features a clergyman avidly gaping at a letter of preferment from the Bishop of London and

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Paulson, Hogarth: His Life, Art and Times, p. 108.

a crony of Sir Robert Walpole. Hogarth's insinuation was that churchmen were invariably more preoccupied with their own fortunes than they were with either public morality or the physical safety of their charges. As a guardian spirit, the clergyman is a desperate failure and without counsel, the young girl opts for a world of style and fashion as the pampered and idle mistress of a rich Jewish merchant.

Despite the evident luxury of her new world, the girl is a restless example of discontent and, as a devotee of the masquerade, she had fulfilled its hidden promise of sexual adventure and acquired a new lover. Print No. 2 features her kicking over a tea-service to direct attention away from the young man's hasty retreat after discovery by the outraged merchant. As Paulson points out, the paintings on the walls heighten interest in the scene. "In this case they predict the harsh Old Testament judgment the Jewish merchant is going to impose by casting her out into abject prostitution."<sup>2</sup>

Her independent career, as featured in print No. 3, would appear to have been of short duration. Although still attired in the finery of a Lady, she was unable to resist the prosecuting zeal of a contemporary magistrate identified as

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<sup>2</sup> Paulson, The Art of Hogarth, p. 97.



Sir John Gorson.

Convicted of Prostitution, print No. 4 features her term of hard labour, her beautiful clothes a sad and ironic reminder that she has finally descended to the level of the diseased and haggard. Already her face bears the dark spots synonymous with syphilis, and print No. 5 was Hogarth's caustic way of reminding his audience about the deadly nature of the disease and of the useless remedies prescribed by incompetent doctors.

Print No. 6 reiterates the moral that the wages of sin are death, but even this final scene is devoid of any real compassion or quiet dignity. Friends share the women's remaining possessions and the clergy, called in for prayer, are shown to have fallen under the influence of drink and about to succumb to the knowing advances of sister-prostitutes. While effective, the scene was eventually to be repeated with even greater impact and horror in the concluding print of Marriage à la Mode.

Paulson concludes that Hogarth's intention with the cycle was to show the consequences of the innocent encountering "the ambiance of the great, the fashionable, the respectable"<sup>3</sup> and, in turning against her better nature, "she imitates this

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<sup>3</sup> Paulson, Hogarth; His Life, Art and Times, p. 114.

greatness and comes to grief, while the great themselves go on their merry way."<sup>4</sup>

Hogarth's thematic concern for the dangers of vanity translated into a sequel entitled The Rake's Progress. The narrative focuses on a young man's attempt to transform himself through careful tailoring into a fashionable dandy. The story-line curiously resembles a Sartor Resartus in reverse. Rather than growing to look beyond the material for spiritual betterment, the young man capitulates to the tangible, takes up with disreputable associates, and dedicates himself to a life of debauchery and waste.

Impending bankruptcy fosters a commercially-inspired marriage with a woman many years his senior and the groom indeed exudes a certain wary discomfort for the physical aspect of the union as he unhappily contemplates the wicked expectation in his bride's one gleaming eye.

Inevitably, the rake's penchant for excessive gambling leads to crushing debt and incarceration in debtors' prison. Unlike Wilde's Dorian Gray, who was able to hide the ravages of insensitivity and degeneration, Hogarth records the results of the rake's descent into depravity and insanity with an

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<sup>4</sup> Paulson, Hogarth: His Life, Art and Times, p. 114.

exactness which is both startling and frightening.

Hogarth's satiric assertions in both The Harlot's Progress and The Rake's Progress effectively parallel Swift's belief that men and women are "prey to subversion and unhappiness from within, that men are by mental constitution restless, irrational and unsatisfied, congenitally prone to false needs, and driven to superogatory and destructive satisfactions."<sup>5</sup>

Hogarth judges the rake's eventual confinement to Bedlam as a consequence of self-indulgence and willful extravagance. Like the harlot, the rake had allowed an inflated sense of self-importance to overrule any of the restraints of moderation or discipline. Hogarth's sequel reveals the belief that both male and female are equally vulnerable to the dangers of false pride and catalogues with particularly disturbing effect the consequences and horrors that awaited those who chose to disregard the call of reason.

In keeping with the Augustan belief in the necessity of rational behavior, Spectator No. 15 attempted to pin-point some of the problems posed by women in polite society.

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<sup>5</sup> C. J. Rawson, ed., Swift (London: Sphere Books, 1971), p. 17.

Addison's initial judgment held that women were "smitten with every thing that is Showy and Superficial" and more interested in appearances than substance:

In short, they women consider only the Drapery of the Species, and never cast away a thought on those Ornaments of the Mind, that makes Persons Illustrious in themselves and Useful to others.

To reinforce his theory, Addison attempted to make appealing the lifestyle of a calm, modest and dedicated housewife by contrasting it to the nervous, restless and unsatisfied lot of a vain and self-centered woman constantly trying to be conspicuous. Essentially, Addison and Steele attempted to reinforce positive behaviour by referring to exemplary conduct as a sensible model for emulation. Although Hogarth was to demonstrate some of the virtues he found worthy of imitation in Industry and Idleness, his strength lay in detailing the fate of those who chose to ignore the precepts of reason or the urgings of moderation.

Steele dedicated Spectator No. 33 to a discussion of various forms of behaviour and concluded his essay with the belief that "the true Art of assisting Beauty consists in Embellishing the whole Person by the proper ornaments of Virtuous and Commendable Qualities." While Hogarth would have agreed with Steele's principle, it must be admitted that his

paintings and prints which dealt with the absence of such qualities are intrinsically and artistically more interesting than the rather bland and idealized representations of goodness in Industry and Idleness.

Addison and Steele catalogued the qualities they found commendable in virtuous women and stressed the belief that women were responsible for duties specific to their sex and distinct from those of men. In Spectator No. 57, Addison wrote that "Men and Women ought to busie themselves in their proper Spheres, and on such Matters only as are suitable to their respective Sex." This is not to suggest that he advanced a flagrant sexist position, for indeed he saw men and women as mutually interdependent and accorded a woman's role considerable respect and honour:

Women were formed to temper Mankind, and Sooth them into Tenderness and Compassion, not to set an Edge upon their Minds, and blow up in them those Passions which are too apt to rise of their own Accord.

In Spectator No. 81, Steele effectively underlined this point when he mockingly recounted an evening at the Opera which featured an incident between divergent Whig and Tory women who manifested their political allegiance by the patches which they wore on opposing cheeks. While Steele made sport of this bizarre affectation, it is evident that his satire was predominantly aimed at ridiculing the male politicians who

inspired such strange support:

I must here take notice, that Rosalinda, a Famous Whig Partizan, has most unfortunately a very beautiful Mole on the Tory part of her Forehead, which, being very conspicuous, has occasioned many Mistakes, and given an Handle to her Enemies to misrepresent her Face, as though it had Revolted from the Whig Interest . . . If Rosalinda is unfortunate in her Mole, Nigranilla is as unhappy in a Pimple which forces her against her Inclinations, to Patch on the Whig side.

The subtle point in Steele's humorous discussion of women in politics is that the whole process requires fewer rather than more participants and that, by offering their services, women only tended to aggravate "the Hatreds and Animosities that reign among Men, and in great measure deprive the Fair Sex of those peculiar Charms with which Nature has endowed them." Steele believed that women had a nobler role to fulfill and encouraged them "to distinguish themselves as tender Mothers and faithful wives, rather than as furious Partizans." In stating this, Steele advanced an important idea about the sanctity of marriage and a sound home-life as the basis for a healthy society. It is also evident that he hoped politicians would abandon their petty, parochial concerns and focus on the true interests of the nation:

Female virtues are of a Domestick turn. The Family is the proper Province for Private Women to shine in. If they must be showing their Zeal for the Publick, let it not be against those who are perhaps of the same Family, or at least of the same Religion, or Nation, but against those who are the open, professed, undoubted Enemies of their Faith, Liberty, and Country.

Although Hogarth was to paint a powerful and incisive account of an election during the last decade of his life, he generally refrained from the specifics of political satire. Paulson offers the following explanation for Hogarth's reserve in this delicate area:

After flirting with politics in the late 1720's and establishing rapport with his large public in the 1730's, Hogarth maintained a pose of generality and uncommittedness. Though often extremely topical, he was never political in his allusions--a stance which supported the universality of his appeal, the generality of his audience, and perhaps also the doctrine of general (vs particular) satire advocated by Addison and Steele in their influential essays on the subject.<sup>6</sup>

While Hogarth may not have expressed many ideas about the participation of women in the political process, he certainly held strong views about the subject of marriage. Like Addison and Steele, he realized that a stable marriage represented a fundamental element in the social health of the nation.

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<sup>6</sup> Paulson, Hogarth: His Life, Art and Times, p. 329.

Although a marriage represented a form of contractual bond, all three satirists were aware that a viable union depended upon a strong emotional commitment.

In Spectator No. 41, Steele answered the bewildered complaint of a man who had discovered after his wedding that his wife was not as young as she had purported to be. Steele feigned sympathy for his plight by denouncing the use of make-up as deceitful camouflage. However, the essay is tinged with a bitter-sweet irony that reflects Steele's unstated belief that the man should have been more concerned with the woman's mind and personality than with her appearance.

Steele concludes his essay by advancing an appropriate model for women to imitate and, by consequence, for men to appreciate:

In the meantime, as a Pattern for improving their Charms, let the sex study the agreeable Statira. Her features are enlivened with the Cheerfulness of her Mind, and good Humour gives an Alacrity to her Eyes. She is Graceful without Affecting an Air, and Unconcerned without appearing Careless. Her having no manner of Art in her Mind, makes her want none in her Person.

Unlike Addison and Steele who tempered their advice with a gentle humour and a genuine sympathy and concern for the human condition, Hogarth was clinically detached in his observations. His self-appointed task as a moralist was to show the consequences of succumbing to vanity and his judgments are as



uncompromising as they are visually disturbing.

Hogarth's greatest work, dedicated to exploring the myriad tensions of wedded life is contained in the marvellous cycle entitled Marriage à la Mode. While Addison and Steele were to celebrate the merits of a sedately generous union and the happy consequences of a successful marriage, Hogarth produced one of his most technically brilliant and hauntingly savage attacks on contemporary mores by focusing on the deadly conditions which surrounded the failure of an emotionally bereft alliance.

The opening scene depicts a family gathering called to assent to the conditions of a marriage settlement. The study of contrasts involved reveals that the forging of the contractual link resembles more a business merger than an emotional commitment. The most obvious and disturbing feature of the print is the casual indifference affected by both the bride and groom. The only intensity in evidence is reflected in the eyes of the two fathers. Under the careful scrutiny of a lawyer, the girl's merchant father greedily barter part of his amassed fortune for a share of a bankrupt and gout-ridden nobleman's title. The children are but pawns in an economic exercise in self-interest. It is not a love-match and nothing about the picture augurs well for the couple. It is significant to note that the prospective groom already displays symptoms of syphilis.

It is also important to note the careful attention one of the lawyers is paying to the resigned but seemingly emotionally upset young lady. The presence of the two chained dogs is a marvellous symbolic summary of the situation and there can be no doubt that the two fathers' careful accounting had consigned their children to a life of misery.

The second painting details how quickly the loveless relationship had deteriorated into a bemused and independent tolerance for each individual's obvious infidelity. The girl has become a devotee of all-night whist parties, while the Count has so little interest in his wife's opinions that he neglects to conceal the fact that he has come away from a night of carousing with another woman's bonnet in his jacket pocket. Only the couple's dog and their servant seem distraught at their extravagant ways and the latter's despair foretells the disastrous end awaiting their careless personal habits.

The third and fourth prints reveal with greater detail the couple's private indiscretions. The Earl has taken to consorting with a child-prostitute eagerly supplied by a bawd, reminiscent of Elizabeth Needham in The Harlot's Progress. She is pictured in a pose of self-defense in case the Earl's lamentations about his venereal disease should prompt him to blame the child and bring him to violence. The repulsive quack who has given the Earl a prescription was identified as one Dr.

Jean Misaubin<sup>7</sup> and maintains Hogarth's tradition of giving his fictional villains real-life countenances.

The fourth print records an evening of indolence in which the Countess has joined the company of the fashionable and foppish-to-listen-to a castrato singer, while entertaining the advances of the consoling lawyer to attend a masquerade with him. Once again the pictures on the wall are revealing. Paulson identifies them as "the Rape of Ganymede, the Rape of Io, and Lot's daughters getting him drunk in order to seduce him."<sup>8</sup> Appropriately enough, their sexual connotations forecast the girl's eventual seduction.

The fifth print indicates that she has succumbed to the lawyer's advances and worse, has had her adultery discovered by her husband. The resultant confrontation leads to an empty brawl in which the Earl perishes. His death proves Fielding to have been incontestably right when he wrote:

. . . a husband should never enter his wife's apartment without knocking, among the many excellent reasons for which are that the lady has time to adjust herself or to remove any disagreeable object out of the way, for there are some situations in which particular and delicate women would not be discovered by their husbands.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Paulson, The Art of Hogarth, p. 146.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>9</sup> Henry Fielding, Tom Jones (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1964), Chapter XXII, p. 168.

For the Countess there can be neither reconciliation nor peace in living alone and in dishonour. Having seen a poster announcing her lover's hanging, she decides to take her own life by consuming a bottle of laudanum. Her death is a source of concern for two individuals, but for entirely different reasons. A tired nanny has trouble removing a loving but syphilitic daughter from a final embrace, while the merchant father carefully removes the girl's wedding-band, content that he has at least recuperated part of his investment.

In their totality the prints represent a devastating attack on social pretension, grotesque and hypocritical motives, and the consequences of life lived and directed without a thought for dignity or compassionate concern for anything except social advancement and personal gratification.

Although the subject and the moral position are hardly original, Marriage à la Mode does effectively echo Spectator No. 268 and its warning that only a marriage based on affection and respect could work. Addison and Steele had long before perceived and discussed the evils inherent in pre-arranged and economically dictated matches (Spectator Nos. 220, 553) and Hogarth's contribution vividly realized their worst fears while neatly heightening the impact of Richardson's examination of the "property marriage" in Clarissa.

Divorce might have saved the unhappy protagonists but their relationship was too symbiotic to allow for either escape or survival. Unlike Addison and Steele who only used humour to soften their serious intentions, Hogarth dealt in cold, harsh realities whose horrors were seldom mitigated by anything less than the grotesque and gloomy. In Marriage à la Mode, Hogarth painted the consequences of greed and concluded that failure and death were the ultimate rewards of personal vanity and affectation.

Hogarth argued, like most great Augustan voices of conscience, from a firm commitment to rational and moderate behaviour and heartily endorsed Addison's call for a return to natural habits in Spectator No. 45:

A Natural and unconstrained Behaviour has something in it so agreeable, that it is no wonder to see People endeavouring after it. But at the same time, it is so very hard to hit, when it is not Born with us, that People often make themselves Ridiculous in attempting it.

In Spectator No. 38, Steele advised adapting an objectified disinterestedness as the perfect foil to any untoward sense of personal self-aggrandisement:

When our Consciousness turns upon the main Design of Life and our Thoughts are employed upon the Chief Purpose either in Business or Pleasure, we shall never betray an Affectation, for we cannot be guilty of it: But when we

give the Passion for Praise an Unbridled Liberty, Our Pleasures in little Perfections, rob us of what is due to us for great virtues and worthy Qualities.

Addison and Steele emphasized this point by exposing the trends of vice and folly to a public delighted to read about their shortcomings. Without being overly vindictive or sarcastic, they were able to gently scold their readers into realizing that society's ills were but a reflection of each individual slipping in his attempts to adhere to a system of values rooted in reason and moderation. They demurred from attacking specific individuals and dealt in universal truths. Rarely does their work frighten. Rather it indicates introspection and obliges the sensitive individual to realize that for all his weakness, he is capable of much good. Sir Roger de Coverley is their greatest legacy and reminder of this fact.

Despite his personal eccentricities, his obsolete political theories and his basic conservative nature, he remains a delightful and glowing example of the consummate decent human being. One does not turn to Addison and Steele to be startled, but rather to be prodded into remembering the fundamental responsibilities man owes to himself and to society.

Although Hogarth's paintings attempt to remind us of these same duties, his approach and the impact of his work vary considerably from that of Addison and Steele. Like

Swift, he seems to have seen deeper into the mirror of humanity and in the light of his revelation, could only paint metaphorically in black and white. As a moralist, he avoided the grey areas so loved by Addison and Steele, but ultimately his work blends beautifully with theirs to give a complete portrait of the way in which eighteenth-century artists interpreted their times.

Hogarth painted the human drama to provoke shudders rather than smiles. He left it to the viewer to extrapolate the good from the evil he exposed. It is not a difficult task. Hogarth's message remains like a timeless beacon to remind us that man must learn to commune with self over substance and to relate his individual conscience to the spirit of a universal and innate goodness born of reason.

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