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RELATIONS AND CONTRARIES

IN

CHARLES TOMLINSON'S

THE WAY OF A WORLD



"RELATIONS AND CONTRARIES"
IN
CHARLES TOMLINSON'S
"THE WAY OF A WORLD"

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Sema Bulutsuz
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Cem Taylan

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A B S T R A C T

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze in depth the poetry of Charles Tomlinson in order to elucidate his conception of the relationships between man and various vital components of his universe. With this purpose in mind, the thesis will focus on The Way of A World, the product of the poet's mature mastery.

As far as Tomlinson is concerned, the major elements outside man which confront him in his endeavour to come to terms with his environment are nature, time and art. It is with these external elements that man has to form a harmonious relationship, in spite of their fundamental opposition to him.

In the first chapter of this thesis, we shall explore Tomlinson's conception of the relationships between man and nature. As this is a rather wide subject, we have found it expedient to explore it in three sub-divisions: "Fineness of Relationship", "The Way of A World" and "Seeing is Believing".

The section headed "Fineness of Relationship" deals mainly with man's confrontation with the outside world as a physical entity and with other human beings. The second sub-division, "The Way of A World", is on the opposing forces in nature which serve to maintain her essential integrity. The final sub-division of the first chapter is entitled "Seeing is Believing" and focuses on the process of perception. A superficial 'reading' of nature, as Tomlinson terms it, leads man to the impossibility of really

coming to terms with the basically alien environment he finds himself confronted by.

The second chapter of this thesis explores the relationships between man and time. The intuitive reaction of man who, confronted with this vital medium which spans his life, is to dominate it through various means, like measuring it or trying to direct its course by exerting his will-power. Tomlinson's prescription is to make 'truce' with time, and to 'consent' to its inevitable flux.

The final section, the title of which is "The Relationships Between Life and Art" will be a general survey of Tomlinson's conception of the function of art in man's life and his understanding of the artist's duty and responsibility within the wider context of human existence.

The theme of relations and contraries which prevails in Tomlinson's poetry from the beginning of his career on, helps to explain the sources of dichotomy between various elements of nature. This dichotomy also encompasses the element of integrity which is a vital component of these forces. For Tomlinson, the solution which lies in front of man is based on his acceptance of the separateness of the elements around him, an accomplishment made possible through a relinquishment of his prevailing ego and basic respect shown to the entity of contrary elements.

I N T R O D U C T I O N

One of the most eminent contemporary poets of England, Charles Tomlinson, comments on his poetry and says:

My theme is relationship. The hardness of crystals, the facets of cut glass; but also the shifting of light, energizing weather, which is the result of the combination of sun and frost - these are the images for a certain mental climate, components for the moral landscape of my poetry in general. (1)

These images best define his poetic world. It is hard and solid as a crystal. The objects and things prove their solidity under a changing light, blowing wind or pouring rain. The weather is energizing because frost and sun struggle to dominate it while foxes and daisies try to survive. The mental climate of such a world could only be a searching and contemplating one. He finds a skull on the beach and thinks about the finalities. He links objects with each other and with human existence and observes the variety, richness, complexity and fineness of their relationships. The moral principle of such a world could not be but a relationship based on a recognition of the otherness of these elements.

In the "Preface" to his Collected Poems, Tomlinson says that the title of his first pamphlet of verse, Relations and Contraries (1951), has proved to contain a dialectic very fundamental for subsequent poems. However, the poems published in it were not included in the

(1) eds., James Vinson and D.L. Kirkpatrick, Contemporary Poets, (London: St. James Press, 1985) p.865

Collected Poems except for one which is considered by Tomlinson to be "a kind of prelude to what follows" (1). As the first poem of the book, it appears to be a good prelude to any evaluation of his conception of poetry, and of his imagery and vocabulary:

Poem

Wakening with the window over fields
 To the coin-clear harness-jingle as a float
 Clips by, and each succeeding hoof fall, now remote,
 Breaks clean and frost-sharp on the unstopped ear.

The hooves describe an arabesque on space,
 A dotted line in sound that falls and rises
 As the cart goes by, recedes, turns to retrace
 Its way back through the unawakened village.

And space vibrates, enlarges with the sound;
 Though space is soundless, yet creates
 From very soundlessness a ground
 To counterstress the lilting hoof falls as it breaks. (2)

This is a typical Tomlinson poem, beginning with a sensory impression, developing this impression through detailed and concrete description using various antithetical images and finally concluding with a contemplation or a recognition of the Relations and Contraries, that is, of the relationships between the opposing elements of nature.

The first stanza provides an auditory impression that evokes the very sound of the milkman's float on the soil, through a masterful technique. The two-stressed word groups scattered among the lines provide the exact rhythms: 'coin-clear', 'harness-jingle', 'clips by', 'hoof fall', 'now remote', 'breaks clean', 'frost-sharp'. These sound

(1) Charles Tomlinson, "Preface" in Collected Poems (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1975) no pagination.

(2) Ibid.

effects, alliterations and choices of words recreate a harsh and solid atmosphere.

In the second stanza, the sound makes a where in the space: it is 'a dotted line in sound'. But one can imagine the dotted visual line of hooves as well. The tension in this stanza is between the rise and fall of the hooves and between the progression of the cart and its sound which turns to retrace its way back.

The third stanza is a contemplation on the possibilities created by that sound. A sound effect in a soundless space enlarges it. If it had not been a silent one, this sound would not have provided the same effect. In turn, the sound gives it a vibration.

This is only one way of reading this poem. Its title and the famous expression of Pound, 'unstopped ear' in the first stanza links it to literary tradition. In this sense, it is a homage to Pound. In his autobiographical Some Americans, Tomlinson states that this poem

... had been intended as a piece of Poundian syncope, modelled on that "Ode Pour L'Élection de Son Sepulchre"... (1)

In "Poem", Tomlinson establishes parallels with Pound and himself.

In "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley", Pound describes himself as one who

... had been born in a half-savage country, out of date. (2)

In Pound's time, England was the centre of artistic tradition and

(1) Charles Tomlinson, Some Americans: A Personal Record, (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1981), p.10

(2) ed., George McMichael, Anthology of American Literature, Vol.II, (Macmillan Publishing Co., USA, 1974), p.1143

Pound had left his country for a journey to England. In Tomlinson's time the situation was reversed, England being no longer the artistic centre. During the 1950s, Tomlinson had mounted an attack on what he called 'the provincial laziness of mind' and 'equally provincial verse' (1) that reigned over England and advocated a journey to the modernist tradition of Europe.

The difference between Pound's and Tomlinson's journeys is that whereas Pound made allusions to mythical heroes of classical literature, especially Odysseus, Tomlinson places his poem in a humble setting. Whereas Pound's ear was 'unstopped' to the classical tradition, Tomlinson's ear is 'unstopped' to "the sharpness of sense experience" (2). Taking the sounds of journey by cart as a starting point, Tomlinson creates a poem that expresses his 'poetica' in three stanzas.

During his Phi Beta Kappa address on poetry at Colgate College, Tomlinson expresses the main concern of his poetry as "the fineness of relationships" (3). However, insistence on relations and on certain formal and technical devices does not create any sense of repetition. On the contrary, each of Tomlinson's books introduces new technical elements, and new landscapes and people into his poetic world. In fact, both his life and his work are manifestations of "fineness of

(1) Bruce M. Martin, British Poetry Since 1939, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985), p.143

(2) Charles Tomlinson, Some Americans, p.10.

(3) Ruth Grogan, "Charles Tomlinson: The Way of His World", Contemporary Literature, 19 (Autumn 1978), p.479

relationships" between different people, artistic forms and ways of life. His own life-style, at once urban and rustic, seems to be attuned to the very essence of his poetry.

Born in Stoke-on Trent in 1927 into a working class family, Charles Tomlinson goes to Cambridge after a local education (1). Between 1949 and 1951 he is an elementary school teacher "while trying to paint in the evenings..." (2). In 1951-1952 he is in Italy writing most of the poems in his second volume of poetry, Necklace (1955). Necklace and his third volume Seeing and Believing (1958), reflect the influences of French symbolist poetry and American poetry, and both depict many scenes from Italy.

Late in February 1957, he writes his "first poems in emulation of the three-ply cadences that Williams used..." (3). In 1959 he is awarded a travel grant to visit the United States. He travels along New Mexico, Atlanta, the Deep South, Baltimore, Washington and New York. In A Peopled Landscape (1963), there are American and British scenes. He is in New York again in the Spring of 1966 and American Scenes contains much of his visits to America. In 1966 and in 1970, he revisits Italy (4). The Way of A World (1969) brings British and American scenes together. The settings in Written on Water (1972)

(1) Michael Schmidt, A Reader's Guide to 50 Modern British Poets, (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1979), p.316

(2) Charles Tomlinson, Some Americans, p.98

(3) Ibid.

(4) Ibid., passim.

are the Isle of Skye and Italy and in The Way In (1974), the English Midlands and the Hebrides (1). The Shaft (1978) and The Flood (1981) contain many poems dedicated to the artists and people whom he knew and they both include Italian and British scenes. Notes from New York depicts many American scenes and people. About his last volume, The Return (1987), Tomlinson says that it

... goes back to and tries to gather up the meaning of the experience of beginning to write poems (that were my first real poems) in Italy in 1951-1952.... the American experience is still being balanced up against these youthful days in Italy. (2)

During these visits to various parts of the world, he meets many contemporary artists and shares their artistic interests. He approaches their contributions to world literature with his 'unstopped ears' and tries to make use of them for the benefit of English poetry. He is, moreover, the editor and critic of the works of American writers like Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams and Marianne Moore. He has translated the works of Russian, Spanish, Italian and Mexican poets and contributed to a multilingual poetic work with poets from Italy, France and Mexico.

He is also a painter whose pictures "do come back to the same area of imagery: water, stones, light, space" (3) and share the same concerns with his poetry:

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- (1) Ruth Grogan, "Charles Tomlinson: The Way of His World", Contemporary Literature, 19(1978), p.473.
- (2) "Charles Tomlinson At Sixty in Conversation with Richard Swigg", P.N. Review, Vol.14, no.3(1987), p.58.
- (3) ~~Jack~~ Jasula and Mike Erwin, "An Interview With Charles Tomlinson", Contemporary Literature, Vol.16, no.4 (Summer 1975), p.414.

I like something lucid surrounded by something mysterious. I see poems and pictures as the place where the civilized, discriminating faculties and the senses of the elemental, of origins, reinforce each other. (1)

Tomlinson's search for a profundity through the observation of periphery is more obvious in his paintings than it is in his poetry. Skulls filled with a dreamland of birds, clouds in the form of human heads, different natural elements united in one painting through the technique of collage constitute the imagery.

In addition to literature and painting, another artistic medium that had fascinated Tomlinson during the 1940s was the cinema, leading him into writing scripts for films.

Charles Tomlinson, a man of such broad range and scope of artistic and intellectual interests, is a professor of English at the University of Bristol and prefers to live an isolated life in his cottage in Gloucestershire. Peter Levi describes his house as follows:

... (it) seemed to me intimately related to his admirable poetry. It is a cottage with an austere furnished living-room in which I remember nothing not genuine. It stands in the quietest valley I have ever penetrated in Western England, steep-sided with hanging woods and badgers than there are people. Upstream there are the remains of one of the last box forests in England. (2)

This brief glance at the way of life and at the artistic interests of Tomlinson gives many indications as to the sources of the variety and richness of his poetry. The sound of warm Mediterranean water moving in

(1) Charles Tomlinson, "The Poet as Painter", Poetry Review, Vol. 4, no. 76 (1986 December), p.16

(2) Peter Levi, "Fifteen Ways of Looking at A Tomlinson", P N Review, Vol. 5, no. 1, 1977, p.40.

and out of the caves of Italy under a blazing sun, 'frost-sharp' hoof-falls of a horse on the icy English soil in winter, follow each other in different poetic forms while the Mexican peasants, American Indians and Englishmen share the same humanity in their capacity for confronting the outside world.

The main purpose of this thesis is to show the working of Relations and Contraries in Tomlinson's sixth volume of poetry, The Way of A World. After the publication of this book, Michael Edwards, one of Tomlinson's best critics, wrote:

It is an event, a happening in English literature; it confirms Mr. Tomlinson as the most powerful poet that we have among us (...) I know of no better writing being published in England. (1)

The Way of A World contains the best examples of his recurrent themes and images in such a variety of subject-matter and form that to take this mature work as the basis for an analysis of his poetry will not result in any injustice to the richness of his artistic concerns. Although the poems are going to be examined by classifying them under various headings in order to provide an easier access to the way of his world, each chapter is in close thematic relationship with the previous and ensuing ones. The first chapter, "The Relationships Between Man and Nature", including those between various elements of nature and human relationships, will also cover the way human beings perceive and interpret the outside world and catch the possibilities it offers. The second chapter will analyze "The Relationships Between

(1) Michael Edwards, "Charles Tomlinson's The Way of A World", Adam International Review, 340-342, (1970), pp.52-57.

Man and Time". The third chapter, which is on "The Relationships Between Art and Life" will be a general assessment of Tomlinson's approach to art and poetry.

CHAPTER I

THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MAN AND NATURE

A. FINENESS OF RELATIONSHIPS

The Way of A World begins with an epigraph by Jorge Guillen:

Y tanto se da el presente
Que el pie caminante siente
La integridad del planeta.

Jorge Guillen, Perfeccion (1)

This brief poem gives a short synopsis of the book: it is about a world which overwhelms man with its integrity. Tomlinson aims at a similar integrity in his work. The Way of A World begins with a poem about the initiation of a human being into life ("Swimming Chenango Lake") and concludes with a poem on death ("The End"). The other poems are about natural, mental and artistic processes.

In the lecture he delivered at the occasion of his Phi Beta Kappa address, which was entitled "The Poem as Initiation", Tomlinson reads his "Swimming Chenango Lake" twice, explaining that this poem occupies the moral centre of all that he has done hitherto and that its analysis of the act of swimming was

(1) "And the present is so much with us
That the stepping foot feels
The integrity of the planet."

Jorge Guillen, Perfeccion (Translated by
Türkan Araz)

almost an allegory of the way we take purchase
 on the world of phenomena yet can never
 'possess' it and the way it takes purchase
 on us, confirming our identity. (1)

The poem is divided into four parts so as to show how the swimmer moves from one level of experience to another and arrives at an awareness of, or illumination about human existence.

The title attracts attention with its unusual omission of the preposition 'in'. It is not "Swimming in Chenango Lake", but "Swimming Chenango Lake". This omission brings an extra significance to an ordinary act of swimming. It becomes a trial for the swimmer, a confrontation during which the swimmer and the lake exert conflicting powers on each other through their bodies and eventually change each other.

The first octave of the poem (2) deals with the actual sensations of the swimmer. The first sentence, with its more powerful sound effects in the first half, gives the impression that winter, or nature, is more powerful than the swimmer and that he is bound to obey it. Immediately after this prophecy, the swimmer begins to 'read the water' and sees how it carries contradictory portents. It is astir and steady at the same time, like a hesitating human being. What the swimmer reads in the water reflects his own feelings and creates a sense of unity between the swimmer and the lake: knowing the coldness of the water, he is likewise prey to autumnal hesitations. The weather and the trees are in a tremor, and the swimmer

(1) Ruth Grogan, "Charles Tomlinson: The Way of His World", Contemporary Literature, 19(Autumn 1978), p.473.

(2) For the texts of the poems analyzed, see Appendix.

is probably trembling, or at least very excited. Then come the leaves which have fallen into the water, anticipating what the swimmer himself will do to the lake: they 'launch' their 'imprints' on it in an 'eccentric' manner. Their impact on the surface of the water changes the water, and although the leaves are very light, the process is not a gentle one. The word 'launch' has connotations of strife, and implies the beginning of an attack. All these words and descriptions serve to create a tense atmosphere between different elements of nature.

In the second part of the poem, the observer passes from concrete observations into abstract thinking. The rhythm of this section is slower than that of the first one which rendered the excitement of the swimmer and the movement of his eyes from one object to another. The second part, on the other hand, depicts the flow of water and reflects the thoughts of the swimmer. The two motional elements, flowing water and thoughts, are again united in the same mood.

At that point, the water's being a 'geometry', a square, a form, can be applied to the poem as well. In fact, the poem imitates nature in all its variety and regularity. The lake is endowed with consistency, with a form with four parts. Furthermore, it is similar to a musical piece, a sonata in four distinct sections, repeating variations of the same theme. Thus art, as a component of human life, is included in this natural encounter.

The following section is about the actual confrontation during which the swimmer's splashes and his gradual progress towards a baptism are heard as a musical crescendo. It begins immediately after

the slow movement of the 'pulsating flow' and the four-stressed lines are occasionally replaced by the three-stressed ones with a quicker movement which imitate the strokes of the swimmer. This section is the culmination of the experience during which the swimmer and the lake change each other. The use of expressions like 'scissors apart', 'sway to tatters', implies that the act of swimming is an act of violence. The water's violence is its 'coldness'. But again, the swimmer and the water unite in their resistance and they embrace each other with a 'grasp' and a 'grasping'. The swimmer lets himself be grasped by the water. He himself 'grasps' the substance and the meaning of water. Thus, the two different and colliding forces become liberated in their unity. The moral principle underlying this unity is to refrain from egoism in the act of mutual 'possession', to allow each to 'move' freely in mutual 'embrace'.

After the quick movement of the confrontation comes a slower passage in which the swimmer begins to understand the language of water, feeling himself a part of and apart from it. The water 'heals' itself, becoming smooth again. The swimmer heals himself leaving his ego aside. He is 'unnamed' in his union with water.

The 'lost language' of Chenango, on the other hand, is one which can only be comprehended and responded to through a direct contact of one's own body with nature. To be human is to be open to confrontations with the outside world. The result is a kind of 'Know thyself' with its humiliating and exalting dimensions. The swimmer now knows that although nature is 'impenetrable', 'merciless' and 'cold', it is also endowed with a kind of mercy which enables him

to swim in it.

At the end of the poem, the swimmer is back on the bank watching the water. His way of seeing things has undergone a transformation. The earth is a 'mosaic' of distinct forms which are being 'shattered' and 'shaped' incessantly and are in a continuous flow. The smooth flow of the five-stressed lines and the use of expressions like the 'flowing obsidian', 'last sun', 'shatterings', 'wind unscaping' and 'going elsewhere' all lead to finalities. Furthermore, there is a new prophecy at the end, but this time one more philosophical than "Winter will bar the swimmer". The individual swimmer is part of this great flow and change, at the end of which looms death. A quotation from Tomlinson may reiterate the implications of this poem:

At the edge of conversations, uncompleting all acts of thought, looms the insistence of things which, waiting on our recognition, face us with our own death, for they are so completely what we are not. And thus we go on trying to read them, as if they were signs, or the embodied message of oracles. We remember how Orpheus drew voices from the stones. (1)

These words reveal the way Tomlinson sees or 'reads' nature. The visible things lead him to invisible ones, and back to the self again. Nature is superior to this relationship and after a mixed feeling of fear and admiration, the self understands that there is no way but to accept the things nature is offering.

Tomlinson presents variations of feeling and mood through a picture of a world peculiar to himself. In this world, nature's calmness or warmth is under the threat of frost or storms, or it is already in turmoil and natural elements are trying to survive. The observer of

(1) Charles Tomlinson, "The Instance of Things: paragraphs from a journal", Stand, Vol. 14, no. 2, 1972-73, p.52

these poems is thus led into thinking of his own predicament or death. His "Weatherman" lives the pain of his coming imprisonment into confined spaces in winter as he watches the migration of geese to warmer regions.

The beginning of this poem, with the antithetical words 'release' and 'tyranny' and with the connotations of 'white finality', summarizes man's predicament in a sentence. Although there seems at first to be a contradiction between the 'releasing' weather and 'tyrannizing' rooms, both are actually attributes of nature. The weather releases one from the finality of houses, but it possesses a finality of its own as well. Immediately after that comes a comparison that reflects man's hopes of freedom or escape from death: birds can fly away to warmer regions while man can only escape within himself. Although migration is an escape from death for the birds, it reminds man of his own 'going elsewhere' and disquiets his 'blood'. He feels like a prisoner in the house and in the universe, because he has no way of escape. He interprets the 'yelp' of geese as omens of his death. The word 'blood' is crucial in reflecting his instinctive fear and in establishing a bond between man and the animal kingdom.

Then the sun dawns. Tomlinson depicts it as "opal changes of dawn light on the light of snow." The confrontation here is between sun and man. Ice and cold resist the sun. Man cannot look at it directly, 'winces away' and 'blinks back', because it is a life-source. Drinking in its warmth and light, man puts his fears aside and establishes his kinship with the world. He is then ready to accept its clamour, its cold and 'changes-to-come-from skies.'

Tomlinson thus expresses his feelings about the outside world:

... I am awed by things that outgo my grasp and I am awed by the mystery of a universe that refuses to be tidied away. And this brings one back to that vexed question of the poet's self and the role it plays in his poems. In my poems, self has to justify its existence in relation to what is other. (1)

The swimmer of Chenango Lake justifies his existence by letting himself be 'unnamed' by nature. "Weatherman" can put his anxiety aside and embrace the sun as a regenerating force. Man's relation to nature in its perfect form is like a love affair. In "Swimming Chenango Lake" two independent bodies, man and water, come together, penetrate each other and, in their unification, leave their selves aside without forgetting their 'otherness'.

Out of this recognition, on each side, of the separate identity of the other, arises the moral principle of this relationship: respect.

... you can't have things your way all or even most of the time, you must respect what is other than you as you respect people in a conversation. You don't want to bawl them down and you don't want to bawl down the universe. But you do want an awareness of things that is both passionate and balanced. (2)

This is how Tomlinson interprets an ideal relationship between the self and other things. It is a passionate and balanced love based on mutual respect. Nature, as a perfect example of balance and harmony, is the model for man. Human existence on earth is a constant confrontation with things and people. Sensory organs force man to look, hear and feel, and the body responds to their call. Man either confronts these external forces, or recoils from them. In all these confrontations he liberates himself from the limitations and distortions.

(1) "Charles Tomlinson at Sixty in Conversation with Richard Swigg", P.N.Review, Vol.14, no.3, (1987), p.61.

(2) Ibid., p.61.

tions caused by his ego. The free elements in Tomlinson's world are not free in their own isolated egotism, but free in their relationships and through the help of their relationships. Freedom is a binding agent. It makes relationship possible without bawling the things and people down.

Tomlinson's humorous poem "Descartes and the Stove" ridicules self-centred attitudes with an extreme example of solipsism. He reveals the absurdity of Descartes' idealist motto "cogito ergo sum" and his doubts about the existence of reality through a powerful sensual description of the cold outside and the fire inside. At the beginning of the poem, Descartes tries, on a cold day, to enliven the flames of his stove. The irony here is centred on Descartes' use of an iron tool, called 'armoury', to protect his hands from the flames, the reality of which he doubted. His being on the verge of 'melting' into a recognition of the reality of the 'hot delight' the stove gave him on a cold day is strikingly humorous. As Descartes doubts the existence of everything around him, Tomlinson gives a colourful and vivid description of the outside. In this section, the poet identifies all the creatures of nature and depicts the impact of the cold and the snow on nature itself. Among other things, there are Descartes' own footprints lined "with a fur of frost". Thus, if the philosopher exists with his footprints on the snow, why should he deny the existence of other creatures?

The last section of the poem comes immediately after the description of changes of light. Darkness gradually covers the earth with its 'anonymity'. Tomlinson tries to drag Descartes into this anonymity, but 'the great mind' refuses to comply. The poet isolates 'the great

mind' at the end of the line and the sentence continues in the following line: "Sat with his back to the unreasoning wind". 'The unreasoning wind' has a more powerful and insistent sound effect than 'the great mind' does. Hence nature's dominance on man is asserted. The adjective 'unreasoning' ironically turns out to be descriptive of the very thing Descartes himself is doing. Sitting in the room, he insists on doubting his senses, but were it not for the 'unreasoning wind' and the cold outside, he would not have set a fire inside. He is not sure about the existence of the fire, but even if the patter of ash and snow-bound farms and the flames cannot disperse his doubts, the iron tool is nevertheless in his hand, moistening it.

Another concept which is an indispensable part of Tomlinson's world is that of 'civility'. Civility defines a life which is shared by other people and things and based on mutual respect. It generally belongs to the sphere of human relationships, but sometimes it is used for nature. "Autumn" begins with a description of the tensions between the forces of winter and of summer.

The civility of nature overthrown, the badger
must fight in the roofless colosseum of the
burning woods. (1)

On the other hand, the fundamental human need of being in 'civil' relationships with other people is generally impeded by the egoism and apathy of human beings. "Terminal Tramps" explores the various difficulties and tensions involved in human relationships. This poem is an example of extremity again, because the protagonists are outcasts: a mad woman, a drunkard, and a sober tramp. Although alien to

(1) Collected Poems, p.189

the people among which she finds herself, the mad woman

declares to the entire
room: I expect
a civil answer

There are important differences in the poem between the mad woman whose fundamental humanity is constantly felt in her search for a connection with others, and the civilized and sane people around her who do not seem to have any intention of sharing anything, and who cannot, at any rate, respond because she is so utterly isolated in her own world. Her isolation is emphasized by highlighting three main features. First, she has no conception of time:

she sips
at the unmeasured time of her
terrible leisure.

while for others

... the clocks
impose a certainty.

Secondly, she has no sense of place. She inhabits "this shifting place" while others have a 'destination'. Thirdly, she is mad. Madness can be considered to be an extreme case of solipsism. To communicate, she tries to create a personal language: she 'babbles'

for the right sound
the word to express
her groundless humanity.

To express the importance of language as a common medium that binds man to things and other people, Teulinson says:

In my own case, I should add that the particular, rather than existing in its own isolate intensity, means first of all the demands of a relationship - you are forced to look, feel, find words for something not yourself - and it means, like all relationships, a certain forget-

fulness of self, so that in contemplating something, you are drawn out of yourself towards that and towards other people - other people, because, though the words you use are your words, they are also their words: you are learning about the world by using the common inheritance of language. (1)

But sometimes even language is impotent when it comes to dragging people out of their 'self-centred' worlds. "A Word In Edgeways" is a funny poem which reflects the superficiality of verbal contact when it lacks any real exchange of feelings and thoughts. Tomlinson imitates the way a talkative person interrupts the discourse of another in

... mid-narrative.

The difficulty and tension of the listener is evoked through the interruption of expressions in their vital points of connection: 'they / say', 'I / am', 'him / self', 'un / interesting'. The listener finds the discourse 'uninteresting' and 'unreciprocal', because the sole subject is 'the self' of the speaker. The poem ends in an exchange of good wishes and thanks as if it really were a conversation, but it is, in fact, a soliloquy. The annexation of these polite words to each other shows their superficiality and emptiness. They indicate polite behaviour, but they are far from being signs of civility, because the two individuals do not feel any real concern or respect for each other.

When the 'self' ceases to be a limitation of or restriction on man's perception of the outside world, one may have the chance of seeing the world in all its complexity and integrity.

(1) Jed Rasula and Mike Erwin, "An Interview with Charles Tomlinson", Contemporary Literature, Vol.16, no.4, (Summer 1975), p.407.

B. THE WAY OF A WORLD

The most important feature of Tomlinson's universe is its integrity. It is not, however, a static universe. The process of metamorphosis is constantly in the poet's mind. Octavio Paz rightly comments:

Whether the poem is about rocks, plants, sand,
insects, leaves, birds or human beings, the true
protagonist, the hero of each poem is change.
Tomlinson hears foliage grow. (1)

Significantly, Tomlinson's nature poems generally develop as meditations. The observing mind first experiences the awe or excitement of catching natural phenomena in their strain or violence. Then it discovers the law underlying the strife. This discovery generally takes the form of a recognition of the power and integrity of nature. If humiliation is one of the consequences of such an acceptance, freedom is the other. Freedom, because freedom is to be able to see the world as it is, to discover its laws, and to know where a human being stands in his relationships with other elements and other creatures.

Tomlinson sees life through an ascetic's eyes. There is no excess of joy or pain in life. There are no extremes in the way human beings or other creatures confront it. Every turmoil ends in peace, and

(1) Octavio Paz, "The Graphics of Charles Tomlinson" in Black and White by Charles Tomlinson, trans. Michael Schmidt, (Cheadle, Carcanet Press, 1976), p.10

peace is forever threatened by upheaval. The redeeming feature here, however, is that there exists a law, a regulating force underlying these changes. The prose poem "Autumn", mentioned above in our discussion of the significance of civility, restates this constant struggle in more straightforward terms:

Peace? There will be no peace until the fragility of the mesquite is overcome and the spirals of the infuseria turn to glass in the crystal pond (...) It will endure? It will endure as long as the frost. (1)

The sudden 'flew' of frost on a warm day's night in "The Instance" may be taken as an example of man's potential for establishing harmony with the world. At the beginning of the poem, the barber's 'cold shears' give his first surprise to the protagonist. The barber foresees frost for the night and his customer believes him because he is a man who knows the ways of nature. But since the day is warm, the man forgets the barber's prophecy and is surprised again when night comes. The opposition here is between the 'tepid' day and the night 'frost' as they follow one another creating a dynamism. The frost 'burns' hands as if it were fire, 'flows' as if it were water and eventually covers the earth, thus uniting the four elements within itself. It is, however, distinct from the others, being hard like a crystal. There is, indeed, something sinister in its flew. It approaches by stealth like an enemy, and, finding a hole in the hedge, invades nature. But this is a surprise only for the barber's customer, a human being ignorant of the ways of nature.

The instinctive withdrawal of man from frost can be compared with the withdrawal of a fox from a human habitation in "The Fox Gallery".

(1) Collected Poems, p.190.

This house, which seems to be built in a valley near a forest, gives man a chance to have relationships with other creatures. In the middle of the poem, the man exclaims, surprised by the approach of a fox 'straight at the house'. But the animal suddenly turns back, feeling that this is no place for foxes. Reciprocally, human beings do not visit fox dens either. The childish excitement of man hoping to have a closer contact with a fox is rendered through the use of three-stressed short lines. Although the animal passes for an ideogram of agility in man's world, and although the two creatures, man and fox, inhabit the same valley or wood, it is impossible for them to have a closer relationship.

"The Way of A World" is the first of a series of poems about the integrity of the planet. The observer of the poem remembers a scene with a gull and an ash-key whirling in the air under the pull of a gust of wind. To quote him, it was a "surge of air", "whirling" and "disheveling". He fears lest everything float in the air. But he notices that there exists a counterforce preventing things from floating up. The black and supple boughs of trees and their roots bind them firmly to the soil. The discovery of a cross-current, of a rooting gravity working against an uprooting force assures him that the world is safe under their balanced powers.

Similarly, the daisies in the poem of the same name can resist wind and rain because of their roots and their dryness. They are capable of flying in the air without being broken. Thus, a rooted flower becomes an image of 'flight'. There is a delicate balance between the rooting gravity, without which they would not be able to grow at all, and the uprooting gravity, without which they would not be

able to stand upright. Without moisture, they would fade away, and without dryness they would not be able to protect their bodies which would swell up and collapse under their own weight.

As the observer of the daisies tries to close the window, he notices the weight in his hand, and this discovery leads him to think of the daisies' flight in terms of a reciprocal support between 'the grave and the acute': The grave roots support the acute stalks, and the grave stalks support the acute leaves.

This dichotomy between opposing natural forces can be observed in another poem, "The View", which opens with winter approaching and the woods making preparations to protect themselves. Against signs of vitality like the sun and an apple, there are signs of destruction and death like gust and frost. An old, empty house with a dark window makes man think about the darkness in the universe. He thinks of the invisible, hidden aspects of nature and imagines the window as a way which may probably lead to the centre of the universe. The idea of the existence of any centre is again destroyed by the riot of rain and thunder. Water, air and fire send their fiercest blows on to earth and thus shatter any hopes of finding a centre on earth.

C. SEEING IS BELIEVING

The observer of Tomlinson's poems 'reads' nature to arrive at conclusions not only about natural laws or human predicaments, but also about the mystery behind the visible. When seeing acquires a more comprehensive meaning as the first step in interpreting nature, the problem of perception comes into the foreground.

'Seeing' denotes different phases of perception in different poems in the book. At its simplest, it is the second step after looking and the step previous to understanding. In "The Fox Gallery", people first 'look down to see' the fox, and at the end 'see' how utterly the two worlds are different from one another.

The second form of seeing is encountered in the word 'read' in "Swimming Chenango Lake". The difference between seeing and reading is that the latter can reach a conclusion relying on previous experiences and on their imprints on man's brain. As a matter of fact, it necessitates a knowledge of the alphabet of what is read, as in the case of the swimmer who can read the surface of the water to reach the conclusion that it is cold and that winter is approaching.

Seeing as comprehension is generally hidden in poems which are visual descriptions ending in a comprehension of the relationships between things. "View", "Daisies" and "The Way of A World" all deal with observations which lead to a contemplation and a conclusion. In "The Way of A World", seeing is replaced by 'watching' and comprehension by 'grasping'. 'Grasping' is a key-word in "Swimming Chenango

Lake", uniting a cerebral activity with a corporeal one, and an act of the human body with that of water in the most perfect way.

The prose poem "Poem" establishes this relationship in the process of perception. It explains that the act of seeing is connected to the sympathetic nerve system. That is why what the eye is looking at becomes a command for it to send a script of to the brain for that organ to move the body accordingly. The word 'script' makes a differentiation between a replica of the sight and its transformation into meaning through a system of codes. Thus, the complex deciphering system of the body corresponds to the complex system of ciphers in the universe, and perception gains creative dimensions.

This is the way Tomlinson defines his conception of seeing in "The Insistence of Things":

... what one actually sees is more than the sight - an instance radiating unlooked-for instances, a swarm of unreasoning hopes suddenly and vulnerably brought into the open. (1)

For Tomlinson, one of these 'unlooked-for instances' is Eden. In the expression 'I have seen Eden', seeing becomes an experience. The idea of Eden with its light, air, and generous land, and with its direct contact with nature, is thought to be possible to experience on earth.

Tomlinson's trust in the senses, and especially in seeing, is by no means a handicap that prevents him from noticing the distortions sight is prey to. In "Poem", he explains how a light source, the

(1) Charles Tomlinson, "The Insistence of Things", paragraphs from a journal", Stand, Vol. 14, no.2, 1972-73, p.52.

volumes and shapes of things, may distort our perception. A small thing like the skull of a bird can be considered to be a frail thing. But the blade-like beak and the additional impact of sensations caused on man by other sensory organs, shatter any illusions about the frailty of a 'bird-skull' and reveals how solid this little thing is.

'The eye of the mind' is an expression Tomlinson uses to define the process of perception. "Weatherman" looks at the sky, hearing the birds which are

Unseen, they drive the eye
Of the mind the way they go...

The third paragraph of "Skullshapes" is an explanation of the 'eye of the mind'. The two important points Tomlinson makes here are, first, that seeing is not imprinting an exact copy of nature on the retina, and, second, that it is related to memories and conceptions formed previously in the brain. Every new sensation or vision is implanted somewhere in the brain according to its relation to those already existing. But besides interpreting visions in relation to previous experiences, the brain is also capable of creating new possibilities for seeing things. This possibility belongs to the sphere of artistic creation which can see Eden on earth, or can listen to the sound of the dead in silence.

More profound ways of seeing develop as the eye tries to see the invisible. This process involves feelings and intuitions that can generally be considered as immanent in the process of perception.

In "Tout Bâture de Mon Regard", Tomlinson uses the image of a circle, which is also the shape of the contours of the earth and of the human eye. Since the world is thus like a circle, the eye can only see the portion of it which is within its sight. The eye is like-

wise a circle, but it only sees through its protruding half. Taking this deficiency as a starting point, Tomlinson develops his notion of invisibles. Nature gives many clues indicating that there are mysteries in it. Cloudshapes, water surfaces or skulls force us to ask the same question time and again: "What is there behind all the periphery?" But this question can never be answered. That is why Tomlinson puts the eye at the centre of a circle and claims that

To see is to feel at your back this domain of
a circle whose power consists in evading and
refusing to be completed by you

To only see the shapes and colours and to miss the domain hidden in the dark is a form of blindness.

In "Night Transfigured", seeing is transformed into an epiphany when two people suddenly understand how the dead and the living are united in one universe. The poem uses the contrasting images of light and dark. Living people enter into a dark night with a torch in their hands. Under the torch-light, nettles seem like crystals, and then, in the light of this transformation, like solidities. They reveal something about the essence of life: death. This sudden awareness or confrontation with death is frightening, as implied by the usage of the expression 'drew back'.

The moment of this recognition is termed 'to see with the words we did not make', that is, it is denoted by the silence of two people experiencing identical feelings of awe. The silence is shared by both the living and the dead. When shared, it speaks and tells of the previous generations. The discovery of the invisible existence of the dead results in an awareness of the fact that the dead and the living

share the same universe. Thus, their absence speaks of their existence and their sound is heard in the silence. Although the eye and the ear do not see or hear anything in this dark and silence, the mind perceives that death is immanent in life.

The highest form of seeing, artistic vision, is 'never a prisoner of the things seen', as Tomlinson upholds in the prose poem "Process". Thus, in the second paragraph of "Skullshapes", it is not the eye, nor the 'light', but 'shadow' which explores the recesses of a skull. It therefore seems that the best way of exploring the unknown, the hidden, is using an implied language which belongs to art. A straightforward language is as limited in scope as a naked eye. What we need to see is the thing which is not there. That is why it cannot be illuminated in broad daylight, but can only be concealed, implied, by 'shadows'.

History or time, another domain that refuses to be shaped or manipulated by human will and that can only be consented, is the topic of the following chapter.

CHAPTER II

THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MAN AND TIME

In Tomlinson's world, where everything is in motion and in a process of transformation, time appears as a crucial element. Time is sometimes the duration between night and dawn, dawn and sunset, shadow and light or rain and sunshine, sometimes the great flux, the 'going elsewhere' of nature and men, and sometimes a historical period with its civic relationships.

Time is generally regarded as an enemy associated with degeneration, decay and death in nature. In Tomlinson's poetry, however, we encounter no such suggestion of hostility. For him, time is not a separate element, but the background for nature and human life, both of which are pervaded by incessant alterations. It is one of the things 'other' than the self, but, at the same time, it is so deeply involved with the self that human beings find themselves obliged to come to terms with it. They feel a similar need to make a 'where' in time as they do in nature.

The first two poems to be examined in this chapter are refutations of extreme responses by some artists and individuals to their time. In these poems, Tomlinson defends social traditions against the radical and bloody transformations which are, as far as he is concerned, manifestations of ego-centric attempts to transcend time and to force a 'where' for the self. The other two poems are about the possibilities of making peace with it.

"Prometheus", one of the best of Tomlinson's poems exploring the artists relationship with his time, reveals the antagonism between artistic or political dreams and the brutality of political ambitions by successfully juxtaposing a thunderous upheaval in nature and a musical piece by Scriabin whose "hope of transforming the world by music and rite" is simulated by composition. The poem begins with a description of nature as it is falling apart like the music of Scriabin. Nature "disowns man's zenith" and counteracts upon the music by causing the radio to "simmer with static". Life's dominance over artistic dreams is thus implied as a prelude to the poet's theme. This Russian composer's music reminds the listener of the actual realization of similar hopes during the October Revolution in Russia. Thus, nature, Scriabin's music, the October Revolution, and Tomlinson's poem intermingle in thematic unity.

In the second stanza, the poem begins to synchronize the various phases of the October Revolution with the introduction of diverse musical instruments. At each step, it refutes Scriabin's illusions by setting them against the real progress of the greatest transformation in history. The contrast between the instruments a musician would use and those a politician would use is strikingly emphasized by the expression "mob of instruments".

Tomlinson's criticism of artists like Scriabin is directed towards their "fanatic ego of eccentricity" which blinds them. While these artists are wrapped in their eccentric dreams, the "systematic" politicians prepare another dose of "daily prose" for the people. In Scriabin's music, Prometheus becomes the ruler of a brand new world and starts a new phase in human history. But in real life, there are no mythical heroes who ascend to power by terror to rule in justice.

Tomlinson compares a politician's attitude towards an artist with that of an anti-semitic's towards a Jew, and emphasizes the fundamental antagonism between artistic creativity and political abuse.

In the penultimate stanza, the upheavals in nature, Scriabin's music and history have different results: nature re-establishes its harmony, the music ends in artistic perfection, the revolution in blood-shed, and the poem, in the last stanza, ends with the "daily prose" of life. An ice-cream van playing "Greensleeves" replaces Scriabin's heroic music and the idealist procession of revolutionary heroes. The last line may be interpreted as Tomlinson's coming to terms with his time, because it asserts that the time-old solidity of political institutions in England and the new houses with their ugliness still have a 'mercy' of their own, although it is a 'cruel' and stale one.

Tomlinson explains his ideas about revolutionary changes in an interview:

I am much moved by the event of revolution. And I am anti-revolutionary. I see the assassination of Tretsky in The Way of A World ("Assassin") as an attempt to transcend time, almost as a caricature of mysticism, an attempt to have the future now on one's own terms. (1)

"Assassin" pursues the same theme by revealing the dilemma of those who join in the actual transformation of history. The poem develops the dramatic monologue of Tretsky's assassin. Tomlinson is more interested in the assassin's outlook on life and history than in his political motives.

The poem begins by revealing the disparity between the way the

(1) Jed Rasula and Mike Erwin, "An Interview With Charles Tomlinson", *Contemporary Literature*, Vol.16, no.4, (Summer 1975), p.410.

assassin imagined the assassination and how his sensations distracted him in the actual moment of the act. The paperweight attracts his eyes and he sees Tretsky as a prisoner inside the transparent paperweight. After wiping out this image he sees "only his vulnerableness". But this time sounds begin to distract him: papers "rasp", "snap" and "crackle" and these sounds lead him to the sound of his actual striking of Tretsky's head. Then he tries to get rid of his auditory impressions.

The technical mastery of the first three stanzas reveals how the assassin's ambitions to change history in one blow is related to his fundamental ignorance about life. His frequent use of abstractions and Latinate words like "distractions", "discriminations", "patterns", "recognitions", "liquidities", "absurd", "vulnerableness" reflects his loose relationship with the outside world and his lack of direct contact with it.

The ironical statements in the third stanza are emphasized through line divisions. The first sentence at the end of the first line is "We inhabited together". It refers to the past relationship of the assassin and his victim until the day of the murder, and creates an expectation that he is going to regret what he is going to do. The second line ends with the sentence, "I must put down", raising similar expectations. The new line, however, reveals that what he wants to put down are his sense impressions. Immediately after that comes the expression "its absurd" which can also be read "it's absurd" and thus become a comment on his thoughts.

The moment he strikes Tretsky's head is the culmination of his confrontation with a human being in a violent crush. He is now under a shower of sense impressions. He begins to see the room in all its detail. Objects talk to him and tell him where his body is standing. Tretsky's animal cry vibrates in his blood and he hears the sound of papers, as if they were whispering in a 'rear'. The essential humanity of the assassin inevitably comes to the foreground under the impact of the cry that unites him with his victim through a blood-tie. Furthermore, the assassin experiences direct bodily contact with his victim as he leans towards the dying man. Before the murder, the assassin had been aware neither of his essential kinship with the man he was to kill, nor of his 'otherness'. After his violent blow, the assassin is horrified of the image of Tretsky and, in a fallacy of vision, feels as if "the body that rose against me were my own". He is ignorant of the fact that entities other than his self are nevertheless related to him, and that he cannot kill a man without, in the process, killing his own humanity.

At the end, he is astonished of feeling uneasy after what is to him a great heroic deed. Tomlinson emphasizes the ambivalence of the killer's feelings by using ambiguous words reflecting the irony involved in the illusion of possessing history in one's own hands.

Indeed, the assassin thinks that he holds the tightrope of history in his grasp, but the rope is not a resilient one. As the word 'tightrope' connotes acrobatics, the assassin appears by implication to be more of a jumper than a hero. Other connotations of the word are pressure and the use of force, so that to think of it as the 'tightrope of necessity' is awkward. If it had been a necessity, there

would have been no need for violence.

'Grasping' is a significant word Tomlinson uses to define the process of perception. In "Swimming Chenango Lake", it is through both physical and mental contact that the protagonist attains an awareness of himself in relation to the outside world. The assassin, on the other hand, is only 'grasping' a dead body, though he imagines himself to be 'grasping' the non-existent rope of history. Mentally, he is incapable of properly grasping anything because of the fundamental flaw in his attitude towards the outside world.

"The weight of a world" which "unsteadies his feet" is the weight of air that enables one to stand on one's feet. He uses the indefinite article 'a' to indicate the world, implying that he is just beginning to feel the existence of a new world, different from his own. This may be read "The Way of A World" in reference to Tomlinson's conception of the world which

The assassin feels as if "he were fallen into the contamination of contingency". The fact is that both words are derivations of the same Latin word, tangere, which means 'to touch' (1). He is indeed being 'touched' both by the outside world and by his victim. Contingency is an antonym of necessity, but what he thinks is necessity is in fact a contingency, while what he thinks are contingencies (like hands, looks and time) are really necessities. Moreover, he is actually 'fallen', because he betrays his relationships with other people, other things and with his time. He has also 'fallen' into the hands of others by accepting to be an instrument for the realization of

(1) Ruth Grogan, "Charles Tomlinson: The Way of His World", *Contemporary Literature*, 19 (Autumn 1978), p.479.

political ambitions. He is 'fallen' in time's judgement, as time considers him to be an assassin, not a hero.

After two negative illustrations of relationships with time, two instances of attempts at making one's peace with it may elucidate Tomlinson's concept of time as an inherent component of the deeds and words of man.

One of these, "Before the Dance", presents a primitive culture's divergent conception of time. In western cultures, time is generally considered to be a hostile element. People measure it, compete with it and try to transcend it. In this attempt they are active, since they are attempting to impose their will upon time. For the Indians of the poem, however, time cannot be captured by running after it or measuring it. During the ritual that will unite them with the forces of nature, the period of waiting is considered to be part of the ceremony. Furthermore, the ritual does not begin at a definite time. Thus, a duration which is not measured expands and melts into the continuous flux of time. The Indians refuse to consume this duration through any other activity, and thus time 'burns' without being consumed. Every moment has immediate material existence and is felt to be endowed with a charm. The repetition, in the poem, of the words "the moment" and "is expansible" in parentheses becomes an incantation whispered by each Indian to the other or to himself, an incantation reiterated while the group is waiting for the dance to begin. Thus, the community as a whole is amalgamated into the greater flux of nature.

Another example of man coming to terms with time, the poem "In the Fullness of Time" deals with the possibilities of man in

establishing a 'fine' relationship with this concept. As indicated overtly in the title, it is about man in the 'full flow' of time. The term 'fullness' describes time as a perfect entity. It is 'full' because its movement is circular, the geometric figure of a circle being a traditional symbol of completeness and perfection. Tomlinson's approach to time is expressed at the beginning of the poem:

... the way
Time, in its fullness, fills us
As it flows...

Time then is not the enemy who 'steals' hours or days from human lives. When the 'self' comes to terms with it, the succession of days, years, seasons and human beings will turn out to be beautiful. Besides, time offers opportunities for meeting pleasant people and creates friendships which will eventually complete our lives.

The poem itself deals with the chance meeting of two strangers. Tomlinson sets this event in a location where both men are aliens, and the strength of the element of chance is thus enhanced: the situation is no longer a common-place one. The protagonists belong to different nationalities, different countries, and they use different languages. They meet, not in one of their own countries, but in the alien territory of an airport, amidst "confusions, cases and telephones". Immediately after the hasty, fortuitous meeting, the poem moves into the slow and beautiful description of a quiet Umbrian evening on a train.

The development of the poem is circular. As the sun completes its cyclic course, the two men end up in friendship, and so they complete their own circles. The short journeys in the poem are all part of man's greater journey in life, and mankind's still greater

journey within the flux of time. Thus, there are two movements in the poem. One progresses in the direction of death and it is linear. On every point on this line, there are little segments which consist of the chances time offers. In accepting these chances, man connects these segments in circular entities. Tomlinson calls these acceptances 'consent' to time. They are 'negotiations' and 'truces' with a force greater than man. This is not a passive consent as the term implies, but a question of free choice. Tomlinson explains the 'hesitant arc' of the poem in an interview:

... (it) is one we can convert into a circle by accepting things as given - in this poem by not attempting to escape from time or transcend it or search for the moment of intersection of the timeless with time, as Eliot does. The poem celebrates my friendship with Octavio Paz. Many chances led to our meeting; we had corresponded before but finally met by chance at Rome airport, then travelled together to Spoleto. Our friendship ripened through chance and time but we chose it also - and the arc became a circle and chance became 'event', which in the poem rhymes with 'con-ent'. (1)

The arc of time has its counterpart in artistic creation, which is one of the possibilities time offers. The quiddity of this arc will be the subject-matter of the following chapter.

(1) Jed Rasula and Mike Erwin, "An Interview with Charles Tomlinson" Contemporary Literature, Vol.16, No. 4, (Summer 1975), p.409.

CHAPTER III

THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN LIFE AND ART

... The artist lies
For the improvement of art. Believe him.
Charles Tomlinson (1)

In the prose-poem "Tout Entouré de Mon Regard", Tomlinson creates a landscape of obscurities through the usage of an implied language. It is an imaginary landscape in which "shapes... staring back into foreground shapes", "the arc of winter", "glowing obscurity", "a window which is no window", "a late sun", are implications of unpresent presences. In the same poem, moreover, the eye is in the centre of this world "half of which balances in darkness". Tomlinson's art explores this darkness "whose power consists in evading and refusing to be completed."

Tomlinson declares that this darkness is the sphere of artistic creation:

... things are not given absolutely, so that there is much (necessarily) that escapes us, escapes the forms of language. And in this I rejoice. If you could close that circle, if language or consciousness could completely possess their objects, there would be no more room for literary endeavour and there would be no surprises, no discoveries. (2)

(1) Charles Tomlinson, "A Meditation on John Constable", Collected Poems, p.35.

(2) Jed Rasula and Mike Erwin, "An Interview with Charles Tomlinson", Contemporary Literature 16 (1975), pp. 408-409.

Tomlinson's prose-poems are generally explorations of the way the human mind tries to penetrate into that evasive domain of the universe. In the second paragraph of "Skullshapes", for example, the recesses of skulls cannot be apprehended either by the eye or by a source of light, and only "shadow reaches down out of this world of helmeted cavities and declares it." In other words, darkness can only be penetrated by still another element of darkness: that of poetic images. In Tomlinson's world, such images are not duplications of nature. His world is a world of ideas, and the visible shapes in it hide the invisibles. Since language is the only means the mind can use to enter into this darkness, it should be blurred as well. Tomlinson transforms language into a cipher, as it is implied in "Oppositions": "To cipher is to turn the thought word into flesh." (1) What we are presented with in the form of a poetic image is in actual fact a thought given the shape of a landscape, a skull or a flower. In the same prose-poem, skulls and shells are hollow images, but

both are helmeted, both reconcile vacancy with its opposite... Intimate presences of silent plenitude.

Imagination fills the hollow cavities of the skulls and creates a plenitude out of their very hollowness. With this acquired plenitude, they become archetypes of mortality.

In the beginning of another prose-poem, "A Process", Tomlinson compares the language he uses to describe the rain to the language of

(1) Charles Tomlinson, Collected Poems, p.189.

a more primitive culture. The syntax is not familiar. It does not connect things, but leads us somewhere else, where the "rear, dense, ubiquitous and incessant,... overcomes the hills..." This is the language of art, and it purposefully draws attention to its own peculiarity. It enables the poet

to enter the world of images and, thereby, to be entered by them. To experience the primordial in the given, the archetypal in the concrete. To be possessed by ungovernable presences, and render through paint that invasion coming from outside... (1)

These words reveal the way Tomlinson combines the concrete with the archetypal and the singular with the universal. The outside world and the world of images constitute the two realms of experience implicit in his poetry: the sensory and the mental. The poet interprets the human significance of what he sees and shares this experience with other people through the medium of art. What he calls the self-forgetfulness and objectivity of the artist is the most important factor enabling him to become aware of the possibilities the outside world is offering him. Artistic process begins with the artist casting aside his ego, 'to be possessed' by exterior things. It continues as a mutual relationship between the outside world and the artist. The end, that is the finished work of art, is the sharing of this experience with others who have similar questions in their minds about the truth hidden in the universe. What they lack is a heightened sense of awareness, which is provided for them by the artist, who improves the

(1) Charles Tomlinson, "Image and Chance: From A Notebook", In Black and White, p.20.

way people see by means of artistic language. Supplying the object of this demand, the artist's job is both private and public.

Tomlinson's concept of the relationship between the public and private functions of art is not related to the subject-matter of his poems. Although he has written poems on historical and social events, his main interest has always been the processes experienced by the poet and his reader: the artist's perception of the outside world and the reader's participation in this mental process. The artist's duty is to transmit this private experience through the integrity of his art and through a mastery of technique.

I think the private and the public impulse are reconciled in one's care for language - one's duty towards that is a duty to a thing at once public and private: one will so deal with language that insofar as it is in one's power, one will not issue a debased currency. (1)

For Tomlinson, the responsibility of the artist to his age or to his reader lies in his meticulous craftsmanship.

The public and private impulses of Tomlinson's art are combined, through his 'unstopped ear', with artistic traditions of various cultures, with the voices of the artists of various countries and branches of art. He aims at a perfection he tries to acquire from them. Tomlinson has always been against artistic trends which demand isolation from the outside world and from the international intellectual and artistic climate. His responsibility is to contribute to this general climate and never to issue "a debased currency".

(1) Jed Rasula and Mike Erwin, "An Interview with Charles Tomlinson", Contemporary Literature 16 (1975), p. 411.

Tomlinson makes a 'where' for himself in world literature, a place in line with the modernist tradition and with the contemporary achievements of various artists. He considers himself to be "an heir of Pound, Moore, Crane, Stevens" (1) when he begins his poetic career in the 1950s. His interest in American poetry at that time makes him "appear an odd fish in English waters" (2). Tomlinson, explaining how he was influenced by the Americans, says:

I was... haunted by a number of American poems- they made an inhabitable atmosphere that seemed consistent with modernism as I knew it through painting, particularly cubism and die Brücke - and Williams seemed part of this world as no other English figure did... (3)

Tomlinson is a polyglot, and was therefore receptive to the influences of works he read or translated from Italian, Spanish, French or Japanese originals. In reply to a question asking whether his poetry is excessively subject to various influences, he says:

A measure of the real artist is his capacity for discipleship. (4)

But being open to these diverse contributions does not prevent him from being essentially English and original in his art. He adds:

You can't have too much influence if you know what to do with it. (5)

(1) Charles Tomlinson, Some Americans, p. 12

(2) *Ibid.*, p.12

(3) Ian Hamilton, "Four Conversations", The London Magazine, Vol. 14, no. 8 (November 1964), p.83

(4) *Ibid.*, p.84

(5) *Ibid.*, p.84

In all his polemics, poems and paintings, Tomlinson is a man of parts, the international figure who tries to re-establish the loosened ties with Europe and the past. The modernist tradition and objectivity are the two major criteria against which Tomlinson judges his contemporaries:

A poet's sense of objectivity, however, of that which is beyond himself and beyond his mental conceit of himself, and his capacity to realise that objectivity within the artefact is the gauge of his artistry and the first prerequisite of all artistic genius. (1)

During the sixties and seventies, however, the general poetic tendencies were far from aiming towards objectivity. The editor and critic A. Alvarez, for instance, advocated confessional poetry on the grounds that it reflected the catastrophes of our time, catastrophes like wars, concentration camps and the like. He believed that this kind of poetry revealed identical destructive forces hidden in the psyche of man. He applauded personal risk, extremity and even suicide as the artist's remarkable responses (2). Tomlinson, on the other hand, is against the reflection of such extreme responses in art. He says:

there are certain things one would like to see an end of: the invitation to prolonged adolescence from Liverpool; the suicide mania; Francis Bacon-like screamings about the absurdity of the universe; the 'Look, I am ruining my life' type of poetry. (3)

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- (1) John Press, "Provincialism and Tradition", Rule and Energy: Trends in British Poetry Since the Second World War, (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp.106-107.
- (2) Alan Sinfield, ed., The Context of English Literature: Society and Literature, 1945-1970, (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers Inc.,) p.216.
- (3) Charles Tomlinson, "Views on Poetry", Review, no.29-30, (Spring-Summer 1972), p. 50.

The poem "Against Extremity" is Tomlinson's refutation of these responses through which poets try to shake people by way of an exhibition of their experiences.

The poem begins and ends as a call for 'treatises' and 'bridges' that will bind the artist to age-old artistic traditions and refers to Sylvia Plath and her work as a negative example. The words 'exercise', 'exhibit', 'sin' and 'heroine' unite Sylvia Plath with religious fanatics of the past. The quick and frantic rhythm and quarrel-like sounds of the middle of the poem foreground the slow and harmonious flow of the beginning and the end. The poem, as it comes to a close, refers to nature, demonstrating the fallacy of a chaotic outlook on the world. In nature, nights, days, the moon and the sun follow one another in succession. In art, the extremists are 'in love with endings' without any succession. An artist's relation to the artistic tradition he is an heir to should be in the manner of nature, using that tradition as a 'possession that is not to be possessed'. In other words, the tradition should be retained, though without the artist being hampered by it.

As far as Tomlinson is concerned, the chance element, which has an important part to play in daily life, is a crucial factor which prevents the artist from falling into subjectivism. Any ordinary event or object in the outside world may be an occasion for a poem or a painting. In explaining the role of chance in artistic processes, Tomlinson says:

The fact that 'chance' rhymes with dance is a nutrifying thought for the artist, whether he is a poet or a painter. (1)

(1) Charles Tomlinson, "The Poet As Painter", Poetry Review, Vol. 16, no. 4 (December 1986), p.14

In fact, Tomlinson considers rhyme as a chance element in poetry that provides a continuum within the text. He finds it nutrifying, because he feels it relates different things to each other and enables the poet to find similarities and disparities between things. Through the element of surprise involved in its apprehension, rhyme liberates the artist from the limitations of his ego and diverts him into new possibilities:

The element of meeting something you didn't expect, something that isn't yourself. And once you attend to it, whatever you are starts to see an interesting challenge to its own relaxed complacency. (1)

Tomlinson's poem "Chances of Rhyme" is a meditation on the process of finding rhyming words while writing poetry. The main concern of this poem is subjectivism in art. Tomlinson deals with this serious subject in a playful manner, though he refers to all the crucial points of discussion. Using internal rhymes and alliteration, he jumps from one word to another. After claiming that "chances of rhyme are like the chances of meeting", he begins to explain how they work: they are "in the finding fortuitousⁿ, but once "found, binding".

Starting out with the idea that the union of words that rhyme results in new significations engendered by their proximity, Tomlinson proceeds to trace a route that begins with the word 'succeed' (in the sense that rhyming words follow one another) which takes him, through derivations and implications, all the way to nature. 'Succeed', which can imply either 'success' or a sequence or an inheritance, stresses

(1) Charles Tomlinson, "The Poet As Painter", Poetry Review, Vol. 16 no. 4 (December 1986), p.14

the idea of continuation. This connects 'succession' and Tomlinson differentiates it from a 'royal succession' by qualifying it as 'literal'. This word connects it to literature again. The mechanism employed here involves beginning with a rhyming word and jumping from it to an idea. Although these words come to mind by chance, they signify something at each step and the artist uses them by connecting them to and differentiating them from the previous ideas. This succession, which is said to be a literal and not a royal one, could in fact denote a royal succession, if man can be considered to be royalty with respect to nature. In the Bible, man is said to be the ruler of other creatures: he names them, and thus gives existence to them. He consequently thinks he can dominate them. Man is thus led to Arden (the forest), which, Tomlinson points out, is a rhyme for Eden (the garden). He is therefore brought there by way of language. It can thus be said that man is not sovereign over this world, just as he is not sovereign over language. Quite the contrary, language leads man and determines the way he perceives the world. To imagine this world as being under the control of man or as an idyllic universe with its loyal beasts is a mistake. But to see man as a prey in the hands of destructive forces in a jungle of sheer violence would likewise be an illusion. Tomlinson criticizes all these artists who think that art is fortuitous when it is related to extreme experiences. The section of the poem which deals with this discussion is written using a different technique. The poem starts out slowly and rhythmically, with four-stressed lines and a caesura in the middle of the line. It then proceeds to evoke the rhythms of a discussion and alliteration is more frequently used than rhymes. The last part summarizes the argument humorously, with jokes at the expense of the two

extreme attitudes. One can 'dance' in 'vigilance' in certain 'circumstances', because life is neither a 'rest-in-peace' nor a 'precipice' to live in 'inertia' or in 'perversion'. Man can 'increase', 'lease' and 'release', each with their two-fold meanings: the 'increase' may be through artistic creation or precreation; the 'lease' can be a contract and a possession - man can make a contract with time, with other people and possess a tradition- and finally, comes the release, that is the renewal of that contract and the possibility of freedom. At the end, all these colliding chances of rhyme are converted into energies to 'combat' mental and artistic 'confusion', which in turn rhymes with 'conclusion' as far as the poet is concerned.

This trend of thought is not exclusively related to poetry for Tomlinson. He maintains the same combat with identical forces of confusion in his understanding of painting. He declares himself to belong to the tradition of European modernism in this respect (1). Cezanne has always been his model of objectivity.

What impressed me about Cezanne, and what on my own humbler level I wanted for poetry, was the entire absence of self-regard.... Cezanne in himself was threatened by misunderstanding, neglect, ill-health and prone to deep melancholy. Had he chosen to ignore nature or merely to dramatise that self and impose it on nature, his pictures would have wanted the liberating Mediterranean radiance that we find there. Even his self-portraits lack introspection. (2)

Later on, his interest is first focused on Cubism, and eventually surrealism (3). His aim in painting is to relate the images to the daily actions of human life. For him, the image

(1) Charles Tomlinson, "A Retrospect, Eden, p.73.

(2) Ibid., p.13

(3) Ibid., p.73

tells us what we do and are blind to. Visual art: not an unleasher of 'the subconscious', but a cure for blindness. (1)

One of his prose-poems, "Ceci n'est pas une pipe", is about the use of images in visual art. The title is taken from the "caption for a painting by Magritte", the famous surrealist painter. This particular work of art is entitled The Wind and the Song (1929), and it is the realistic image of a tobacco pipe (2). It deals with a visual image and its relation to the reality it represents. Using this caption, Magritte implies various things about his picture: first, that it is not a playing pipe; second, that it is a tobacco pipe; and finally that it is not the actual pipe itself, but a visual image in a painting named The Wind and the Song.

In his prose-poem, Tomlinson develops verbal explanations about the image of the pipe. It may be a smoking mouth, a speaking mouth or an open mouth, or even an open wound or some dreadful gap. This is the usual way surrealist painters like Magritte create contrasting images in their paintings. They put the mind under a shower of images and try to shake the grounds of human perception. Language can do the same thing by reflecting subconscious and subjective thoughts. For Tomlinson, extreme fears, which are said to have arisen out of a chaotic world, are as groundless as undue optimism about life. His understanding of art differs from a surrealistic approach on the problem of perception. Tomlinson 'lies to improve the truth', whereas surrealists lie to terrorize. The second image in the poem reveals

(1) Charles Tomlinson, "Image and Chance: From A Notebook", In Black and White, p.20.

(2) Marjerie Perleff, "The Duality of the Visible", P.N.Review, Vol.54 no. 1 (1977), p.48.

this difference with the image of a "flying stone" which is not a bird. Combining the characteristics of both bird and stone in one image, it broadens the way one looks at and perceives objects and entities in the outside world. A landscape with a flying stone is abstracted to be improved. The image transmits its solidity and flight to the landscape and reveals the latter's possibilities. As such, "it is a cure for blindness."

The impact of surrealism on Tomlinson was not limited to painting. He was also interested in the cinema. "The fluidity of movement and clarity of image" (1) in the cinema was what Tomlinson aimed at in his poetry:

Indeed, I was rather taken by the surrealist cinema of the 1920s and 1930s... and the ability of these films to move so surprisingly and rapidly from one image to the next. But finally I came to feel there was a fatalism in them, too, a mere surrender to the fortuitous and to a fluidity in which there was not enough resistance. I had to write a script of my own, along surrealist lines to see that... Once I had it on to paper... I saw clearly the trap of fatality. (2)

The 'fatality' involved in the surrealist cinema can be explained as the dominance of fortuitous elements free of the control of an ordering mind. The loosening of showy and eye-catching images does not leave ground for the element of choice and may thus hamper the artist's objectivity.

On the subject of the influence of the cinema on his paintings and poetry, Tomlinson says:

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- (1) Richard Swigg and Charles Tomlinson, "Charles Tomlinson at Sixty" P.N.Review, Vol. 14, no. 3, p.59
 (2) Ibid., pp.59-60.

Poetry moves through time like the cinema. That is why it is a necessity for the poet who has felt the influence of the painter to avoid the genre of the literary still life, to prevent a stasis among the elements of his poem. (1)

The poem "Composition" explains how John Berger prevented his picture from becoming a still life and how he put it in motion through time and space. Comparing the realist painter Courbet with John Berger, Tomlinson gives two variations for the same flowers in a vase: Courbet would paint them realistically, in all their colour and flesh, but would miss the objects and the space surrounding them. Berger, on the other hand, uses the whole space, including what he sees from a triangle-shaped gap between the stalk and the curtain. The house and the deer behind the window move the flowers from the room into the exterior. Berger does not miss the contribution of the black tyre of an automobile with its 'blazing wheel-hub'. Thus the image begins to move in time as well. The 'cheap green' of the vase, the street and the car all contribute to the overall meaning of the composition. As for Courbet, he remains blind before the fleshy petals of chrysanthemums. He is blind to details.

Tomlinson's perspective in his poetry and paintings is similar to that of Berger's in capturing all the possibilities of space and putting his images in motion in time. Courbet's gluttony when faced by the "gigantic" and "opulent" flowers is one expression of the artist's inability to retain both an objectivity towards nature and an acceptance of the greater entity that nature is, when viewed in all her detail. With respect to man's relationship with his environment, as well as in the case of his relationship with other components of his universe

(1) Julian Gitzen, "Charles Tomlinson and the Plenitude of Fact", The Critical Quarterly, Vol.13(Winter 1971), p.357.

it appears that Charles Tomlinson is consistent in his approach to relations and contraries.

C O N C L U S I O N

Throughout the preceding chapters, we have analyzed the way Tomlinson reconciles the dichotomy between the relations and contraries in a number of his poems in The Way of A World. Man is fundamentally in conflict with diverse components of his environment, components such as nature, time and art, which are vital to his existence. Nature, that great continuum outside man, determines the terms of any "truce" between her elements, leading and forcing them into a recognition of their limitations and an awareness of their potentialities. To reach the completeness that man should be striving for, he has come to terms with these different entities through a renunciation of his self-centred ego while attaining, at the same time, a unification with them without forcing his sense of respect for the integrity of both his own and others' separate existence.

Any integrity necessitates a harmonious relationship between diverse elements of which nature abounds. Nature is an arena of conflict between opposing gravities which radiate energies to prevent the world from being dissolved. In the poem "The Way of A World", Tomlinson defines these forces as the "rooting and uprooting gravities" that maintain the working of nature's perfect mechanism. As an artist who reads nature as a book, Tomlinson is sometimes a natural philosopher interested in deducing the principles that steer human life. He observes how the animals and flowers struggle to survive against the cold and wind and how human beings drink in the sun's warmth in a cold day.

The possibility of living in harmony with nature is based on man's understanding of the essence of nature. Teilhard's "perfect" self is a part of this integrity while being open to any confrontation with it. Observations and relations teach man that any entity outside him is a cry saying "Only connect!" and the human response par excellence is to look, to see, to hear and to embrace self-forgetfully. The swimmer confronting the hostile waters of Chenango Lake initially feels a corresponding enmity. The lake is cold, resisting his grasp. It is only when he actually takes the ultimate plunge into that other entity, nature, that he can reconcile himself to a merging with the water, which in turn recognizes man's distinct self as an entity. The two conflicting components of the same universe are capable then of existing both alongside and together with each other. The experience involved in his attempt to swim Chenango Lake, taking it on as an opponent, enables man to attain a new perception of the alien element in nature. The freedom of man in this relationship is his freedom from the limitations of his binding ego. Man's bondage in nature and in time can be transformed into possibilities of freedom through his choices and through an understanding of the laws that govern the universe.

Man's response to the outside reality and time may be distorted due to a lack of understanding or sympathy. The figure of Descartes, wallowing in his "cogito ergo sum" is unable to realize the fundamental importance of the natural phenomena surrounding him. In spite of the physical reality of the warmth of the flames and of the iron instrument he uses to fend off their excessive heat, Descartes insists on doubting the existence of the outside world. This attitude is a

negation of nature and the possibilities nature offers to man, a denial of reality itself and an evasion from the challenge the outside world presents man with. Instead of drinking in the cup nature is offering to his eyes, he may turn his back to nature and escape into a solipsism. Tomlinson's ideal self is both passionate and balanced in his relationship with the outside world. Passionate in his direct bodily contact with it and nevertheless balanced because he still retains his sense of a distinct self refraining from bawling down the others.

In the continuous flux of time, natural elements follow a course of succession. The sun relinquishes his throne to the moon and night replaces day in harmony or they "possess" the day and night in succession. But this is a possession "without being possessed", each knowing that their sovereignty is temporary. Erroneously thinking himself to be omnipotent over nature and time, man sometimes attempts to transcend these universal entities through his will power or through presumptuous heroism. This, however, is the result of his fundamental ignorance of his place in time and inevitably ends in destruction. Trotsky's assassin is an example of an unawareness similar to Descartes'. The difference here is that the murderer tries to suppress his sensations in order to rule over his body through his will power. Imagining himself to be one of the heroes who change history at one blow, he is deprived of his essential humanity to the extent that he kills another human being and ironically contributes to the forces of repression in the name of progression.

Man's first confrontation with nature is through his sense impressions. "Seeing" is man's most important sensation in connection with the process of perception. The eye and the mind work together in interpreting sense impressions. Memories of previous experiences and their

imprints on the brain determine the way human beings perceive the world. A perception which is capable of embracing the object in all its dimensions and interrelations with other entities may lead to an understanding of the quiddity of nature.

The highest perception on the other hand, is artistic vision which is able to see the hidden, the invisible. Never a prisoner of the thing seen, artistic vision leads to a heightened awareness of the universe and reveals the latent possibilities in time and space. The artist as the clairvoyant, shares what he sees with his audience. The function of the artist however, is not solely to mirror the things he sees, but also to improve the perception of others by providing them with different modes of seeing. The artist, in his endeavour to encompass in his work the great diversity of the universe surrounding him, must be capable of depicting what seems to be superfluous to the self-centred eye as well as that which temptingly strikes the beholder. The poem "Composition" compares two distinct modes of seeing, one represented by Cousbet who is blind to the details and the possibilities offered by space and who reproduces the object as it is reflected in his retina and the other by Berger, who is capable of seeing an object in its relation to space and time.

The imaginary landscapes of Tomlinson's poems and paintings are not duplications of the ordinary world. The poet carefully builds up the mental climate necessary for his purpose. Although there are flowers, clouds, birds in these landscapes, the weather is always stormy and rainy. It is either winter or approaching winter. Life is a continuous struggle for all creatures concerned. They are always under a threat by hostile forces, but are always saved by an opposing gravity. Light

shifts more obliquely than it does in ordinary life. It is a "moral landscape" defining the predicament of man in nature and time without any need for verbal explanations.

Tomlinson says that he reads hidden meanings behind the periphera. These meanings are not related to the things of this world, but to another realm, a realm of darkness. To express these, Tomlinson uses archetypal images such as skulls, cloudshapes, the hills' dark harvest drunk by rain, which belong to that domain. Since no language can explain the hidden meanings in a straightforward way, art tries to accomplish this feat through a specific use of language. This language is significant in its peculiarity and its capacity of evoking the primordial in the given. Tomlinson qualifies this language as a "cipher" and defines it as "thought word". A thought word is the expression of an idea in the form of a visible shape which has been endowed with an archetypal significance.

One of the important problems the poet deals with in poems focusing on art is the artist's relationship with his time and his response to it. In consistency with his understanding of nature and time, Tomlinson rejects both the extreme responses to life and the denial of artistic tradition.

In his apprehension of the artist's responsibility, Tomlinson echoes his concepts of the balanced relationship between contraries. Language, though a product of man's intellect, is not a medium man can dominate. In fact, as Tomlinson demonstrates in "Chances of Rhyme", it is language which leads and governs man in his perception of the outside objects he is surrounded by.

Exploring Tomlinson's attitudes towards a series of artistic problems, one can not but appreciate his attempts at the maintenance of an objectivity against an egotistic eccentricity. Whether it be in the relation of man with nature, man with time or man with art, Tomlinson professes that these entities, which are basically contrary to each other, can mainly be reconciled through mutual respect and an acceptance of the "other"'s separate existence. It is only then that man can come to terms with the seemingly threatening universe he finds himself in. The artist's responsibility lies in his attempt at guiding the rest of humanity on this course. The artist thus, through a sensitivity peculiar to art, finds and indicates new modes of perception that man can use while trying to come to a fuller understanding of nature and the universe. Such a perception and the proper usage given to it will enable man to overcome the fears caused by the seeming confusion reigning in the world around him. It is a certain ordering element, the element of art in its many guises, that best resists and prevails over the ominous confusion. Hence, "let rhyme be my conclusion."

A P P E N D I X

POEMS REFERRED TO IN THE THESIS

Swimming Chenango Lake

Winter will bar the swimmer soon.

He reads the water's autumnal hesitations

A wealth of ways: it is jarred,

It is astir already despite its steadiness,

Where the first leaves at the first

Tremor of the morning air have dropped

Anticipating him, launching their imprints

Outwards in eccentric, overlapping circles.

There is a geometry of water, for this

Squares off the clouds' redundances

And sets them floating in a nether atmosphere

All angles and elongations: every tree

Appears a cypress as it stretches there

And every bush that shows the season,

A shaft of fire. It is a geometry and not

A fantasia of distorting forms, but each

Liquid variation answerable to the theme

It makes away from, plays before:

It is a consistency, the grain of the pulsating flow.

But he has looked long enough, and now

Body must recall the eye to its dependence

As he scissors the waterscape apart

And sways it to tatters. Its coldness

Holding him to itself, he grants the grasp,
For to swim is also to take hold

On water's meaning, to move in its embrace
And to be, between grasp and grasping, free.

He reaches: in-and-out through ^{ed} that space
The body is heir to, making a where

In water, a possession to be relinquished
Willingly at each stroke. The image he has torn

Flows-to behind him, healing itself,
Lifting and lengthening, splayed like the feathers

Down an immense wing whose darkening spread
Shadows his solitariness: alone, he is unnamed

By this baptism, where only Chenango bears a name
In a lost language he begins to construe-

A speech of densities and derisions, of half-
Replies to the questions his body must frame

Frogwise across the all but penetrable element,
Human, he fronts it and, human, he draws back

From the interior cold, the mercilessness
That yet shows a kind of mercy sustaining him.

The last sun of the year is drying his skin
Above a surface a mere mosaic of tiny shatterings,

Where a wind is unscaping all images in the flowing obsidian,
The going-elsewhere of ripples incessantly shaping.

Weatherman

Weather releases him from the tyranny of rooms,

From the white finality of clapboard towns.

The migrations have begun: geese going

Wake him towards dawn, as they stream south

Drawing the north behind them, the long threat

That disquiets his blood. He rises and roams

In the grey house. In the dark

Height, geese yelp like a pack

Hunting through space. Unseen, they drive the eye

Of the mind the way they go, through the opal

Changes of dawn light on the light of snow.

The sun looks full at the town, at each

House with its double fringe of icicles

And their shadows. He can hear no more

The cries that had woken him, but through eyes

That wincing away from it, blink back

The radiance that followed the flock, he drinks in

Human his inheritance and retrieved his kin

With that clamour, this cold, those changes-to-come from skies

Now a stained-glass blue in the whiteness of the weather.

The Instance

They do say said
the barber running
his cold shears
downwards and over
the neck's sudden
surprised flesh:
They do say frost
will flow in
through the gap of a hedge
like water, and go
anywhere and I
believe it. I believe
him- a gardener,
he knows. The tepid
day erases
his wisdom and he
is out of mind
until at night
I grope for a way
between darkness and door
and passing a hand
down over
a parked car's
roof feel

the finger tips
burn at the crystal
proof of a frost
that finding a hole
in the hedge
has flowed through like water.

Descartes and the Stove

Thrusting its armoury of hot delight,

Its negroid belly at him, how the whole
Contraption threatened to melt him

Into recognition. Outside, the snow
Starkened all that snow was not-

The boughs' nerve-net, angles and gables
Denting the brilliant hoods of it. The foot-print

He had left on entering, had turned
To a firm dull gloss, and the chill

Lined it with a fur of frost. Now
The last blaze of day was changing

All white to yellow, filling
With bluish shade the slots and spoors

Where, once again, badger and fox would wind
Through the phosphorescence. All leaned

Into that frigid burning, corded tight
By the lightlines as the slow sun drew

Away and down. The shadow, now,
Defined no longer: it filled, then overflowed

Each fault in snow, dragged everything
Into its own anonymity of blue

Becoming black. The great mind
Sat with his back to the unreasoning wind

And doubted, doubted at his ear
The patter of ash and, beyond, the snow-bound farms,

Flora of flame and iron contingency
And the moist reciprocation of his palms.

Terminal Tramps

The first is female.

In the station restaurant,
taking tea
that some thirsty traveller
had found too hot
for drinking, she sips
at the unmeasured time of her
terrible leisure.

The eyes of the mad
have a restless candour:
even their furtiveness
betrays itself openly:
there seems, in the way
she declares to the entire
room: I expect
a civil answer-
the appearance of an honesty.
It is distinct from the absurd
sobriety in the drunk
tramp's gesture
carrying on
in the corner, an imitation
conversation, with one
as craftily glanced as he
but sober. All

three inhabit
this shifting place
on whose fluidities the clocks
impose a certainty.
The room is aware of them.
The room is tolerant
in its curiosity and waits
to see, but to see
what? The Indian
personnel pretend
that the three are not
there—even the mad
woman has had
sense to avoid
in this two-roomed
restaurant, the white
management next-door.
What does ^o occur
is this—this
and no more: she picks
out of the air and starts
to repeat the word
Eisenhower. She takes
apart into its four
syllables the arbitrary
sound, then feels

her way out
over them, as though
they might have led
her somewhere, stretched
from here to there,-
might have proved
there there, but the mind's
needle merely
chokes on its repetitions
until, with an accumulating
force, the vortex
spins her on
into inconsequence.

The drunk walks
suddenly half
the room's length,
balanced tensely
by the strength of one
determination- to make it;
and to complete the demonstration
he flings with a total
accuracy into the slot
of a litter bin
his emptied bottle.
Her babble stops him.
He attends, and for the first

time sees her:
she takes him in
her din rises
raging against the mere
shape he makes there:
it is her voice not she
gets up to accost him
and to demand her civil
answer. Answer
she has, but whether
she hears, or whether
she can interpret
the sharp transition
as with half a threat
he gestures at her, then
lets the gesture
drift, die out across
the air...with an
Ach! - the dawning
sense of her daftness-
he goes back
aiming himself at his former
corner, and gets
there on both
feet, as neat
as bottle into bin-slot-

to resume (he has clearly
forgotten her) his parody
of someone perfectly
self-possessed. The room
holding its breath
for his fall
is relieved. The room
has seen it all and now
inches out daughters
and sons into the loud
sane ambience
of train-sounds.
Under the dome
of stale air,
two Indians are
going their rounds,
swabbing the tables.
They circle the one
she sits at
with her all-but-spent
babble, her syllable-
chopping search
for the right sound,
the word to express
her groundless humanity,
hunched, alien

and intent amid

the new invasion

of travellers with a destination.

A World in Edgeways

Tell me about yourself they
say and you begin to
tell them about yourself and
that is just the way I
am is their reply: they play
it all back to you in another
key, their key, and then in mid-
narrative they pay you a
compliment as if to say what a good
listener you are I am
a good listener my stay
here has developed my faculty I will
say that for me I will not
say that every literate male in
America is a soliloquist, a
ventriloquist, a strategic
egoist, an inveterate
campaigner-explainer over and
back again on the terrain of him-
self-what I will
say is they are not un-
interesting: they are simply
unreciprocal and yes it was a
pleasure if not an unmitigated
pleasure and I yes I did enjoy our
conversation goodnightthankyou

The Fox Gallery

A long house-
the fox gallery you called
its upper storey, because
you could look down to see
(and did) the way a fox would
cross the field beyond
and you could follow out, window
to window, the fox's way
the whole length of the meadow
parallel with the restraining line
of wall and pane, or as far
as that could follow the sense of all
those windings. Do you remember
the morning I woke you with the cry
Fox fox and the animal
came on-not from side
to side, but straight
at the house and we craned
to see more and more, the most
we could of it and then
watched it sheer off deterred
by habitation, and saw
how utterly the two worlds were
disparate, as that perfect
ideogram for agility

and liquefaction flowed
away from us rhythmical
and flickering and
that flare was final.

The Way of a World

Having mislaid it, and then

Found again in a changed mind

The image of a gull the autumn gust

Had pulled upwards and past

The window I watched from, I recovered too

The ash-key, borne-by whirling

On the same surge of air, like an animate thing:

The scene was there again: the bird,

The seed, the windlines drawn in the sidelong

Sweep of leaves and branches that only

The black and supple boughs restrained-

All would have joined in the weightless anarchy

Of air, but for that counterpoise. All rose

Clear in the memory now, though memory did not choose

Or value it first: it came

With its worth and, like those tree-tips,

Fine and dishevelling hair, but steadied

And masted as they are, that worth

Outlasted its lost time, when

The cross-currents had carried it under.

In all these evanescences of daily air,

It is the shapes of change, and not the bare

Glancing vibrations, that vain and branch

Through the moving textures: we grasp

The way of a world in the seed, the gull

Swayed toiling against the two

Gravities that root and uproot the trees.

The Daisies

All evening, daisies outside the window, have gone on flying, stalk-anchored, towards the dark. Still, vibrant, swaying, they have stood up through dryness into beating rain: stellar cutouts, arrested explosions; too papery thin to be 'flower-heads'- flower-faces perhaps; upturned hands with innumerable fingers. Unlike the field daisies, they do not shut with dark: they stretch as eagerly towards it as they did to the sun, images of flight. And your own image, held by the pane, diffuses your features among those of the daisies, so that you flow with them until your hand, lifted to ~~close~~ the window, becomes conscious of its own heaviness. It is their stalks thrust them into flight as much as their launching-out of winged fingers, all paper accents, grave thrusting on acute, acute on grave. Cut the stalks and they fall, they do not fly; let them lose their bond and they, too, would grow, not lighter, but suddenly heavy with the double pull of their flower flesh and of the rain clinging to them.

The View

The woods are preparing to wait out winter.

Gusts blow with an earnest of all there is to be done
Once frost will have entered the apple and the sun.

Of the view, there is no tale to tell you.
Its history is incidental. One would not date

The window that stands open like a gate
In the opposing house-face. It is dark inside.

The façade is a dirty white, and yet it seems
The right colour to stand there between

The dull green of the foreground trees
Still bearing leaves, and the autumnal glare

From the others framing it, foregoing theirs.
The dark of the window square might be

A mineshaft of pure shadow, a way
Through to the heart of the hill-the black

Centre, if centre were where
Sight must travel such drops and intervals,

And an undulation of aspens along the slope
Is turning the wind to water and to light,

Unpivoting place amid its shaken coins,
While under a shuddering causeway, a currency,

The season is dragging at all the roots of the view.

Poem

The muscles which move the eyeballs, we are told, derive from a musculature which once occupied the body end to end... Sunblaze as day goes, and the light blots back the scene to iris the half-shut lashes. A look can no longer extricate the centre of the skyline cople. But the last greys, the departing glows caught by the creepers bearing its mass, prevail on the half-blinded retina. Branches deal with the air, vibrating the beams that thread into one's eye. So that 'over there' and 'in here' compound a truce neither signed- a truce that, insensibly and categorically, grows to a decree, and what one hoped for and what one is, must measure themselves against those demands which the eye receives, delivering its writ on us through a musculature which occupies the body end to end.

Skullshapes

Skulls. Finalities. They emerge towards new beginnings from undergrowth. Along with stones, fossils, flint keel-scrapers and spokeshaves, along with bowls of clay pipes heel-stamped with their makers' marks, comes the rural detritus of cattle skulls brought home by children. They are moss-stained, filthy with soil. Washing them of their mottlings, the hand grows conscious of weight, weight sharp with jaggednesses. Suspend them from a nail and one feels the bone-clumsiness go out of them: there is weight still in their vertical pull downwards from the nail, but there is also a hanging fragility. The two qualities fuse and the brush translates this fusion as wit, where leg-like appendages conclude the skulls' dangling mass.

Shadow explores them. It sockets the eye-holes with black. It reaches like fingers into the places one cannot see. Skulls are a keen instance of this duality of the visible: it borders what the eye cannot make out, it transcends itself with the suggestion of all that is there beside what lies within the eyes' possession: it cannot be possessed. Flooded with light, the skull is at once manifest surface and labyrinth of recesses. Shadow reaches down out of this world of helmeted cavities and declares it.

One sees. But not merely the passive mirrorings of the retinal mosaic-nor, like Ruskin's blind man struck suddenly by vision, without memory or conception. The senses, reminded by other seeings, bring to bear on the act of vision their pattern of images; they give point and place to an otherwise naked and homeless impres-

sion. It is the mind sees. But what it sees consists not solely of that by which it remembers. It sees possibility.

The skulls of birds, hard to the touch, are delicate to the eye. Egg-like in the round of the skull itself and as if the spherical shape were the result of an act like glass-blowing, they resist the eyes' imaginings with the blade of the beak which no lyrical admiration can attenuate to frailty.

The skull of nature is recess and volume. The skull of art- of possibility-is recess, volume and also lines-lines of containment, lines of extension. In seeing, one already extends the retinal impression, searchingly and instantaneously. Brush and pen extend the search beyond the instant, touch discloses a future. Volume, knived across by the challenge of a line, the raggedness of flaking bone countered by ruled, triangular facets, a cowskull opens a visionary field, a play of universals.

Tout Entouré de Mon Regard

Surrounded by your glance-shapes at the circumference of its half-circle staring back into foreground shapes-, you measure the climbing abyss up to the birds that intersect in contrary directions the arc of winter air.

To the question you did not ask, comes the reply of arriving and departing cloud, the intensifying violet skyline that throws forward its patterns of boughs, the spaces between them flushed with a glowing obscurity.

It is like a phalanx of ~~moth~~-wings with their separations of line and darkly incandescent tints, pressed against a window which is no window and behind which, burning towards them, a late sun hangs.

Surrounded by your glance, you are the pivot of that scale half of which balances in darkness behind you. And you feel its insistence held over against the light, the yellowing sky, the colliding of imitation mountains that presage more snow.

To see, is to feel at your back this domain of a circle whose power consists in evading and refusing to be completed by you.

It is infinity sustains you on its immeasurable palm.

Night Transfigured

Do you recall the night we flung

Our torch-beam down in among

The nettle towers? Stark-white

Robbed of their true dimension

Or of the one we knew, their dense

World seemed to be all there was:

An immense, shifting crystal

Latticed by shadow, it swayed from the dark,

Each leaf, lodged blade above blade

In serrated, dazzling divisions.

What large thing was it stood

In such small occurrence, that it could

Transfigure the night, as we

Drew back to find ourselves once more

In the surrounding citadel of height and air?

To see then speak, is to see with the words

We did not make. That silence

Loud with the syllables of the generations, and that sphere

Centred by a millennial eye, all that was not

There, told us what was, and clothed

The sense, bare as it seemed, in the weave

Of years: we knew that we were shareres,

Heirs to the commonalty of sight, that the night

In its reaches and its nearnesses, possessed

A single face, sheer and familiar

Dear if dread. The dead had distanced,

Patterned its lineaments, and to them

The living night was cenotaph and ceaseless requiem.

Prometheus¹

Summer thunder darkens, and its climbing
Cumulae, disowning our scale in the zenith,
Electrify this music: the evening is falling apart.
Castles-in-air; on earth: green, livid fire.
The radio simmers with static to the strains
Of this mock last-day of nature and of art.

We have lived through apocalypse too long:
Scriabin's dinosaurs! Trombones for the transformation
That arrived by train at the Finland Station,
To bury its hatchet after thirty years in the brain
Of Trotsky. Alexander Nikolayevitch, the events
Were less merciful than your mob of instruments.

Too many drowning voices cram this waveband.
I set Lenin's face by yours-
Yours, the fanatic ego of eccentricity against
The systematic son of a schools inspector
Tyutchev on desk-for the strong man reads
Poets as the antisemite pleads: 'A Jew was my friend.'

Cymballed firesweeps. Prometheus came down
In more than orchestral flame and Kérensky fled
Before it. The babel of continents gnaws now

(1) 'Prometheus' refers to the tone-poem by Scriabin and to his hope
of transforming world by music and rite.

And tears at the silk of those harmonies that seemed
So dangerous once. You dreamed an end
Where the rose of the world would go out like a close in music

Population drags the partitions down

And we are a single town of warring suburbs:
I cannot hear such music for its consequence:
Each sense was to have been reborn
Out. of a storm of perfumes and light
To a white world, an in-the-beginning.

In the beginning, the strong man reigns:

Trotsky, was it not then you brought yourself
To judgement and to execution, when you forgot
Where terror rules, justice turns arbitrary?
Chromatic Prometheus, myth of fire,
It is history topples you in the zenith.

Blok, too, wrote The Scythians

Who should have known: he who howls
With the whirlwind, with the whirlwind goes down.
In this, was Lenin guiltier than you
When, out of a merciless patience grew
The daily prose such poetry prepares for?

Scriabin, Blok, men of extremes,

History treads out the music of your dreams
Through blood, and cannot close like this

In the perfection of anabasis. It stops. The trees
Continue raining though the rain has ceased

In a cooled world of incessant codas:

Hard edges of the houses press

On the after-music, senses, and refuse to burn,
Where an ice cream van circulates the estate

Playing Greensleeves, and at the city's
Stale new frontier even ugliness

Rules with the cruel mercy of solidities.

Assassin

The rattle in Trotsky's throat and his wild boar's moans

Piedra de Sol (Octavio Paz)

Blood I foresaw. I had put by

The distractions of the retina, the eye

That like a child must be fed and comforted

With patterns, recognitions. The room

Had shrunk to a paperweight of glass and he

To the centre and prisoner of its transparency.

He rasped pages. I knew too well

The details of that head. I wiped

Clean the glance and saw

Only his vulnerableness. Under my quivering

There was an ease, save for that starched insistence

While paper snapped and crackled as in October air.

Sound drove out sight. We inhabited together

One placeless cell. I must put down

This rage of the ear for discrimination, its absurd

Dwelling on ripples, liquidities, fact

Fastening on the nerve gigantic paper burs.

The gate of history is straiter than eye's or ear's.

In imagination, I had driven the spike

Down and through. The skull had sagged in its blood

The grip, the glance-stained but firm-
Held all at its proper distance and now hold
This autumnal hallucination of white leaves
From burying purpose in a storm of sibilance.

I strike. I am the future and my blow
Will have it now. If lightning froze
It would hover as here, the room
Riding in the crest of the moment's wave,
In the deed's time, the deed's transfiguration
And as if that wave would never again recede.

The blood wells. Prepared for this
This I can bear. But papers
Snow to the ground with a whispered roar:
The voice, cleaving their crescendo, is his
Voice, and his the animal cry
That has me then by the roots of the hair.

Fleshed in that sound, objects betray me,
Objects are my judge: the table and its shadow,
Desk and chair, the ground a pressure
Telling me where it is that I stand
Before wall and window-light:
Mesh of the curtain, wood, metal, flesh:

A dying body that refuses death,

He lurches against me in his warmth and weight,

As if my arm's length blow

Had transmitted and spent its strength

Through blood and bone; and I, spectred,

The body that rose against me were my own.

Woven from the hair of that bent head,

The thread that I had grasped unlabyrinthed all-

Tightrope of history and necessity-

But the weight of a world unsteadies my feet

And I fall into the lime and contaminations

Of contingency; into hands, looks, time.

Before the Dance

at Zuni

The dance
is not yet
and when it will begin
no one says:
the waiting
for the Indian
is half the dance,
and so they wait
giving a quality
to the moment
by their refusal
to measure it:
the moment
is expansible
it burns
unconsumed
under the raw bulbs
of the dancing chamber:
the Navajo faces
wear
the aridity of the landscape
and 'the movement
with the wind
of the Orient and

the movement against
the wind
of the Occident'
meet
in their wrinkles:
they wait, sitting
(the moment)
on the earth floor
(is expansible)
saying very little
or sleep
like the woman
slipping along the wall
sideways
to wake
in the clangour of the pulse of time
at the beginning
drum...

In the Fullness of Time

a letter to Octavio Paz

The time you tell us is the century and the day

Of Shiva and Parvati: imminent innocence,

Moment without movement. Tell us, too, the way

Time, in its fullness, fills us

As it flows: tell us the beauty of succession

That Breton denied: the day goes

Down, but there is time before it goes

To negotiate a truce in time. We met

Sweating in Rome and in a place

Of confusions, cases and telephones: and then

It was evening over Umbria, the train

Arriving, the light leaving the dry fields

And next the approaching roofs. As we slowed

Curving towards the station, the windows ahead swung

Back into our line of vision and flung at us

A flash of pausing lights: the future

That had invited, waited for us there

Where the first carriages were. That hesitant arc

We must complete by our consent to time-

Segment to circle, chance into event:

And how should we not consent? For time

Putting its terrors by, it was as if

The unhurried sunset were itself a courtesy.

A Process

A process; procession; trial.

A process of weather, a continuous changing. Thus, the gloom before darkness engenders its opposite and snow begins. Or rain possesses the night unbrokenly from the dazzle on the lit streets to the roar, dense, ubiquitous and incessant, that overcomes the hills drinking-in their black harvest^t. Its perfect accompaniment would be that speech of islanders, in which, we are told, the sentence is never certainly brought to an end, its aim less to record with completeness the impression an event makes, than to mark its successive aspects as they catch the eye, the ear of the speaker.

To process: to walk the bounds to lay claim to them, knowing all they exclude.

A procession, a body of things proceeding, as in the unending commerce of cloud with the seamless topology of the ground. Or a procession of waters: the whole . . . moving belt of it swallows itself in sudden falls to be regurgitated as combed-over foam. Flung in . . . reverse against the onrush that immediately pushes it forward, it is replaced by its own metamorphosis into this combed-back whiteness.

A trial: the whole of the proceedings, including the complication and the unravelling. One accords the process its reality, one does not deify it; inserted among it, one distinguishes and even transfigures, so that the quality of vision is never a prisoner of the thing seen. The beginnings have to be invented: thus the pictograph

is an outline, which nature, as the poet said, does not have. And the ends? The ends are windows opening above that which lay unperceived until the wall of the house was completed at that point, over that sea.

Against Extremity

Let there be treaties, bridges,

Chords under the hands, to be spanned

Sustained: extremity hates a given good

Or a good gained. That girl who took

Her life almost, then wrote a book

To exorcise and to exhibit the sin,

Praises a friend there for the end she made

And each of them becomes a heroine.

The time is in love with endings. The time's

Spoiled child ~~rea~~ threaten what they will do,

And those they cannot shake by petulance

They'll bribe out of their wits by show.

Against extremity, let there be

Such treaties as only time itself

Can ratify, a bond and test

Of sequential days, and like the full

Moon slowly given to the night,

A possession that is not to be possessed.

The Chances of Rhyme

The chances of rhyme are like the chances of meeting-

In the finding fortuitous, but once found, binding:

They say they signify and they succeed, where to succeed

Means not success, but a way forward

If unmapped, a literal, not a royal succession;

Though royal (it may be) is the adjective or region

That we, nature's royalty are led into

Yes. We are led, though we seem to lead

Through a fair forest, an Arden (a rhyme

For Eden)-breeding ground for beasts

Not bestial, but loyal and legendary, which is more

Than nature's are. Yet why should we speak

Of art, of life, as if the one were all form

And the other all Sturm-und-Drang? And I think

Too, we should confine to Crewe or to Mow

Cop, all those who confuse the fortuitousness

Of art with something to be met with only

At extremity's brink, reducing thus

Rhyme to a kind of rope's end, a glimpsed grass

To be snatched at as we plunge past it-

Nostalgic, after all, for a hope deferred.

To take chances, as to make rhymes

Is human, but between chance and impenitence

(A half-rhyme) come dance, vigilance

And circumstance (meaning all that is there

Besides you, when you are there). And between
Rest-in-peace and precipice,

Inertia and perversion, come the varieties
Increase, lease, re-lease (in both
Senses); and immersion, conversion- of inert
Mass, that is, into energies to combat confusion.

Let rhyme be my conclusion.

Ceci n'est pas une Pipe¹

(Magritte)

This is not a pipe, but an explosion of the lips, the mouth unseaming rapidly and the lips exploding once more.

This is not only a statement. It has roots. And they are unpleasant, as though the possibility distinctly existed that lips should explode without benefit of quotation marks.

Our words surround us with contingencies. The mouth unseaming rapidly may do so like an unstitched wound. This is not a pipe.

We summon our terrors before us, to cohabit with clocks, plants, window-panes and apples, as if we would always know the worst.

But we are scarcely to be trusted. Our 'sins of fear' remain as incorrigible as our groundless optimism.

So we terrorize ourselves factitiously, with the body that has become a face, or the face that has become a body. But 'this is not a pipe'.

Such a face disproves itself. It could terrorize only by existing.

There is this comfort in the hypotheses of fancy: they restore the world to us by denying its premises.

This is not a stone because it is flying. This is not a bird because it is made of stone.

Yet the flying stone impends over the landscape by abstracting all the qualities of the real one. And the density of the stone bird

is negated by the contours of flight.

This is not a pipe, but it entails the rider that the stone will interpose an irremovable 'and yet-', and the bird spread wings of bone and feather towards its point of high vantage.

Composition

for John Berger

Courbet might have painted this
gigantic head: heavy, yellow
petal-packed bloom of the chrysanthemum.

He would have caught the way
the weight of it looms from the cheap-green
vase this side the window it lolls in.

But he would have missed the space
triangled between stalk and curtain
along a window-frame base.

The epulence of the flower
would have compelled him to ignore
the ship-shape slotted verticals

of the door in the house beyond
dwarfed by the wand of the stem
and the gate before it would not

have echoed those parallels to his eye
with its slatted wood, its two
neat side-pests of concrete

The triangle compacts the lot: there
is even room in it for the black
tyre and blazing wheel-hub of a car

parked by the entrance . But the eye
of Courbet is gluttoned with petals
as solid as meat that press back the sky.

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