

The *Wednesday*



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford

Editorial

Nietzsche on Happiness as Pleasure

Happiness, the topic of our last editorial, does not seem to sit well with a philosophy that promotes the tragic sense, such as Nietzsche's. But what he objected to in happiness was the idea of pain and pleasure as a moral psychology. Instead, he promoted the idea that the world, and humans, are motivated by a will to power. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche said: 'The world viewed from inside, the world defined and determined according to its "intelligible character" – it would be "will to power" and nothing else.' (BGE, 36). And 'life itself is Will to Power' (BGE, 13).

The will to power is a cause of suffering. It has a terrifying cruelty:

'Life itself is essentially appropriation, injury, overpowering of what is alien and weaker; suppression, hardness, imposition of one's own forms, incorporation and at least, at its mildest, exploitation-... "Exploitation" does not belong to a corrupt or imperfect or primitive society: it belongs to the essence of what lives.' (BGE, 259)

In the *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche extends the point to meaning and interpretations:

'... that everything that occurs in the organic world consists of overpowering, dominating, and in their turn, overpowering and dominating consist of re-interpretation, adjustment, in the process of which their former "meaning" and "purpose" must necessarily be obscured or completely obliterated.' (GM, II, 12)

To exercise your will to power is to face up to difficulties and this means facing displeasure:

'Human beings do not seek pleasure and avoid displeasure... What human beings want, what every smallest organism wants, is an increase of power; driven by that will they seek resistance, they need

something that opposes it – displeasure – as an obstacle to their will to power, is therefore a normal fact... human beings do not avoid it, they are rather in continual need of it...' (The Will to Power, 702).

In actions, physically or mentally, in doing things or interpreting texts, there are always difficulties that have to be overcome. Overcoming difficulties involves suffering. But then Nietzsche introduced a new idea that changes this suffering into a source of happiness and feeling of satisfaction in performing the given task. But it is not the pleasure of the weak who either do not try or give up at the first hurdle, but the privilege of the strong who feel pleasure in their struggle, those who see: 'a desire to overcome, a desire to throw down, a desire to become master, a thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs.' (GM, I, 13)

Nietzsche defines will to power as the increase in the feeling of pleasure. The pleasure is not the motive, but it is a by-product of getting over difficulties:

'What is good? – All that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself in man... What is happiness? – The feeling that power increases – that a resistance is overcome...' (The Anti-Christ, 2).

Happiness is not a teleological motive for action, as in Aristotle, nor it is a respite from suffering, as in Schopenhauer, but it is epiphenomenal: 'Pleasure appears where there is the feeling of power.' (WP, 1023).

Nietzsche calls on his readers to take an interest in the world and to insist on the value of actions. Is he asking too much? Do we all have to be an image of his Dionysus? Can we cope with such a life?

The Editor

The Metamorphoses of Life Attitude: From the Aesthetic to the Religious

Written in 1842 and intensely personal, Søren Kierkegaard's *Either / Or*, together with *Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition* from the same period of his life, is regarded as one of his masterpieces, and like them is the product of a traumatic episode in his life. In 1841 he had broken off his engagement with Regine Olsen with whom he was deeply in love but whom he decided he could not marry. His reflections on the Aesthetic, Ethical and Religious men may show his state of mind at the time, but they also produced a masterpiece of philosophy and literature.

DAVID SOLOMON

Part 2

The first part of Kierkegaard's *Either / Or* contains a collection of essays, aphorisms and other writings written by someone referred to as A, and edited by the pseudonymous Victor the Hermit ('Victor Eremita'), who according to his own story has accidentally found these papers and arranged them. It is not clear who A is, or even if he and the supposed author of the subsequent collection B, are really anything other than characters created by Victor himself. But, be that as it may, A is presented to us as an Aesthete and a champion of an aesthetic way of life. The A collection culminates in a diary by a man calling himself John (Johannes) in which he describes the seduction of an innocent young woman called Cordelia. In the light of a previous essay in the A collection on 'The Immediate Erotic Stages Or The Musical Erotic' in the operas of Mozart, we immediately think of Don Juan (Don Giovanni) who was famous for seducing hundreds of women of all nations, ages and classes. But we also associate Johannes with Goethe's Faust who seduced only one woman: Gretchen. For the author of the A collection, both Don Juan and Faust in different ways are demonic characters:

Don Juan, consequently, is the expression of the demonic specified as the sensual; Faust is the expression of the demonic specified as the spiritual which the Christian spirit excludes Faust is idea, but an idea which is also essentially individual.... Don Giovanni constantly hovers between being idea – that is to say, energy, life – and individual. But this hovering is the vibrating of music. (Either / Or, A, The Immediate Erotic Stages Or The Musical Erotic).

Johannes, the 'writer' of the diary and seducer of Cordelia is likewise a demonic figure. He has chosen the aesthetic life but his choice is in fact a non-choice, because he has already despaired of the idea of choice itself as a futile dead end. Life for him consists of fragmented experiences that he can vary and manipulate for enjoyment and interest. There is no overall theme that will tie up these fragments to form an overall self with a history, trajectory or development. Choice for him is not a determination of his life but a game, a playing with possibilities for the sake of amusement and to keep boredom at bay. What is important

to him is freedom, possibility, and the immediate. He scorns convention, and regards marriage as the enemy and stultification of the erotic. The seducer rejects the idea of the ethical in marriage as boring and pedestrian, in favour of the heightened passion and beauty of the immediate moment in love. There is no commitment beyond the instant and outside the poetic. His attention is on firstly the object of his affection and then secondly on himself as the erotic subject.

In the first case he savoured the aesthetic element personally; in the second he savoured his own person aesthetically. In the first case the point was that he egoistically, personally, savoured what in part reality gave him and what in part he himself had impregnated reality with; in the second case his personality was volatilized and he savoured, then, the situation and himself in the situation. In the first case he was in constant need of reality as the occasion, as an element; in the second case reality was drowned in the poetic. (Either / Or, A, The Seducer's Diary (Victor's Introduction)).

John the Seducer however is not an egoist. He is good natured and aims to endow the woman who he has been seducing with the ability also to transcend the mundane and pedestrian, the ordinarily human in favour of something 'higher'. The importance of freedom and possibility will exist for Cordelia as well as her seducer. There is an implication that everybody should or could live an aesthetic life.

It is this hidden 'ethical' of the writer of A that provides an opening for the writer of the B collection. Unlike the author of A, the B writer has a name: Wilhelm, who is a married man and is a Judge. He is a friend of the A writer, and most of the second part of Either / Or consists of two lengthy letters to the



Kierkegaard

latter. Wilhelm interprets the young A writer's despair to his sense of a moral conundrum at realising that his own aesthetic pleasure is frequently bought at the expense of others who do not have the freedom to achieve a similar beautiful way of life. (This of course assumes that the young man is not a total egoist and that he already has the beginnings of a sense of moral responsibility to others). The only way out of his despair according



Goethe

to Wilhelm, is to choose a life according to Ethical universal values. This kind of Either / Or is a determinate serious choice, rather than a pastime. His young friend, in opting for the ethical, will also be committing to values that go beyond the immediate moment, to the development and continuity of his selfhood, and to commitments of vocation, marriage and friendships. He will become part of a universal community instead of defining himself as an exception in opposition to the universal. The ethical life is committed and serious, the self evolves instead of being volatile and divided.

In a letter called '*The Aesthetic Validity of Marriage*', Wilhelm characterises the Aesthete's attitude to love as lacking commitment.

person, on the other hand, love is everything, I acknowledge no duty. If the love is over, we are through with the friendship. It is reserved exclusively for marriage to base itself on such an absurdity. (Either / Or, B, The Aesthetic Validity of Marriage).

Choice for the Aesthete meant experimenting with alternatives successively. The moment is crucial. There is no resolution, no anchor by which the opposites can co-exist. From the ethical point of view, an aesthetic approach to life is volatile i.e. subject to sudden change, alteration, therefore unstable. But a person committed to an ethical existence will enjoy the erotic within marriage. The category of the Aesthetic is not done away with but is subsumed within a greater whole.

If I form an intimate attachment to another

The Aesthete can resolve his guilt and despair

that his pleasure has been bought at the expense of others, by the realisation that everywhere there are individuals following their own vocations and harmonising with each other respectfully.

He [= The Ethical Individual] knows that everywhere there is a dance floor; that even the lowliest man has his own, that when he himself so wishes, his dance can be just as beautiful, just as graceful, just as expressive, just as moving as that of those who have been assigned a place in history. It is this fencing skill, this suppleness, which is properly the immortal life of the ethical. (Either / Or, B, Equilibrium Between The Aesthetic and The Ethical in The Development Of Personality).

Only through the Ethical can the individual become an individual, and will get to know himself not for the sake of contemplation but of acting in the world.

He [The Ethical individual] knows himself. The expression gnothi seauton [Know Thyself] is repeated often enough and one has seen in it the aim of all human striving. Quite right, too, but it is equally certain that it cannot be the goal unless at the same time it is the beginning. The ethical individual knows himself, but this knowledge is not mere contemplation, for then the individual would be specified in respect of his necessity; it is a reflection on himself, which is itself an action, and that is why I have been careful to use the expression 'to choose oneself' instead of 'to know oneself. In knowing himself the individual is not complete; on the contrary, this knowledge is highly productive and from it there emerges the true individual. (Either / Or, B, Equilibrium Between The Aesthetic and The Ethical in The Development Of Personality).



Mozart

The Ethical aims to unite the universal and the particular. For example, the Ethicist will say 'It is a duty for everyone to work in order to live'. In so far as everyone has their own special vocation, the particular individual is integrated into the universal. Similarly the individual ethically orientated will aim to express the universal through the ties of marriage and friendship.

To live the Ethical life is for someone to come to himself / herself. Repentance is presented here as a category of the ethical. Through the ethical someone comes to have or possess himself / herself concretely. Unlike the Aesthetic Individual, the Ethical Individual determines him / herself not arbitrarily, but responsibly in the realisation of the decisive nature of this choice.

*However, for the ethical individual this distinction [= between the accidental and the essential] is not the product of whim, making it look as though he had absolute power to make himself into whatever he wanted. For although the ethical individual might refer to himself as his own editor, he is at the same time fully aware of his editorial responsibility to himself, in so far as what he chooses has a decisive influence on him personally, to the scheme of things in which he lives, and to God. (Either / Or, B, **Equilibrium Between The Aesthetic and The Ethical in the Development of Personality**).*

We can note here that in Wilhelm's description of the ethical individual, God and the religious are introduced but only as an annex or a sub-category of the Ethical.

The position set out by Judge Wilhelm appears to sum up the theme of the work as a whole. The Aesthetic philosophy, an expression of an estranged, isolated and despairing individual, gives way to an Ethical way of life in which eroticism is subsumed under committed marriage, while also being preserved within it, and the individual harmonises with the universal.

But there is a last turn in Either / Or. Parallel to the Aesthete's despair, which was seen by Judge Wilhelm as a gateway into the ethical, there is a lingering sadness for the individual within the ethical. Judge Wilhelm acknowledges that there is something in the universal that cannot be realised. Some individuals, maybe all, will experience their inability to live up to the demands of the universal. This is the situation of someone, like Kierkegaard himself, who felt called to fulfil the universal demands of marriage, but because of his intense introspection, experienced his love affair as somehow unreal, as being over even

while it was going on. Far from allowing him to fulfil the universal, this experience merely increased his estrangement. Such a person will feel that he has failed the universal.

*He will then be assured that there is something of the universal that he cannot realize. With this assurance, however, he is not through, because it will engender a deep sorrow in his soul. He will rejoice in the others to whom it was granted to accomplish this thing, he will see perhaps better than they do how beautiful it is, but he himself will sorrow, not in a cowardly and dispirited way, but deeply and frankly, for he will say: 'After all, I love the universal. If it were the happy lot of others to bear witness to the universal by realizing it, very well then, I bear witness to it with my sorrow, and the deeper I sorrow the more significant my witness.' And this sorrow is beautiful, is itself an expression of the universally human, a beating of its heart within him, and will reconcile him with it. (Either / Or, B, **Equilibrium Between The Aesthetic and The Ethical in the Development of Personality**)*

The ethical author of B thinks that the individual will have to be content with a sadness which may be a beautiful sadness. But just as despair had been a transition from the Aesthetic into the Ethical, can we see this sadness as a transition out of the Ethical into something else?

This way out now emerges as an orientation towards the Religious. Wilhelm adds a 'Last Word' at the end of his correspondence to his young friend in which he tells him of a priest he knows. This priest has gone to work in a remote part of Denmark. The man has sent him one of his sermons, which Wilhelm is now passing on to his young friend, and which he thinks merely confirms everything that he



Søren Kierkegaard and Regine Olsen

has tried to say about the ethical life. But a further examination of the sermon (which is included) shows that this is not quite the case. It is true that the priest's sermon is addressed to uneducated farmers in Jutland and that this shows that it has a universal appeal:

(‘You are not to sneeze at it for that reason, for the beauty of the universal consists precisely in everyone being able to understand it’).

But the title of the sermon is: *The edifying in the thought that against God we are always in the wrong.*

What removes doubt and despair? The good-natured Aesthete has despaired because his good fortune might have been purchased at the expense of someone else. Now the Ethical individual will doubt that he has done enough to be in the right. The resolution of this doubt is the edifying thought that in relation to God we are always in the wrong. Everything is lacking in relation to God, whether the individual who experiences himself as outside the universal

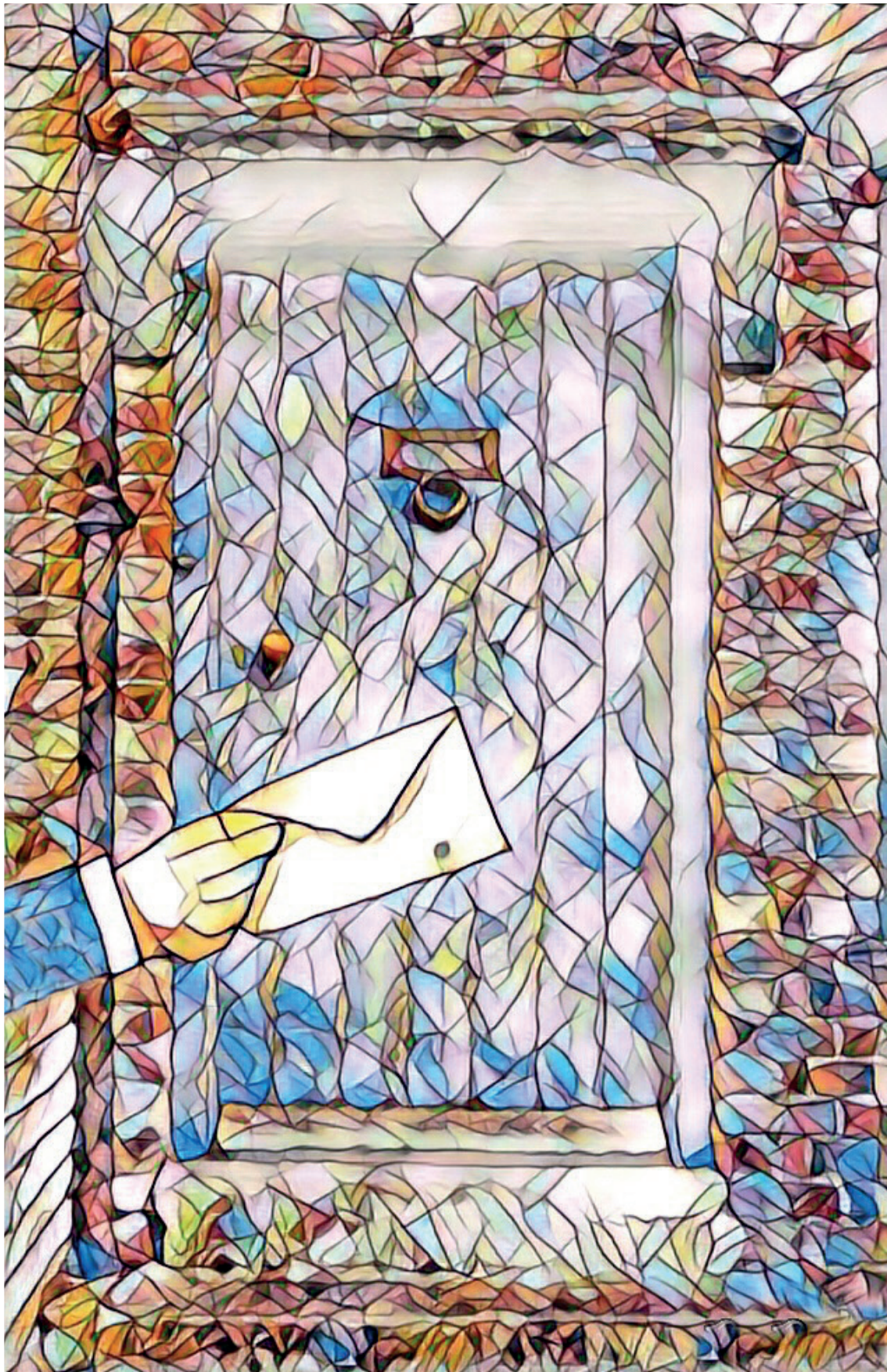
or even the universal claims of ethics itself. For the priest the realisation of this is not an expression of failure, but a mark of hope, the need for humility, forgiveness, love and thereby true freedom.

This thought, then, that you are always in the wrong against God, is not a truth you are forced to recognize, not a comfort to soothe your pain, not a substitute for something better; it is the joy in which you triumph over yourself and over the world, your rapture, your song of praise, your worship, a proof that your love is happy as is only that love with which one loves God. (Either / Or, B, The Edifying In The Thought That Against God We Are Always In The Wrong.)

So hidden within the bipartite division of *Either / Or*, of the Aesthetic versus the Ethical, is in fact a tripartite division, between the Aesthetic, the Ethical and the Religious, so that maybe this work ought to be called *Either / Or / Or*.

Return to Sender

**This house I remember,
not grey but white,
now overgrown
by the sun-bleached climbing rose
struggling on the dusty sideway.
By the brick wall an iris
sucks up the rain
like intricate food,
its tongue eager and furred.
I reach the door,
its paint is peeling,
I tap the rusty knocker,
the handle turns slowly,
like the hands of a dying clock
and the hinges cry with the effort.
Then I see her,
the old lady, breathless, flustered:
‘I thought you were the postman’
No, I am simply the letter you posted
thirty-five years ago.**



Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

When Literature Complements Philosophy

Roland Barthes (1915-1980) was an unusual philosopher. His writings sparkled with a lively analysis of culture. He was a structuralist, but his later work was also seen as post-structuralist. This article briefly examines some key points of his philosophy in terms of his literary criticism and semiology*.

PAUL COCKBURN

In his early career Barthes did not have an academic post, and in 1963 he wrote that there were two 'critiques' in France: one which was dreary and was just positivistic academic criticism, the other 'the new critique' which sought not to establish facts but to explore the meaning of literature from a modern theoretical or philosophical standpoint. The 'old' critiques claimed objectivity, to have no ideology. But Barthes thinks critiques should be ideological and the ideology, whether it be Freudian, Marxist, or semiotic, should be declared. This annoyed Raymond Picard, a professor at the Sorbonne.

Barthes also thought that often in academic circles a literary work is explained by facts about the author's life, or events say in the author's world. But he thought the structure of the actual work could be analysed on its own, in 'immanent analysis'. Picard thought this led to relativism. In studying Racine, say, Picard thought 'we should look for Racine, in his historical context, not the changes Racine undergoes in the light of modern ideologies'. For Barthes however interpretation should be extravagant: maybe Barthes goes too far, while Picard (representing the 'ancient regime') does not go far enough. Barthes critiques, but he does not fill in meaning.

He extended Saussurean semiology to gestures, images, sounds, and made it a critique of culture. He looked at the 'codes' which work 'behind our backs' to generate meaning in our social practices. These codes camouflage the ideological discourses which underly social reality as popular consciousness perceives it. For instance he studied the social nature of fashion as exemplified in advertisements. There was a code to what is fashionable, in one particular case this was expressed in certain patterns and motifs on dresses which are shown in photos of women going to horse-race meetings. It is desirable to be

in the 'high-level' company of people who go to the races, but you also need the right sort of dress. The insignificant (a pattern on a dress) can signify and therefore have meaning. In studying the food system of a culture, there is in restaurants for example a 'food grammar' relating to appetizers, main course and desserts, and this also extends to types of food (healthy, meat, vegan etc.). Signification can quickly become seemingly complex and even ambiguous, but it is easier to read from within a particular culture. You have to break through 'hidden' layers to find the signified. Barthes seems to say that sometimes all you have is a series of signs and hidden levels, there is no obvious 'signified'. It is clear that to him semiology is not a science, it is more apophatic. and it is a meta-language. There is ambiguity between the original meaning of a sign and the ideologically transformed variant.

Barthes thought that literature was very important. 'The real is not representable, but literature tries to do this. It is a desire for the impossible that is sane'. All knowledge is contained in literature, but in an indirect way'. For instance, in a novel such as Robinson Crusoe there is historical, geographical, social, colonial, botanical, and anthropological knowledge. The book shows a progression from nature to culture as Crusoe eventually escapes his island.

Barthes analysed literature in an interesting way, proclaiming the 'death of the author'. The 'I' that approaches a text 'is itself already a plurality of other texts, of codes....' The reader is the producer of the meaning of a text. This implies there is no ultimate meaning, in fact there will be a multiplicity of meanings. He wanted an openness in interpretation. 'The true place of writing is reading, the place where desire is finally unchained'. He was a champion of avant-garde literature, but he also gained pleasure



Roland Barthes



Alain Robbe-Gillet

from reading old 19th century French classics. In these works, however, he thought the signified is 'abstract, out of date'.

Speech generally involves too much classification, which Barthes sees as oppressive. We need literature to 'cheat' language, to provide subtlety. We must try to express the inexpressible.

Effective theatre does not require us to be empathetic with the characters in a play, rather we need distance and even alienation from them which enables us to judge and evaluate their situation. For this reason, Barthes admired the plays by Bertolt Brecht which to him seemed to contain this distancing aspect. Barthes does not want to see too much of the inner psychological states of characters on stage, there is a contrast between surface and depth, critical distance and empathetic identification, mask versus character, which should remain. Brecht wants to offer politics with a 'light touch'. Similarly, Much of Barthes' work seems to have a light touch, as in his studies linking semiotics to fashion.

In his support of the novelist Alain Robbe-Gillet, Barthes thought his novels tried to suspend meaning, to block our normal interpretative moves, so that we can question our normal ordering of our experience.

In Robbe-Gillet's novels there is no clear narrative development, and stories are disrupted. Barthes thought literature should 'unexpress the expressible,' as well as 'expressing the inexpressible'!

Novels are sometimes long and the bare bones of the plot are often fleshed out in minor incidents, all sorts of detailed descriptions, observations, comments, etc which seem insignificant. They do not contribute to the main narrative drive of the novel. Barthes asks: what is the significance of this insignificance? He deserves credit for asking this question. He concludes that these details do have a signifying function: our lives are in fact full of the seemingly meaningless, and this makes such novels 'true-to-life' – there is somehow an opposition and a balance between meaning and 'reality'.

As a philosopher, Barthes was different to the 'norm'. Perhaps his early start outside academic circles helped him to develop an unusual style. His approach to literary studies was revolutionary and thought-provoking.

- *This article is based on material in the book 'The Very Short Introduction to Barthes' by Jonathan Culler, published by OUP in 1983, from which the quotes above are taken.*

An Odyssey



CHRIS NORRIS

I've lived here now these twenty years,
Two decades to the day.
I've had my joys, I've had my fears,
I've shed a bucketful of tears,
But thought: 'It's home, you're here to stay;
It's home, you're here to stay'.

I'd crossed a dozen dark frontiers
With weapons on display.
I'd begged the guards, I'd bent their ears,
I'd listened to their sniffs and sneers,
And tried to keep despair at bay,
To keep despair at bay.

Then one, at Dover port, said 'Cheers,
Must be your lucky day!'
No taunts this time, no jests and jeers;
They even gave some handy steers,
And said 'you've come the hardest way,
You've come the hardest way'.

Of course there were the racist smears,
The sort of stuff they say,
Those media hacks and pamphleteers
Who make their devilish careers
By saying 'there'll be hell to pay,
Yes, there'll be hell to pay'.

Yet I had friends, some perfect dears,
Who made me feel okay,
Who said 'Wait till the hate-cloud clears,
Till those dark stars throw down their spears,
And you'll find harbor come what may,
Find harbor come what may'.

But hard men came, banged on my door,
Full twenty years since I
Cleared Immigration, stepped ashore,
And found what I'd been longing for,
A place where I could live and die,
Where I could live and die.

They said 'Come on, you know the score,
You'll have to say goodbye.
It's over now, that little war
Back home we made allowance for,
So do give home another try,
Give home another try'.

So I've new wanderings in store,
New foes and threats to fly,
For home's the place where neighbors swore
'You're dead if you return once more',
And old friends gave the evil eye,
Gave me the evil eye.

You say 'Tough luck, the law's the law,
It's rules we're going by',
But there's some things I heard and saw
From the Home Office boot-boy corps
That give your legal talk the lie,
That give your talk the lie.

So stuff them in your bottom drawer,
My plea and your reply.
There's thugs I've seen with eyes like your
Door-knocking squad, so why ignore
This darkening of a migrant's sky,
This darkening of my sky?

In those forgotten days

In those forgotten days
Of falling leaves
And logs on the fire
When work is done
And new work not begun
And no demands are made

In those balmy music-filled days
Those leisured hours
Those treasured hours
Those moments of calm
Of effortlessness
When all the world is frantic
With business deals and wars
And personal achievements and getting on

Just to be
What more purpose
Than to be

Poem and Artwork by William Bishop



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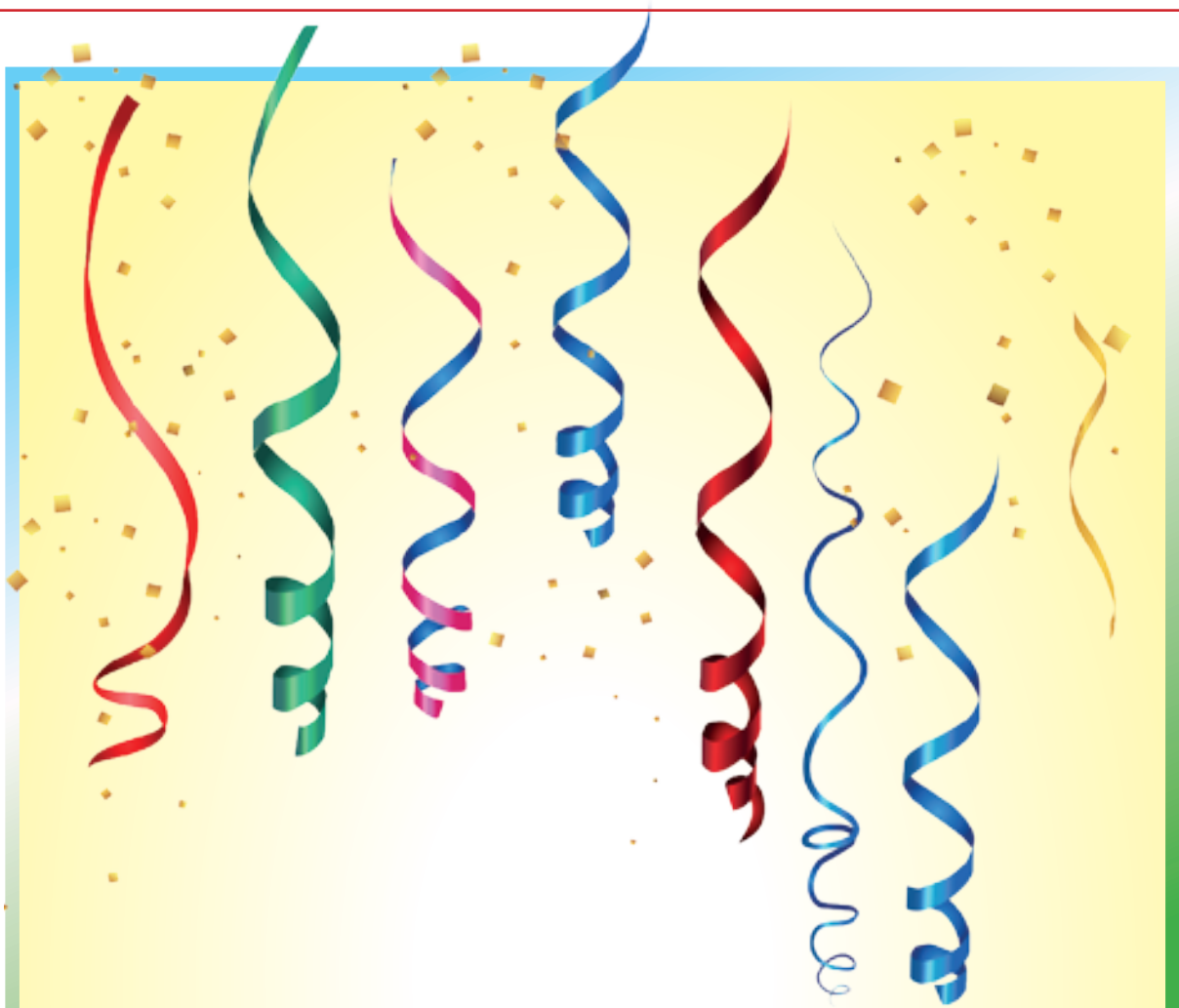
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