This dissertation has been microfilmed exactly as received

64–6362

WEATHERS, Winston Wiley, 1926–
THE BROKEN WORD: THE THEME OF COMMUNICATION FAILURE IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY LITERATURE.

The University of Oklahoma, Ph.D., 1964
Language and Literature, modern

University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan

Downloaded from SHAREOK. Persistent Handle URL: https://hdl.handle.net/11244/1721

Copyright by

WINSTON WILEY WEATHERS

1964

THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE BROKEN WORD: THE THEME OF COMMUNICATION FAILURE IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY LITERATURE

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

WINSTON WILEY WEATHERS

Norman, Oklahoma

1964

THE BROKEN WORD: THE THEME OF COMMUNICATION FAILURE

IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY LITERATURE

APPROVED BY

John M. Raines

C. G. Thayer

Leda P. Williams

J. P. Pritchard

V. K. Eleonori

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am most grateful to Dr. John M. Raines, Professor of English, for the assistance he gave me in preparing this dissertation, which is presented as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctor's degree at the University of Oklahoma. Dr. Raines' wisdom and great knowledge made my own task much easier. I am grateful, too, to Dr. Calvin G. Thayer, Professor of English, and Dr. John Paul Pritchard, Professor of English, who have been my valued mentors and who joined with Dr. Raines in allowing me the utmost freedom in my exploration of twentieth-century literature and in the development of my thesis and the various ideas it comprises.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I.	INTRODUCTION: THE PATHOS OF COMMUNICATION	1
II.	SEMANTIC AWARENESS: THE OLD ORDER	15
III.	A TIME OF CHANGE	35
IV.	LITERATURE AND THE NEW AWARENESS	54
V.	EUGENE O'NEILL AND THE TRAGIC WORD	81
VI.	JAMES JOYCE AND THE WORD THAT FAILED	105
VII.	T. S. ELIOT AND THE REFORMED WORD	162
VIII.	EPILOGUE: POSSIBILITIES OF RESTORATION	197
BIBLIOGRAPHY		218

THE BROKEN WORD: THE THEME OF COMMUNICATION FAILURE IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY LITERATURE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: THE PATHOS OF COMMUNICATION

> . . . the Renaissance and our own era are alike in having much that is new in them, both have seen the rapid breakdown of what belonged to slow evolutionary growth, of a society held together by traditional codes of conduct, of power modified by common ethical values and judgments. Our revolutions followed by dictatorships, our almost omnipotent states and ubiquitous politics, return to Machiavelli's world, except that we are aware of dangers that would have appalled him.[1]

Certain moments in history find a people preoccupied with some particular psychological, sociological, or philosophical problem. This preoccupation often assumes the complexion of a veritable pathos. When this happens, vast numbers of problems, vast numbers of cultural phenomena become identified with, and are explained in terms of, the predominating "suffering" of the age. Some particular problem becomes, as it were, a kind of ideological scapegoat, a problem that is burdened with all other problems. At such times, a majority of a culture's population feel that if this one "scapegoat problem" were to be solved, then their world and their lives would return to normal, the major difficulties of existence would be overcome.

---

[1]J. B. Priestley, Literature and Western Man (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), pp. 16-17.

Usually this exaggerated concern with a problem, this governing preoccupation, occurs in an age that is beset with extreme crisis or confusion. At those times in history when traditional values seem inadequate, when established world-views seem more fiction than fact, when the universe itself, or the social structure, or the human psyche, is being seen anew in the light of new discoveries and realizations, then a people seek, it seems, some unifying ideology, some monolithic explanation, some generally recognized fault in the nature of things to which society can relate its failures and by which society can explain its frustrations.

The pathos of mutability that occurred in England late in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century can be cited as an example. In those momentous years when men witnessed the decline of the old universe of scholastic thought and medieval tradition and the rise of the new universe of inductive reasoning and disrupted social patterns, an intense preoccupation with "order" and "degree" emerged, a preoccupation "common to all Elizabethans of even modest intelligence."[2] This preoccupation in turn engendered the pathos of the age--a fear of negated order. "If Elizabethans believed in an ideal order animating earthly order, they were terrified lest it should be upset and appalled by the visible tokens of disorder that suggested its upsetting."[3] The Elizabethan pathos, and the Jacobean continuation of that pathos, was an obsession with "the fear of chaos and the fact of mutability."[4] To maintain order and to conquer time was the ideological quest of a people at a time when the crisis of science

---

[2]E. M. W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1944), p. 10.

[3]Ibid., p. 13.

[4]Ibid.

versus faith was yet to be resolved, when new cosmological and ontological explanations had yet adequately to replace the old vision and the old understanding.

Such preoccupations, as they appear at various critical moments in history, have a general structure or anatomy. A first phase of such a pathos is usually a philosophic or scientific preparation, a period of intellectual questioning of the universe in which new theories and new organizing concepts of the world appear. A second phase is one of educated recognition of the problem and an educated and even belletristic articulation of it. A third phase is that of the popular acceptance of the pathos, the period in which the "problem" is discussed by the man on the street and every schoolboy becomes an expert on the nature of the problem and its solution. Roughly these phases are sequential, though a great deal of overlapping occurs. The scientific-philosophic phase comes first, but it may continue into the subsequent phases; the scientific-philosophic questioning does not necessarily come to an end simply because educated articulation begins or because popular acceptance occurs. Erasmus, Machiavelli, and Copernicus may in their individual ways have instituted the first phase of what was to become the Elizabethan pathos, yet long after Shakespeare, Spenser, and Marlowe had effected the second phase, the first phase continued in the work of Galileo, Bacon, and Kepler. Likewise the second phase of educated recognition and articulation does not cease with the advent of the third phase; popular acceptance and concern does not quiet authors and artists--the Jacobean dramatists and the metaphysical poets were still examining and expressing the pathos of chaos and mutability even after the common Englishman had begun to relate great

numbers of his perennial problems to the lack of order and degree and to the inevitability of time's ruthless progress.

Nearly every age, of course, has had a pathos. The eighteenth century, for instance, had its preoccupation with the ideas of nature, reason, and taste--a pathos of "natural decorum." But some preoccupations, like that in the eighteenth century, are fortunately more unifying than problematical, are more an answer than a question. Sometimes the scientific or intellectual event that sets the tone for an age is more constructive than disturbing. The difference between Newton and Copernicus, for instance, is in part that Newton provided an answer and rationale that served Western man until modern times, while Copernicus exploded an old universe, tore down the old foundation before the culture had time to shift position, to readjust and reorient. Both Copernicus and Newton dealt with the same "truth" and the same view of the universe, but Copernicus' contribution created cultural problems while Newton, resolving those problems, provided answers.

In many ways, the contribution of Charles Darwin, in the middle of the nineteenth century, is comparable to that of Copernicus. If the date 1543, when Copernicus published the De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium, is the beginning of a disturbing epoch, then the date 1859, when Darwin published The Origin of the Species, is similarly epoch-marking, too. For the acceptance of Darwin's biology, just as did the acceptance of Copernicus' astronomy, necessitated a revision of man's understanding of himself and his world, and opened the door to a period of confusion, misunderstanding, and intellectual strife as man struggled to make sense out of his universe and to achieve some articulate realization of himself and his place in

reality. And just as Copernicus' description of the heavens helped institute the chain of intellectual events that promulgated the Elizabethan and Jacobean pathos, so Darwin's description of man's genesis helped institute the sequence of intellectual considerations that has led to the pathos of the twentieth century.

In the hundred years since Darwin brought to a climax the evolutionary theories of the early nineteenth century, the phases leading to a major intellectual mid-twentieth-century preoccupation have occurred, and in the years following World War II, a pathos has developed in Western culture with its roots in the Darwinian revolution and the whole series of scientific, philosophic, and cultural mutations that occurred in the wake of Darwinian thought. The anatomy of this pathos is marked, roughly, by a rather long speculative and theoretical first phase that begins with Darwin, 1859, gathers momentum around 1880, and develops fully by the beginning of World War I. The second phase, the literary and aesthetic, occurs most richly in the period between the wars, 1919-1941. And the third phase, the real period of the pathos as a popular phenomenon, has dominated large areas of cultural life in the postwar period of the late forties, fifties, and sixties.

2.

This twentiety-century pathos has been the pathos of communications. In the past two decades especially, Western man has become obsessed and preoccupied with a breakdown of communications, with man's inability to say what he means and to communicate with others, with man's tragic isolation, loneliness, and alienation as the result of his inability to bridge the gap from his intelligence to that of another. "Failure of

mental communication is painfully in evidence nearly everywhere we choose to look,"[5] we are told. And this failure is occuring concurrently, strangely enough, with an increased desire to communicate: in our century ". . . something has happened to our relation with language which seems to require that we make methodical and explicit what was once immediate and unformulated."[6] Also paradoxically, in our century we have seen the development of the most sophisticated, elaborate, and extensive systems of communication ever devised on earth; ours has been a century of high-speed presses, national distribution of newspapers and magazines; of telephones, telegraphs, and radios; of movies and television. Never before in the history of the world have so many people talked with so many people at such great distances. We are as close to one another as the flick of a telephone dial or the fastening of a postage stamp. Yet never in history has man been so concerned over his failure to communicate with other human beings. Twentieth-century man hurls into space his communication satellites, his radar beams, his radio-equipped interplanetary probes, yet he is increasingly frightened by the seemingly inevitable silence that surrounds his soul, by the lingering darkness that surrounds the island of his individual mind through which, he begins to suspect, he can never completely or even adequately penetrate.

Man cannot communicate, we are told, because of the very nature of the universe and reality and our own limited intellectual capacity. Modern science has opened doors that reveal a meaningless and indescribable

---

[5]Stuart Chase, The Tyranny of Words (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1938), p. 19.

[6]Lionel Trilling, The Liberal Imagination (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1959), pp. 178-79.

universe, and as "the very concept of existence becomes meaningless,"[7] then ". . . the only way of reacting to this is to shut up. We are confronted with something truly ineffable."[8] We grow mute in the face of the universe, because our language proves totally inadequate to express what we see, because ". . . our neat language has lately become increasingly inadequate to express recent observations of nature."[9] And if language is not equal to the recent observations of nature then it is a weak and deceptive medium that in no other area of experience is trustworthy; all our faith in it is shattered. It is blasphemous, therefore, to ignore the limits of language, to "assume that one's words do indeed tell . . . what is going on. There is an important sense in which nobody knows what he is talking about."[10] And we arrive at the pathetic realization that

> . . . the glass of language is flawed, and as man looks through it back into the past and out into the present, his view is distorted and blurred. Individually and collectively he is linguistically maladjusted. Not understanding himself, he fails to understand others. Such misunderstanding may lead to fears, anxieties, conflicts, and disasters which might have been lessened or prevented if man were able to communicate properly.[11]

But does the fault all lie in the universe or in the language medium? Does not the fault lie in man's misuse of language, his failure to manipulate the language properly, his failure to take care in his communication

---

[7]James B. Conant, Modern Science and Modern Man (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), p. 51.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Walker Gibson (ed.), The Limits of Language (New York: Hill & Wang, 1962), p. 50.

[10]Ibid., p. 113.

[11]Kelly Thurman (ed.), Semantics (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1960), p. viii.

experience? Is it not "an unconscious misuse of man's most human attributes--thinking and its tool, language"?[12]

Such ponderings are, of course, a part of the pathos itself. And regardless whether they are right or wrong, true or false, they have led to the widespread and popular lamentations in the twentieth century over the breakdown of communications, to the hue and cry for improved communications, to the explanations of many of our ills in terms of communication success or failure. Tragic positions are taken. Hopeful positions are taken. Positions of every kind are taken regarding man's articulative relationship with fellow man. In nearly every area of modern life, men or various responsibilities and commitments have had something to say about the subject.

From the pulpit to the comic strip--and at every way station in between--the pathos of communications flourishes. Recently the Very Rev. James A. Pike, Episcopal Bishop of the Diocese of California, in answering the question, "What is the world's greatest need?" said: "To my mind, the world's greatest need now is for communication . . . we are still making only a beginning at real communication." He pointed out the presence of communication problems in the home, in national life, and in international relations. "Some readers may wonder why as a clergyman I didn't say that the world's greatest need is God. Of course it is. But the knowledge of God comes through people--people who can communicate. Communication is the very essence of God." Bishop Pike then quoted the first verse of the Gospel according to St. John, and went on to say: "As made in God's image, man's greatest gift is his ability to communicate. When

---

[12]Chase, op. cit., p. 19.

he loses it, he is hardly a man. Yet we are losing it--or, worse still, having it, refusing to use it."[13]

We realize how extensive the pathos of communication is when so distinguished a churchman recognizes our need to communicate as the "world's greatest need," and we realize how extensive the pathos is, also, when an editor of The New Yorker is able to interpret a phenomenon of social behavior--the Twist, a dance that flourished for a brief time in the early sixties--as evidence of our communication problems:

> A dance, we suggest, is a socially performed parable of sexual relations. The minuet, with its intrigue-like shifts of position and its subtle homage to a Clockwork Universe, offered the Age of Reason a contemporary frame for this perennial parable. Cool fingers touch, eyes glance, lids lower, fans tilt and quiver, and all the while the little buckled feet tidily slither and patter through the pattern of a secure rationale. Whereas in the Twist a man and woman, isolated not only from everybody else but from each other, eyes closed, teeth clinched, perform one monotonous motion to rigorously monotonous music. It is very beautiful. Across the little space between the man and the woman a call goes forth, but the space remains, and they never touch, poignantly acting out the Breakdown of Communications for which our century is celebrated. We live in the Age of Unconsummation . . . .[14]

And everywhere we look, like manifestations of the pathos are apparent. In the years since World War II, our university courses in Freshman English composition have become courses in Communications, while at the same time the most interesting avant-guarde segment of American youth--the notorious postwar Beat Generation--are obviously "determinedly antiverbal . . . lying on beaches in Zenlike silence,"[15] accepting

---

[13]"What Is the World's Greatest Need?" The New York Times Magazine, April 2, 1961, p. 39.

[14]"Notes and Comments," The New Yorker, May 19, 1962, p. 31.

[15]Gibson, op. cit., p. 112.

wholeheartedly the Zen observation that

> Words cannot describe everything,
> The heart's message cannot be delivered in words.
> If one receives words literally, he will be lost,
> If he tries to explain with words, he will not attain
> enlightenment in this life.[16]

And even so popular an art form as the American comic strip--reflecting as it often does the issues of the postwar society--is riddled with satire on communication failures, with pointing out the humor of various semantic situations. In one installment of the strip Dennis the Menace, the balloons read as follows:

> Dennis: (Rushing into the kitchen). Mom, do we have any bug killer?
>
> Mother: What?
>
> Dennis: When Grandpa said "Goodnight," he said, "Don't let the Bedbugs bite!"
>
> Mother: Oh, he was joking!
>
> Dennis: Was he jokin' about "gettin' up with the chickens," too?
>
> Mother: Uh-huh.
>
> Dennis: Where does Grandpa get all those new jokes?
>
> Mother: I don't know, honey . . . . Where are you going?
>
> Dennis: Back to Grandpa's room! Maybe he was jokin' about bein' tired, too!
>
> Mother: Grandpa wasn't joking about that, dear. I could tell.
>
> Dennis: Yea? How? He never winks![17]

Dennis in this situation is faced with a semantic problem. How is he to know what the words mean? How is he to orient himself to the communication

---

[16]Paul Reps (comp), Zen Flesh, Zen Bone: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1957), p. 150.

[17]The Tulsa World, May 27, 1962.

of his grandparent? How to tell a joke from the serious statement? And the fact that Hank Ketchem can make humor out of a communication problem is a reflection upon our age. Likewise another popular strip, called simply B.C., a satire on our age presented in the guise of stone-age life, deals frequently and extensively with communication. For one whole season the comic strip dealt with man's problem in naming the objects of his world, and in one particular strip we see a stone-age man cast into the waters a large stone slab bearing the message, "Our winter is very cold. What is your winter like?" Two panels go by while he waits for an answer. Finally another stone slab floats into shore; the stone-age man picks it up and reads it; all it says is, "Winter?"[18] This, of course, is a semantic joke; a seeing something funny in man's difficulty in finding a common language, common terms, common definitions. The joke--presented to a mass audience--is meaningful to the mass audience because of popular semantic awareness, because of popular familiarity with communication problems.

Another instance of the widespread pathos is seen in the popular newspaper advice column. Howard Whitman, writing a column entitled "Making Marriage More Rewarding," opened one column, under the headline "Don't Stop Communicating with Your Soul Mate," with this observation:

> Animals, said an ancient sage, do not talk because they have nothing to say. But people do. And in marriage, talk is at once the greatest balm for trouble and the surest way for two people to become the soul mates they have always wanted to be. For some reason our generation has produced more than its share of clams.[19]

When the "How to be Happy" columns of popular journals deal, naturally and

---

[18] Ibid., January 8, 1963.

[19] Ibid., October 18, 1962.

easily, with the problem of communications, then we know the problem has become a cultural possession, that we are faced, not with a simple academic question, but with a problem of truly "pathetic" proportions.

We don't talk. When we do talk, we misuse the language. In either case, we don't communicate. But if we could truly communicate, we would do away with many of our problems. So the argument seems to go--in the sermon, in the comic strip, in the what have you. On one side we are faced with the imperative: communicate--it is our greatest need; we can do it if we try. On the other side, we are faced with the tragic observation: we can never communicate--it is impossible to do so because of the nature of man, his universe, and his language. And from both sides comes the constantly iterated "truth": Communications have broken down. Regardless whether the situation is correctible or not, man is not communicating at the present time. And he is suffering because of his failure. And in the face of such statements, modern man has grown semantically self-conscious, deeply concerned with language, deeply concerned with what direction he should take.

3.

Nowhere has a consideration of this entire phenomenal concern with communications been more effectively presented than in the great masterpieces of twentieth-century literature. In both American and British literature of our age, the pathos of communication has found moving, profound, and perceptive articulation. Especially in that great period of modern literature, the period between the two great wars, do we find various demonstrations of and commentaries upon the pathos of communication. Even before the pathos became popular in the forties, fifties, and sixties,

many of the great writers of the twenties and thirties had given their formulations of the pathos of communication, had assimilated the pathos of communication into their various world visions, had incorporated an awareness of communications into their understanding of life and their depiction of reality.

The semantic awareness, the understanding of communications, that occurs in modern literature is important for several reasons: First, the articulated semantic awareness in our great literature stands as a contribution to the popular acceptance and development of the pathos of communications. The exceptional body of interbellum literature in both America and Britain serves, in general, as the second phase of the anatomy of our modern pathos. Second, an author's semantic awareness can throw light on our communication problems, may serve to instruct us about man's need to communicate, his possibilities of doing so, his use of language, and the like. The literature may, indeed, help us find direction, may show us what to do. Third, the semantic awareness that appears in any one author's writings is an essential key to understanding that author's Weltanschauung, his message and meaning in general; and, therefore, a recognition of an author's semantic awareness contributes to our over-all literary experience.

For these reasons, the isolating of an author's semantic awareness is a significant task, and to isolate various patterns or modes of semantic awareness in twentieth-century literature, the awareness growing out of and becoming a part of our age's pathos, is the purpose of this study. Acknowledging without argument the existence of a pathos of communications, we can legitimately explore the significant literature of our times to see what various directions various authors have taken in their handling

of semantic problems. And after examining twentieth-century literature in general, in order to determine the scope of semantic awareness as it occurs in drama, fiction, and verse, we can with reward examine in some detail the semantic awareness of three representative figures--Eugene O'Neill, James Joyce, and T. S. Eliot--who, each in his own special way, have articulated the essential modes and approaches apparently available to twentieth-century man in dealing with the problems of communications and in incorporating an understanding of communications into the fabric of their lives.

Before making this examination, however, we may well--in a kind of prologue--ask ourselves some questions about semantic awareness prior to our age and some questions about the scientific-philosophic development (the first phase) that brought our pathos of communication into existence.

CHAPTER II

SEMANTIC AWARENESS: THE OLD ORDER

> There is an ancient Arabian story about a poet who composed a satire about his Sultan. The Sultan was very displeased but he pretended that the poet was still in favour and sent him on a special mission to the Sultan of Baghdad, carrying certain papers. The poet . . . could not read but, while crossing the desert, he met a wise old man who could do so. The old man took the papers from the poet and read them to him. One was a request for an armed guard to meet a caravan which would shortly be travelling north; another was a suggestion that the two Sultans might exchange daughters in marriage to one another; the third was a warrant for the execution of the poet.
>
> When he read this last, the old man urged the poet to destroy it and continue with only the remaining two articles of his embassy. But the poet replied with a little poem which, translated roughly, ran: 'Great is the power of the spoken word, but even greater is that of the written. Let it never be said that I who have lived by the spoken word, attempted to destroy that which is written.' Having said those words, he gathered his papers from the old man and continued on his way toward Baghdad and his death.[1]

Semantic awareness has not been an intellectual development peculiar to the post-Darwinian world. From the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries a semantic awareness prevailed among the Schoolmen, who made extended efforts to verbalize the sacred mysteries in order that the mysteries might serve as a basis for human reason. Theologically oriented, scholastic semantic concern was with definition and distinction of metaphysical terms. In the several centuries from the Renaissance to the

---

[1]"The Poet's Voice," The Times Literary Supplement, July 14, 1961, p. 425.

second half of the nineteenth century, a semantic awareness[2]--of greater dimension than that of the medieval era--existed that, as it is articulated through British and American literature, acknowledges certain language phenomena and draws certain definite conclusions about communication and man's use of the language medium. In the post-Renaissance, pre-Darwinian era of Western culture, the need and desire for communication was recognized, the power of the word was acknowledged, the reality of various kinds of communication (non-lexical as well as verbal) was admitted. The pre-Darwinian culture acknowledged that articulation and verbalization was a vital human experience, that inarticulation contributed to cultural deterioration rather than progress, that indeed, "One good deed, dying tongueless/ Slaughters a thousand waiting upon that." The pre-Darwinian culture recognized certain psychological aspects of articulation, certain therapeutic factors in verbalizations; recognized that it is "the silent griefs which cut the heartstrings," and that alleviation of sorrow can come with "the opening out of griefs." So certain was the pre-Darwinian culture of the need for articulation (and articulation was considered the equivalent of communication) that even when men were confronted with meaningless words and expressions they were inclined, as they were in the face of Ophelia's fanciful and mad talk, to read into the articulation some meanfor themselves: ". . . they aim at it,/ And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts."

Indeed, in the pre-Darwinian world, the power of the word was undisputed. Hamlet, in his advice to the players, clearly extolls the power

---

[2]Rooted to a certain extent in such classical language treatises as Plato's Cratylus and Aristotle's De Interpretatione and Categoriae.

of the word to effect emotional revelations in listeners; throughout the age, words could stir men's souls, could soothe men's minds, could enter like daggers into the ear. But the word was not the only means of communication. The pre-Darwinian world had faith, it seems, whereas the post-Darwinian world has lost nearly all faith, that even "dumb discourse" could be "excellent," and that "The silence often of pure innocence/ Persuades, when speaking fails." In general, there was a major appreciation of the word and its use and a generally optimistic assumption that communication could be achieved with the word or, if the word failed, with some other medium of expression.

2.

Such an optimistic semantic awareness did not preclude, however, certain observations about language and observations of language problems. The problems of ambiguity and definitions, diverse languages, and discrepancies between words and events were all recognized by pre-Darwinian "semanticists." Locke, for instance, recognized that "confusion arises from the ambiguity of the words we use as symbols of our ideas, which only too often do not fit them exactly and which suggest other ideas besides those of which they are the name."[3] From Shakespeare's puns and quibbles to Coleridge's observation that "Controversy is not seldom excited in consequence of the disputants attaching each a different meaning to the same word,"[4] the problem of ambiguity is discussed in the semantically-alert literature of the pre-Darwinian world.

---

[3]A. G. Fuller, A History of Philosophy (Rev. ed.; New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1945), p. 132.

[4]Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria (London: J. M. Dent and Sons; New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1906), p. 164.

Some of the problems of definition were also acknowledged in this earlier period. Berkeley had recognized that "there is no such thing as one precise and definite signification annexed to any general name, they all signifying indifferently a great number of particular ideas."[5] And as late as the mid-nineteenth century, such Victorian writers as Ruskin and Arnold were toying with various definitional plagues. Ruskin, in Modern Painters, worries over the definition of such philosophical terms as beauty and truth, and over the definition of terms, especially as terms are applied to art:

> Nothing is more common than to hear people who desire to be thought philosophical, declare that 'beauty is truth,' and 'truth is beauty.' . . . The fact is, truth and beauty are entirely distinct, though often related things. One is a property of statements, the other of objects. The statement that 'two and two make four' is true, but it is neither beautiful nor ugly, for it is invisible; a rose is lovely, but it is neither true nor false, for it is silent. That which shows nothing cannot be fair, and that which asserts nothing cannot be false . . . in things concerning art, the words true and false are only to be rightly used while the picture is considered as a statement of facts.[6]

And Arnold, in his essay "Sweetness and Light," worries about definitions of words peculiar to certain limited groups. He regrets that "men have got such a habit of giving to the language of religion a special application, of making it a mere jargon . . ."[7] and he considers nothing more pathetic "than to see people . . . employ . . . language which properly

---

[5]Fuller, op. cit., p. 145.

[6]John Ruskin, Modern Painters, III--Part IV: Of Many Things, Chapter III, "Of the Real Nature of Greatness of Style," Note 7, in William E. Buckler (ed.), Prose of the Victorian Period (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1958), p. 352.

[7]Matthew Arnold, Culture and Anarchy (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1924), p. 22.

applies only to complete perfection."[8] Sir William Temple, earlier, in 1690, had, simply by his argument for an easy solution, admitted to the definitional problem: "The best is to take words as they are most commonly spoken and meant, like coin as it is most currently passed without raising scruples upon the weight of the alloy, unless the cheat or the defect be gross and evident."[9]

A more important, and more widely discussed, problem to the pre-Darwinian world was that of diverse languages. Though certain authors and philosophers had recognized the problems in ambiguity and definition, they had not developed any great concern over communication as a result, had not worried a great deal about any communication failure. With diverse languages the matter was somewhat different. Latin, of course, had long served as a kind of universal tongue, but as the old medieval unity more and more disappeared in the post-Renaissance centuries, and as nationalism and its attendant English-for-the-English and French-for-the-French psychology made progress, the problem of talking on an international level began to appear. When one man spoke French and one man spoke English, with neither one a Milton and with Latin scarcely practical outside school and church, a communication barrier existed that could not be ignored. One simply had to say, "You speak a language that I understand not." But even in the face of this unavoidable obstacle, no great "suffering" about communication took place, at least not until late in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and even at those moments of greatest concern, an

---

[8] Ibid., p. 21.

[9] Sir William Temple, "Of Poetry," Eighteenth Century Poetry and Prose, ed. Louis I. Bredvold, Alan D. McKillop, and Lois Whitney (New York: The Ronald Press, 1939), p. 128.

attitude of acceptance rather than frustration seemed to prevail. Early in the pre-Darwinian era, late in the Renaissance, the "foreign language" problem seemed more amusing than frustrating, as is the case in Henry V. Kate's French and Henry's English meet head-on, but the result is more comic than tragic. And even as the decades passed, and the "foreign language" problem was seen as more and more a barrier, especially to world-wide communications, very hopeful systems for universal languages were proposed, a prime example being that set forth by John Wilkins in his Essay Toward a Real Character (1668). Wilkins, in the glow of Restoration optimism, assumed that the spirit of rationalism would make a universal language practicable. Yet no such language was forthcoming, in spite of Wilkins' elaborate plans for one, and by the eighteenth century a general feeling was, as Thomas Paine said, that "human language, more especially as there is not an universal language, is incapable of being used as an universal means of unchangeable and uniform information."[10] Human language, as Paine realized, was local and changeable, and this regionalism and mutability presented a serious obstacle to communication--but only, so it seemed at the time, to communication on a universal scale. The "foreign language" problem seemed to have no effect upon communication among individuals. Only a few men, such as Coleridge, saw that the "foreign language" problem was but a variation of a deeper problem that might spoil communications among individuals: Coleridge, for instance, saw that two men, both speaking English, might in reality be speaking diverse tongues. "Every man's language varies," said Coleridge, "according to

---

[10]Thomas Paine, "The Age of Reason," American Poetry and Prose, 2 vols.; ed. Norman Foerster (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951), I, p. 204.

the extent of his knowledge, the activity of his faculties, and the depth or quickness of his feelings. Every man's language has, first, its individualities; secondly, the common properties of the class to which he belongs; and thirdly, words and phrases of universal use."[11] Just as Coleridge suggested that difficulty in finding common language "has proved the weightiest obstacle to the progress of our most zealous and adroit missionaries,"[12] in their work with uncivilized tribes, so the difficulty in finding common language, Coleridge implies, proves a weighty obstacle in the communion among men who would seem otherwise to be in a position to understand one another.

More serious even than the "foreign language" problem, however, was the problem of discrepancy between words and events of words and realities. Well aware that men "will speak daggers . . . but use none," the pre-Darwinian semanticists realized that words spoken do not always relate accurately to behavior, to thought, to event. Words can fly up to heaven indeed, while thoughts remain below. In general, the trouble seems to be that men wilfully misuse words, failing to match words honestly and accurately; that is, the problem seems to be a social or moral one rather than strictly linguistic, and the statements involving this semantic awareness are frequently statements of social criticism. The Fool in Lear speaks of those men who are priests "more in words than matter"; Bentham, the philosopher, chides Socrates and Plato with talking nonsense, with a morality that consists only of words;[13] and Coleridge damns

---

[11]Coleridge, op. cit., p. 189.

[12]Ibid., p. 188.

[13]quoted in Matthew Arnold, op. cit., p. 35.

> . . . all our dainty terms for fratricide;
> Terms which we trundle smoothly o'er our tongues
> Like mere abstractions, empty sounds to which
> We join no feeling and attach no form![14]

There was some awareness, of course, that words were inadequate for the expression of reality, as when Cordelia says that her love is "More ponderous than my tongue," and therefore comes to the conclusion, "Love, and be silent." But in general the feeling is that, linguistically, words can be equal to things, as Dr. Johnson observes in the Preface to Shakespeare, but that frequently, in communication, words do not truly represent the real state of affairs because men misuse language, the misuse being a moral or social crime rather than a strictly linguistic one.

3.

Obviously, the more perceptive pre-Darwinian semanticists recognized in the problems of ambiguity and definition, foreign language barriers, and word-reality discrepancies certain essential inadequacies of language and the resulting inadequacy and imperfectness of communication. Certainly Francis Bacon recognized such a thing as poor communication and blamed it upon language: " . . . whenever an understanding of greater acuteness or a more diligent observation would alter those lines to suit the true division of nature, words stand in the way and resist change."[15] And Locke, perhaps the first of the true semanticists, recognized, in his questioning of the thought process itself, a certain censorship operating

---

[14]Coleridge, "Fears in Solitude" (11. 113-116), The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. E. H. Coleridge (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1912), p. 260.

[15]J. M. Robertson (ed.), The Philosophical Works of Francis Bacon (London: G. Routledge, 1905), p. 269.

within the mind itself to inhibit articulation and communication. Indeed, "Locke has no illusions about the accuracy of verbal communication,"[16] and though he tried to work out in the Essay Concerning Human Understanding an explanation of the mind's function and the symbolic processes the mind uses, he could not ignore the limitations on human intellect. Likewise Coleridge, who has been called by some the first semasiologist, "was deeply interested in the philosophical implications of language and sensitive to the problems of communication. He conceived a word as a focal point of thought, whose sources are forever hidden,"[17] and returns from his study of the unconscious with a "new approach to the study of language and signs"[18] and with "subtle modern ideas on semantics."[19]

The interesting thing, however, about these semantic observations is that they do not arrive at anything approaching the twentieth-century pathos of communications. Even these most alert semantic observers seem to assume that reform and improvement are possible and that whatever semantic problems do exist can be overcome, that communication itself need not be seriously or permanently impaired, that only certain readjustments need to be made. Especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a belief in science promoted an essentially optimistic attitude toward communication. Certainly it was believed that "science was one field in

---

[16]Ralph Renwick, Jr., "Seventeenth-Century Semanticists," ETC., XIX (May, 1962), p. 90.

[17]Kathleen Raine, Coleridge (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1953), p. 32.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Donald A. Stauffer, "Introduction," The Selected Poetry and Prose of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (New York: Modern Library, 1951), p. xxiii.

which clear communication would be possible,"[20] even if faulty communication remained in the popular area. Locke, as one of the leaders of the scientific-philosophic movement of the late seventeenth century, proposed a number of semantic reforms, applicable especially to scientific communications, but with implications for communications in general. Interestingly enough, the "first step" he proposed had to do not with the nature of language but with the nature of man:

> . . . methinks those who pretend seriously to search after or maintain truth, should think themselves obliged to study how they might deliver themselves without obscurity, doubtfulness, or equivocation, to which men's words are naturally liable, if care be not taken. . . . How many are there, that, when they would think on things, fix their thoughts only on words, especially when they would apply their minds to moral matters? And who they can wonder if the result of such contemplations and reasonings, about little more than sounds, whilst the ideas they annex to them are very confused and very unsteady, or perhaps none at all; who can wonder, I say, that such thoughts and reasonings end in nothing but obscurity and mistake, without any clear judgment or knowledge? . . . For language being the great conduit, whereby men convey their discoveries, reasonings, and knowledge, from one to another, he that makes an ill use of it, though he does not corrupt the fountains of knowledge, which are in things themselves, yet he does, as much as in him lies, break or stop the pipes whereby it is distributed to the public use and advantage of mankind. He that uses words without any clear and steady meaning, what does he but lead himself and others into error.[21]

This plea for sincerity and carefulness is typical of nearly all pre-Darwinian semantic considerations. Locke, however, supported this plea for better use of language with some observations about definitions:

> A man shall take care to use no word without a signification, no name without an idea for which he makes it stand. . . .[22]

---

[20]Renwick, loc. cit., p. 87.

[21]John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, ed., Alexander Campbell Fraser (2 vols.; Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1894), II, pp. 149-50.

[22]Ibid., p. 152.

> Men . . . must also take care to apply their words as near as may be to such ideas as common use has annexed them to.[23]
>
> . . . it is sometimes necessary, for the ascertaining the signification of words, to declare their meanings: whether either common use has left it uncertain and loose . . . or where the term . . . is liable to any doubtfulness or mistake.[24]
>
> . . . in all discourses wherein one man pretends to instruct or convince another, he should use the same word constantly in the same sense.[25]

Locke also "urges that abstractions be clearly defined and that names of substances be 'conformable to things as they exist.' Where common usage lacks an adequate name, a new term, or old word with a new meaning can be used, if immediately clarified by synonyms or by 'showing'--producing the referent."[26]

Similar attempts at reform were carried on by others, the chief attack on language problems being made by proposing rigid controls on the use of language. Dryden said,

> If written words from time are not secur'd,
> How can we think have oral sounds endur'd?
> Which thus transmitted, if one mouth has fail'd,
> Immortal lies on ages are entail'd.[27]

The prescriptive attitude implicit in those lines was developed fully in the century that followed when the regimentation of language occurred, the Latinate imprisonment of language took place, and rule books and grammars

---

[23] Ibid., p. 154.

[24] Ibid., p. 154.

[25] Ibid., p. 164.

[26] Renwick, loc. cit., p. 91.

[27] John Dryden, "Religio Laici" (ll. 270-73), Eighteenth Century Prose and Poetry, ed. Louis I. Bredvold, Alan D. McKillop, Lois Whitney (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1939), p. 71.

were composed to hold the language "steady and true." Another reform proposed late in the seventeenth century, and advocated from time to time ever since, was that of "plain style." The assumption was that most language and communication problems would disappear if language were simply purified and relieved of some of its complexities. In 1664, for instance, the Royal Society set up a committee--including Dryden, John Evelyn, and Bishop Sprat--to reform the language, and Bishop Sprat, in particular, in his History of the Royal Society (1667) argues for a return, in language, to a primitiveness and brevity, and to an equality in number between words and things. This is the same attitude toward language that Wordsworth was to reveal in his faith in rustic language and that Emerson was to reveal in his faith in natural language.

The "plain language" reform became, in the hands of some, something like a "wordless language" reform, with a preference for things to words, and certainly a limitation of words to real things. William Petty even proposed a Dictionary of Sensible Words, "to show what perceptible reference belongs to each word."[28] Petty described his plan in a letter to Southwell: "The Dictionary I have often mentioned was intended to translate all words used in argument and important matters into words that are signa rerum et motuum."[29] But both the "plain language" reform and the "things, not names" reform were to come to naught, mainly because they are both inherently fallacious. The fallacy was pointed out most effectively in literature by Jonathan Swift, who in Gulliver's Travels "gibes

---

[28]Renwick, loc. cit., p. 88.

[29]Marquis of Lansdowne (ed.), The Petty Papers (2 vols.; London: Constable & Company, Ltd., 1927), I, p. 150.

at the many suggestions from scientists and others, for the formation of a philosophical or universal language,"[30] and who, in the third book, when Gulliver visits Laputa, laughs in particular at the notion that things could become words in themselves.

> We next went to the School of Languages, where three professors sat in Consultation upon improving that of their own country.
>
> The first Project was to shorten Discourse by cutting Polysyllables into one, and leaving out Verbs and Participles; because in Reality all things imaginable are but Nouns.
>
> The other was a Scheme for entirely abolishing all Words whatsoever . . . that since Words are only Names for Things, it would be more convenient for all Men to carry about them, such Things as were necessary to express the particular Business they are to discourse on . . . .
>
> Another great Advantage proposed by this Invention, was, that it would serve as an Universal Language to be understood in all civilized Nations, whose Goods and Utensils are generally of the same kind . . . .[31]

Swift's laughter and criticism of the proposed language reforms suggests, of course, the futility of the reforms, the kind of wrong-road approach taken by semanticists in the pre-Darwinian culture; but the laughter also suggests that the whole problem of language and communications was not yet deadly serious. The reforms proposed were serious, of course, but even the proposers did not suggest that without the reforms no communication should take place or that any serious consequences would result. Things would just be better if communication could be improved. Indeed, a half century later, Laurence Sterne was to write one of the most semantically-oriented novels ever written, Tristram Shandy, in which he vigorously explores all the semantic difficulties imaginable in human experience and gives some of the most telling instances of communication

---

[30]Louis A. Landa (ed.), Gulliver's Travels and Other Writings by Jonathan Swift (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Riverside Edition, 1960), p. 512.

[31]Ibid., pp. 150-51.

failures. But Tristram Shandy is humorous, not tragic. And even in the face of all the communication failures and semantic idiocies, men survive, even joyously. Apparently, semantic awareness in the pre-Darwinian era inevitably leads to an optimistic view of communication situations at the very time semantic problems are acknowledged. Even when men recognized the rickety nature of the language machine, even when they were attempting to repair and fix the language instrument, even when they admitted that the language vehicle was not getting them where they wanted to go as speedily and smoothly as they might wish, they nevertheless took their communication journey in high spirits, trusting that the ultimate outcome would be satisfactory if not perfect.

4.

Of far greater concern, actually, to the pre-Darwinian world than the semantic problem in language was the problem of social usage. If there were difficulties in communication, the pre-Darwinian world saw them as the result, not of inadequate language or even an inadequate semantic use of language, but of the corruption of man. Language was merely an instrument, and any failure with the instrument was primarily the result, not of unskilled men, but of insincere and even immoral men. Words had social and moral values as well as communicative values; the communicative values were rarely questioned, but the social and moral values were given great attention.

As late as 1837, Emerson had said that "The corruption of man is followed by the corruption of language," and the order of those events reflects the pre-Darwinian attitude. Dickens was saying the same thing when he said he was tired of hearing about "the tyranny of words," since

he was "less concerned with the way words abuse us than with the way we abuse words."[32] The question was one of taste and morality, and semantic awareness in the pre-Darwinian era must always be considered in the light of such matters as society and decorum and manners. Even Locke, in all his concern with language, felt that popular usage, just as it was, served the market place and exchange satisfactorily.[33] And Bacon, even earlier, had seen the problem of communication in social terms, and aristocratic terms at that: "Essentially, the difficulty is mass communication, or rather participation by the masses in the communication process."[34] The real trouble with language, with communication, was the misuse of it, the social abuse of it, the indecorous use of it. What the pre-Darwinian era really feared and hated and questioned was not inadequate communication, but distorted or perverted communication, the distortion and perversion being measured in social rather than scientific terms. Caliban says in The Tempest, "You taught me language, and my profit on't/ Is, I know how to curse." And this was what the pre-Darwinian world was essentially concerned about; not communication failure, but the curse within communication. And the "curse" of language is extended in meaning to include all sorts of distortions and misuses, even to include language that is insignificant and meaningless and empty.

Ben Jonson, in particular, attacked and satirized this sort of language curse. Jonson deals with the misuse of language and with meaningless communication as a symbol of moral disorder, and nearly all his

---

[32]quoted in Lionel Trilling, op. cit., p. 187.

[33]John Locke, op. cit., pp. 148-49.

[34]Renwick, loc. cit., p. 86.

major comedies are plays not of noncommunication but of insignificant communication and perverted communication, wherein characters like Jack Daw or Subtle become prototypes of language abusers. In The Staple of News, for instance, the great attack, carried on primarily by Pennyboy Canter, is against cant or the meaningless language of the jeerers. Jonson saw throughout his plays communication reduced, by way of cant, to blatant noise. Even in such an early masque as Cynthia's Revels he satirizes a courtly society who amuse themselves by playing the game of "Substantives and Adjectives," in which the players ingeniously fit adjectives to unlikely nouns. His attack, as usual, is against the trivial and lighthearted use of language.

Almost as reprehensible, in the pre-Darwinian view, as distorted or insignificant language, is language that violates one's sense of aesthetics and decorum. The Mistress Quicklys and the Mrs. Malaprops not only twisted language but robbed it of its loveliness. Sweet words are spoiled, not communicatively but aesthetically, when they"Are muttered o'er by men, whose tones proclaim/ How flat and wearisome they felt their trade." This socio-aesthetic concept of language is expressed clearly by Samuel Johnson:

> Language is the dress of thought; and as the noblest mien, or most graceful action, would be degraded and obscured by a garb appropriated to the gross employments of rusticks or mechanics so the most heroic sentiments will lose their efficacy, and the most splendid ideas drop their magnificence, if they are conveyed by words used commonly upon low and trivial occasions, debased by vulgar mouths, and contaminated by inelegant applications.[35]

Pre-Darwinian men charged one another not so much with the lack

---

[35]Samuel Johnson, "Cowley," Lives of the English Poets, ed. George B. Hill (3 vols.; Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1905), I, pp. 58-59.

of clarity as with the lack of taste or significance in communication. To question with a wicked tongue brought forth answers with an idle tongue. To speak rudely was to be censured; to speak lowly was to lower one's social status. It is true that not only in America, as Lionel Trilling points out, but in England as well, "Our most fervent interest in manners has been linguistic," and an accent or dialect was long, and in some cases still is, regarded as a social stigma rather than a communication barrier.[36]

This social criticism of and attitude toward language was corollary, of course, to the assumption that both communication and noncommunication were controlled by social considerations and were not the result of incapacities, inherent or acquired, in either man or the language medium. Men failed to communicate only because it was not politic to communicate or was not socially proper to do so. One was advised to "Give thy thoughts no tongue . . .," and to "Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice," and Hamlet, when he cries, "But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue," is refusing to communicate, not because he himself is incapacitated, but because the situation does not tolerate communication; it is neither politic nor gracious to communicate at the present time. And when Hamlet addresses his father's ghost with "Speak. I am bound to hear," we notice the importance of the word "bound." One speaks and listens, just as one fails to speak or listen, as the result of status, occasion, propriety. If one fails to abide by the propriety, one is criticized. "The truth you speak doth lack some gentleness./ And time to speak it in." So Gonzalo expresses the general criticsm and attitude of the age, an attitude that

---

[36]Trilling, op. cit., p. 253.

lasts throughout the pre-Darwinian era.[37]

Since language was conceived as an adequate communication instrument but as a flawed social instrument, the most grievous communication problem, the most grievous case of communication failure, was that of false or insincere communication. "Good God," Katherine exclaims, in Henry V, "the tongues of men are full of trickeries." And the old order feared the "candied tongue" and the "painted word" as the primary ingredients in inadequate communication. Inadequate communication was simply false communication, the communication that, like poison in the king's ear, kills and destroys. To be deceived is as bad as to fail to understand. The lie, in other words, joins the curse as one of the two great language crimes in the pre-Darwinian world, crimes that far transcend any problem in semantics. For as the Houyhnhms explained to Gulliver,

> . . . the use of Speech was to make us understand one another, and to receive Information of Facts; now if any one said the Thing which was not, these Ends were defeated; because I cannot properly be said to understand him; and I am so far from receiving Information, that he leaves me worse than in Ignorance; for I am led to believe a Thing Black when it is White, and Short when it is Long.[38]

Thus "our human speech is nought," when we find "Our human testimony false,"--as Browning says--and the plea of the pre-Darwinian centuries becomes, essentially, a plea less for semantically accurate and adequate communication, more for the better moral use of communication. Not so much accuracy, but candor, as Whitman, again late in the older order,

---

[37]George Bernard Shaw, whose semantic awareness reflects the old order more than the new, depicts frequently a society that values language more as a social instrument than as a communication instrument (see Pygmalion).

[38]Louis A. Landa, op. cit., pp. 193-94.

still expressing the sentiments of semantic optimism, says in the 1882 Preface to Leaves of Grass: "All faults may be forgiven him who has perfect candor. Henceforth, let no man of us lie, for we have seen that openness wins the inner and outer world . . . ."

5.

The significant features of this earlier order of semantic awareness are its general optimism and melioristic position. Communication failures appear partial rather than complete; language appears as an adequate medium; man's use of language appears as behavior subject to social and moral improvement. The faults and flaws in language behavior are actually rooted in extra-linguistic areas of experience, and the gravest crimes to emerge from these faults and flaws are those of false, not broken, communication.

Such an attitude toward language and communication contributes to and reflects the general cultural attitude of the post-Renaissance world. Indeed, "our present age of pessimism, despair, and uncertainty succeeds a quite different earlier period of optimism, hope, and certainty--a period when man believed in himself and the work of his hands, had faith in the powers of reason and science, trusted his gods, and conceived his own capacity for growth as endless and his widening horizons limitless."[39] What caused the change from this happier world to the present, what caused the change from faith in communication to the loss of faith in communication, is actually a complex series of events and attitudes, a revolution in both the world of ideas and the world of experience that wrought a

---

[39]Eric and Mary Josephson (eds.), Man Alone: Alienation in Modern Society (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1962), p. 10.

cultural metamorphosis, the dimensions of which even yet are difficult to measure.

CHAPTER III

A TIME OF CHANGE

> There is the general feeling, to be sure, that we have reached a significant turning point in the ages, but people imagine that the great change has to do with nuclear fission and fusion or with space rockets. What is concurrently taking place in the human psyche is usually overlooked.[1]

Late in the nineteenth and in the early twentieth century a new world emerged that could no longer support the old order of semantic awareness. It was a new world of experience and idea that completed a reevaluation of language and communications, a revaluation that marks a transition from a generally optimistic view to a generally pessimistic view of man's use of words and other communication devices. Understanding this new world provides a basis for understanding the semantic developments of our time, for not only did this new world cause a change in the understanding of language functions, but also caused the pathos of communications to develop.

Darwin's Origin of the Species marks the beginning of this new world's appearance, but all the phenomena of the new world are not necessarily an immediate outgrowth of Darwinian thought. For the new world is not only an intellectual-scientific creation; it is also an outgrowth of

---

[1]C. J. Jung, "Jung's View of Christianity" /from Memories, Dreams, Reflections, recorded and edited by Amiela Jaffe, trans. by Richard and Clara Winston/, The Atlantic Monthly, CCXI (January, 1963), p. 64.

events in the economic-technological area and in the social-cultural area. Although Darwin's great work conveniently marks a point of no return in the development of the modern world, not all the experiences and ideas in the modern world are necessarily indebted to Darwin or explicable in Darwinian terms.

Actually the new world is a vast complex of forces and phenomena of diverse order, all seeming to contribute, one way or the other, to three basic problems that mark man's condition in the twentieth century and provide the basis for the new semantic awareness that is symptomatic of our time. The three basic problems are the loss of adequate identification within some recognizable social group; the loss of personal freedom in the face of increasingly inflexible and totalitarian social and political structures; and the loss of acknowledged absolutes and certainties, not only in ideological fields, but in scientific fields as well.

In reaction to these losses that developed in the new world of idea and experience, man's attitude toward so basic a social behavior as language began to change. Seeing himself both alienated and imprisoned within a shifting, uncertain world he began to put emphasis upon the contact and communion with the world that his use of language and other communication devices would seem to provide; yet at the same time, his overwhelming sense of loss seemed an indictment of communication itself, a constant reminder of communication failure, and he more and more discounted the efficacy of communication, noting that in spite of all his communication efforts his sense of loss remained.

What are the forces and phenomena that brought modern man to pessimism, that robbed him of his earlier optimism regarding himself, his

language, his communications? What are the characteristics of the new world--the characteristics that are themselves the causes of the new world--that have alienated, imprisoned, and robbed man and forced him to a new order of semantic awareness, almost antithetical to the old? The forces are numerous, of course, but a few of the more significant ones can be cited in order to indicate the powerful transition that occurred from an old semantic view to a new one.

2.

Perhaps the most striking features of the new world are its increased industrialization, urbanization, and over-population. Technological and political revolutions that had begun late in the eighteenth century and that had been continued throughout the nineteenth came to their maturity at the end of the nineteenth century and gave birth in turn to a complex of sociological and economic problems. Eric and Mary Josephson, in an admiral commentary on an alienated society,[2] describe the development of the isolated individual that took place as the result of economic, political, and technological changes in our society. They point out that the great revolutions had a "shattering impact on a rigid social order,"[3] with the result that "one of the most disturbing phenomena of Western culture has been man's sense of estrangement from the world he himself has made or inherited--in a word, man's alienation from himself and from others."[4]

---

[2]Eric and Mary Josephson (eds.), op. cit.

[3]Ibid., p. 10.

[4]Ibid.

This alienation is to a certain extent rooted in the machine. The machine, developed late in the eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth century, increasingly impersonalized the economic world, reducing the human being to something of a machine, relieving the human being more and more of many of his significant activities. Thorstein Veblen suggested that modern life "is guided by the machine process, the course of things is given mechanically, impersonally, and the resultant discipline is a discipline in the handling of impersonal facts for mechanical effect."[5] And Henry Adams, of course, defined the machine as the culprit of the age, seeing in the dynamo the inhuman divinity that ruled the modern world. As Adams looked at the dynamos exhibited at the 1900 Paris Exposition, he

> began to feel the forty-foot dynamos as a moral force much as the early Christians felt the Cross . . . . Before the end one began to pray to it; inherited instinct taught the natural expression of man before silent and infinite force. Among the thousand symbols of ultimate energy, the dynamo was not so human as some, but it was the most expressive.[6]

Confronted with the machine, men were actually relieved of a great deal of communication experience, for suddenly their colleague in economic and business matters was a noncommunicative instrument, the inarticulate robot, who could not answer or converse, who--if he ever were to speak, as the modern computors of our day seem to do--would speak only what he had been told to say, echo back to us our own words.

In yet another way, the machine contributed to a change in communication habits. In those cases where the machine provided increased leisure and less labor, men failed to employ their new free time in any

---

[5]quoted in Josephson, op. cit., p. 20.

[6]Henry Adams, The Education of Henry Adams (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1946), p. 380.

maturing way; failed to grow up--in a certain sense of the word. A failure to grow up may well contribute to a modification of previous adult communication habits, and communication may well change when left in the hands of children and adolescents, even when those children and adolescents are fifty and sixty year old people in charge of society and culture.

Significantly, too, the machine gave rise to the industrial revolution with its industrial society and class consciousness, and with an increased antagonism of social classes. Class distinctions became social abysses over which communications seemingly could not leap; with the "breakdown of traditional community bonds,"[7] even the will to communicate was lessened. Also within the industrial city, dominated by the machine, there arose on all class levels a new sense of "norm" and "standard"--the great criteria of a mass-production society--that was to alienate more and more individuals and groups within the industrial society. Not only had the industrial cities of England and America attracted peoples of all races and nationalities, but the industrial cities harbored the inevitable and natural minorities within any society. All different people--peoples of different race, nationality, and religion; even the "young, the aged, the physically handicapped, the sex deviant"[8]--were made to feel outside the machine-controlled, one-standard society that flourished with industrialization, and people outside were faced with communication problems

---

[7]Josephson, op. cit., p. 33.

[8]Ibid., p. 35.

in trying to deal with those inside.[9]

In general, the machine and the industrial revolution that it prompted wrought great changes on the human personality; in fact, the industrial revolution may be considered a "characterological" revolution.[10] And with changes in character came changes in language habits and in communication processes. With the loss of social identity, with a loss of a sense of humanity, with the burden of alienation from the human spirit and from fellow man, the modern man grew increasingly suspicious of the generally optimistic world-view that had prevailed; modern man was prepared to alter his semantic awareness. (Interestingly enough, this new semantic awareness was accompanied by what may be called a neo-infantilism in language habits of the masses. The machine produced not only alienation; it also produced--at least after the initial stage of mechanization was played out--an increased amount of leisure for many people. Many people began to "play" more, and in their "return to the playground," reverted to language habits of abbreviation, sing-song, syntactical reduction, and the like.)[11]

Not only has the new world been marked by industrialization, and accompanying problems, but it has also been marked by international militarism on a scale never before known in history. Perhaps such militarism

---

[9]Cultures have always, at all times, managed to shove some people "outside." One culture may protect the aged while practicing infanticide. Another culture may do the opposite. The pernicious quality of modern ostracism is that it is more frequently subtle, tacit, and unadmitted. Denying a caste system on the one hand, while practicing a caste system on the other surely creates more frustrations than an out-in-the-open admission that some people are "in" and others "out."

[10]Josephson, op. cit., p. 18.

[11]Above, p. 38.

is an outgrowth of the machine, too; certainly the new economic problems introduced by the machine, the greatly larger populations supportable by the machine--these were factors in bringing about the great wars of the world that have raged since late in the nineteenth century. Also the technological know-how growing out of mechanized economy made possible the development of an increasingly complex weaponry that, in turn, made possible the extension of the horrors of war over wider and wider areas. Beginning with the Franco-Prussian War, tortuously maturing with World War I, climaxing in World War II, the military spirit of the modern world has contributed greatly to a new semantic awareness, for war not only alienates one culture from another but war is a direct contradiction of any philosophy of optimism, and with the demolishing of optimism, the semantic awareness based upon an idealistic view of the world is demolished also.

Following the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War, "a wave of pessimism and materialism, spreading across the Channel from defeated France, swept many men of letters into an aesthetic isolation from practical life . . . ."[12] Following World War I, there was a repudiation of a chaotic world and a rejection of values[13] that once had supported communication experience. Following the horrors of Nazism and World War II, men at last stared inexpressible tragedy in the face, and as Lionel Trilling says,

> The facade is down; society's resistance to the discovery of depravity has ceased; now everyone knows that Thackeray was

---

[12]Samuel C. Chew, "The Nineteenth Century and After," A Literary History of England, ed., Albert C. Baugh (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1948), p. 1449.

[13]Ibid., p. 1582.

> wrong, Swift right . . . the great psychological fact of our time which we all observe with baffled wonder and shame is that there is no possible way of responding to Belsen and Buchenwald. The activity of mind fails before the incommunicability of man's suffering.[14]

Modern militarism and the machine that preceded it have together contributed to a world of alienation and isolation and to a world of inexpressible experience. Obvious repercussions have taken place in the world of language, for, as Van Wyck Brooks comments in discussing American culture after World War I, "It was no use to talk to the young about 'sacred' and 'glorious' things especially when the war had traduced them further; and the more sacred one felt they were, the more one felt it was obscene to use the words or even think about them."[15] Militarism and the machine contributed mightily to a changed semantic awareness, to a rejection of certain vocabularies, to a revaluation of communication, to a revised faith in communication possibilities. And even while this alteration of semantic awareness was taking shape, other economic, political, and cultural forces emerged that threatened to inhibit communications even further.

Primarily these new forces were the outgrowth of the mass society produced by the machine and industrialization. Depersonalized and urbanized, the new industrial society was also large. Neither our wars nor our diseases have seemed adequate to keep population in control. And with a mass society have come various forms of regimentation, socialism, and totalitarianisms that, in spite of whatever virtues of order and control

---

[14]Trilling, op. cit., p. 256.

[15]Van Wyck Brooks, New England: Indian Summer (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1940), p. 498.

they may bring, bring various forms of conformity, imprisonment, and restrictiveness that militate against free and open communication. "Perhaps the basic difference between the semantic investigations of the seventeenth and twentieth centuries," Renwick says, "lies in their divergent social climates, the seventeenth century being dominated by the few, and our times by the many."[16]

The "many" joins the machine and militarism as a shaping force in the modern world, and modern man is faced with the overwhelming power of large numbers of people, machine-oriented, who create, for the sake of self-preservation, various forms of socialistic, dictatorial, and paternalistic political systems that--instead of providing the stabilizing social structures that once supported communication--prove themselves to be deceptive social structures that in actuality destroy communication experience by rigorously controlling all such experience.

John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer both argued in the nineteenth century against paternalism, regimentation, and socialism, on the grounds that such ideologies tend to destroy human freedom and consequently individual communication.[17] And in our new world, the mass society, increasingly controlled by regimenting institutions, becomes the victim of controlled communications and "managed news." The "many," in necessarily surrendering their freedom to small powerful elites, let the elite monopolize the means of communication,"[18] and the individual, within the many, finds himself the victim of a one-way communication process.

---

[16] Renwick, loc. cit., p. 93.

[17] Fuller, op. cit., pp. 403-408.

[18] Josephson, op.cit., pp. 42-43.

> Mass society weakens or destroys traditional human groupings, thus leaving the individual at the mercy of impersonal 'communication,' such as newspaper and radio. In addition, the process of communication itself, presumably a two-way system, tends to become a one-way street, with individuals more on the receiving or taking end than on the giving end. How does one talk back to a TV screen? As a result, the information of opinion is facilitated for those who control the channels of communication--whether they be propagandists in a military dictatorship or the advertising industry in our society; the stage is set for manipulation of tastes and opinions as obstacles to mass persuasion are removed.[19]

3.

Victim of the machine, militarism, and the "many," modern man finds himself, not only less and less in control of communication on a social scale, not only more and more restricted and inhibited in communication experience, but he finds himself deprived of two of the prerequisites for successful creation of communication, no matter how limited that communication may be. These prerequisites are social conventions and common experiences.

In a new industrial society, seemingly without forms and conventions, and in a detached, isolated state, removed from institutions and events that once provided common communication ground, man faces a world of normlessness--what Emile Durkheim calls anomie.[20] Language being itself a conventional system of symbols, communication is always dependent upon certain agreements within any given group of people, agreements about the meanings of words and phrases, meanings of syntactical arrangements, and the like. Such agreements come about, however, only through common experience and through reference to common beliefs, traditions, faiths.

---

[19] Ibid., p. 42.

[20] Ibid., p. 13.

Communication is more than simply a manipulation of language; it depends upon common events and feelings. A word defined by other words is only partially defined; until a word is defined by common experience within a common framework of values, it will not work effectively within communications.

In the new world, however, conventions and experiences and values once held in common have disappeared. Mass standardization and norm-establishment are not the same as organically active values and forms. The former are negative, the latter are positive. And "it was the atrophy of positive convention during the nineteenth century,"[21] and "a pervasive sense of social disintegration,"[22] in the twentieth that led, finally, to a "cynical repudiation of all standards,"[23] and "a disgust with history and society and the state."[24] More and more men gave up a faith in such common ground as family, state, nation, church, or what have you. And in the face of growing materialistic and mechanistic philosophies, such as that of Ernst Haeckel, men were inclined even to give up such common reference-ideas as God, freedom, immortality; man began to "suffer from lack of faith in a transcendent truth."[25] And modern man began, therefore, a deep and profound search wherein he "is constantly and anxiously looking around for external rules and regulations which can guide him in

---

[21]J. W. Lever, The Elizabethan Love Sonnet (London: Metheun & Co., Ltd., 1956), p. 57.

[22]Chew, loc. cit., p. 1454.

[23]Ibid., p. 1584.

[24]Trilling, op. cit., pp. 256-57.

[25]Basil Willey, The Seventeenth Century Background (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1953), p. 18.

his perplexity . . . ."[26] Paradoxically, however, man's quest has led him, not to new forms of stabilization to replace the old, not to new permanent foundations to replace the shaken foundations of the old world. Rather, man's quest has led him to the great, profound observations of modern psychology and physics, wherein truth itself has taken on new complexion, truth itself has become a matter of relativity rather than absolutism.

Without attempting to rehearse a history of modern psychology, we can nevertheless note a major result of this ideological revolution, especially as Sigmund Freud affected it. As psychology relates to language and communication, perhaps Freud's chief contribution was his showing that "no image or symbol has one meaning alone, for it carries with it at least its opposite in the unconscious or in dreams."[27] It is this "perception of the hidden element of human nature and of the opposition between the hidden and the visible,"[28] that not only militated against any discovery of absolutes but also militated against the old faith in anything like absolutely perfect communication. Indeed, "the idea of the hidden thing went forward to become one of the dominant notions of the age."[29] This dominant notion that apparent truth is not real truth did little to assuage man's quest for a common field of reference or commonly recognized truth, and furthermore, this dominant notion contributed mightily toward

---

[26]Jung, loc. cit., p. 62.

[27]Frederick Karl and Marvin Megalaner, A Reader's Guide to Great Twentieth Century English Novels (New York: The Noonday Press, 1959), p. 34.

[28]Trilling, op. cit., p. 34.

[29]Ibid.

a new semantic awareness, a new attitude toward communications. Man began to think Freudian-like, always sensitive to the hidden beneath the obvious, always assuming that the "truth" or the "real" was somewhere beyond the surface of things, always hidden within. The old joke about the psychiatrist, being greeted by a friend, "Good morning, how are you?" and pausing to ask the question, "What did he mean by that?" is an example of the kind of Freudian doubt that began to affect semantic attitudes and subsequently communications. To a certain extent, one may argue that Freudian and related psychologies have actually provided the modern world with a common field of reference, but the trouble in that observation lies in the fact that a unique field of reference is not what man needs. He needs fields of reference--plural. He needs more ways than one to talk. And more than that, the Freudian field of reference has in many cases become dictatorial; it has, in the hands of some, become more than a field of reference--it has become the one language into which all other languages must be translated. An extreme Freudian position actually subverts communication, because it makes Freudianism a kind of magnet that pulls all symbols to it and, regardless of meanings attached to the symbols of others, makes of those symbols a part of the Freudian discourse.

This misuse, if we call it that, of Freudianism is most clearly seen in what has always been a communications curse--the innuendo--but which in the Freudian age has taken on definite anti-communication proportions. To say one thing and mean another has always presented communication problems, but to say one thing and to be accused of saying another, or burdened with saying another, is a grievous problem. In Freudian semantics there is no such thing as a non-Freudian statement; all statements

have Freudian meanings. The college boy--or the office worker or the artist or who have you--who gives sexual meaning to every word he hears is merely carrying on, in a work-a-day manner, a Freudian attitude toward language; he is translating all meaning back into a single meaning. And as Lionel Trilling well puts another side of this problem:

> A specter haunts our culture--it is that people will eventually be unable to say, 'They fell in love and married,' . . . but will as a matter of course say, 'Their libidinal impulses being reciprocal, they activated their individual erotic drives and integrated them within the same frame of reference.' Now this is not the language of abstract thought or of any thought. It is the language of non-thought.[30]

Freudianism, it would seem for all the light it has thrown on human behavior, has, as the result of the misuse made of it, served to inhibit communication and has contributed to a new semantic attitude.

Likewise the new science, particularly the new physics, though contributing to great and wonderful achievements, has contributed to a semantic awareness that is essentially doubtful and pessimistic. The new science has not only contributed to the destruction of old value systems, but has also pointed to a relativistic universe in which no permanent or absolute value system or system of references could be established. Just as in the past the developments in astronomy "had already made man and his earth of infinitesimal significance,"[31] so Darwinism had placed man in the animal kingdom, psychology had seemed to make man "a creature of blind impulses and automatic responses to stimuli,"[32] and a new physics,

---

[30] Ibid., p. 276.

[31] Merle Curti, The Growth of American Thought (2nd ed.; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1943), p. 706.

[32] Ibid.

at least by the early decades of the twentieth century, had "made it clear that many of the long-accepted views of the universe were in reality not universal and final law . . . the scientists were less convinced of absolutes and certainties within the realm of science."[33] As a result, reality "can no longer be thought of as the orderly stable uniform causally determined and mathematically calculable affair it was of yore. It rather suggests a core of caprice and chance and spontaneity and indeterminism, in whose sheer madness there is no method."[34]

Scientists and philosopher-scientists have both contributed to this new view of the universe. Spencer, in the second half of the nineteenth century, had anticipated "the relativity of all human knowledge to perceived phenomena," and suggested that any sort of "absolute and the unconditioned must be, in the nature of things, forever unknowable."[35] Later Henri Poincare argued that ". . . it is impossible to assert an absolute fact;" many of our simplest scientific statements--i.e. the earth moves around the sun--"depends entirely upon where we take our stand."[36] Santayana, in the twentieth century, has said.

> Possession of the absolute truth is not merely by accident beyond the range of particular minds; it is incompatible with being alive, because it excludes any particular station, organ, interest, or date of survey: the absolute truth is undiscoverable just because it is not a perspective. Perspectives are essential to animal apprehension; an observer, himself a part of the world he observes, must have a particular station in it; he cannot be equally near to everything, nor

---

[33] Ibid.

[34] Fuller, op. cit., p. 511.

[35] Ibid., 406.

[36] Ibid., p. 417.

> internal to anything but himself; of the rest he can only take views, abstracted according to his sensibility and foreshortened according to his interests.[37]

Hans Vaihinger, the German philosopher, established the philosophy of the "as if," wherein he argued that our scientific, theological, moral, and social assumptions are not at all true to experience: "On the contrary they are falsifications of experience in the interest of great convenience and edification. They are fictions--stories that it is pleasanter or more profitable to tell ourselves about the facts than to accept and transcribe the facts as they are . . . ."[38] Such philosophers as Heisenberg and Schrodinger, observing the new discoveries in physics, postulated a "principle of uncertainty," according to which

> it proves impossible in the first place to determine with mathematical precision either position or the orbit of an electron, and in the second, even to approximate an exact formulation without at the same time proportionately decreasing the certainty of our computation of the electron's movement. The physicist thus finds himself between the devil and the deep blue sea,[39]

for he finds the physical universe, in its elemental phase, operating in a totally random and erratic fashion.

Perhaps all the new science and the new scientific philosophy is summarized in the work and theories of Albert Einstein--a theory of relativity itself.

> In physics, Einstein's theory of time as a 'fourth dimension,' of the relativity of motion, of the non-Euclidean nature of space, and of the equivalence of the mass of a body with its momentum, have brought into question many of the fundamental

---

[37]George Santayana, The Realm of Essence: Book First of Realm of Being (London: Constable and Company, 1928), p. xiii.

[38]Fuller, op. cit., p. 478.

[39]Ibid., p. 510.

> principles of the old physics. To this has been added the development of the quantum theory based upon the discovery that energy, far from delivering itself in a continuous flow, comes in irregular beats and puffs for whose separated and capricious occurrence no reason can be found or even conceived.[40]

The new universe, in other words, is not dependable. Without the sense of the absolute, man has grown uncertain and insecure, and that uncertainty and insecurity have colored his semantic attitudes, his understanding of communications. The symbols of his discourse suddenly have become less reliable, for the symbols themselves seem to have only relative meaning now, relative meanings operative within a relative universe. How is man to catch understanding on the wing? How is he to hold the moment still and make contact with another being?

But not only is the universe relative; it is mysterious.[41] What man had thought was expressible within the realm of symbols and language now seems to slip away from the realm of expression. The symbols of language seem now only to point to emptiness and darkness. As early as such philosophers as Spencer, Lange, and Emile Dubois Reymond, in the second half of the nineteenth century, there were growing suspicions about the unknowability--and hence the inexpressibility--of reality. "Spencer agrees with Hamilton, Mansel, and Mill in regarding the nature of Reality as a mystery which it is beyond the power of the human mind to grasp,"[42] and Reymond proclaimed that ". . . we must resign ourselves to the fact that

---

[40] Ibid.

[41] Sir James Jeans
Always says what he means:
He really is quite serious
About the universe being mysterious.--E. C. Bentley

[42] Fuller, op. cit., p. 406.

we can never know the answer and must remain forever ignorant."[43] By the twentieth century, it was generally agreed among philosophers, scientists, and ordinary citizens that we live "with the knowledge that a good deal of life is inexpressible,"[44] for the "final intelligibility of the world is no longer accepted."[45]

4.

Alienated from fellow man, imprisoned within the restrictions of dictatorial and mass societies, staring into a constantly changing and inexpressibly awesome universe, man began, as early as the 1890s, that gruelling experience of readjustment that marks his twentieth-century experience. Not willing simply to surrender to utter nihilism--though this possibility was presented to him--he began to change his philosophies and his intellectual attitudes in order both to describe accurately his situation and to survive as best he possibly could. His reaction was not one of utter denial of the past, although the cleavage with the past was extreme. His reaction was rather a kind of metamorphosis out of the past into the new world, out of certainty into question. His new position was not so much a brand new position as it was a reshaping of the old, a re-adjustment, and accepting into his position questions and doubts that he would rather have ignored, indeed perhaps had ignored for centuries.

Modern man's philosophies and intellectual attitudes were now imbued "with the sense that everything is questionable, problematic. Our

---

[43] Ibid., p. 416.

[44] Gibson, op. cit., p. x.

[45] William Barrett, Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy (London: Heinemann, 1961), p. 49.

time, said Max Scheler, is the first in which man has become thoroughly and completely problematic to himself."[46] Included within the changing and problematical philosophies and intellectual attitudes were, of course, man's aesthetics and his semantic awareness. Man was having to change his attitude about language in order to deal with the diverse, uncertain, and sometimes hidden nature of reality at the same time he was having to explore the possibilities of achieving a workable system of communications in a world that threatened, or at least discouraged, communications.

The old semantic awareness gave way to its modern replacement: the pathos of communications. Within this pathos, there was less conviction that the senses were the road to truth,[47] less certainty about the sensory relationship of language symbols and reality, more sensitivity to language's being a subjective creative act much of the time. A new understanding of communication arose that, though at times enlightened with scientific hope, though at times highly organized and analytical, was generally shot through with pessimism. The broken word served as foundation for a pathos that, though embracing many of the observations and truths of the old semantic awareness, had come to far different conclusions and faced far different challenges.

---

[46] Ibid., p. 56.

[47] Renwick, loc. cit., p. 92.

CHAPTER IV

LITERATURE AND THE NEW AWARENESS

> The master-songs are ended, and the man
> That sang them is the name. And so is God
> A name; and so is love, and life, and death,
> And everything. But we, who are too blind
> To read what we have written, or what faith
> Has written for us, do not understand:
> We only blink, and wonder.[1]

Even while the anti-communication forces of the late nineteenth century were yet beginning their revision of the world and their emasculation of the old semantic awareness, the new pathos of communications was being articulated by poets, dramatists, and novelists. This articulation has served, all the way from the 1890s to the present, as the second phase of the pathos' anatomy, as the articulative bridge between the historical, sociological, scientific, and ideological events that were creating the broken word and the cultural recognition and acceptance of the broken word as a prime issue in modern life. Though the pathos of communication, i.e. the new semantic awareness, has been discussed in reams of scientific and technical literature written by linguists and semanticists, it has been the articulation, expression, and discussion of the broken word in major British and American literature that has made the pathos of communications a part of contemporary Anglo-American daily

---

[1]Edwin Arlington Robinson, "Walt Whitman," The Torrent and the Night Before (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1896), pp. 31-32.

life. Without the literary consideration of the broken word, the pathos of communications would not have developed; without the literary consideration, the new semantic awareness would have remained simply an academic issue and contemporary man would, in general, have been removed from any discussion of his communication problems.

As it is, however, British and American writers have maintained a constant survey and analysis of a variety of communication problems and have helped formulate a variety of semantic positions. Immensely alert to language itself and immensely sensitive to human behavior, serious writers of the twentieth century have presented the modern semantic awareness more effectively than the professional semanticists and linguists themselves and have related semantics to human behavior better than the professional psychologists or "general semanticists." Writers, at their best, have the sense of language that non-literary professionals frequently do not have. Writers, at their best, have that keen insight into life that many non-literary professionals either have but fail to express very well or have had but lost during careers of statistics, theories, and professional commitments. Writers, in many ways, have been freer than any other group in the twentieth century to survey the new semantic awareness and to articulate that awareness for both the professionals and the public.

Certainly the literature of the twentieth century ranges widely over the problem of communications and the nature of language. Nearly every significant writer has touched upon at least one major aspect of the communication situation and some writers have erected vast and elaborate structures of semantic awareness in the course of their work. Though certainly there is no common agreement in modern literature as to the exact

nature and cause of communication difficulties or to the exact capacity and function of language, agreement does seem to exist that a problem is upon us, a problem the significance of which in the lives of human beings is worth discussion and comment. And even a quick and cursory promenade through modern literature reveals the richness of that discussion and comment, the diversity and the depth. At heart, the discussion, admittedly, is more pessimistic than hopeful. The feeling seems to be that modern man has grown increasingly inarticulate--our threads of thought "are freezing on the doorsteps of the house of my mind," as Sherwood Anderson says; has grown increasingly nonreceptive to the communication of others--we are too blind "to read what we have written, or what faith/ Has written for us," and therefore "do not understand," as Edwin Arlington Robinson says; and has encountered, even if he can articulate, an increasingly unresponsive world--"Is there anybody there?' said the Traveller,/ Knocking on the moonlit door." But even pessimism has its range of possibilities; there is, as it were, a light pessimism and a dark pessimism, and the semantic discussion in modern literature approaches the problem of communications from various points on the compass.

2.

In 1905, E. M. Forster published his first novel, Where Angels Fear to Tread, and makes in that novel a plea, as it were, for the importance of communication in human affairs. Forster recognized all the growing problems of the modern world and recognized, no doubt, the emergence of a new semantic awareness, but saw problems and difficulties only as emphasizing the role that communications should play in human life. Indeed, in his first novel, Forster presents a kind of tragedy of

communication. Yet even in the tragedy communication is important, for the tragedy grows out of the way people talk to one another. So convinced was Forster of the role of communications that "the crucial years from 1905 to the late Twenties--which included the trauma of the First World War--had if anything reinforced his convictions with respect to the importance of communication and communion among people of varying lands, religions, and social backgrounds."[2] All his novels are full of obvious and overt communication efforts, full of letters and postcards and conversations, communications of all sorts--"spoken, written, psychically transmitted."[3] For Forster, the attempt at communication, at least, is a good thing, and though it may not work all the time, when it does work, it is as Septimus, in Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway, says: "Communication is health; communication is happiness." And even in failure, a certain virtue inheres in the very attempt; Winston Smith notes in Orwell's 1984, "To mark the paper was the decisive act."

Communication is important, for within our humanity is the need and desire to communicate--a need and desire the old semantic awareness had also observed. Man's need, desire, and commitment to communicate is explored by Maxwell Anderson in Winterset (1935), especially in his creation of a character passionately in search of communication. Mio Romagna cries out, "I shall not keep quiet," as he searches for the truth about his executed father and as he seeks to reveal the truth once he knows it. Mio promises to communicate the truth "No further than the moon takes the tides" and he becomes almost messianic in his Whitmanesque promises to

---

[2]Karl and Magalaner, op. cit., p. 120.

[3]Ibid., p. 106.

give "ears to the deaf and voice to the dumb." And Mio's simple plea to Miriamne, "Stay and talk with me," is matched by her own need to hear verbalized his love for her: "Say once you love--say it once; I'll never/ ask to hear it twice . . . ." Why communicate, why verbalize? Esdras, Miriamne's elderly father, makes the point when he says there is no earth till men "have a word/ to say this is the earth." We speak, Anderson says, in order to make our earth; we speak, Winston Smith says, even when nobody can hear, in order to remain sane; we speak, Helmholtz, in Huxley's Brave New World, says, because we have the inexplicable desire to do so.

To a certain extent the recognition of the importance of communication and the recognition of the inevitable need to show forth in the word is a vestige of optimism in a semantic awareness that is otherwise essentially dark. And likewise vestigially optimistic is the recognition, similar to that in the old semantic awareness, of the great power of words. Just as Esdras points out that the word makes the earth, so Edwin Muir celebrates the word in his poem, "The Animals":

> For by words the world was called
> Out of the empty air,
> With words was shaped and walled--

Though language is to be criticized almost mercilessly in the twentieth century, Yeats could say, "Words alone are certain good," and Forster could approve of the barrier of language in that, even in its weakness, it lets pass what is only good. It is the power of words that Aldous Huxley discusses at some length in Brave New World (1932). "Words can be like X-rays, if you use them properly--they'll go through anything. You read and you're pierced." There is the "terrible beautiful magic" of words as they go rumbling in our heads, words that make possible even

our emotions as well as our ideas. So powerful are words that the totalitarian society satirized in Brave New World has to use them, but must make sure the words are without reason. And in Mrs. Dalloway, the single word "time" can set off a fountain of fantasy in one character's mind, while another character avoids the word "madness," substituting "not having a sense of proportion," knowing the power that a single, highly connotative word can have. Mrs. Dalloway herself comments on "the enormous resources of the English language, the power it bestows after all, of communicating feelings . . . ."

Even within this positive-thinking area of the new semantic awareness, there was, however, a criticism to be made of communication behavior--the criticism of inadequate communications. Huxley records in Crome Yellow the observation that "when a human response is needed, it is voided by vacuous talk," and Mrs. Dalloway is aware of her own tendency to talk nonsense, "saying things she didn't mean . . . ." Words are powerful, our desire to use them is powerful, our use of them is important, but even Forster recognizes that communication tends to evaporate in "small talk" and "nonsense" and "inane prattling." The motifs of "true communication versus mere suburban small talk"[4] run through all of Forster's novels, and in all of them he "hints at the sacrilege involved in allowing this gift of tongues to be debased by frivolous, insincere or superficial use."[5] This criticism of what Orwell calls "duckspeak," is, of course, the chief criticism made in the old semantic awareness, wherein communication failure is mainly the result of some moral or social failure. And certainly

---

[4] Ibid., p. 103.

[5] Ibid., p. 104.

the semantic awareness so far described is simply that of the pre-Darwinian world carried over--with a greater tone of concern perhaps--into the twentieth century. If, however, there is agreement with some portions of the old semantic awareness, there is a far greater rejection, or at least ignoring, of pre-Darwinian language thinking. Even when modern authors make the same observations that the old authors did, the modern authors are not supporting tradition or the past; they are articulating what they think is true here and now. They are not defending the old semantic awareness; they are restating universal truths for the sake of a new awareness to serve and reflect their times.

3.

Of great concern to twentieth-century authors has been, of course, the medium in which communication is to take place. The thought has prevailed in many quarters that perhaps a great deal of the difficulty in modern communications results from a devitalized, worn-out language that needs to be remodeled and reshaped for the modern world. Yeats, for instance, once lamented "the writer of some language exhausted by modern civilization," the writer who must "reject word after word." And Joseph Conrad deplored "the commonplace surface of words," the inadequacy "of the old, old words, worn thin, defaced by ages of careless usage." One of Virginia Woolf's characters in The Waves cries out at one place, "How tired I am of phrases that come down beautifully with all their feet on the ground!" And Hemingway explains in Death in the Afternoon that "all our words from loose using have lost their edge," just as in A Farewell to Arms he denounces the grand language that symbolized an old and inadequate world:

> I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain. We had heard them, sometimes standing in the rain almost out of earshot, so that only the shouted words came through, and had read them, on proclamations that were slapped up by billposters over other proclamations . . . and I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory . . . . There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity . . . . Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene . . . .

Essentially this is all a rejection of the old language, the language handed down--not just by the Victorian world--but by the whole pre-Darwinian civilization. It is a rejection that climaxes in such calls as that of Walter Lippmann who says "our business is to tear down this mighty structure of words, these imperial will-o'-the-wisps . . . ."

The old language was not only rejected, however. In the eyes of some, the old language was lost. Edna St. Vincent Millay did not call for a rejection of the old language, but was simply decrying the castration of that old language in the hands of the "advertisers." "It is advertising that has been the death of words," she says in Conversation at Midnight.

> The word "personal" now on an envelope means "impersonal" . . . . We are a nation of word-killers: hero, veteran, tragedy--Watch the great words go down.

John Dos Passos also agreed that the old language was inadequate, but the reason is that "strangers"--or so he says in USA--"have turned our language inside out who have taken the clean words our fathers spoke and made them slimy and foul." And Mio Romagno complains that the old words have lost their meaning and power because of the inroads of the new knowledge:

> . . . This men called love
> in happier times, before the
> Freudians taught us
> to blame it on the glands.

All seem to agree the old language has lost its power.[6] Some blame time and the ages for the debilitation. Others blame the forces of the modern world. Some cast the old language aside in scorn. Some lament its failure after its long history of grandeur. But in all cases the feeling was that the old language could no longer do the job. Regardless the cause, the old language could not serve modern man's communication needs. But dispensing with the old language did not always mean the authors had an adequate replacement on hand. Some authors of course--in fact most authors--kept right on using the old language, modernizing it as best possible, trying merely to record the language as it actually developed in the twentieth century, letting their characters communicate in the idioms of the day. There was a move on the part of a few authors,

---

[6]The rejection of the old language received support from the pragmatic philosophers. Charles Saunders Peirce, one of the early formulators of American pragmatism, had developed a kind of semantic agnosticism, seeking to strip philosophy of words that have no meaning but seem to have meaning because of syntax and grammar. Peirce developed his famous axiom, first published in 1878, that declares a proposition means the sum total of its results if the proposition were true; but since some propositions have no results--they obviously are only syntax, grammar, and linguistics; they are meaningless. William Graham Sumner, the pragmatic Social Darwinist, stormed the bastions of economic theory and social science by attacking such expressions as "natural rights" and "brotherhood of man" because of their lack of meaning. Sumner declared that many of man's verbalizations tend to confuse thinking and deter man from reaching working arrangements in the fields of economics and social behavior. William James, the most famous of the pragmatists, said that a pragmatist "turns away from abstractions . . . from verbal solutions . . . . He turns toward concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards actions and towards power." /William James, Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1959), p. 51/. Thomas Beer, The Mauve Decade (Garden City: Garden City Publishing Co., 1926), pp. 28-29, tells the interesting anecdote about William James and his concern with word meanings: "Miss Grace Ralston caught the words from air about her and made use of 'the nobility of womanhood' to a courtly, charming gentleman in a Bostonian drawing room. 'Just what' he asked the girl, 'is the nobility of womanhood?' . . . Mrs Ralston had to lecture him stringently. The nobility of womanhood meant the nobility of womanhood! Anybody knew that! 'Yes,' said William James, 'but just what is it, my dear?'"

however, to call for and develop various special languages to replace the old.

Primarily the Symbolists and their heirs were the perpetrators of special language movements. Symbolism is "a reaction against a type of language that says rather than suggests,"[7] for the Symbolists thought--at least to the extent their movement involved semantics--that the old language was equatable with "language that says," and the only direction a new language could take would be away from "saying." Also the Symbolists and all their heirs seemed to think of language, in its communicative capacity, as unable to serve private experience or inner feeling. Even if they could accept, or so their thinking seems to go, the old language as a medium for communicating experiences and events already known and recognized, already a part of social understanding, they would have to seek a new or special language in order to communicate what had not been communicated before, what was so personal and so private that it was unique. The Symbolist sought, as Edmund Wilson points out in Axel's Castle, "To invent the special language which alone would be capable of expressing his personality and feeling."[8] The Symbolists were trying to find a new level of language, just as was Virginia Woolf, who--though not a Symbolist--felt a sympathy with their need and the need of the Georgians when she asks for "a new system of communication, a new series of conventions, to transmit their vision."[9] Yeats was indicating the same need when he said,

---

[7]Karl and Magaliner, op. cit., p. 18.

[8]Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1931), p. 21.

[9]Karl and Magalaner, op. cit., p. 9.

"I have no speech but symbol, the pagan speech I made/ Amid the dreams of youth--"

The trouble with the seeking of special language or new language is that it has nowhere to go if it intends to remain also within the area of communications. All the efforts toward new, special, or unique languages in the twentieth century have led, one way or another, to a less than communicative system of symbols. The new languages have all been forms of the old language pushed into areas of delayed communication, indirect communication, or noncommunication. The promotors of special language have asked the world to accept delayed or confused communication as a new medium of communication, but finally, of course, the paradox shows itself; though the modern world has accepted the special languages as a form of aesthetic experience, the world has not been able to accept the antithesis that noncommunication is communication. To turn out the light and stand in the dark may be an interesting, even stimulating, even provocative, even dynamic experience, but only a fool would claim that in the darkness he can see or behold the world as we normally think of seeing and beholding. When Arthur Symons wrote, "To name is to destroy, to suggest is to create," he contributed perhaps to aesthetic experience but he gave a blow to communications, a blow that three generations have continued to duplicate in various cults of unintelligibility. The whole movement of literature rooted in Poe, Baudelaire, Mallarme, Rimbaud, Verlaine, and Gautier has carried on a tradition of high aesthetics at the expense of communications, and by employing language deliberately to create ambiguity, indirection, and suggestion, has not only reflected but contributed to the pathos of modern communications. Gertrude Stein's

"antagonism to commas--almost any commas--is really a defense of ambiguity, a protection against being taken too simply,"[10] but it is also a denial of communications for the sake of aesthetic effect, just as also is Bernard's plea, in The Waves, for "some little language . . . broken words, inarticulate words, like the shuffling of feet on the pavement."

Another reaction to the failure of old language has been a kind of rejection of verbalization altogether in favor of nonverbal forms of communication. In a way, nonverbalization is another case of special language, save that it is a special language that has always been admitted to the province of communications; the only problem with nonverbalization is in an evaluation of its importance. In the twentieth-century, some authors--failing to see the regressiveness in over emphasizing nonverbal communication--have expressed their dismay with the old language by throwing out language altogether or by drastically subordinating it and by building up nonverbalization to an importance far beyond its capacity to be important as a form of communication.

D. H. Lawrence, perhaps more than any other author of our time, celebrated and insisted upon nonverbalization as a prime communication medium. "Men live only by touch, and all of Lawrence's villains deny this fact,"[11] and his characters, even when they cannot understand each other in language, manage to communicate with one another on a different level. Tom Brangwen does not understand Lydia Lensky's half-Polish, half-German foreign speech, "But he knew her, he knew her meaning, without understanding. What she said, what she spoke, this was a blind gesture on her part,

---

[10]Gibson, op. cit., p. 80.

[11]Karl and Magalaner, op. cit., p. 199.

he saluted her, was with her."[12] Lawrence carries his faith in nonverbal communication to its ultimate in tactile communication and tactile communication to its ultimate in sex. Lawrence once told Bertrand Russell: "There is the blood-consciousness with the sexual connection holding the same relation as the eye, in seeing, holds to the mental consciousness. One lives, knows, and has one's being in the blood without any reference to nerves and brain." And in Lady Chatterly's Lover, he makes the point, "Sex is only touch, the closest of all touch."

Others, besides Lawrence, recognized nonverbal communication, of course, though few put such an emphasis on sex. For Virginia Woolf, nonverbal communication was a matter of subtle understandings. Peter Walsh and Clarissa Dalloway "had always this queer power of communication without words," and though Richard Dalloway could never bring himself to say "I love you" to Clarissa, he could hold her hand, and "She understood; she understood without his speaking." And in To the Lighthouse, there is a recognition on the part of Lyly that intimacy of spirits is better than anything written in any language known to men. In Forster, too, there is nonverbal communication in the form of non-sexual love. The marriage of Lilia and Gino in Where Angels Fear to Tread gives "symbolic significance" to "the theme of communication"[13] and when Gino and Philip sup together, "both men . . . come to understanding through love. Their communication is now, though wordless, complete."[14] Indeed, most of Forster's more sensitive characters "come to know that there is a deeper

---

[12] Ibid., p. 176.

[13] Ibid., p. 104.

[14] Ibid., p. 108.

more satisfying bond than the spoken or written word . . . ," based upon a common sympathy or understanding.[15]

Communication based upon sympathy and understanding rather than upon verbalization was carried to its extreme by William Butler Yeats, who finally saw human communications, regardless what form they may take on the surface of our lives, as taking place primarily on some mysterious or even supernatural level. Yeats developed the idea of an Anima mundi, a communal psyche beneath our conscious selves, which serves as a kind of common communication ground and which supports a kind of telepathic communication not only between living men but also between the living and the dead.[16] Yeats asks, in Hodos Chameliontos, "Is there nationwide multiform reverie, every mind passing through a stream of suggestion, and all streams acting and reacting upon one another no matter how distant the minds, how dumb the lips?"

The trouble with so abstract a conception of communication is, however, that it can lead to a great deception. Nonverbalization is an admitted part of communication, but when it becomes a way of communication in itself it can lead man to such a communication madness that he will accept self-communication as communication with others and will equate noncommunication with communication. He will begin to suppose, being deprived of the proving out that verbalization is, that communication has taken place when actually nothing has taken place except some interior feeling or illusion. Many people who rely heavily upon nonverbalization

---

[15] Ibid., p. 105.

[16] Austin Warren, "William Butler Yeats: The Religion of a Poet," The Permanence of Yeats, ed. James Hall and Martin Steinmann (New York: Collier Books, 1961), p. 208.

live in a state of illusion, assuming that they are in communication with the world when actually they are merely creating within themselves some sort of make-believe dialogue between parts of their own psyche.

Virginia Woolf explores the danger of illusory communication in Septimus in Mrs. Dalloway (1925). Septimus, in his madness, perceives meaning and communication where they do not actually exist. Words are not as important to him in their regular communicative symbolism; what is important is the "message hidden" in words, the "secret signal," the secret message that he alone encounters in language. His response to the word "time" is to let it flourish into a vast number of other words and meanings that interrupt or break any communication: his response to the word "war" leads him to attach meanings of his own to the word at the expense of any established or communicative meaning for the word. But not only does Septimus destroy the real communication coming into him from reality outside, but he projects a communication that is not actually taking place. The leaves rustling in the wind speak to him, the skywriting of an airplane overhead is a message direct to him. And God speaks to him in some mysterious way, revealing to him truths that are to be written down on backs of envelopes. Septimus believes, too, that "people were talking behind the bedroom walls," and he carries on conversations with these unseen peoples, "answering people, arguing, laughing, crying, getting very excited . . . ." And most painfully, of course, he carries on his conversation with the dead, with his friend Evans. Lucrezia, Septimus' wife, is forced to write down many of Septimus' conversations:

> That man, his friend who was killed, Evans, had come, he said. He was singing behind the screen. She wrote it down just as he spoke it. Some things were very beautiful; others sheer nonsense. And he was always stopping in the middle, changing

his mind; wanting to add something; hearing something new; listening with his hand up.
But she heard nothing.

Lucrezia hears nothing for, as she knows, Septimus is talking to himself. He is making a mistake about communications. He is projecting his own conversation out of himself, creating a communication mirage. And it is this very mirage that awaits the dedicated traveller down the road of nonverbalization--or down the road of special language for that matter.

4.

Septimus, in his madness, becomes a noncommunicative personality, and the noncommunicative personality has emerged in twentieth-century literature as an almost ubiquitous character. Modern writers have been especially concerned with the human being who will not or cannot communicate. As early as 1896, Oscar Wilde portrayed the prisoners who silently go their rounds, "And no man spoke a word;" each man in his separate hell is isolated from the human voice; and in their "hell," . . . made no sign, . . . said no word,--/ . . . had not a word to say." The "prisoner," separated from communication, becomes the subject of a vast number of works in our time, for though the highly communicative personality may still exist in the twentieth century, he seems, so authors appear to think at least, less representative of the problems of his age.

Clifford Odets' characters, for instance, "reveal themselves by their very inability to communicate with their fellows; . . . they cannot communicate because each is too absorbed in his own misery even to recognize the similar state of all around him."[17] And in Sherwood Andersons's

---

[17]Joseph Wood Krutch, "An American Drama," Literary History of the United States, ed. Robert E. Spiller, et al. (3 vols.; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), II, p. 1328.

characters there are "the measureless distances" that lay between them; "They spoke out of the depths, but in a sense they did not speak at all; they addressed themselves . . . ."[18] Some characters, like Clarissa Dalloway, simply do not make the effort to communicate: ". . . she never wrote a letter . . . ," and "She knew nothing; no language, no history; she scarcely read a book . . . ." Some characters, like those in Joseph Conrad's Under Western Eyes, have been deprived of the communication opportunity: Tekla says, "No one talks to me, no one writes to me . . . I have no use for a name . . . ," and Razumov is "cut off from all human intercourse, his only companion is a bronze statue . . . ."[19] Some characters want desperately to communicate but do not know how; consider for instance Denis' attempt to speak to Anne in Huxley's Crome Yellow:

> "What I need is you." That was what he ought to have retorted, that was what he wanted passionately to say. He could not say it. His desire fought against his shyness. "What I need is you." Mentally he shouted the words, but not a sound issued from his lips. He looked at her despairingly. Couldn't she see what was going on inside him? Couldn't she understand? "What I need is you." He would say it, he would--he would.
> "I think I shall go and bathe," said Anne. "It's so hot."
> The opportunity had passed.

And conversely there are characters who do not want to communicate, seek to avoid it. In Brave New World, Lenina is such a character; when Bernard asks her to go walking with him alone, in order that they may talk, she replies, "'Talking? But what about?' Walking and talking--that seemed a very odd way of spending an afternoon." And on another occasion, "Lenina did her best to stop the ears of her mind; but every now and then a phrase

---

[18]Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1956), p. 168.

[19]Karl and Magalaner, op. cit., p. 74.

would insist on becoming audible."

Given the noncommunicative personality--whatever the nature of his noncommunication--modern literature has explored in some detail the causes of his communication failures, hesitancies, and the like. Modern literature has explored the causes in general, some of the particular and isolatable causes, and has once again explored the language medium itself--not in rejection of the old or in pursuit of the new, but in analysis of the language being used, in analysis of its function and workings.

First of all, noncommunication may simply be in the nature of things. Perhaps noncommunication is not so much a matter of human failure as it is of a flawed universe. Perhaps we are, in a communication sense, a God-forgotten people as Thomas Hardy suggests when he has God blame Earth for having cut itself off from communication with Him: " . . . . sudden silence on that side ensued,/ And has till now prevailed." Perhaps we do live under "silent powers" as Maxwell Anderson suggests, or live under the Christian God who, though he can fashion everything from nothing every day, as Yeats tells us in "A Prayer for My Son," seems to lack "articulate speech." But even without referring to the divine or metaphysical, we may well have to face up to the question that Denis asks in Crome Yellow: "Did one ever establish contact with anyone? We are all parallel straight lines," and of course, "Parallel straight lines . . . meet only at infinity." Perhaps we are all eternally separated, all solitary travellers in life, and, as Peter Walsh asks, ". . . to whom does the solitary traveller make reply?" But why are we solitary travellers? Life is like that, Clarissa Dalloway observes, and she recognizes, noncommunicative as she herself generally is, that the supreme mystery of

our human existence is simply ". . . here was one room; there another. Did religion solve that, or love?" We dwell, indeed, as Walter Pater much earlier said, behind "that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without."

There are, of course, less universal and inherent causes of non-communication. Certainly modern authors have identified and discussed a host of causes rooted in particular personality attitudes and problems. We do not communicate, we are told, in Mrs. Dalloway, because "the recollection of cold human contacts forbids us . . . ," because "a solitude" exists between husband and wife, a "gulf . . . that one must respect"; we do not communicate because we are afraid in the presence of others, or because "one's too shy to say it . . . to say straight out in so many words . . . . Partly one's lazy; partly one's shy." Sometimes we try to communicate but our emotions get in our way and the messages strangle in our throat (Mio in Winterset); sometimes we try to communicate but we do not know how: "If I were a little older--if I knew the things to say!" (Miriamne in Winterset). Sometimes we do not have enough experience in common, sometimes the communication is dependent upon a difficult-to-achieve common feeling or understanding.[20] And sometimes, most frequently

---

[20]Mr. Scogan in Huxley's Crome Yellow says: "I read the works of the mystics. They seemed to me nothing but the most deplorable claptrap--as indeed they always must to anyone who does not feel the same emotion as the authors felt when they were writing. For it is the emotion that matters. The written work is simply an attempt to express emotion, which is in itself inexpressible, in terms of intellect and logic. The mystic objectifies a rich feeling in the pit of the stomach into cosmology. For other mystics that cosmology is a symbol of the rich feeling. For the unreligious it is a symbol of nothing, and so appears merely grotesque. A melancholy fact."

perhaps, we simply do not have the words: John, the Savage, in Brave New World, "would have liked to speak; but there were no words," or we do not have the same words as those around us: Mio Romagne tells Miriamne: "We don't speak the same language . . . ."

But is there any common language? If we had the words, would they do us any good? Some of the severest criticism in the area of communications has been of the nature of language. The criticism at times has reached extremely negative positions, the kind of negative positions that support, not special languages--since they fall under the same criticism--, but nonverbalization, and lead, it would seem, to the same consequences.

Words have seemed to many in the twentieth century to be ineffectual. "What you say or do doesn't matter; only feelings matter," we are told, and any delight in language--or belief in it in fact--is more or less a symptom of ignorant youth. And when people use words against us, they do us no harm. "They can take away so little with all their words," Miriamne says. Words are but decorations we use to cover up our actions; John Beavis in Eyeless in Gaza uses "the sacred names of religion and philosophy" to cover up what are simply his intellectual masturbations.[21] And Addie, in William Faulkner's As I Lay Dying, says of names in general, "It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what they call them."

Addie is no doubt one of the most semantically-oriented characters in modern fiction, and her criticisms of language are among the severest made in modern literature. Her two great complaints seem to be that words have no meaning in general, and words are quite separate and distinguishable from reality. She speaks of "high dead words" that have lost "even

---

[21]Karl and Magalaner, op. cit., pp. 283-84.

the significance of their dead sound," in much the same way that Esdras in Winterset speaks of "names of names . . . and words that shift their meaning." Words have no savor, no reality behind them. At least they do not point to anything real in our lives. "Words are no good," Addie says. "Words don't ever fit even what they are trying to say at." She cites in particular the word "love." "I knew that word was like the others: just a shape to fill a lack." Words are simply devices to trick us. The only real words are deeds themselves; words that are not deeds are "just the gaps in people's lacks, coming down like the cries of the geese out of the wild darkness . . . ." She deplores the people "to whom sin is just a matter of words" and to whom "salvation is just words, too." Some people never know reality, all they know are words, but "words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless" and they are opposed to the terrible "doing" that "goes along the earth." "Sin and fear," Addie says, "are just sounds that people who never sinned nor loved nor feared have for what they never had and cannot have until they forget the words."

Words are separate from reality. Forget the words and live only among deeds and real experience. An extreme position. But even in less extreme positions, the feeling prevailed that words were a poor reflection or indication of reality. "No word is adequate," Conrad said. And when Mrs. Ramsy listens to a conversation between her husband and Charles Tansley in To the Lighthouse she notes that their words "are merely a species of baby talk when measured against the sum total of meaningful experience."[22] Birkin, in Women in Love, is "unable to express in suitable words what his blood-consciousness tells him is true . . . ."[23] And

---

[22] Ibid., p. 139.

[23] Ibid., p. 186.

Mio Romagna sums up the position well when he says:

> . . . You see the words
> in books. Honor, it says there, chivalry, freedom,
> heroism, enduring love--and these
> are words on paper. It's something to have them there.
> You'll get them nowhere else.

Edna St. Vincent Millay said "the great words are dead," but here the feeling is that perhaps the great words never were, never really pointed to anything in human experience.

The human inability to communicate and the inadequacy of language for communication are both surveyed in the twentieth century, but the twentieth century has also recognized another cause of noncommunication--the active, aggressive anti-communication spirit or force within human society. Though many writers have discussed this problem, no doubt the most effective and startling discussion occurs in George Orwell's 1984, that frightening anti-utopian satire upon our age, with the horrors of the world-to-come rooted in the activities and experiences of contemporary man. Looking at today, Orwell foresees a time when man will live in a noncommunicative world, a world in which the serious communicator, like Syme, "will be vaporized," because "he is too intelligent. He sees too clearly and speaks too plainly." Orwell foresees a world in which it will be inconceivable that people ever "exchange any kind of written communication." It will be a world in which the only communications will be prepared communications--"For the message that it was occasionally necessary to send, there were printed postcards with long lists of phrases, and you struck out the ones that were inapplicable." It will be a world in which an official, prescribed language prevails, a language carefully constructed to discourage communication. And behind this intolerable world will be

the evil anti-communication totalitarian forces that cannot tolerate a free and open communicative society.

Newspeak is the official language of the anti-utopian Oceania, and Orwell gives a full description of the language, not only in the novel itself, but in an Appendix. In Newspeak "the expression of unorthodox opinions, above a very low level, was well-nigh impossible" for "the intention was to make speech and especially speech on any subject not ideologically neutral, as nearly as possible independent of consciousness." To do this--to make speech meaningless--the Oceania powers are preparing the Eleventh Edition of the language's dictionary, and in that edition "We're cutting the language down to the bone," for the chief task of the language-controllers is to destroy as many words as possible: "You think, I dare say, that our chief job is inventing new words. But not a bit of it! We're destroying words--scores of them, hundreds of them, every day." Newspeak will gradually destroy Oldspeak "with all its vagueness and its useless shades of meaning," and a new language of "one word--one meaning" will take its place and a new language of telescoped and contradictory words will prevail. Telescoped words--such as Minitrue, Minplenty, and the like--will be used because they get rid of old connotations while still retaining some necessary denotations.

> Even in the early decades of the twentieth century, telescoped words and phrases had been one of the characteristic features of political language; and it had been noticed that the tendency to use abbreviations of this kind was most marked in totalitarian countries and totalitarian organizations . . . . It was perceived that in thus abbreviating a name one narrowed and subtly altered its meaning, by cutting out most of the associations that would otherwise cling to it.

Newspeak also liked contradictory words--such as "blackwhite" or "duckspeak." "It is one of those interesting words that have two contradictory

meanings. Applied to an opponent, it is abuse; applied to someone you agree with, it is praise."

Obviously, Orwell, in his description of Newspeak, is criticizing a great many of our contemporary fashions in language, but his chief criticism is of those forces that would take advantage of those fashions--and weaknesses--in language for totalitarian ends. There are those, there is that spirit, that would, if given the opportunity, deny communication.

Others saw the same thing, of course. Mr. Scogan claims, in Crome Yellow, while discussing the anticipated Rational State, that Denis, the poet or articulative figure, will be destroyed. "No, I can see no place for you; only the lethal chamber." And Huxley says himself, in his Foreword to Brave New World, while discussing modern political propaganda, "Great is truth, but still greater, from a practical point of view is silence about truth." Society, in all its manifestations, has a tendency to thwart or destroy communications, and anti-communication figures appear, such as Sir William in Mrs. Dalloway, who would deprive Septimus of friends, books, or messages; or Trock and Shadow, the criminals in Winterset, who destroy and kill anyone who threatens to spread the words they fear. Hariet Herriton, in Where Angels Fear to Tread, is also an anti-communication figure, condemning those who can't talk properly, criticizing communication between people of different social levels. And when Sherwood Anderson speaks of the fear in America, the fear of sex, the fear of telling the truth, he is talking about an anti-communication force within society that provides the fear. Oscar Wilde, too, when he speaks of "the love that dare not speak its name" is pointing to the force within society that uses taboos, social and moral, to prohibit discussion or articulation.

The anti-communication forces, the human inability to communicate, the inadequacy of language--all these have had a tendency to force some authors to an articulation of a compensating rejection of communication altogether. Throwing up their hands in despair, some authors--or at least the characters they create--accept Schopenhauer's Nirvana where we find a positive bliss beyond all thought and speech. "What is the use of speech?" Ernest Dowson asks. "Silence were fitter,/ Lest we should still be wishing things unsaid . . . ," and in his poem "Beata Solitudo," he describes that land of Silence "Where all the voices/ Of humankind/ Are left behind." No verbalization, no nonverbalization. Just silence. It is the same kind of nihilism that Mr. Wimbush expresses in Crome Yellow:

> How gay and delightful life would be if one could get rid of all the human contacts! Perhaps in the future . . . it will be possible for those who, like myself desire it, to live in a dignified seclusion, surrounded by the delicate attentions of silent and graceful machines, and entirely secure from any human intrusion. It is a beautiful thought.

5.

Between qualified optimism and this utter nihilism, twentieth-century authors have explored the problem of communications, at times saying much the same things said in the old semantic awareness, but at other times--and more frequently--raising new questions and new problems peculiar to the contemporary pathos of communications. Shifting from pre-Darwinian criticism of motives and manners in communications, twentieth-century authors (as well as professional philogists, linguists, and semanticists) have focused their criticism primarily upon the nature of language and upon the technique of using that language for communication purposes. They have told a story primarily of failure, yet within that failure

are moments of light and hope.

The best way to read the story, however, is in the articulation made by individual authors in the course of their total work. Especially in those authors whose work is substantial and of major significance in our age do we find presentations of rather comprehensive understandings of communications. Nearly every major writer of the twentieth century reveals, if not a consciously organized semantic awareness, at least a sensitivity to communication problems that, by the time his canon is complete, takes on the dimensions of a complete and intricate semantic structure. It seems that in the twentieth century especially, what with the pathos of communications in the background, a major author--who in the course of his work presents a comprehensive "view of the world"--must include in that view a portrait of communications, an enactment of and a statement upon what he thinks are the problems and possibilities in man's use of language.

Though the modern pathos of communications was being articulated as early as the 1890s, the articulation reached its peak in that richest of modern literary periods, the twenty some odd years between World War I and World War II. It was during these interbellum years that so much of the "change" that had taken place between 1860 and 1914 "was beginning to reach into the popular consciousness,"[24] and it was during those years that some of our greatest twentieth-century authors reached their flowering and did their greatest work, work that no doubt helped bring the message of change to the popular mind. In fact, it was the gigantic articulation of the pathos of communications prior to World War II that effected

---

[24]Curti, op. cit., p. 579.

the popular occupation with the pathos after 1945.

Three of the great interbellum writers are James Joyce, Eugene O'Neill, and T. S. Eliot. Though their work is by no means dedicated exclusively to the pathos of communications, each deals extensively with the problems of communication and each comes to a discernible semantic position, a position growing out of his total philosophy and reflecting back upon that philosophy. Each of the three presents his own individual mode of semantic awareness, and together the three summarize, if not all possible semantic positions, at least the most popular and significant semantic attitudes available to modern man.

CHAPTER V

EUGENE O'NEILL AND THE TRAGIC WORD[1]

> . . . we come into the unspeakable and incommunicable prison of this earth.[2]

Eugene O'Neill, James Joyce, and T. S. Eliot have in common that act of exile and alienation that marks them as representative modern men. O'Neill exiled himself from the Catholic Church in an uncommuted apostasy; Joyce exiled himself from the Catholic Church and from Ireland; and T. S. Eliot exiled himself from America, his native land. For each of them the act of exile was an act of criticism[3] and, to a certain extent, an act of quest. Critical of the way things were, _circa_ World War I, each of these three major writers set out on uncharted seas to find, if he could, some "new world" to replace the old. And though their quests must finally be seen in terms larger than that of communication, a concern with language,

---

[1]An earlier version of this chapter appeared as the article "Communications and Tragedy in Eugene O'Neill," ETC.: A Review of General Semantics, XIX (July, 1962), pp. 148-60.

[2]Thomas Wolfe, Look Homeward Angel (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1947), n.p.

[3]Communication difficulties are related, of course, to modern anti-social hostilities, and exile is a manifestation of a general antisocial attitude. O'Neill once said, in an interview with Mary B. Mullett, American Magazine /quoted in Arthur and Barbara Gelb, O'Neill (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 146-47/ that he "hated a life ruled by the conventions and traditions of society," and on another occasion he made clear, to William Griffith of Current Opinion (quoted in Gelb, op. cit., p. 483), that "Silence is the only answer possible to the yapping of morons . . . ."

semantics, and articulation does permeate their depiction of the world and its reality. For each of them, their semantic awareness becomes an analogue of their total vision.

Especially in O'Neill's case, semantic awareness supports a tragic vision, and O'Neill's implied theory of communications delineates a fundamentally tragic world. Implicit in all of O'Neill's work is the struggle man makes to escape what Melville called the insular grief of noncommunication, and O'Neill seems thoroughly aware of the part noncommunication plays in creating and maintaining the tragic moment. O'Neill "stated over and over in his plays the theme of man's tragic inability to reach his fellow man."[4] And in the play that first made O'Neill famous, Emperor Jones, the general outline of his attitude toward communications can be seen, as Brutus Jones--representatively acting out the plight of the modern age wherein every man is the Negro, a member of the oppressed minority--descends from articulateness to silence. Brutus Jones represents simultaneously both the individual and the age, both the individual and the culture who have gone over the hill and who travel the "backward" and "downward" path away from the high point of individual glory and cultural triumph. Almost symbolically writing the play in "minuscule penciled script, cramming the entire play onto both sides of three sheets of typewriting paper,"[5] O'Neill tells the story of a man who believed (as obviously O'Neill thought modern man believed) that articulation without meaning, communication become noncommunication, would suffice to preserve him in

---

[4]Gelb, op. cit., p. 10.

[5]Ibid., p. 440. The Gelbs also point out, p. 377, that as O'Neill's career developed his handwriting grew smaller and more difficult to read.

power (or would suffice to preserve a culture): "Ain't a man's talkin' big what makes him big--long as he makes folks believe it?"[6] Sensitive to the power of language, possessing a certain minimum semantic awareness--"And ain't I got to learn deir lingo and teach some of dem English befo' I kin talk to 'em? . . . . You ain't never learned any word er it, Smithers, in de ten years you been heah, dough you' knows it's money in yo' pocket tradin' wid 'em if you does"[7]--Jones is nevertheless forced to flee into the jungle. An advocate of false and corrupt communication--"If I finds out dem niggers believes dat black is white, den I yells it out louder 'n deir loudest"[8]--he is nevertheless forced to enter that Great Forest with its symbolic "brooding, implacable, silence."[9]

The retreat of Brutus Jones into the silence of the forest is the retreat of modern man into the silence of noncommunication. In the forest, Jones finds he must be both communicator and receptor; though figures appear throughout the deteriorating experience, Jones has only self-communication, and the extended monologue, for which Emperor Jones is famous, becomes representative of modern discourse, the prevalent form of communication in modern life. Finally, in the seventh scene, wherein Jones has become anthropos, dwelling in the primitive, savage era of human origin, he is confronted by the Witch-Doctor, who makes a noise, but does not speak. "The Witch-Doctor sways, stamping with his foot, his bone

---

[6]The Plays of Eugene O'Neill (3 vols.; New York: Random House, 1946), III, p. 179. This edition hereafter referred to as The Plays.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Ibid., p. 185.

[9]Ibid., p. 187.

rattle clicking the time. His voice rises and falls in a weird, monotonous croon, without articulate word divisions."[10] Man has returned to the savage utterance that is meaningless, that is not communication. Man is reduced to the articulation that is incantation, but is not message. And when Brutus Jones is reduced to the animal level of the alligator, when the silver bullet has been shot, he lies on the primeval river bank "whimpering,"[11] no longer even maintaining a monologue with himself. He is reduced to the communication level that O'Neill seems to imply awaits our age: communication become whimpering, infantile, primitive, inadequate, meaningless.

Looking through all of O'Neill's drama, we can reconstruct his theory of communications and relate his semantic awareness to his creation of the tragic character, who--in all his quests--keeps "trying to find the Word in the Beginning"[12] and who engages, it would seem, in an everlasting conflict with the inarticulate forces of the world. O'Neill's frequent pitting of poet against materialist is not only a demonstration of the conflict of philosophical values; it is also a demonstration of the communications-minded man as opposed to the reticent. The appearance of the playwright and the stockbroker in Servitude "hints at future shadings of the male figure into related types"[13] whom we see as protagonist and antagonist in such plays as Beyond the Horizon, Marco Millions, The Great

---

[10] Ibid., p. 201.

[11] Ibid., p. 202.

[12] The Great God Brown in The Plays, III, p. 284.

[13] Doris V. Falk, Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Vision (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1958), p. 19.

God Brown, Dynamo, and Days Without End. In these plays there is obvious, overt conflict between him who wishes and him who may not want or need to articulate, with the tragic burden carried most frequently by the poet-artist who fails to achieve his communications with the world. Not only in the poet-artist, however, is the tragedy of noncommunication revealed; all of O'Neill's characters face the problem of communications, and how they deal with the problem becomes O'Neill's comment on man's use of language.

O'Neill's theory of communication begins with an awareness of man's innate desire and need for communicative contact with the world. Even man in his primordial state has this natural need to articulate--"Say, lemme talk!" Yank says in The Hairy Ape. ". . . Say, listen to me--wait a moment--I gotter talk, see"[14]--for communications provides us not only with our identity, but allows us to maintain our psychological health. Man needs to communicate for therapeutic reasons if for no other. O'Neill once said that Yank's struggle was "to 'belong,' to find the thread that will make him a part of the fabric of Life--we are all struggling to do just that. One idea I had in writing the play was to show that the missing thread, literally 'the tie that binds,' is our understanding of one another."[15] Ruth, in Beyond the Horizon, says, "I'd got to the end of bearing things--without talking,"[16] and Eben in Desire Under the Elms expresses the same therapeutic drive toward articulation: "An sooner'r

---

[14]The Plays, III, p. 215.

[15]Croswell Bowen, Curse of the Misbegotten (New York: Ballantine Books, 1959), p. 152.

[16]The Plays, III, p. 164.

later, I'll meddle. I'll say the thin's I didn't say them t'him. I'll yell'm at the top o' my lungs. I'll see t' it my Maw gits some rest an' sleep in her grave."[17]

Such a desire for therapeutic communication rises even to the level of penitential communication with such a guilt-ridden character as Orin Mannon. His writing the history of the Mannon family is certainly a guilt-ridden communicative act, and his plea to Lavinia that they confess their crime is his desire to use communication as an act of penitence. "That's the only way to wash the guilt of our mother's blood from our souls!"[18]

There are other reasons for communication among O'Neill's characters, of course. In addition to the therapeutic need and the penitential need, there is the aesthetic need that Charlie Marsden expresses--"Oh, I can do it, Nina! I can write the truth! . . . I'll write the book of us! . . . my duty as an artist."[19] Whatever the particular need, all these drives toward communication are a part of basic human nature, and even in those characters where articulation does not take on a specific utilitarian tone the need for communication is present. "In a sense, this was the theme of so many of O'Neill's plays--man's agonizing loneliness, his feeling of not belonging, wanting and not wanting to belong, of being cursed to remain forever alone, above, and apart."[20] The Dancer's cry, in O'Neill's early play, Thirst, is representative: "My God! My God!

---

[17]The Plays, I, p. 209.

[18]Mourning Becomes Electra in The Plays, II, p. 152.

[19]Strange Interlude in The Plays, I, p. 177.

[20]Bowen, op. cit., p. xviii.

This silence is driving me mad. Why do you not speak to me?"[21]

Out of need and desire, O'Neill's tragic characters attempt communication in a variety of ways. Though most communication takes place informally, one character with another, O'Neill shows the place that more formal means of communication have in our lives. Nina Evans, in Strange Interlude, attempts to communicate by writing a biography of Gordon Shaw, Charlie Marsden by writing his novels; John Loving, in Days Without End, plans a novel that will permit him to make his statement to the world; even Simon Hartford is writing a book "about how the world can be changed so people . . . will be content with little and live in peace and freedom together, and it will be like heaven on earth."[22] Books, letters--especially in Anna Christie and Beyond the Horizon--and prayers (in Days Without End) are presented as possible communication forms in O'Neill's dramas, as his tragic characters search for the most satisfactory means of communication. Some characters--James Tyrone for instance--even turn to the art of others to do their communication for them. "Why can't you remember your Shakespeare . . . . You'll find what you're trying to say in him--as you'll find everything else worth saying."[23] Communication by direct discourse; communication by recognized forms such as book, letter, and prayer; communication by the proxy of art--but even beyond these verbal communications. O'Neill's characters reach out for less obvious, more subtle forms of communication in their urgency to escape from the human

---

[21]Thirst and Other One-Act Plays (Boston: The Gorham Press, 1914), p. 1.

[22]A Touch of the Poet (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 29.

[23]Long Day's Journey Into Night (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), p. 131.

silence and the island of themselves.

"There is . . . a vast amount of communication aside from language . . . among men,"[24] and O'Neill's characters rely on non-linguistic means a great deal of the time. O'Neill points out the importance of intuitive or psychic communication on several occasions. In Mourning Becomes Electra, Ezra Mannon feels something uneasy in his mind, ". . . as if something in me was listening, watching, waiting for something to happen,"[25] and Christine Mannon says, "Even if he never spoke, I would feel what was in his mind . . . ."[26] Especially in Desire Under the Elms is this sort of nonverbal communication pointed out. At various times, Eben says, "I kin feel him comin' on,"[27] "And I tell ye I kin feel 'em a-comin,'"[28] while a stage direction points out that Eben senses Abbie's presence behind him,[29] and at one time, Eben and Abbie respond to one another although a wall intervenes.[30] Even old Cabot has this sort of intuitive communication experience: "I felt they was somethin' onnateral--somewhars . . . ."[31]

Verbal and intuitive communication in O'Neill are also accompanied by various forms of tactile communication, wherein some physical act or

---

[24]Edgar Sturtevant, An Introduction to Linguistic Science (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947), p. 40.

[25]The Plays, II, p. 60.

[26]The Plays, II, p. 40.

[27]The Plays, I, p. 216.

[28]The Plays, I, p. 219.

[29]The Plays, I, p. 228.

[30]The Plays, I, p. 236.

[31]The Plays, I, p. 264.

sign serves as articulation. O'Neill gives special attention to the language of the eye, of the mind, and of sex. In Desire Under the Elms, Simon says, "What've ye got held agin us, Eben? Year arter year it's skulked in yer eye--something!";[32] in The Iceman Cometh, Hickey says, "She'd kiss me and look in my eyes, and she'd know. I'd see in her eyes how she was trying not to know . . .";[33] and most vividly in Mourning Becomes Electra, Ezra Mannon says, "Your eyes were always so--so full of silence! That is, since we've been married. Not before, when I was courting you. They used to speak then. They made me talk--because they answered."[34]

The language of the hand is seen in such a play as Beyond the Horizon, wherein the two brothers, Andrew and Robert, express their otherwise inexpressible emotions by using their hands. In the stage directions we read that Andrew "grins and slaps Robert on the back affectionately," Robert puts "one hand on top of Andrew's with a gesture almost of shyness," and Andrew "pulls Robert's hand from his side and grips it tensely; the two brothers stand looking into each other's eyes for a minute."[35] The most elaborate form of tactile communication, the language of sex, is clearly seen in Mourning Becomes Electra. Christine's confession that her marriage to Ezra "soon turned his romance into disgust,"[36] testifies to the power of this language, and Orin's incestuous proposal to Lavinia

---

[32]The Plays, I, p. 208.

[33]The Iceman Cometh (New York: Random House, 1946), p. 236.

[34]The Plays, II, p. 53.

[35]The Plays, III, pp. 82-86.

[36]The Plays, II, p. 31.

is actually an attempt to find a kind of "final talking" between them. When he says, "You would feel as guilty then as I do!"[37] he shows that he thinks of sex as a means of communicating his feelings to her.

In spite, however, of the great need to communicate and the range of communicative means available, O'Neill's characters find the communicative act itself difficult to achieve. O'Neill is aware of the many obstacles that face man as he tries to reach out beyond himself, and an identification of these obstacles becomes a major part of O'Neill's communications theory.

The primary obstacle to successful communications among O'Neill's characters is their own individual incapacity to articulate. Something in their imperfect human nature is a communications flaw that must finally be seen as a piece of their larger tragic flaw, whatever it may be. Edmund in Long Day's Journey Into Night puts the situation succinctly: "I couldn't touch what I tried to tell you just now. I just stammered. That's the best I'll ever do . . . . Well, it will be faithful realism. Stammering is the native eloquence of us fog people."[38] And so all of O'Neill's fog people stammer. Chris cries, "Ay can't say it;"[39] Andrew in Beyond the Horizon says, "I'd rather go through a typhoon again than write a letter;"[40] and Charlie Marsden explains his particular incapacity as inevitable where father and son are concerned: ". . . father . . . wanted to speak to me just before he died . . . . I couldn't understand him . . . what son can

---

[37]The Plays, II, p. 165.

[38]Long Day's Journey Into Night, p. 154.

[39]Anna Christie in The Plays, III, p. 67.

[40]The Plays, III, p. 131.

ever understand?"[41]

Such natural incapacity to articulate is magnified in O'Neill when his characters grow additionally inhibited or misinformed about communications. The Mannons seem to have a special inhibition: "Something queer in me keeps me mum about the things I'd like to show," Ezra says.[42] And sometimes in O'Neill such inhibition is encouraged by a sense of social propriety or decorum. Orin says, "I--I let off steam when I shouldn't,"[43] and Ned Darrell puts it forthrightly, ". . . there are things one may not say."[44] Likewise, such a rigid notion about communications as Andrew takes in Beyond the Horizon--"What's said is said and can't be unsaid . . ."[45]--only contributes to the general, prevailing sense of incapacity that O'Neill's characters possess.

Even when O'Neill's characters overcome their incapacities and seek to fulfill their communicative desire, however, there is the frequent, tragic failure of the communications receptor to be prepared for the articulation or to be equipped to receive the message. The communicator must find a response, of course, or the communication does not take place. Mere self-expression is not the problem in O'Neill's theory of communications; his characters must not only perform the communicative act themselves but the act must be completed by reaching another intelligence. Time and again his characters cry out, as the Mannons do, for some response

---

[41] Strange Interlude in The Plays, I, p. 4.

[42] Mourning Becomes Electra in The Plays, II, p. 82.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Strange Interlude in The Plays, I, p. 133.

[45] The Plays, III, p. 109.

to their articulation. "Don't be so still!" Mannon exclaims. "God, I want to talk to you, Christine! I've got to explain some things--inside me--to my wife--try to anyway!"[46] And Christine cries to Lavinia, "Answer me when I speak to you!"[47] So desperate do some of O'Neill's communicators grow that they turn to other than humans. Yank turns to the gorilla --"Yuh got what I was sayin' even if yuh muffed de words"[48]--and Cabot says, "I kin talk t' the cows. They know. They know the farm an' me. They'll give me peace."[49]

Receptor failure is the result of both deliberate refusal and simple incapacity. Larry, in The Iceman Cometh, on occasion disqualifies himself as a receptor with such statements as "No one takes him seriously. That's his epitaph,"[50] and "I'd never let myself believe a word you told me."[51] Larry is shutting out any possibility of receiving a communication simply by setting up a wall of advance judgment. More frequently, though, receptor failure in O'Neill is simply the result of receptor weakness and incapacity. Dion, in The Great God Brown, speaks for many of O'Neill's characters when he says, "This domestic diplomacy! We communicate in code--when neither has the other's key!"[52] We simply aren't capable, Dion says; we don't possess the equipment to be good communicators or receptors.

---

[46]Mourning Becomes Electra in The Plays, II, p. 53.

[47]The Plays, II, p. 78.

[48]The Hairy Ape in The Plays, III, p. 252.

[49]Desire Under the Elms in The Plays, I, p. 238.

[50]The Iceman Cometh, p. 12.

[51]Ibid., p. 129.

[52]The Plays, III, p. 270.

And as a result, we do not hear others when they talk to us. Professor Leeds realizes that Nina simply can't hear him. "I must talk her out of it! . . . find the right words! . . . oh, I know she won't hear me!"[53] and "No use! . . . she doesn't hear . . . thinking of Gordon . . . ."[54] The example, par excellence, in O'Neill of receptor failure is, of course, the wireless operator in Warnings,who returns to his job on a transatlantic liner knowing that he may go totally deaf at any moment; when the liner he is on begins to sink, the operator sends a distress signal but cannot hear the answer. He has grown deaf to the messages of the world and he commits suicide at the play's end.

Another obstacle to successful communication lies in the failure of language itself. On those occasions when O'Neill's characters, without inhibition or restraint, try to communicate with one another, try to be good communicator and good receptor, there is still the difficulty of the language medium.[55] Perhaps Nina Leeds, more than any other O'Neill character, is aware of the failure of word symbols. On numerous occasions she curses the language that man so unsuccessfully uses. She accuses her father of using "spiritless messages from the dead . . . dead words,"[56] and later extends her accusation to all of us. She is particularly aware of

---

[53] Strange Interlude in The Plays, I, p. 15.

[54] Ibid., p. 17.

[55] Edwin A. Engle, The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), p. 224, suggests that O'Neill was especially aware of the language difficulty because of his own writing struggles. "O'Neill the playwright, had been acutely /aware of the failure of symbols/ almost from the start of his playwrighting career--a fact to which the inarticulateness of his early protagonists and a continued suggestion of ineffableness bear witness."

[56] Strange Interlude in The Plays, I, p. 15.

the emptiness of our words, of the failure of our words to denote actual referents. "How we poor monkeys hide from ourselves behind the sounds called words!"[57] she exclaims, and then attacks especially those abstract words which all semanticists recognize as especially dangerous symbols. "Do I seem queer? It's because I've suddenly seen the lies in the sounds called words. You know--grief, sorrow, love, father--those sounds our lips make and our hands write."[58] This semantic problem becomes, for Nina, an obstacle even to religious experience. She cannot accept the Gospel, she tells us, because she cannot believe the words.[59]

The great discrepancy between symbol and meaning is at the heart of O'Neill's implied criticism of language. Just as Charlie Marsden had never "married the word to life,"[60] so few of us, O'Neill seems to say, can ever achieve the proper language for our thoughts.[61] All our words, finally, are to be evaluated in the way Dion Anthony evaluates 'love'": "Love is a word--a shameless ragged ghost of a word--begging at all doors for life at any price!"[62] The ghost word, the spook word is the great failure of language, and in spite of our desires and our willingness we can never achieve a truly adequate language.

---

[57] Ibid., p. 40.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid., p. 41.

[60] Ibid., p. 148.

[61] In O'Neill's own family, his father, mother, and brother always "explained away" their talk to each other by saying it was the "booze talking" or it was the "poison talking," as though somehow they and their talking were separate phenomena. See Gelb, op. cit., p. 101.

[62] The Great God Brown in The Plays, III, p. 266.

Another area of language failure is examined by O'Neill when he shows us our human predilection to use meaningless labels to identify one another and when he shows how we respond, emotionally and irrationally, to the connotative associations that go along with certain labels. We certainly notice in The Iceman Cometh the communication confusion that arises with the use of such labels as "nigger," "Wop," and "whore." The subterranean characters in this play give much importance to the correct labels; they respond violently to the "wrong" labels. Joe dislikes the label "nigger," Rocky dislikes "Wop." And the label "whore" receives particular attention. In speaking to Larry, Parritt says, "I remember that you got mad and you told her, 'I don't like living with a whore if that's what you mean!'" to which Larry vehemently replies, "You lie! I never called her that."[63] Rocky and the girls frequently have it out over the matter of names. Rocky in speaking to Margie on one occasion says, "And imagine a whore hustlin' de cows home! For Christ sake! Ain't dat a sweet picture!" Margie answers, "You oughtn't to call Cora dat, Rocky. She's a good kid. She may be a tart, but--" to which Rocky agrees: "Sure, dat's all I mean, a tart."[64] Somehow "tart" is a much nicer word to the girls than "whore" is.

This particular semantic phenomenon is easily related, of course, to tragic character itself in that O'Neill's characters make language do the duty of mask in their attempt to conceal their true identities from both themselves and others. Look how important names and labels become in the tragic statement of a play like Long Day's Journey Into Night.

---

[63] The Iceman Cometh, p. 125.

[64] Ibid., p. 69.

In the tragedy of the Tyrones, it becomes very important how one talks about people and events. The choice of words is supposed mysteriously to alter reality. "Another shot in the arm!" says Jamie of his mother's dope addiction, but he is immediately attacked by Edmund and Tyrone. "Cut out that kind of talk!" Edmund says, and Tyrone adds, "Yes! Hold your foul tongue and your rotten Broadway loafer's lingo . . . ,"[65] and the real fight in the play, when Edmund strikes Jamie, is when Jamie asks, "Where's the hophead? Gone to sleep?"[66] As Bess Sondel says,

> We protect the self, even if we must delude the self to do it. We talk ourselves out of our uneasiness, out of our ineptness, out of our blunders; out of our fears, out of our frustrations; out of our tensions, our unhappiness, our failures. We do this with coercive signs. It is the rare one who can resist the seduction of his own flattering, soothing, felicitous signs. For this is the formula, it seems, for living with the inadequate self.[67]

Such misuse of language, coupled with the semantic failure of language itself, leads us many times to false communication, a "lie" in fact, that is the greatest obstacle to the achievement of any genuine communication. O'Neill's use of masks and interior monologues is related to his semantic awareness of the false communication into which we frequently slide.[68] For O'Neill, our acceptance of this false communication is

---

[65]Long Day's Journey Into Night, pp. 75-76.

[66]Ibid., pp. 161-62.

[67]Bess Sondel, The Humanity of Words (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1958), p. 161.

[68]One senses in O'Neill's use of the monologue an implicit attempt to reach what, in his tragic world, was the typical if not the ideal communication situation. The extended monologue of Emperor Jones, Before Breakfast, Hughie, and other plays, plus all of his experimental attempts to reveal inner thought (Strange Interlude) and carry on dialogues with self (Days Without End), are a gesture on O'Neill's part to reach that noncommunication between characters that he thought was the reality

dangerous, not simply because it is a lie, but because it delays genuine communication and, over a prolonged period of time, sickens us with communication, deceives us and embitters us to the point that we put no trust in communications at all. This great failure of language and our human misuse of it, added to our incapacities as communicators and receptors,

---

beneath the surface of our specious conversations. One feels that O'Neill would have liked to have moved toward the one-character play, the play in which a single character converses only with himself. This solo performance would not have been the coming to a level of pure and uninterrupted communication; it would have been symbolic of the way things really are in O'Neill's world: we are all "solo characters" alone upon the stage of life. The pure monologue, with which O'Neill toyed, is also an expression of pure ego--the uninterrupted communicator who talks without regard for receptor--for the receptor has been removed; if one talks only to oneself, vast quantities of communication problems are removed. And this ego-aspect of the dramatic monologue is a clue, perhaps, to a great deal of the "tragic flaw" in O'Neill's tragic world: perhaps communication fails, not only because of all the semantic reasons, all the language inadequacies, but because of a kind of hybris that denies communication, a kind of hybris that is willing to pay the price of tragedy for the contentment and satisfaction of self conversations. O'Neill, himself a terribly inhibited man most of the time as far as the give and take of conversation was concerned, perhaps saw in his monologue experiments a depiction of what can only be considered a paradox: the free-flowing articulation within and to and for oneself that at the same time is a rejection and collapse of genuine communication with others.

O'Neill's predilection for masks also has a significance in the area of communications. Though his most startling use of masks is in The Great God Brown, O'Neill would have liked to use masks in all the plays he wrote; he frequently expressed the desire that the characters in his plays wear masks, his argument being that masked actors more readily adapted themselves to the roles they were playing. More significant, however, than this dramaturgical excuse for O'Neill's love of masks is the implication that masks are the symbolic representation of our confused identities, on the one hand, and are the symbolic representation of two major communication difficulties, on the other hand. As far as communication is concerned, the mask obviously is a muffling of our voices; perhaps a magnification indeed (O'Neill related his love of masks to the Greek megaphonic masks) but distortion nevertheless. And the mask also deceives us in our communication orientations; are we talking to the mask or to the man, is it the man who hears us or the mask he wears? O'Neill made it clear that our masks have identities of their own (see The Great God Brown), and the single human being, the individual, may actually be a complex of communicators and receptors. In O'Neill's tragic world, when one man speaks to another, what may be happening on a psychological level is that twins are talking to twins, or a trio to a trio, or even a crowd to a crowd. Even in those plays where O'Neill does not actually call for the physical mask, the idea of mask is often apparent. Consider, for instance, the early play Servitude.

bodes ill of course for any successful and meaningful communication in O'Neill's world. Too easy is the road that leads to the world of non-communication where the final tragedies of man take place.

In O'Neill, part of the blame for the tragedy of noncommunication must be given to the tragic character's fear of articulation. At the very time the tragic character has the desire and need to articulate, he fights off that communication which he feels would shatter his illusion and carry him into a reality for which he is not prepared. The Mannons have this fear: "We'd better light the light and talk awhile," Ezra says, but Christine answers, "I don't want to talk! I prefer the dark."[69] Christine's very equation of talk and light, noncommunication and darkness underlines the part that communications play in O'Neill's tragic vision, and Christine becomes especially culpable, it seems, in her failure to communicate not because of fate (incapacity, language failure, etc.) but because of will. Time and again she says to Ezra, "Don't talk . . . ,"[70] "For God's sake stop talking. I don't know what you're saying."[71] And even Mannon himself, at one point, becomes fearful of communication and cries out, "Be quiet, Christine!"[72]

In The Iceman Cometh, this same culpable fear of communication is seen. The fact that the boarders, in Act III, have had to lock out Hickey, and lock out each other even, reveals their fearful refusal to communicate. Even if they have the capacity and means of communication they do not want

---

[69] Mourning Becomes Electra in The Plays, II, p. 59.

[70] Ibid., p. 53.

[71] Ibid., p. 56.

[72] Ibid., p. 61.

it. "But if you don't keep still," Larry says to Parritt, "you'll be saying something soon that will make you vomit your own soul like a drink of nickel rotgut that won't stay down."[73] And the same fear threads its way through Long Day's Journey Into Night. We hear Edmund cry, "Mama! For God's sake, stop talking,"[74] "Stop talking, Mama."[75] And Tyrone, too: "Be quiet! Don't say that to me!"[76] While Mary, more than the others, fears and rejects communication: "Now, now. Don't talk . . . ,"[77] "Please don't--talk about things you don't understand!"[78] and "I don't know what you're talking about, James. You say such mean, bitter things when you've drunk too much."[79]

O'Neill's characters plunge themselves into the tragedy of non-communication not only out of this fear of what communication will bring, but more frequently out of a hostile recognition of the uselessness of communication, the hopelessness of every achieving it, and the deception that inadequate communication can be. Most of O'Neill's characters express the futility of communications at some time or other--Paddy: "Yerra, what's the use of talking? 'Tis a dead man's whisper;"[80] Christine: "I meant--what is the good of words?";[81] Anna: "Oh, what's the use? What's

---

[73]The Iceman Cometh, p. 227.

[74]Long Day's Journey Into Night, p. 74.

[75]Ibid., p. 109.

[76]Ibid., p. 145.

[77]Ibid., p. 92.

[78]Ibid., p. 92.

[79]Ibid., p. 123.

[80]The Hairy Ape in The Plays, III, p. 214.

[81]Mourning Becomes Electra in The Plays, II, p. 56.

the use of me talking?";[82] Elsa: "Oh, John, stop talking! What's the good of talk?";[83] Mark: "I know it's useless to talk. But sometimes I feel so lonely";[84] Tyrone: "But what's the good of talk?";[85] Edmund: "But let's not talk about it. It's no use now."[86] And out of this philosophy of futility, O'Neill's characters go on to a complete renunciation of communication, not because they fear it, do not desire it, think it impossible, but because they find it ultimately false. With all its pitfalls and difficulties, communications become too much to worry about, and there is the final denial of it, on the very border of the ultimate tragedy.

Even in his early plays, O'Neill foresaw a world of silences, devoid of communications--silences that he depicts, for instance, in Emperor Jones and in The Moon of the Caribees.[87] Mrs. Evans, in Strange Interlude, denounces communication by saying, "Being happy, that's good! The rest is just talk!"[88] Lavinia Mannon, also, comes to a denunciation of communication because it is a meaningless gesture. Her refusal to speak after her father's death is a symptom of her final tragic rejection of communication with the world. Larry Slade feels that he, too, has moved beyond

---

[82] Anna Christie in The Plays, III, p. 74.

[83] Days Without End in The Plays, III, p. 550.

[84] Long Day's Journey Into Night, p. 45.

[85] Ibid., p. 78.

[86] Ibid., p. 132.

[87] "Brooks Atkinson once described The Moon of the Caribees as a 'drama of silence.'" See Gelb, op. cit., p. 327.

[88] The Plays, I, p. 64.

the futility of communication when he says, "I've gotten beyond the desire to communicate with the world . . . ."[89]

This is the point to which O'Neill's characters finally come as they move toward their tragic climaxes. Beyond the desire to communicate, they are beyond the sane human situation wherein man does desire to communicate, does make the attempt, fearful or futile as it may be. The climax of Days Without End shows the struggle upon the brink, when the articulate nature of man struggles with the rejection of communication. John's prayer in the last scene of the play represents the eternal tension between communication and noncommunication; as John cries out in his prayer, "I have come back to Thee!" so Loving cries out, "Words! There is nothing!"[90]

If man does not win in this struggle, if his will to communicate does not triumph over the noncommunicative forces around and within him, he is doomed, of course, to the tragedy of silence. The shuttered, darkened Mannon house is the symbol of this final hell into which man can fall when he at last accepts, for whatever reason, his insular grief and works no more against it. In this hell, we sit with one another, but "we sit together in silence, thinking . . . thoughts that never know the other's thoughts . . . ,"[91] and the only cry we make, an interior cry, is "Oh, God, so deaf and dumb and blind!"[92] ascribing to the universe the same noncommunicative characteristics which we have assumed. In a hell where

---

[89] The Iceman Cometh, pp. 28-29.

[90] The Plays, III, p. 565.

[91] Mourning Becomes Electra in The Plays, II, p. 139.

[92] Strange Interlude in The Plays, I, p. 199.

"the damned don't cry"[93] or express themselves, we must finally look even at those whom we love and realize that "You can't talk to her now. She'll listen, but she won't listen,"[94] and become one with Tyrone and Mary who, having known the very closeness of wedded love, must finally act their separate parts--"Tyrone: (In hopeless appeal.) 'Mary!' (But it cannot penetrate her preoccupation. She doesn't seem to hear him . . . .)"[95]

O'Neill's tragedies are, of course, more than communication tragedies, but certainly his semantic awareness leads to an intensification of his tragic vision, and certainly the tragic moment in O'Neill is seen more completely and wholly because it includes a knowledge of man's communicative nature. And O'Neill's theory of communications must be included in any organizing concept of O'Neill's tragic world, in any statement about O'Neill's philosophy of life and his tragic concept.

O'Neill's theory of communication as revealed in his plays can be summarized, I believe, in this way: Normal man has an innate desire to communicate, but the best he can do is simply strive toward communication and accept the imperfection of it. Because of his own incapacities and those of his receptors, and because of the inadequacy of the language medium, man can never achieve the perfect understanding via the perfect communication that he desires. The worst that can happen to man is that he may reject communication altogether--out of fear of what it will reveal, out of a realization of its imperfections and failures--and fall into the tragedy of silence that is our final separation from fellow man.

---

[93] Mourning Becomes Electra in The Plays, II, p. 156.

[94] Long Day's Journey Into Night, p. 78.

[95] Ibid., p. 172.

Fittingly or ironically, as one may wish to view it, O'Neill's own private life was itself something of a communication tragedy. Son of a highly articulate father, the actor James O'Neill, and a frequently incoherent mother, Ella O'Neill, addicted to dope, O'Neill suffered all his life not only from a psychological reticence to communicate--he usually avoided communication even with family and friends save when he was drunk--but from a disease one of the symptoms of which, in its acute stage, was speech impairment.[96] Numerous people found O'Neill sphinxlike, and he was notorious for his soft almost inaudible voice. He had a tendency to stutter.[97] And perhaps one of the most prevalent criticisms of his art has been that he did not have an ear for "actual spoken language,"[98] and that his plays seem "often strangely inarticulate," as though O'Neill were "unable to put his ideas into words with even ordinary fluency . . . ."[99] O'Neill was, of course, aware of his own communication failures, his language inadequacies. And out of this recognition he developed his philosophy of communication failure.

One of his favorite passages from Hindu philosophy was, "Before the ear can hear it must have lost its sensitiveness . . . . Before the voice can speak it must have lost its power to wound."[100] One of his favorite passages from his Master Nietzsche's Thus Spake Zarathustra was

---

[96]Gelb, op. cit., p. 941.

[97]Bowen, op. cit., p. 79.

[98]Ibid., p. 75.

[99]Joseph Wood Krutch, The American Drama Since 1918 (New York: Random House, 1939), p. 291.

[100]See Gelb, op. cit., p. 332; also Bowen, op. cit., p. 95.

"Almost in the cradle we are given heavy words . . . ."[101] O'Neill repeated many times throughout his life a remark he heard from his friend, Terry Carlin, "Words only conceal thought and do not express . . . ,"[102] and he once commented on his favorite people, sailors of the high seas, in this manner: "In many ways they are inarticulate. They cannot write of their own problems. So they must often suffer in silence."[103]

O'Neill saw man suffering in silence, and he saw the tragedy of that suffering. His own communication difficulties, the difficulties of those around him, led him to an almost fatalistic recognition of communication failure, a failure that man cannot overcome, but against which man can only make that hopeless effort of stuttering. O'Neill himself strove to be eloquent by dramatic inarticulation. A paradox. And a sense of tragedy.

James Joyce was to explore the paradox at length and was to emphasize the comedy, along with the sorrow, of communication failure.

---

[101] Gelb, op. cit., p. 209.

[102] Ibid., p. 291.

[103] Ibid., p. 147.

CHAPTER VI

JAMES JOYCE AND THE WORD THAT FAILED

> . . . Mara, in old runic, was a goblin that seized upon men asleep in their beds and took from them all speech . . . .[1]

James Joyce, teacher of languages, has given the twentieth century its most magnificent demonstration of communication failure, a demonstration manifest not only in the depiction of a linguistically-thwarted world, but also in an enactment of communication deterioration in a literature that finally transcends "the extreme limits of intelligibility."[2] An Irish apostate like O'Neill, Joyce managed a life-long rebellion against the Roman Catholic "tyranny over mind and speech,"[3] especially against the Jesuit order, which he called the "silent service."[4] Rebelling against the Church's restrictive nature, he exiled himself from its communion, not only in the sacramental sense, but also in the sense of excommunicating himself from the Church's tradition of language. In so cutting himself adrift from restriction within an established order of communication, Joyce found himself forever after "at sea" as far as communications were

---

[1]Sir William Temple, op. cit., p. 139.

[2]Samuel C. Chew, op. cit., p. 1562.

[3]W. Y. Tindall, James Joyce (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p. 85.

[4]James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man (New York: The Modern Library, 1928), p. 217.

concerned; for "having left the church, he could never bring himself to participate in any other communion--religious, literary . . . social"[5] or verbal. Out of this plight, Joyce created a great comic critique of communications in general, its traditional foibles and failures; and in telling his own story of exile and apostasy, he created a harlequinesque narrative of modern man's falling away from the old order of communication into seemingly new frontiers of language and speech.

Joyce's critique and narrative deal with a world called "Dublin," a world that emerges out of the totality of his work and transcends any particular geographical identification. It is a world in which, as Leopold Bloom observes, the language question takes precedence over nearly any other civic question. And it is a world in which an "unconscionable amount of talking . . . goes on,"[6] though, as we discover in the course of Joyce's critique, most of the talking amounts to scarcely more than articulation (as opposed to true communication) and the most significant utterances are those animal-like cries such as Stephen Dedalus emits from time to time:

> . . . the cry that he had strangled for so long in his throat issued from his lips. It broke from him like a wail of despair from a hell of sufferers and died in a wail of furious entreaty, a cry for an iniquitous abandonment, a cry which was but the echo of an obscene scrawl which he had read on the oozing wall of a urinal.[7]

It is a world in which, as in "The Sisters," the chalice of the living word is broken, in which the communication-that-is-communion is symbolically shattered.

---

[5]Harry Levin, James Joyce: A Critical Introduction (Rev. and Augmented Ed.; New York: New Directions, 1960), p. 24.

[6]Ibid., p. 33.

[7]A Portrait, pp. 112-13.

Joyce depicts this world--from Dubliners to Finnegans Wake--as a complex enterprise of interlocking and intricately involved relationships, a veritable jungle of contacts and communication efforts crisscrossing back and forth. People meet, depart, meet again; people gather, disband, gather again. A labyrinth of communication possibilities is presented as Joyce brings his hungering Irish souls together in every possible combination, offering them every chance to communicate. And it is through this jungle of potential discourse that the Joycean personality, the Joycean modern man, wanders that downward path from a semblance of communication to a lack of verbal contact with the world. The Joycean 'hero' wanders down a road, symbolized by Joyce's own literary method, that leads from dialogue and conversation, through argument and misunderstanding, to monologue and finally to soliloquy.

In the early works, Dubliners and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Joyce's most vital element in writing is his use of conversation,[8] a rich Irish conversation that "mitigates the sordid realities"[9] of the world. But even in these books, the monologue, the one-sided conversation, is present: the stranger in "An Encounter" harangues the two young boys with his incomprehensible message and invitation, and Stephen Dedalus in A Portrait listens to the long and incoherent monologues of his father, the long sermons of the priests. Next the monologue goes inward and becomes an interior kind of discourse, discourse with oneself, the monologue grown silent as Stuart Gilbert observes,[10] that soliloquy

---

[8]Levin, op. cit., p. 52.

[9]Ibid., p. 33.

[10]In Richard Ellmann, James Joyce (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 368.

of unheard and unspoken speech that Joyce used so dramatically in A Portrait, Ulysses, and Finnegans Wake, with Ulysses and Finnegans Wake ending with famous recitatives of self to self.

Joyce also employs literary method to symbolize the downward communication path of modern man by gradually shifting the level or style of his language from clarity to confusion. Just as in "The Oxen of the Sun" episode in Ulysses Joyce reviews the historical decline of English style "until it ends in a frightful jumble of Pidgin English, Nigger English, Cockney, Irish, Bowery slang and broken doggerel,"[11] so his own literary style moves from the clarity of Dubliners down to the deliberate obscurity of Finnegans Wake, wherein the "ahnihilisation of the etym" betokens the collapse of the word[12] and wherein, as Joyce himself admitted, "I have put the language to sleep."[13] The language abyss of Finnegans Wake--the "last word . . . the witless wandering of literature before its final extinction," as Stanislaus Joyce put it[14]--represents the abyss that awaits modern man, who tries to communicate but who is victim of a degenerative process to which both individuals and cultures[15] must submit.

The individual communicator who travels the downward path starts his journey, of course, with the intention of ascension, not regression. He is travelling to escape the ordinary world, the ordinary Dublin. His

---

[11]Joyce in a letter to Frank Budgen, quoted in Ellmann, op cit., p. 490.

[12]Tindall, op. cit., p. 92.

[13]Ellmann, op. cit., p. 559.

[14]Ibid., p. 589.

[15]Tindall, op. cit., p. 71.

journey, which proves foolish, has its origins in his desire to retreat from the broken word as he recognizes it in the market place. Even though the individual himself comes at last to his own broken word, to his own witless wandering in language confusion, he begins his journey to escape the broken word of others, the broken word of the society from which he hopes to isolate himself. And Joyce is much concerned, in the scope of his work, to portray and denounce communication failure on the larger stage of society and city, the communication failure of the agora. Stanislaus Joyce wrote in his diary that James' "great passion is a fierce scorn of what he calls the 'rabblement'--a tiger-like, insatiable hatred,"[16] and it is the communication of the "rabblement" that Joyce presents as prolegomenon to all subsequent communication consideration.

Market-place communication, it would seem, is not communication at all, but merely a matter of noise. The very god of the Dublin-world thunders audibly, but not understandably; the voice of God speaks in Finnegans Wake in vast hundred-letter, polylingual thunderclaps that are sound without sense. And modern man, imprisoned in the market-place world, as H. C. Earwicker is, receives representative communication from fellow-man in the insults shouted through the keyhole by a visiting hog-caller from America. Even when some semblance of understandable communication does occur, its significance is nil or perverse; in this Dublin-market-place world, "Things are so topsy-turvy that the preachers of God's word lead the prostitutes into sin."[17]

---

[16]Ellmann, op. cit., p. 142.

[17]Joseph Campbell and Henry Morton Robinson, A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake (New York: The Viking Press, 1961), p. 35.

The market place is peopled with such men as Corley and Lenehan of "Two Gallants"--Corley who talks earnestly, but speaks without listening to the speech of his companions and whose conversation is mainly about himself; Lenehan, a leech, whose "eloquence had always prevented his friends from forming any general policy against him."[18] A certain verbosity and eloquence prevail, but it is suspect, shady, underhanded, cheap. Talk, but only talk, as Lily explains to Gabriel in "The Dead:" "The men that is now is only all palaver . . . ."[19] The market-place men tire themselves out "talking all afternoon in a public-house,"[20] but their talk is innerdirected; they are magnetised by their own speech. And even at the communication center of the city, the newspaper office, conversations are a conglomeration of disdain, timidity, brashness, twisted words, and semantic sport.

Communication among such people is frequently scurrilous, as is the mysterious card received by Mr. Breen in Ulysses, and as is the rumour instigated by the Cad about Mr. Earwicker in Finnegans Wake. Or the communication is ludicrous, as is the letter Mr. Deasy has written on foot and mouth disease for the newspaper: "I want that to be printed and read."[21] Nearly always the communication is confused or meaningless. In Mr. Earwicker's tavern, drunks tell their drunken tales against a background of radio broadcasts constantly interrupted by static, key clickings, "vaticum cleaners," and the like. At the Ormond restaurant,

---

[18]James Joyce, Dubliners (New York: The Modern Library, 1954), p. 59.

[19]Ibid., p. 227.

[20]"Gallants," Dubliners, p. 59.

[21]James Joyce, Ulysses (New York: Random House, 1934), p. 34.

in Ulysses, a regular phantasmagoria of communication takes place with Miss Kennedy and Miss Douce giggling hysterically at each other, Richie Coulding telling whopping lies, Simon Dedalus singing the wrong words to the song, George Lidwell hearing in the seashell the roar of the sea that isn't there. And at Holles St. Hospital a drunken communication prevails in the waiting room, with "words . . . difficultly understood and not often nice . . . outrageous mots . . ."[22] that only late in the evening "blend and fuse in clouded silence."[23] Public communication emerges scarcely more than animal-like; the vicious dog Garryowen articulates as well as anyone. Public communication is as senseless as a chamber pot: "Empty vessels make most noise."[24]

The Joycean 'hero,' born and bred into this poorly communicating world, finds himself surrounded by a debilitating experience. Stephen Dedalus, in A Portrait, becomes acutely sensitive to his mother's mutterings, the screech of an unseen maniac, offending voices, common noises, tongues that babble. And all the noise finally becomes, to the sensitive man of the Joycean world, a kind of hell where, as the Jesuit portrays the afterlife, "The damned howl and scream at one another . . . full of blasphemies against God and of hatred for their fellow sufferers . . . ."[25] All the noise finally concentrates us in a nighttown where "A deafmute idiot with goggle eyes, his shapeless mouth dribbling" tries to communicate,

---

[22] Ibid., p. 400.

[23] Ibid., p. 407.

[24] Ibid., p. 278.

[25] A Portrait, p. 140.

"Grhahute!"[26] and where "a woman screams; a child wails; oaths of a man roar, mutter, cease . . . ."[27]

In spite of the hellish noise, however, men do try to communicate. Little Chandler has "an infant hope"[28] that he might somehow communicate with "a little circle of kindred minds."[29] Martha Clifford types out her pathetic messages to Henry Flower, whom she has never met or seen: "Please write me a long letter . . . ."[30] And in Finnegans Wake, we hear the plea: ". . . so please kindly communicake with the original sinse we are only yearning as yet how to burgeon."[31] And we are told: "All the world's in want is writing a letters. A letters from a person to a place about a thing. And all the world's on wish to be carrying a letters . . . . Is then any lettersday from many peoples, Dagnasanavitch? Empire, your outermost. A posy cord. Plece."[32] But the wish and the desire must contend with the inevitable obstacles. Do we have the energy to persist? Lenehan "knew that he would have to speak a great deal, to invent and to amuse, and his brain and throat were too dry for such a task."[33] Do we have the courage to speak up? Little Chandler has trouble catching the barman's

---

[26]Ulysses, p. 422.

[27]Ibid., p. 423.

[28]"A Little Cloud," Dubliners, p. 89.

[29]Ibid.,

[30]Ulysses, p. 77.

[31]James Joyce, Finnegans Wake (New York: The Viking Press, 1962), p. 239.

[32]Ibid., p. 278.

[33]"Two Gallants," Dubliners, p. 68.

eye and ordering another drink. Do we dare risk our job? Farrington, in "Counterparts," would like "to execrate aloud, to bring his fist down on something violently,"[34] but he's afraid of the boss. We are like Jimmy, in "After the Race," riding in the back seat of the car, trying to communicate with the Frenchmen up front:

> The Frenchmen flung their laughter and light words over their shoulders and often Jimmy had to strain forward to catch the quick phrase. This was not altogether pleasant for him, as he had nearly always to make a deft guess at the meaning and shout back a suitable answer in the face of a high wind. Besides Villona's humming would confuse anybody; the noise of the car, too.[35]

For the average man, unfortunately, the quest cannot overcome the obstacles and ends up in a rejection of communication. Like Eveline, watching her lover rush beyond the train barrier, listening to him calling her to come, we can only stare back "passive, like a helpless animal."[36] Eveline knew "that he was speaking to her, saying something about the passage over and over again . . . . She answered nothing."[37] The average man, unfortunately, settles into adamant noncommunication, as does Joe, in "Clay," who refuses to speak ever again to his brother Alphy. Or the average man, inhibited by customs and traditions and mores, refuses to let himself speak out; Gerty MacDowell, in Ulysses, "was about to retort but something checked the words on her tongue. Inclination prompted her to speak out: dignity told her to be silent."[38]

---

[34] Dubliners, p. 111.

[35] Ibid., p. 51.

[36] "Eveline," Dubliners, p. 48.

[37] Ibid., pp. 47-48.

[38] Ulysses, p. 343.

For the more specialized, more sensitive Joycean personality, however, the reaction to communication difficulty midst the hellish noise of the market place amounts to something besides simple rejection of communication. A rejection is made, of course, but the result is not simply noncommunication, but a kind of fertile silence out of which he believes can grow some new communication possibility. Joyce himself seemed to prefer a kind of "sensitive inarticulateness" to the "usual bombast" of society,[39] for out of the fertile and sensitive silence one can begin to make the distinction between public, market-place language and another language, call it literary or what you will, wherein words have, as Stephen Dedalus observes, "the wider sense,"[40] a greater dimension more likely to facilitate communication. In fact, the sensitive inarticulateness serves merely as a temporary and on-the-spot reaction to the agora; a hope prevails, definitely a Joycean hope, that somehow, somewhere there is an extra-public language that will permit man to transcend the agora and become truly communicative. And it is the search for this greater, more adequate language that pervades a great deal of Joyce's semantic awareness.

When Stanislaus Joyce notes that James makes his confessions "in a foreign language--an easier confession than in the vulgar tongue,"[41] he is describing James' rejection of the ordinary for the extraordinary. Joyce's rejection of Gaelic is likewise a rejection of the Dublin language, the common, the ordinary, the "native tongue," and even his beloved

---

[39]Ellmann, op. cit., p. 96.

[40]A Portrait, p. 250.

[41]Ellmann, op. cit., p. 153.

English, which in a Sinn Finn sense is a foreign tongue, proves inadequate. He said once that though there were enough words in English, they weren't the right ones.[42] Joyce went on, of course, in his own life to learn a number of languages--French, Italian, German--in a kind of continual quest to find his better language. And certainly Joyce's abundant use of foreign languages in his writings becomes symbolic of a perpetual reaching out for more than the one tongue. Like Little Chandler, impressed with the German- and French-speaking waiters in Corless's, Joycean 'heroes' desire more than the native tongue, more than the public language, and they weigh frequently the merits of language candidates: Simon Dedalus calls Italian "the only language;"[43] Buck Mulligan plugs for Greek, as does Professor MacHugh; Cranly, in A Portrait, demonstrates a preference for Latin; Bloom dabbles in Hebrew. What they are all looking for actually is the perfect language, the composite language. Polylingualism becomes, in the Joycean world, a kind of patchwork symbol of a language that does not exist, but is envisioned; one that will let the inarticulate and non-communicative rise into a better world of happier understanding. The quest is well expressed by Joyce himself; "I'd like a language which is above all languages, a language to which all will do service. I cannot express myself in English without enclosing myself in a tradition."[44]

2.

With visions of perfect language dancing in his head, the Joycean

---

[42] Ibid., p. 410.

[43] Ulysses, p. 274.

[44] Ellmann, op. cit., p. 410.

'hero' would seem to be on the verge of some sort of positive gesture to escape the silent inarticulateness. He seems on the threshold of a journey out of the market place. But unfortunately, or at least ironically, the questing journey that the poor man takes becomes a nightmarish kind of running to nowhere, like that of the Red Queen and Alice. Is it because the perfect language does not really exist and any quest for it is a kind of madness? Or is it that modern man is mad to start with and simply corrupts a quest that theoretically could have been made? Or is it that the Joycean 'hero' who has the sensitiveness and desire to escape the market place becomes, because of that very sensitiveness and desire, too vulnerable to life's ravages upon human sanity? Regardless the answer, the language quest taken by the Joycean man becomes a downward path leading him away from the noise of the world perhaps, but not at all in the direction of clarity or communication. And if the 'hero' envisions that he is getting somewhere, his vision is illusion.

A part of the problem lies in the fact that the sensitive Joycean 'hero' slips into the trap of considering language almost thoroughly connotative. In reaction against the denotative babel of the public communication,[45] the Joycean 'hero' casts aside the generally agreed upon or the traditionally accepted definitions for words and concentrates upon a personal, subjective response to word symbols. Though even the men of the Dublin market place supposedly appreciated the connotative capacity of words at the very time they were making denotative use of words, the more sensitive Joycean personality allows his whole relationship with language to be based upon his personal response and association with words.

---

[45]Levin, op. cit., p. 197.

Some words, for instance, he simply cannot stand; Joyce himself did not like the word love: "When I hear the word 'love' I feel like puking," he once said.[46] Stephen Dedalus cannot stand the words generous and just, for they are "those big words . . . which make us so unhappy." And if we cannot stand a word, because of our emotional responses to it, we can refuse to use the word, eliminate it from the language. When confronted by Cranly's question, "Do you love your mother?" Stephen can be relieved of answering: "Stephen shook his head slowly.--I don't know what your words mean--he said simply."[47] To the contrary, if one's response to a word is acceptable, then one can use it, and use it far beyond any denotative limitations. Stephen reads the word foetus cut on an old school desk where his father had once attended class; seeing the word, Stephen envisions a whole way of life that the students must have lived; a vision "which his father's words had been powerless to evoke, sprang up before him out of the word cut in the desk."[48] The Joycean 'hero' concentrates, in other words, on complete obliteration of word denotations, building instead a connotative definition. if his response to a word is at all meaningful to him; if his response is not pleasant or meaningful, the word is eliminated completely, neither denotative nor connotative definitions being given. One plays with a word, carefully, slowly, arousing one's emotions to it, as does the boy in "The Sisters," toying with the word paralysis.

---

[46] Ellmann, op. cit., p. 644.

[47] A Portrait, p. 283.

[48] Ibid., p. 100.

> Every night as I gazed up at the window I said softly to myself the word paralysis. It had always sounded strangely in my ears, like the word gnomon in the Euclid and the word simony in the Catechism. But now it sounded to me like the name of maleficent and sinful being. It filled me with fear, and yet I longed to be nearer to it and to look upon its deadly work.[49]

One toys with the word until one has defined it emotionally, subjectively, privately, and if one finds oneself in a situation where one's private definition does not coincide with reality, then reality is in error, damnable, malicious. The young boy in "Araby" suffers in this way: "The syllables of the word Araby were called to me through the silence in which my soul luxuriated and cast an Eastern enchantment over me,"[50] but the boy is undeceived when he discovers that the word stands for a "prosaic church bazaar,"[51] and he is reduced to "anguish and anger."[52] Such an attitude toward language serves as a basis for the deterioration of communications in the Joycean world.

A more serious reason for failure, however, is that the quest for the perfect language becomes a matter of building a new language, of taking what was originally a market-place language and transforming it into a new medium. Based upon the fallacy that if one pares a watermelon from a round shape into a square and paints the rind blue rather than green one will have a new kind of fruit (when all one actually has is a distorted watermelon), the new, perfect language that the Joycean 'hero' creates for himself is no more than self-induced mirage, a mud pie passing for cherry

---

[49] Dubliners, p. 7.

[50] Ibid., p. 37.

[51] Levin, op. cit., p. 34.

[52] Dubliners, p. 41.

cobbler, a windmill posing as giant before quixotic minds. This deceptive new language appears in the Joycean world in two major guises--that of non-language and that of anti-language. Non-language embraces those aspects of language which are sensory or physical; anti-language embraces those aspects of language having to do with meaning and sense.

First of all, in the area of non-language, the Joycean 'hero' establishes a language wherein the word has become matter. He establishes a vocabulary of words as physical things, shapes, and forms, without any consideration of the denotative capacity of language and with an increasing disconcern with even its connotative capacity. We are in a world where words have become things, where to reach things we must go through words.[53] In the new perfect language one ignores the distinction "between the things he is describing and the words he is using to describe them,"[54] and words become movable blocks, objects to arrange, for the word _is_ the thing; old referents have been absorbed into the symbol; _love_ is no longer an experience, it is a four-letter word-object that one can play with as a child might play with a colored block of wood in the nursery. We are where "the word now shone on his brain, clearer and brighter than any ivory sawn from the mottled tusks of elephants. _Ivory_, _ivoire_, _avorio_, _ebur_."[55] We are where words can sink "slowly out of hearing like a stone."[56] We are where one can pronounce "a soft _o_" protruding one's "full carnal lips" as if one

---

[53]Ellmann, _op. cit._, p. 2.

[54]Levin, _op. cit._, p. 87.

[55]_A Portrait_, p. 208.

[56]_Ibid._, p. 228.

"kissed the vowel."[57]

With the word become matter, it degenerates easily into becoming experience and reality. "Joyce . . . came to equate language and experience,"[58] and he uses his literary method to symbolize the same state of mind for the modern man of his myth: the exact verbal equivalent of infantile experience presented at the opening of A Portrait is not exact at all, of course, but in the Joycean mind it becomes the same as the experience, for the mind operates on the premise "that any given physical effect can be exactly duplicated by means of language,"[59] with the further conclusion that language is experience, and hence, language is reality. Emotion, feeling, life are not described by words but are buried into words, the words become necessary in order to have the vital realities of existence. Emotions are not real, feelings are not real until they are phrasable, until all is integrated by words.[60]

Like the little boy in "The Sisters" who cannot comprehend the priest's death until reading the card on the crape "persuaded me that he was dead,"[61] the Joycean 'hero' has stepped into a world in which words replace people, objects, and sensations. Stephen Dedalus tries to remember the past, tries to call forth some of its vivid moments, but all that comes to his mind are names: "Dante, Parnell, Clane, Clongowes."[62] There

---

[57] Ibid., p. 294.

[58] Levin, op. cit., p. 97.

[59] Ibid., p. 98.

[60] Ibid., p. 50.

[61] Dubliners, pp. 10-11.

[62] A Portrait, p. 104.

are not even any pictures. Only words. So he desperately tries to add to his store of words, since they are all that count: "Words which he did not understand he said over and over to himself till he had learnt them by heart: and through them he had glimpses of the real world about him."[63] His fascination with words, his explorations in Skeat's Etymological Dictionary to find them, rests on his belief in their physical reality.

> Although Stephen agrees that words are receptacles for thought, they acquire for him another value. Becoming intercessors, they stand between himself and reality. Through their agency alone he has 'glimpses of the real world about him.' Words do more than reveal that reality. They create it, and, as if God's compasses, draw significant form.[64]

All things become verbal, even guilt, sorrow, self-reproach,[65] as reality passes away into the physicality of words.

Obviously if words are reality, then the manipulation of words is the manipulation of that reality, and the Joycean 'hero' adds the dimension of verbal magic to the new, perfect language he is creating. Stephen has "a consciousness of the power of words to confer an order and life of their own,"[66] and when he ponders the question, "If a layman in giving baptism pour the water before saying the words is the child baptised?"[67] he is making of a sacrament an act of magic, for in asking about the order of words in the rite he is not asking if the baptism will be legal by canonical law, but is asking will the baptism be "real" in a physical and

---

[63] Ibid., pp. 67-68.

[64] Tindall, op. cit., p. 95.

[65] Levin, op. cit., p. 95.

[66] Ibid., p. 58.

[67] A Portrait, p. 120.

sensory universe. Stephen has

> the state of mind that confers upon language a magical potency. It exalts the habit of verbal association into a principle for the arrangement of experience. You gain power over a thing by naming it; you become master of a situation by putting it into words. It is psychological need, and not hyperfastidious taste that goads the writer on to search for the mot juste, to loot the thesauraus.[68]

Stephen's own life, for instance, seems governed and shaped by the nature of his name; "his strange name seemed to him a prophecy"[69] and when he listens to his own name he seems "to hear the noise of dim waves and to see a winged form flying above the waves and slowly climbing the air."[70] The Joycean 'hero,' manipulator of words, indulges in name-magic and in a vast variety of cabalism and incantation throughout the Dublin-world as he sinks deeper and deeper into the quagmire of his illusory language quest.

Finally, in the area of non-language and the consideration of the sensory aspect of words, the Joycean quester converts the word into music. Joyce once wrote in a schoolboy composition, "There is nothing so deceptive and for all that so alluring as a good surface,"[71] but Joycean 'heroes,' in their attempt to escape the market place, forget the danger of the deception and respond only to the liveliness of surfaces without depth. The sound of words, the figure a word can cut upon the page become increasingly attractive to the Joycean quester, and the rejection of the market-place language becomes more and more a rejection of surface ugliness rather than the rejection of communication failure. Stephen can be

---

[68]Levin, op. cit., pp. 50-51.

[69]A Portrait, p. 196.

[70]Ibid., p. 196.

[71]Ellman, op. cit., p. 36.

saddened by speech of genteel accent "marred by errors,"[72] and can be critical of a friend's speech because it has "neither rare phrases nor Elizabethan English nor quaintly turned versions of Irish idioms."[73] Words are increasingly judged by the way they sound, not for what they mean: "Suck was a queer word . . . the sound was ugly."[74] And though Professor MacHugh, in Ulysses, tells his library companions, when the expression Imperium romanum is defended as sounding nobler than British or Brixton, "We mustn't be led away by words, by sounds of words,"[75] the Joycean 'hero' finally is led away by just that. He is more interested in the onomatopoetic potential in Verlaine's famous rain poem than in its message,[76] and he becomes intensely delighted with words like seesoo, hrss, rsseeiss, oos[77] (describing ocean waves) because he feels they are onomatopoetically valid.

The rhythm of words becomes important: Buck Mulligan is concerned that his name has "two dactyls."[78] And Stephen bathes in the luxurious flow of language:

> A soft liquid joy flowed through the words where the soft long vowels hurtled noiselessly and fell away, lapping and flowing back and ever shaking the white bells of their waves in mute chime and mute peal and soft low swooning cry . . . .[79]

---

[72] A Portrait, p. 268.

[73] Ibid., p. 228.

[74] Ibid., p. 6.

[75] Ulysses, p. 129.

[76] Ellmann, op. cit., p. 444.

[77] Ulysses, p. 50.

[78] Ibid., p. 6.

[79] A Portrait, p. 265.

Joyce himself sometimes shocked his friends by "caring more for sounds and rhythm than sense" in his writing,[80] and his 'heroes' grow gravely concerned with "the structural rhythm" possible in language, with the "poise and balance of the period," until communication, which must embrace more than the sensory symbols of language, goes the way of Stephen's prayer: "His prayer . . . ended in a trail of foolish words which he made to fit the insistent rhythm of the train . . . ."[81]

Language has become music. Joyce's literary method, which symbolizes the course of the communication quest in the Dublin-world, came to music in Finnegans Wake, as Joyce himself acknowledged.[82] But music is not communication. Music, as far as communication is concerned, is a dead-end road, just as magic is a dead-end road, or any exclusively sensory use of language is. Given this kind of matter-magic-music language, one can talk of nothing and still seem momentarily entertaining, one can talk of nothing and even seem a genius,[83] but always there is the nothingness,[84] truly a tale signifying naught.

In the other area of the new language, that area concerned with the meaningful aspect of words, the Joycean 'hero' manages to create for himself a veritable anti-language, with all the outward signs of a communicative possibility but so functioning as to deny any fulfillment of that possibility. Whether or not it is true that the new "synthetic language

---

[80]Ellmann, op. cit., p. 646.

[81]A Portrait, p. 98.

[82]Ellmann, op. cit., p. 393.

[83]Ibid., p. 533.

[84]Ibid., p. 533.

had to distort, if not disown, the tongue of Shakespeare and Swift . . . ,"[85] we certainly find a language in which the "native tongue" has been smelted "back to protean plasma . . . ."[86] Purportedly modeled upon dream language, this anti-language is a "fermented"[87] or soured version of all that we mean by normal discourse.[88] Humpty-Dumptyism prevails in this frightening world where "calculated slips of the tongue"[89] abound, where pig-Latin is the household dialect,[90] where the malapropistic language of the outlaw is defended, and where rhetoric succumbs to a perpetual trickery: adverbs become verbs ("I am almosting it," Stephen says);[91] sentences are chopped in half (the opening of Finnegans Wake); and a myriad other prankster constructions occur.

One of the principal devices of the anti-language is the compression of several words into one, sometimes in so simple a construction as that called by Lewis Carroll the portmanteau word, but at other times more elaborate than any single suitcase could contain. For instance, consider the word "mathmaster" as explained by Joseph Campbell and Henry Morton Robinson: "Math is Anglo-Saxon for 'mow' or 'cut down,' and Sanskrit for 'annihilate.' It is also Hindustanti for 'hut' and 'monastery.' The word

---

[85]Levin, op. cit., p. 173.

[86]Campbell and Robinson, op. cit., p. 4.

[87]Ibid., p. 128.

[88]Especially hilarious is the fact that the Anna Livia Plurabelle passage of Finnegans Wake was not only written in Joycean anti-language but was also translated by C. K. Ogden into Basic English, anti-language at the other end of the spectrum. See Ellmann, op. cit., p. 627.

[89]Levin, op. cit., pp. 185-86.

[90]Ibid., p. 47.

[91]Ulysses, p. 47.

says: 'to overpower by cutting down men and annihilating their homes and monasteries.'"[92] Delightful. Or consider the explication given by Tindall of the following passage from Finnegans Wake: "This is big Willingdom mormorial tallowscoop. Wounderworker obscides on the flanks of the jinnies. Sexcaliber hrosspower."[93]

> This passage is to be taken according to Freud. The mormorial tallow-scoop, the marble-memorial-telescope-obelisk in the Park, is phallic and deathly too. The wounderworker combines wound with Mr. Bloom's wonderworker for curing flatulency. Sexcaliber hrosspower combines several symbols, all of them sexual: Excalibur or sword, caliber or gun, horse mixed with roos (the German for nag), and six-cylinder or car. As for the jinnies, they are girls.[94]

Such squashed language provides a firm basis for the anti-language, for it creates the general effect of carefully controlled ambiguity, a double-talk, a tripletalk, a saying one thing one time, another another time, all depending how one holds the words up to the light. Squashed language becomes the double-talk that Orwell warns about in 1984, a talk that points both north and south at once. Joycean 'heroes' delight "in saying two opposite things in the same words,"[95] with the result that we abide in a directionless world of deified antitheses and paradoxes.

Another principal device in the anti-language is agnomination. Puns have had a frolicking and legitimate place in the history of man's communications; Joyce was keenly aware of the pun that serves as bedrock for the Church of Rome. But paronomasia becomes anti-language when it becomes so perpetual an event as it does in the Joycean world. From the

---

[92]Campbell and Robinson, op. cit., p. 33.

[93]Finnegans Wake, p. 8.

[94]Tindall, op. cit., p. 54.

[95]Campbell and Robinson, op. cit., p. 34.

notorious double-entendre of Chamber Music to such piddling ones as the "A.E.I.O.U." in Ulysses, the pun discolors any conceivable communication, simply by distraction if nothing else. A third principal device of the anti-language is the backward word. As Tindall points out, "'Jabberwocky' is written not only in dream language but in looking-glass language as well."[96] The voice of the damned sing God's praise backwards in Ulysses--"Htengier Tnetopinmo Dog Drol eht rof, Aiulella!"[97]--and we are told by Levin that, in Finnegans Wake, "The motif of the rainbow, appearing to Noah in the aftermath of the flood, is complementary to the thunderbolt; we can dimly descry it, if we read the girls' names on page 227 backwards."[98] The noncommunicativeness of such a device is obvious. A fourth principal device of anti-language is abbreviation. In this world why should one write out "four things," when all one need do, with medieval blessings we are told, is write "f.t." Why should one write out "please to lick one and turn over," when one can say, "P.t.l.o.a.t.o." Why use words when initials will do?

> Scuse us, chorley guy! You tollerday donsk? N. You tolkatiff scowegian? Nn. You spigotty anglease? Nnn. You phonio saxo? Nnnn. Clear all so![99]

Anti-language uses all these devices and more to create a squashed, distorted, unique vocabulary that filters out any and all communication. The strangulated words of the Croppy Boy, in Ulysses, "Horhot ho hray ho

---

[96]Tindall, op. cit., p. 56.

[97]Ulysses, p. 584.

[98]Levin, op. cit., p. 157.

[99]Finnegans Wake, p. 16.

rhother's hest"[100] (which is supposed to be, "and forgot to pray for my mother's rest") is all that we get in these lost and lonely areas of language gone awry.

The journey taken by the Joycean 'hero' in quest of the perfect language proves to be, primarily, an elaborate neurotic development within his own mind. Denied communication within the market place, accepting the silent inarticulateness, the Joycean man begins to develop a kind of mania for language, a mania which he thinks is his quest, but which is really a destructive gesture. His neurosis amounts to something like this: If language is the container which communication must use, if language is the "form" and meaning is the "content," and if the problem is to find a better, more perfect language, one's attention and energies should be spent on container and form, rather than upon substance and content. And the Joycean personality does just that. His quest for the perfect language degenerates into an excessive worship of the idea of language at the expense of meaning. Communication, the original goal, is lost in an overwheming passion for medium. The areas at the journey's end remind one of those poor Southern dwellings in the United States where isolated, lonely souls have gathered up gourd fruit, have removed the succulent fruity pulp and thrown it away to rot, have dried and decorated the gourd shells, stringing them about the tree limbs in a fantasy of garish rinds.

The Joycean 'hero' flounders into a worship of language medium to escape a language communication he dislikes. He lists into an aggressive or opulent language, connotatively known, to escape from the frightening silence. Words, which are now his own and not the rabble's, can raise

---

[100] Ulysses, p. 578.

him up from death,[101] can permit him to indulge in experience otherwise impossible: ". . . it was only amid softworded phrases . . . that he dared to conceive of the soul or body of a woman . . . ."[102] But his neurosis creates not a real language, not a better or more perfect language, but only the non-language of matter, magic, and music, and the anti-language of distortion, truncation, and strangulation. The only communication that remains is with oneself, a soliloquy in which one's voice speaks softly to one's lonely heart. The only communication that remains is the one described by Joyce himself: ". . . that letter selfpenned to one's other, that neverperfect everplanned."[103]

3.

With society and market place as the enemy, the Joycean 'hero,' equipped with a language of folly, pits himself against the ordered rabble and traditional noise in a contest that achieves the comic proportions of Don Quixote's battles for the fair Dulcinea. If Don Quixote went to battle riding on a sagging nag and wearing a cardboard visor, the Joycean 'hero' plunges into frantic battle boasting a theory of communications just as ridiculously inadequate. Don Quixote, that man turned inward, pits illusion against reality; the Joycean 'hero,' also turned inward, pits an illusory language against the inescapable facts of human need for communication. And just as there is a mingling of laughter and tears over the pilgrimage of the Spaniard, so in the searchings and seekings of the

---

[101]The word "whisky," uttered at the wake, raises Finnegan from the dead.

[102]A Portrait, p. 180.

[103]Levin, op. cit., p. 171.

Irishman laughter and weeping find a common source. Should we laugh or cry over the man who attempts to speak to others by talking to himself and who seeks to improve language by destroying it? Joyce creates a comedy, laced with agony, by acknowledging the paradoxes in the communication struggle.

Such a man as Gabriel Conroy, in "The Dead," represents one phase of Joycean paradox. Gabriel is a teacher of languages; also he is a man who can feel the pangs of an incurable isolation which no language can penetrate or assuage. He is the public communicator, maker of speeches; at the same time he is haunted by a sense of communication failure. When he reviews the speech he is to give at the dancing party, he becomes acutely aware of all the problems of communication, of all the subtleties and delicacies of allusion and reference and tone, and he convinces himself that the "whole speech was a mistake from first to last, an utter failure."[104] Yet he makes the speech and everyone applauds. Have they understood? Or does it matter whether they have understood or not? Do they really care? Certainly one would think, on the surface of things, that Gabriel is involved with a highly communicative world: the talk is lavish, professional newspaper people are present, the question of the native Irish tongue is discussed, young ladies cry goodnight in German as they depart. Yet Gabriel is sensitive to the fact that names are slightly mispronounced, words are not understood, allusions misfire, voices catch and stutter. Gabriel is aware of the discrepancy between the surface and the depth, and as an educated man, sensitive and alert, he tries to make his accommodation to the world by being ever on his communication toes;

---

[104] Dubliners, p. 229.

though he may not solve the problems, he at least is aware that he had taken the wrong tone with Lily in the pantry, that he should not risk a grandiose phrase with Miss Ivors, that he should question Miss Ivor's sincerity, and that he should grab hold of Aunt Julia's hand and shake it when no other communication will suffice. Gabriel is the paradoxical hero, frightened and inconfident, fighting the battle, aware of the pitfalls but making his attempt, unusually aware of communication difficulties but making his living by teaching a communication medium. He is more involved than adept; more courageous than skilled; more informed of a situation than in command of it.

Gabriel's communication experience comes to a climax in his attempt to speak to his wife. Aware that for a brief moment she heard from beyond the world's noise some enigmatic communication, Gabriel wishes to cast aside the artificial, superficial articulation that passes for communication and to reach truly into his wife's heart and soul. He longed "to run after her noiselessly, catch her by the shoulders and say something foolish and affectionate into her ear."[105] But in this wish he comes to the greatest paradox of all: the harder one wants to communicate the more difficult it is; the more we have to say, the less language we can seize upon. He longs to be alone with his wife, so that he can call softly to her and have her turn and listen, yet in the carriage driving away from the party, he is glad of the rattling carriage noise that saves him from having to converse with her. And later in the silence of the hotel room, he is delayed by the look upon her face--its seriousness and weariness

---

[105] Ibid., p. 274.

keep words from passing his lips. "No, it was not the moment yet."[106] And the moment never comes. When he learns of her distant lover, winter dead, he is inhibited further. "He longed to cry to her from his soul"[107] but "He did not know how he could begin."[108] Gabriel Conroy, master of languages, master of ceremonies, falters and fails and shivers into winter silence. As he comes closer and closer in his own mind to the message to give his wife, he more and more loses the facility to talk. Paradox. And irony.

Likewise the dilemma of Mr. Duffy in "A Painful Case." Here is the antisocial hero, whose "refinement" had made him withdraw from the rabble. "He lived his spiritual life without any communication with others,"[109] until he meets one evening Mrs. Sinico and accepts her invitation to talk. He is truly eager to talk with someone who speaks, as it were, his language, and he begins a long discourse, opening his nature to the full. His "message" proves so interesting that Mrs. Sinico asks him why he does not write out all this thoughts, but he rejects the idea with scorn. Why should he? "To compete with phrasemongers, incapable of thinking consecutively for sixty seconds? To submit himself to the criticism of an obtuse middle class which entrusted its morality to policemen and its fine arts to impressarios?"[110] Mr. Duffy wants to communicate, but only on his terms; he is sensitive to communication failures in the market

---

[106] Ibid., p. 278.

[107] Ibid., p. 279.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Ibid., p. 135.

[110] Ibid., p. 138.

place and therefore prefers to limit communication to a dialogue with himself or someone close to him. Mrs. Sinico seems to understand his words, and little by little they broaden their discussion to include not only the remote, but the near; and in the clarity of their isolation together, in their discovered silence away from the market place, Mr. Duffy is able to communicate more clearly than ever before his one great message about life: We cannot communicate. His own articulate voice insists on the soul's incurable loneliness. Mrs. Sinico misunderstands, thinking Mr. Duffy's observation is actually an invitation for a more intimate communication, and she proposes the final gesture of communication in the act of love. Mr. Duffy is disillusioned, and they agree to break off their intercourse.

Whereas Gabriel Conroy lost communication the more he sincerely wanted it, Mr. Duffy rejects communication the more it becomes available. Mr. Duffy actually relishes the impasse of man's wanting to communicate but never being able to do so. Even more clandestinely, perhaps, he relishes the communication that is within himself, the interior monologue, more than he does any social or outward communication. He wants to talk but doesn't want to talk. He is disgustingly frustrating as a communicator. And even when he hears of Mrs. Sinico's death, he is not shocked from his stupidity. The only emotion that crosses his soul is a nausea: ". . . it revolted him to think that he had ever spoken to her of what he held sacred."[111] And "the threadbare phrases, the inane expressions of sympathy, the cautious words of a reporter won over to conceal the details

---

[111] Ibid., p. 144.

of a commonplace vulgar death attacked his stomach."[112] So critical of and precious about the language of others, so insensitive to the communication needs of others, Mr. Duffy refuses to play the game; if "they" aren't going to stay within the limitations he prescribes then he will not communicate at all with them. All of which goes to prove the point he's held all along: We cannot truly communicate. Mr. Duffy arranges his life so that "He could not feel her near him in the darkness nor her voice touch his ear. He waited for some minutes listening. He could hear nothing: the night was perfectly silent. He listenend again: perfectly silent."[113] And then, we may assume, he piously damns the universe for its awful stillness and his undeserved loneliness.

Mixed with our tears over the Conroys and the Duffys is an inevitable touch of laughter. We can sympathize to a degree, but beyond sympathy is a growing laughter such as Cervantes and Swift alike knew how to elicit. It is the laughter of scorn, of criticism. And the Joycean world, after a certain seriousness occupies the stage, turns to that kind of humor that is in the human comedy, calling forth that kind of laughter that Jonson evoked by showing the world its follies and by showing the idiocies and ironies of life, the impasses and paradoxes. Joyce in his early work is generally straightfaced and reasonably serious, but as his canon progressed he turned more and more to the joke as a literary form, to an hysterical kind of comic strip in which, by broad caricature and grotesque masks, he sets forth the battle and quest of the individual communicator. Don Quixote emerges full blown in Ulysses and Finnegans Wake.

---

[112] Ibid.

[113] Ibid., p. 147.

In Ulysses, Stephen, Leopold, and Molly are the three great studies in communication experience, each of them having something of Joyce's "own preoccupation with language."[114] Each one demonstrates a different kind of articulateness and a different pattern of quest for communication. Also, each one comes at last to a different form of noncommunication, the three making up a Joycean triangle of the broken word. Stephen, of course, is studied earlier in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man and in the even earlier Stephen Hero; and because of the attention given to him in Joyce's work he comes closest, no doubt, to being the most extensive contribution Joyce made to the study of modern man.

Even as a boy, we are told, Stephen Dedalus was concerned with words, concerned with their meaning and their use. Like the boy in "Araby" fascinated by a term, like the boy in "The Sisters" fascinated by a word, Stephen ponders various problems of definition, attempting to equate in some way words with reality:

> What did that mean, to kiss? You put your face up like that to say goodnight and then his mother put her face down. That was to kiss. His mother put her lips to his cheek; her lips were soft and they wetted his cheek; and they made a tiny little noise: kiss.[115]

That sort of semantically-sound definition would seem a good place to begin in developing an understanding of communications. And certainly Stephen's concern with words continues. He worries about the meaning of the word "smugging," though he is hesitant to ask anybody about it; the meaning of the word "surd" is considered. As a schoolboy, he meets the matter of definition on a larger philosophical plane when Father Arnell

---

[114] Levin, op. cit., p. 126.

[115] A Portrait, pp. 10-11.

ponders the meaning of the word "retreat" and the word "eternity." "O, dread and dire word. Eternity! What mind of man can understand it?"[116] And perhaps it is out of the perplexing definitional problems of the Church that Stephen begins, as his boyhood develops, to reveal a certain cynicism toward traditional or classical definitions of words, definitions that really do not enlighten one about the use of a word in everyday affairs. There is a hint of scorn when he observes the heads of his classmates "meekly bent as they wrote in their notebooks the points they were bidden to note, nominal definitions, essential definitions . . . ,"[117] as well as a hint of scorn when later he observes a professor beginning "to jugle gravely with the terms pure science and applied science."[118] Scorn gives way to smugness, however, as Stephen decides to take over the definitional work left unfinished by Aristotle; he will define "pity" and "terror" with ease, and he becomes increasingly pedantic in the task. Asked to define "claritas," Stephen explains that the connotation of the word is rather vague, that Aquinas' use of the term seemed to be inexact, it has baffled him for some time, but at last he is willing to give a definition. In fact, Stephen becomes very skillful at defining difficult, abstract words, words of theory. If he has any problem it is with the definition of more ordinary words like "alone"; his friend Cranly questions Stephen's knowing what that word means.

The concern with definition is significant only as a rather quick glimpse into the way Stephen's mind is developing. Words and reality are

---

[116] Ibid., p. 151.

[117] Ibid., p. 206.

[118] Ibid., pp. 225-26.

the problem, but growing weary with philosophical and theological definitions he enters a period of scorn in which he outdoes the enemy by becoming a very articulate definer of theoretical terms, though perhaps still bothered by the terms that should have everyday meaning in his life.

Early in boyhood, too, Stephen develops, in some sort of psychological reaction to the world of Jesuits and Irish schoolmates, to the market place in miniature which the boarding school represents, a carefully nurtured silence. Innately shy, he at times would stand among the boys "afraid to speak, listening"[119] and later developed an extended mood "of embittered silence,"[120] as some sort of "incommunicable emotion"[121] developed within him. He maintained a "silent watchful manner,"[122] and "he could respond to no earthly or human appeal, dumb and insensible to the call of summer and gladness and companionship, wearied and dejected by his father's voice."[123] Unquestionably, Stephen's problem has sexual origins, but a major part of that problem's manifestation is in terms of noncommunication. Inhibited by the Church and by society in general from expressing an essential emotional experience within him, Stephen responds pathologically by rejecting all expression, by "getting even" with the culture that has prescribed the limits of his articulation. Stephen, of course, is making something of a mistake by assuming that restrictions upon experience are necessarily restrictions upon communication (though

---

[119] Ibid., p. 42.

[120] Ibid., p. 73.

[121] Ibid., p. 83.

[122] Ibid., p. 75.

[123] Ibid., p. 104.

heaven knows they frequently are); he is already flirting with the concept that experience and language are interchangeable.

Finally, of course, especially in a boy's world, the dam breaks. The "inarticulate cries and the unspoken brutal words rushed forth from his brain to force passage"[124] and he begins an understandable career of furtive communication by writing foul long letters "in the joy of guilty confession" and by carrying them "secretly for days and days only to throw them under the cover of night among the grass in the corner of a field or beneath some hingeless door or in some niche in the hedges where a girl might come upon them as she walked by and read them secretly."[125] Stephen's silence breaks out into pornography, a satisfying form of communication to him now because it both satisfies the immediate need to articulate and yet makes no peace with the society that he already sees, even as a boy, as the enemy.

Because of his early Jesuit and Catholic orientation, however, Stephen suffers a great sexual guilt following his experience with prostitutes; in a moment of new commitment to the Church's teachings, he makes ready his confession, but now he is confronted with a new sense of inarticulation--not the old embittered silence of rejection, but the dumbness of shame and fear. He needs to communicate now, but the capacity to do so is gone: "He had to confess, to speak out in words what he had done and thought, sin after sin. How? How?"[126] His tongue cleaves to his palate, and "Shame covered him wholly like fine glowing asked falling continually.

---

[124] Ibid., p. 112.

[125] Ibid., p. 132.

[126] Ibid., p. 144.

To say it in words! His soul, stifling and helpless, would cease to be."[127] This inarticulation, though consciously not the bitter rejection of social communication, is, in fact, rooted in a subconscious rejection of all that the Church stands for. He is not really a changed man underneath. He makes his confession, however; moves toward a piety and even toward a vocation--to accept the words of the Church and of social order. But again he turns--and again because of language of the social order. One might ask of Stephen: did he reject the Church because of its language, or did he reject a certain kind of language in rejection of the Church? Stephen's whole concept of language and reality suggests the possibility that his rejection of Church and the language it represents is a chicken-or-egg situation.

Stephen's mind "wearied of its search for the essence of beauty amid the spectral words of Aristotle or Aquinas."[128] Somehow the language of philosophy and religion did not supply him, here in late adolescence, with the beauty he needed, and he finds himself, wherever he goes in the established world, anywhere in the Church-market place, walking "on in a land among heaps of dead language."[129] Stephen's earlier problem of definition is no doubt involved here, but a new problem of aesthetics in language is also appearing. Not only the question of what words mean, but also the question of what aesthtic experience they provide enters Stephen's considerations. He comes to a point where "every mean shop legend bound his mind like the words of a spell and his soul shrivelled up sighing with

---

[127] Ibid., p. 164.

[128] Ibid., p. 205.

[129] Ibid., p. 208.

age . . . ."[130] A growing hypersensitiveness to language develops, not only to word meanings, but to word forms, shapes, and sounds.

Once more having rejected the Faith and its language, and now burdened with an increasingly acute "consciousness of language," Stephen moves, not to the earlier silence of rejection or the silence of fear, but to a silence more neurotic than all previous ones, a silence based upon a new satisfaction with a growing self-communication, a silence growing out of an increasing nonverbalized dialogue with the world around him, a dialogue that no one hears save Stephen himself. Not bitter, not frightened, Stephen now in his silence can smile interestingly enough "in answer to the smile which he could not see on the priest's shadowed face, its image or spectre only passing rapidly across his mind . . . ."[131] Taking a smile as a slight kind of visual communication, it is interesting that Stephen can "answer" a message that reaches him only by some kind of mental telepathy. A hint of this growing kind of self-constructed communication occurs when Stephen, listening in "reverent silence" to his priest, hears through the priest's words "even more distinctly a voice bidding him approach offering him secret knowledge and secret power."[132] In other words, Stephen is beginning to read messages that he envisions rather than simply the messages that are being directly communicated. He reads hostility in his mother's "listless silence,"[133] and the epiphanical communication with a young lady is, one suspects, rather one-sided: "Her image had passed into

---

[130] Ibid., pp. 207-208.

[131] Ibid., pp. 179-80.

[132] Ibid., pp. 184-85.

[133] Ibid., p. 191.

his soul for ever and no word had broken the holy silence of his ecstasy. Her eyes had called him and his soul had leaped at the call."[134] Though visual and other nonverbal forms of communication are valid, of course, one realizes that a great deal of the communication going on in Stephen's life is actually a form of ventriloquism in which Stephen throws out his own voice and hears back what he wants to hear. It is interesting, too, in the last example, that Stephen should be pleased that no word was spoken and that the silence of noncommunication has now become holy.

By the end of A Portrait, Stephen has begun that downward path of rejection that leads, as demonstrated earlier, to no communication whatsoever but to linguistic dead ends. The story of Stephen's deceptive quest for a communication outside the market place, even though within the market place, is told in Ulysses. Tindall suggests that "since Ulysses begins with the beginning of the Mass, the entire book may be considered a symbolic celebration of Stephen's communion with man."[135] More accurately, it is a celebration of Stephen's search for communion and communication. Because of the communication neurosis that had been developing throughout his childhood, Stephen, on the threshold of adulthood, can "no longer communicate with anyone in Ireland but himself."[136] He goes into exile to France, symbolic of retreating to noncommunication within the agora, but now he returns, at his mother's death, and begins the quest for communication in his own peculiar terms.

An emblem of Stephen's doomed communication quest appears in his

---

[134] Ibid., p. 200.

[135] Tindall, op. cit., p. 29.

[136] Ellmann, op. cit., p. 368.

reaction to his mother's request to hear his prayers for her. She "wanted to hear my music. Silent with awe and pity I went to her bedside. She was crying in her wretched bed. For those words, Stephen: love's bitter mystery."[137] His remaining silent and refusing his mother the words she wanted to hear becomes a haunting remembrance to Stephen through the awful day of Ulysses: His mother comes in a dream, "silently . . . with mute secret words;"[138] she comes to him "Silently, in a dream . . . mute, reproachful."[139] Her silence and muteness are a reenactment of his own wilful noncommunication; and when at last he hears from her ashen breath the very prayer he refused to say, his response prophetically reveals the anti-language and noncommunication that awaits him at the end of his supposed quest for contact with the world:

> His response is entirely in character: first an obscene monosyllable, then a phrase of expatriate French, next the echo of Lucifer's refusal, Non serviam, and finally a direct Wagnerian leitmotif, the cry of Siegfried as he wields his sword, Nothung![140]

The verbal chaos, the neurotic muttering of Stephen's private language reveals itself when challenged by the most significant communication failure in his life.

Stephen begins his communication quest that June 16, 1904, walking on through Dublin-world "waiting to be spoken to,"[141] but finding that since he "spoke to non-one; none to me."[142] He engages, of course, in

---

[137] Ulysses, p. 11.

[138] Ibid., p. 12.

[139] Ibid., p. 7.

[140] Levin, op. cit., p. 110.

[141] Ulysses, p. 21.

[142] Ibid., p. 46.

superficial forms of market-place communication as teacher at Mr. Deasy's school and as messenger for Mr. Deasy, carrying the foot-and-mouth disease letter to the newspaper; but in the "public" situations, Stephen finds in both himself and others only "talk" and not understanding. As he observes one of his students at work, he thinks: "Secrets, silent, stony sit in the dark places of both our hearts: secrets weary of their tyranny."[143] The essence of the message not spoken remains in spite of articulation with others. Leaving Mr. Deasy's, Stephen wanders along the beach at Sandymount where he reads the language of things: "Signature of all things I am here to read, seaspawn and seawrach . . . ,"[144] but since this is a form of self-communication, he more honestly cries to the world, "O touch me soon, now. What is that word known to all men? I am quiet here alone. Sad too. Touch, touch me."[145] And he writes his message to the world that never wrote to him:

> Turning his back to the sun he bent over far to a table of rock and scribbled words . . . . Who ever anywhere will read these written words? Signs on a white field . . . .[146]

As the day moves on, Stephen finds himself more and more involved with the market place, even though he rejects it. At the newspaper office and in the library, he is surrounded by talkative, noisy people and, as he had done in his adolescence, he boisterously joins in this rabble communication, outdoing them at their own game. "Stephen outdoes them . . . with . . . ingenious misquotations,"[147] and in questionable definitions:

---

[143] Ibid., p. 29.

[144] Ibid., p. 38.

[145] Ibid., p. 49.

[146] Ibid., p. 49.

[147] Levin, op. cit., p. 117.

"Unsheathe your dagger definitions. Horseness is the whatness of all-horse."[148] He engages in all the communication stupidities of the Shakespeare discussion. But underneath, in his secret mind, he is in rebellion against the rabblement as always. He knows he is surrounded by "Coffined thoughts . . . in mummycases, embalmed in spice of words,"[149] surrounded by a world of "brainsick words,"[150] and even while he plays the game of market-place communication, he ranges through a host of foreign languages as well as various forms of the English language: modern, Elizabethan, and the like, in what we have already described as the symbolic search for a better, more perfect language.

Earlier in the day, Buck Mulligan had observed about Stephen's taciturnity that "The sacred pint alone can unbind the tongue of Dedalus,"[151] and certainly Stephen's drunkenness that night at the hospital and at the brothel makes him exceedingly garrulous; but quite obviously, too, the drunkenness makes his talk increasingly noncommunicative. In the increasing darkness of his quest, he moves, paradoxically, toward a certain cheap eloquence which impresses the Dublin streetwalkers; at the same time he sinks into a kind of morose talk with himself in monosyllables. One part of him is acutely aware of the rhetoric of the traditional language that he learned of old--". . . one man in armour will beat ten men in the shirts. Shirt is synecdoche. Part for the whole"[152]--but another part has already rejected the ordered language for that "more perfect language" which is

---

[148] *Ulysses*, p. 184.

[149] *Ibid.*, p. 191.

[150] *Ibid.*, p. 238.

[151] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

[152] *Ibid.*, p. 573.

the creation of the Joycean 'hero.' When Stephen militantly asks, on the midnight streets of Dublin, "Why should I not speak to him or to any human being who walks upright upon this oblate orange?"[153] the answer must be that he doesn't really want to.

Late in the darkness, Stephen tells Mr. Bloom the following anecdote:

> Solitary hotel in mountain in pass. Autumn. Twilight. Fire lit. In dark corner young man seated. Young woman enters. Restless. Solitary. She sits. She goes to window. She stands. She sits. Twilight. She thinks. On solitary hotel-paper she writes. She thinks. She writes. She sighs. Wheels and hoofs. She hurries out. He comes from his dark corner. He seizes solitary paper. He holds it towards fire. Twilight. He reads. Solitary.[154]

This is Stephen's story of communication. Solitary communicants. Indirect messages. Dim light. Solitary result. And it is to this point that Stephen must come himself. He has, through the day, thrown himself into the talk of the world, but he has communicated with no one. He has perhaps left a few messages scattered along his way. But even if they are found and read, he will never know. His disbelief in the talk of the market place and the inherent inadequacy of his own private methods for serious communication lead him to a lonely walk home in solitary silence as the long quest comes to an end.

Stephen's most likely chance to communicate during his questing day came in his association with Leopold Bloom, who joined him at the hospital for the subsequent trip to nighttown. Bloom, like other Joycean characters, is a communication quester. "Bloom, is seeking and never

---

[153] Ibid., p. 574.

[154] Ibid., p. 668.

finding, human intercourse."[155] In the advertising business, a form of "public" communication, Leopold Bloom actively tries to improve his communication skills by refining his vocabulary--he is thoughtfully concerned with the meaning and use of such words as "parallax," "teco," the "I.N.R.I." on the Roman Catholic crucifix (he ingenuously deciphers it to mean "Iron nails ran in"),[156] and various other "what you may call."[157] And he is concerned, as most Joycean characters are, with polylingualism, in which he puts much trust most of the time. He himself dabbles in Hebrew, reverts to pidgin Chinese, tries a bit of Spanish, and, in a fantasy of daydreaming, envisions himself as parent of eight children, each of whom speaks five modern languages fluently. (Admittedly though, by day's end, Bloom is not so sure about the helpfulness of polylingualism--at one time he observes that there are more languages to start with than necessary.) Bloom also tries to lend a helping hand to the communication affairs of the world. In addition to his anxious concern with the advertisement for Mr. Keyes, he alone sends a kind message to the mother and child at the hospital, he alone tries to bring order to the "strife of tongues"[158] at the hospital, and it is he who, in another fantasy of daydreaming, envisions himself as king of Ireland performing the rites of public articulation and communication: the spokesman for the people.

Indeed, Bloom has something of a reputation as a talker.

---

[155] Levin, op. cit., p. 114.

[156] Ulysses, p. 80.

[157] Ibid., p. 70.

[158] Ibid., p. 403.

> I declare to my antimacassar if you took up a straw from the bloody floor and you said to Bloom: Look at, Bloom. Do you see that straw? That's a straw. Declare to my aunt he'd talk about it for an hour so he would and talk steady.[159]

But the sad part is that Bloom's talk never really becomes communication. He tries so hard, but it is nearly all just a sincere kind of verbosity in a world that is not really listening anyhow. When Bloom has something really to say, something to communicate, he is most usually thwarted. Martin Cunningham thwarted his speech rudely several times at Dignam's funeral: "Mr. Bloom, about to speak, closed his lips again."[160] At the newspaper office, he tries to communicate, but has a hard time of it, "Slipping his words deftly into the pauses of the clanking" machine.[161] When he calls the newspaper editor, the response is "To tell him to go to hell . . . ."[162] When people do listen, they don't understand. "You don't grasp my point, says Bloom. What I mean is . . . ,"[163] and in a conversation with Joe Hynes, he mixes up his words, "Then he starts all confused . . . ."[164] A major misunderstanding comes with the Citizen: the news is reported that Throwaway has won the Gold Cup horse race, and because Bloom had offered Bantam Lyons a sporting paper that he was "just going to throw . . . away,"[165] his words are misinterpreted and misunderstood as a tip, and the Citizen grows violently angry at this knowledge

---

[159] Ibid., p. 311.

[160] Ibid., p. 95.

[161] Ibid., p. 119.

[162] Ibid., p. 135.

[163] Ibid., p. 301.

[164] Ibid., p. 307.

[165] Ibid., p. 84.

on Bloom's part. Bloom that he is "often considerably misunderstood,"[166] and he sinks frequently into unintelligibility. In the mocktrial in nighttown, Bloom is charged to make a "bogus statement,"[167] and he begins a "long unintelligible speech . . . . He mumbles incoherently. Reporters claim that they cannot hear . . . he talks inaudibly."[168] And Bloom can envision himself as a "dummymummy who utters an unintelligible and incoherent word."[169]

Thus, behind Bloom's verbose and language-concerned manner is the potential of unintelligibility. And why not, he might ask himself. Doesn't the world one minute say to us: "Puke it out. Be candid for once,"[170] and the next minute say to us: "Hold your tongue! Speak when you're spoken to?"[171] Bloom grows naturally shy at times about communication, especially communication of any permanence. He has a reputation of never putting anything down in black and white, he has fears that someone will read out the letter he has written to Martha Clifford, he argues himself out of speaking, verbally, to Gerty MacDowell, and he frequently, as he does in the hospital episode, gives dissembling, evasive, compromised answers to questions.

Nevertheless, shy and afraid, frequently shut out of communication or misunderstood, Bloom has an almost pathetic hunger for communication

---

[166] Ibid., p. 641.

[167] Ibid., p. 453.

[168] Ibid., p. 454.

[169] Ibid., p. 537.

[170] Ibid., p. 526.

[171] Ibid., p. 526.

with someone. Almost shut entirely out of his wife's considerations, he clings to every possibility of communication. He reads the letter he receives from his daughter Milly over three times and saves it carefully. He carries on a furtive, clandestine correspondence with Martha Clifford--he hides the letter, tears it open secretly in his pocket, reads it in secret places; his answer is written in a tavern, midst difficult circumstances, having to be hidden from prying eyes. In fact, Bloom has a long history of secret, furtive, ultimately unsatisfactory correspondences--indirect, partial communication--to which he confesses in the nighttown episode; he tells also that he prepared "unspeakable messages" and telephoned them mentally to various women. These furtive, illegitimate attempts at communication are almost comic, as Bloom tries anything at all possible to make his contact with the world. Though he concentrates on sexual correspondence with women, it is not difficult to see in his quests the deeper need for understanding conversation with his fellowman. He smiles at unidentified women on the streets, he has even once tried to communicate with a nun in church, and when he talks with Mrs. Breen he almost begs her to communicate: "Let her speak. Look straight in her eyes. I believe you. Trust me."[172] All his attempts, of course, are failures or near failures. When he helps the blind boy along the street, Bloom tries to converse with him, but to no avail. All he gets is "No answer."[173]

Can there be any direct communication for him? He can remember a conversation he had once with a barber, but the conversation went

---

[172] Ibid., p. 155.

[173] Ibid., p. 178.

indirectly, by way of the mirror. They talked to each other in the mirror, in a kind of oblique and intercepted way. Is that the way all his communication must be? When he goes to the beach and sees Gerty MacDowell he is tempted to talk to her, but doesn't. He tries rather to talk with his eyes.

> Yes, it was her he was looking at and there was meaning in his look. His eyes burned into her as though they would search her through and through, read her very soul.[174]

The communication with Gerty is at a distance, removed, indirect, nebulous, nonverbal. And the climax of their uncertain conversation is the symbol of the standard Joycean terminal in communications: the self-communication that is masturbation. Bloom brings the uncertain dialogue to an end by talking to himself with his hand; the implications of this gesture in the field of communications is self-evident.

What is left for Bloom to do? He tries to write a message in the sand, but knowing the impermanence of that, he "effaced the letters with his slow boot."[175] And when he goes that night to the bordello and finds his subconscious released into its long sequence of fantasies, the most pathetic moment comes when he tries to talk to the spectre of his dead son Rudy. Rudy does not answer. Only a stage-direction is given. The awful loneliness sinks in upon Bloom. Our messages are effaced. Even our ghosts do not speak. And Bloom's day ends, after Stephen has left him, with his going through his possessions--including his old communications, old letters, old advertisements, old words. Alone. In the dark house. And when at last he lies down in bed with Molly and they talk together,

---

[174] Ibid., p. 351.

[175] Ibid., p. 375.

he knows their talk is just that. Talk. There is no understanding. He accepts in the final instance the ". . . mute immutable mature animality"[176] of human life.

The bringing of Mr. Bloom and Stephen Dedalus together is, of course, the great climax of communication discussion in Ulysses. "The primary object of Ulysses is to bring these two inglorious heroes together . . . and to see whether they have anything to say to each other."[177] And one might think that two Joycean 'heroes,' both seeking communication, would find in their confrontation some sort of satisfactory, even if eccentric or socially incomprehensible, communication. At first, such seems to be the case. Meeting at the hospital for the first time that day, Bloom feels an attraction for Stephen and senses the possibility of a communicative rapport between them. He stays with Stephen through the chaos of the bordello and nighttown experiences, playing his paternal role; then in the journey that leads to Bloom's house, the communication attempts are made. Once it seems that communication is a very real possibility; when they "exchanged meaning glances in a religious silence of the strictly entre nous variety . . . ,"[178] but their great quantity of talk soon runs into communication troubles: Stephen begins "staring and rambling on to himself or some unknown listener, somewhere . . . ,"[179] and when Bloom tries to explain that economic reform in Ireland will lead

---

[176] Ibid., p. 719.

[177] Levin, op. cit., p. 66.

[178] Ulysses, p. 613.

[179] Ibid., p. 621.

to better "intercourse between man and man," Stephen doesn't really get the message:

> He could hear, of course, all kinds of words changing colour like those crabs about Ringsend in the morning, burrowing quickly into all colours of different sorts of the same sand where they had a home somewhere beneath or seemed to. Then he looked up and saw the eyes that said or didn't say the words the voice he heard said . . . .[180]

When Stephen says something in the conversation, Mr. Bloom "fancying he was perhaps under some misapprehension," bends over and asks, "Unfortunately I didn't catch the latter portion. What was it you?" And Stephen, "patently crosstempered,"[181] has to repeat what he said. In fact, Mr. Bloom gets in quite a "quandry as he couldn't tell exactly what construction to put on belongs to which sounded rather a far cry,"[182] and he is not at all certain he catches the right allusions in Stephen's talk. But then Mr. Bloom, worried about actually how to "word it," finally asks Stephen to come home with him and try the communication there: ". . . you just come home with me and talk things over."[183] But even on the way home, Bloom's mind wanders often enough while their conversation lags, and in the Bloom house, the two men drink their cocoa in what amounts to a "jocoserious silence."[184] What is there really to say? How can they say it? Isn't it too much work really? Talking is great fun. But is communicating? In a rather symbolic gesture, Bloom and Stephen recite

---

[180] Ibid., p. 628.

[181] Ibid., p. 629.

[182] Ibid., p. 629.

[183] Ibid., p. 642.

[184] Ibid., p.661.

languages to each other, Bloom Hebrew, Stephen Gaelic. They try to teach each other their "native languages," both try to provide each other with some means to make the contact they wish. But the evening is late, and neither one really knows his "native language" very well; their vocabularies are very deficient. Stephen will not stay the night. The two men part.

The question is, of course, "What . . . can Stephen and Bloom have to say to each other? . . . With every futile question and perfunctory reply, they become more aware of the barriers that separate them--name and age, race and creed."[185] The failure of Stephen and Bloom to achieve a working communication underlies the Joycean fact that "the barrier between man and man breaks down only occasionally and usually only a little, and the barrier quickly reforms . . . ."[186] But is it the barrier that causes the communication failure? Or is it the communication failure that erects the barrier? Whatever the answer, Mr. Bloom, as his role in the day's drama comes to an end, curls himself up into the womb of the great bed, next to the warmth of the great mother, returning, down the path of sleep, to that noncommunicative kingdom, which--save for the kingdom of the grave--is man's most isolated fortress from the words and the symbols of the life he is forced to live.

Ulysses ends with Molly Bloom's famous soliloquy, the long extended conversation with self that all Joycean characters come to at last. If Stephen Dedalus represents the youthful, sensitive, well-educated, aesthetically-oriented communication quester and if Bloom represents the practical,

---

[185]Levin, op. cit., pp. 120-21.

[186]Ellmann, op. cit., p. 383.

conscientious, thoughtful but not especially well-informed, socially-oriented quester, Molly Bloom represents that kind of uneducated, ignorant, sensually-oriented soul who does not even sense the need to take a communications quest, who lolls in the deep satisfaction of her own visit with herself, and who, symbolically, brings Joyce's communication story to a close.

Molly's long talk with herself is devoid of the normal language controls--syntax and punctuation and ordered thought--and even in those rare moments in life when she attempts some communication with others, she rarely rises to an acceptable level of language: From her warm bed, she gives her orders abstractly to Bloom "in a sleepy, almost wordless manner."[187] And "unintelligent and unalert, most of her remarks to others take the form of animal-like noises of satisfaction or dissatisfaction."[188] Her greatest communication medium happens not to be language at all, but the tactile communication of sex, a form of communication that has a certain place in man's conversations with the world but which has value only as a very subordinate support or affirmation of communication that occurs verbally. As far as words themselves go, Molly is linguistically ignorant. Her English is pedestrian and vulgar, she scarcely remembers any of the Spanish she once spoke. She has a suspicious attitude towards words in general, especially polysyllabic words; she can't comprehend big words for ordinary things. She can only comprehend polysyllabic words by breaking them down into monosyllables: "metempsychosis" becomes "Met him pike hoses" to her, and when Bloom explains that the word means, "the

---

[187]Karl and Magalaner, op. cit., p. 237.

[188]Ibid., p. 228.

transmigration of souls," she vulgarly replies, "O rocks! . . . Tell us in plain words."[189] She's scornful of the doctor who asked her if she had "frequent emissions." She questions, "where do those old fellows get all the words they have emissions . . . ."[190] And in general, she's satisfied to call the things of the world "whatyou callit."[191] Words don't really matter, mainly because they are so vexing. She dislikes having to spell "newphew," because it has "2 double yeus,"[192] and she is constantly plagued by words she can't make out, "jawbreakers"[193] she calls them that a body can't understand. The main words in Molly's vocabulary are those elementary monosyllables, which, alas, she has to pretend, for form's sake, she doesn't know but which she supposes any fool would know. The only real interest Molly shows in language is in her passing concern with people's names. She doesn't like books "with a Molly in them,"[194] she would drown herself if she had "the name of Mrs. Opisse,"[195] she finds names with "bottom"[196] in them ludicrous, but in general, even in the world of names, she is content to be rather vague, referring to people as "Miss This Miss That Miss Theother . . . ."[197]

---

[189] Ulysses, p. 64.

[190] Ibid., p. 755.

[191] Ibid., p. 746.

[192] Ibid., p. 743.

[193] Ibid., p. 738.

[194] Ibid., p. 741.

[195] Ibid., p. 764.

[196] Ibid., p. 746.

[197] Ibid., p. 747.

Toward the communication of others, Molly takes a rather sneering tone. She sees no point in Mrs. Riordan's "gabby talk," she's displeased with Miss Stack's "old maid's voice,"[198] and she wonders what Stephen and Bloom "find to gabber about all night."[199] Most people are ignorant in Molly's eyes, "never understanding what you say even youd want to print it up on a big poster for them . . . ."[200]

Nevertheless, Molly likes to receive communications, unprepared as she herself is to communicate with others. Receiving love letters is her greatest delight, some of which she is inclined to answer but "short just a few words,"[201] and she has been known to instruct other ladies in the art of ambiguous love-talk, "a few simple words he could twist how he liked."[202] She tells us that "long ago I wished somebody would write me a loveletter,"[203] and at times in her life when she received "not a letter from a living soul" she would mail letters to herself "with bits of paper in them so bored sometimes . . . ."[204] Obviously, though, she is less concerned with the contents of the love letters, more with simply receiving them. She is like a child who enjoys playing the game of letter-writing and communication without being the least prepared for any serious endeavor.

---

[198] Ibid., p. 723.

[199] Ibid., p. 749.

[200] Ibid., p. 742.

[201] Ibid., p. 743.

[202] Ibid., p. 743.

[203] Ibid., p. 743.

[204] Ibid., p. 765.

Joycean comedy reaches a height when Molly declares, toward the end of her long soliloquy, that "I'd love to have a long talk with an intelligent, educated person . . . ."[205] One is reminded of Marilyn Monroe's oft-expressed wish for a serious conversation with the world or nightclub singer Eartha Kitt's insistence upon a serious visit with Albert Einstein. For what Molly really wants to do, as far as communication is concerned, is simply go through a minimum number of rituals, without committing herself to anything at all. And as Molly ponders the possibility that master-of-languages Stephen Dedalus may return to give her Italian lessons (the implications of which, in the light of Stephen's own communication failures, are ironic), she also ponders the language that she will teach him: the language in re os and other sexual pleasantries that she, in her benightedness, sees as equal to all the verbalizations in the word. Her appalling disdain of all that Stephen and Bloom made an unsuccessful effort to achieve brings Ulysses to a humorous and pathetic end.

4.

Finnegans Wake, en masse, serves as symbol of the broken word, but, in addition, through the chinks in the ruin, we see depicted a ghostly and bizarre still life in which the basic communication symbols of the Joycean world appear in their last stance. Nothing new is added to the situation described in Ulysses and the earlier works. Finnegans Wake merely becomes the summation of the semantic awareness that has prevailed throughout Joyce's canon. Here is the Great Letter, an archetypal symbol of communication, jumbled, confused, undecipherable, only partly understood.

---

[205] Ibid., p. 765.

Dug up from the garbage dump, it seems to be a letter from Boston, telling of various family matters, but since it is written in runes and in "sia-mixed twostalk," it is difficult to read. This is the Joycean concept of communications: trivial in the first place, floating in the dunghill of the market-place world, written in the "strife of tongues." Anna Livia Plurabelle, one of the symbols of mankind, must acknowledge about the communication-letter: "Every letter is a hard but yours sure is the hardest crux ever."[206]

Here, too, in Finnegans Wake, is the archetypal communicative man: H. C. Earwicker, the stutterer, who in his "anxiety to justify himself riddles his every utterance with incriminating slips of the tongue,"[207] setting off the false communication of rumour that pervades the book. As Levin says, "We distinguish Earwicker by his intermittent stutter and catastrophic hiccup. He is usually submerged in a welter of dialects and documents--pidgin English, American slang, vulgar Latin, liturgical responses, legal forms, advertisements, riddles."[208] He is the talkative, noncommunicative man, floundering in polylinguialism in a search for understanding. When he says, "In the buginning is the woid,"[209] he symbolically expresses the communication paradox of our lives: the Word, the archetypal idea of communication in the human experience, is recognized by man, its possibility and its having been are recognized, but even as we express the truth of it, we distort, twist, and parody.

---

[206] Finnegans Wake, p. 623.

[207] Campbell and Robinson, op. cit., p. 7.

[208] Levin, op. cit., p. 176.

[209] Finnegans Wake, p. 378.

Earwicker's sons, Shem and Shaun, are also a composite portrait of communicative man, a portrait based upon real-life Irish characters "famous for their incomprehensible speech."[210] Going under various names, the sons appear on occasion as Jute and Mutt, the one a stutterer, the other a half-intelligible person,[211] who together perform a deafmute dialogue.[212] As Penman and Post, they appear as the writer and bearer of a message. Their concern is definitely with communications and though they appear as opposed characters, they are, taken together, mankind in general. Shem is the stuttering boy whose business it is "to find and utter the Word."[213] Shem, typically, is at war with society, and deteriorates, following the downward path from the market place, to an irresponsible muttering of "family secrets, taking notes of private conversations, and publishing filth."[214] Convinced that nobody really wants to hear what he has to say, Shem writes a language that nobody can understand--"with increasing lack of interest in his semantics . . ."--[215] and sickens into the perverse communication gesture of using his own excrement for ink as he writes his incomprehensible message to the world. Lost in the downward maze that leads to the deceptive pseudo-communication areas, Shem lifts his foolish wand and thinks he has made the dumb speak, but all one hears is articulation, not communication; noise, not sense: "quoiquoiquoiquoiquoiquoiquoiq!"[216]

---

[210]Ellmann, op. cit., p. 562.

[211]Campbell and Robinson, op. cit., p. 48.

[212]Levin, op. cit., p. 182.

[213]Campbell and Robinson, op. cit., p. 13.

[214]Tindall, op.cit., p. 61.

[215]Finnegans Wake, p. 173.

[216]Ibid., p. 195.

Shaun, more the parallel of Mr. Bloom, more the citizen communicator, less disturbed by the market place, is the bearer of messages, the great transmitter. Unfortunately when he brings the word to the world, he "misreads it, fundamentally rejects it,"[217] and concerns himself with deliberately restricting communication on the grounds of propriety. Concerned more with surfaces of communications, not with the real messages underneath, Shaun is quite confident that "I am, thing Sing Larynx, letter potent to play the sem backwards like Oscan wild or in shunt Persse transluding from the Otherman or off the Toptic or anything off the types of my finklers in the draught or with buttles, with my eyes thinkshut and all,"[218] yet when he is confronted with the symbolic letter and is unable to understand it, he grows enraged and denounces the communication as bogus and improper.

Earwicker, Shem, and Shaun summarize the various aspects of Joyce's theory of communications, a theory that trails through all his work. They are the positions that different men take. All the positions are futile. We all fail to communicate, even if in different ways. And the question that Anna Livia Plurabelle asks, toward the very end of the book, "Is there one who understands me?"[219] is Joyce's recognition of the pathos of communications that pervades the twentieth century. To that question, Joyce gives the thundering no, though there is every indication even while he is giving the no he is trying to work out, to explore the possibility of finding a yes. Like his character Richard, in the play Exiles, "He

---

[217] Campbell and Robinson, op. cit., p. 13.

[218] Finnegans Wake, p. 419.

[219] Ibid., p. 627.

admits his own failure to penetrate the lives of others, yet he goes on expecting them to penetrate his. He questions the very bases of human intercourse, yet his constant effort is to communicate."[220] Joyce, indeed, seemed confident that he might find the "yes" to replace the "no." "His study of archaic language and his notes on living language in street or pub had made him master of all verbal effects from the divine speech of thunder to 'lowquacity,'"[221] and with such a range of language at his command, with such an insight into words, with such an appreciation of their beauty and their shapes and their forms, Joyce boasted, "I can do anything with language."[222] But the more he tried to write the "yes," the more it kept coming apart. It is like the five men in Ulysses advertising HELYS, each man carrying one letter of the word; as they walk along the Dublin street the word begins to spread apart, becomes disjointed, and the letter "Y" is out of place, "lagging behind."[223] The word is broken. Joyce's "yes" is "written in smoke and blurred by mist and signed of solitude."[224] It cannot drown out the overwhelming "no" that his work reveals.

---

[220] Levin, op. cit., p. 38.

[221] Tindall, op. cit., p. 96.

[222] Ibid., p. 95.

[223] Ulysses, p. 152.

[224] Finnegans Wake, p. 337.

CHAPTER VII

T. S. ELIOT AND THE REFORMED WORD

> . . . men cannot communicate by means of sound over either wire or air. They have got to communicate through love. Communication that is not also communion is incomplete. We use communication; we participate in communion.[1]

In his poems and plays, more than in his prose criticism, T. S. Eliot has given himself to a depiction and analysis of general twentieth-century malaise--to the terrors and torments of our time. More than many of his literary compatriots, Eliot has emphasized the integral relation of his work "to the society of which he is a part, to the climate of thought and feeling which give rise to his expression."[2] And perhaps inevitably, therefore, Eliot has included in his analytical social descriptions an elaborate consideration of the pathos of communications, the breakdown of the word that haunts the modern consciousness. Eliot depicts, of course, a world grown spiritually sterile, but that sterility becomes demonstrable and is given effective witness in the more precise area of communication failure.

Sir Claude Mulhammer says, early in the first act of The Confidential

---

[1]Allen Tate, Collected Essays (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1959), p. 385.

[2]F. O. Matthiessen, The Achievement of T. S. Eliot (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 19.

Clerk, that "My rule is to remember that I understand nobody,"[3] a statement that echose through all Eliot's work and serves as a kind of definitive aphorism for modern culture (just as, perhaps, the aphorism "Nothing too much" served for the Greeks). We "understand nobody" because we never receive their messages ("I sent you a message, which never reached you," Mrs. Guzzard tells Sir Claude)[4] or if luckily a message does arrive we find it undecipherable, as Sir Claude finds undecipherable the postcards that Lady Elizabeth sends him from Zurich. We try to get the message, we try to read the writing, we try to understand, but most of the time we have to say with Celia Coplestone, in The Cocktail Party, "I simply don't know what you are talking about."[5] Of if we deceive ourselves into thinking we do understand, we at last are told (in two of the most pathetic lines in modern literature), "That is not what I meant at all./ That is not it at all."[6] It is as though there were "flood and drouth/ Over the eyes and in the mouth"[7] of modern man, a flood and drouth that not only separates man from man but deprivates the individual until he must agree with Lord Claverton, in The Elder Statesman, "Now I've no more to say, and no one to say it to."[8] Frustrated by communication failure, modern man sinks

---

[3]T. S. Eliot, The Confidential Clerk (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1954), p. 19.

[4]Ibid., p. 150.

[5]The Cocktail Party in The Complete Poems and Plays (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, Inc., 1962), p. 324.

[6]"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," in The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 6.

[7]"Little Gidding," Four Quartets in The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 140.

[8]T. S. Eliot, The Elder Statesman (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1959), p. 23.

into noncommunication itself, to the tragic acceptance of a verbal isolation analogous with, a metaphor for, a corollary to, the vaster spiritual hermitage of the twentieth-century personality.

Eliot explores this whole problem in great detail throughout his canon. Not seeing communication failure simply as a matter of fate and destiny, as Eugene O'Neill does, Eliot looks for the human error in our misunderstandings. He dissects the problem, asks questions about language and man's use of it, tries to locate the breakdown of communication in the context of the total human predicament, and finally proposes, if not a solution, at least a direction by which man may make his way toward a better, if not perfect, communication experience.

2.

A central premise in Eliot's semantic awareness is that the major portion of man's problem in communication is the result of human inadequacy. Almost with deliberation, man weaves the web of inarticulateness and noncommunication around himself. As Agatha says, in The Family Reunion,

> Thus with most careful devotion
> Thus with precise attention
> To detail . . .
> . . . .
> Men tighten the knot of confusion
> Into perfect misunderstanding . . . .[9]

We "tighten the knot" and fail to communicate because of all sorts of psychological problems that we carry around within ourselves. We meet somebody different or strange, and we cannot communicate; Peter Quilpe, in The Cocktail Party, could not talk to Celia because "She was different

---

[9]The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 230.

from any girl I'd ever known/ And not easy to talk to . . . ."[10] Or we misjudge the people around us; Sir Claude had never bared his soul to Lady Elizabeth because "I didn't think/ That you would be interested."[11] Or we are simply afraid, as J. Alfred Prufrock is. Sometimes we are the victims of ignorance and confusion, as Colby Simpkins is when his "rather forced misapprehension about incest"[12] upsets his communication with Lucasta Angel, in The Confidential Clerk. Sometimes we are simply the victims of the social setting: we can't communicate at a party, at tea (Charles Hemington says, in The Elder Statesman, "Very well, then I still stop to tea,/ But you know I won't get a chance to talk to you"),[13] on a shopping expedition ("But how can one talk on a shopping expedition.")[14] or over luncheon. Sometimes we are even victims of our own sensitivity to decorum: Charles Piper says, in The Family Reunion, "Do you think I ought to mention it now? It seems to me too late,"[15] and Ivy, in the same play, observes that "These things are much better not inquired into."[16] Dr. Warburton also delicately explains, "I don't like to say this."[17] We are greatly inhibited in our talking by a goodly number of psychological

---

[10]The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 314.

[11]The Confidential Clerk, p. 106.

[12]C. L. Barber, "The Power of Development . . . in a Different World," in Matthiessen, op. cit., p. 226.

[13]The Elder Statesman, p. 14.

[14]Ibid., p. 13.

[15]The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 229.

[16]Ibid., p. 230.

[17]Ibid., p. 262.

and social restrictions, all human in origin, all humanly cultivated.

Even when we are able to make some statement, however, or utter some word, we are confronted by receptors who doubt us (Charles Hemington to Monica Claverton-Ferry: "I'm sorry, I couldn't help wondering/ How much your words mean"),[18] who don't listen to us (Alex Gibbs, in The Cocktail Party, to Julia Shuttlethwaite, "You've missed the point completely . . . . It's perfectly hopeless. You haven't been listening"),[19] who simply cannot hear us (Harry Monchensey, in The Family Reunion, to Mary: "I can only speak/ And you cannot hear me").[20] Or even worse, we find our receptors responding only to the externals of our talk, as does the audience of Mr. Apollinax;[21] they hear our words, but do not know our meaning. Sometimes, too, we are confronted with receptors who overinterpret our message (as Dr. Warburton charges Harry Monchensey) or "take things" in the wrong way (Edward Chamberlayne says to his wife Lavinia, in The Cocktail Party, "It's just that way of taking things that makes you so exasperating"[22] and Lord Claverton asks, "How open one's heart/ When one is sure of the wrong response?").[23] And we are always confronted, of course, with the simple inevitable differences in age, wisdom, maturity, and the like. Sir Claude explains his failure to communicate with his father:

---

[18]The Elder Statesman, pp. 99-100.

[19]The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 297.

[20]Ibid., p. 280.

[21]Elizabeth Drew, T. S. Eliot: The Design of His Poetry (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), p. 26.

[22]The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 238.

[23]The Elder Statesman, p. 105.

I never understood him.
I was too young. And when I was mature enough
To understand him, he was not there.[24]

Because we are human--emotional, sensitive, imaginative, individualized--we complicate our communications. But Eliot, in his semantic awareness, faces up to the problem that man is also handicapped in the medium of communication, the language itself; though even in dealing with language, Eliot suggests a part of the problem abides in human misuse. "I've gotta use words when I talk to you,"[25] the suffering Sweeney says (Sweeney Agonistes), but using them, "It is impossible," as Prufrock points out, "to say just what I mean!"[26] This language problem may be simply the result of ignorance; Harry Monchensey admits that "I do not know the words in which to explain it . . . ."[27] Or the problem may be the lack of vocabulary within the language; Harry, again, argues that "I talk in general terms/ Because the particular has no language,"[28] and Agatha says there is "more than there are words for."[29] Likewise, Monica Claverton-Ferry points out that "there's no vocabulary/ For love within a family."[30] In addition to man's failure with language, language itself is a limited instrument; Charles Hemington speaks of the "limits of speech,"[31] and

---

[24]The Confidential Clerk, p. 48.

[25]The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 83.

[26]Ibid., p. 6.

[27]Ibid., p. 280.

[28]Ibid., p. 235.

[29]Ibid., p. 246.

[30]The Elder Statesman, p. 88.

[31]Ibid., p. 131.

observes that "It's strange that words are so inadequate."[32] Eliot admits that we are confronted with a weak medium when he says, in Four Quartets, "Burnt Norton,"

> Words strain,
> Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
> Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
> Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
> Will not stay still,[33]

though obviously with the word "imprecision" Eliot asks man to share the guilt of language inadequacy.

Eliot, it seems, is critical of a number of flaws in the whole area of language--flaws that make up the weakness and the inadequacy. He is critical of "dark generality" (Archbishop Thomas Becket chides the Tempter, in Murder in the Cathedral, for wrapping his meaning "in as dark generality/ As any courtier");[34] of discourse that is "Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse"[35] (The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock); to abstractions: Harry Monchensey asks, "Do you think that I believe what I said just now? . . . I was talking in abstractions: and you answered in abstractions."[36] Eliot is also critical of cliches and the "formulated phrase"[37] of Prufrock, and implies a language weakness when Lavinia Chamberlayne says, "Oh, Edward, I'm so sorry," then adds the apology,

---

[32] Ibid.

[33] The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 121.

[34] Ibid., p. 188.

[35] Ibid., p. 7.

[36] Ibid., p. 268.

[37] Ibid., p. 5.

"what a feeble thing to say!"[38] or when Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly, in The Cocktail Party, admits

> And when I say to one like her,
> "Work out your salvation with diligence," I do not
> understand
> What I myself am saying.[39]

More significantly, Eliot seems critical of what might be summed up as deliberately noncommunicative language. He seems to imply, for instance, in Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service, an opposition to "the appalling polysyllables and learned terms with which the poem is loaded,"[40] and in The Waste Land he also seems to attack, by implication, overtly noncommunicative words: the "demotic French"[41] of Mr. Eugenides, and the various other languages that the poem itself employs. As Elizabeth Drew puts the matter well in her remarks about the Sanskrit words "Datta," "Dayadhvam," "Damyata":[42] The protagonist is "attempting to shore up the ruins by repeating words of comfort and strengthening of the spirit which may help him. But they are in foreign tongues, not translated into his own inner experience and so become a part of himself. Give, Sympathize, Control, Peace, remain abstract ideas . . . ."[43] The same opposition on the part of Eliot prevails, it would seem, in Choruses from "The Rock" (VII) when he sees a denial of this world in "rites with forgotten meanings."[44]

---

[38] Ibid., p. 381.

[39] Ibid., p. 368.

[40] Drew, op. cit., pp. 38-39.

[41] The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 43.

[42] Ibid., p. 50.

[43] Drew, op. cit., p. 90.

[44] The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 107.

Although the popular undergraduate opinion assumes that Eliot's use of Greek and Latin epigraphs, German and French quotations, Sanskrit words and the like is indicative of a precious and learned sophistication, an equally enlightened reading of Eliot's non-English lines may well be that they are a depiction of a modern Babel, a depiction--and indictment--of noncommunication, or at least delayed communication, sophisticated or otherwise.

All language problems come to climax, of course, in the matter of definition and meaning, and so it is that Eliot, in his perusal of the medium, touches upon the ambiguity of word meanings, upon the subtleties of word choices and terminologies, and especially upon the precariousness of nomenclature, since all these matters involve the denotative-connotative capacity of words as well as private evaluations (definitions in the broadest sense) of word symbols.

First, it is difficult to know what words do mean. Mrs. Guzzard brings up the matter,

> I feared there might be a confusion in your mind
> Between the meaning of confusion and imposture.[45]

And "What does the word mean?" Agatha asks, when Harry Monchensey has suggested she is not unhappy.[46] In The Cocktail Party, psychiatrist Reilly explores the matter of definitions. "'Nervous breakdown' is a term I never use:/ It can mean almost anything," he explains,[47] and he tells Celia, "Tell me what you mean by a sense of sin,"[48] making also the point

---

[45] The Confidential Clerk, p. 144.

[46] The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 276.

[47] Ibid., p. 346.

[48] Ibid., p. 361.

that "We have yet to find what would be normal/ For you, before we use the term 'abnormal.'"[49] To Lavinia, Reilly points out that "You have come where the word 'insult' has no meaning."[50] The meaning of words, Eliot observes, depends upon varying conditions. Dr. Warbuton says, "Health is a relative term."[51] "What do the words mean now--I and you?" Charles Hemington asks Monica,[52] and Doris explains, in the Prologue to Sweeney Agonistes, in her reading of the cards, which are easily metaphors for words, "You can't be sure. It just depends on what comes next."[53] Doris goes on to explain that, in trying to determine whether the King of Clubs "means" Pereira or Sweeney, "You've got to think when you read the cards,/ It's not a thing that anyone can do."[54] Eliot is aware of the chameleon-like nature of words and is aware, too, of the care that man must take in determing word meanings.

Second, it is difficult and problematical to know what words to select in order to communicate. Even when words are essentially synonymous, there is the matter of taste, connotation, tradition, and decorum. B. Kaghan says, in The Confidential Clerk, "I really don't know what emotion to register," but Lucasta scorns the phrase "emotion to register:" "You don't need to talk that language any longer:/ Just say you're

---

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid., p. 353.

[51] Ibid., p. 255.

[52] The Elder Statesman, p. 16.

[53] The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 76.

[54] Ibid.

embarrassed."[55] And when Colby refers to his father as "an unsuccessful organist," Mrs. Guzzard suggests he say instead, "not very successful."[56] Eliot's point is not that one phrase, in either case, is better, but that people do not agree, that we each live in little worlds of preferences that create obstacles along the communication road. Nor can anyone make our choices for us. When Lady Elizabeth says, "But you know, I actually liked to believe/ That I was a foundling--or do I mean 'changeling'?" Colby answers, "I don't know which you mean."[57] The communicator must make his own selection and suffer the consequences, knowing full well that many people respond rather heatedly to certain terms. Michael Claverton-Ferry, in The Elder Statesman, is offended by being called a gambler just because he gambles,[58] and when Lucasta refers to herself as a "guttersnipe," Colby cries out, "You mustn't use such words! You don't know how it's hurting,"[59] as does Edward, when Lavinia informs him, "I think you're on the edge of a nervous breakdown." Edward reacts against the term by crying out, "Don't say that!"[60]

People are most sensitive, no doubt, about names. Though Eliot considers names absurd, as C. L. Barber suggests,[61] he sees that absurdity

---

[55]The Confidential Clerk, p. 141.

[56]Ibid., p. 152.

[57]Ibid., p. 86.

[58]The Elder Statesman, p. 81.

[59]The Confidential Clerk, p. 72.

[60]The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 342.

[61]Barber, "The Power of Development . . . ," in Matthiessen, op. cit., p. 222.

as a part of man's language problem, and there is much semantic implication in our human delight and concern with what we are called and what we call others. To call a person the wrong thing is to interrupt communications, but to find the right name is not always easy. Mrs. Carghill, in The Elder Statesman, wants Lord Claverton to call her not Mrs. Carghill, not Maisie Batterson, but her stage name Maisie Montjoy: "It would give me such a thrill . . . ," she says.[62] Monica does not wish to be called Miss Claverton, but Miss Claverton-Ferry, or even better, just Miss Ferry.[63] Mrs. Piggott does not want to be addressed as Matron or Nurse.[64] And Lucasta is greatly distrubed if she is called Miss Angel; in fact she considers herself to be cursed "with a name like Angel./ I'm thinking of changing it."[65] Some people do change names, of course: Dick Ferry becomes Lord Claverton[66] and Fred Culverwell becomes Mr. Gomez.[67] And some souls, like Lady Elizabeth, change the names of others; Mr. Simpkins becomes Mr. Colby because she prefers it.[68] But taste in names is hard to ascertain. Mrs. Guzzard considers Kaghan an odd name, but has to agree with Lady Elizabeth that her own name is "an unusual name."[69] Taste is especially confusing in regard to given names and surnames: "You call

---

[62] The Elder Statesman, p. 63.

[63] Ibid., p. 57.

[64] Ibid., p. 56.

[65] The Confidential Clerk, p. 23.

[66] The Elder Statesman, p. 29.

[67] Ibid.

[68] The Confidential Clerk, p. 37.

[69] Ibid., p. 88.

her Lucasta?" Lady Elizabeth asks. "Young people nowadays/ Seem to have dropped the use of surnames altogether."[70] Eggerson is horrified, in The Confidential Clerk, that Kaghan should call Mrs. Eggerson by her first name, Muriel, though apparently Muriel likes it.[71] And Colby is equally disturbed that Lucasta should address Sir Mulhammer as Claude "to his face," and call Lady Elizabeth "Lizzie" behind her back, though Sir Claude is amused by it all.[72]

Eliot reveals in all this discussion of human inadequacy and language weakness something like a survey of venial sins in the area of communication. Our sensitivities, our doubts, our fears, our foolish responses, our imprecisions, our shifting definitions constitute our communication follies, less than malicious, more laughable and stupid, symptomatic somehow of our untransfigured humanity. Undesirable, but to be expected. Far more serious are those communication sins partaking of the nature of deceptive cant, sins that occur as the venial sins strengthen and deepen in the human experience, festering into falseness. When we begin to overlook our faults and flaws and begin to think we have no problems, no sins, begin to think we are communicating adequately and seriously, then we are in deep danger.

The women who "come and go/ Talking of Michelangelo"[73] are as in grave danger of stupidity-grown-proud as is Mr. Apollinax with his "dry

---

[70] Ibid., p. 81.

[71] Ibid., p. 21.

[72] Ibid., pp. 27-28.

[73] The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 4.

and passionate talk" devouring the afternoon.[74] And the lass, in The Waste Land, who explains, "I didn't mince my words, I said to her myself,"[75] is, with Amy Monchensey who says, "I do not mince matters in front of the family,"[76] guilty of a kind of smug confidence that she, if no one else, is getting through to others. Pretentiousness and over-confidence lead us to vain attempts "To communicate with Mars, converse with spirits"[77] (Four Quartets) and such people as Madame Sosostris, the famous clairvoyante of The Waste Land, begin to appear, she who has a bad cold, a voice muffled and unclear, and an unclear message for the world.[78] People with the "unclear message" become almost villainous, almost death dealing, as Harry Monchensey explains, in recounting a time in his childhood:

> I remember the silence, and the hushed excitement
> And the low conversation of triumphant aunts.
> It is the conversation not overheard,
> Not intended to be heard, with the sidewise looks,
> That brings death into the heart of a child.[79]

Pretentious and over-confident communication is on the same level with the shadowy, suspect communication of Harry's aunts[80] or the communication of Mrs. Carghill and Mr. Gomez who "whisper" their "miserable stories" in The Elder Statesman,[81] or the guests who whisper their gossip behind Mr.

---

[74] Ibid., p. 18.

[75] Ibid., p. 41.

[76] Ibid., p. 229.

[77] "The Dry Salvages," Four Quartets in The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 135.

[78] Drew, op. cit., p. 71.

[79] The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 260.

[80] Ibid.

[81] The Elder Statesman, p. 109.

Prufrock's back. Flawed communication degenerates into false and corrupted communication that is all "voice" and "noise," void of meaning, superficial and ersatz communication, decadent and destructive.

Archbishop Thomas Becket speaks of the "undesirable/ Voices under sleep"[82] that keep the mind from being "whole in the present."[83] These are the same undesirable voices that Prufrock recognizes--"the voices dying with a dying fall"[84]--and that wake us into our death. They are the same voices, "sea and aerial,"[85] the endless repetition of which is rejected in Four Quartets, "The Dry Salvages," the same "lying voices"[86] that Harry Monchensey recognizes, and the "voices shaken from the yew tree,"[87] in Ash Wednesday, which, until they drift away, drown out the more legitimate voice of prayer. We give ourselves, as we are told in Choruses from "The Rock", to "endless palaver"[88] and "friendly sentiments"[89] and "write innumerable books,"[90] but it is all "noise without speech,"[91] in a universe, as described in Lines to a Yorkshire Terrior, where "Natural

---

[82]The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 185.

[83]Ibid.

[84]Ibid., p. 5.

[85]Drew, op. cit., pp. 184-85.

[86]The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 251.

[87]Ibid., p. 66.

[88]Ibid., p. 102.

[89]Ibid.

[90]Ibid., p. 105.

[91]Ibid., p. 99.

forces shriek'd aloud,/ Screamed, rattled, muttered endlessly."[92] Celia Coplestone damns the false communicators, the "voices," and the "noise" when she says, "They make noises, and think they are talking to each other;/ They make faces, and think they understand each other."[93] And Celia goes on to describe what happens to our communicative capacity when we let it sink into the corruption not only of venial error but of the lie, the evasion, and the slander:

> I listened to your voice, that had always thrilled me,
> And it became another voice--no, not a voice:
> What I heard was only the noise of an insect,
> Dry, endless, meaningless, inhuman.[94]

Inevitably, as communication difficulties degenerate into communication chaos and superficiality, a certain skepticism about the communication process begins to develop in anyone who has a grain of sense. Sir Claude expresses a general skepticism when he asks about the conversation his wife is having with the cabman, "What can they be talking about?"[95] In Four Quartets, "Burnt Norton," the narrator ponders, "My words echo/ Thus, in your mind. But to what purpose . . . ,"[96] and Prufrock, contemplating the mermaids, despairs: "I do not think that they will sing to me."[97] Dusty asks, in Sweeney Agonistes, "What'll I say!" and the cynical response of Doris is, "Say what you like . . . ,"[98] for she knows with

---

[92] Ibid., p. 91.

[93] Ibid., p. 360.

[94] Ibid., p. 236.

[95] The Confidential Clerk, p. 33.

[96] The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 117.

[97] Ibid., p. 7.

[98] Ibid., p. 75.

Sweeney himself, ". . . if you understand or if you don't/ That's nothing to me and nothing to you."[99] Harry Monchensey confirms this skepticism when he observes, "Whether I know what I am saying, or why I say it,/ That does not matter."[100]

Skeptical, we grow silent. We refuse even to make a communication attempt. Harry turns against the world's talk: ". . . that's not the language/ That I choose to be talking. I will not talk yours."[101] "It is no longer worthwhile to speak to anyone!" Celia says.[102] We turn on the gramophone to escape "From talking . . . when we had to be alone" (The Cocktail Party).[103] And we descend into the hell of The Hollow Men, groping together to "avoid speech."[104] We become the modern, twentieth-century isolated and alienated man--"Poor Father! All your life! And no one to share it with," Monica says;[105] "Hell is oneself," Edward Chamberlayne says. "One is always alone."[106] And we are left in that stark and sterile world that Eliot has delineated so forcefully for our times, a world in which our mayor, as in Coriolan, rides mutely forth, ". . . no interrogation in his eyes/ Or in the hands . . . ,"[107] and our

---

[99] Ibid., p. 84.

[100] Ibid., p. 252.

[101] Ibid., p. 266.

[102] Ibid., p. 360.

[103] Ibid., p. 341.

[104] Ibid., p. 58.

[105] The Elder Statesman, p. 108.

[106] The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 342.

[107] Ibid., p. 86.

representative man, Sweeney, may meditate upon birth, copulation, and death, but "cannot communicate his feelings;"[108] can only stand, with his companions, suggestive of many of the fragments into which the wholeness of our culture has broken,[109] "the silent vertebrate in brown"[110] and "the silent man in mocha brown,"[111] blocking the horned gate, no messages coming through. And they grow old, until, with the aged one in Gerontion, modern man says: "I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch:/ How should I use them for your closer contact?"[112]

3.

Eliot's semantic awareness does not end on this pessimistic note, however. Eliot recognizes something in human nature, some calling, that will not let us rest easy in our failures. "We can't sit here in silence,"[113] Edward Chamberlayne says, for we have a passionate need to escape our isolation and loneliness. Even in our semantic wilderness, our waste land, we begin a crying out, "Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak" (The Waste Land).[114] Like Lord Claverton, terrified of being alone, we all need "Someone to make a remark now and then."[115] We "want to talk

---

[108]Matthiessen, op. cit., p. 159.

[109]Ibid., p. 105.

[110]"Sweeney Among the Nightingales," in The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 35.

[111]Ibid.

[112]Ibid., p. 23.

[113]Ibid., p. 331.

[114]Ibid., p. 40.

[115]The Elder Statesman, p. 19.

to somebody" (The Cocktail Party);[116] "I had to talk to someone" (The Cocktail Party);[117] "I believe that all he needs is someone to talk to" (The Family Reunion).[118] We begin to make our subtle and less-than-subtle requests for communication, as happens in Portrait of a Lady:

> The voice returns like the insistent out-of-tune
> Of a broken violin on an August afternoon:
> "I am always sure that you understand
> My feelings, always sure that you feel,
> Sure that across the gulf you reach your hand."[119]

Recognizing a communication failure, the lady is making her pathetic plea. "Perhaps you can write to me," she says. "You will write at any rate."[120]

Human beings possess that great desire to come up out of silence, like Lazarus from the dead, "Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all" (The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock).[121] We know "We must try to penetrate the other private worlds/ Of make-believe and fear"[122] (The Family Reunion) and "We've got to try to understand our children"[123] (The Confidential Clerk) and we must let others know that we are willing to cooperate, to make an effort. Celia says: "I want to understand you. I could understand."[124] Lady Elizabeth says:

---

[116] The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 304.

[117] Ibid., p. 316.

[118] Ibid., p. 237.

[119] Ibid., p. 9.

[120] Ibid., p. 11.

[121] Ibid., p. 6.

[122] Ibid., p. 268.

[123] The Confidential Clerk, p. 158.

[124] The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 236.

> I wish you would talk
> Sometimes to me as if I did understand,
> And perhaps I might come to understand better.[125]

Yet we must realize that communication is not necessarily our privilege but a right to be won by struggle. Weak as we are, inadequate as language is, we must be willing, as Charles Hemington puts it, to "struggle for words,"[126] and we must accept the lesson described in Four Quartets, "East Coker": "You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy"[127] and accept "the intolerable wrestle/ With words and meanings."[128] And Eliot, in this poem, is talking not alone about the specialized matter of poetry but of communication in general when he says,

> Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
> Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
> Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
> For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
> One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
> Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate . . . .[129]

We must wrestle and struggle and raid the inarticulate. We must listen to Agatha, in The Family Reunion:

> . . . best tell us as you can:
> Talk in your own language, without stopping to debate
> Whether it may be too far beyond our understanding.[130]

Eliot envisions our struggle to be actually toward the achievement of a new language, or perhaps more properly a new level of language.

---

[125] The Confidential Clerk, p. 106.

[126] The Elder Statesman, p. 131.

[127] The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 127.

[128] Ibid., p. 125.

[129] Ibid., p. 128.

[130] Ibid., pp. 234-35.

Ultimately the struggle must involve more than medium; it must involve our psychological and intellectual attitudes and processes. But fundamental to any improvement in communications is the verbal accommodation, and though Eliot is not over explicit about the nature of the new language, he argues that it is possible. Harry Monchensey contends "there must be another way of talking/ That would get us somewhere,"[131] and Eliot, in this situation a disciple of Arthur Symons and the Symbolists,[132] seeks communication relief by exchanging an old language for a new: ". . . last year's words belong to last year's language/ And next year's words await another voice" (Four Quartets, "Little Gidding").[133] What we need do is "purify the dialect of the tribe,"[134] to "find words" we "never thought to speak."[135] What we need do is lift ourselves up into a new language situation and a new communication possibility, an elevation that Eliot describes in Choruses from "The Rock" (IX):

> Out of the slimy mud of words, out of the sleet and
> hail of verbal imprecisions,
> Approximate thoughts and feelings, words that have
> taken the place of thoughts and feelings,
> There spring the perfect order of speech . . . .[136]

Where the word is now unspoken, "We will build with new speech" (I),[137]

---

[131] Ibid., p. 269.

[132] Matthiessen, op. cit., p. 27 n., quotes Eliot's saying, "I myself owe Mr. Symons a great debt."

[133] The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 141.

[134] Ibid.

[135] Ibid.

[136] Ibid., p. 111.

[137] Ibid., p. 98.

and with our new speech we will achieve a new power, an achievement comparable to the learning of a foreign language so fluently ". . . that you can think in it,"[138] and henceforth "feel yourself to be/ Rather a different person when you're talking it" (The Confidential Clerk).[139]

But how are we to achieve our new speech? How are we to lift ourselves out of our silences and come into the perfect order of speech? Eliot's answer comes through a peculiar analysis of the communication situation, an analysis that provides less a universal and ubiquitous panacea for communication problems, more a methodology and perspective for the individual who wishes to say his prayers, express his loves, attend to his affairs even while those around him are victims of cant and confusion. The new speech, as Eliot envisions it, may not come to one and all but only to a limited few who, through proper effort, can make for themselves an establishment upon green islands of articulation, "between two waves," "between the storms."

4.

Eliot divides communication into two parts: the public and the private. Or, to use other terms, the vulgar and the extraordinary. This partitioning is kin to the division that he makes in a more specific way in poetics between "the common word" and "the formal word," though in this latter division he would seem to be seeking "the right equilibrium"[140] between the parts in order to effect "The complete consort dancing together"

---

[138] The Confidential Clerk, p. 45.

[139] Ibid.

[140] Matthiessen, op. cit., p. 78.

(Four Quartets, "Little Gidding"),[141] while in the division of communications he is seeking the disappearing of the one part and the triumph of the other.

Public communication comprises all the flaws and failures which Eliot has carefully observed in human communication experience. It is the communication of those citizens who, in describing their ordinary lives in Murder in the Cathedral, tell how they

> Talked at the corner of the fire
> Talked at the corner of streets,
> . . .
> Living and partly living.[142]

It is the ordinary, pedestrian, inadequate, "partly living" communication that slips so easily "Among velleities" (Portrait of a Lady).[143] It is the communication of those women in The Waste Land whose cockney voices are "vulgar, insensitive voices which speak of marriage, unfaithfulness, fertility and abortion at exactly the same level and in exactly the same tone as of a new set of teeth or a Sunday dinner."[144] It is what Eliot calls in Poetry and Drama "Ordinary speech,"[145] that ordinary speech "with its fumbling for words, its constant recourse to approximation, its disorder and its unfinished sentences."[146] It is the communication that a civilization "founded on money values and secular rationalism, with no

---

[141] The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 144.

[142] Ibid., p. 180.

[143] Ibid., p. 8.

[144] Drew, op. cit., p. 78.

[145] T. S. Eliot, Poetry and Drama (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), p. 12.

[146] Ibid., p. 11.

religious communion or human sense of community"[147] possesses as the result of a perversion of some better communication in times past. The word once clear "has lost all its resonance and is only a confusion of 'whispers.'"[148] Public communication--or mass communication, social communication, what have you--is that which we finally accept as members of the group, accept as do people described by Reilly:

> Two people who know they do not understand each other,
> Breeding children whom they do not understand
> And who will never understand them.[149]

Set against this public communication is private communication--private in a specialized sense that it is "out of the stream" of public communication or elevated above it. And one must note here Eliot's general distinction, regarding communications and other behavior, between the group, the mass, the mob, the public on the one hand and the club, the community, the city (in Charles Williams' sense of the word), the institution on the other. Eliot's distinction between public and private is not a matter of numbers, but a matter of order. Within the private, ordered community (be it the Establishment, Church, or Atheneum Club) a specialized communication, often involving a specialized language, may develop that functions far better than the inadequate "talk" of the public. It is interesting that Eliot does not condemn Sweeney and his fellows because they are communicating effectively in some argot, dialect, slang, or specialized language; he condemns them because they are scarcely

---

[147]Drew, op. cit., p. 48. Miss Drew is describing the world as portrayed in Gerontion.

[148]Ibid., p. 52.

[149]The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 364.

speaking at all, are not understanding themselves in their own world, and are sinking into inarticulation.

A good illustration of these different worlds--and the fact that they are congruous and concurrent though separate--is to be found in the first act of The Elder Statesman. Charles and Monica, who have gone through their struggle to communicate and who have achieved an articulation of their love for each other, suddenly find, simultaneously with the articulation, that they have stepped into what Monica calls "our private world."

> . . . now we have our private world--
> The meanings are different. Look! We're back in the room
> That we entered only a few minutes ago.
> Here's an armchair, there's the table;
> There's the door . . .[150]

In this private world, things have changed, been transfigured and transformed. In this private world, we are articulate, communicating creatures who find ourselves in a near-paradise of understanding. But when Monica and Charles are confronted with having tea--with father as guest and with butler to serve--Monica has to say, "Now we're in the public world."[151]

The struggle of man becomes, then, in terms of these worlds and in terms of the quest for communication, to gain the one and leave the other. A tension develops within the individual and within the society. In Four Quartets, "The Dry Salvages," for instance, Eliot puts in juxtaposition "the communication which is prayer and intercession . . . and the kinds of 'conversing with spirits' which deaden the sound of the

---

[150]The Elder Statesman, p. 16.

[151]Ibid., p. 17.

'voice descanting.'"[152] In the same poem Eliot proposes the idea of "an inner voice" singing "in counterpart to the 'faded song' of . . . delusion . . . ."[153] And in The Waste Land, he reveals the "invoilable voice"[154] of Philomel--the communication of the private and better world--crying "Jug, Jug" to the dirty ears of the public world.[155] In Act II of The Cocktail Party, a scene is enacted that reveals the two different kingdoms of communication: Reilly, Alex, and Julia--apparently citizens of a private kingdom-- make libations in prayer for Edward, Lavinia, Celia, and Peter--who are, apparently, unhappy members of the public kingdom, but who yearn to escape from it and who, to differing degrees, are making their way from the public kingdom to the private. When Alex says, "The words for the building of the hearth" and "The words for those who are upon a journey,"[156] we infer that somehow Edward, Lavinia, and Celia have moved into a position to accept the "words," that the words are now a meaningful gesture on their behalf, that words now have a living quality for them. But Julia, in the elevated private kingdom of communication, looking down into the public kingdom, watching Celia in particular climb up the road from publicness to privateness, asks that Celia be protected "from the Voices," and that God protect her "in the silence."[157] We must, apparently, climb up through the voices of the public kingdom, the voices and

---

[152] Drew, op. cit., p. 185.

[153] Ibid., pp. 183-84.

[154] The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 40.

[155] Ibid.

[156] Ibid., pp. 368-69.

[157] Ibid., p. 369.

the noise both, march through the forests of some kind of silence, before we can enter the higher kingdom of true communication and true understanding. Edward,Lavinia, and Celia, it seems, have come far enough along in this development that "words" are truly "for" them. But Peter Quilpe, who has said a number of times in the play that he cannot understand anyone, is not in sight of the new speech. "There is one," Reilly explains, "for whom the words cannot be spoken."[158]

> Alex: They cannot be spoken yet.
> Julia: You mean Peter Quilpe.
> Reilly: He has not yet come to where the words are valid.[159]

Coming to where the words are valid--coming from the public kingdom into the private--involves, of course, some sort of change of mind, some sort of intellectual and spiritual insight that, confronting the same faces and same problems and same language even, transforms all, makes clear what was obscure, makes understandable what was confused. We must acquire, to make our shift from world to world, some kind of fire, some kind of burning intensity within us. As an example, one form of communication, prayer, as we are told in Four Quartets, "Little Gidding,"

> . . . is more
> Than an order of words, the conscious occupation
> Of the praying mind, or the sound of the voice praying.
> And what the dead had no speech for, when living,
> They can tell you, being dead: the communication
> Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language
> of the living.[160]

To be tongued with fire is not, however, so much a matter of special eloquence. Whatever eloquence inheres in our new speech would seem to be

---

[158] Ibid.

[159] Ibid.

[160] Ibid., p. 139.

more of a product than cause; the cause of the new speech, the cause of development from public to private, would seem to be a moral event on our part. "The individual locked in his solitary identity can escape from this obsession only by self-surrender and by sympathy with others."[161] Somehow our attitude toward others must morally improve if we are to escape our Sweeney-like isolation in the public world and come to the new words and new speech of the private. "There is only one way for you to understand/ And that is by seeing . . . ," Harry Monchensey says,[162] but this seeing is essentially a matter of moral insight. Lady Elizabeth's complaint that Sir Claude "always made me feel that I wasn't worth talking to"[163] is at heart a moral criticism, just as is Lavinia's complaint against her husband:

> Edward, what <u>are</u> you talking about?
> Talking to yourself. Could you bear, for a moment,
> To think about me?[164]

Can we overcome our egotism, our selfishness, our self-concern in order to communicate with others? Can we turn our vision into the lives of others and come to say with Colby:

> . . . I understand <u>you</u> better
> In learning to understand the conditions
> Which life has imposed upon you . . . .[165]

Eliot recounts a great deal of his thesis of the translation from the vulgar to the extraordinary kingdom of communications--a translation involving the moral event--in terms of the Christian tradition. One is

---

[161]Matthiessen, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 138.

[162]<u>The Complete Poems and Plays</u>, p. 250.

[163]<u>The Confidential Clerk</u>, p. 108.

[164]<u>The Complete Poems and Plays</u>, p. 342.

[165]<u>The Confidential Clerk</u>, p. 50.

tempted to say that Eliot recounts his communications theory in a religious metaphor, yet one must as honestly say that Eliot recounts a religious doctrine in a metaphor of communications. What one finally acknowledges is that, in Eliot, religious experience and communication experience are parallel if not congruent; and though certainly our religious experience is more comprehensive than communications, Eliot sees a great affinity between the two.

Developing the religious parallel, Eliot tells of a foundational silence in the universe, a deadly silence, an almost diabolical silence, the silence of that darkness which awaits us if we fail in our spiritual commitments and out of which man has struggled to rise over the millenia. Eliot most frequently calls it the "empty silence"[166] as he does in Four Quartets. It is empty because "there is no 'sense' or meaning or message."[167] It is the silence of the funeral (Four Quartets, "East Coker").[168] It is the silence we recognize in our daily lives when in the

> . . . dark dark dark . . .
> . . .
> . . . an underground train, in the tube, stops too long
> between stations
> And the conversation rises and slowly fades into silence
> And you see behind every face the mental emptiness . . . .[169]

In "The Dry Salvages," Eliot speaks of the "silent fog"[170] and that "soundless wailing,"[171] "voiceless wailing"[172] (oxymorons comparable no doubt

---

[166]The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 123.

[167]Drew, op. cit., p. 170.

[168]The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 126.

[169]Ibid. [170]Ibid., p. 131.

[171]Ibid. [172]Ibid., p. 132.

with Milton's "darkness visible") and "the silent withering of autumn flowers."[173] In The Waste Land, the jungle is crouched and "humped in silence,"[174] and in Coriolan, we hear of the "silent croaking night."[175]

In opposition to this deadly, empty silence is the Word. "In the beginning was the Word"[176] is that scriptural verse fundamental to Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service. The Word is, of course, applicable to both sides of the religion-communication parallel, for the Christian logos means the initial, life-giving revelation of God among matter, but logos, ambiguous term that it is, must, along with all other potential meanings, still denote "word" and "speech." Elizabeth Drew makes the point well; "the ultimate revelation is the image of communication by speech . . . ,"[177] and though Eliot refers in the term Word to the Christ, he almost means, inevitably, the spirit of communication, the spirit of life that is our knowing and our reaching out for what is beyond us. We can only proceed from "light to light, in the light of the Word" (Choruses from "The Rock" VII).[178]

The spirit of communication, incorporating a moral sense, comes into the empty silence of the human predicament not as the perfect articulation of which we dream, however. The spirit of communication, the Word, comes, as we learn in Gerontion, as

---

[173] Ibid., p. 132.

[174] Ibid., p. 49.

[175] Ibid., p. 88.

[176] Ibid., p. 33.

[177] Drew, op. cit., p. 203.

[178] The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 108.

> The word within a word,
> unable to speak a word,
> Swaddled in darkness.[179]

The Word must evolve within us (Christ must re-enact our humanity), experiencing the difficulties of misunderstanding and confusion, until it can effect for us the necessary transfiguration into the new speech. Born into the empty silence, the Word experiences also the agony of the "voices" and the "noise":

> The Word in the desert
> Is most attacked by voices of temptation,
> The crying shadow in the funeral dance,
> The loud lament of the disconsolate chimera.[180]
> (Four Quartets, "Burnt Norton")

Certainly the

> Shrieking voices,
> Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering
> always assail . . . ."[181]

and "Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled . . . ." (Ash Wednesday).[182]

Yet the Word's birth and agony are not in vain, for though the Word has gone through the empty silence and gone through the rabble, it has left in its wake that moral enlightenment that permits the protagonist of The Waste Land to awake from his blindness: ". . . to the 'I' of the poem the ancient 'word' is no longer completely dumb and dark . . . . He is agonizingly aware, in the imprisonment of his personal waste land, that

---

[179] Ibid., p. 21.

[180] Ibid., p. 122.

[181] Ibid., pp. 121-22.

[182] Ibid., p. 65.

the possibilities of rebirth cannot be dismissed . . . ."[183] Rebirth is, of course, in the communication side of Eliot's religion-communication parallel, that translation from the vulgar to the extraordinary, that sudden moral firing of the human heart and mind, which permits us to say, as Monica says to her father, "It is time to break the silence!"[184]

Breaking the empty silence, accepting the Word, disavowing the counterfeit "voices" and "noises," all these lead us, however, to a paradoxical moment in human experience. As we step over from the public kingdom into the private kingdom of communication, we find that we must enter a new silence, a silence that is a genre of stillness necessary for our accepting the Word. "The silent listening"[185] (Four Quartets, "The Dry Salvages") Eliot calls it, where one can "hear your voice as in the silence/ Between two storms . . ." (The Family Reunion).[186] This is necessary; otherwise we shall find ourselves in the situation depicted in Ash Wednesday: "Where shall the word be found, where shall the word/ Resound? Not here, there is not enough silence . . . ."[187] We need the silence that, in religious terms, Mariana and Our Lady (in Ash Wednesday) provide us, "The silent sister"[188] who "spoke no word,"[189] that "lady of silences."[190]

---

[183]Drew, op. cit., p. 63.

[184]The Elder Statesman, p. 105.

[185]The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 132.

[186]Ibid., p. 251.

[187]Ibid., p. 65.

[188]Ibid., p. 64.

[189]Ibid.

[190]Ibid., p. 62.

What we must accept now is ". . . to be blessed with the gift of silence" (Choruses from "The Rock" V),[191] the living silence, the spiritual stillness, that borderline of moral consciousness that we must cross over in order that we may come into paradise.

And there is a paradise. "Children's voices in the orchard" (Landscapes, "New Hampshire").[192] That lovely place

> . . . of the hidden waterfall
> And the children in the apple-tree
> Not known, because not looked for
> But heard . . . in the stillness . . . .[193]
> (Four Quartets, "Little Gidding")

There is a communication paradise (and a religious paradise) where

> . . . every phrase
> And sentence . . . is right (where every word is at home,)
> Taking its place to support the others . . . .[194]

The Word progresses through deadly, primeval silence, through the suffering of "noise and darkness and terror and division,"[195] through the new and transforming silence ("the center of the silent Word"[196]), into the paradise of perfect understanding. Man, instructed by that metaphysical and religious example, progresses, if he will, from utter inarticulation, through cant and broken words and all that is contained in "public communication," through the transforming moral realization that true communication must begin in our private hearts before it can abide in our

---

[191] Ibid., p. 105.

[192] Ibid., p. 93.

[193] Ibid., p. 145.

[194] Ibid., p. 144.

[195] Drew, op. cit., p. 113.

[196] Ibid.

mouths and our messages. Then man can come into that paradise that Eliot describes in the dedication to The Elder Statesman, a dedication "To My Wife": We may become lovers

> Who think the same thoughts without need of speech
> And babble the same speech without need of meaning . . . .
> . . .
> The words mean what they say, but some have further meaning
> For you and me only.[197]

5.

Those who do achieve true communication in their private ways must then become, in Eliot's thinking, the teachers of communication to the world and, thereby, the saviors of the culture: ". . . unless we have those few men who combine an exceptional sensibility with an exceptional power over words, our own ability, not merely to express, but even to feel any but the crudest emotions, will degenerate."[198] Indeed, true communication becomes the manifestation of the metaphysical Logos here in our world, a counterpart of Logos that becomes emblematic of it. And those practitioners of the new speech perform, as priests, a kind of sacramental action beneficial to the rest of mankind, extending into the world the Word and propagating, out of the private kingdom into the public, that perspective or consciousness "which emphasizes the need to move as best we can towards 'definite meaning expressed in the properest words,'"[199] toward the envisioned semantic paradise.

Eliot sees for most men today something less than paradise, of

---

[197] The Elder Statesman, p. 5.

[198] Barber, "The Power of Development . . . ," in Matthiessen, op. cit., pp. 200-201.

[199] Ibid., p. 202.

course. But Eliot's chief contribution to modern semantic awareness is a kind of hope based upon an astute criticism. His belief that "the incommunicable . . . may often mean merely 'the vague and unformed'"[200] suggests to us the need for an intellectual effort, an intellectual refinement. His belief that our flawed history (including our total communication effort) is human experience "lived without the framework of a Logos,"[201] suggests the need for a religious and spiritual quest. Man's struggle in mind and heart, in language and in attitude, in the machinery and in the conception--this is what shall bring us to a better world wherein the word is made whole.

Eliot leaves us on a threshold. He leaves us at a moment of expectation. He leaves us at a moment of moral decision. "I'm not sure, Edward," Celia says, "that I understand you;/ And yet I understand as I never did before."[202] And Charles Piper says,

> It's very odd,/
> But I am beginning to feel, just beginning to feel/
> That there is something I could understand, if I were told it.[203]

And Harry Monchensey says, "I think I see what you mean,/ Dimly . . . ."[204] Dimly we see through the glass. Something is beyond. Eliot brings us to the threshold, brings us to peer over into the possibility of resolving the pathos of communication, of picking up the broken word, of mending our broken lips.

---

[200] Matthiessen, op. cit., p. 64.

[201] Drew, op. cit., p. 54.

[202] The Complete Poems and Plays, p. 326.

[203] Ibid., p. 288.

[204] Ibid., p. 237.

CHAPTER VIII

EPILOGUE: THE POSSIBILITIES OF RESTORATION

> There is nothing that forges and creates a people more, and nothing that preserves their humanity more than words, more than speech . . . .[1]

> In the absence, for many people nowadays, of any absolute sanction to give us the Word, it becomes necessary to create our own (lower case) words, to make our own definitions as best we can. The resulting responsiblity for each individual person can be enormous; in Jean-Paul Sartre's famous phrase, we are "condemned to freedom."[2]

O'Neill, Joyce, and Eliot vigorously developed the theme of the broken word in their literature; they stand as representative spokesmen for the twentieth-century pathos of communications. Their various explorations of man's inability to communicate with man became an integral part of their myths and world-views and philosophies. Their great articulation of communication breakdown--an articulation effected also by other greats of the interbellum period: Hemingway, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Huxley, Lawrence, Woolf--has been carried on into the age of anxiety, cold war, and the bomb by Samuel Beckett, George Orwell, Tennessee Williams, J. D. Salinger, to name only a few.

Within this articulation there appears a complex of motifs that,

---

[1]The Rev. William F. Lynch, S. J., "In Word and In Song," Art and the People, Television Show No. 4 (New York: The Catholic Hour-TV, January 27, 1963), p. 1.

[2]Gibson, op. cit., pp. x-xi.

woven together, constitutes a major portion of the theme of communication failure. This complex comprises at least five major motifs in modern literature having close connections with the pathos of communications. These motifs do not necessarily have their matrix in the pathos, but they have received aid and succor from the pathos so that their prevalence in modern literature has been strengthened and given a significance they might not otherwise have had. No one author, of course, has necessarily developed all of these motifs, but they are to be found in nearly every area of modern literature and together they provide the chief characteristics of the theme of the broken word.

1. The Solo Conversation. This motif is one of literary technique and craftsmanship and has had a vogue in modern literature in various guises: monologue, soliloquy, and all forms of "stream of consciousness." Though usually considered a technique growing out of the desire for greater realism in literature, the "solo conversation" motif can also easily be seen as a facet of the communication failure theme. Though indeed the modern devices of monologue, soliloquy, and stream of consciousness may be "realistic," they are also quite evidently forms of self-communication, forms of a one-sided conversation. Actually a literary technique long before modern literature--see the Una Ellis-Fermor discussion, for instance, in The Jacobean Drama[3]--the use to which the solo coversation has been put in modern letters has a special association with the pathos of communications. The technique or motif can be re-examined, with the pathos of communications in mind, wherever it occurs--not only in Joyce, Eliot,

---

[3]U. M. Ellis-Fermor, The Jacobean Drama (London: Metheuen & Co., Ltd., 1936), pp. 49 ff.

and O'Neill--but in Faulkner, Woolf, or who have you, including the Beatniks and the Angry Young Men of the fifties.

2. The Facade. With its more recent roots in Baudelaire's homo duplex, the idea of dual-natured man (not the duality of body and soul, but the duality of the true and the false) has been a major motif in modern literature. Most apparent in O'Neill's mask experimentations, the theme of preparing our faces to meet the faces that we meet echoes throughout modern literature from the Richard Cory's to the J. Alfred Prufrock's, into the whole concern of Edith Sitwell's Facades in general, of Jean Genet's The Blacks in particular, and on into the search for the genuine beneath the phony in all the literature of the J. D. Salinger tradition. The facade motif is connected with the pathos of communications, for in the context of communications the human mask is significant both as a barrier and as a distorting filter. Man's facade hides what he has to say and distorts that which is said by others. The facade motif has been incorporated into the theme of the broken word, and the broken word has helped give the facade motif its popularity in the modern arts.

3. The Experimental Language. All the attempts in modern literature to manipulate the language in unorthodox ways (Joyce, Gertrude Stein, even William Burroughs with his folded pages), to incorporate foreign tongues into literature (Joyce, Eliot, Ezra Pound), to work with as many specialized areas within the language as possible, i.e. argot, slang, idiom, (O'Neill, Joyce, Salinger)--all come into focus in the light of the pathos of communications. Language experimentation is seen, of course, in modern literature as attempts to extend the facility of language to verbalize reality and, in some cases, as a rather snobbish attempt to speak to one

audience (some vaguely identified academic and polylingual audience) at the exclusion of all others. In addition, however, all the language experimentation in modern literature--and such experimentation is admittedly one of the hallmarks of a great deal of twentieth-century serious literature--can be seen as a motif symbolic of the loss of communication, of deviation from orthodox, communicative language. Perhaps it is a two-way street: to a certain extent language experimentation fostered and popularized the pathos of communication, but without the pathos in the background a great deal of language experimentation, especially as we see it in modern poetry, would not have been maintained at all.

4. The Communication Hero. One of the major characters in modern literature has been the artist, the creative person.[4] The Joycean hero is the most obvious example, but the communications-minded, the language-sensitive, the articulation-inclined man appears, too, as a major type in O'Neill's drama, and in a vast number of other literary works. Thomas Wolfe's Eugene Gant is but one of the many "sensitive young men" who, in their twentieth-century costume, are particularly concerned with the expression and communication of that which they feel. The novelist or journalist character in such works as Huxley's Point Counter Point and Gide's The Counterfeiters, such painters and artists as appear in To the Lighthouse

---

[4]"Perhaps this is again a sign of the interregnum /late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century/ in the thinking of modern man: that the artist should suddenly come to have exorbitant value as subject matter--should seem a hero or a traitor to his proper heroic role--and should seem so to the artist himself and not merely to his biographer. In this James is not alone; he is followed by Mann and Proust and Gide and Pirandello and Joyce, to all whom the artist became the type of hero most precious . . . ." Richard P. Blackmur, "Henry James," Literary History of the United States, ed., Robert Spiller, et alia, (3 vols.; New York: The Macmillan Co., 1948), II, p. 1050.

and in Joyce Cary's The Horse's Mouth are all part of a modern motif related to the pathos of communications. The struggle of these communication heroes both to develop into full-fledged articulators and expressors (all in the tradition of the Kunstlerroman) and to articulate and communicate in spite of a hindering rabblement with its noise and meaningless talk--the struggle achieves its full significance only as a part of the larger theme of communication failure in modern poetry, drama, and fiction.

5. The Moral Event. A more nebulous motif than the others, this facet of the communication failure theme is seen in Joyce's epiphanies, in all the "moments of truth" or "moments of insight" that are discussed in modern literature. Again, this concept of the dynamic moment when man turns from one way of life to another is not peculiarly modern--consider Oedipus Tyrannus for instance. But much has been made in modern literature of these intense, usually transfiguring moments when a human being suddenly has the opportunity, even if for only a brief time, to find in what had been only emptiness and noise a far better world of harmonious silence and true communications. One need cite only the works of Charles Williams, Rainer Maria Rilke, Par Lagkervist, T. S. Eliot to find examples of the moment of moral event, that, in the context of the pathos of communications, becomes the hopeful ingredient in the otherwise somber-threaded theme of the broken word. Even though the transfiguring moral event occurs in modern literature not as an immediate concern with the pathos of communications, in nearly every case the event touches upon the pathos, and to the extent that communication is involved in larger moral issues, the moral event provides some sort of possibility of restoration for the broken word.

Also, the prevalence of the pathos of communication has no doubt prompted a good deal of the quest for the moral event, as well as the quest for a number of other spiritual answers.

2.

Out of the articulation of the pathos of communication, with its complex of motifs and with the particular emphasis given to the broken word by such major figures as O'Neill, Joyce, and Eliot, the popular, more-than-literary concern with communications has developed in the English-speaking world, until today "communication failure" has become the scapegoat-explanation for problems in nearly every area of human experience--from agriculture to politics, from child-rearing to team sports. C. P. Snow has carried the pathos of communications to a certain logical end in his concept of "two cultures," and a large percentage of the militant debates of our days--see for instance Richard Hofstadter's recent book, Anti-Intellectualism in American Life (the eggheads versus the fatheads), and Daniel Boorstin's critical response in Saturday Review,[5] as well as the continuing battle between the camps for and against Webster III and between the traditional stylists and the liberal linguists as described recently by Lincoln Barnett[6]--have at least a number of their roots in our almost neurotic semantic awareness.

Surely, though, the pathos of communications need not be a lasting cultural disease. Surely modern man must begin to envision some

---

[5]Richard Hoftstadter, Anti-Intellectualism in American Life (New York: Knopf, 1963), reviewed by Daniel J. Boorstin, "The Split-Level Tower," Saturday Review, June 1, 1963, p. 19 ff.

[6]Lincoln Barnett, "Who Is Behind the Assault on English?" Horizon, (July, 1963), p. 33 ff.

restoration of the broken word. The restoration will probably be a matter of seeing that the broken word is not quite as shattered as once thought and be a matter of revitalizing our faith in language and attending to it with greater care. The restoration will probably be a matter of improved attitude and craftsmanship combined. Also the restoration will probably be a matter of recognizing the deep affiliation communication has with man's moral and spiritual nature as well as with his intellectual capacities. As Father William F. Lynch has written,

> People love words and they love great speech, speech that flows out clearly in the air and challenges us to be as great, as clear-cut, as rhythmic as itself. It is exactly this we are being denied today by men who have a contempt for the people and are the new masters of our public arts. People love words and speech. They carve them as great monuments so that they shall not forget what has been good in the past.[7]

Perhaps the most powerful of the restorative movements to date has been that of Korzybakian General Semantics, but the trouble with General Semantics is that it raises as many problems as it solves. Quite properly and effectively, General Semantics has encouraged a greater consideration of language, a more meticulous concern with language possibilities and limitations, but at the same time it has had upon many people a tremendously inhibiting effect, frightening people into silence for fear they may "misuse" language. Also, at the same time General Semantics has attacked varieties of language mystiques, it itself has floundered many times into a kind of faith-healer role, promising better health and increased prosperity simply through communication reform.[8] Without wishing

---

[7]Lynch, op. cit., p. 1.

[8]

to engage in the exciting debate about General Semantics, one cannot help observe that a great deal of the support for General Semantics has come from engineers, scientists, mathematicians, and the like--men who perhaps envision language as a scientific instrument, a mechanical structure, and who, in spite of protestations to the contrary, may be blind to the humanness of language experience.[9] All in all, General Semantics, while urging reform of language and restoration of the broken word, has so overwhelmingly condemned man's misuse of language and failure to communicate that the poor patient has less faith in the cure than in the reality of the illness.[10]

A genuine restoration of the broken word must begin with a rejection of any sort of fatalistic attitude toward communication failure--a rejection of the sort of hopelessness that O'Neill acknowledged in his semantic awareness--and must also begin with a rejection of a number of fallacies that plague our understanding of language and communication. A good many of these fallacies have themselves grown out of restorative movements (including General Semantics), but are entirely deceptive as programs for improving communication. Though no doubt hundreds of fallacies could be listed, some of the more disturbing ones--and popular ones--are the fallacies of "the new improved language," "the good old

---

[9]See H. L. Mencken, The American Language Supplement (New York: Knopf, 1945), p. 102, for a similar opinion.

[10]As a teacher, I had, several years ago, an interesting experience with a student in creative writing class: the young man had had several courses in semantics and now found himself totally unable to put words down on paper, for he had become too acutely conscious of the uncertainties of language; each time he put a word on paper, all the possible implications and meanings of the word leaped into his mind and he was forced to cancel the word out. I have known several other cases of what I call "semanticitis."

language," "the simplified language," "euphemism and anti-euphemism," and "sophisticated inferences."

Within the fallacy of new language one must include all advocation of one universal language (Esperanto et alia), new improved alphabets (that of George Bernard Shaw for example), new standardized, phonetically-accurate orthography (telefon, nite, thru), and the myriad other reform schemes. Language, though having certain arbitrary aspects to it, cannot be concocted arbitrarily or wrenched overnight out of old molds into new.[11] Whatever changes take place in language can only be reflections of changes taking place in the human situation. Human change and growth are slow; language changes are slow. And any new language can only be a modification, a variation upon the existing language. One cannot arbitrarily cancel out a language and construct a new tongue. As Edmund Wilson says, "We may hope that there will yet be a medium by means of which all the peoples can communicate with one another, but we cannot forecast what such a language might be, we can hardly as yet even speculate as to which linguistic elements will predominate; still less can we concoct one synthetically."[12] All the experimentations of the twentieth-century toward the development of a "new Language" actually are not genuine restorative efforts to mend the broken word but are simply reflections

---

[11]What Susanne K. Langer, Philosophy in a New Key (New York: The New American Library, 1949), p. 112, has to say about primitive peoples applies I think to our own age: "No savage society of unintellectual hunters and squaws could ever build a language; they could only produce it by some such unconscious process as endless misunderstanding, modification, reduplication for emphasis . . . and 'filling in' by force of a formal feeling based on habits."

[12]Edmund Wilson, "My Fifty Years with Dictionaries and Grammars," New Yorker, April 20, 1963, p. 208.

and mirrorings of the broken word itself. Though some people have seen in the excessive linguistic experimentations of Joyce, in the more controlled and limited experimentations of Eliot, an extension of language into new dimensions, the truth is that the experimentation is simply linked "with our contemporary sense of chaotic change and upheaval, of disequilibrium and insecurity."[13] The restoration of the broken word will not come about simply by devising a new vocabulary, a new syntax, a new alphabet, a new orthography. The communication problems faced by man would simply be transferred into new sounds and shapes.

Likewise we are confronted with a fallacy if we suppose that the broken word will be restored by our going back to some language situation of the past. It is easy to daydream about the good old days when language was purer and lovelier than it is now. But language is a stream that flows only in one direction, and any nostalgia for a language of the past is no more pertinent to a restoration of the broken word than is the utopian dream of a better language far ahead. Man has never had, and never will have, more to work with, as far as communication goes, than "the language of this day." To invest his hopes in something past or future is to avoid the contemporary issue. Though much is to be praised in Eliot's program for improved communication, he reveals an astonishing communication blindness in his intense predilection for seventeenth-century English and in his vigorous assurances--in many places, but typically in a recent review of The New English Bible--that deterioration and corruption are rampant in the language, that we are victims of an active "agent of decadence."[14]

---

[13]Matthiessen, op. cit., pp. 134-35.

[14]T. S. Eliot, "T. S. Eliot on the Changing Language of the Scriptures," The National Observer, December 24, 1962.

Eliot, too, has a weakness for the etymological fallacy in that he believes that a word *really* means what it *first* meant, that somehow the Greek or Latin roots of a word give us the *real*, the *genuine* meaning of a word.[15] He hates to acknowledge that language changes, flows, moves, and that language can no more be kept what it once was than one can keep a human being or a flower what they once were. At the heart of Eliot's problem, and at the heart of the fallacy of the "good old language," is a burning desire for stability and a confusion of taste in language with communication in language. But the restored word does not necessarily mean a static word, nor does it necessarily mean, alas, a beautiful word.

The fallacy of simplified language appeals to those who feel that present-day communication problems are the result of complexity (rhetorical and syntactical elaborateness, one supposes) and size (large vocabularies). The point of this fallacy is to reduce language to bedrock; to avoid complex communication problems by throwing out the window all the implements of those complex problems.[16] (Baby with the bath water, as it were.) Absurd as it may sound, the simplifiers seem to argue that if we don't have a name for something the something goes away. Or that the primary colors are quite adequate to describe any color sensation. Ogden's Basic English is, undoubtedly, the prime example of language by reduction, an approach that by now has been proved hopelessly inadequate--neither satisfying our

---

[15]Joyce tended toward the same etymological fallacy, though he went in a slightly different and bizarre direction by making up his own word origins. He insisted, for instance, upon a thirteenth-century etymology for "Odysseus": *Outis*--"nobody"; *Zeus*--"God." As Richard Ellmann, *op. cit.*, p. 372, says, "The etymology is merely fanciful . . . ."

[16]See Sapir's contention, quoted in Langer, *op. cit.*, p. 89, that infantile language has a limited communication aspect.

communication needs nor our aesthetic needs. Herman Melville, a century ago, explored the possibilities of communication improvement by "going back" and "down to" an earlier, more simple language, but he discovered, and wisely admitted, that simplified language becomes simply kindergarten or infantile language, complicating our communication efforts rather than helping them.[17]

Another fallacy is that concerning euphemisms and anti-euphemisms and word preferences in general. Some people feel that to use language properly and effectively and most communicatively, we should use it "realistically," whatever that means. Perhaps this sense of "realistic" language is a reaction against Victorian circumlocutions;[18] but whatever the cause, it is a fallacious position. The most common example used by advocates of "realistic" or "anti-euphemistic" language is in connection with death. We are told that the word dead is much "better" than the expression passed away. But to demonstrate the "betterness" is utterly impossible, unless one insists upon the equally fallacious criterion of syllabic economy: fewer syllables are better than more syllables. The old anti-euphemistic argument that the expression passed away is unrealistic reveals an appalling ignorance not only of language but of people. Few bereaved survivors have ever made a mistake about the expression passed away; they know exactly what it "means." Jessica Mitford recently damned the funeral business for its calling a coffin a casket, an undertaker a

---

[17]Particularly in his first novel, Typee, Melville explores the primitive and infantile communication experience. He rejects the experience, however, for the more realistic one of Moby Dick.

[18]Obviously euphemisms, when they become non-referential and lead us away from reality, can be harmful, but a great many criticisms of circumlocutions are really criticisms of metaphors and synonyms.

mortician, a flower truck a flower car, and so forth.[19] But surely her preferences are legitimate only in the area of subjective taste, not in the area of communication. Likewise, Eliot's dismay that the swine of the King James Version has become pigs in The New English Bible is valid only in the area of likes and dislikes, not in the area of communication.[20]

A final fallacy to mention is that of sophisticated inference. Quite simply stated, this fallacy holds that whatever one says in language something else is implied, and that the implications constitute the "real message" being communicated. It is the fallacy that literal language is insignificant and ignorable; that direct communication is impossible. Joyce seems especially addicted to this fallacy, or at least is intent upon depicting it. It is a fallacy especially appealing both to the highly-creative and overly-educated personality and to the guilt-ridden, criminal, or minority-group personality. Perhaps, most of all, it is appealing to the socially ambitious who have great fear of naivite or ingenuousness: one must not seem simple-minded by taking language literally; one must always wink and smile, having discovered the "real message," the real implication, the unsaid. When this fallacy maintains, communication gets lost in cleverness and ingenuity.

More important than rejection of fallacies, however (and the fallacies could be explored at great length), is a positive program of thoughtful language use in order to communicate. First of all, one should maintain as large a vocabulary as possible and should encourage the

---

[19]Jessica Mitford, "The Undertaker's Racket," The Atlantic, CXI (June, 1963), p. 62.

[20]Eliot, op. cit.

general enlargement of the language in order to effect as discrete and distinct a nomination of things, events, and ideas as possible.[21] Obviously, one must avoid any sort of nomination mania or any sort of naming magic; but our common realization that rose and tulip are, many times, more precise and useful words than the general term flower still holds true. And at times of extreme communication crisis or delicacy, the more refined and precise our words are the better off we are. Refinement and precision in words is vastly helped by word quantities, for to distinguish and discriminate, one must have material with which to work.

Secondly, one must maintain a constant cautiousness concerning abstract and generalized words. (General Semantics has made a useful contribution here, constantly calling our attention to the danger of these words.) Words that have no immediate physical referents are not to be cast aside, but our use of them must be quite careful and we must be aware of the danger of ambiguity that surrounds them. Thirdly, and this grows out of the dangers of ambiguity, we must be willing to define our terms as often as necessary and in as precise and specific a way as possible. Though we may normally assume that certain words are commonly defined in our culture, we must always be willing, if the obvious necessity arise, to define our terms as best we can, knowing, of course, that there are certain limitations on definition that we simply can't overcome.

Fourthly, in our positive program of language use, we must

---

[21]Admitting that many people cannot accept reality without having a name for the things within reality, I am inclined to agree with Langer, op. cit., p. 102, that "to name things is a thrilling experience, a tremendous satisfaction." Having the names of things--names we have given or the names our culture has given--is advantageous; where's the value in a limited vocabulary?

constantly search for agreements within as large social and cultural groups as possible concerning the technical operation of language--its syntax, grammar, and rhetoric. Though we know perfectly well we will never achieve a one hundred per cent agreement on every language construction, on every syntactical propriety, and though we know perfectly well that the language agreements we do achieve today are going to be changed tomorrow, we must constantly search for at least temporary, fairly widely accepted understandings of what we are going to do within the province of sentence structure and the like.

Fifthly, though, at the same time we are looking for agreement, we must maintain as flexible an attitude toward language as possible. We must be willing to bend in our use of language if the bending is necessary for communication. We must avoid anyauthoritarianism or dogmatism that values rules and regulations above communication. We must never let ourselves be more concerned with being "right" than with being "understood." (Eliot, it seems, errs in this direction at times, counting too much upon validation within institutional or corporate language.) Our task is, somehow, to avoid language anarchy, (with each person speaking his own private tongue), by coming together into community--yet without letting that community become dogmatic.

Sixthly, we must acknowledge the mutability of language, its constant movement, rearrangement, change. We must learn to float with the current of language; we may build our little dams for the day in order to achieve a quiet pool of language, but we must be prepared for the dam's breaking tomorrow and the flood of language moving on.

Seventhly, we must understand the nature of the word itself. The

word is actually a logos duplex: words have meaning, words have sound. Words are both symbols for referents and physical structures having sound and rhythm. Both aspects of the word are very valuable to us, but we must not confuse the two. We must never substitute the one for the other. Joyce, as we have demonstrated, made the mistake of substituting the physical word for the meaningful word, and many of us grow more concerned with the aesthetic aspect of language than with the communicative aspect.[22] We are more concerned with "sounding good" than "making sense." In fact, we must take great care always to distinguish between aesthetics and communication; to distinguish between language as a literary medium wherein perhaps the aesthetics of language is of equal value with the communicativeness of language, and language as a communication medium wherein the aesthetics must take a secondary place. As Santayana warns us,

> . . . sometimes sensation and language, instead of being passed over like the ticking of the telegraph, may become objects in themselves, in all their absolute musical insignificance; and then animals become idealists. The terms in which they describe things, unlike the things they meant to describe, are purely specious, arbitrary, and ideal; whether visual, tactile, auditory, or conceptual these terms are essentially words. They possess intrinsically in their own ontological plane, only logical or aesthetic being; and this contains no indication whatever of the material act of speaking, touching, or looking which causes them to appear. All possible terms in mental discourse are essences existing nowhere; visionary equally, whether the faculty that discovers them be sense or thought or the most fantastic fancy.[23]

We must distinguish between communication as a literary problem and communication as a problem in human intercourse; in the former we have the additional privilege of private investment of meaning; in the latter we

---

[22]Locke, op. cit., p. 149, attacks an over-concern with the sounds of words at the expense of word meaning.

[23]Santayana, op. cit., p. viii.

have the moral obligation to come as close as possible to the communicator's intended meaning.

Finally, we must constantly keep in mind that language and communication are a social experience, and like all social experience, require courtesy, compassion, and wisdom. Susanne Langer says "it requires a certain amount of good-will and like-mindedness to understand the speaker of a one-word sentence,"[24] but the same need for good will and like-mindedness holds true for all communication efforts. We must have the desire to communicate, and we must give our communication efforts the loving attention and concern that they deserve. Charles Williams makes much of "attention" and "concentration" as Christian virtues, and likewise they are virtues in our attempts to understand one another. Vast amounts of communication failure occur not because of any language difficulty whatsoever, but because of a failure of our wills and our desires. To a certain extent, Lionel Trilling is right when he says, "It is not words that make our troubles, but our own wills. Words cannot control us unless we desire to be controlled by them."[25] We must increase our desire to communicate, and then pay attention as we go about our communication business.

We must always consider the standard determinants of communication: to whom are we speaking, what is the occasion, what is the subject of our message, what role do we play in this experience. Most important, of course, is in the paying attention to our receptors: if they do not understand our rhetoric we must change it, if they have limited vocabularies or other language limitations we must respect their weaknesses

---

[24]Langer, op. cit., p. 111.

[25]Lionel Trilling, op. cit., p. 187.

and accommodate ourselves to them. That is, if we truly want to communicate. And we must be willing to communicate in as many ways as necessary and as many times as necessary. We must not be afraid to repeat ourselves, or to try various supporting media. Words certainly constitute our major communication medium, but we must be willing, if necessary and if possible, to use tactile and visual communication, the communication of action and deed, to back up our verbal attempts. Economy may be an aesthetic virtue, but it is not always a communication virtue.[26]

A great deal of our communication breakdown in the twentieth century must finally be attributed to a moral and spiritual breakdown. Eliot is perfectly right in suggesting that some sort of moral event is necessary if we are to restore the broken word, if we are to return to communication. Allen Tate, too, has had much to say on the need for communion among men as a requisite to communication. Though Edwin Arlington Robinson may have seen our modern world as a spiritual kindergarten where mankind is trying to spell 'God' with the wrong blocks, the opposite may be as equally true: we may have the right blocks and be trying to spell something less than the moral word. Our moral and spiritual apathy has led us to the deep silences that we blame on language rather than upon ourselves. Many people cannot communicate because they do not want to communicate; they have nothing to say, not in intellectual lack, but in spiritual lack. They cannot say "I love you," because they have no emotional feeling. They are without rage or passion or insight or delight. They

---

[26]John Stuart Mill in his essay "On Liberty" made a similar observation when he said that "Very few facts are able to tell their own story, without comments to bring out their meaning." The simple statement, without the necessary contextual communication, often fails.

have nothing to say, they don't want to say anything, they apologize for their nothingness by claiming it is impossible to communicate. The breakdown of our time is in emotional sensitivity, in social concern, in spiritual commitments--not really in language or in communication. The broken word is often the mask behind which more grievous problems hide. The people who are unable to tell us what they feel, often feel nothing. The people who are unable to explain their ideas, often have no ideas. The people who claim the prerogative of inarticulateness often are simply claiming the prerogative of irresponsibility and noninvolvement. Joyce is a good example of communication destruction by means of exile; Joyce failed to see the need for love as the ultimate basis for communication. And though some may feel that "the harrowing tragedy of the O'Neill family was not the lack of love but failure in the communication of their love for each other,"[27] there is every evidence that the love itself was suspect, that the communication failed because there was so little love behind it. In all our lives, a great deal of the failure to communicate can be attributed to linguistic stubbornness, pride, snobbery, and general rigidity. One of the great restorative gestures our age must make to set right the broken word is seek out a new sense of ethics, morals, and spiritual awareness.[28]

In spite of all, of course, man will never communicate perfectly.

---

[27]Bowen, op. cit., p. xviii.

[28]It has been suggested that language communication is, in itself, a part of the ethical necessity for modern man: "Nonviolence means faith in the Word, or simply Faith. Nonviolent action presupposes violent speech and covenants, openly arrived at. Silence and secrecy are the enemies. Where debate stops, there begins fight. Words heal, silence infects. Silent inaction means apathy. It shows interest in nothing." Niccolo Tucci, "Offhand," Saturday Review, January 20, 1962, p. 12.

At least, man will always wonder if he has communicated perfectly. The truth is, he will never know. But communication difficulty or incompleteness need not be exaggerated into utter communication failure, into the utter tragedy that O'Neill described. After all, man's very state is a qualified and compromised state. All our affairs, here in our human condition, are inadequate. Just as we accept the mystery of life without having all the explanations we would like, so we must accept communication as we are able to manage without ever having that perfect accord and understanding that we would like to achieve. Life is a matter of faith. So is communication. All symbols are at last potentially ambivalent--even symbolic action is ambivalent--and it is only on faith that we accept a certain meaning for a symbol.

The broken word, after all, is not unuseable. It is less broken, more merely flawed. And man is accustomed to flawed instruments. Flawed as the word is, inadequate as language is, we must still recognize that "Language is, without a doubt, the most momentous and at the same time the most mysterious product of the human mind. Between the clearest animal call of love or warning or anger, and a man's least, trivial word, there lies a whole day of Creation--or in modern phrase, a whole chapter of evolution."[29] Whether modern man establishes within himself the faith and will to lift himself from the pathos of communications is yet to be seen, of course. But surely he will. Surely he will not let that "whole day of Creation" have been in vain and slip back forever into the maddening doubt that he is no more than the dumb animal. Modern man surely can, through thoughtfulness and compassion, make his way through all the

---

[29]Langer, op. cit., p. 83.

communication obstacles and articulate, not just sounds without meaning, but the living words, neither magical nor miraculous but immensely human, that reach, though falteringly, flimsily, and flawed, somehow the other man, the other soul, the other consciousness hidden there behind that other garment of earthly being. "I am here, I am here!" we cry. "I am sending you my message. Help me to be heard. Help me to be understood." And in that very human cry we lift up the broken word, lift it high, lift it in the gesture that must be made. The broken word is better than no word. And we must rejoice in our partial victory, in the fact that we have a word at all, that we can elevate it at all--in human aspiration and in human dignity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

Adams, Henry. The Education of Henry Adams. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1946.

Arnold, Matthew. Culture and Anarchy. New York: Macmillan Co., 1924.

Bacon, Francis. Advancement of Learning. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1915.

Barrett, William. Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy. London, Heinemann, 1961.

Baugh, Albert C. (ed.) A Literary History of England. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1948.

Beer, Thomas. The Mauve Decade. Garden City: Garden City Publishing Co., 1926.

Bowen, Croswell. Curse of the Misbegotten. New York: Ballantine Books, 1959.

Bredvold, Louis I, McKillop, Alan D., and Whitney, Lois (eds.) Eighteenth Century Poetry and Prose. New York: The Ronald Press, 1939.

Brooks, Van Wyck. New England: Indian Summer. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1940.

Buckler, William (ed.). Prose of the Victorian Period. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1958.

Campbell, Joseph and Robinson, Henry Morton. A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake. New York: The Viking Press, 1961.

Chase, Stuart. The Tyranny of Words. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1938.

Clark, Barrett H. Eugene O'Neill: The Man and His Plays. New York: Robert M. McBridge & Company, 1929.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. Biographia Literaria. London: J. M. Dent Co., 1906.

_____. The Complete Poetical Works. Edited by E. H. Coleridge. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1912.

_____. The Selected Poetry and Prose. Edited by Donald A. Stauffer. New York: Modern Library, 1951.

Conant, James B. Modern Science and Modern Man. New York: Columbia University Press, 1952.

Curti, Merle. The Growth of American Thought. 2nd ed. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1943.

Drew, Elizabeth. T. S. Eliot: The Design of His Poetry. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949.

Eliot, T. S. The Complete Poems and Plays. New York: Harcourt Brace & World, Inc., 1962.

_____. The Confidential Clerk. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1954.

_____. The Elder Statesman. New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1959.

_____. Poetry and Drama. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951.

Ellis-Fermor, U. M. The Jacobean Drama. London: Metheuen & Co., Ltd., 1936.

Ellmann, Richard. James Joyce. New York: Oxford University Press, 1959.

Engel, Edwin A. The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953.

Falk, Doris V. Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Vision. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1958.

Foerster, Norman (ed.). American Prose and Poetry. 2 vols. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1951.

Fuller, A. G. A History of Philosophy. Rev. ed. New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1945.

Gelb, Arthur and Barbara. O'Neill. New York: Harper and Row, 1962.

Gibson, Walter (ed.). The Limits of Language. American Century Series. New York: Hill and Wang, 1962.

Hall, James E. and Steinmann, Martin (eds.). The Permanence of Yeats. New York: Collier Books, 1961.

James, William. Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking. New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1959.

Johnson, Samuel. Lives of the English Poets. Edited by George B. Hill. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1905.

Josephson, Eric and Mary. Man Alone: Alienation in Modern Society. New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1962.

Joyce, James. Dubliners. New York: The Modern Library, 1954.

_____. Finnegans Wake. New York: The Viking Press, 1962.

_____. A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. New York: The Modern Library, 1928.

_____. Ulysses. New York: Random House, 1934.

Karl, Frederick R. and Magalaner, Marvin. A Reader's Guide to Great Twentieth-Century English Novels. New York: The Noonday Press, 1959.

Kazin, Alfred. On Native Grounds. Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1956.

Krutch, Joseph Wood. The American Drama Since 1918. New York: Random House, 1939.

Langer, Susanne K. Philosophy in a New Key. New York: The New American Library, 1948.

Lever, J. W. The Elizabethan Love Sonnet. London: Metheun & Co., Ltd., 1956.

Levin, Harry. James Joyce: A Critical Introduction. Rev. & augmented ed. New York: New Directions, 1960.

Locke, John. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding. Edited by Alexander Campbell Fraser.. 2 vols. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1894.

Mattiessen, F. O. The Achievement of T. S. Eliot. 3rd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1959.

Mencken, H. L. The American Language Supplement. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1945.

O'Neill, Eugene. The Iceman Cometh. New York: Random House, 1946.

_____. Long Day's Journey Into Night. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956.

_____. The Plays of Eugene O'Neill. 3 vols. New York: Random House, 1928.

_____. Thirst and Other One-Act Plays. Boston: The Gorham Press, 1914.

_____. A Touch of the Poet. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957.

Petty, William. The Petty Papers. Edited by the Marquis of Lansdowne. 2 vols. London: Constable & Company, Ltd., 1927.

Priestley, J. B. Literature and Western Man. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960.

Raine, Kathleen. Coleridge. London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1953.

Reps, Paul (trans.) Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings. Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1957.

Robinson, Edwin Arlington. The Torrent and the Night Before. Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1896.

Santayana, George. The Realm of Essence: Book First of Realms of Being. London: Constable and Company, Ltd., 1928.

Sondel, Bess. The Humanity of Words. Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1958.

Spiller, Robert E. (ed.) Literary History of the United States. 3 vols. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1948.

Sturtevant, Edgar. An Introduction to Linguistic Science. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947.

Swift, Jonathan. Gulliver's Travels and Other Writings. Edited by Louis A. Landa. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1960.

Tate, Allen. Collected Essays. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1959.

Thurman, Kelly (ed.). Semantics. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1960.

Tillyard, E. M. W. The Elizabethan World Picture. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1944.

Tindall, W. Y. James Joyce. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950.

Trilling, Lionel. The Liberal Imagination. Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1959.

Willey, Basil. The Seventeenth Century Background. Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1953.

Wilson, Edmund. Axel's Castle. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931.

Wolfe, Thomas. Look Homeward, Angel. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947.

Articles

Barnett, Lincoln. "Who Is Behind the Assault on English?" Horizon, V (July, 1963).

Boorstin, Daniel J. "The Split-Level Tower," Saturday Review, June 1, 1963.

Eliot, T. S. "T. S. Eliot on the Changing Language of the Scriptures," The National Observer, December 24, 1962.

Granger, Bruce. "Illusion and Reality in Eugene O'Neill," Modern Language Notes, LXXIII (March, 1958).

Hardy, William G. "The Philosophy of Modern Semantics," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XXX (April, 1944).

Jung, C. J. "Jung's View of Christianity," The Atlantic Monthly, CCII (January, 1963).

Locke, Norman. "Semantic Psychotherapy: An Exchange of Views," ETC., XV (Autumn, 1957).

Mitford, Jessica. "The Undertaker's Racket," The Atlantic Monthly, CXI (June, 1963).

"Notes and Comments," The New Yorker, May 19, 1962.

"The Poet's Voice," The Times Literary Supplement, July 14, 1961.

Renwick, Ralph, Jr. "Seventeenth-Century Semanticists," ETC., XIX (May, 1962).

Tucci, Niccolo. "Offhand," Saturday Review, January 20, 1962.

Weathers, Winston. "Communications and Tragedy in Eugene O'Neill," ETC., XIX (July, 1962).

"What Is the World's Greatest Need?" The New York Times Magazine, May 19, 1962.

Wilson, Edmund. "My Fifty Years with Dictionaries and Grammars," The New Yorker, April 20, 1963.

Newspapers

The Tulsa World, May 27, 1962.

The Tulsa World, October 18, 1962.

The Tulsa World, January 8, 1963.

Scripts

Lynch, William F., The Rev. Art and the People. New York: The Catholic Hour-TV, January 27, 1963.