

In what is probably the best book on Wordsworth ever published, modestly entitled *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814*, Geoffrey Hartman demolishes the comfortable case that the imagination in Wordsworth harmoniously reconciles the alienated self with Nature. On the contrary, as Hartman superbly demonstrates, Wordsworth fears the imagination as an alien, external force which surges up from some abysmal depth to disrupt the self's imaginary security, paralysing it with subversive intimations of death. Hartman, inauspiciously, receives only one passing preliminary reference in John Beer's new study; but there is a relation nonetheless between the two critical approaches. For Beer is concerned with a continuing tension in Wordsworth's poetry between what he terms his 'rational' and 'subliminal' consciousness – between the organising mind and the irrational forces by which the poet was at once frightened and fascinated. Beer's case is that it was the nudgings of the more 'subliminal' Coleridge which opened Wordsworth up to these more disturbing speculations, alerting him to a universe constituted of 'living powers' even before Coleridge's contact with German idealism allowed him full-bloodedly to formulate these notions. His study, accordingly, takes us through a wide range of Wordsworth texts in its pursuit of various manifestations of this motif.

What all this amounts to, in effect, is that Wordsworth was a good deal less stuffy, sagelike and statuesque than he generally wants us to think. Beneath the stoical puritan exterior for which the Victorians loved him lurk fears of madness, fits of paralytic depression, dishevelled fantasies, haunting hallucinations. And indeed this is surely obvious to any careful reader of *The Prelude*, which is a good deal less sanguine than it would like us to believe. The quotable bits almost all concern stark moments of minatory encounter with alien, chastising, deathly forces: the unfortunate poet is pursued by a threatening crag, plagued by eerie sounds, buttonholed by beggars, confronted with a corpse rising from a lake. Not that Wordsworth himself would have us

believe that all this is unfortunate: on the contrary, the 'official' ideology of the poem instructs us in the spiritual nourishment one can reap from such transactions with the infinite. Studiously intent on assuring us that his biography indeed forms one rich, organic whole, he attempts to 'naturalise' such disruptive invasions in the interests of the supposed unity of the ego. But here, as usual, it is a matter of trusting the poem rather than the poet: the poem, like *Paradise Lost*, is most interesting precisely at the points where it betrays and contradicts what it is officially supposed to be up to, lets the ideological cat out of the aesthetic bag.

Dr Beer, regrettably, does not allow his study of Wordsworth's dualities to bring him to such conclusions. Despite his perception of the 'subliminal' poet beneath the rationalising sage, his Wordsworth remains too much Wordsworth's Wordsworth. Nor does he offer us the least *historical* explanation of why all this should be as it is; and in this he is at one with Geoffrey Hartman, who would no doubt simply refer us to some mythological entity called the 'Romantic imagination'. Beer's emphasis on the debt to Coleridge, proper and accurate though it no doubt is, constitutes an evasion of the real questions: it trivialises the issue to a matter of when Coleridge happened to turn up on the doorstep. 'In Coleridge's company, we may assume, it was hard to resist seeing the world about one as a world of life, full of forces springing up, renewing themselves ... In his absence, on the other hand ... the energies of life gave way to the still forms that dominated the natural scene'. This seems about as helpful as saying that Virginia Woolf wrote badly when Leonard was under her feet but sparkled when he left for his club. The truth is that Wordsworth's formative development was dominated by the upsurge of an alien, fearful yet fascinating force which indeed threatened to rupture his 'organic' bond with the Lake District: the French revolution. Once that had 'failed', the estranged, guilty poet returns home to reconstruct in his very writing an imaginary continuity for himself, only to

find that his ego is constantly displaced and decentred by the 'unconscious' – call it, if you like, history – it needs to repress. This is not to convict Wordsworth of 'bad faith'. Like all good writers, he was

able to put his repressions to significant use; one might add that, as one of the most repressed poets of the canon, he needed to.

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NEW PERSPECTIVES ON WORSHIP TODAY by J. G. Davies, SCM Press 1978
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The method which Professor Davies uses in presenting these new perspectives is that of 'divergent thinking', that is, examining a subject by placing it in conjunction with several others with which it is normally not associated. The novelty of such a conjunction is calculated to produce a creativity in understanding the subject under enquiry.

Worship is considered in this book in conjunction with play, dance, sexuality, conflict, politics and laughter – on the face of it a very diverse agglomeration of themes to use in throwing new light on liturgy. However, in Professor Davies' examination of the connection between them and worship they do not diverge all that much, indeed, one apparently divergent theme follows from another.

Davies begins by reflecting on worship in terms of games theory – worship and play; worship as play. Worship and dance is the next step since dancing is one method of playing which engages (as full play should) body, mind and emotions, in a social activity. The use of the dance in liturgy leads him to consider the place that sexuality has in the context of worshipping God – the Kiss of Peace is related not only to sexuality but also to a concern for *shalom*: – harmony within the community. The positive meanings of harmony and peace are then considered; peace is not the suppression of conflict but is rather the process of searching for wholeness and righteousness, and so the expression and resolution of conflicts are essential steps towards the unity which is a characteristic of *shalom*. Having argued that there should be a place in the liturgy for the expression of conflicts, Davies next considers the relatedness of worship and politics – one of the primary areas of conflict. And finally, lest we take ourselves and our worship with an unwarrant-

ed seriousness, laughter (an essential part of play) and liturgy are juxtaposed.

The association of worship with such seemingly diverse subjects as sexuality, conflict, laughter etc. is quite logical once you accept Davies' initial and controlling assumption that worship can properly be discussed in terms of games theory. To talk of worship as play does not necessarily entail a liturgical frivolousness nor irresponsibility; play is not simply superficial and childish, on the contrary, it is serious and absorbing: a game, as Bill Shankly once said, can be more than a matter of life and death.

Professor Davies maintains that worship can validly be looked upon as play because play harmonises human freedom and the observance of rules; play is, as worship should be, a bridge between creativity and conformity. *Playing engages the whole person* – in full play the creative mind, the body and the emotions are involved in relationship with others in a situation shaped by a minimum set of rules. Davies does not demand that worship be characterised by a chaotic and unreflective spontaneity, his new perspective does not cause him to regard liturgy as a 'happening' organised by christian hippies; it does, however, cause him to argue that liturgy is made for man and not man for liturgy.

If salvation embraces the *whole* person then the whole person can be brought into worship. In worship we should be neither puppets nor parrots: – "What we have witnessed over the centuries in the main line churches has been a takeover of the game of worship by the rules themselves ... if (worship) is to be a source of joy and if it has a certain spontaneity one must question the continued production of revised liturgies which do no more than perpetuate the regimentation of congregations ..." (p. 9).