The Connection Man:

A Study of Russell Hoban's Fiction

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this thesis entitled ***The Connection Man: A Study of Russell Hoban's Fiction*** submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy is a record of the bona fide research carried out by S. Nagesh under my supervision and that no part of this thesis has been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma or any similar title before.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled ***The Connection Man: A Study of Russell Hoban's Fiction*** is a record of the bona fide research carried out by me and that no part of it has previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, or any other similar title.

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S. Nagesh

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The second half of the twentieth century has seen the flowering of an unprecedented approach to the writing of fiction in all parts of the world. Experimentalism, linguistic virtuosity, wide allusive frames, intertextuality, textual self-consciousness, parody, indifference to traditional ideas of character and plot are all characteristic of such fiction which has been given labels such as metafiction, fabulation and surfiction. John Fowles and B.S. Johnson in England; John Barth, Robert Grover, Donald Barthelme and John Hawkes in the United States; Alain Robbe-Grillet and Michel Tournier in France; Italo Calvino and Umberto Eco in Italy: Julio Cortazar, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and others in Latin America; Salman Rushdie in India; Haruki Murakami in Japan have all been pioneers in this area although their concerns and styles are too wide apart for them to be clubbed under one movement or school. Among these contemporary experimentalists Russell Hoban stands all alone for a variety of reasons.

Born in Philadelphia in 1925, to Jewish immigrants from Ukraine Russell Hoban, as a child drew precociously well. After serving in the army during the Second World War (he was

awarded a Bronze Star for bravery in action) he became a successful illustrator in television and advertising. Later, he became a freelance illustrator working for such magazines as *Sports Illustrated*, *Newsweek* and *Time*. In 1960, his first children's book *Bedtime for Frances* launched him into a career as a very successful children's writer. *The Mouse and his Child* (1968) about a wind-up mouse looking for a self-winding mechanism is now considered a children's classic. In 1969 he moved to London and it was here that he began to write his adult novels beginning with *The Lion of Boaz-Jachin and Jachin-Boaz* (1973).

Any study of Russell Hoban, necessarily has to be tentative and exploratory in nature because of the lack of attention paid to him. He is one contemporary novelist who has been unjustly ignored by critics. There are three important reasons for this. Hoban is an American born writer who has been living in England since 1969. Neither fully American nor English, he is very difficult to be compartmentalized and consequently has generally been ignored by both American and British critics-quite understandable in a critical atmosphere where nationality is inextricably linked to trends and more important, reputations. Another reason is that Hoban began as an illustrator and writer of children's books. His successful career as a children's writer has been an important reason why he has not been accepted as a

serious novelist. A third reason is that he is from no real literary tradition and when academics and critics try to place him in one, they find it impossible.

Through the Narrow Gate (1989), the only book length study of Hoban's novels to have appeared attempts a Jungian reading of the novels. The book covers his novels up to *The Medusa Frequency* which was published in 1987. Christine Wilkie does not take into consideration Russell Hoban's awareness of the contemporary literary theories embedded within the structure that the myths offer. Her interests are limited to categorizing Hoban as a contemporary mythopoeic writer, but refuses to define the contemporary quality of his writing in terms of the reading strategies that form a major pattern of the novels. She writes: " In his writing Hoban invites to go beyond our swimmer's fright and with him the neophyte, make our return into cosmic night and primordial waters; and with him reach for the elemental depths before returning to the sunlight"(18) Hoban's worldview that emerges from Wilkie's study is the ideology of shamanism and how it has contributed to the presence of myth in his novels.

This study 'The Connection Man' attempts to explore the recurrent patterns of crisis in which Russell Hoban manages to foreground thinly veiled theories of writing, theories that range

from romantic theories of inspiration through Reader-Response to Post-structuralist ones of endless deferral of meaning. These themes exist along with his major concerns of man's alienation from the larger order and his reintegration into a greater whole through a series of connections that he makes.

The centrality of language in Russell Hoban's fiction was pointed out as early as 1984 by Natalie Maynor and Richard F. Patteson in "Language as Protagonist in Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*" which appeared in the Fall issue of *Critique*. The interface with contemporary critical theories that Russell Hoban's novels highlight was later pointed out by Elizabeth Dipple in *The Unresovable Plot*: "Reading Hoban's fictions ineluctably awakens the readers sense of contemporary literary theory in a way achieved by only a handful of post-modernist fictionists such as Alain Robbe-Grillet, Umberto Eco, Italo Calvino, John Barth and John Fowles" (165). She has classified Russell Hoban as a writer "obsessed by Form" (165). This study attempts to examine the various forms in which critical theories are disseminated in the texts. Hoban's heroes, it is further argued, serve as a space for the discussion of the limitations of form and their bearing on the immediate crisis that they experience.

In most of the characters the crisis is a result of a slackening belief in a particular approach towards reality that the hero has internalized. The hero is forced to test the limits of his belief through a series of encounters which take the form of a dialogue that exposes the inadequacy of creating mutually exclusive, even inimical categories of writing this reality.

Russell Hoban's distrust of stable categories of experience is nowhere more visible than in the way in which his characters move with great ease from one mode of representation to another, where questions about the nature of the medium triggered by one manner of representation are carried over to another, signifying the most pressing questions of the urge to represent reality. The quest that Hoban's heroes undertake is to make connections that go beyond the personal experiences in life. Most of the heroes feel the continuity and connections that exist among various art forms like painting, sculpture, music, films, puppet shows, comic strips and even advertisements. The quest of the hero usually comes to an end when he opts for a particular form of representation and in most cases the personal crisis is meshed with the crisis of an artist. This crisis manifests itself as certain fears and obsessions that are usually related to the limitations of a particular form of representation.

Hoban's heroes are placed against the larger narrative of a myth of which the most notable is the Orpheus myth, which he uses repeatedly because of its possibility of bringing together the idea of the poet, the artist and the lover. The patterns of the quest myth in Hoban are fused with a desire to be connected to a larger and broader plane of experience of which Orpheus becomes the symbol. Myth offers a way out of the impasse that the character experiences. Hoban seeks to treat myth from two different angles. The more common method is to import a well known myth and try to present an alternate reading which goes against the traditional associations that have come to be accepted as the normal cultural response. Another method is to take an obscure myth (or create one) whose meanings have not yet been stabilized and to introduce it into the narrative in order to illuminate and possibly solve the problem that the protagonist encounters. In either case Hoban exhibits a resistance to received patterns of experience and a desire to question the received versions of myths.

At the same time Hoban's heroes remain sensitive to the pertinence of the questions that the myths throw up, suggesting certain obsessions that have haunted human beings at every stage of their progress. The unorthodox treatment of myths opens up a space that very effectively accommodates most modern critical theories with their suspicion of the notion of 'meaning'.

The recovery of Hoban heroes is found to be largely dependent on a series of meetings with artist figures – mythical or real. The recovery may be the recovery of the possibility of articulation as supported by certain theoretical positions. The hero's initial image of himself is most often a conventional one and the crisis exposes the problems of such a conventional image and it is this that forces the hero to explore the problems and possibilities of learning more unorthodox concepts. The hero faces a crisis in faith that is largely defined in terms of artistic practices that are considered to be stable.

Hoban's heroes are presented in a condition of transition, and this focus on transition rather than the arrived state, is paralleled by certain concepts that the post-structuralist theories have expounded. Hoban's exploration of absences in the myth seems to imply that the absences are the very source of meaning, a thought that is strikingly close to the foundations of contemporary critical theory. The fluidity of identity co-exists with the fluidity of meaning stressing the violence that is implicit in the more conventional and static theories of self and art. The rigid compartmentalizations that the hero carries within him in his condition of crisis and creative barrenness, Hoban seems to convey, have to be replaced by an increasing awareness of the life denying quality of such attempts to superimpose a pattern of difference and thereby convey a false sense of order. The relative

merits of various methods of representation which are central to the artists conventional notion of identity, break down in the process, resulting in a condition of recovery and a renewed conviction in oneself and ones own profession.

The connection that the Hoban hero establishes, is one that is largely assisted by a fresh and radical view that destabilizes most of the essentialist definitions of the artist. Hoban's image of the artist in search of truth is expressed in the form of a journey that extends both inward and outward. He constantly takes pains to consider the journey into the landscape of the mind as having some correspondence with the real journey that the hero experiences. Such a technique further demolishes the question of borders, the inner and the outer, which are all based on the idea of differences. Such a vanishing of the boundaries is further played out in the characters who share very similar experiences thus suggesting an area of experience where the individual and the personal cease to exist. A fine manifestation of such a technique is the use of myth that suggests a collective experience.

The Hoban hero is a site where there is a confluence of contemporary scientific theories like the quantum theory, contemporary critical theories and traditional notions associated with inspiration. The identity of the Hoban hero is thus connected both to age-old notions of creativity where the artist

figure is identical with the shaman and to contemporary ideas associated with Critical Theory.

Hoban's notion of the 'connection man' is bound by an awareness of the failure of capturing meaning finally. The journeys that the hero undertakes do not provide final answers. On the contrary it conveys the impossibility of the same. Since Hoban's heroes reject the idea of 'the meaning', subjective conclusions have as much validity as dominant meanings, thus offering the context of a number of reader-response positions which is explained within the frame work of the Orpheus myth.

The progress of the protagonists in Hoban is at least in some novels marked by the powerful awareness of the experience of the body, which marks out the stages through which he passes. The idea of being possessed, which is seen as an essential pre-condition for successful articulation comes to be associated with an experience of the body which is often unpleasant. The experiences are generally those of pain or a forced condition of absence (castration). The 'connection man' in Hoban has a compulsive need to express himself that finds parallels in the Romantic notion of writing. The recovery of the hero coincides with his awareness that existence itself is crucially defined by articulation in some form of expression. Being possessed by a source of inspiration manifests as an aching, the disappearance of

which becomes indicative of the recovery. The lesser characters in the novel set up a contrast in the way they respond to the crisis. The crisis is remarkably similar to that of the experiences of the hero, but the response differs. The hero survives the crisis whereas the others succumb to it though ironically they too have contributed to the recovery of the hero. At least in certain novels the lesser characters act as initiators. They echo the problems of the hero and some of them suffer a similar condition. The hero exhibits a more comprehensive awareness and an ingenious way of tackling his crisis, assisted by voices and apparitions which may to a large extent be seen as extensions of certain fears and obsessions that are for the most part of the hero's life relegated to the unconscious.

The study approaches the works of Hoban from the perspective of a conventional methodology, that of studying the works of an author in the chronological order they were published. Instead of attempting to classify the individual works of Russell Hoban under certain broad themes, which allow the possibility of switching from one text to another, the study looks for the persistence of certain themes within the logic of each work. Since there is a paucity of book length studies on his fiction it was felt that a study of an initiatory nature has to be structured in a traditional manner. The study is therefore divided

into eight chapters including an introduction and conclusion dealing with his six major novels.

The second chapter "The soul of harmony" examines the eponymous hero of Hoban's 1974 novel *Kleinzeit*. Though not his first adult novel to be published, it is in this novel that all the characteristic themes of Hoban receive an elaborate treatment for the first time. Having exorcised the familial aspects of experience in *The Lion of Boaz-Jachin and Jachin-Boaz* which Hoban has confessed is an extremely autobiographical novel, Hoban found his voice in *Kleinzeit*. This chapter stresses the patterns that recur in his later works. Kleinzeit suffers from a pain along the hypotenuse from A to B. He undertakes a series of journeys through the underground and goes in and out of Hospital (the personified hospital). Through a series of messages that keep changing each time, he is brought to a moment of 'remembrance' that enables him to make the connections that restore him to harmony. Questions of loss, of bodily anguish, psychological stress, the relationship between memory and identity, the desire to experience a large reality, journeys as an essential factor of a broadening consciousness, death as final loss, all appear in this novel.

The preoccupations of *Kleinzeit* are taken up in *Turtle Diary* (1975) which is the focus of "Going Where They Are Going".

This chapter explores the ways in which Hoban is still concerned with loneliness, pain, desire for a collective experience embodied in the image of the sea, and the need to reach out. This is the most environmentally conscious novel of Hoban and is based on a deep reverence for nature that is the result of an understanding of the interconnectedness of things and the fragile balance of the universe. Man's isolated and fragmentary understanding of reality is counterpointed by an acceptance of the fact that man is yet another element without a privileged position in the vast universe. William G. and Neaera H. leading desiccated lives in present day London, become obsessed with three turtles in London Zoo, steal them and release them into the sea, an act that connects them to the mysterious workings of the universe.

Riddley Walker (1980), the novel that established Hoban as a major writer, and the novel for which he is most likely to be remembered is set twenty three centuries after the nuclear holocaust and it is the focus of "Tuning into the Worl". Riddley Walker's quest for the secret of a lost science ends in the discovery of gunpowder, but the search also becomes a quest for language, myth, meaning and coherence. Hoban explores the connection between language and reality expressed in the firm belief that language functions as a mode of retrieval, which is simultaneously a mode of construction. Construction of the narrative becomes the construction of the language, which in

turn becomes the construction of the past. Hoban seems to be conveying the idea that so long as language exists nothing is irretrievable. Reality then becomes largely an experience of language, an idea to which Hoban returns in *The Medusa Frequency.*

If the quest for coherence takes Hoban into the future in *Riddley Walker*, *Pilgermann* (1983) takes him back into the past. *Pilgermann* continues with the earlier themes of the desire for wholeness, harmony and order and these are explored in "A Mode of Perception", the fifth chapter. However it differs from all his other novels in that it treats these themes in an overtly religious framework. Hoban uses the Jewish experience of disobedience, fall and redemption to pursue questions of loss, search and wholeness. Pilgermann's destiny is to die in Antioch though his destination is Jerusalem. In the conventional sense his is a futile enterprise. The notion of inherent values comes to be dismantled when Pilgermann comes to accept Antioch as Jerusalem. Painting and sculpture offer Hoban convenient contexts to chart Pilgermann's conflicts, hopes and the type of reality with which he is confronted. Pilgermann's journey is through different narratives, the narratives of Bosch's paintings and medieval church sculpture and overarching this is the larger narrative of the fall, a pattern that is repeated in *The Medusa Frequency.*

The Medusa Frequency with its return to the theme of Orpheus and Eurydice is discussed in chapter six, "The Manyness of Singing". Herman Orff is the artist figure in the novel who experiences a writer's block. Through a series of encounters with the Orpheus figure, which may be of a hallucinatory nature, he is initiated into the problems of art and the nature of representation. In his attempts to establish the connection with language he is assisted by a mode of representation where the traditional notions of language are immaterial. Herman is assisted by a number of female figures who generally tend to be lover figures from his own past. The image of the sea and its associations with the unconscious, the unknown, and the unarticulated or that stage of experience prior to language, abounds in the novel. As in *Turtle Diary*, the sea comes to represent a condition to which the individual aspires since the sea stands for some kind of an experience that cannot be contained within the sphere of personal experience. The immensity of the sea becomes a symbol of the vastness of the unconscious and Herman's cure comes when he realizes that narratives are just fragments in the sea of the unarticulated unconscious. Through Herman, Hoban stresses the idea of reality as a highly fluid and elusive condition where absence rather than presence seems to determine its nature. Herman makes the connection that loss is essentially a part of language and any

attempt to represent reality is by its very nature, bound to be a failure. Herman's growth is reflected in the fate of Orpheus, whose search for Eurydice becomes a metaphor of every artist's destiny. Hoban develops a strong parallel between Orff and Orpheus by using the idea of journey as applicable to both these figures. Orpheus's quest for Eurydice through the underworld is paralleled in Herman's frequent journeys in the Tube and his journey to see the Vermeer original. Herman's awareness of a larger connection is conveyed to the reader by a series of encounters with artist figures from different media who have experiences very similar to Herman's. Herman's fascination shifts from Eurydice to Medusa a highly suggestive shift as Medusa in mythology is considered to be the source of the Greek alphabet/ language. The themes of pain, hospital, bodily anguish and death contribute to the complexity of Herman's response to his crisis and his recovery is consequently understood in these terms.

"The Farther End of a Spectrum", the last chapter looks into *Fremder* (1996), the last novel accommodated into the scope of the study. If in the first novel the ordering principle and the possibility of a solution were tested out against the background of the Orpheus story with its attendant notions of a mythic past, *Fremder* is an attempt to establish a connection and a condition of harmony and wholeness by examining the possibilities of the

latest scientific theories, especially the many worlds interpretation of the quantum theory. If in *The Medusa Frequency*, the protagonist is forced to undertake a number of journeys through the underworld /underground necessitated by the use of he Orpheus myth, in *Fremde*r the journey is through deep space. The connections that Fremder makes are connections very similar to the ones that Herman Orff makes. The conditions of his progress are strikingly similar though the notion of journey in the earlier novel is vastly different. In another sense *Fremder* is a continuation of *The Medusa Frequency* in terms of the idea of an all-embracing consciousness. Fremder's attempt to attain a connection results in a series of reflections on the nature of reality and most of the reflections do not differ substantially from the ones arrived at in his earlier novels. The last chapter attempts to show that most of the preoccupations of Hoban that surfaced in *Kleinzeit* are still with him.

This study does not take into consideration Hoban's later novels like *Mr Rinyo-Clacton's Offer*; *Angelica's Grotto*; *Amaryllis, Night and Day* and *The Bat Tattoo*. In *Mr Rinyo-Clacton's offer* (1999), the hero Jonathan Fitch fears that he may have contracted AIDS. The association between sex and death is vital to the novel and it marks a deviation since the hero is not worried in any substantial way about questions of reality and the limits of representation. The desire to be a part of a larger order

embodied in a quest myth does not figure in *Angelica's Grotto* (2000) too. It is about a 72 year old professor who is introduced to internet sex. Most of the content is erotic with explicit descriptions of sex, but Hoban's larger themes of man's desire to be integrated into a more comprehensive dimension of reality are again missing in this novel.

In *Amaryllis, Night and Day* (2001) Peter Diggs sees Amaryllis at a bus stop and they embark on a journey of nocturnal experimentation. *The Bat Tattoo* (2002) is about Roswell Clark, a toy inventor and Sarah Varley, a dealer in antiques whose lives are intertwined by orders from a Parisian sybarite for wooden models of human beings with very adult moving parts. Set in present day London, Hoban's last four novels form a quartet of sorts, with the erotic as a dominant theme. In all four novels his earlier interests in making a larger connection with a greater reality have shifted to the intricacies of personal relationships.

Experimentalism, use of fantasy, attention to the linguistic structure and reworkings of ancient myths are all characteristics of post-modern fiction. What makes Russell Hoban unique is that he uses these techniques to convey a spiritual apprehension of the world. His concerns are metaphysical unlike those of most contemporary novelists. The reconciliation of the individual

consciousness with the universal will and the consequent philosophical problems of the one and the many are constant themes in his novels, pursued in many ingenious ways. His works are also explorations of his personal as well as contemporary theories of fiction and of science. Hoban's achievement lies in bringing together all these strands, connecting the metaphysical with the critical, the mythic with the scientific. "Now as I walk I know that there is no separateness in the world", he says in *Pilgermann* (89) and all his work is an attempt to exhibit the unity that he sees. In an interview with John Haffenden in 1981 he said, "It seems obvious to me that all things are connected and a function of art is to explore the connections and engage with the action revealed by them" (139). This study is an attempt to explore how he makes those connections in his major novels.

The Soul of Harmony

S.Nagesh “The Connection Man: A Study of Russell Hoban's Fiction ”
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Chapter 2

The Soul of Harmony

In an interview with Edward Myers in the Fall 1984 issue of *The Literary Review*, Hoban said that *Kleinzeit* was the novel that was closest to his heart "because that's where [he] found [his] characteristic narrative voice"(8). A bizarre, hallucinogenic novel with personified characters, its plot centres around the protagonist's illness — a pain along the hypotenuse from A to B — his treatment at the personified Hospital and his final discharge. However in the novel we find all of Hoban's characteristic concerns in their most concentrated forms — loneliness, the quest for creativity as well as psychic wholeness, his idea of the universe as one mind, a Zen Buddhist idea of harmony and most strikingly, his unique, quirky way with language.

As in *Riddley Walker* what is most striking about *Kleinzeit* is the novel ways in which Hoban uses language to construct a world that is bizarre yet strangely familiar. In a novel that centers on the medical ailments of people in a hospital Hoban makes the diseases universal (and solves the problem of laborious research) borrowing terms suggestive of disruption and disorder from other fields like geometry, algebra, physics, rhetoric and

music. The protagonist is hospitalized for a pain along the hypotenuse from A to B. His diapason is hard and swollen. Later his asymptotes become hyperbolic and his stretto gets blocked. Flashpoint has a distended spectrum and later dies of hendiadys. Nox is a penumbra case on the verge of partial eclipse. The fat man, M.T. Butts, has a chronic case of ullage and dies when he is full. Schwarzgang has a bad case of Ontogeny and Red Beard loses all leverage because of a slipped fulcrum. Smallworth has an enlarged proscenium, Raj suffers from Hesperits and Damprise from Efflorences, Piggles' imbrications have reified - Hoban's facility for invention is apparently endless. As in the case of the names of diseases, so with the names of characters; Hoban has a Dickensian feel for the right name that conjures up a whole character and characters that conjure up a whole condition. Flashpoint is a very thin, very pale man who looks as if, "he might flash in flame and be gone in a moment"(16). M.T. Butts is an ullage case who is never full and has applied for a grant from the Arts Council "on metaphoric grounds. The human condition"(34). Very often there is an erotic charge to the way he gives names and sometimes the gay abandon with which he revels in it can be extreme. Commenting on a newspaper photograph of the bestselling writer Harry Solvent "alone...in his bath, correcting the proofs of his next novel," Red Beard caustically observes:

> While the eighteen members of his household staff are variously occupied elsewhere in the mansion, Harry Solvent, in the presence of his agent Titus Remora, his solicitor Earnest Vasion, his research assistant Butchie Stark, his secretary and p.a. Polly Filla, his flower arranger Satsvma Saloma, his masseur and trainer Jean Jacques Longjacques, his boyfriend Ahmed, Times photographer Y. Dangle Peep and his assistant N.Ameless Drudge and Times writer Wordsworth Little, sits in his bath with the proofs of his new novel Transvestite Express. (58)

Apparently lighthearted fun, it is also a caustic account of a recent generation of best-selling novelists whose works are a result of corporate enterprise rather than traditional solitary endeavour and whose success is a result of Public Relations Management, Madison Avenue style marketing and most typified by the hedonistic lifestyle of people like Harold Robbins who has confessed in interviews that he has never described a sex act in his books that he himself has never experienced.

Names like these remind you that Hoban began as a children's writer and that children's books are meant to be read aloud. Nuances that one misses when eyereading Hoban appear when one reads him aloud. N. Ameless Drudge suggests Nameless Drudge to an eyereader. Read aloud it also appears as an aimless drudge. Not for all tastes is the poster announcing the movie based on Harry Solvent's latest novel:

> Now Showing: KILL COMES AGAIN. They were all dying to come with him! Starring Prong Studman, Maximus Jock, Immensa Pudenda, Monica Bedward. Also starring Gloria Frontal as 'Jiggles'. Directed by Dimitri Ithyhallic; Screenplay by Ariadne Bullish based on the novel "Kill for a Living" by Harry Solvent. Additional dialogue by Gertrude Anal. Music composed and conducted by Lubricato Silkbottom. Theme "Suck my Lolly" composed and arranged by Frank Dildo, performed by The Pubic Hares by permission of Sucktone Recording Inc. Executive producers Harold Sodom Jr. and Sol Spermsky. Produced by Morton Anal Jr. photographed in Spermasksion, a Division of Napalm Industries. Recorded by Sucktone, a Division of Sodom chemicals in association with Napalm industries, a Division of Anal Petroleum Jelly. A Napalm- Anal Release. Certified X for Mature audiences only'' (24-25).

Clearly Shakespeare was not the last writer to have been intoxicated and carried away by his own wordplay. But as anyone who has observed Hollywood posters will realize, each name that Hoban uses suggests actual Hollywood names. It is clear that very little alteration is necessary to bring to the surface, the latent sexuality of Hollywood posters. Rock Hudson, Jayne Mansfield and Jean Harlow are only a few of the names that Hollywood has created to suggest masculine virility and feminine willingness. The irony in the passage comes out at the very end when the movie is certified as being restricted to mature

audiences whereas the whole passage indicates that the appeal is to immature ones.

The erotic charge spills over into his description of people like Wanda Udders, winner of the Miss Guernsey contest. "No matter how heavy the going might be," Wanda was quoted as saying, "I try never to lose my bounce. I've always known there were big things ahead of me" (52).

But most of the time the wordplay is controlled, disciplined and works towards an aesthetic end. This is especially true of the personifications in the book and the manner in which the personified entities are described. Hospital which controls the people who come into its grip and from whose clutches most people do not escape, dominates the novel: "The next day Hospital unleashed its claws, sheathed them again made velvet paws, put its paws away, shifted its vast weight from one buttock to another, crossed its legs, played with its watch chair, smoked its pipe, rocked placidly" (39). Death is a beastly creature, "black and hairy and ugly, no bigger than a medium sized chimpanzee with dirty fingernails"(134). Pain is not one person, but a whole company of armed soldiers who roar by on motorcycles (163).

The world of *Kleinzeit* is one in which language can enthrall and enchant you, seduce and mislead you. Kleinzeit as a

copywriter at an advertising firm had written the copy for an advertisement for Box-U-well coffins and later when he is ill and in hospital a patient in the next bed hands over a copy of the advertisement to him. Kleinzeit at first thinks it is pornography and finds it is not. For the reader however, the advertisement is more obscene than dirty pictures since it treats death as a party event. The advertisement needs to be quoted in full for an appreciation of Hoban's stylistic skills – for the way in which he uses the jargon of advertising to throw light on a world trivialized by glossy appearances and for the way in which throughout the novel he uses comic effects to heighten the horror of the theme – of man living in a death oriented present.

CHOOSING YOUR COFFIN

> How many times have all of us said, or heard others say "I wouldn't be caught dead in that hat/coat/suit etc? And yet how many of us, even the most discriminating are caught dead in a coffin that does not reflect our high standards of personal taste! That is why we say; 'A word to the wise'. The choice is yours whether to go in the style that is personally yours or simply to be packed off at random.
>
> Leaving this world is no less important an occasion than coming into it. Just as your parents showed their love for and pride in you by their careful choice of a baby carriage that provided as it were the setting in which you as a baby were the jewel, so you as an 'outgoing party' owe it to your family,

> friends and business associates to the community at large, to take your leave in a distinctive and "personalized" manner.
>
> Examine the Box- U- well line carefully and you will see why generations of satisfied customers have endorsed our slogan: "A box for every budget." Traditional skills passed from father to son, years of consummate craftsmanship and technical 'know-how' go into every Box-U-Well coffin. Whether you choose an economy model such as the Tom-all-Alone's or a de-luxe container like "The Belgravia" your assured of materials, fittings and workmanship of the first quality. With Box-U-well you can indeed "Rest in Peace" (139-40).

Part of the appeal of the passage lies in the way the usual relation between death and life has been subverted. Life has generally been moulded according to one's concept of death. Here death is fashioned according to one's style of life. A turn of phrase to indicate one's aesthetic dislike of something "I wouldn't be caught dead in...." becomes the starting point of a frivolous "personalized" concept of death. Death becomes an occasion and as the reason for that occasion one owes it to others to do it in style.

But the passage is also an illustration of how advertising has cheapened every aspect of life, even death itself, turning everything into opportunities for creating market riches. Kleinzeit lives –literally - in the shadow of death. He also lives in a world that has trivialized it so that he can shop around for the

kind of death that he prefers. The culminating irony of the passage teeming with ironies is of course that it is Kleinzeit himself who has created that advertisement and by implication fashioned that world.

Kleinzeit's world is also one in which everyone keeps talking: Hospital, the Underground, God. This is the way day breaks for Kleinzeit:

> The day knocked three times at his eyeballs.
>
> Morning for Mr. Kleinzeit, said the day.
>
> I'm Mr. Kleinzeit, said Kleinzeit
>
> Sign here, please.
>
> Kleinzeit signed.
>
> Thank you very much sir, said the day and handed him the morning.
>
> (26-27)

The imaginative language, the ingenious word-play and the innovative situations are however, not the excesses of a capricious writer, delirious with language. Language for Hoban is central in a way quite different from all other contemporary writers – not in the sense that it is with language alone that we construct our worlds but in the uniquely spiritual sense that the

world communicates to us through language. In 'Pan Lives' he says:

> To me it seems that everything that happens is language, everything that goes on is saying something, There is a continual telling and asking going on, a continuous conversation that is trying to happen between everything around us and us ...Hear the earth say itself, say itself ponderous with evening, turning to the night while little words of flesh kick a football in the empty paddling pond. All of it needs to be taken in, not as event but as language, as the allness of everything saying itself to us because we are what it talks to (128).

The language of *Kleinzeit* is an expression of Hoban's belief that if only you opened up to the universe, tried to listen to it, it would communicate itself to you. Listening to the Universe is like listening to alien music, which may seem to have no pattern or meaning in the beginning:

> Listen to it a few times. Very quickly the lips and bleeps become orderly and familiar, become the voice and language of something that was in you waiting for music. However random the composer tries to be, its impossible to compose sound that has no pattern: anything you hear is a pattern of sound waves and every pattern refers to all other patterns; everything is some kind of information. The universe is continually communicating to us in a cosmic eucharist of waves and particles (Moment, 37).

In the same essay he writes:

> It came to me while listening to that pump one night that it was foolish to make too many distinctions between the animate and the inanimate: everything was talking, the world was full of constant language. What did all the language mean? It meant itself, that's all, and itself was something to tell about it but the knowing was in me (37).

Kleinzeit then is a comic novel with a very serious intent. Like much of postmodernist literature it uses parody and pastiche not to trivialize the heroic but to find significance in the trivial. The language above all is one suited to a work in which a major theme is that the universe – both the animate as well as inanimate aspects of it – is constantly communicating to you.

Like Lewis Carroll before him, Hoban uses the illogicalities and ambiguities of language to reveal a world that is essentially absurd. "Nowhere's safe", says sister to Kleinzeit, when he's on the run from Hospital. "But its hard to stay nowhere," replies Kleinzeit (164) immediately recalling the famous scene from *Through The Looking Glass* in which Alice along with the white king encounters nobody on the road. "I see nobody on the road," said Alice. "I only wish I had such eyes" the king remarked in a fretful tone. "To be able to see Nobody! And at that distance too!

Why it's as much as I can do to see real people, by this light!" (232)

"Barrow full of rocks is nothing, more than a mnemonic for hidden soul of harmony," says Word to the yellow paper and the yellow paper is outraged because they are nothing like each other. Word's reply is worthy of classic Carroll:

> If the mnemonic is the same as what it reminds you of why bother with it. I don't even like him to be too close. If you have a nice thing to think about you don't want to keep it out in plain view all the time, you know, with the virtue getting rubbed off it. Keep it dark is what I say. (161)

Hoban's finest book for children *The Mouse And His Child* is about two clockwork toys and their quest to be self-winding. "Quests for self winding of one sort or another come into my work a lot," he told Edward Myers in the interview quoted earlier (8). All his characters are seekers after self-reliance and Kleinzeit is no exception: In *Kleinzeit* because the action is metaphoric in the extreme this quest is foregrounded as in no other novel of Hoban's.

The various illnesses in the novel are examples of Hoban's distinctive way with language, yet the names of the illness are all part of the metaphoric structure of the work. The protagonists of

Hoban's novels are usually people who suddenly find themselves alienated men who have lost their connections with other people, with the past and with the world around them. Kleinzeit one day suddenly finds himself with a pain along the hypotenuse from A to B. To every student of geometry the hypotenuse is associated with Pythagoras' Theorem, one of the foundations of classical geometry. A and B are classically the points that need to be connected, the point from which you start and the point at which you arrive. The hypotenuse is that part which keeps the angle right (90^0). A skewed hypotenuse will lead to one's angle becoming false or wrong (not right) or distorted-either obtuse or acute.

Asymptotes in mathematics is a line that constantly approaches a curve but never meets it. A hyperbolic asymptotes will lead to an intersection that will divide or break the curve. Diapason in music is harmony, various sounds in concord. When the diapason becomes hard and swollen there is discord instead of concord. A stretto is that part of a fugue that brings the subject and the answer together. Blocking of the stretto results in a separation of the two causing dissonance. Already the pattern that Hoban is building up is obvious. All of Kleinzeit's illnesses are metaphors of discord, disruption, dissonance and strife. The other patients in the hospital too suffer from illnesses suggestive of lack of harmony. The spectrum is the range of colours or

frequencies which together make a harmony of sounds or colours. A distention causes distortion in the spectrum and thus harmony is lost. Hendiadys is a figure of speech in which a notion normally expressible by a modifier and a noun (one unit), is expressed by two nouns joined by a conjunction (two units)—in other words where one is split into two. Thus both of Flashpoint's diseases are metaphors of rupture and division. Nox's condition is that of darkening and failure – he suffers from penumbra, the partial shadow around the darker shadow of an eclipse. All characters in other words are suffering from a lack of harmony- the natural condition for the ordinary small-timer. This condition is symbolized by Schwarzgang's illness - he suffers from Ontogeny - the normal development of the individual being. The disease for which all the patients have been hospitalized then is the human condition.

Kleinzeit is the average man - the name in German means smalltime. His life so far has been like the abstract lives of almost every man: "I was born, I had a mother and a father and a brother, I lived in a house, I had a childhood, I was educated, did military service, got married, had a daughter and a son, bought a house, got divorced, found a flat, lost my job, here I am" (88). His possessions too seek to show how representative, anti-realist and symbolic he is:

> I also have insurance polices, a lease, marriage and divorce certificates, a will, passport, drivers license, cheque account and savings account, bills paid and unpaid, letters unanswered, books, records, tables, chairs, paperclips, desk, typewriter, aquarium, shaving cream, toothpaste, soap, tape recorder, clocks, razor, gramophone, shoe polish. I have neckties I'll never wear again (88).

This long catalogue of possessions not different from that owned by almost every adult in the society in which he lives serves to emphasize not only Kleinzeit's typical nature, but also the fact that harmony and happiness in the end will have to come not from outside, but from his own internal resources.

His discovery of a sheet of yellow paper, A4 size in the London Underground is what sets him off on the voyage of personal discovery, a journey in quest of both psychic wholeness as well as of creativity. Yellow paper has a special significance for Russell Hoban as he himself does all his writing on yellow paper. In an essay on writer's block called 'Blighter's Rock', he writes:

> I always use 80-gram yellow A4: it's the kind of yellow the paper manufactures call gold and gold is what one is trying to refine the base metal of one's thought into, isn't it. While at the same time making a modest living if possible: yellow paper definitely more word resistance than blue: yellow paper molecules are happier with black-ink molecules than blue paper

> ones are, and more susceptible to Brownian or even purpureal motion (179).

It is the very individualistic choice of a very individualistic writer, but one whose writings are of a piece with his personal life and practices. A4 too has significance for Hoban: "Four is a number associated Hermes which name according to the Oxford Classical Dictionary signifies the daemon who haunts or occupies a heap of stones or perhaps a stone, set up by the roadside for some magical purposes" (Moment, 179).

In another essay "Certain Obsessions, Certain Ideas" he goes on to elaborate on his concept of Hermes. Hermes is the conductor of souls to the other side of things, the realm of Persephone. He is the messenger between this and that, between here and there. Unrecognized god of the arts, he manifests the darkness in the light, the seeing in the dark:

> I believe Orpheus to be the son of Hermes. It's the lyre that convinces me. Hermes scraped a tortoise out of its shell to make the lyre and the blood of that harmless animal stayed on the instrument, blood crying out for more blood, passing with the lyre from the father to the son who would be dismembered and whose severed head, endlessly voyaging under the ocean sky, would become the perception of all artists everywhere (244).

The yellow paper makes Kleinzeit dream of a plain deal table, of whitewashed walls and a bare room. Kleinzeit's journey then will be an internal one, one in which he slowly gives up his belongings that had been catalogued and which in a sense constituted the Kleinzeit that the world knows and comes to self-realization in a bare room. The yellow paper also connects Kleinzeit to strange wells of creativity and at his job as a copywriter in an advertising agency he finds himself being guided by strange forces and writing a mystifying commercial for Bonzo toothpaste - one in which a man goes along a barrow full of rocks. The creative director is not amused and fires Kleinzeit and this is the beginning of Kleinzeit's weird journey to the inside of things.

Kleinzeit's feeling that he is a normal well-adjusted person is shown by the replies he gives to Dr. Pink (another evocative Dickensian name for a doctor). Asked whether his vision is normal and whether he sees floating specks or spots his reply is "Doesn't everybody have those? " Asked whether he hears a seething in a perfectly silent room he feels that a "high pitched sibilance is characteristic of silent rooms" (12).

But Kleinzeit is not an ordinary person. When the sister asks him what his name means, he says it means 'Hero' and in a way he becomes the traditional hero of a thousand tales. The hero's story in the form made popular by Joseph Campbell is one

in which he is called by strange circumstances to an exceptional adventure. He is usually led by a guide through strange regions, especially the underworld. There he sees into the nature of things and obtains knowledge about the nature of reality. He comes back to his own land and society with an altered consciousness even though this may not always be obvious to the others.

Kleinzeit's adventures begin with his dreams of a corridor in the underground. At the superficial level the underground in *Kleinzeit* is only the London Underground Railway. But it obviously stands for the underworld into which all the great heroes like Aeneas and Dante descend. It also reminds the reader of the other great 'underground novel', *Alice in Wonderland*, which *Kleinzeit* resembles in so many ways, not least in the innovative way in which language is used. The symbolic significance of the underground is specifically evoked by comparing it to the land of the Dead, a place in which he meets ghosts from the past:

> Underground seemed the country of the dead, not enough noise, too many empty spaces. Life was like a television screen with the sound turned off. His train zoomed up in perfect silence, he got in. In the empty spaces his wife and children spoke, sang, laughed without sound, the tomcat shook his fist, Folger Bashan was smothered with a pillow, his father stood with him at the edge of a grave and watched the burial of the trees and grass and

> blue, blue sky – The train could take him to the places but not the times "(98).

Hospital seems to be a place where security is amazingly lax and Kleinzeit goes out of the hospital and into the underground whenever he wants. But Kleinzeit is a special case, as we discover later. The cases in his ward, the symbolically significant A4 (number of Hermes, the conductor of the dead) are all terminal ones and only he will escape.

In Hoban, making connections with nature, with the cosmos, is usually indicated by several people having the same thoughts, usually expressed with a high degree of common language. At the same time that Kleinzeit dreams of the corridor in the underground, "In a music shop glockenspiel dreamed of a corridor in the underground" (17). This is also paralleled by sister's mind showing her "a corridor in the underground "(19). All the while the yellow papers that will draw him to his destiny are lying in the underground scattered by Red Beard who will function as his enigmatic guide in the underworld.

The underworld is significant for Hoban as a source of illumination because it is a symbol of the secret places in the mind, which we ordinarily shut off from our lives, because to explore those areas is risky and dangerous. The writer, Hoban says, has to go to those places and listen to them:

> The straight people seem not to have the capability of living in full reality. The straight people live in limited-reality consensus in which the chair is real, the table is real, the aeroplane is real, the summit meeting is real, but what is inexplicable and ungraspable and nameless isn't real. So the writer has to find names and handless, the writer has to find words to make it real (Moment, 189).

What the world demands of writing he says is an attention to the hidden:

> What the world needs more of . . . is writing that tries to find out what's what by playing attention to the images that live under the picture-cards that we conventionally exchange and the images that appear beyond where we ordinarily look, occulting glimpses under the reasonable thought and beyond the ordinary range of thought, the words that twist and moan and dance behind the words that go out through our mouths and the unknown words that we sometimes almost hear from far away, the mysteries that move us, and the patterns of the dance that lives us ... you have to the ungraspable ideas take you in their jaws and shake you around (Moment, 198).

Kleinzeit is drawn to underground as inexorably as Orpheus was and in fact the myth of the Orphic artist is central to the meaning of the novel. In the original Greek myth Orpheus was the archetypal artist, a musician who made such sweet music on his lyre that even the stones and the trees stopped to

listen. His beloved Eurydice died of snakebite and a distraught Orpheus went singing from place to place. At last Hades was so charmed by his music that he was allowed to take Eurydice back to Earth provided he never turned back to look at Eurydice till he reached Earth. Orpheus fatally looked back and lost her forever. In his grief he refused to look at other woman and the enraged Thracian women who had thrown themselves at his feet, tore him apart and threw his head into the river Hebrus down which it floated towards Lesbos.

Hoban gives the Greek myth a characteristic twist. For him Orpheus is the epitome of harmony, a person who had made the ultimate connections with the universe. " He was tuned into the big vibrations, you see ", says Hospital, " He and the grains of sand and the cloud particles and the colours of the spectrum all vibrating together "(147). Eurydice for him is the inside of things, the places under the places, the moments under the moments that it is the duty of artist, the writer to explore:

> With the power of this harmony, Orpheus penetrated the world, got to the inside of things, the place under the places, underworld if you like to call that. And that's where he found Eurydice, the female complementary to himself. She was Yin, he was Yang. What could be simpler (148).

But a true artist is not content at the inside of things. He needs to live actively in a world of temporal progression:

> His harmony has brought him to the stillness and calm at the center and he cannot abide it. Nirvana is not his cup of tea. He wants to get back outside, wants that action with the rocks and trees again, wants to be seen with Eurydice at posh restaurants and all that. Naturally he loves her. She can't go outside any more than he can stay inside (148).

The archetypal artist then, is a person who has to visit the underworld, the dark recesses of the mind, but who also has to come back. Hoban alters the ending of the traditional myth too. In his version the head floated towards its place of dismemberment "like a Salmon swimming upstream" and there he remembered himself for "what is harmony," as Hospital says, "but a fitting together? "(143).

The comparison of the head of Orpheus swimming towards Thrace to a salmon swimming upstream is revealing. To Hoban, as to many biologists, the salmon and the turtle are two of the most mysterious creatures on earth. At a certain period of their life, driven by instincts that man has not yet begun to understand, they swim vast distances, sometimes thousands of miles of strange waters to reach the places where they were born, there to spawn or lay eggs. For Hoban this has always seemed a

symbol of harmony - doing what is in one to do – and in fact the next novel that Hoban wrote *Turtle Diary* , is built around the theme of connecting with the natural world through these instinctual creatures. This idea of harmony is also mirrored in Zen Buddhism—a philosophy which has influenced Hoban and which pervades *Kleinzeit.* "Life," according to D.T. Suzuki in *An Introduction To Zen Buddhism,* "ought to be lived as a bird flies through the air or as a fish swims in the water "(164).

The path to harmony, to wholeness then is through remembering, for only by re-membering can one become whole again as Orpheus did. It is a lesson that Kleinzeit learns through his various journeys underground. One of the ways in which his lack of harmony is evident is in the way he is unable to remember the past. Memories come to him only in bits and fragments; a memory of a big battered tomcat that once came in and peed on his bed; he had trapped it behind a chest and smothered it with a pillow; another memory of his father's funeral on a beautiful day with blue sky and green grass; a third one about Folger Bashan, the bully with the ugly face who terrorized him at school everyday. These are the memories, more pleasant versions of which he sees during his journeys underground. Living in a fragmented time with no connections to the past or the future he comes before a house and asks it to be the house of his childhood, stops before gravestones and requests them to be his mother and

father. A past that he has lost and a future that he dreads are the A and B of his life, no longer connected by a hypotenuse that could have kept his angle/vision right. "Kleinzeit dreaming, looked back at A. So far away! Too far to get back to. He didn't want to arrive at B too soon. Didn't ever want to arrive at B in fact "(51).

At first he does not understand the import of the various messages that come to him. The glockenspiel, organic product of a more harmonious long lost time is constantly contrasted with the mechanical gadgetry of the present. Hospital says, "Remember"(31) but that message is lost on Kleinzeit as well as sister. When next he goes to the underground Redbeard gives him a blank yellow paper and tells him to "Remember"(33). Underground itself tells him to "remember "(83). Yet it is only when Hospital again tells him to remember (172) and narrates to him the full significance of the Orpheus story that he understands how simple is the act of remembering—one only needs to be heroic. He comes to terms with the past when Folger Bashan appears as the doctor in the place of Dr. Pink and he realizes that Bashan cannot terrorise him any more. True harmony like satori in Zen comes on Kleinzeit as he listens to Arthur Tede reciting Milton, when he comes to the lines "Untwisting all the chains that ty / The hidden soul of harmony" from L'Allegro (180). The lines immediately connect with Word's

explanation that ' Barrow full of rocks ', the image that forced on himself through the yellow paper and led to his being sacked, was a mnemonic for ' Hidden soul of harmony' and then in a simple act of remembrance harmony takes place. From memory's hall of records memories come tumbling out, whole, connected, complete:

> Moment, said Hall of Records: spring, age something
>
> Evening, the sky still light, the street lamps coming on
>
> Harmony took place .
>
> I remember, said Kleinzeit.
>
> Moment, said Hall of Records : summer, age something
>
> Before a thunderstorm. Black sky : A piece of paper
>
> Whistling in the air high over the street. Harmony took Place.
>
> I remember, said Kleinzeit. But so long ago !
>
> Moment, said Hall of Records : Autumn , age something.
>
> Rain. The sound of the gas fire, Sister naked. Atlantis
>
> Harmony took place.
>
> Ah! said Kleinzeit .
>
> Moment, said Hall of Records: Winter, age something.
>
> In hospital. Feeling of circle inside self, sweet rhythm.
>
> Harmony took place.
>
> Kleinzeit waited (181-182).

And then Kleinzeit realizes that for him the place of dismemberment and therefore the place of remembering is "everywhere, all the time" (182).

Harmony, like satori or enlightenment in Zen Buddhism does not radically change things to the external viewer. But there is a "mental upheaval which destroys the old accumulation of intellection and lays down the foundation of a new life; there is an awakening of a new sense which will review the old things from a hitherto undreamed of angle of observation" (Suzuki, Introduction 6).

His earlier life had been spent under the shadow of death, death being a physical presence under his hospital bed, occasionally putting out of his paws to remind him he was there. Now death is still there, but he can no longer menace Kleinzeit. They share an easy relationship (Death pays him a social visit and they smoke together) and he is aware that when death finally comes it will be in the fitness of things.

The harmony that he finds comes to a fruition in the image of a circle - platonic symbol of perfection and fulfillment - that he is now able to draw with a tranquil, unforced ease—with the same ease with which birds fly and fish swim. Watched by Death art comes naturally to him:

> Kleinzeit took a bottle of black ink and a far Japanese brush out of the plain deal table drawer. He took a piece of yellow paper, dipped the brush in the ink, poised it over the paper... Kleinzeit touched the paper with the brush, drew in one smooth sweep a fat black circle, sweet and round (191).

That the harmony that Kleinzeit has found, is a completely internal one is signalled by the fact that when Kleinzeit leaves the Hospital, cheered on by the terminal cases there, the pain in the hypotenuse is still there. Kleinzeit's journey is reminiscent of the Zen story that Carl Gustav Jung quotes in his foreword to Suzuki's book:

> Before a man studies Zen, mountains are mountains to him and waters are waters. But when he obtains a glimpse into the truth of Zen through the instructions of a good master, mountains are no longer mountains, nor waters, waters: later, however when he has really reached the place of Rest (i.e., has attained satori) mountains are again mountains and waters, waters (13).

And so at the end we leave Kleinzeit where he was at the beginning with a pain along the hypotenuse from A to B, but a higher level.

Redbeard is a guide during Kleinzeit's journeys underground; a more important one is Hospital. As in Zen, where a Master does not and cannot teach a student anything, but can

only set up a dialectic relationship in which he points the way, the relationship between a doctor (especially a psychiatrist) and a patient is a dialectic one. As Jung says:

> It is a discussion between two spiritual wholes, in which all wisdom is merely a tool. The goal is transformation; not indeed a predetermined, but rather an indeterminable change...No efforts on the part of the doctor can force the experience. The most he can do is to make easy the path of the patient towards the attainment of an attitude which will oppose the least resistance to the decisive experience (qtd. in Suzuki, Introduction 25).

From the beginning Hospital understands Kleinzeit to be full of potential and he is treated differently from the other patients. "You understand things," says Hospital at the beginning, "you're clever"(31). Later when they discuss Hospital's functions (of eating up the patients) Hospital says, "your understanding is stronger than it was. If in the nature of things, it should happen, you will understand, won't you, that its only in the nature of things"(142). Hospital is in a privileged position as far as Orpheus is concerned because "the beach at Lesbos was Hospital for Orpheus" (143). And finally of course, it is Hospital who explains the true nature of the Orpheus Myth to Kleinzeit and so helps him to remember /re-member.

Kleinzeit is not merely an allegory of the quest for psychic wholeness, but also one of the quest for creativity and for Hoban, the Orpheus myth is a paradigm of both these quests. The artistic quest takes the form of an ambivalent relationship with the sheets of yellow paper that keep taunting him and urging him to master them. Along with it there is also the quest for semantic stability, for meaning, in a world where words keep slipping and sliding and meanings keep changing all the time.

It is a Derridean world with one signifier leading to another signifier, resulting for Kleinzeit in a confusing and terrifying world of endless signification. The yellow paper that forces him to conjure up the image of a barrow full of rocks, leads him on a trail of signifiers without his being able to understand what they signify. Redbeard writes ' Man with Harrow full of crock' in his sheet and leaves it in the corridor in the underground (20). When flashpoint is attacked by Hendiadys he mysteriously says ' Arrow in a box ' (23). The music shop where Kleinzeit finds the Glockenspiel that forces itself on him is ' Yarrow fullest stop ' (26). Later as he comes up from the underground, a newspaper headline reads ' SORROW; FULL SHOCK '(37). Another sheet of paper although blank asks Redbeard ' Borrow fool's pox? ' (41). At the fag end of his career, the yellow paper echoing one of the themes of the novel, the inevitable and sad passage of death warns Redbeard of ' Morrows cruel mock '(47). It is a nightmarish

world where signifiers differ from each other only on the basis of sounds and they don't have signifieds attached to them, even arbitrary ones.

Later Kleinzeit discovers that Nox, who is suffering from penumbra has had an experience similar to Kleinzeit's. He had picked up a piece of paper in the underground, rung up his doctor, written something on the paper and had got sacked. Only this time it was a piece of ordinary foolscap and he had written "Narrow, cool. The flock" (129). Kleinzeit turns it into a song and as he sings it another patient thinks he is singing a song which he, Drogue had made up and which went "sparrows rule the clocks" (131).

It is a world in which words keep slipping into other words all the time and the arbitrariness of signifier's connections to signifieds are shown when misreading or mishearing results in absurd situations. The sister asks Kleinzeit to sign a declaration agreeing to Hypotenectomy, Asymptoctemy and Strettoctomy, at the place mistakenly spelt undesigned. "Undesigned," says Kleinzeit, "that may be your opinion, but I am God's Handiwork just as much anyone else "(79).

A driver in a Morton Taylor lorry asks Kleinzeit directions to Moor place which Kleinzeit hears as 'your place' and an

argument ensues. Mishearing Morton Taylor, as Mortal Terror enables Kleinzeit to fantasize about lorries loaded with mortal terror trying to find the way to his place (210). It is a comic recreation of one of the major literary and theoretical issues of our time.

Hoban is radically different from all other postmodernists in that if his sense of the deconstructability of all constructs and the arbitrariness of signs seem to connect him to poststructuralist positions, they are strongly counterbalanced by a religious apprehension of a transcendental signified and a mystical conception of the world. Personified in *Kleinzeit* as are all other major entities, Word is the all powerful being who employs gods and is constantly impregnating the yellow paper with its seed. Here it is important to understand Hoban's concept of the word. In "Pan Lives" he writes:

> The Word here is the Greek Logos. Logos means both word and Reason, and in the Gospel of St. John the Logos is nothing less than god. Can god and word and reason be thought of separately? Obviously not. (When I talk of god here I don't mean any particularized denominational god, I mean the primal force and the mover of the cosmos, I mean the universal mind, I mean whatever it is that pervades the universe and requires us to take notice of it). If god is the origin of all things then word and reason along with everything else must come from god. That

> being so, any thinking about language will necessarily be religious (127-128).

Hoban's distance from the anti-logocentric positions of contemporary theorists is obvious. His uniqueness as postmodernist fictionist lies in the way he echoes some of the deepest insights of contemporary theory about the nature of language and fictions without losing the sense of the sacred about it. And that is why, for all the slapstick comedy and verbal horseplay of *Kleinzeit* one never misses the seriousness of the intent behind it. Profundity is coupled with a deep and reverential humility before language that constantly aspires to the condition of the Logos, words that keep slipping towards the Word.

This is illustrated by the "barrow full of rocks" that keeps changing all the time and is finally revealed by Word himself to be the signifier for the "Hidden soul of Harmony" – the universal mind itself. To the yellow paper the condition of language seems oppressive and pointlessly tyrannical "...not even the thing it refers to. For a flash through your mind, for an odd tune come and gone like lightening, men suffer and die, riddling where there is no riddle, digging where there is no treasure" (161).

But this has always been the curse as well as blessing of creativity; and to find that treasure the supreme reward of the

artist. "Why not," replies Word, "that's what men are for. From time to time, as I said, I see to it that one wriggles through"(162).

Psychic wholeness as well as creativity is achieved by Kleinzeit in that epiphanic moment when he hears Tede reciting Milton and realizes that all the phrases that had baffled him were pointing to the 'hidden soul of harmony'.

In the beginning when the yellow paper had insistently thrust itself on him, it had wanted a plain deal table and a bare room. When we finally leave Kleinzeit, he is busy taking yellow sheets already impregnated by word from a plain deal table in a bare room, already on his way to creating fictions.

The artistic quest is a heroic one and it is this that makes Kleinzeit, the smalltimer, a true hero. When first he meets sister he tells her that his name means hero, but he knows that he is wrong. Yet by the end when he remembers himself and makes himself whole sister calls him a hero. "Kleinzeit does mean hero" (146).

The yellow paper can be demanding and tyrannical and only a few can survive its demands. Flashpoint was a yellow paper man before he was hospitalized when he could no longer suffer its demands. Redbeard too finally lands up in hospital, done in by the yellow paper. To be an artist is to be Orpheus, to

be a hero and it isn't in Redbeard to be Orpheus. When Underground asks whether is Redbeard is Orpheus the yellow paper replies, " He's not" (42).

Later when underground asks Kleinzeit whether he is Orpheus the answer comes cocky and confident; "No question about it, says Kleinzeit, in time extending infinitely forward, backward. Who else could be this harmonious, this profound?"(86).

The meeting of Kleinzeit and the yellow paper is always described in language with erotic overtones, again an aspect of the novel that connects Hoban to such theoreticians of the pleasure of the text as Roland Barthes. To be an artist is to master the material. To create art is to defeat death—a form of immortality. So it is when Kleinzeit beats death away that the yellow paper approaches him like a lover and says,"You're so brave, said the yellow paper, so strong, so virile. Take me"(122).

Throughout his journeys Kleinzeit carries with him a copy of Thucydides and the passages that he reads are a running commentary on the nature of heroism. Later when he 'takes' the yellow paper and the words 'come' easy and quick it seems like magic to the yellow paper.

> "There's no magic in it, said Kleinzeit. Its simple heroism, that's all that's required. Like the Athenians and the Spartans, you know, all those classical chaps. Thin red line of hoplites, that sort of thing.
>
> "Yes, said the yellow paper, I believe you. You're a here.
>
> "One does one's possible, said Kleinzeit modestly. That's all"(166).

To do one's possible like the green turtles crossing thousands of miles of ocean and finding the right place to lay the eggs is harmony, is heroism. It may not result in victories. The Peloponnesian war, is the one more than any other in the history of the world in which both sides can be said to have been defeated. As such it is a metaphor for life itself - it is only the heroism that remains. "The war is always, always the enemy mound rising outside the walls, always the cold surf, the frightening appearance of the ships as they sail in. Always a war that cannot be won, fought by troops who cannot be defeated"(158) - an image of the artist in a heroic battle to conquer death through art.

The artist's attempts to create are closely linked with the problems of interpretation. In this Kleinzeit reflects the longings of the small timer for stability of meaning and his horror of a world without meaning."You're no better than a sucking baby", Redbeard tells him when he asks Redbeard about the phrases

associated with the yellow paper that keep changing all the time "you bloody want answers to everything, everything explained, meanings and what not all laid on for you...."(57). Later the central myth of the novel, the Orpheus myth itself is seen to occupy a site of semantic indeterminacy when Kleinzeit asks Hospital its meaning: "How can there be meaning? said Hospital. Meaning is a limit. There are no limits "(148).

In the way Hoban's theoretical as well as metaphysical concerns converge together, this scene is particularly illuminating. Kleinzeit echoes some of the central theoretical ideas of our times, a position that dominates most postmodernist fiction—how language never comes to rest in a stable order of meaning. But he also reflects the unease of the ordinary man who desires meaning oriented fiction and which is reflected in the realist fiction that still dominates the markets. "He (Kleinzeit) wants a world where meaning is narratable and hence clearly outlined within the fiction, or subsequently explainable through hermeneutic help from an authority," as Elizabeth Dipple points out (164).

Kleinzeit's craving to make sense, to discover a true though hidden significance is also metaphysical and this is what makes Hoban such a unique voice in postmodernist fiction. With the possible exception of Italo Calvino, no other contemporary writer

gives his readers the feeling that all spiritual experience is a way of exploring literary experience and at the same time that all literary experience is a way of apprehending a metaphysical reality. And therefore to make literary connections is to make spiritual connections as well. Kleinzeit's attempts to make sense of the series of disconnected phrases that begins with 'barrow full of rocks' are reminiscent of Derrida's attempts to find the possible meanings of "I have forgotten my umbrella", the marginal jotting in Nietzsche's notebooks. Derrida concludes that, because this sentence is structurally liberated from intentions or living speech it might be "that it means nothing or that it has no decidable meaning" and that this sentence is neither more nor less significant than any other passage in Nietzsche's writing (131-2). In a slightly different way Kleinzeit comes to the conclusion that in a world full of significances, one thing is just as significant as any other. "I don't really see the need for making a mystery of every single mystery. Especially as there's nothing but mysteries", he says (135). Unconnected things may mean nothing. When the connections are discovered everything become equally meaningful and Kleinzeit discovers that everything is connected. "I mean life is gluey," he says, "Everything's all stuck together. That is not what I mean. Everything's unstuck, runs over to everything else. Clocks and sparrows, barrows, flocks and crocks,

green turtles, golden Virginia, Yellow paper, foolscap, Rizla. Is there an existence that is only mind?"(134).

Later he understands that he is also Schwarzgang and that "I have no separate existence"(137). It is this knowledge makes him an Orpheus "tuned into the big vibration" (147) and which helps him later to achieve 'the hidden soul of harmony'.

Kleinzeit, thus articulates for the first time, Hoban's vision of a larger order that enables the hero to reject a separate compartmentalized existence and to make himself part of a more harmonious reality. The reconstruction of the Orpheus myth and the retrievability of the past become instrumental in the recovery of the advertisement copywriter whose crisis is one of creativity. Kleinzeit's inability to relate to his past and to the world around him is also an inability to relate / narrate / create. The novel with its images of the publishing industry becomes a comment on the present and also a study of various notions of creativity, ranging from Kleinzeit's romantic dejection consequent upon the loss of inspiration to his post- structuralist despair at the loss of meaning. The unconventional notions of the body that Hoban foregrounds further become a manifestation of his belief in the interchangeability, interconnectedness and correspondences that lies at the heart of apparently dissimilar discourses. Through the erasure of differences that man has always insisted upon, Hoban

extends the horizon of the possibility of analogous conditions that are available provided man is willing to drop his conventional ways of understanding.

Further, Kleinzeit emphasizes the artist's freedom to reorganize and redefine myth, to accommodate them into contemporary structures of experience. The novel exemplifies the connection between the experiences of a personal past embodied in childhood memories, and a mythological past that is transcultural and transhistorical manifested in the Orpheus myth.

Going Where They Are Going

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Thesis.Department of English, University of Calicut, 2003

Chapter 3

Going Where They Are Going

The most realistic of Hoban's novels and therefore the most accessible to the common reader, *Turtle Diary* is the story of how two lonely people William G. and Neaera H. become obsessed with three turtles in the aquarium at the London Zoo and carry out a plan to rescue them and release them into the sea. In the process they redefine their own lives – but not quite in ways we might expect. Hoban's familiar themes are present here – aloneness, connecting with other people, with nature, with the universe – but unusually for him in the familiar setting of present day London. The style too is toned down – there is none of the wild, wacky inventiveness that we found in *Kleinzeit* nor the awesome linguistic achievements of *Riddley Walker*. Instead, in keeping with the dry desiccated lives of his two protagonists, the style too is bare, stark although there is a wry humour that is often fresh and sparkling.

The story is narrated through the intercalated diary entries of the two protagonists. William G. was married once, had two daughters and doesn't even know where they are now. He works in a bookshop and leads a dull, dreary life. The animals that he

sees in the cages on his visit to the zoo are metaphors of his own parched life. Watching the gibbons in the zoo apparently at home even in their cages, "I had a sort of bursting feeling, as if my self were a wall round me that I couldn't knock down or climb over"(20). The gibbons swing around, play as if they were at home in the jungles. In harmony with their surroundings, it is as if they have interiorized time and space – as if for them it is still the jungle. But for William, there is only the painful knowledge of alienation: "I have no talent, no Zen like that of the gibbons... There's a wall inside the self as well. Can't get through anymore. Can't live is what it amounts to. No place to live. Get through the days, the seasons, oh yes. But no place to be" (20).

It is a life devoid of any activity except the dreary routine of daily life. When Mrs Inchcliff, his landlady offers him the use of the tools her boyfriend Charlie used to operate, he finds he can't even imagine what to use them for. "There's nothing I need to make right now. When I had a house I used to make things. When I had a family. When the girls sat in my lap and I read to them"(14). William is so cut off from any relationship with anyone that he does not know where his daughters are or whether his wife has remarried.

The quiet terror of unconnected urban life is built up by a language that is all the more powerful for being stark and simple:

> I used to bird watching with the binoculars. . . . Weekends are dicey, Saturdays aren't too bad, there's the shop to go to and lots of people in the street, football crowds in the afternoon. Sundays are dangerous, the quiet waits in ambush. Close the museums and there's no telling what might happen (31).

William tries to find ways of escape from the terror that is slowly suffocating his life. He goes to see the model Port Liberty at Greenwich. But he realizes that Port Liberty is for the "clear – eyed, the competent, the strong"(93). It is for people with a strong sense of direction, for people who know where they want to go and who can understand and follow properly, the instructions that the Admiralty has provided:

> When night falls the navigator has to rely on the navigation lights shown by other vessels to avoid colliding with them. . . A confusion of fixed and flashing lights confronts him when he approaches a port, but trained to interpret the various light colours and sequences in conjunction with his chart he can safely identify and follow the correct channel into Port [Liberty] (38).

But for William there is only the confusion and therefore no way to go to Liberty. "A confusion of fixed and flashing lights confronts the navigator, that is what the sign on the Port Liberty model says"(61). That is how life seems to him. Trapped in the prison of his life, symbolized by his workplace and the building

that he shares with two other tenants, William dares only obliquely to dream of freedom – by thinking of a model of Port Liberty – itself "a fiction created by the Admiralty as fig. 67 in the Admiralty manual of navigation Vol 1,"(40).

Each attempt at finding some sort of peace, a kind of harmony only ends in failure and in an abject realization of the failure. Inspired by an advertisement in 'Time Out', he goes to a Bio – Feed back center where an Alpha – wave machine monitors brainwaves as one stripped into a state of meditation, so that one could hear oneself getting into or out of a state of relaxation. "I didn't think there was one quiet place in my brain"(93). However William does manage to get the machine clicking a few times - an indication that there were at least a few peaceful places in his head. Significantly the machine starts clicking not when William deliberately tries to relax by thinking of soothing subjects like a heron he had once seen flying over a marsh flapping very slowly. It does when he lets "go of the heron, let[ting himself] sink back into whatever there might be to sink back into [his] mind"(95).

Already the forms in which grace might come to this tortured unhappy man is evident for in Hoban grace comes not when one attempts to hold on but when he learns to let go. In "Mnemosyne, Teen Taals and Tottenhams Court Road", Hoban writes:

> We must find in ourselves the shapes of letting go, because we're not free to become what we are going to be next until we let go of what we are now. We need to stop putting our seeing and our hearing of the world between us and it. We need to stop putting our perceptions between us and the thing perceived. We need to stop putting our retention ahead of the thing to be retained, which cannot be retained, which must be let go of (235).

William's alienation, and the sense of emptiness in his life result in fantasies of utter resignation:

> Lately my fantasies have been of a place that doesn't exist...My fantasy is of a give up place. At County Hall may be, in a grotty corridor, a door with frosted glass: Department of capitulation and Unconditional Surrender ... whether they have TV or books or brothels I don't know but its out of the struggle. Sleep after toil, port after stormy seas, ease after war and all that (93).

This, of course is a very negative resignation that William will discover is not the means to grace and a new meaning in life. The "Port after stormy seas" that he dreams of, like the model of Port Liberty that he visits is a fiction and when he finally reaches his own harbour when attempting to release the turtles into the sea, it will be a supreme act of communion with nature and the cosmos and an understanding that the right thing to do is to let things that have to happen, happen.

William even tries to come to terms with the present by regressing to the past. With Harriet, another assistant who works at his bookstore and who has romantic inclinations towards him he goes to attend an Original Therapy session, one of the numerous facts that are always part of the Western Spiritual/Cultural scene. Run by a lady called Ruby it is a technique of getting people into a scissors grip that results in an alteration of consciousness that enables them to regress to the past. Ruby had hit upon this technique when, during a wrestling match she had regressed to the warm sea, what they call the primordial soup:

> Ruby went farther than the soup even, she got to a point when there was nothing, no time, no her, no anything. Then there came something like the idea of a question, a kind of original YES or NO? It put together as YES...That was the turning point of Ruby's life, going back to the origin of life and finding the big YES, and she was going to show us slides and demonstrate her therapy (102).

During that particular session, the outcome accidentally changes and instead of regressing to a primordial soup a young man called David undergoes a birth experience. Harriet volunteers for it but William doesn't. "Not my time for rebirth just yet"(106). But the experience of watching others undergo 'a rebirth', the nakedness of their faces, the rage and despair that

accompanied their actions brings to William with awful force the terror of his life, the terror of all existence:

> One moment I was safe and a little detached and the next I looked at the candle flames and moving shadows and was sick with terror. It was as if the evening had reversed a giant devil-mirror with its picture of a world and I was silvered at the back of things, lost atoms speeding to infinity. Terror was all there was, nothing else. It might reflect the images of aeroplanes or cathedrals or Ruby in a bikini and the faces in the room but there was no reality but the terror, all that it reflected was illusion (107).

Shaken by the experience he goes back and in an attempt to find some mooring in a world that had lost all moorings, tries to make desperate love to Harriet. It is not love or even erotic attraction that energizes his movements – just the plain terror of existence, an attempt to relate to somebody in a world that had lost all meaning; a terrifying world in which he feels desperately alone, totally alienated. It is an anguished attempt to make some connection in a world in which all connections have been lost, in which there are only lost atoms speeding to infinity. Yet it is a deeply dissatisfying attempt, a physical attempt at what should be spiritual. Instead of sexual ecstasy – 'ecstasies' is the going out of oneself – and the mystery of total contact with another, a sharing of being, it only accentuates the terror of existence.

Neaera is a similarly alienated individual. A successful writer of children's book who began as an illustrator (like Hoban himself) she is bored with the cute little anthropomorphized characters like Delia Swallow and Gillian Vole that she has created:

> Here I am, I thought, forty three years old, waiting for a water-beetle. My married friends wear Laura Ashley dresses and in their houses are grainy photographs of them on continental beaches with their naked children. I live alone, wear odds and ends, I have resisted vegetarianism and I don't keep cats (10).

Delia Swallow herself, her most successful creation had been a distinct "Laura Ashley type" (11) but now it isn't in her to change animals and birds into treacly human types. The water beetle that she orders is itself resistant to such attempts on her part to change it into a "Victoria Beetle, submariner" or "Victoria Beetle's sunken treasure".

The water beetle, in harmony with her little world of a small illuminated aquarium just 'is' and is fiercely resistant to Neaera's attempts to mould her in a marketable image. The water beetle confined in a small aquarium, like the green turtle later, is an obvious parallel to Neaera herself in her small flat, but Neaera's dissatisfaction is in clear contrast to the beetle who

is at home in her submarine world. Neaera longs for such harmony:

> One can't have a horse to help with writing or drawing . . . Madame Beetle is not a help in any practical way but I feel that her attitude is exemplary. Swimming, diving, coming to the surface for air or sitting quietly in her shipwreck she is in harmony with her small world, has a good style (118).

Harmony, Neaera realizes, is doing what one has to do, doing what has to be done. It is what she finds in Arabella, the spider aboard the skylab – 2 flight, who on the thirteenth day of the flight produced a web just like the ones on the ground. "She needs no recognition, can recognize herself and spin a web wherever she may be. What good things instincts are!" (97). What she sees in the animal world is a " magical reality, juice of life in a world gone dry"(50) that is a terrifying commentary on her own dry and desiccated life:

> Madame Beetle swims in her green world expecting neither continuation nor sanity. I don't think expectation is a part of her. While there is water she will swim. Arabella spins her weightless web on skylab-2 and the white shark goes its way without rest.There is no buoyancy in sharks ,they cannot rest , they must keep swimming till they die(113).

The shark is her image of the terror of existence. Early one morning, drifting into sleep she has a nightmare of a white shark coming up as she is swimming a green ocean. She feels that it is William's shark and frantically tries to contact him. When Neaera finally manages to see him and tells him that she was worried whether he would commit suicide, William is outraged that she thinks that it is his shark, when it was she who had had the dream. But William also realizes that there is a shark deep within him, waiting to come up:

> She [Neaera] said in a half whisper looking down at her coffee cup that she'd had all this green water in her mind and a white shark coming up from below. Well, of course, they're always in me I suppose, coming up from the darkness and the deep water chill. But I wouldn't say I'm broadcasting sharks. (86).

By making the shark dream Neaera's, but at the same time implying that it was William's shark, Hoban is suggesting both the terror that is the condition of all existence and the idea of universal connections – a cosmic relationship that we can all be part of if only we laid ourselves open to its action upon us. "The differences in scale and costume do not alter the event. Oedipus went to Thebes, Peter Rabbit into MacGregor's garden, but the story is essentially the same: life points only towards the terror", says Neaera (50 – 51). At the same time the idea of a universal mind is suggested through the shared ideas and common

language that are a characteristic of the diaries of the protagonist. "The articulations of William and Neaera", says A.V. Ashok in his essay on *Turtle Diary* as a green novel, "are marked by a high order of common expressiveness (common words, phrases, sentences and sentiments) which symbolizes a unity underlying the separateness of the two" (71).

This unity is symbolized by the turtle plot into which the two are slowly drawn. Although the two characters do not even meet each other till a third of the way through the novel, both visit the zoo regularly and are drawn towards the turtles there. For both William and Neaera, animals are beings who live in a zoo they are imprisoned, kept from being themselves. "The zoo is a prison for animals who have been sentenced without trial and I feel guilty because I do nothing", feels Neaera (23). If Neaera sees Madame Beetle and Arabella as instinctual creatures in harmony with their world, this is how William sees the gibbons:

> Have the gibbons been corrupted by captivity? How can they possibly be happy in a cage, but they seem not to care about it especially. Debonair is the only world for them. May be aerial acrobatics are to them what jazz is to musicians who do it wherever they are and whether they get paid or not, just for the thing itself...Their small black faces are full of Zen. Jazz acrobat is what they are and they seem philosophically beyond such trifles as a cage (19).

Their thoughts coalesce in the turtle thoughts that both of them unknown to each other have [By a coincidence which would probably have struck Russell Hoban as entirely natural, in the same year that *Turtle Diary* was published, Peter Matthiessen published *Far Tortuga* in which he saw turtles as a mysterious beacon reminding him of lost and better times]. The green turtle, (chelonia mydas) along with the salmon is one of the world's most mysterious creatures. They follow instincts that scientists have not even begun to understand. "I don't know of any branch of science where we have applied so much effort and learned so little," says Richard Byles of the U.S. fish and wildlife service (Anne and Jack Rudloe 101). Its name comes from its popularity as a dish – green turtle nest is the most delicious of any sea turtle. Its shell is actually grey and it is its fat, which is green in colour. For most westerners Green turtles are only the source of Green Turtle Soup. Savagely hunted by man for its eggs and meat its great enemy in the ocean is the shark, Hoban's symbol of the terror of existence. In ways totally mysterious to man the green turtles swim 1400 miles across the ocean to breed and lay eggs on the Ascension, an island in the Atlantic only five miles long. Like Arabella's web and Madam Beetle's swimming, this is what is in them to do.

For both William and Neaera the turtles are a symbol of the magical and mysterious in nature. Its ability to swim through

uncharted waters for hundreds of miles to reach the particular place (probably) imprinted in their genes is evidence of a connection with the universe that they themselves have lost. "Thousands of miles of navigation, I couldn't get it out of my mind," says William (20). "I'm always afraid of being lost, the secret navigational art of the turtles seems a sacred thing to me," feels Neaera (27).

These thoughts of the sacredness of the turtles are accompanied by reflections on the crime of imprisoning them in a tank and they inevitably lead to thoughts of rescuing them and releasing them into the ocean. (In 1968 John Irving wrote a book called *Setting Free The Bears* whose theme bears a superficial resemblance to *Turtle Diary*. However it is about a plot to release all the animals from the Vienna Zoo by a group of merry pranksters and has none of the metaphysical resonance of Hoban's novel) Neaera dreams:

> I'd been aware of the turtles for some time before I went to look at them. I knew I'd have to do it but I kept putting it off. When I did go to see them I didn't know how to cope with it. Untenable proportions assembled in my mind... I imagined a sledgehammer smashing the thick glass, letting out the turtles and these little list of ocean (27).

William, in a flash in Mrs. Inchcliff's lumber room thinks of himself "walking down a dark street in the middle of the night

wheeling a turtle on a sack trolley"(14). The turtles are on his mind all the time. "I can feel something building up in me, feel myself becoming strange and unsafe"(29).

There is no sentimentalizing or crude anthropomorphizing of the creatures. They are as far removed from Neaera's Delia Swallow and Gillian Vole as can be. Hoban does not trivialize their feelings by suggesting that William or Neaera has only love or warmth for these huge, ungainly creatures that are graceful only in water. What impels them is the feeling that the turtles can express themselves only by being in an ocean and by going on their destined journey to Ascension Island and that by helping them to do so they too would be connecting themselves to the mysterious currents of the universe and in the process they would be able to water their own parched lives. Neaera thinks:

> I thought about the turtles. The essence of it is that they can find something and they are not being allowed to do it. What more can you do to a creature short of killing it, than prevent it from finding what it can find ? How must they feel? Is there a sense in them of a green ocean, white surf and hot sand? Probably not. But there is a drive in them to find it as they swoop in their golden green light with their fingers clicking against the glass as they turn (42 – 43).

It is an attempt at vicarious fulfillment and a hope that like the turtles she too might find what is there in her to find:

> There is no place for me to find. No beach, no breeding grounds. Do I owe the turtles more or less because of that? Is everyone obliged to help those who have it in them to find something? ... something evidently wants there to be a finding Time's arrow points one way only.Even the moment just passed cannot be returned to. (43).

For William too, the turtles are an attempt to find connections. In all of Hoban's novels the protagonist tries to be a shaman – a shaman being a person who has made the right connection with the past, with nature, and with the universe. Riddley Walker is in fact the shaman of his tribe, but the other characters in Hoban's fictions too in their own ways try to emulate the shamanic situation. William quotes Micea Eliade on shamanism:

> While preparing for his ecstasy and during it, the shaman abolishes the present human condition, and for the time being, recovers the situation as it was in the beginning. Friendship with animals, knowledge of their language, transformation into an animal are all so many signs that the shaman has reestablished the 'paradisal' situation lost at the dawn of time (92).

This is followed by thoughts about his own situation: "That's the crux of it: abolishing the human condition...could I swim, experience swimming, finding, navigating fearlessness,

unlostness? Could I come back with an answer, I shouldn't need to come back" (92). Earlier too he had had such thoughts:

> In Siberia and South America wherever they have shamans, they're always the unstable, the epileptics, the weird ones of the group, people prone to depression and terrors as I am. But unlike me they get initiated into power and a place of importance, they become seers and healers. There's something between them and animals, a bond, a connection, channels of powers. Speech with animals, magical transformations. Could I be a turtle? Could I through an act of ecstasy swim unafraid and never lost, finding, finding? Swimming with Pangea printed on my brain and bones, the ancient continent that was before the land masses drifted apart. That's part of it too: there were no seas between, the land was one, there was one thing unbroken. Now there are thousands of miles of open water and the strong ones, the swimmers, the unlost are driven to trace the paths between, maintain the ancient connection. I don't know whether I can keep going. A turtle doesn't have to decide every morning whether to keep on bothering, it just carries on (61).

"One thing unbroken"; "Pangea"; - all different names for the unity that all of Hoban's creatures are seeking, whether it is Kleinzeit in need of a cure, Riddley Walker in pursuit of the 1 Big 1, Pilgermann's quest for Jerusalem, Herman Orff looking for creativity or Fremder in deep space, they are all quests for the same unity that making the right connection will reveal.

So the turtles in the aquarium serve a double function. Imprisoned in their little bit of ocean they are an analogue of the alienation (which is the human condition that the shaman tries to overcome) of William and Neaera, themselves trapped in their tiny apartments, cut off from all meaningful relationships. This image is not unusual in literature – aquariums and more frequently cages are common metaphors of imprisonment. In Julio Cortazar's *Hopscotch* the two lovers Olivera and La Maga are obsessed with aquariums, and the aquarium, a transparent but impenetrable barrier between two orders of life becomes a symbol similarly of solipsistic isolation. In his *Bestiary*, the heroine Isabel is similarly obsessed with the ants behind the glass wall of her ant-farm and it is an image of her own alienation. If the glass of the aquarium is a symbol of separation, alienation and isolation, the turtles inside is also a symbol of unity, a "metaphor for the human search for wholeness"(Ashok, 71).

The quest for this wholeness, inklings of the unity behind all apparent separation are the turtle thoughts that constantly haunt both the characters and finally become an obsession with them. Both of them feel that they are in the hands of a greater power than themselves and that the turtle plot is in the end something that had to happen; that happened not because they willed it – even something into which they were drawn against

their will. "I wanted to be shot of the whole turtle affair and I knew he did too but there it was like a massive chain welded to leg irons on both of us and clanking maddeningly", feels Neaera (90). After setting the plans with George Fairbairn, the Head Keeper of the turtles, William feels the same way:I was beginning to want it over and done with as quickly as possible...We shook hands and I left without looking at the turtles. They'd become an obligation now and heavy (55).

For both William and Neaera the turtles are an attempt to seek the reality behind the world that increasingly seems to be an illusion, a fiction; an attempt to put reality into a world that is no more real. William's obsessive thoughts of Port Liberty, "the fiction invented by the Admiralty manual of navigation Vol 1"(40), is mirrored by Neaera's about the small Cornish fishing village of Polperro now a tourist attraction and touted as a model fishing village, with model houses, model boats and a model harbour. William recounts in his diary Neaera's words:

> "It [Polperro] was real once but it isn't any more", said Neaera, "Its souvenirs and cream teas and a box with a slot for money to preserve the character of the local Cornish village. The turtles may be headed for extinction but they're real, they work. When we put them in the sea, they'll do real turtle work"(136).

In fact the turtles behind glass in the London Zoo and Polperro are both similar. Mere tourist attractions they are no longer real. No real fishing is done in the model fishing village, the turtles are prevented from doing real turtle work and Neaera realizes the connection. "There is a connection between my turtle thoughts and my Polperro thoughts but I'm not sure I can find it"(32).

The feeling that the world is unreal, even that they themselves are unreal constantly haunt both William and Neaera: "He [George Fairbairn] was talking to me in a matter – of – fact way as if I really existed and was a real grownup person who could drive vans, be at a certain place at a certain time and do what I'd undertaken to do" (122), feels William when the final plans for stealing the turtles from the aquarium have been made with the Head Keeper. When William rings up Neaera to tell her about the plans she feels exactly the same way: "Thursday would be the day. He spoke as if it was all really real and we were real people who were simply going to go ahead and do what we'd said we'd do" (123).

At the same time she is worried that her "wanting to set the zoo turtles free (is) a kind of polperrization, a trying to pretend that something is when it isn't" (35). But it is also a reverse of 'polperrization', an attempt to 'turtlize' Polperro:

> There'd be the long drive to Cornwall, it would be night- time. I'd put them into the ocean at Polperro. The mystery of the two turtles and their secret navigation is a magical reality, juice of life in a world gone dry. When I think of the turtle going into the ocean I think of it happening in that place that so badly needs new reality. (50).

The fact that all things are connected is suggested with even greater force when Neaera suggests that they put the turtles into the sea at Polperro and William is startled as it was his birthplace: "I was one year old when Mother and I came to London and I still can't see the point of my having been born in Polperro. I've never been back there"(62).

William has never been back there, but he has always tried to go back to the past, to come to terms with it, to exorcise it even if only vicariously. His visit to the Original Therapy Session was only one of his attempts to do so. His alienation is a result of a loss of connection with the past:

> The past isn't connected to the future any more. When I lived with Dora and the girls, the time I lived in, the time of me was still the same piece that had unrolled like a forward road under my feet from the day of my birth. That road and all the scenes along it belonged to me, my mind moved freely up and down it. Walking on it I was still connected to my youth and strength, the time of me was of one piece with that time. Not now. I can't walk in my own time past. It doesn't belong to me anymore (69).

Along with worries that they are not in harmony with space and time, there are also inklings that everything is interconnected. Neaera feels:

> Then another of those dream thoughts came to me: every action has a mother and a father and is itself the mother or the father of the action that comes out of it. And endless genealogy branching back into the past and forward into the future. There is no unattached action. I woke up and it was half-past seven. (79).

The point of his having been born in Polperro, William realizes in that transcendent moment when he releases the turtles into the sea at Polperro, the action which will later enable him to be connected to all things.

The release of the turtles into the sea itself, although the center of the novel is narrated in a very understated way – five sentences in Neaera's diary, two in William's – and is all the more powerful for it. For as is obvious to any sensitive reader, though the three turtles dominate the plot from beginning to end, the novel is hardly about turtles at all. "If it hadn't been the turtles, I suppose it would have been something else", feels Neaera (89). It is about the human quest to find some meaning in the world around, an attempt to find the pattern that makes sense, a trying to find the unity behind the appearances of separateness. The turtles themselves, without losing their

identity as huge, ungainly, hardly lovable creatures, remain symbols of the connected reality behind the illusory disconnectedness of the world. Neaera feels that it will give reality to an unreal fishing village and also change her life. William feels that it would make him a shaman, connect him to a higher reality, help him find what is in him to find. But for both at then, the turtle plot is one that just 'happened', into which they were drawn against their will: " 'Oh, shit', she said. No laughter, 'It seemed to want to happen, didn't it?' 'Yes', I said, ' It seemed to want to happen' (129).

After the turtles have been released they do not feel that they have triumphed in the sense of carrying out a heroic adventure. Instead what they feel is that they have allowed themselves to be part of the action of the universe. "Each one dived under the wild water and was gone. It was done. It had actually happened", writes Neaera(141). For William, "It happened, turtles happened into the ocean, champagne happened in the moonlight"(142).

For Hoban, the essence of being is to be in connection with the universe. In "The Bear in Max Ernst's Bedroom", he writes:

> To me it feels as if all of us inhabit and are inhabited by one universal mind, we are all receptors of a universal transmission. Some of us tune into more of it, some less, but it wants to be

> received; it wants to be perceived and we are organs of its perception. Surely we haven't yet received the whole transmission, surely we haven't tuned into all the frequencies (197).

It is a theme Hoban pursues in greater detail in *Riddley Walker*, but it is the same quest that we find in William and Neaera. By releasing the turtles they too are trying to tune into the universe, to find what is in them to find. "Our part in the rhythm of things was to put the turtles in the sea and however it went would be the way it went", feels Neaera (140).

In 'The Bear in Max Ernst's Bedroom', Hoban talks about a time he went to hear Ornette Coleman, the great Jazz saxophonist play. The music was strange and elliptical and he commented to Don Cherry, who was playing the trumpet on how Coleman was taking risks with his music. Cherry's reply was illuminating "Man, we ain't taking no risks – however we're blowing, that's how we are blowing tonight"(187). For Hoban this philosophy – nothing as product, everything as process is central. Neaera's comments also echo Hoban's ideas of finding and keeping as a letting go, quoted earlier. It is a feeling mirrored by William's thoughts:

> I felt all right. Atoms speeding to infinity weren't necessarily lost are they? They're just going where they're going. There's a thing that happens in my mind, a foreshadow of a waiting

> thought. Sometimes I know it's a thought that'll fill one with dread and then the dread comes before the thought and the ease comes. What was it, I wanted to hold on to it. Going where they're going, that was it. Things and people as they are, where they are Dora and Ariadne and Cyndie are where they are, Neaera and I and the turtles. That's all, nothing to be afraid of. One needn't hold on to that, no holding on (128).

And according to Hoban one is not free to become what we're going to be until one lets go of what one is now. "It may be silly and wrong and useless, it may be anything at all but it seems to be a thing that I have to do before I can do whatever comes after it," feels Neaera (64).

Whatever comes after it, still takes about a quarter of the novel. Hoban is too much of an artist to make their lives change radically after the event and readerly expectations are disappointed at every stage. The expected romance of William and Neaera not only fails to materialize but their incompatibility is stressed at every stage. William writes:

> She [Neaera] looked doubtful. Her basic look, I realized. Dora had looked angry, Harriet reproachful, Neaera doubtful. Not that it mattered in a permanent way, there was nothing between us except the turtles and there wasn't likely anything. Why not? I don't know, I think we have too much in common. We are not complementary, she doesn't fill in the blanks in me nor I in her (126).

The morning after the release of the turtles, William feels awkward with her. "But it wasn't that, it wasn't that she was the wrong person for the turtles. I didn't know what it was. There seemed to be little for us to say to each other. Nothing in fact"(45). This uncomfortable relationship prevents the story from being sentimentalized into one about likeminded souls who find love and meaning in the act of releasing the turtles – the kind of story that was Neaera's staple product and which she now finds she cannot write anymore. "Suddenly I don't know, haven't the faintest idea how people make up stories about anything. Anything is whatever it happens to be, why make up stories? "(42).

In fact, it is because they are so similar that the relationship that readers expect doesn't materialize. "We have too much in common for us to be comfortable in each other's presence," knows Neaera (59). When Neaera walks into the bookstore where William works, for the first time, looking predictably for books on turtles, William all at once, "felt a strong urge to talk to her for hours about everything. And at the same time felt an urge not to talk to her at all"(45).

Neaera and William will have to find whatever it is they are searching for, in their own ways. Like the turtles that "lay on

their backs ponderous with the finding in them "(134) they too have to wait and search. What is there to find, wonders Neaera:

> Thomas Bewick diligently followed the patterns of light from feather to feather. John Clare looked carefully at hedgerows, Emily Dickinson cauterized her lopped off words with dashes. Ella Wheeler Wilcox implacably persisted. Shackleton came back against all odds, Scott didn't (43).

For Neaera the acceptance of life comes through the person of George Fairbairn, the Head Keeper at the zoo. Because the story is focalized through the eyes of William and Neaera we see Fairbairn only from the outside, we do not see his doubts or questionings or despair. Instead we see a person who like Madame Beetle or Arabella is at peace with the world, lives in harmony with the universe. In many ways, he is the person who brings the turtle plot off. It is when he offers William all help and even tells William the date that William discovers that he is in it so deep that he cannot opt out. He takes the greatest risks because it is he who would have to explain the disappearance of the turtles. For the reader Fairbairn and his role in the theme of making connections comes to the foreground when he packs the turtles in the crates that William has made and they are about to drive off to Polperro. Fairbairn produces a bottle of champagne to give William and Neaera a farewell. He tells them, "It's not everyday I send my turtles out into the world, you know.

Something of an occasion"(130). William feels ashamed of the fact that he has never thought of Fairbairn except as an anonymous person who could help him with the turtles. "I'm the big turtle humanitarian, but he thinks of people as well," he understands(130).

Neaera is still not sure whether she has "found" anything after the turtles are launched: "I didn't know what to do really, didn't know how to pick up where I left off. There no longer seemed to be continuity in my mind. The road went up to the turtle launching and ended there at a chasm where the bridge was out" (150).

She makes her own connections when she discovers in Fairbairn the same qualities that she admired in Arabella and which made Madame Beetle such a comfort to her even though she never inspired a single fictional character.

"I don't mind being alive," he (Fairbairn) said, "There is nothing you can do about this you know," he said, "Nothing to be done really about animals. Anything you do looks foolish. The answer isn't in us. It's almost as if we are put here on earth to show how silly they aren't. I don't mind" (158).

In an absurd universe all our acts look foolish, don't make sense, except when we make the right connections, except when

we try to do what is in us to do. The result may be failure, but the success is not in the finding, but in the search.

> All they had was themselves but they would keep going until they found what was in them to find. In them was the place they were swimming to, and at the end of their swimming it would loom up out of the sea, real, solid, no illusion. They could be stopped of course, they might be killed by the sharks or fishermen but they would die on the way to where they wanted to be ...I wished I had somewhere to go to besides my flat (170).

She does have somewhere to go to, a place where she could be herself, Fairbairn's place: "He [Fairbarin] hadn't done anything special, it was simply his way of being. Like him I found that I no longer minded being alive. And the turtles were swimming, there was always that to fall back on. It was extraordinary, the whole turtle affair" (183).

The seeming absurdity of life is most evident in the face of death, the most inexorable 'given' of human existence. In many ways it is the boundary to existence that can help us see existence as a finite whole. Neaera had earlier bewailed the fact that she could not see "the whole picture":

> When a photograph in a newspaper is looked at closely one can see the single halftone dots it is made of. There one sees the incidence of a single dot, there another and another. Thousands of them coinciding make the face, the house, the tree,

> the whole picture. Every picture is a pattern of coincidence unrecognizable in the single dot. Each incidence of anything in life is just a single dot and my face is so close that I can't see what its part of. I shall never be able to stand far enough to see the whole picture I shall die in ignorance and rage (156).

It is the apparently meaningless crushing of a cat, run over by a lorry that brings her face to face with death. "He looked as if he'd been one hundred percent alive until the lorry closed his account in the flower of his tomcathood and his mortal remains were cheerful rather than depressing"(189). For existentialist philosophers like Heidegger "death, honestly accepted and anticipated can become an integrating factor in an authentic existence" (Macquarrie 198). To face death and to accept its possibility are to become aware of a boundary to existence. "Awareness of such a boundary does enable one to think of existence as a finite whole"(197). It is this acceptance of life , "To live with a yowl and die with a WHAM "(189), that makes Neaera truly self reliant, her existence truly authentic. If she has not 'found' she was already on her way to finding. She reflects, "I was waiting for something now and the waiting was pleasant. I was waiting for the self inside me to come forward to the boundaries from which it had long ago withdrawn"(184).

As the novel ends we learn that the "minutes make [her] strong"(189). Her diary ends with hope, confidence and

expectancy in a setting which has not physically changed (her flat, her square without a fountain) but which has been radically changed because she now connects with it (on her way to the flat she plays hopscotch in the square without a fountain). "Between now and then [lunch with George Fairbairn at the aquarium] were all kinds of minutes, all of them good. Who knew what might happen at the typewriter", she wonders (180).

For William, making connections is much more difficult and the results much more ambiguous. Meeting Fairbairn after the turtle launch William says, "Launching the turtles didn't launch me, you can't do it with turtles." Fairbairn's reply is typical of a person at peace with himself. "You can't do it with turtles," he says, "But with people you never know straightway what does what. Maybe launching them *did* launch you but you don't know it yet"(172).

There is a change in William's relations with those with whom he shares his apartment building, particularly Sandor, the foreigner who leaves his bathtub and cooker dirty every morning. For him, Sandor's hair in the bath and the filthy, evil smelling cooker that he has to clean and use is an image of everything that has gone wrong with his life: "I'd had a whole life, a house and a family; And it had come to this : Sandor's pubic hair in a rented bath"(152). After the launching, William decides to take matters

into to his own hands and goes up to Sandor and catches him by the lapels. Sandor, built like a wrestler, gets him into a scissors grip. He is wearing only his underpants and the incident immediately evokes the original therapy and the way Ruby in a bikini held people in a scissors grip and gave them a rebirth. Then, he had not been ready for rebirth. Now, making new connections, he undergoes a certain rebirth. The scuffle ends with both of them rolling down the stairs to the surprise of the landlady. Two days later when the cooker is full of muck again, William goes once more to Sandor and shoving a cloth in his face, he knees Sandor in the crotch. Sandor's feet send William flying and the episode ends with both of them in their beds. William is helpless like a newborn and has to be looked after by Mrs. Inchcliff. In this own way, he has made connections with a lonely, misunderstood and therefore belligerent foreigner – in an act of violence that uncovers the visceral response that make them both one. It is an attachment that immediately recalls the relationship of Peter and Jerry in Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*.

It is also a beginning for him. One of his favourite books, one that he keeps on his shelf is Eliot's *Four Quartets* and that morning he had read "East Coker", the poem that begins, "In my beginning is my end" and ends "In my end is my beginning". In a way the end –the black out as he went flying and slammed into a wall –is a beginning for him and therefore, as the novel ends we

are back at the beginning, but at a different level –life has not changed very much, he lives in the same place, works at the same shop –but the bathtub and cooker are no longer dirty, there is a renewed sense of possibility, with a passive but optimistic waiting.

The death of the cat in Neaera's life is paralleled in William's life by the death of Miss Neap and again it is a death – the possibility of the end of all possibilities –that helps Williams to see his life whole. Miss Neap was the other person with whom William shared the house. She worked at a ticket agency and was never without something to do. "She was an avid museum goer in the afternoons and favoured music in the evenings, overdressing smartly and appropriately for each part of the day" (178-79). Earlier, William had written in his diary, "close the museums and there's no telling what might happen"(31). Now he understands all of Miss Neap's activities as those of a lonely, desolate woman – a woman desperately trying to make connections: More loneliness than either the reader or William expects is revealed when Miss Neap hangs herself. Among her few books there is a paperback copy of the *Four Quartets*. Her death brings the others in the building closer as each understands the other's loneliness. Sandor feels, "You nod hello but you don't look at foreigner like regular human person. You look at me as if you think I carry in my briefcase nothing but

sausages"(167). Now he rises above whining about himself and learns to care about others too – he leaves the tub and cooker clean. William, who felt that he had always left "the bath and he cooker clean for the next chap, the next human person"(168), now realizes that it is not enough – he knows that Sandor's accusations are true.

William's experience of death is not quite as epiphanic as Neaera's who is inspired to compose a three line poem on the death of the cat. Instead it is a more sober acceptance of human finitude, even human absurdity. "Ridiculous ", William had thought after the first fight with Sandor, "But so is everything. So was Thermopylae"(160). After the second fight, he explains it to Mrs Inchcliff. "Thermopylae. In my end is my beginning". The paperback *Four Quartets* near Miss Neap's body had revealed to him how all things were connected – Eliot's lines connect him and Miss Neap in the same way that the turtle thoughts connected him and Neaera – just like the scissors grip of Sandor had shown him how he had been connected to all the parts. "I'd been wrong to feel my past no longer mine. I was joined umbilically to all parts"(154). And with this knowledge, an understanding of the sacramental fellowship of all life, a fact brought to full significance in the marvellous moonlit scene of the release of the turtles, William too redefines his own life.

In ancient myths of the hero, the hero descends into the underworld and after a series of encounters there, comes up with a knowledge and acceptance of the nature of life. *Turtle Diary* ends with the protagonist coming up the escalator of Camden Town tube station with his knowledge and he expresses it in words that recall Neaera's own discovery of the meaning as well as possibilities of life: "I didn't mind being alive at the moment. After all who knew what might happen?"(190).

The protagonists, [of Hoban] "develop not toward conventional happiness, but toward reintegration of the self, recovery of the past, openness toward the future, and the freedom to act in the present, " says Jack Branscomb(29) In *Turtle Diary* the reintegration of the self is dependent on the possibility of finding a solution in the world of nature. Perhaps the most environmentally conscious novel of Hoban, *Turtle Diary* suggests certain continuities in nature which make life more bearable. Hoban conveys the feeling that man's willingness to be part of nature's rhythms is essential for a richer life.

Tuning into the Worl

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Chapter 4

Tuning into the Worl

Like all of Russell Hoban's novels, *Riddley Walker* has a quest theme at least on two levels. Set against the background of a world devastated by the nuclear holocaust, it is the story of how the protagonist searches for the lost technology of "Time back way back", specifically, the secret of atomic fission and ends with the discovery of gunpowder - setting in motion another cycle of progress and doubtless nuclear destruction. In the process he has to redefine his own life and values so that the quest for a lost scientific know-how also becomes a quest for meaning and coherence.

Hoban paints a bleak and stark picture of a world that has not only been physically devastated by the atomic explosion or the one "1 big 1", but also culturally and linguistically. With the destruction of books and printing even language has been almost destroyed. What remains twenty three centuries after the nuclear holocaust in the year 2347 O.C. (our count) is a crude, primitive form of English, partly phonetic, using a vocabulary that is a

mixture of British slang and degenerate forms of scientific terms from an era dominated by nuclear fission and the computer. So when Riddley is very worried during a journey to Fork Stoan he says, "I have to say it overloadit my serkits (circuits) just that littl bit" (93) and when he decides to keep off the main tracks on the journey he says: "I pirntowt (printout) we bes not go the straites way" (85). The Eusa folk are the descendants of the Puter Leat (computer elite) and when they gather together they do some poasyum (symposium). They talk vantsit theary (advanced theory) about the many cools (molecules) of Addom (atom) and party cools (particles) of stoan. Narrating the story of the 'Bloak as Got on Top of Aunty', Riddley tells of the man who wanted to die: "He were so much out of luck his number all gone random and his program come unstuck" (87). Or again while talking with Lissener, Riddley "tryd to plot the parbeltys of it and program what to do nex" (95).

But it is a language that Hoban endows with considerable complexity. Their myths of the "1 big 1" or the atomic explosion refer to "the little Shynin Man the Addom", combining the long lost technology of the splitting of the atom with the Biblical story of Adam and the fall of Man. Again Riddley's companion and guide during the journey towards knowledge is the Ardship of Cambry, a descendant of the Puter Leat of Canterbury which was

where the explosion took place. His name brings to mind both images of Lordship and the Archbishop and it also suggests what a hardship it is to be the mutant descendant of the once elite. Hoban's feat in sustaining this kind of a language and vocabulary throughout the novel is of course a major intellectual achievement as most readers have noted.

Riddley Walker is just one of the kindly obedient people living in Fentses (Fences) scattered around what is obviously Kent, controlled by the Mincery or Government with its Pry Mincer, Abel Goodparley and Wes Mincer, Ernie Orfing. He is hardly the kind of person who would question either the Mincery or the myths with which they control the people. The central myth of this primitive, almost nomadic, foraging people is the Eusa myth which is a conflation of the legend of St. Eustace and the story of the atomic explosion. Significantly the text of this myth is written down in 33 paragraphs "in the old spel" (28) echoing both the gospels as well as the age of Christ at his crucifixion. The official form of the myth is known completely only to Eusa showmen - wandering puppeteers who stage Eusa shows around the country - and "connexion men" of whom Brooder Walker, Riddley's father is one - those who make "connexions" after the show and come up with important truths.

In its official version the Eusa story tells of the "time back way back" (a kind of Garden of Eden) when man was technologically very advanced and they had "boats in the ayr [aircraft] and picters on the win [Television]" (28) Mr. Clevver was the "Big Man in inland" (England) when enemies declare war on them. "Eusa wuz a noing man vere quick he cud tern his han tu enne thing" (28), and so Mr. Clevver tells Eusa that ordinary "masheans of warr" would not be enough this time, they would need the "1 big 1" (28). For that he would have to "Fyn the littl Shynin Man the Addom [the atom] he runs in the wud" and for that he must "Fyn the wud in the hart uv the stoan and thay partickler traks" (29). The reference is very obviously to the dance of the subatomic particles and the tracks made by such particles. Making himself smaller and smaller and taking two dogs Folleree and Folleroo he goes into the "partickler traks" and comes to "the wud in the hart of the stoan". Following a track of light he comes to the "hart of the wud" which was the "stag uv the wud" (29). In between the horns of the stag with arms outstretched is the littl shynin Man the Addom. Eusa asks him the "no. of the 1 big 1" and when he says that he "doan hav no word tu tel it" (30), Eusa gets hold of him and starts pulling him apart. The Addom dies, split into two and out of the two pieces come shining waves in spreading circles, lighting up the dark wood. "Eusa seen thay Master Chayngis uv the 1 Big 1. Qwik

then he riten down thay nos uv them" (30). The dogs now start talking like men and warn him of what will happen to the land but Eusa kills them. Stumbling out of the "wud" Eusa makes a Power Ring (particle accelerator) and running the "nos" through it he makes "the 1 big 1". Eusa built atom bombs and Mr. Clevver drops so many that they win the war. "They wun the warr but the lan wuz poyzen frum it the ayr and water as wel" (30). The destruction of course is awesome.

Eusa with his wife and two little sons go looking for another place to live. He goes to the captain of a ship .to take them away but the captain and his "hevve men" take away Eusa's wife and throw Eusa and his sons off. One day the little Shyning man comes in two pieces with the two dogs and each piece goes away with one of Eusa's children, one towards the river and the other, away. Eusa tries to swim after the one in the river but he suddenly goes weak and has to come back. As he is lying by the river the shyning man appears to him and tells him that now that he has let the nos. of the Master Chayngis out he would have to go through all the Master Chayngis.

Later the origin of the myth is revealed when Goodparley gives Riddley the only printed document that had survived the nuclear holocaust, a pamphlet that gives a pedestrian description

of Dr E.W. Tristram's reconstruction of the fifteenth century wall painting "The Legend of Saint Eustace" (that actually hangs in Canterbury Cathedral and which, Russell Hoban says in the introduction to the novel, was the inspiration for the book). This tells the story of how while hunting one day, St. Eustace sees a stag with a crucifix between its horns and how his family is converted. His wife is taken away by pirates in a ship. Reaching a swollen river and attempting to cross it with his children he finds a wolf running off with one son and a lion with another. Fifteen years later, he has recovered his wife and sons but on refusing to make sacrifices to the gods they are roasted to death in a brazen bull on the orders of Emperor Hadrian. All four are received into heaven by the spirit of God in the form of a dove.

It is easy to understand how this pamphlet and memories of an explosion which changed their world completely and threw them out from a glorious garden of Eden to their present condition after the Fall together gave rise to the only written tract of this primitive society. Considered to be of Biblical importance, this tract has given rise to its own priesthood headed by Goodparley and its rituals, the Eusa shows.

Apart from this central myth, there are two other myths which are also of importance to Riddley's society; one from before

the "1 big 1" and one after. The one before the 1 big 1 or "Why the Dog wont show its Eyes", an allegory of mystical knowledge and greed leading to the Fall is told by Lorna Elswint the "tel woman" to Riddley. "Time back way back" man lived in harmony with nature symbolized by the dog that came to them and with whom they looked into the night. "The man and the woman seen the nite in the dog's eyes and thats when they got the lst knowing of it. They knowit the nite the same as the dog knowit" (17). If Ist knowing is so good, how wonderful would 2nd knowing and 3rd knowing be, he wonders and in a story reminiscent of the Biblical one of the Tree of Knowledge he catches a goat and looks into its "clever eye" (18). From a primitive, nomadic life, foraging for food they turn. agricultural. They fence up cattle and gather wheat and barley. "They los out memberment uv the shapes of nite and worrit for ther parpety they might get snuck and raidit. They made the dog keap look out for ther parpety" (18). They built the Power Ring and put in the 1 big 1 and accelerated it. In the explosion that followed night turned to day and when order returned everything had changed: "Day beartht crookit out of crookit nite and sickness in them boath" (19).

The third myth, the "Hart of the Wud" narrates the origin of charcoal. After Bad Time (the holocaust) a man, woman and child are foraging for food in the forest. Starving and freezing

cold, they are at the end of their strength when a "clevver looking bloak" (3) comes through the wood and offers them the secret of making fire in exchange for something to eat, glancing meaningfully at their child. In a rite that recalls the Christian rite, they kill the child, drink its blood and eat its flesh, the "clever bloak's" share being the heart of the child. Before he goes away he predicts the return of clevverness (technological knowhow) and the burning of charcoal and that "when they bern the chard coal ther stack will be the shape of the hart of the chyld" (4). After the man has gone the man and the woman build a bigger and bigger fire trying to prevent the black night from moving in on them. But they fall asleep by the fire and are burnt to death. "They ben the old 1s or you myt say the auld 1s and become chard Coal. Thats why theywl tel you the aulder tree is bes for charring coal" (4). It is a story that recalls both the myth of Prometheus and the legend of Doctor Faustus. It is these three myths that form the religious, intellectual and even the political background of Riddley's society.

At the simplest level - the level of the story - *Riddley Walker* is an adventure story in which the protagonist sets out on a quest and after a series of incidents attains what he has been searching for. But it is also a quest which echoes the mythical quest of Jason for the Golden Fleece, Aeneas' quest for the

knowledge of the destiny of Rome and the Buddha's quest for the meaning of life.

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell traces the pattern of the quest of the archetypal hero. "A separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return" (35). The separation begins with a call to adventure that the hero hears and responds to.

> "A blunder - apparently the merest chance - reveals an unsuspected world and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood ... But whether small or great, and no matter what the stage or grade of life, the call rings up the curtain always on a mystery of transfiguration - a rite, or moment of spiritual passage, which when complete amounts to a dying or a birth. The familiar life horizon has been outgrown; the old concepts, ideals and emotional patterns no longer fit; the time for the passing of a threshold is at hand" (51).

In *Riddley Walker*, the call to adventure is a series of accidents beginning with that traditional rite of passage, his "naming day when I come 12" (1) and he becomes a man, symbolized by the wild boar that he kills. His departure from the world of his Fents society is foreshadowed in a change of attitude: "The woal thing felt jus that littl bit stupid" (1). His reaction to the tribal rite of passage indicates that from being an

unquestioning member of the fents society he is going to change and looks forward to his questioning of the Eusa myth later.

When the hero responds to the call and accepts his destiny he is aided by the supernatural. That mysterious forces are urging Riddley on is clear to him from the three remarkable incidents three days later - the 'accidental' death of his father while digging at Widders Dump leading to his becoming the "connexion man" of the fents people, the birth of a dead baby, an indication of what would happen if they tried to dig up or bring back "old time, bad time, black time" (23) and the fact that the old leader of the Bernt Arse pack (particularly savage wild dogs that are a constant threat to the badly protected people) offered himself to Riddley in a kind of sacrifice indicating that Riddley is the chosen one. This is again bolstered by the fact that the new black leader of the Bernt Arse pack keeps looking into Riddley's eyes with its yellow eyes in a special kind of way. "I dint think my dad gone in to no black dog but it did seem to me that dog musve come special from somewhere or ben sent to tel me something somehow" (63). It also relates Riddley to the myth of the dog that wont show its eyes and suggests that since the black dog had looked into Riddley's eyes in the same way that the mythical dog had looked at the man and woman, Riddley has access to 1st knowing or mystic knowledge. "The man and the

woman seen the nite in the dogs' eyes and that's what they got the 1st knowing it" (17). The next day it is the dog that leads him away from the fents. The fact that the leader of a pack of savage, man eating dogs could become his guide in the quest reveals that this supernatural aid has all the ambiguous qualities that Campbell suggests as characteristic of the archetypal guides:

> Protective and dangerous, motherly and fatherly at the same time, this supernatural principle of guardianship and direction unites in itself all the ambiguities of the unconscious - thus signifying the support of our conscious personality by that other, larger system, but also the inscrutability of the guide that we are following to the peril of all our rational ends (73).

Personifications of the hero's destiny guide and aid him, and he goes forward in his adventure until he "comes to the 'threshold guardian' at the entrance to the zone of magnified power" (77). Belnot Phist is the guardian at Widders Dump, symbol of the tyranny of the Ram. When Phist tries to bully Riddley into giving him the Punch figure Riddley has discovered in the muck, Riddley attacks him and leaving him for dead goes off and in literally jumping the fence crosses the First Threshold. Beyond is danger, the world of the unknown, controlled by agents of the Ram, a world of which he knows nothing - but with a senseless courage and confidence in the dog-guide he embarks on the journey. As Campbell says, "The adventure is always and

everywhere a passage beyond the veil of the known into the unknown, the powers that watch at the boundary are dangerous; to deal with them is risky; yet for anyone with competence and courage the danger fades" (82).

The passage of the threshold is accompanied or followed by a metamorphosis - a change in which the hero dies to the old world and is reborn to a new world or new knowledge. This is usually undergone in an interior - a temple interior, the belly of the whale, below the confines of the world and so on. Riddley is led to the underground cell (the kingdom of the dark) in which Lissener is imprisoned and his meeting with Lissener - one of the mutilated, mutant descendants of the Eusa people imprisoned to protect their hereditary knowledge - opens his eyes to a whole new world. Lissener will become the first of the three guides who lead him on, all of them again answering to Campbell's description of the ambiguous nature of guides on such a quest.

In the second part of the archetypal quest, the hero having crossed the threshold has to follow a path of trials leading up to the attainment of the boon. The great adventures of myth and literature - tests and trials, ordeals and tribulations - belong to this area. In Riddley this begins with a truer understanding of the nature of the Mincery at the Ram and of the way in which the

Eusa myth has been used by them. Lissener's story gives a new twist to the official version of the Eusa story. Instead of being the villain who was the cause of the '1 Big 1' he becomes the prophet who was not listened to. And Riddley begins to understand that there might be many versions of the myth, each power group (the imprisoned Eusa people also representing a political power group) using the one most advantageous to their purposes.

The appearance of Lissener also signifies a transfer of Riddley's "Spiritual centre of gravity from within the pale of society to a zone unknown" (Campbell 58). In traditional myth this is usually a distant land, or a forest or a kingdom underground, beneath the waves or above the sky and so on. In *Riddley Walker* it is both the past and the future. It is a past vaguely remembered through tales passed down from one generation to the next and through various nonsense rhymes for children's games the meanings of which are never clear. It is a past of computers and atomic power stations and boats in the air and pictures in the wind, a past exemplified by Riddley's comment when he sees the "broakin machines" at Fork stoan (Folkestone), "O, what we ben! And what we come to" (96). And it is a future that seeks to recreate that broken word, both in the merely technological sense of the "1 Big 1" and the "1 littl 1" and

also in the case of "trying to reconstruct the world and its history into a unity" (Dipple 173).

And for this the only instruments are the myths that keep changing and the rhymes in which the original concepts are completely muddled. Riddley's quest, a quest for meaning is one of trying to understand and interpret unstable texts. "I wish everything wud mean jus only I thing and keap on meaning it not changing all the time" (140). But he will have to recreate the world into a unity with what he has at his disposal including the children's rhyme "Fools Circel 9 wys". "What ben makes tracks for what will be words in the air printow footsteps on the groun for us to put our feet to. May be another 100 years and kids wil sing a rime of Riddley Walker and Abel Goodparley with the circel game", (116) Goodparley tells him.

It is by using the list of place names in 'Fools circel 9 wys' that Riddley and Lissener reach The Warnings and obtain the 'Salt 4' (sulphur) from the wrecked boat. Lissener immediately understands that the little stones in the bag that they get from the dead sailor contains power. Later when Riddley and Goodparley go the Granser, it will be using the knowledge that has been passed down generations of 'chardcoal berners' and another rhyme that the three ingredients charcoal, Saul and

Peter (saltpetre) and Salt 4 will be mixed and gunpowder obtained.

This discovery of gunpowder is the attainment of the boon and as the hero all that remains for Riddley is to come back to his people with this knowledge. But by this time the focus of Riddley's quest has shifted from a search for the secret formula of the "1 big 1" to a quest for the ultimate meaning of the world around him - a quest for coherence and ultimately a quest for unity.

Throughout Riddley's long journey after he leaves How Fents he undergoes a long process of education under the three people who act as his guides - Lissener, Goodparley and Granser. It is Lissener who awakens him to a new world, glimpses of which he snatches from Lissener's talk of 'vantsit theary' (advanced theory), and Axel rating the Inner G. (energy), puter leat programming the great dance of everything and tuning in without inner fearents (interference). It is also Lissener who consciously teaches him so that he will be able to go on even when he is alone:

> "Im trying to bring on that seed of the red in you. Im trying to strong it on. Im trying to rise your hump Dyou lissen me? Im trying to get you to be your oan black dog and you oan ardship."

"I said, 'why'?"

"He said, because you wont all ways have me will you? (95).

When Riddley has to separate from Lissener and return to Widders Dump, Goodparley becomes his next guide and from Goodparley he hears yet another version of the Eusa story, this one in which Eusa's own people, angry at the destruction he has wrought "beat him to death with col iron because it ben col iron he done Inland (England) to death with" (117). The Mincery at the Ram puts out Eusa shows because the dismembered head of Eusa tells them to "make a show of me for memberment and for the answers to your askings" (117). For Riddley the latest version of Eusa and the story of St. Eustace, the pamphlet of which is given to him by Goodparley shows the difficulty of finding a meaning or coherence in an increasingly complex world. It is hard to make sense of ambiguous and often contradictory facts - the cause of the "1 big 1" might have been Eusa who is identified with St. Eustace or it might have been the villainous Mr. Clevver who is identified with the medieval devil. "Whatever youre after youwl never fynd the beginning of it thats why youwl always be too late. Onlyes things youwl ever fynd is the end of things" (147), Granser, the last of his guides tells him and it is Granser who, using traditional rhymes and the knowledge that "chardcoal berners and dyers" knew achieves the "1 littl 1" - and

thus sets Riddley and mankind on the path that will in all probability end in another "1 big 1", thus repeating the cycle.

But for Riddley himself the end of the quest is not the discovery of gunpowder. For by the time he discovers the secret of gunpowder and the power that accrues from it he has discovered that power means nothing. The goal of the myths of the hero and his quest says Campbell, ". . . . is to dispel the need for such life ignorance by effecting a reconciliation of the individual consciousness with the universal will. And this is effected through a realisation of the true relationship of the passing phenomena of time to the imperishable life that lives and dies in all" (238). And this realization, which is the attainment of the boon, comes to Riddley in the magnificent scene in the crypt of Cambry (Canterbury) Cathedral.

Like the descent of the hero into the underworld Riddley is led underground to the ruins of the cathedral by the black dog and there amid the gothic arches that resemble huge trees carved in stone, the formulaic idea that is at the heart of every myth and rhyme of the people - the wood in the heart of the stone - is made concrete for him. There he makes an important connexion - "I cud feal something growing in me, it were like a grean sea surging in me it wer saying LOSE IT. saying LET GO. Saying

THE ONLYES POWER IS NO POWER" (162). Later he understands that, that was not quite it. Walking towards Cambry after the experimental explosion that kills Goodparley and Granser, he understands that "It aint that its no power. It's the not sturgling for power that's where the power is. Its in jus letting yourself be where it is. Its tuning into the worl its leaving yourself behynt and letting yourself be where it says in Eusa 5 ". . . in tu the hart uv the stoan hart uv the dans. Evere thing blipping & bleaping & moving in the shifting uv thay nos. sum tym byting sum tym bit" (191).

This stage in the hero's spiritual growth is what Campbell describes when he says:

> "The agony of breaking through personal limitations is the agony of spiritual growth. Art, literature, myth and cult, philosophy and ascetic disciplines are instruments to help the individual past his limiting horizons into spheres of ever expanding realization. As he crosses threshold after threshold, conquering dragon after dragon, the stature of the divinity that he summons to his highest wish increases until it subsumes the cosmos. Finally the mind breaks the bounding sphere of the cosmos to a realization transcending all experiences of form - all symbolizations, all divinities; a realization of the ineluctable void" (190).

The reconciliation of the individual consciousness with the universal will is a major theme of *Riddley Walker* as it is of Hoban's novels in general. When Riddley succeeds his father as 'connexion man' he decides to make his method of making 'connexions' very rational and scientific:

> I had in mynd to take it slow and make it solid. But I thot to a nother like ring poals in poal hoals and holders to ring poals and rafters to holders and the reveal on top or it all like thatch. So you could always go back from the reveal and get a good look at how the woal thin ben bilt and that wer goin to be the Riddley Walker style (57).

Yet when he does his first 'connexion' after the special Eusa show put on by Goodparley and Orfing, it comes out in a trance "EUSA'S HEAD IS DREAMING US" (58) - something that mystifies everyone including Riddley. Elizabeth Dipple points out that this suggests a solipsistic world as the subjective dream of each perceiving self, being reminiscent of Lewis Carroll's Alice who is told by Tweedledum that the sleeping king is dreaming her and that if he were to awake she would cease to exist (177). However as the story proceeds and Riddley hears newer versions of the Eusa story and the nature of Eusa himself changes, the meaning becomes clear. "You know what the idear of Eusa is. Hes the 1 what goes thru chayngis" (139) Goodparley tells him pointing to the fact that Eusa is a basic principle of the universe -

the principle of change. Later this universal is identified with the individual when Goodparley says, "Coarse, I have to be Eusa, you do as wel and everyy 1 else weve all got to be Eusa and get him thru chayngis. Dont you see its on all of us to be everything. There aint nothing only us to be Punch and Eusa both" (140).

When this idea of Eusa as the universal principle of change (or universal spirit or God, call it what you will) becomes clear Riddley's first 'connexion' becomes antisolipsistic in the extreme, the whole world being just the different expressions of the unity at the centre. At the June 1984 Seminar of the Israel Association of American Studies in a lecture entitled "I, that was a child my tongue's use sleeping . . .' Hoban observed:

> "The overall number of minds is just one", said Schrodinger. There's no way of proving this; one can only test it against one's own experience. Does consciousness feel like that, as if there's only one mind? To me it does. I feel inhabited by a consciousness that looks out through the eyeholes in my face and this consciousness doesn't seem to have originated with me. I feel like a receiver made for a transmission that was going on long before I arrived (166).

It is of this spirit that Lorna Elswint the local tel woman tells Riddley when she talks of something in humans which has no name. "Its some kynd of thing it aint us but yet its in us. Its

looking out thru our eyehoals . . . we dint begin when it begun we dint begin where it begun. It ben here before us nor I don't know what we are to it" (6). It is this that sets Riddley thinking and the writing of the book itself is on Riddley's part a result of rumination on this. "Thats why I finely came to writing all this down. Thinking on what the idear of us myt be thinking on that whats in us lorn and loan and oansome (7).

It is to this spirit that Riddley has access when the black leader of the Bernt Arse Pack befriends him, though again it is Lorna Elswint who recognizes it immediately "whatd I say did you keep it in memberment? lst knowing in that dog I said dint I. Here it come agen dinnit. lst knowing in the new dog the black leader" (66). The reference to lst knowing immediately evokes the dog myth and a Garden-of-Eden time when man lived in harmony with nature and had access to a mystic knowledge.

Riddley realizes this when he looks at the black dog after receiving Lissener. "Looking at that black leaders eyes they myndit me of gulls eyes. Eyes so fearce they cudnt even be sorry for the naminal they were in" (79). It is Lissener who as his first guide teaches him how to make himself accessible to the universe, how to tune himself to it by telling him the story of 'The Other Voyce Owl of the World'. When Lissener tells him about

the gathering dream that the Puter Leat have, it refers to a unity of the world that is extreme even by Riddley's present knowledge for it is an idea not merely of a universal consciousness permeating and directing everything but of a unity in the universe where one cannot distinguish where one ends and the other begins "Its (the gathering dream) where theres all the many nor there aint no end to you there aint no place where you begin nor leave off . . No mor edge where you leave off and the nex begins jus all of as far as you can see with all the eyes of us it don't matter whose eyes youre looking out of you don't need none of your oan" (90-91). This unity at the heart of things is central to Ridley Walker as it is to Hoban. In a keynote address to the sixth Annual Literary Conference of the Manitoba Writers Guild in 1987 entitled 'The Bear in Max Ernst's Bedroom' he talked of this again:

> To me it feels as if all of us inhabit and are inhabited by one universal mind, we are all receptors of a universal transmission. Some of us tune into more of it, some less, but it wants to be received, it wants to be perceived and we are its organs of perception. Surely we haven't yet received the whole transmission, surely we haven't tuned into all the frequencies (197).

To tune into the right frequency is to make the right 'connexion' and it is Riddley's job to make 'connexions' whether it

is in unravelling the myths of the Fents communities or in trying to discover the unity at the heart of everything doomed though many of his efforts are to failure. Nobody can make all the 'connexions', nobody can tune in to all the frequencies. But from the time that he was an egoistic individual at Widder's dump, Riddley has come a long way in recognizing the basic interconnectedness of all things:

> Wen I gone over the fents at Widders Dump it ben jus me throwing myself in to the black and taking my chance what it myt do with me. Swaller me up or spit me out. I dint care I dint have no 1 on my back only myself. Only myself; looking at them words going down on this paper right this minim I know aint no such thing there aint no only myself you all ways have every l and everything on your back (106).

In fact this idea of everything being related accords with modern scientific theories of reality and the imagery of the dancing in the stillness and the wood in the heart of the stone strongly echo the quantum view of the universe. Fritjof Capra in *The Tao of Physics* talks about this unity:

> Quantum theory thus reveals a basic oneness of the universe. It shows that we cannot decompose the world into independently existing smaller units. As we penetrate into matter, nature does not show us any isolated 'basic building blocks' but rather appears as a complicated web of relations between the various

> parts of the whole. These relations always include the observer in an essential way (57).

This is the reason Riddley is never able to completely unravel the meaning or to recreate the world into a coherent whole; "if you cud even jus see 1 thing clear the woal of whats in it you cud see everything clear. But you never will get to see the woal of anything youre always in the middle of it living it or moving thru it" (181). And this is why at the end we see Riddley on the road still wondering about the riddles of his world, compelled to keep walking in a Beckettian kind of way knowing that he will never have answers to all the questions that trouble his mind. "Why is Punch crookit? Why wil he all ways kil the baby if he can? I wont never know its jus on me to think on it" (213).

This unity, together with the philosophic problems of duality and unity is suggested ingeniously by evoking images of the splitting of the atom (the 1 becoming the 2) and the vaguely remembered language of the binary system used in computers evoked through references to the 1 and the 2. In this, Hoban's ontological concerns are remarkably close to currently accepted ideas of the basic structure of the universe. As Elizabeth Dipple points out, the dominant idea in the book is that "one will always

become two and vice versa" (175). This in fact is central to the basic myth of the fents people - the Eusa story. The legend of St.Eustace discovering a shining crucifix between the horns of a stag while hunting in the wood and being converted is mixed with memories of a great destruction caused by the splitting of the atom to create the myth of how Eusa discovered the shining man, the Addom in the heart of the wood and how he split him, into two creating the '1 big 1' and the 'Master Chayngis' that it sets in motion:

> Out uv thay 2 peaces uv the littl shynin Man the Addom thayr cum shyningness in wayvs in spreading circles. Lyting up the dark wud. Eusa seen the littl going roun and roun insyd the l big l and the l big l humin roun insyd the litttl l. He seen thay Master Chayngis uv the l big l. Quick then he riten down thay Nos uv them (31).

The little man's words to Eusa that because of his actions he must go through all the changes required by the idea of him is echoed in Riddley's own life as he is forced to undergo a series of changes. This emphasis on change and flow has been a characteristic of mystics throughout the ages and because of his access to lst knowing Riddley is in his own way a mystic. During the course of the first Eusa show that Goodparley and Orfing put on, the little man says to Eusa, "You and me weare 2 1/2s of l thing it don't matter if you tear me a part or I tear you a part.

But the 1 as tears the other a part has got to put something together nor you aint done that" (47). As a Eusa, one who goes through the changes, Riddley's attempt to put the two together is a quest for his own identity and an attempt to discover the unity at the heart of all things. On the way to Cambry he says "Now that 2 wanted to be 1 again and moving me I cud feel it strong that Big Power whatever it wer" (152).

It is at Cambry, standing in the underground remains of the magnificent gothic cathedral that the unity at the heart of the world becomes clear to Riddley through the experience of wonder. Gary Zukav in *The Dancing Wu Li Masters* describes how things that have not been understood rationally may be understood in an intuitive way:

> To stand in awe and wonder is to understand in a very specific way, even if that understanding cannot be described. The subjective experience of wonder is a message to the rational mind that the object of wonder is being perceived and understood in ways other than the rational (40).

This section in Cambry is the 'hart' of the novel when everything that was vague, everything that was confused and jumbled up becomes clear; when the muddled formulaic rhymes and jingles are made intelligible. The two basic concerns of the

novel - the "hart of the wud" or the heart of reality and the idea of 'stoan' as a symbol of the physical world around, coalesce in the idea of the wood that has become 'stoan' and the 'stoan' that has become wood. This interchangeability of wood and stone is also the identity of the 1 and the 2 or the many. Standing wonderstruck with the trees of 'stoan' towering above him and branching into magnificant gothic arches Riddley realizes that "The 1 big 1 the Master chayngis it wer all roun me wood into stoan and stoan in to wood" (156).

For Riddley this is a radical change in the way of apprehending the world. For the wood-stoan duality marks the end of the 'either-or' way of looking at the world. Wood when he looked at it as wood, and stone when he looked at it as stone and both wood and stone at the same time, it brings to him both the knowledge of the unity at the centre of things and the way in which that unity could be apprehended. "If you cud even jus only put yourself right with 1 stoan youwd be moving with the girt dants of the everything the 1 big 1 the Master Chayngis" (157).

Throughout the novel Hoban uses this image of dancing to indicate the nature of reality. The image of dancing to describe the existence of the universe is of course a very common one in eastern religious literature especially in the image of Shiva who

sustains the endless rhythm of the universe through his dance (Coomaraswamy 56-66). T. Legget in *A First Zen Reader* quotes a traditional Taoist text the *T 'sai Ken t'an*: "The stillness in stillness is not the real stillness. Only when there is stillness in movement can the spiritual rhythm appear which pervades heaven and earth" (229).

But Hoban's use of the idea of the dancing in the stillness also explicity alludes to the dance of subatomic particles that is part of the quantum picture of reality. Nobody can, of course, write in a post 'Tao of Physics' age and evoke eastern mysticism without also suggesting the New Physics and vice versa. Capra explains the modern scientific view thus:

> The exploration of the subatomic world in the twentieth century has revealed the intrinsically dynamic nature of matter. It has shown that the constituents of atoms, the subatomic particles, are dynamic patterns which do not exist as isolated entities, but as integral parts of an inseparable network of interactions. These interactions involve a ceaseless flow of energy manifesting itself as the exchange of particles; a dynamic interplay in which particles are created and destroyed without end in a continual variation of energy patterns. The particle interactions give rise to the stable structures which build up the material world which again do not remain static, but oscillate in rhythmic movements. The whole universe is thus engaged in endless motion and activity in a continual cosmic dance of energy (211).

Hoban's remarkable achievement lies in evoking images that are in consonance with the consciousness of a primitive, twelve year old narrator, but which are also quite clear to anyone living in the post - Hiroshima world. "Moving in the millyings which is the girt dants of everything it's the fastes thing there is it keeps the stilness going"(158) and later "the hart of the wud is in the hart of the stoan where the girt dants is" (159). It is here that the reader also realizes that the myth of the wood must have arisen from the corruption of original philosophical terminology relating to 'would be' or 'wanting to be' - the energy or force that drives a person to be what it is in him to be, the energy that drives a people to be what it is in them to be; to discover gunpowder or nuclear fission; the energy that will make Inland "rise up out of what she ben brung down to" (117).

Integration of Eastern Philosophy with western scientific knowledge has not been uncommon in contemporary literature but Hoban's uniqueness lies in how he has combined this with his views of a universal soul as the energy which propels Riddley and implicitly, mankind, forward. And this he does without ever making the reader doubt the reality of Riddley as a person in a specific time and place.

Hoban integrates the ideas of the identity of the one and the many and the universal soul with the image of Greanvine that crops up in Riddley's mind as he stands in the cathedral. He reflects on the face with the vines and leaves he had never seen: "I knowit that dint come out of my mynd it musve come into it from somers" (160). This face that obsesses him has universal characteristics. "Never seen that face befor yet it wer a face I knowit. Take a way the vines and leaves and it myt be Punch's face or it even might be Eusa's face" (160). This leads him to an identity of all mankind and consequently the illusory nature of the kind of power that he was searching for (gunpowder and the ability to defeat an enemy):

> I begun to see it wer the onlyes face ther wer. It wer every face. It wer the face of the boar I kilt and the dog that old leader. IT wer the face of my father what ben kilt in the digging. It wer Belnot Phist hung up by his hands tyd behynt him and it wer the little shynin Man (160).

When this identity of victor and victim, conqueror and defeated is perceived, the traditional idea of Power becomes absurd. From the connexion that Riddley makes with Greanvine he understands that "The onlyes power is no power" (162).

Together with this apprehension of the basic unity of the universe there is a gradual growth in the understanding of the nature of Eusa himself. At the time that Riddley takes over as the "connexion man" of the How Fents community and becomes part of the privileged priesthood of Inland he knows only one version of the Eusa myth - the official one - in which Eusa is the villain who puts the 1 big 1 in bombs, and after destroying the world, exiles mankind from a sophisticated but idyllic Garden of Eden to its present condition - a fallen state. During the course of his journeyings Riddley hears other versions and begins to doubt all versions. During Goodparley and Orfing's Eusa show, Eusa puts the blame for the bombings on Mr. Clevver. It is suggested that the story keeps changing because it is in the nature of Eusa.As Orfing says:

> The shows are different all the time thats how it is meant to be. Which a show is something youre doing right now in this here time we are living in and youre doing the chayngis with Eusa. New things happening and new changes every time. Thats how its meant to be and that's how we all ways do it (49).

The identification of Eusa with the universal soul is suggested by Riddley's reaction to the first Eusa show. "Only this time it seamt like it wer the lst time I wer seeing him and I wer afeart of him. The way he kept terning his head it made me

think of that thing with no name looking out thru our eye hoals" (43). In Lissener's version Eusa has changed from villain to the prophet who would not be listened to. Regretting what he had done Eusa says that he is going to take to the road and tell the people of his mistake and the possible dangers. "Them at the Ram they wunt lissen to Eusa. They kep asking for the cleverness and how to make the 1 big 1. When he wunt tel them they beat him to death with col iron then they took his head they put it an a poal for telling" (78). But Eusa's head continues to admonish them and they are terrified when a giant wave comes and separates the Ram (obviously Ramsgate) from the rest of Inland (England). Afraid that the head wouldn't rest, they do what Eusa had decided to do and using a figure for Eusa, take to the road and put on the Eusa shows.

Lisseners' version is crucial in changing the world view of Riddley because the Eusa show is now seen as a political act by the Government at the Ram in order to control the people. Besides the Ram has carefully hidden from even connexion men like Riddley the truth about Eusa's end. And although Eusa wanted the Ram to give up the 1 big 1, Riddley knows that Goodparley is actively engaged in searching for it. Riddley now has reason to suspect both the original myth as well as Lissener's version, for, Lissener, as a mutant descendant of the original

'Puter Leat' and one of the Eusa people, has his own political ambitions.

The version of another person with political ambitions, that of Goodparley is similar to and at the same time opposed to Lissener's version. In this version Eusa is beaten to death too, but it is by his own people who were angry with him at the destruction he had wrought. The head then directed the people to throw it into the sea and swimming to the Ram it ordered them to put up the Eusa shows for memberment (117) and predicted that "when the right head of Inland fynds the right head of Eusa the answer wil come and Inland wil rise up out of what she ben brung down to" (117).

The hold that Eusa has over his imagination is broken when he discovers the figure of 'Punch' at Widders Dump and later learns the history of Punch shows from Goodparley. For Riddley who is confused by the instability of the Eusa myth and who is questing for one meaning the Punch shows offer stability of meaning. Goodparley tells him, "It aint like a Eusa show its meant to stay the same all the time" (128). And so at the end of the novel we have Riddley abandoning Eusa shows and on the road with his own gospel in the form of Punch shows, although it

is obvious that like the Eusa shows they will also start changing from show to show.

Together with this demystification of the mythical Eusa there is also the growing awareness of the universal soul that is responsible for the forward movement of Riddley. This spirit is closely associated with Eusa. Riddley's very first connexion as noted earlier is 'Eusa's head is dreaming us'. Goodparley is more explicit when he tells Riddley, "You know what the idear of Eusa is. Hes the 1 what goes thru the chayngis" (139) and later he suggests that Eusa was not just a particular character at a certain time in history. "Coarse I have to be Eusa you do as wel and every 1 else." (140).

When Riddley arrives at Weaping Form for his first Punch Show a new cycle is beginning as he and Erny are identified as Eusa by Rightway Flinter:

> There's all ways some kind of cleverness waiting for some 1 to pul it someone to fetch it someone to bring it down on the res of us. And them what fetches it whoever they myt be theyre Eusa . . . you and your young partner here you're Eusa which of coarse you've got your Chayngis to go thru. You've got things youwd like to do nex only befor you get to them youwl have to pay for the las things what you done. (206).

It is easy to imagine how centuries later there might be myths of how Riddley Walker discovered the secret of the 1 Big 1 incorporating all the consequences of the discovery.

The idea that all fiction is about fiction itself is one of the great themes of post-modern fiction. This has led to the novel which "self consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (Waugh 2). Although in this experimental sense *Riddley Walker* is not metafiction - the devastated world of *Riddley Walker* is evoked with a solidity of detail that is comparable to the most traditional of Victorian narratives - there are numerous ways in which Hoban evokes metafictional themes.

Broadly speaking metafiction can be defined as fiction that explores a "theory of fiction through the practice of writing fiction" (Waugh 2). In this sense *Riddley Walker* can be considered metafiction, for in the novel, Riddley as a self conscious narrator faced with the limitations of narrative technique is illustrating theoretical positions which are Hoban's own. Central to this aspect of the novel is Hoban's theory of inspiration. In an interview with John Haffenden in 1981 he said:

> I don't think of myself as the creator but as the medium through which certain things come. Its difficult for me how other people can feel otherwise. I never use the word 'creative' in connection with writing. I feel as if we are all particles of a single consciousness and that the vital force which moves the universe requires of us to be its organ of perception (132).

Stories come to Riddley Walker also in this way as he connects himself to the mysterious energy of the universe. In the crypt at Cambry thoughts on the nature of stone come to him from he knows not where. "This nex what I'm writing down it aint no story tol to me nor it aint no dream. Its jus something come into my head wylst I ben on my knees there in that stoan wood in the woom of her what has her woom in Cambry" (158). In this sense even though Hoban does not claim for writers the 'creativity' that is generally regarded as the hallmark of writers, in a quite 'different' way he is claiming something far higher - an exalted role as a person who is able to tune into the universe. In other words the shaman of the tribe just as Riddley is.

"It seems to me that all things are connected and a function of art is to explore the connections and engage with the action revealed by them," he goes on to say in the interview given to John Haffenden (139). In other words the artist is a 'connexion man'. Riddley in the novel succeds his father as a 'connexion

man' or a shaman - a person whose duty it is to interpret the Eusa shows put on by the Mincery. Initially Riddley thinks of going about his job in a very rational, scientific and solid way - putting one thing on another like the construction of a house. But when it is time for his "lst connexion" it comes to him in a trance as if the universal spirit were talking through him.

Metafictional novels often contain discussions of the arbitrary nature of beginnings and endings. Early in the narrative Riddley encounters this problem. "I don't think it makes no differents where you start the telling of the thing. You never know where it begun realy. No moren you know where you begun yourself. You might know the place and day and time of day when you been bearth. You myt even know the place and day and time when you ben got. That don't mean nothing tho. You stil don't know where you begun" (8). In a discussion between Greanvine and Punch on the nature of endings Punch says:

> Its different right the way up to end and thats why the end is diffrent. If the way is diffrent the end is diffrent. Because the end aint nothing only part of the way its jus that part of the way where you come to a stop. The end cud be any part of the way its in every step of the way thats why you bes go ballsy (167)
>
> .

And so the novel ends with a courageous " ballsy" Riddley going around putting up Punch shows, a clearly subversive act against which the Mincery will not fail to act , with the knowledge that the end could be anywhere, that it is in every step of the way.

Riddley also has to face the problem of language and in this novel, language is central in a way that it is not in any of Hoban's other novels. "I don't have nothing only words to put on paper. Its so hard. Sometimes theres mor in the empty paper nor there is when you get the writing down on it. You try to word the big things and they tern their backs on you" (156), says Riddley and throughout the novel Hoban very ingeniously makes Riddley's problem the readers own. By creating a crude language that initially at least strikes us as unfamiliar, Hoban succeeds in slowing down our pace of intake to that of Riddley.

It also illustrates in a very obvious way how many limitations language has in understanding and interpreting the world. Riddley keeps repeating the same phrases in different contexts (especially 1 ness and 2 ness) not only because he realizes the basic unity beneath everything but because he has been educated with only these few concepts which have come down from " Time back way back" and which have been muddled

in the process. "I wisht everything wud mean jus only 1 thing and keap on meaning it not changing all the time" (40), he bewails but it is not merely because meanings keep changing. It is because there are so few words to describe so many different experiences.

It has been pointed out that Riddley's quest is an attempt to build a coherent unity of his world (Dipple 174). This he attempts to do by writing down his story. "which I fealt like sitting down to a table with a candle and putting some words on paper. That ben the beginning of this writing and I am sitting at that same and very tabel now" (196). Thus the pursuit of a very material chemical mixture – gunpowder – which later becomes a quest for a spiritual oneness with nature also becomes an exploration of the nature of fiction and the source of its inspiration.

This is most explicity illustrated in the Hagman's 11 section where Wayman Footling tells Riddley the different stories of how the place name originated. Footling explains to a confused Riddley:

> wel no I dint make it up you cant make up nothing in your head no moren you can make up what you see. You know what I mean may be what you see aint all ways there so you cud reach

> out and touch it but its there some kynd of way and it came from somewhere. That place Hagman's 11 I used to wunner about it everytime we come by it till finely that story come into my head. That story cudnt come out of nowhere cud it so it musve come out of somewhere. Parbly it ben in that place from time back way back or may be in a nother place only the idear of it come to me there. That dont make no odds. That storys jus what ever it is and thats what storys are (90).

Hoban repeatedly talks about this concept of the story existing before and apart from the author and the author as merely the medium who has to represent it as faithfully as possible. "I'm at the service of the material that enters me, it takes me where it wants to go and I might not know why I'm going there thats all right. The material requires of me that I make it manifest as clearly and as beautifully as I can. There my responsibility ends and whether you and I understand, it is secondary" (Haffenden 132).

It is the irrelevance of the reader that makes Hoban uniquely different from all other post- modernist writers who have made the writing of fiction a major theme of their works and especially from Italo Calvino whom he most closely resembles in other respects. Like *Riddley Walker*, Calvino's *If on a winter's Night a Traveller* is also an enquiry into the nature and

production of fiction although Calvino's work is an extremely self conscious one. Like Hoban, Calvino is metaphysically obsessed with the idea of the one, which in this book is symbolized by the idea of all books as one book and both the writer and reader as one. But most of all at a time when the spirit of the age has veered away from the idea of the spiritual, both have firmly clung to the idea of a cosmic mind and and the author as merely an instrument through which the thoughts of this mind are communicated. The writer in Calvino's book, Silas Flannery writes, "If I were only a hand, a severed hand that grasps a pen and writes . . . who could move this hand? The anonymous throng? The spirit of the times ? The collective unconscious? I do not know. It is not in order to be the spokesman for something definable that I would like to erase myself. Only to transmit the writable that waits to be written, the tellable that nobody tells" (136) . Even in the manner that they convey this idea there is a very strong similarity using almost identical verbal examples. "I read in a book that the objectivity of thought can be expressed using the verb " to think" in the impersonal third person: saying not "I think" but "it thinks" as we say "it rains". There is thought in the universe – this is the constant from which we must set out everytime." (139), writes Calvino. In ' Household Tales', an introduction to the 1977 Picador edition of *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, Hoban writes:

> We make fiction because we are fiction. Because there was a time when "it lived" us into being. Because there was a time when something said, 'what if there are people?' A word perhaps, whispered in the undulant amorphous ear of the primordial soup: 'what if there are people hey? What if?'.
>
> It lived us into being and it lives us still. We make stories because we are story. The fabric of myths and folk tales is in us before birth. The action system of the universe are the origin of life and stories. The patterns of blue-green algae and the numinous wings of the Great Nebula in Orion and the runic scrawl of human chromosomes are stories. Begotten by noone knows what, stories beget people to live them. We are the offspring of immeasurable ideas (146).

Where Calvino differs from Hoban is in the supremacy that the reader has in Calvino's fiction. If the universe speaks through the writer, it can still be realized only through the action of the reader in submitting himself to the text. In *Riddley Walker* on the other hand it is the writer's duty to tune himself as perfectly as possible to the universe and reproduce it as faithfully as he can, but his responsibility stops there. Consequently there is no search for an ideal reader. Riddley writes, but he does not write for anyone. Nor does he say what he did with the manuscript. Before setting out at the end with his punch shows we do not see him handing over the manuscript to anyone.

The quotation from "Household Tales" also brings us to another of Hoban's themes - of Man himself as a fiction who is created and shaped as he goes along by the ideas and thoughts that come to him, especially by the stories and myths that are available to him and which he creates:

> Our primal "what if ?" is the twining of our fingers in the dark with those of unseen chance and whispering Dread who walk with us . . .
>
> In that uncertainty our stories go with us on roads of luck and death, of love and lostness. Burn all the books and there will be stories . . .
>
> But they will live us according to their need because we are a fiction, a continual forming and shaping (149).

The world of *Riddley Walker* is one in which all the books have been lost and yet have their stories - stories so powerful that they are used to suppress a people. Riddley is shaped and formed by the three myths of the How Fents people. When the black dog looks with his yellow eyes into Riddley's eyes and leads him away it immediately connects him to the myth of "why the dog won't show its eyes" and "1st knowing". When he starts showing the Punch Shows, "the Heart of the child" story is evoked in Punch's attempts to kill the baby. And finally the central myth is so powerful that in the end, Riddley has been changed into Eusa

himself. In Lissener's version after the discovery of the 1 big 1, "Eusa gone crookit from Bad Time"(71). Riddley after the discovery of gunpowder is metaphorically humped- carrying the guilt on his back as he realizes when he hears the kids' doggerel: "Dont go Riddley walkers track / Drop Johns ryding on his back" (214).

In Lissener's version Eusa after his discovery threatens to take to the road to warn everyone of his mistake. "Show me for a lessing and a learning. I l tel every 1 my story so theywl know that road 1 took wrong and what harm 1 done" (78). At the end of *Riddley Walker* we find Riddley Walker on the road with Punch, and his description of what there will be in his show, is also a summing up of what traditionally finds its way into an author's works:

> If youre a showman then whatever happens is took into your figgers and your fit up its took into your show. If you dont know whats happent sooner youwl hear of it later youwl hear your figgers tel of it 1 way of another. That boar kicking on the end of my spear hewl be in my shows I dont know how but hewl be there. The crow what callit "Fall, Fall, Fall'' and my smasht father that greyling morning at Widders Dump and that old leader with his yeller eyes and woar down teef. Granser's head glimmering in the twean lite and Goodparley sitting qwyet in amongst the black and nekkit aulders loppt off pink and red in

> the hart of his wud with the stoan in his head and the twean lite holding his breath and listening. In amongst it all the thot of may be I wer the aulder kincher. May be the idear of it been waiting all them years for me to come along and be it (201).

And the stories themselves change in the same way that each Eusa show is different because it is in the nature of them to be different. Early in the novel Lorna Elswint tells Riddley, "You hear diffrent things in all them way back storys but it dont make no diffrents. Mostly they aint strait storys anyhow. What they are is different ways of telling what happent" (19).

In the sense that *Riddley Walker* is about the nature of narrative itself - its sources and its methods - it is in the long line of self-conscious narcissistic narratives that is characteristic of the sixties and seventies.

In a review of *Riddley Walker* in the *Times Literary Supplement,* Jennifer Uglow condemns Hoban for the repetitious quality of the language used. Quoting a not atypical passage she writes, "There is a great deal of this and although a spiritual quest may involve writing with nuances of meaning, the repetitious circling becomes increasingly indulgent and out of control" (1221). In criticizing this aspect of the novel it seems to

me that Ms. Uglow misses one important aspect of the work. In this novel Hoban is probing an aspect of consciousness that most futuristic novels evade - that a complete change in our physical and cultural environment will result in a change of consciousness that will be reflected in the changes that the language undergoes and this changed language will again influence the way which characters perceive.

Riddley belongs to a primarily oral culture and as scholars are increasingly beginning to realize, there is a very clear difference in the language used in an oral culture and a culture where writing is dominant. Riddley's repetitions of cliches, epithets and formulae – ' hart of the wud', 'hart of the stoan' 'woom of her what has her woom in Cambry', to take just three examples from the passage that Ms. Uglow quotes disparagingly - are closer to the Homeric world than the twentieth century because in such a world:

> The entire oral noetic world or thought world relied upon the formulaic constitution of thought. In an oral cultural, knowledge once acquired had to be constantly repeated or it would be lost; fixed formulaic thought patterns were essential for wisdom and effective administration (Ong 24).

In Riddley's world, wisdom is passed from one generation to the next orally. In such a society, rhythmic discourse with repetitions, epithetic expressions and easily memorized jingles or verses have to be incessant because they are aids to memory. Otherwise the wisdom of each generation would be lost.

The language of *Riddley Walker* exhibits many of the characteristics of oral cultures pointed out by Walter J. Ong in Orality *and Literacy; The Technologizing of the Word.* Oral style is additive rather than subordinate. The sentences usually are a series of similar simple sentences rather than compound or complex ones connected by connecting pronouns. In a passage from the story of 'why the dog wont show its eyes' almost every sentence begins in a similar way:

> They were stressing ther self and straining . . .
>
> They said . . .
>
> They lost out of memberment . . .
>
> They just wantit daytime . . .
>
> They had the nos of the sun and moon . . .
>
> They said . . .
>
> They built the Power Ring . . .

They put in the 1 big 1 . . . (18- 19).

There are eight consecutive sentences that begin identically. In an oral culture, syntactic structures have to be simpler than the elaborate and complex sentences of a written discourse as otherwise it would be incomprehensible to the listeners.

Oral discourse is aggregative rather than analytic, therefore it carries "a load of epithets and other formulary baggage which high literacy rejects as cumbersome and tiresomely redundant because of its aggregative weight" (Ong 38). Without writing, to break up these expressions is risky as it may entail losing the thought itself. Therefore in *Riddley Walker* - we have the constant repetition of the phrases like "hart of the wud" and "hart of the stoan", that Ms. Uglow finds so indulgent. The redundancy that we find in *Riddley Walker* is therefore a characteristic of the oral society out of which Riddley comes. It is essential for him because repetition helps to keep the speaker and listener on the track.

Oral societies are conservative because in a culture without writing, "knowledge that is not repeated aloud soon vanishes [and therefore] oral societies must invest great energy in saying

over and over again what has been learned arduously over the ages" (Ong 41). In Riddley's world there is an unquestioning acceptance of the myths and rhymes and doggerels which have been handed down from generation and Riddley begins to tentatively question the established order in his society only after he has access to the written form of the central myth. In fact Jack Goodby in *Literacy in Traditional Societies* suggests that the residual orality of a chirographic culture can be calculated to a degree from the mnemonic load it leaves on the mind that is, from the amount of memorization the culture's educational procedures require (13- 14).

Another interesting fact that can be related to the orality of the How Fents community is the high content of violent incidents in the novel. The novel begins with Riddley killing a boar; three days later his father is killed in a gruesome accident; the conditions in which the Eusa people are kept are gory and revolting; Good parley is blinded and in the explosion that marks the discovery of gunpowder Granser's head lands upon a pole and his pounder goes through Goodparley's head. Now the violence of Riddley's society is of course evident. It is a primitive and harsh society and life is a long struggle as illustrated by the nature of their work – excavating old machinery for metal is a dangerous task and Riddley's father dies because of it – and the savage

beasts who have to be constantly held at bay. But what is striking in the narrative itself is the graphic nature in which these violent incidents are described. This as Ong points out is a characteristic of oral cultures. "Portrayal of gross physical violence, central to much oral epic and other oral genres and residual through much early literacy, gradually wanes or becomes peripheral in later literary narrative" (44).

The characterization in *Riddley Walker* exhibits the characteristics of narratives of oral societies. Interiority, analysis, complexity of motivation and psychological growth are usually associated with the modern novel. Characters of oral narratives are more flat to use E .M. Forster's term (46 – 54). In *Riddley Walker* the characters do not change and are sterotypical. Goodparley is ambitious and Orfing is conservative in the way Odysseus is clever and Nestor is wise.

The only exception to this is Riddley himself and the novel itself is an account of the growth of his consciousness. From an unquestioning acceptance of the traditions of his society, which reflects its present values rather than curiosity about the past he slowly becomes aware of how the traditions have changed reflecting the political ambitions of the controlling group. His inner growth is both cause and effect of his writing – his curiosity

about alternative stories or texts and his analysis of the political uses to which they have been put are characteristics of a chirographic or text based culture. It is of course a known fact that it is writing more than any other invention that has transformed human consciousness (Ong 78 – 116). *Riddley Walker* is an account of this transformation.

A Mode of Perception

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Chapter 5

A Mode of Perception

Russell Hoban writes in the introduction to his collection of essays *The Moment Under the Moment*:

> Reality is ungraspable. For convenience we use a limited reality consensus in which work can be done, transport arranged and essential services provided. The *real* reality is something else – only the strangeness of it can be taken in and that's what interests me; the strangeness of what the living and the dead are to one another; and the strangeness of ideas...that seem to have been with us from a long time before the stories of him happened (ix).

In *Pilgermann* the reality that Hoban tries to portray is the reality of the medieval pilgrim, the story being set during the crusades in which the Christian and Islamic civilizations clashed against each other with the Judaic one caught in between. And to portray this reality or "the moment under the moment" as Hoban prefers to call it, Hoban goes back to that great baffling painter whose vision is for many the definitive vision of the Medieval Age – Hieronymus Bosch.

Like the world of Bosch, the world of *Pilgermann* is less the recognizable one of the created scene than the unexplored domain of created landscapes. And like Bosch, Hoban insists on the strangeness of his fictional settings because he is fascinated by the possibilities of the imagination " In *Pilgermann* the scene shifts diametrically from (the) imagined future (of Riddley Walker) to (the) historical past, but the harrowing vision remains essentially unchanged." (Cannaroe1) It is a world in which a personified Death goes around, his bones looking as if they would clatter, sodomizing children on their way to the holy land; where gruesome violence is the order of the day and human heads are used as cannonballs; where the dead wander around, their headless bodies covered with maggots; where animals which have been popular with sodomites mince around and when rejected by a Jew cause the deaths of hundreds of Jews by letting loose pogroms. It is in short a strange, phantasmagoric and hallucinogenic world, reminiscent of the bizarre paintings of Bosch: "The art of the older masters in firmly rooted in the prosaic, substantial world of everyday experience, but Bosch confronts us with a world of dreams and nightmares in which forms seem to flicker and change before our eyes" (Bosing 7).

The indebtedness to Bosch is explicit. There are detailed considerations of three of Bosch's paintings "Christ crowned with thorns", "The Temptation of St. Anthony", and "The Haywagon".

And the narrator when he manifests himself sometimes does so as an owl painted by the master: "Bosch is above all the master of what is seen out of the corner of the mind, the essential reality behind the agreed an appearances of things. Sometimes I manifest myself as an owl painted by Bosch and in this way I fly through the skies of his paintings and observe what is happening" (46).

The reason why Pilgermann has to manifest himself as an owl is because he is no longer flesh and blood: "What my name was when I was walking around in the shape of a man I don't know; I simply can't remember. What I am now is waves and particles. I don't need to walk around, I just go" (1).

Both dead and still existing, both as waves as well as particles, the narrator exhibits a characteristic of Postmodernist writing – the conquest of the death frontier (McHale 230) Like Pilgermann, in John Hawke's *Travesty* , a dead narrator tells the story of his own death.

But the very condition of Pilgermann is part of the theme of the novel itself; an attempt to come to terms with the binary oppositions that classify and organize the objects, events and relations of the world. By bringing in an undecidable like Pilgermann, Hoban disrupts the oppositional logic which makes

sense of the consensual world. Pilgermann slips across both sides of binary oppositions, but doesn't fit into either. And therefore he dramatizes the failure of major oppositions like the life/death one. Cutting across categories Pilgermann is neither truly dead nor truly living and thus short-circuits the usual logic of distinction. Thus Hoban raises the Derridean spectre of undecidability – that the Western rationalist distinction of binary oppositions like life and death simply does not hold. But in his characteristic manner he goes beyond ordinary world oppositions to reach out to a unity that is for him at the heart of reality. This reconciliation like that in *Riddley Walker* is pursued in a number of ways. Whereas in *Riddley Walker* the dominant images were from the world of Atomic Physics and the splitting atom, the imagery in Pilgermann is naturally from the beliefs of Medieval Man; the great binary oppositions of Heaven and Hell, Eden and Gehinnom and Jesus and Judas. Yet the description of Pilgermann himself as waves and particles immediately connects him to late twentieth century thinking with its discovery of the unity behind the multiplicity of scientific phenomena.

The allusion to the dual nature of light is obvious. It was the discovery that light could be described as consisting of particles (concrete objects restricted in space), as well as waves (processes spread over space and time) that led to a revolution in twentieth century physics. It was to explain such phenomena

that Niels Bohr introduced the concept of complementarity. "He [Bohr] considered the particle picture and the wave picture as two complementary descriptions of the same reality, each of them being only partly correct and having a limited range of application" (Capra 145).

The transcendence of the fundamental opposition of existence and nonexistence is also a characteristic of atomic reality:

> We can never say that an atomic particle exists at a certain place, nor can we say that it does not exist. Being a probability pattern, the particle has tendencies to exist in various places and this manifests a strange kind of physical reality between existence and nonexistence. We cannot, therefore, describe the state of the particle in terms of fixed opposite concepts (Capra 158).

The condition of the narrator hero as one of existence as well as nonexistence, in the form of particles as well as waves is thus an important pointer to the major theme of the work - the transcending of opposites by a higher reality. The contemporary sensibility of the narrator is also made clear when he describes himself as "a microscopic chip in that vast circuitry in which are recorded all the Narrations and Permutations thus far"(102). Hoban's uniqueness as a writer is evident in the way he makes connections – connecting the past with the present, the medieval

with the postmodern, the scientific with the metaphysical, literary theory with physical fact.

The plot concerns the series of incidents that set off Pilgermann, a Jew in medieval Germany, on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and how he meets his end during the fall of Antioch at the hands of Bohemond and his subsequent transformation into waves and particles. But the bare outline can hardly convey the complex resonances of the narrative. As Joel Cannaroe points out his review in the *New York Time Review of Books*, it borrows from a number medieval narrative and artistic traditions like the pilgrim narrative, religious allegory and artists' descriptions of heaven and hell. It is a sophisticated novel of ideas in which Christian, Judaic and Islamic philosophy interact with each other and the apparent diversity and multiplicity of such beliefs are transcended by a philosophy that owes to medieval Gnosticism.

Although Gnostic philosophy is never explicitly mentioned in the novel, right from the beginning there are pointers in that direction. Proverbs 3:18 describes wisdom as a "a tree of life to those who lay hold of her". In Genesis, the Fall is brought about by the irresistible fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Pilgermann is umanned because he lay with wisdom, "the Tree of Life". Adam becomes mortal because of the fall.

Pilgermann's castration itself is a symbol of the mortality that castrates us all:

> All of us are castrated by mortality, we are unmanned, unwomanned, we are made nothing because all we have is this so little space of time with a blackness before and after it...How to live then in this little space in which we have a self and a name, this little space in which we are allowed to accumulate our tiny history of tiny days, this moment that is at once the first moment and the last moment, this moment that contains our universe and such space/time as is unwound in the working of it (200 - 201).

Like the fall of Adam, the fall is one into consciousness; the loss an essential one in order to gain understanding. Pilgermann realizes: "Now I understand why there must be a tree of knowledge in the garden of Eden it bears the fruit that cannot be resisted ... Life has no value, means nothing until we have paid for it with the sin of disobedience; only after that original sin does one's proper life begin" (31).

The irresistible fruit in the shape of the irresistible Sophia is seen as an essential part of God's plan, God's pattern so that man would reach understanding, a higher consciousness, for man was not meant to lead a vegetable even if idyllic existence in the Garden of Eden. To create an irresistible fruit and expect Eve

not to yearn for it, to create the irresistible Sophia and expect Pilgermann not to climb ladders for her could not have been part of God's plan. But the price demanded for such knowledge is high. "Life moves by exchanges; loss is the price of gain. Some pay with one thing, some with another ; whatever is most dear, that is my price," Jesus tells Pilgermann (25). And as Riddley discovers in the crypt of Canterbury Cathedral, the only keeping is a letting go. "The only wholeness is in the letting go, " Jesus tells him, "And I am the letting go" (20).

Although she does not pursue the line, Margaret Dipple points out that the thinking in the novel appears to be connected to the idea of Wisdom or Sophia in the Gnosticism of Valentius :

> Sophia appears in the thirteenth aeon. Her attempts to penetrate the abyss with knowledge caused chaos in the pleroma; as a result of her passion she was banished and became a formless existence outside of the pleroma where the present wise being of Pilgermann appears to reside" (180).

In the Valentinian myth, Sophia is the cause of the fall but wisdom in the form of Achamoth is also the cause of salvation, for Achamoth "having caused material creation, imbued it with a soul which would help it to obtain salvation and restoration in the original unity of the pleroma "(Mathews,156). The parallel with the idea of Christian womankind is also evident. Eve

caused the Fall of Man, but Mary, descendent of Eve bore Christ to redeem mankind. The Gnostic approach is very similar to Hoban's philosophy in all his books – the uncovering of the spiritual spark within each person.

It is during his pilgrimage to Jerusalem that Pilgermann finally comes to resolve his doubts in this Gnostic vision of life but from the beginning itself there is the sense of a covenant between him and God. The Covenant is of course the central feature of the Jewish faith and the circumcision to which all males are subjected a week after birth is the visible symbol of the covenant between God and the Jews. In Hebrew this is called "brit milah ", "Covenant of circumcision" usually shortened to "brit" or "Covenant". The original covenant was between God and Abraham, the patriarch. God asks of him his foreskin, the foreskin of the males of his future progeny and in return promises to make a great nation of him even though Sarah, his wife, is still barren and Abraham himself is ninety nine. And circumcision is not a sign in a purely external way like a tonsure:

> Abraham's penis – and the penises, the sexual potency, of his descendants – is what the covenant is about. God is demanding that Abram concede, symbolically, that his fertility is not his own to exercise without divine let or hindrance. A physical reduction in the literal superabundance of Abram's penis is a

> sign with an intrinsic relationship to what it signifies. (J. Miles 53).

The circumcision, in other words is a kind of castration – a sacrifice of ones fertility in return for a superabundance of the same. Pilgermann's castration thus comes as a brutal but traditional symbol of the covenant between him and God. His pilgrimage is also a quest in search of the meaning of this covenant, a meaning that he discovers only after he has become waves and particles. "I am only the waves and particles of such as I was, but I have a covenant with the Lord, the terms of it are simple: everything is required of me, forever" (19).

As Pilgermann lies on his back being castrated he doesn't scream because he wants to be brave. "How can I be brave, strong, a real man, a hero ? "(18). All of Hoban's protagonists are people who want to be heroes and who in the end become heroes in their own ways. Kleinzeit explicitly wants to be a hero and even offers a translation of his name as "hero". Riddley Walker's is a heroic quest in the classic pattern suggested by Joseph Campbell. In his own way Pilgermann's too is such a heroic quest – in fact, the quest of the Medieval period – a quest for Jerusalem. Because Pilgermann's is an explicitly spiritual quest, unlike Riddley's and because the quest is set in the Middle East, home to the three great monotheist religions of the world, during

a period of religious conflict, his is a journey that has a wider allusive framework than Riddley's and hence has far greater resonances.

The quest for Jerusalem is a quest for Christ because it is a stern, dynamic Christ who sends Pilgermann on this journey and he is constantly worried that he may miss Christ. "I become terribly, terribly afraid that I shall not be able to get to Jerusalem quickly enough, that no-one will get to Jerusalem quickly enough to keep Christ from going away"(44). The urge to go itself comes in the traditional Jewish way of a "Bath Kol" or a voice of God. "There's something required of me: what ? what should I do, where should I go ? 'Jerusalem ! thou Pilgrim Jew' "(32). This voice, coming to him after an intensely personal disaster and equally intensely personal revelation of Christ also links him with the Zeitgeist, the spirit of the times. "Now I understood why everyone was rushing to Jerusalem, now I knew why this was a time unique in history; this was the time when people everywhere had the same thought that I had just had" (33). In Hoban, this is of course a revelation of the unity at the heart of multiplicity, even fratricidal multiplicity, a revelation of the single Mind that seems to exist in the universe.

The journey to Antioch occasions the most Boschian segments of the novel, but they are also in the tradition of the

great pilgrimage narratives of medieval Europe and the fantastic travellers' tales of the period. The tax collector who was responsible for the killing of Jews and staining the cobbles of Pilgermann's town with their blood, in a fit of remorse had left for Jerusalem earlier. His face, which reminds Pilgermann of a face in Bosch's "Christ crowned with thorns" is identified by Pilgermann with Pontius Pilate. The man's face looks as if he is telling Christ, "I find no fault in you but this is how it must be; I wish it would be otherwise "(29) and looks forward to Pilgermann's meditation on evil and the role of Judas. During his journey he sees the decapitated body of the tax collector, covered with maggots killed by a roadside thug called Udo whom Pilgermann later kills in an encounter. His wife, the second Sophia that Pilgermann meets is busy boiling the tax collector's head in order to sell it to relic hungry churches as the head of Pontius Pilate.

Death is of course one of the great literary characters of Medieval narratives, his presence looming over representations of all life. Whether in prose or verse or painting, Death is a concrete character and so he is in *Pilgermann* too, an off- and- on mate during Pilgermann's long journey. But if his portrayal owes a lot to the medieval tradition of showing horror and disgust, it also is original in that death is shown as not having the resonances associated with traditional Christianity. The

physical portrayal is of course medieval – "Death on his horse, all luminous bones that look as if they would clatter"(44). His modus operandi is to 'take' his victims sexually, thus engendering their deaths inside them. Their "deaths" naturally grow within then and when fully grown are "born" leading to their deaths. Certainly the most gruesome scene in the novel, reminiscent of the wilder scenes in Bosch is the one in which Death and his 'cohort' 'take' a group of children on their way to the Holy Land singing with silvery voices:

> When they reached the children they pushed them down on to their hands and knees in the dusty road, mounted them like dogs and coupled with them, grunting in their ardour, screaming in their orgasms. The children crept forward slowly on their hands and knees, singing as they were violated (61).

It is a horrifyingly traditional, religious vision of life, thankful to God even when/especially when one is visited with the worst.

When Pilgermann tries to prevent a man from killing his bear because "he wouldn't show [him] any more honey trees"(57), it is Death who calls himself Bruder Pfortner (Brother Gate Keeper) who prevents him with an iron hand. And Death reveals himself to Pilgermann with a lipsmacking lasciviousness that reminds us that descriptions of death and everything that death does to the human body in all its sensuous and gruesome detail

was one of the common literary endeavours of medieval religious teaching:

> When I say "sleep with me!" nobody says no, Death says, kings and queens, I have them all, no inch of them is forbidden to me: nuns and popes, ah! There's good loving! I am the world's great lover, that's a simple fact though I say it myself. Well, there's no need for me to blow my own trumpet – you'll see when you sleep with me (57 – 58).

But Hoban connects the historical past with the eternal present, medieval theology with contemporary theory during this journey when Pilgermann debates the great questions of an all powerful God and the existence of binary opposites and comes to an understanding as to the fundamental interconnectedness of all creation.

The question of evil is concretized for Pilgermann in the characters of Pilate and Judas. Pilate had washed his hands off Christ and with the same hands had taken his own life. Judas had betrayed Christ and again with the same hands that received the thirty pieces of silver had taken his own life. Yet what if they had not acted so? What if Eve had not disobeyed God? What if Pilgermann had not mounted the ladder?

To understand the answers to these questions is to realize God's pattern and plan for man. It is to understand God's role in

everything and the interconnectedness of everything – that all contrarieties are complementarities and without these contrarieties the motion of the universe itself would come to a halt and there would only be stillness and silence:

> Now I see why there must be a tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden: it bears the fruit that cannot possibly be resisted; God did not make it resistible, it must be eaten so that a mystery will be perpetuated, the mystery of the gaining of loss.Before we eat of the fruit we have no knowledge of loss, we don't know that there is anything to lose ,nothing has any value (31).

Human failings, betrayals, disobedience are essential to maintain the universe: "The universe would come to a halt without the dynamic asymmetry of Adam and Eve's original sin ... While humankind exists, there can only be the rotation of God's impossible requirements and humankind's repeated failures" (72).

When Pilgermann asks the relic making Sophia why any church would want the head of Pontius Pilate, her answer is enlightening she says:

> How could they not want him? What kinds of relics have they got? They have got Christ's foreskin and Mary's afterbirth and three hairs from Joseph's arse but what about the man who made Christianity possible? What if Pilate hadn't washed his hands?

> What if he'd turned Jesus loose and let him go on preaching, what then hey? (50).

Only a long time later, after the fateful night at Antioch does Pilgermann understand:

> Only now, as these thoughts move among the waves and particles of me, do I perceive that every hand is the hand of God: hands doing good and hands doing evil, are not all His work? Think of the constant action of all the hands of the world, gathering and scattering, building and destroying, holding on and letting go. (30).

Pilgermann's most extended rumination on the nature of oppositions in the world is the meditation on the Christ story sculpted in stone in Naumburg Cathedral. Stones have always been central images in Hoban. In *Who's Who,* Hoban lists as one of his recreations, stones. The paradox of the inert stoniness of stone and all the whirling activity of atomic particles within them has always symbolized for Hoban, the paradoxes of the stillness in the dancing and the dancing in the stillness. In *Riddley Walker* stones were central symbols and it is standing in the midst of the stone trees of the crypt of Canterbury Cathedral that Riddley feels himself tuned to the power of the universe. In *Pilgermann,* the equivalent section is when Pilgermann ponders over the sculpted scenes and understands why it is in stone that all the nuances of Christ's actions are brought out best. He

doesn't even bother to discuss the three scenes that are carved in wood.

It is the scene of the last supper that is central to Pilgermann's thinking for it is the scene that illustrates the moment of the Eucharist when Christ says in the Gospel of Mark "Take Ye! This is the body of me. " Or it could be the moment when Christ says in the Gospel of John that he would be betrayed by the one to whom He would dip and give the morsel. John goes on to say, " After the morsel then entered unto that one Satan".

This is a poignant scene for Pilgermann for he sees it as a double Eucharist. "Take Ye! This is the body of me" and "...after the morsel then entered into that one Satan ". After this Judas has no chance. "He eats the bread of Christ as would a dog given a crust by his master, and with the bread comes Satan " (71). What are we but creatures of the God who made us what we are, asks Pilgermann:

> How was Judas not to betray Jesus after Satan had entered him in that double Eucharist? Jesus was the one who could withstand Satan, he was the strong me; he required of Judas that betrayal that Judas, powerless to do otherwise, already a dead man and Satan entered, enacted as his necessary part of the story (71).

All parts are necessary to maintain the spin of the universe. In the next scene Caiaphas acting for the good of his people, ensures their lasting infamy. In the third scene, Judas betrays Christ with a kiss, a betrayal that Christ must have, that Christ demands of Judas. In the last scene that Pilgermann scans Peter making one of his three denials. This is something that agitates Pilgermann greatly:

> As if Christ is telling us: Look at this mortal lump, this thrice denier; yet will he be my rock. Because mortal lumps are all humanity can offer, and if rocks are needed these must suffice. Having only mortal lumps to choose from Christ will use this one for a betrayer, that one for a rock (75).

So even as Hoban constructs the opposition of good and evil, betrayed and betrayer, authority and disobedience, God and Eve, Jesus and Judas, Jehovah and Jew, Eden and Gehinnom, he also transcends these binary oppositions in a vision that does not privilege one term but sees the undecidability as a positive alternation of inseparable parts of the whole. It is this linking of even such a contemporary theory as deconstruction / transcendence of this binary opposition that gives Hoban a unique voice in contemporary literature. For Pilgermann, all that mankind can know is that there must be betrayal: "Is not life betrayed by death? Is not up betrayed by down? Is not spacetime betrayed by the recurrent contraction to a singularity

from which it must burst anew? The Jesusness of Jesus cannot live without the Caiaphasness of Caiaphas, the Pilateness of Pilate" (73).

All we can do is, like Judas, do that for which we are here: "Do it that the cosmos may uncoil its onward energy, that the wheel may go on turning, night and day, plus and minus, Eden and gehinnam, matter and antimatter, Jesus and Judas "(74). And who can represent man? "Is it Jesus the betrayed, the crucified, or is it is Judas the betrayer and his own hangman? Or is it the binary entity of Jesus/Judas alternating and inseparable"(74). Why must Pilgermann like all mankind remain a pilgrim, forever on the road to an unredeemed dualistic future? "This road is the treadmill on which we walk day into night and night into day, Eden into Gehinnom into Eden, Jesus into Judas into Jesus"(74).

Hoban manages to raise his treatment of such binary polarities above the level of mere vague mysticism by the extent of his allusive range. His discussions of the Jesus/Judas as an alternating binary entity and his allusions to matter and antimatter, the regular contractions of the universe to a singularity (a black hole to the ordinary layman) serves to emphasize how up- to-date his treatment of reality is from a scientific point of view. Pilgermann's realization that good and

evil, pleasure and pain, loss and gain, life and death, Jesus and Judas are not absolute qualities belonging to opposing categories, but two alternating sides of the same reality and that all opposites are thus a unity is paralleled by the reality of the universe which he as waves and particles in the twentieth century is aware:

> Examples of the unification of opposite concepts in modern physics can be found at the subatomic level where particles are both destructible and indestructible; where matter is both continuous and discontinuous and force and matter are but different aspects of the same phenomenon. In all these examples ... it turns out that the framework of opposite concepts, derived from our everyday experience is too narrow for the world of subatomic particles (Capra 134).

The illusion of opposites is paralleled in the story through paired characters who appear radically different but are merely two sides of a greater reality. The oppressive tax-collector an official of some kind, something of authority, a man of exactions and Sophia with a face of mercy and sweet goodness are one such pair:

> That this man should have the management of such a woman is absolutely scientific in its manifestation of that asymmetry without which there would be, no motion in the Universe. Yes, such a coupling imparts spin to the cosmos, it creates action, it utterly negates stasis (14).

The Christian captain of the vessel, which Pilgermann takes from Genoa to go to Jaffa and the Muslim pirate who boards their ship and to whom the captain unscrupulously sells the pilgrims, are again both aspects of the same action. The pirate is tall and lean, the captain short and fat, "together they were obviously spin maintainers"(104).

The Imam and the Rabbi of Antioch are again paired against Pilgermann and Bembel Rudzuk. Both Rudzuk and Pilgermann are unorthodox. Although a devout Muslim, Rudzuk is strongly individual and his plan of creating the pattern of tiles is not received well by the Imam. "God for me is beyond naming", Pilgermann had said and refused to join the congregation at Antioch, citing his mutilation as reason. The Imam is tall and lean, the Rabbi short and stocky; the Imam has black eyes and a white beard, the Rabbi blue eyes and a red beard, "but their differences disappeared in the unanimity of their disapproval" (141). Rudzuk himself is contrasted with Pilgermann. Pilgermann is the Jew, traditionally scholarly, educated in medicine at Salerno, not athletic and now unmanned. Bembel Rudzuk although in his sixties is still strong and vigorous. He is a dashing horseman and expert with bow and sword (160).

Pilgermann is also contrasted with Bohemond who is everything that Pilgermann is not. The epitome of maleness he is

descended from Eohippus, the dawn horse. He can fully armed, "leap from the ground to his horse's back; ...no other man can wield with two hands the sword he wields with one; ...he requires three women nightly to keep him tranquil; ...he is a serpent in cunning, a thunderbolt in attack ...simply not to be withstood" (196). But his quest at Antioch, unlike that of Pilgermann is a quest for the tangible: "Questing on the track of gold and fame and power, questing for the tangible, the visible, questing for that which cannot be mistaken, that which can be held in the strong hand, that which can be held between strong things as a horse is gripped" (197).

Towards the end Bohemond is seen not only as an enemy but as a messenger of God, both as Eljah and as Messiah . Bohemond is also contrasted with Firouz the Christian convert who betrays Antioch. If Bohemond is the quintessential warrior who can never be turned away from his objective, Firouz is the 'turning' kind of man symbolized by his way of half turning as he walked; "a half turn this way, a half turn that way" (138). After his conversion to Islam he oppresses Jews and Christians more than other Muslims. Later with Bohemond at the gates it is he who turns traitor to Antioch. Yet by the end of the novel the reader is aware of how all are inevitable parts of the pattern of space-time that we call the Crusades or Antioch, so that for all its violence, its bloody and gruesome events, its betrayals, this is a

novel in which there are no villains, no heroes, only characters who do what they have to do. And therefore paradoxically, Antioch is the space-time of war as well as peace. For since the acceptance of reality is beyond all pairs of opposites, it also includes and transcends the opposition of war and peace.

The pattern falls into place literally and figuratively in Antioch. Sold into slavery, Pilgermann is bought by a philosophically inclined businessman named Bembel Rudzuk. In one of the numerous discussions of art in the novel Pilgermann discusses Vermeer's "Head of a Young Girl" and describes Vermeer as seeing everything with an eye that is in love with seeing (97). Bembel Rudzuk has such eyes:

> To me everything is extraordinary and nothing is. Aeschylus was killed when he was hit on the head by a tortoise dropped by an eagle but that's not extraordinary when you consider that he was sitting directly below the eagle when it dropped the tortoise from a considerable height. On the other hand, that there was Aeschylus, that to me is extraordinary that the world appeared in his eyes, that the world lived in him like a light in a lantern, that there are continually new lanterns for the world to live in, that you and I are two of them, yes, that to me is extraordinary (107).

He is interested in alchemy but his "alchemy seeks no yellow metal; it is a continual offering to the unity at the heart of the multiplicity" (109).

The character of a cultivated, sophisticated person like Bembel Rudzuk reminds us that the Middle Ages were a period of great intellectual vitality, "of impassioned dialogue among civilizations, Roman heritage and Christian, Eastern elements, a time of journeys and encounters...In short this [was] where modern western man came to maturity." (Eco, Reflections 15). This is of course one reason why the Medieval Age is the period that is being "increasingly seen as Postmodern man's starting point" (Dipple, 170). Eco himself has set his most famous novel *The Name of the Rose* in a medieval monastery and his hero, William of Baskerville bears many resemblances to Bembel Rudzuk, not the least being their very contemporary sensibilities while fitting with ease into the milieu of which they are part.

Bembel Rudzuk buys Pilgermann because he wants a Jew's help in creating a tiled pattern in a large plot of ground that he has bought and levelled and through which he hopes he will understand something about the nature of reality. "This idea came into my mind. An idea is an eye given by God for the seeing of God"(115). To Rudzuk patterns are contiguous with infinity. "Once the mode of repetition is established the thing goes on for ever. It is apparently stopped by its border but in actuality it never stops" (113). The pattern that he builds will partake of the

nature of reality itself because "the air all around us, the earth we stand on, the very particles of our being are continually active with an unimaginable multiplicity of patterns, all of them contiguous with infinity"(114).

On his way to Genoa, Pilgermann had made the discovery that all Hoban heroes make – that everything is interconnected. "Ah ! now as I walk I know that there is no separateness in the world, I know that the souls of things and the souls of people are inextricably commingled"(89) but this knowledge is concretized for him in the pattern that he constructs for Rudzuk. The pattern is for them a connection to infinity, to all the patterns that make up the fabric, of reality. Rudzuk says:

> The patterns traversing one place, intersect the patterns traversing another place and by this webbing of pattern all places are connected. Wherever you are at this moment you are connected with all places where you have been, all places where you will ever be, and all places where you never have been and never will be (114).

As the pattern appears tile by tile – an elaborate affair with 36 red, black or tawny triangles of various shapes constituting each unit – something of the nature of the universe is revealed through the familiar mystical paradoxes of movement in stillness and unity in multiplicity. "However, one looked at the pattern

there could be no doubt that the stillness had became motion but I hadn't noticed at what point it had happened", says Pilgermann (123). The apparently changing patterns echo the images that he had earlier seen amidst the cobbles around the synagogue in his hometown, the cobbles that are stained by the blood of the Jews after the pogrom that followed his seduction of Sophia – twisting serpents, shifting pyramids, and the face of a lion that comes and goes, thus connecting the pattern with all the other patterns the world (21). Seeing the face of a lion that came and went Pilgermann names it 'The Hidden Lion'. Later Tower Gate, the brick maker who makes the tiles names it the 'Willing Virgin' because "the next time you look there's something different about it" (128). The pattern thus reveals the essential unity of another pair of opposites – the lion and the virgin. The Lion lies hidden in the virgin, the virgin and the lion are ultimately like victim and victimizer the same.

This pattern of the Lion and the virgin, is central to the novel in much the same way that the legend of St. Eustace was to *Riddley Walker*. If the inspiration for *Riddley Walker* was a visit to Canterbury Cathedral of *The Legend of Saint Eustace*, the genesis of *Pilgermann* lay in a visit to the twelfth century stronghold of Montfort in Galilee:

> The look of the stars burning and flickering over Montfort, those three stars between the virgin and the Lion with their upward

> swing like the curve of a scythe, the stare into the darkness, the hooded eagleness of the stronghold high over the gorge, the paling into dawn of its gathered fount and power precipitated Pilgermann into his time and place... (ix).

On the night that he mounts the ladder Pilgermann sees the "three stars burning between the Virgin and the Lion, they are like a gesture, a Jewish gesture, the hand flung up, fingers spread" (15). When he leaves the town in the long coarse woollen tunic, woollen hose and stout boots of a pilgrim he looks up at "that grouping of the lower stars of the virgin and those three stars between the Virgin and Lion, that gesture like a hand flung up" (41). In each case it leads him on to his destiny. In his present state as he tries to recall memories, going from incident to incident, it is "like the line connecting the dots that make the constellation of the Virgin and the Lion on the star charts" (99).

As he sails towards Suwaydiyya en route to Antioch with Rudzuk, he looks up to see whether the Virgin and the Lion are there but they aren't (110) and in Antioch he finds that he has to create his own Virgin and Lion. Later in Antioch looking forward to its fall and thinking of his past, he sees those three stars creating the Jewish gesture of the up flung hand, showing part of his destiny and later facing Bohemond among the last sights that he sees is the Virgin and the Lion.

The unity of the Virgin and the Lion stands for the unity of all the other binary opposites in the novel. The lion is a favourite symbol of Hoban (his favourite adjective is tawny or lion coloured) and Antioch itself is described in terms of a lion. "Everything in that land was tawny either over or under whatever colour else it had. A lion coloured land" (111). But in *Pilgermann* the lion is specifically identified with Christ himself. The time Christ reveals Himself, Pilgermann sees Jesus as "the great dead Lion of the world and in his mouth [is] the live black body of Christ Radiant" (23). Christ also appears to him with the eyes of a lion (20). In keeping with the Gnostic thought that pervades the book, the unity of the lion and the virgin could point to various Gnostic myths of the unity of Christ as Logos and the Virgin as Sophia. St. Paul insists in I Corinthians 1: 23, 25 that he is preaching "a Christ who is the power and the Sophia of God".

The pattern meanwhile takes on a life of its own, interconnecting with other patterns of life in Antioch. Children come to play there, stalls are set up there by merchants and the pattern becomes a microcosm of the world itself (157-158). Once there rises up "from the motion and consciousness of the pattern an apparition of Jerusalem, a phantom of place unseen" (150).

Later when the governor Yaghisiyan takes a brutal revenge on the Christians of Antioch for a surprise assault on the Turks by the Franks and beheads a hundred of them on the pattern, their blood and massacre too become part of the pattern (172).

The pattern, incorporating Islamic pattern making, and the six pointed star of David takes on characteristics of the Jungian Mandala – symbol of a new synthesis, a conjunction of virtuality and actuality, finiteness and infinity – a symbolic representation of the archetype of God (Storr 102).

It is contemplating the pattern that Pilgermann becomes reconciled to never reaching the physical Jerusalem. On his way to Jerusalem, the little boy who had just been sodomized by Death tells him an important truth:

> Looking at me out of his eyes I see the lion – eyes of Christ and I am frightened. I hold my head because I know that when he speaks his voice will be a woodwind voice that comes from inside my head and resonates there. Jerusalem will be wherever we are when we come to the end (64).

For the true Jerusalem is not the Jerusalem of bricks and mortar and streets and domes. It is not even the physical vision that he has when observing the tiled pattern. For centuries Jews have promised themselves that they would never forget

Jerusalem but, for Pilgermann , what is Jerusalem but the seeable and the knowable? The quest for such a Jerusalem is no different from the quest of Bohemond, the quest for something that can be held between the thighs. What Pilgermann understands is that "It is the Jerusalem of the heart that must not be forgotten because in the Jerusalem of the heart is the heart of the mystery where lives the idea of the unknowable that is God" (94-95).It is not a complete understanding:

> I have understood so little in my lifetime. Now in the centuries of my death time I am just beginning to understand a little more but my consciousness is not continuous , I am only a mode of perception irregularly used by strangers. Perhaps there will never be the possibility for me to understand what Christ is .... I try to grasp the essence of Him but I grasp only the fading wake of his passage (206-207).

His understanding of Christ, which is also an understanding and acceptance of the nature of the universe demands a change in his way of thinking – a recognition of God no longer as He but as It. And this understanding comes as he watches the pattern:

> I had begun my pilgrimage wanting to save the many mysterious, unseen, fragile temples of the world so that Christ would not leave us as God had done when he ceased to be He. Now as I thought about it I found that Christ as a limited identity had already departed from my perception and been absorbed into

> the manifold idea of himself. And what for me had been Jerusalem was equally to be found wherever I joined the motion of the hidden lion (163).

It is a recognition of the multiplicity of the world as the handiwork of God:

> That this headless stump with the absent face of Pontius Pilate should be writhing with maggots under the freshly turned earth while each perfectly formed drop of dew shines on the powerful strands of the spider's web and the spider itself a percipient witness and the oak leaves tremble in awareness of the morning air – all this is as the hand of God upon my eyes (53).

And this recognition occasions a panegyric to God that immediately recalls Hamlets' homage to man and the difference in perception between the two is the difference between Medieval Man and Renaissance Man. Both see the variety, the diversity, the magnificence and the mystery of the world around; the medieval Jew attributes it to the glory of God, The Renaissance Prince to the wonder of Man:

> What style God has! What a truly godlike extravagance, to burst out all at once with a universe in which everything is going at once and humankind is let to run with nothing to stop it from doing anything at all. And to make this running loose creature with a mind that knows what it is doing and a soul in which Hell burns always and Heaven is grasped so rarely and so briefly that

> it lives in us as a continual yearning for what can never be held into, for what must always be lost – what invention (174).

If it is through art – the Mandala like pattern that he and Rudzuk have created – that Pilgermann glimpses infinity, it is again through art that he experiences eternity. Eternity or the condition of 'total Now' as Pilgermann prefers to call it is like that central area in Bosch's "Temptation of St. Anthony" where day meets night:

> The illumination is like that of a twentieth – century sports stadium in which a night game is being played: only there does one see light of such preternatural brilliance as that through which the creature (is it an angel or a devil ?) with a ladder flies. Bosch could have seen such a light and shadow only in a flash of lightning. But the light in this picture, this light between the night on the left and the day on the right, is not the flash that is gone in a fraction of a moment, it is lightning sustained and steady. This shows Bosch's virtuality as well as his virtuosity: I have flown beside that creature with the ladder (always uncertain as to its allegiance; it has a tail but I cannot be sure it's a devil) and I can testify that Bosch experienced that sky by a quantum jumping to the strange brilliance of total Now (47).

Pilgermann experiences this condition for the first time when he sees the headless, naked body of the tax collector in that strange unearthly light. Sometimes as "crystalline vibrations of the purple blue " But he recognizes both as the total Now, "that

moment without beginning or end in which all other moments are contained" (47). It is an experience of eternity and eternity as we know is not an endless linear succession of moments. It is a transcending of linear time to experience what mystics call the Eternal Now:

> In this spiritual world there are no time decisions such as the past, present and future; for they have contracted themselves into a single moment of the present where life quivers in its true sense....The past and the future are both rolled up in this present moment of illumination, and this present moment is not something standing still with all its contents, for it ceaselessly moves on (Suzuki, Introduction 148-149).

Pilgermann's view of God and creation as not historical but one that goes on without beginning or end, as one that is not of yesterday or today or tomorrow, but one that comes out of timelessness is certainly unorthodox for his times but it is part of a definite tradition most exemplified in the teachings of the medieval philosopher Meister Eckhart:

> A day whether six or seven ago, or more than six thousand years ago, is just as near to the present as yesterday. Why ? Because all time is contained in the present Now-moment....In her natural day the soul knows all things above time and place: nothing is far or near. And this is why I say, this day all things are of equal rank. To talk about the world as being made of God tomorrow, yesterday would be talking nonsense. God makes the

> world and all things in this present now. Time gone a thousand years ago is now as present and as near to God as this very instant (qtd in Suzuki, Mysticism, 12).

It is this that the headless body of the tax collector explains to Pilgermann in the presence of his growing Death:

> You must know in your heart, as I knew in my heart while I was alive, that the Day of Judgement is the only day there is. In our mortal life we play at dividing the everlasting day into many tiny days and we say, "Tomorrow I shall perhaps do better". But there is only this one day in which we live our whole lives and from which we fade as consciousness fades (89).

It is this Now that he experiences in the light of the day as he sails to Suwaydiyya with Bembel Rudzuk (109). It is the dread of this Now that he experiences as he sees Mt. Silpius towering over Antioch in that same way that Mt. Sinai might have towered over Moses (112). It is this Now that he experiences when he understands that the crucifixion of Christ, along with the guilt of the Jews was all part of the present: "And who should know better than I that A.D.30 is along with everything else, the present moment. Its all here and now, you can choose whatever line you like to follow through the space that is called time. Virtualities and actualities both" (42).

The experience of space and time as part of one continuum is an experience of this reality. Again and again Pilgermann

refers to the passing of "what is called time" sometimes he uses time and space interchangeably: "sometimes I don't know anything at all for large spaces, sometimes I know many things all in the same place" (38). This treatment of time and space as linked to states of consciousness is again a feature of mystic knowledge. Before Antioch, Pilgermann like other laymen was aware only of the space of his town and the passage of time as 1096 A.D into 1098 A.D. His growing awareness of space and time as a function of his consciousness and the way they interpenetrate each other are linked to his intuitions of moments of Total Now and the glimpses of infinity that he has from the pattern.

Experiences of Eternity, infinity and the mind constructed nature of space and time are all pointers towards the condition of true Being and therefore the truly transfiguring moment is that moment offstage when the waves and particles of Pilgermann's consciousness become part of the waves and particles of the universe. In an interview with Edward Myers for *The Literary Review* Hoban said:

> While writing *Pilgermann* I was very much aware of what Schrodinger says – that there really is just one mind, and that in that mind the time is always Now I have felt that way. I do feel as if there is only one single universal consciousness and we are all receptors of it; and I do feel as if the time is always.

> Now...Everything in *Pilgermann* had to do with ideas of what it is to be a human particle of the universal consciousness (12).

All of Hoban's characters in varying degrees have been receptors of the universal transmission, but Pilgermann is an extreme literalization of Hoban's philosophy. In the same way that subatomic particles have a tendency to exist rather than an actual existence in a particular shape at a particular place, Pilgermann's existential situation is ambiguous: "And what is this I that speaks now? Only a fiction, a name of convenience, a poste-restante for whatever addresses itself to the persistence of memory and the place of idea; there is no Pilgermann distinct from anything else; why should there be?" (69).

It is a position from which all conventional answers to the great problems of existence seem horribly inadequate:

> From where I am now I see the universe isotropicallly receding in all directions: I am, equally with all other waves and particles its centre. From that centre I speak as I find and I find that I have questions for which neither the Gospels nor the Holy scripture offer answers. Theologians and fathers of the church cannot confound me, they have no firmer ground on which to stand than I (14).

But it is a position from which the essential unity of everything is evident:

> How difficult it is to speak of any single thing – one takes notice of a stone at the foot of a mountain, steps back to look at the mountain, walks for enough to see the top of it, climbs another mountain to see the plain beyond the first one and little by little widening the view sees from a very long way off our little cloud-wreathed planet swimming in the sea of space, and it is only one thing after all (93-94).

That the theme of the novel is universal connections and that how an individual may become part of the wider pattern is through a raising of consciousness are emphasized by the epigraphs to the novel especially the one from the Quran that reads "Nay, but man doth/ Transgress all bounds/In that he looketh / upon himself as self sufficient " and the one from Luke that says "behold for the kingdom of God within you is" (7). It entails a realization that "not only is every she-camel, the she-camel of God, but that every other animal, and all of us as well, we are all creatures of God" (136). It entails a recognition of the fact that if God is everywhere then "every word is the word of God, Yaghi-Siyan's word as well as Mohammed's " (179).

And it is therefore that this Jew, defending a Muslim fortress from an invading Christian army decides that he would never again "be a member of any congregation other than the vast and erring one called the human race" (135). And it is this understanding that gives him the maturity to face his death in

Antioch with equanimity. His ambition to go to the city of Jerusalem remains unfulfilled but as Rudzuk tells him: "There is Jerusalem, and whatever is required of you is required; but in this present moment is Antioch and you are here to do what will be done by you here" (112). In a vision of the fall of Jerusalem in 1099 granted to him just before his death in 1098 he sees Sophia dead in the city with his two year old son alive amid the carnage. It is the one moment when he falters, but just as Death had earlier prevented him from saving the bear, he is now prevented from harming his now maturing death. With this acceptance of the natural cycle of birth, maturity and death he is ready – the readiness is all.

It is an acceptance that even violence and pain and betrayal are part of the pattern without which the universe couldn't exist. "I was able to see in the systole and diastole of the siege of Antioch the reciprocal action of that asymmetry without which there would be only stillness and silence" (167). Before he set out for Jerusalem, Christ had told him, "I am the energy that will not be still. I am a movement and a rest but at the same time I am all movement and no rest and you will have no rest but in the constant motion of me" (26). In Antioch this unmanned Jew, cut off from his generations understands the meaning of Christ. "Better than sons and daughters to be with the stillness that is

always becoming motion...And in being with this stillness – into – motion there is a continuity that is not cut off " (113).

It is a taking part in the pattern in the way stones do. Stones do not have an enemy but during war the stones of one side become missiles, the stones of the other a stronghold, "They do what is required of them but in their hardness they retain their one essential fact: they know that they are all one " (94). To be one with the stone as Christ is in Naumburg Cathedral is to exist as true Being.

Once one's role in the pattern is realized, death can be welcomed, for it is the doorway to a transfiguration – to become part of a greater consciousness. And therefore Pilgermann looks at his now grownup death with feelings of warmth and tenderness ready "to welcome it as one welcomes the stranger to whom one must always show hospitality "(173). Bohemond now can be welcomed not as a bringer of death but as a bringer of Jerusalem for now that he is ready Jerusalem will be wherever the end comes:

> One must find connexions, must find combination that he is part of. By learning to recognize Elijah one learns to recognize the Messiah.... and I know that in this part of the space called time Bohemond is Elijah and for the taking of Antioch will be the Messiah and Jerusalem both. (124).

When the end finally comes at the hands of Bohemond, he finally becomes part of the great cycle of natural life, for, in a circular ending that connects to the beginning, what he finally sees in the very last lines of the narrative is "that drifting meditation of storks that [he had] known from [his] childhood, each year returning in their seasons to their wanted place " (236). One is immediately taken back to the very first scene where Pilgermann returns from his tryst with Sophia via Keinjudenstrasse:

> See me , the Jew fresh from the attainment of wisdom, the Jew returning with the dawn of the Ninth of Av. See me as a bird might see me, as might that stork that slowly flops into way over the huddled roofs and chimneys, over the narrow twisting streets of morning. What might the storks see looking down? (17).

What the storks obviously see, thus connecting the narrative with the first epigraph from the old Testament, is the great pattern of life itself – the disobedience and Fall, the passage out of bondage and years of wandering, the coming to maturity under the shadow of a great mountain and the receiving of the Law there, the coming of a forerunner and the attaining of salvation through the actions of a Messiah.

As in *Riddley Walker*, in *Pilgermann* too a quest that is spiritual in nature can also be read as an artist's quest to make

sense through narrative. Without ever losing sight of the 'real' world which, to Hoban, is a strange and bizarre place half created by ourselves, he also creates metafictional narratives, fictions exploring the nature of fictions.

Hoban's fictions reflect some of the most thought provoking theories of fiction of our times, but they do so with a deep sense of the sacral, a feeling that ultimately is spiritual in nature. *Klenzeit* reflected theories of the deconstructability of all constructs and most of his novels are illustrations of semiotic theories in the way protagonists try to read signs and make sense of the world around them. The ultimate end of all Hoban's protagonists is to make the right connections and to discover that everything is meaningfully related, that the true nature and importance of things do not lie in the things themselves but in the way they are related or connected. In that sense Hoban may be said to be a structuralist. *Pilgermann* because of its concerns with the nature of binary oppositions breathes the spirit of structuralism. At its simplest structuralism believes:

> The nature of every element in a given situation has no significance by itself, and in fact is determined by its relationship to all other elements involved in that situation. In short the full significance of any entity or experience cannot be perceived unless and until it is integrated into the structure of which it forms a part (Hawkes 18).

Basic to structuralism is the idea of a pattern of paired functional differences, binary opposites as they are called. "There are grounds for recognizing in the capacity for the creation and perception of binary or paired 'opposites' ....a fundamental and characteristic operation of the human mind" (Hawkes 24). One way in which we structure reality is through myth. Myths have their origin in human experience and are the results of man's attempt to impose a shape on it. According to structuralist anthropologist Levi-Strauss myths are not merely reflective of man's mind but formative too. His aim he says is not to show how men think in myths but "how myths think in men" (Hawkes 41).

In his own unique way, Hoban reflects all these positions. Man's need to construct his own reality is emphasized by the urgency with which various Jerusalems are created by Pilgermann. Setting out for the actual, historical city that was pillaged by the crusaders, Pilgermann is stuck in Antioch and knows he will never reach the city. He creates out of the tiled pattern a Jerusalem of the mind—but which he realizes is a Jerusalem of his ignorance, a Jerusalem of the streets and buildings and domes that he has seen in pictures (150). Then he creates a Jerusalem of the heart and finally when he falls at the hands of Bohemond he knows that Antioch is his Jerusalem. "One assumes that the world simply is and is and is, but it isn't,"

he says, "it is like music that we hear a moment at a time and put together in our heads" (99). It is this structure making capacity of the mind that Rudzuk tells him about when he explains the significance of the tiled pattern.

Bembel Rudzuk suggests that the motion that we see is the motion of the unseen:

> This power that we see is the power of the unseen, and it is both conscious power and the power of consciousness. Here already are two of my questions answered: motion is in the pattern from the very beginning, because the consciousness is there before the pattern, the pattern is only a kind of window for the consciousness to look out of. Although serpents, pyramids and lions seem to appear in the pattern, that is only because the human mind will make images out of anything: the pattern is in actuality abstract, it represents nothing and asserts no images (146).

These images, these structures that our minds build are as much a function of the mind as they are of the material things on which the mind acts. "The fabric of the world being made as much of dreams and visions as it is of earth and stone, these virtual dreams of Unguent and these actual visions of Bosch centuries after my time are as real as anything else in my pilgrimage," says Pilgermann (55).

Because of the allegorical characteristics of the novel, the novel itself illustrates how narrative proceeds by paired opposites of characters. In the way Pilgermann responds to the Christ story sculpted in stone in Naumburg Cathedral, Hoban gives us an insight into how the human mind works and thus is a good example of how structuralism works.

Structuralist theorists have broken down narratives to their basic units of characters and functions. A.J. Propp's reduction of all narratives to thirty one functions spread over seven spheres of action corresponding to seven performers is the most well known but A.J. Greimas has reduced these to three sets of binary oppositions (Subject Vs Object, Sender Vs Receiver, Helper Vs Opponent). Greimas suggests that the fundamental notion of binary opposition is the basic human conceptual mode :

> A narrative sequence embodies this mode by the employment of two actants whose relationship must be either oppositional or its reverse; and on the surface level this relationship will therefore generate fundamental action of disjunction and conjunction, separation and union, struggle and reconciliation etc. (Hawkes 90).

In sculpture where action has to be reduced to the most fundamental level with no details of narrative (except the sequence of the narrative itself) this opposition can be seen at its

starkest. In 'the Last Supper', Jesus is seen giving the morsel of bread to Judas, the very moment that according to John, Satan entered him. In the next scene Caiaphas is seen giving Judas the thirty pieces of silver. In the following relief Judas kisses Jesus, the moment when according to Mathew, Jesus says, "Comrade, do than on what thou are here". In the fourth scene Peter is turning away from the high Priest's maidservant as she questions him. He is making one of his three denials. The final scene that Pilgermann contemplates shows Jesus before Pilate and Pilate washing his hands off Jesus.

In each case, the opposition is stark – betrayed and betrayer, guilt and innocence. Pilgermann's reading of the sculptures is also an illustration of Barthes' theory of how we bring codes to bear on our reading of texts. Pilgermann's reading of the sculptures in the light of his formidable knowledge of the Bible is typical of Hoban.

While thus illustrating structuralist positions Hoban characteristically goes beyond them. The binary opposition that he sees illustrated in Naumburg Cathedral, The Jesusness of Jesus and the Judasness of Judas that cannot live without each other (73) is a mirror of the oppositions that maintain the spin of the universe. "It is in the rotation of Eden and Gehinnom that we feel the cosmic dance that is the motion of the universe" (68).

Whereas structuralists see oppositions as the only way in which the human mind can make sense of things, Hoban sees them as evidence of the innate unity at the heart of things – that all opposites are part of the same reality which couldn't happen if the oppositions were not there.

The mythical pattern is as pervasive in *Pilgermann* as it was in *Riddley Walker*. Most of Hoban's novels are parables of the Fall of Man and are about the journey towards a new paradise, but it is only in *Riddley Walker* and *Pilgermann* that explicit myths of the Fall are used to structure the narrative. If the controlling myths in *Riddley Walker* are those of "the Dog that won't show its Eyes" and "the Eusa story", *Pilgermann* is dominated by the Biblical story of the Fall of Man and Man's quest for redemption and the history of the Jews and their quest for the Promised Land. As in the Bible story, Pilgermann falls because he covets knowledge or wisdom (Sophia) and this fall is a fall into knowledge – even if it is only a knowledge of loss. Knowledge in both Christian as well as Gnostic Fall narratives is a result of sexual relations and the concept itself of sexuality as knowledge (to know is to know carnally) is a well-known Biblical concept. But out of the conditions that caused the fall itself arise the events that will finally lead the hero to redemption or salvation. If Eve is the cause of Adam's fall and if mortality is the price that Adam has to pay, he will be saved by a woman

herself who will give birth to the Messiah. In the Valentinian Gnostic myth, it is Sophia who causes a fall in the shape of material creation, but it is also wisdom in the form of Achamoth who imbues it with a soul which would help it attain salvation and restoration in the original unity of the pleroma (Mathews 156). It is because Pilgermann is unmanned that he goes on the pilgrimage to be redeemed by his Messiah and his Jerusalem. "When I had my proper parts I must have been blind and deaf, the world would not have come alive for me , I had never talked to Christ ,had never put my feet into the footsteps of my road away, had never alone in a dark wood seen the light of Now," he says (55).

Pilgermann's life and journey are paradigmatic of the history of the Jews. The Jews had a covenant with the Lord and because of their disobedience they had to suffer for long. Their coming of age is celebrated by the Passover that commemorates their passage out of bondage in Egypt. It was then that the Jews really became a nation. But this was succeeded by a long weary journey through enormous difficulties, till in Sinai, they were given the Law from atop a great mountain. It is after this that they enter the Promised Land. Israel is a community whose suffering is inextricably linked to its election, in fact is a result of its election. And this covenant symbolized by the circumcision

means seeing all life and all existence in terms of the relationship with God:

> In fact, as clearly emerges from God's covenant with Noahite humanity after the flood, the permanence of nature itself is a result of a 'covenant', that is, a promise and a social bond ... God was experienced as a calling God and hence the 'Word' was his chief manifestation. He called man, and all that man had to do – although it may have been quite a lot – was to listen. To listen, however, means to obey (Zaehner 10-11).

Pilgermann's journey marks all these stages of the history of the Jews. He is punished because of his disobedience – he goes whoring after a strange, forbidden goddess. The mark of his election, the symbol of his covenant is castration just as the physical sign of the Lord's covenant with Abram was a reduction "in the literal superabundance of Abram's penis" (J. Miles 53). And after this covenant, God (he cries to the father 'why me?', the eternal cry of the Jews, but it is the son who appears) appears and bids him go on a pilgrimage: "I'm the one you'll talk to from now on" (20). This is followed by the years in wilderness, narrated in Boschian terms. At last, he comes to a place under the shadow of a great mountain – Antioch, dominated by Mt Silpius and here he understands the true meaning of the covenant, becomes aware of the unity that is the great mystery of God, obtains his Law. He dies like Moses without setting foot on

the Promised Land, but he also, through his Messiah Bohemond, achieves his salvation. Pilgermann's journey, like that of the Jew, is from bondage to the Promised Land through Sinai where he receives the Law. That this is a result of the covenant is emphasized by the fact that it is seen as a fact of nature, part of the natural cycle of things, illustrated by the storks that he sees as he meets his end.

One of the tenets of structuralism is that myths structure us as much as we structure myths (Hawkes 41) and this can be seen in Pilgermann who is steeped in the Judaeo – Christian heritage. Each of the incidents in his life is interpreted in terms of this knowledge and his life is even expected to be structured in terms of the Torah and the Bible. He sees his life as journey from Passover to Shavouth, Shavouth being the festival celebrating the giving of the Law and therefore he expects Antioch to fall during Shavouth. Antioch actually falls a short while later. As a result, by the end, Pilgermann is transfigured into the archetypal Jew, his life, a paradigm of the archetypal Jewish experience, even as he becomes the Archetypal Adam saved by the Messiah. The same pattern was seen earlier when Riddley turned into Eusa by the end of his narrative.

Pilgermann like Riddley is "trying to grasp what cannot be known. His aim is to make sense of the universe that contains

him" (Gray 58). As people who are trying to put into narrative whatever sense they make of their own lives, both of them face problems that are faced by writers and hence their own difficulties illustrate certain theoretical positions. "I can't tell this as a story because it isn't a story; a story is what remains when you leave out most of the action; a story is a coherent sequence of picture cards," says Pilgermann (38), thus reflecting a distinction that structuralists find very useful between what Shklovsky calls story and plot, Chatman designates story and discourse, Todorov refers to as Fabula and Syuzhet and Genette categorises as Histoire and recit/narration. What the story alone is, is exhibited in the panels of Naumburg Cathedral (70-76), "a coherent sequence of picture cards" but for Hoban the real action is elsewhere and all a writer can do "is to write in such a way that the reader finds himself in a place where the unwordable happens off the page" (Moment ix). It is what is done by a marvel among artists, like Bosch, who is above all "the master of what is seen out of the corner of the mind, the essential reality behind the agreed on appearance of things" (46). Pilgermann illustrates his theory with three picture cards that show the story of Samson tearing the lion apart in the vineyards of Timnah. That is the story. But action for Pilgermann may have been in a butterfly that lay in Samson's field of vision. "The picture cards don't show the butterfly because if they did they would have to explain it.

But you can't explain the butterfly" (38). Bosch on the other hand "never fails to notice the butterfly in Samson's field of vision" (46).

This is of course an alien concept to almost all contemporary theorists for whom the world of the narrative is one created by the words on the page alone. For Pilgermann as for Riddley Walker telling a story is difficult because you are trying to connect yourself to a consciousness that speaks through you and sees through you. But the tuning is always an imperfect one:

> I saw or perhaps I am only now seeing, or perhaps I have not yet seen and I am at the same time going to see that the names of things, of times, of places, of events are useful for reference and they have some subjective meaning but as often as not they obscure the actuality of the thing they attempt to describe. Now as I think about it I see that we don't always know what it is that we are putting a name to. (116).

But even when it is an impossible task it has to be attempted:

> There is a mystery that even God cannot fathom, nor can he give the law of it on two stone tablets. He cannot speak what there are no words for; he needs divers to dive into it, he needs wrestlers to wrestle with it, singers to sing it, lovers to love it. He cannot deal with it alone, he must find helpers (201).

Pilgermann has to attempt it because it is the obligation of a witness but it is an enterprise fraught with danger for "words are images and what is sacred cannot be imaged" (170). All that an artist can do is to look at everything with "the eye that is in love with seeing " (97), with the eyes with which Vermeer's girl with a pearl earring looks out at us or with the eyes with which Vermeer must have looked at the girl. This has a certain resemblance to Brechts' idea of 'alienation' or the Russian Formalists' concept of 'defamiliarization' :

> According to Shklovsky, the essential function of poetic art is to counteract the process of habituation encouraged by routine everyday modes of perception. We very readily cease to see the world we live in, and become anaesthetized to its distinctive features. The aim of poetry is to reverse that process, to defamiliarize that with which we are overly familiar, 'to creatively deform' the usual, the normal and so to inculcate a new childlike, nonjaded vision in us. The poet thus aims to disrupt 'stock response', and to generate a heightened awareness to restructure our ordinary perception of 'reality', so that we end by seeing the world instead of numbly recognizing it (Hawkes 62).

For Hoban, to see the world instead of numbly recognizing it, is to see with the eyes of Vermeer's girl and she sees differently because what looks out through her eyes is the unseen. "From her eyes, the unseen looks out at us, and through

our eyes looking back into hers looks the unseen " (97). It is this unseen that is sometimes called "God". And although Pilgermann has 'action', he can only tell the 'story' and he voices his predicament thus:

> I describe what I do not understand because I am lived by it. Yes, that's what it is, why I have no choice, why I am compelled. This that I have described is not an idea that I have had or a vision or a dream, it is not a means of expression for me as poetry might be. No, I am a means of expression for it, God as He or God as it knows why (205).

As Margaret Dipple says, "Fiction has not directly claimed such a powerful agency behind the task of the writer and hence of the reader for a long time" (181).

The Manyness of Singing

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Chapter 6

The Manyness of Singing

Two of the most extended treatments of the Orpheus myth in twentieth century fiction are to be found in Hoban. *Kleinzeit* was described by Geoffrey Miles as "one of the most complex as well as the wittiest of twentieth century rewritings of the myth" (73-74). *The Medusa Frequency* is a companion piece to *Kleinzeit,* but here the treatment is phantasmagoric and hallucinatory as if Kleinzeit has been let loose in the world of *Pilgermann* or in the language of two of Hoban's favourite painters, Max Ernst has entered the world of Hieronymus Bosch.

The major theme of Hoban's novels is the quest for self-knowledge and psychic wholeness and for him the image of Orpheus trying to recover Eurydice is a particularly haunting one of man trying to come to terms with the loss. *The Medusa Frequency* has as its protagonist, Herman Orff, abandoned by his lover Luise von Himmelbett and suffering from a writer's block after two unsuccessful novels. Orpheus as the archetypal poet has an obvious appeal to writers and has been seen as an

embodiment of all types of creative activity, of all attempts to create harmony and order through art, music and literature.

Some versions of the Orpheus myth see him as a Thracian shaman (G. Miles 62). Shamans were regarded as having power over animals and especially the power to go out of the body and to travel to the land of the dead. It is easy to understand how Orpheus who travelled to the underworld, with his creative powers in music and poetry, his ability to enchant wild animals and even stone, could be regarded as a shaman in ancient times. Shamans were essentially "connection men" who could connect man who had lost his connections with nature, to cosmos and the natural order.

In medieval reworkings of the myth, Orpheus was very often seen as a Christ figure. In art, the figure of Orpheus who enchanted animals with his music was very often conflated with the image of Christ, the Good Shepherd and David, the shepherd-psalmist-king. Orpheus' descent into the underworld to save Eurydice was also seen as a type of Christ's descent to earth to redeem man. During the renaissance, Orpheus was primarily portrayed as a musician and poet whose art reflected the harmonic music of the spheres and created harmony on earth and within man. Shakespeare in the *Merchant of Venice*, Chapman in his translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Milton in "L'Allegro"

portray Orpheus' music as something that can transform the limited, mundane human condition into something more divine and attuned to the cosmos. The Romantics too were drawn to the image of the Orphic poet. Wordsworth at the beginning of *The Prelude* invokes Orpheus as the ideal poet and Shelley in his dramatic fragment "Orpheus" sees in him the power of creative imagination to remake reality.

In the twentieth century, as with other myths, there has been a wide range of treatments including fierce feminist indictments of Orpheus. Poets like Peter Davison, Lauris Edmond, Edwin Honig, Denis Devin, D.G. James and Louis Simpson have used the legend to express personal loss and grief whereas feminist poets like H.D., Sandra Gilbert, Rachel Blau du Plessis, Elaine Feinstein and Margaret Atwood have portrayed Eurydice's point of view, harshly criticizing Orpheus for his attempt at possession and control.

Radical treatment in the spirit of Hoban's *Kleinzeit* is not unusual in contemporary poetry. Michael Hamburger's *"Orpheus Street SE5"* portrays him as a drug- popping poet, paid well for singing protest songs of love and peace and freedom in a seedy, commercialized London. Donald Justice's "Orpheus Opens his Morning Mail" portrays him as a bored and cynical poet and John Heath Stubbs's "Story of Orph" shows him as a rock star whose

death at the hands of an obsessed fan like that of John Lennon, results in increased album and t-shirt sales. Stanley Kunitz's "Orpheus" on the other hand is a holocaust survivor who is silenced by his experience in Nazi concentration camps.

Other such instances of radical treatment of the Orpheus myth in the twentieth century include the shaman-like teacher in David Gascoyne who returns to talk of his experiences in bewildered words with a shattered lyre and William Jay Smith's poet who descends to the underworld risking his own sanity to explore the darkness of the human psyche.

Novelists, of course, for obvious reasons have not accorded extended treatment like Hoban has, but Hoban's stark yet phantasmagoric narratives very often have more in common with poetry and painting than with the traditional English novel. *The Medusa Frequency* is a radically imaginative version of the myth in which the setting is more surreal than mythical.

Hermann Orff like so many other Hoban protagonists is middle-aged, cut-off from his loved ones and past, and his creative powers have dried up. An unsuccessful novelist – his first novel, *Slope of Hell* sold only 1731 copies before being remaindered and his second, *World of Shadows* even less before the publisher went into receivership - he worked for an

advertising agency called Slithe & Tovey (the allusion is to Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky") where he wrote copy for Orpheus Men's toiletries, Hermes Foot Powder and Pluto Drain Magic before he, like Kleinzeit, was sacked. He now writes for "Classic Comics", converting *Treasure Island* or *Ivanhoe* or even *War and Peace* (his masterpiece) into cartoon strips. He even tends to see all speech in balloons and hear all sounds in expressionistic capital letters.

Psychologically wounded, creatively dried-up and having lost all connections Orff sits up night after night trying to write a third novel. He feels that there is "life in (his) head, there (are) all sorts of things going on in it, but nothing that could be made to act like a story for two or three hundred pages" (13). His psychic adventure and the action of *The Medusa Frequency* begins when he tries to get to places in his head that he hadn't been able to.

Kleinzeit's journeys through the London Underground, which are symbolic of his visit to the underworld become Herman Orff's journeys into the depth of his unconscious. And although there is the usual sprinkling of characters in this novel, in the end there are only two or three, for all characters in the end merge into the figure of either Orpheus or Eurydice. That there is a need only for a few characters is brought home to Orff by the

"Gom Yawncher" man whom he first sees when he rushes off from Istvan Fallok's electrode treatment that promises to take him to places in his head he has never gone to. That man in the underground with the tattoo of a snake twined around a dagger on his forearm transmutes into the man in the bar with "an accent so regional that it used up all his articulation and left nothing for words"(56). Economy in constructing both real and fictional worlds is desirable he suggests: "You have a little chat with a stranger now and then, right? So do I, so does everyone. How many lines has the stranger got? Two or three may be. There is really no need for a new actor each time, is there?" (56). So he plays all those insignificant roles in the periphery of Herman Orff's psychic adventure.

The economy of characters is represented in the novel by the way all the main male characters merge into one another and how they merge into the figure of Orpheus. Herman Orff himself, as his name suggests, is both Hermes and Orpheus. As Hermes he is the symbol of the spoken word, whether they are the medium through which exchanges are made and knowledge is conveyed or whether they are the medium through which truth is disguised and man is betrayed. Hermes, we must remember, was the intermediary who went from man to Olympus and from Olympus to Hades – in his own way, a "connection man".

Herman has been searching for the last nine years for his Eurydice, Luise, with whom he had had an affair eleven years before and who had left him two years later. Before Herman, she had been the Muse of the music composer Istvan Fallok with whom Herman had collaborated for the Hermes Foot Powder commercial and who is most famous for the soundtrack of the film *Codename Orpheus.* As his role suggests, he was a maker of enchanting music and he owns the studio "Hermes Soundways". Istvan Fallok has of course never forgiven Herman for stealing Luise from him and his revenge is to take him to the places in his head he is unable to reach. Characteristically when Herman has to go to Fallok for his appointment, he has to go "down" a flight of steps to reach him in his seedy studio in Soho. He has a "haunted" look.

Luise leaves Orff for the art-film director Gosta Kraken, who thus is both an Orpheus figure as well as an Aristaeus one. Aristaeus, of course, was the beekeeper who pursued Eurydice and it was while fleeing him that she was bitten by a snake. It was Actaeon, the son of Aristaeus, who chanced upon Artemis bathing naked and who was turned into a stag and killed by his own hounds. In the novel, the women characters are all images of Eurydice, but they are also Diana-like figures who come under the male gaze.

When Herman and Luise spend an idyllic summer in the island of Paxos, they associate themselves with an olive tree that they agree to be "an entrance to the underworld, a Persephone door" (26). Herman describes it in terms of an Artemis suddenly discovered in a grove: "The greenish grey thick bark all ridged and wrinkled stood open as if two hands had parted it, as if a woman or a goddess has stepped naked out of it into the greenlit shade of the olive grove" (28).

When Herman meets Melanie Falsepercy (Falsepercy -- Phoney Percy--Persephone) who is a reader at the Avernus Press (Lake Avernus was the starting point of many journeys to the underworld. Virgil locates the descent of Aeneas and the Sibyl here), her face is described as having a sudden woodland look: "As if she might just that moment have heard the baying of the hounds" (20). Vermeers "Head of a young girl", a painting that is one of Hoban's obsessions and recurs again and again in his writings is also pictured in such terms. Istvan Fallok has a print of the painting in his studio and the girl is described as having a "Melanie Falsepercy look in her eyes" (23). In his room Herman has four copies of the painting, two books open at colour plates of the painting, a post card stuck on the edge of the monitor screen, and a large print over the fireplace and her face is described as one full of an unnameable fear (14).

Gosta Kraken himself, like Aristaeus in Virgil, is punished for betraying Orff (eus). In Virgil, the nymphs who had been the companions of Eurydice destroy his bees with pests and hunger. Kraken, in the novel has the same session that Herman has, and is found dead of a heart attack with a tin globe/the head of Orpheus in his lap (142).

Luise Von Himmelbett is the Eurydice whom Orff lost nine years ago, leaving him with a note that said, "I trusted you with the idea of me and you lost it" (16). The character and the events and even the emotions in the novel thus have a tendency to shade off into the abstract, into the realm of ideas even when they are portrayed with an acute sense of concretization, some times even with the hightened clarity of someone suffering from a fever or a hallucination. Luise is portrayed as a leggy blonde in a very short skirt but she is also seen as someone ancient and archetypal: "the sort of old fashioned beauty one sees in antique dolls" (17). More importantly she is described as "quite calm just being herself (with) none of the desperation that produces art" (17). Even while being a very attractive, leggy, blonde, the kind of beauty that is favoured in the streets of the West, she is also seen as a symbol of the enigmatic reality that one has no real access to and which one searches for throughout one's life. She is of course intensely human, although the novel never shows her from any except her lovers' points of view. She takes up a series

of lovers, all of them artists. Fallok, the musician had been her lover before Orff, the writer and Orff is followed by Kraken, the filmmaker. But now she is lost to them all.

It is the search for this Eurydice that takes Orff to the innermost depths of his being, where he comes face to face with the terror of being, and the problem of language and expression itself. Talking to his computer screen day after day and night after night, trying to recreate in him the creative juices that had fertilized his first two novels, trying to reconnect with his earlier life, he finds one day a flyer lying on the floor -a cure for people with art trouble. "WHY NOT HEAD FOR IT? WRITE ORPH ONE" (16). This is of course Fallok's revenge on him but even here Hoban's playful use of language is evident. Write or phone becomes Write Orph one and to Orph becomes a verb and a metaphor for man's search for the well-springs of one's being, a search for the mythical Eurydice. "Head for it", says the flyer and the verb head becomes the noun head, the head of Orpheus that will hold Orff in its all-encompassing grip for the rest of the novel.

It is this journey to the heart of reality that is more real to him than the "VAT figures that had appeared on this [computer] screen the day before" (8). Orff articulates a perennial Hoban theme when he says: "what passes for reality seems to me mostly

a load of old rubbish invented by not very inventive minds. The reality that interests me is strange and flickering and haunting" (8). It is this "strange and flickering and haunting" reality that is concretized for him when he undergoes Fallok's procedure and ends up with the head of Orpheus in his lap. It is a reality that shows itself to Orff "in several ways and with several faces" (11). And it is a reality that shapes itself according to the desires and fears of the protagonist. "I think of you as the great Cephalopod," Orff types into his computer screen, "Ancient of the deeps, great thinking head in the blackness of the ultimate deep. I think of you as Kraken" (10). And immediately the monitor replies from the depth of his unconscious:

> I AM THE KRAKEN, ANCIENT OF THE DEEPS, MONSTROUS CEPHALOD, GREAT HEAD AT THE CENTRE OF MY MILES OF WRITING TENTACLES IN THE BLACKNESS OF THE ULTIMATE DEEP: THE KRAKEN, MY DARK MIND WILD WITH THE TERROR OF ITSELF, SHUDDERING, WRITHING, AFRAID TO SLEEP, AFRAID TO DREAM, BUT SLEEPING AGE-LONG AND DREAMING OF IMMENSTIES, OF BURSTINGS AND TRANSITIONS AND UNIMAGINABLE STATES OF BEING, DREAMING A UNIVERSE IN WHICH THERE IS SUCH A THING AS THE KRAKEN, DREAMING THAT I AM THE KRAKEN (10-11).

That Orff's conversations with the computer screen and later with the head of Orpheus are part of a journey to the innermost recesses of his unconscious is obvious from the fact that rather than thinking consciously about things and coming to a conclusion, his thoughts *appear* on the screen. Carl Gustav Jung in his studies on the psychology of mythology has pointed out how the mythologizing mind is similar to the primitive mind because in both there is the dominance of the unconscious over the conscious:

> Functions such as thinking, willing etc are not yet differentiated: they are pre-conscious and in the case of thinking, for instance, this shows itself in the circumstances that the primitive does not think *consciously*, but that thoughts *appear* – the primitive cannot assert that he thinks; it is rather that "something thinks in him". The spontaneity of the act of thinking does not lie, causally, in his conscious mind, but in his unconscious (Jung and Kerenyi 86).

Orff's hallucinatory journeys thus are a series of revelations of the pre-conscious psyche statements about unconscious psychic happenings. In such a condition as Orff's, there is a greater openness to archetypal ways of thinking—the essential quality of the shaman and all shamanistic people like poets and writers – and the manifestations of the unconscious and its archetypes intrude everywhere into the conscious mind. Jung continues: "It

is not the world as we know it that speaks out of his unconscious, but the unknown world of the psyche, of which we know that it mirrors our empirical world only in part, and that, for the other part it moulds this empirical world in accordance with its own psychic assumptions" (87).

The fact that the monster that symbolizes for Orff the terror of being is the Kraken, is also significant for "the lower vertebrates, have from earliest times been favourite symbols of the collective psychic sub-stratum" (Jung and Kerenyi 101). Serpents and dragons and other reptilian monsters from the deep have always been significant in traditional mythologies as threats to one's self and precisely because they symbolize the dangers of the newly acquired consciousness being swallowed up again by the instinctive psyche, the unconscious.

Orff's journey, then is a mythical quest like that of other Hoban heroes, but it is a different variation on the theme because the journey is so explicitly and almost so completely interior. There are few adventures on a physical journey to a material object, only a series of confrontations with inner demons through the medium of the Kraken on the computer screen or the head of the Orpheus speaking through various spherical objects. It is through these encounters that Orff confronts and comes to terms with the nature of his being.

But in *The Medusa Frequency*, Hoban is not merely concerned with the nature of one's connection to reality, but more explicitly with the nature of art and language and representation. Herman Orff's writer's block and his journey into the underworld of his psyche is Hoban's most extended treatment of the artist's relationship with the material of his art and the problems of representation. The search for Luise shades off into the search for Eurydice, the Vermeer girl and Medusa and his quest comes to an end only when he realizes the nature of art as well as reality and he overcomes his writer's block. Language too becomes the central concern of the novel and all the mythical female characters are seen as representations of language itself.

Herman suffers from a writer's block because he fails to make the connection needed to create a narrative. The prime requirement for narrative is language and he has lost his command over language. The progress of the novel is the progress of Herman's recovery of language. It is through a series of encounters especially with the head of Orpheus, which instructs him in the nature of Orpheus itself, that he is cured of his writer's block.

The fact that his hallucinations begin with his encounters with "the words that came out of a green dancing and the excitation of phosphors" (8) on his computer screen links the

novel with the cyber fiction of the eighties. In fact, the mythical, phantasmagoric underworld through which Herman ranges is very similar to the cyberspace through which internet users who tap into the international electronic grid to fulfill their own individual needs and desires, range. William Gibson, who coined the term cyberspace in his novel *Neuromancer* describes cyberspace thus: "A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators in every nation a graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity" (qtd. in Powell 51). This is almost like the psychic underworld that Herman travels, a space abstracted from the needs and desires of every mind in the cosmic system.

Hoban characteristically fuses the cyberspace through which Herman first makes contact with the deeps of his nature with ancient myth and literature and so builds up a nexus of connections with Herman like every other mind at the centre. The Kraken appears first to Herman through the computer screen and the monster for him is a symbol of the perils of trying to understand and represent reality. By making Herman type out the Kraken's words and at the same time by his being surprised by it the ambiguity at the heart of artistic creation is emphasized. The unknown is located in the writer himself and at the same time beyond his control. The nonsense letters

"NNVSNU TSRUNGH" is a symbol in the early part of the novel of the unarticulated trying to become articulated narrative. In fact, the Kraken that speaks out of the computer screen is something that cannot exist without the writer and is a creation of language itself and its strange and unintelligible language can be seen as a condition of the writer's block. In fact, it is language itself. Later when Herman is cured of the writer's block, easily and quite naturally the nonsense dialogue can be incorporated into the comic strip "The seeker from Nexo Vollma" that he writes for cereal box covers. Seen in this light the creature comes to be an externalization of the condition Herman is suffering from and the beast comes into being only when he acknowledges its existence.

The ambiguous nature of the beast—both being something that exists prior to the writer's awareness of it as well as being brought into existence by the writer – points to the writer's role as a medium, a shaman and that presupposes the idea of the realization of connection between different orders of reality.

Through Herman's experience, Hoban thus conveys the impression that many areas of the unconscious hold dangers and are better left untouched or unopened and that many areas exist only when we acknowledge them. This is naturally extended to the idea of writing as summoning worlds into existence, worlds

that do not exist until the writer wills them into life. "Don't think of me. If you think of me I may be real" (8), the Kraken tells Herman.

Since the strange, unintelligible speech of the Kraken conveys the idea that the creature is somehow connected with language, or a language that has lost its connections with the socially accepted language system, Hoban seems to be suggesting that the Kraken is the fear of every writer that he may not be able to make the unarticulated intelligible. The Kraken is thus both a condition and the artist himself and comes to stand for the creative powers and fears that exist in everyone. Herman is confronted by the idea that the Kraken is both a product of his imagination as well as a condition of his artistic life; the manifestation of his hidden and not fully comprehended fears and problems. The Kraken is "the terror of what might be, of universes and worlds that might be" (10), says the green dancing on the screen.

This terror is the terror of creation, which demands the creation of a world. Kraken, thus stands for the writer's mind as well as the Universal Mind that is a major theme in Hoban's works. Kraken is the fear of every artist; the fear of what might be and Eurydice comes to stand for the ideal that he wishes to capture in his writing. Herman realizes that the Kraken in him

is the artist in search of Eurydice, the symbol of the perfection of art, of that which flees.

This fear of the artist is the fear that he cannot capture reality and in the novel this reality is associated with the various female characters especially the Vermeer girl and Eurydice. The image of the Vermeer girl on his desk constantly haunts him and this is associated both with his fascination and fear of the unknown. In fact all the female characters that enter his life, the mythical as well as the 'real life' ones, are associated with the unknown. The real life characters like Luise or Melanie constantly merge with the mythical Eurydice or Vermeer's girl and therefore they all have a timeless quality. The search for Luise who was lost to him thus becomes a search for something that is always lost.

The Vermeer girl is an image of this ideal reality and ideal work of art. "Night and day and in all weathers she looks out at me from her hereness and goneness" (14), says Herman and this introduces the idea of presence and absence. The novel is a story of lost women and women who are found only when they are lost. Herman's constant rumination on the origin of the Vermeer girl is thus suggestive of a larger search for meaning and the women in the novel become links to an understanding of both reality as well as art.

The Vermeer girl is also associated with unmediated language. Herman associates her with music in a language not familiar to him. He realizes that the voice that he hears over Radio Tirana is very close to the mode of articulation that the Vermeer girl would have opted for. He understands that she is both the source of articulation as well as articulation itself (79).

"Come and find me ", says the Vermeer girl (79), and the novel is a search for the girl who is always lost. She is one of the many women in the novel who are always deserting men who are artists in one way or another. The sense of loss and its association with the notion of writing is multiplied in a series of such relationships. Herman is always searching for Luise as are all her other lovers like Istvan Fallok and Gosta Kraken. The Vermeer girl disappears from the reproductions that he has at home and he goes in search of her to Amsterdam where he discovers that she has disappeared from there too. The painting is on loan to America. And of course, the myth of Orpheus is one of a constant search for Eurydice. All the feminine characters are also associated with the difficulty of representation and articulation in language as is Medusa. The myth that it was Medusa who gave the alphabet to Hercules of course, underpins the conclusion, when, having made his connection with Medusa, he is able to overcome his writer's block.

The core of the novel is the series of encounters that Herman has with the head of Orpheus and how his conversations with Orpheus help him understand the nature of reality as well as its representation. Throughout the novel Hoban constantly takes pains to convey the workings of the mind in terms of journeys or quests. The theme of the mind as not fully known and the technique of seeing the mind as a country yet be fully explored make the Orpheus myth still more significant since Orpheus' search for Eurydice is a search through the underworld and it makes the entire experience of Herman a totally subjective phenomenon where Orpheus and Eurydice become projections of the impulses and problems of the artist. It is also made clear throughout the search that reality is vast and fearful and this underscores the idea of an unknown landscape.

Herman is also constantly reminded that this quest for Eurydice is the externalization of the artistic process. Through his conversations with Orpheus, Herman comes to understand better the function of art and the paradoxes involved in its creation. The idea of fleeting life always caught in art, yet always lost and the idea of simultaneous presence and absence that Orpheus often voices become refrains that add to the philosophic dimensions of the novel. Further this idea of Eurydice as artistic creation as seen in the thoughts of Orpheus ineluctably extends itself to the nature of language itself. The

articulation of the loss of Eurydice and the search for her becomes the construction of the stories of Eurydice, the presence and absence of Eurydice reflecting the presence and absence in language. Eurydice herself becomes the absence that generates her story and the various versions of her story make the final reality as elusive as her. As the narrative develops the idea of Orpheus itself undergoes a series of changes, thus resisting the notion of a rigid reality. Herman is forced to realize that there are only stories at best and not just the story.

The head of Orpheus presents itself to Herman as a series of different objects – the head, a cabbage, a grapefruit, a football. And it teaches him that the reality of a work of art resides in the reality and disposition of the perceiver. "I am the response that never dies"(33), the head tells him and part of Herman's education is the acceptance of the fact that the multiplicity of responses possible makes the nature of reality less final than he had first believed. Hoban offers various versions of the Orpheus myth including the one that Herman tries to write for Classic Comics and the terror that Herman experiences in the face of the overwhelming nature of reality subsides only when he realizes that all attempts to pin down meaning are destined for failure. The creation of a number of Eurydice figures each mirroring the other in her role in Herman's life multiplies this effect of the awesome multiplicity of reality and the elusiveness of meaning.

The idea of lostness and foundness, suggests a more traditional Keatsian notion of the work of art capturing life for ever and in the very process evacuating it of life. This adds to the complexity of the novel and the idea of the artistic process in the novel as something in which failure and success are inextricably linked.

The meaningless words that tumble out of the computer screen in Herman's conversations with the Kraken are also related to the idea of language as reality, especially the reality behind the reality, that is so often a feature of Hoban's writing. The nonsense words are a symbol of Herman's condition as a writer suffering from a block but it also suggests a vaster reality that has not yet reached the level of the common sphere of reality. This use of language suggests the condition of language and reality prior to its articulation in narration.

The head of Orpheus that appears to Herman in so many guises offers Hoban the context to discuss the problems of both creating as well as consuming fiction and Orpheus becomes a metaphor for the uncontrollable meanings that are constantly generated and that never stop. Herman realizes that so long as there is a reader or a listener who perceives, meanings will be endlessly produced. It never becomes saturated for the reader constantly brings new dimensions to it. He tells Herman that his

life itself "endlessly voyaging " is a powerful evidence of the fact that for any art form, there is no finality of meaning or vision. It is created in the moment of its reception and comprehension and its endless proliferation is something that cannot be terminated.

"I am that which responds", (72) the head tells him and it again suggests that reality is not a permanent identity but a construction of a series of responses. These responses in the novel are linked to Herman's relationships with the women in his life, Luise, Melanie, the Vermeer girl, Eurydice and the Medusa. While coming back after his session with Istvan Fallok, he has the terrifying vision of a woman's face rising from the waters and it turns out to be the face of Eurydice:

> Closer and closer came the face of Eurydice, her mouth open and grinning, her tongue hanging out. Larger and larger grew her face, widening in my vision until I saw it all around me, this great and grinning face of the Vermeer girl and Melanie Falsepercy and Luise becoming, becoming ... who were they becoming? (28).

This endless becoming, rather than a permanent 'is', is brought to him when later sitting in his room he tries to write: "I looked out at the Vermeer girl, saw Melanie Falsepercy, remembered Luise" (47). And thus he starts typing and what

appears on the monitor is something associated with Eurydice and it seems to appear out of its own free will:

> There's no end to me, no limit, no way to define or measure me, no way of knowing what I am or how much of me there is. There is an endless surging and undulating of me, an endless cycle of ebb and flow that is called the sea. Little moments of me have lines drawn before and after and these moments are given names like Orpheus and Eurydice and they become stories. But I am wordless, heaving in the ocean night of me, stirring in the dark trees, breathing in and breathing out my soul (48).

Orpheus' attempt to bring back Eurydice, mirrors Herman's attempt to get back Luise and his attempt to master the world by constructing the narrative of his third novel. At this stage he does not realize that reality like the women in his life is not to be possessed. Reality is elusive, a goneness, something that cannot stay and that is why the novel is dominated by images of loss whether in art or in love. The story of Eurydice and all forms of articulation are the result of an awareness of a loss of a reality that cannot stay. "What am I if not the quintessential, the brute artist?" asks the head of Orpheus, "Is not all art a celebration of loss. From the very first moment that beauty appears to us it is passing, passing, not to be held" (68). And that is why presence in language and in stories is an evidence of absence itself: "She [Eurydice] was the loss of her even when she was apparently the

finding of her, the having of her" (68). Later Orpheus tells Herman that he lost Eurydice when he stopped perceiving her (118) and Eurydice herself tells Orpheus that only out of the loss, do his stories come: "Now that I'm lost you will perceive me fully and you will find me in your song"(119). For Orpheus, what remains is the endlessly voyaging sorrow and astonishment from which he writes in those brief moments in which he can write (120).

The stories that are created out of the artist's understanding of reality are thus only brief moments, which appear out of the endless unknowing that is not to be understood. There can be no neat beginning or end to anything in the vast unknowing out of which we emerge at certain moments. Worrying about his writing, or non-writing, Herman wonders, "where was the beginning of anything, how could I draw a line through endless cause and effect and say, 'Here is page one'?" (76). Later Orpheus tells him, "we are not a whole story, Eurydice and I; we are only fragments of story, and all around us is unknowing" (117).

The idea of goneness and hereness is extended to the nature of narrative itself. It becomes a way of looking at the nature of narrative itself and the search for the lost woman also becomes a search for the narrative. The Orpheus story is also a

search for a narrative. The lostness of Eurydice is also the hereness of the Orpheus narrative; the entire narrative is constantly interrupted and this underscores the constructed nature of the narrative. Herman by constantly rearranging the narrative suggests the freedom that is possible to the writer. He becomes aware of the reality of the active processes by which material gets transformed by the active imagination, and how stories are generated and myth, which is given some kind of sanctity, gets violated by the idea of subjective interpretations. The story is different everytime, the head tells him, "and everytime there are difficulties – I always need help with it and I'm always afraid it won't go all the way to the end" (100). When Sol Mazzaroth asks him about his progress with the comics version of the myth he refuses to do it because "it's got to come out differently one day " (102).

The head of Orpheus (now reduced to a brain because it is a sliced off grapefruit) tells him that there isn't a whole story: "I don't know what's between [Aristaeus and Eurydice] in that space between the making of the lyre and my finding of Eurydice by the river. I think of the buzzingness, the swarmingness, the manyness of bees singing the honey of possibility" (117).

That responses are what make a narrative and by extension the world, is emphasized when Orpheus says: "The

bees don't tell a story but in the manyness of their singing there sometimes comes a story to the one who listens" (117).

That the artist is not just a craftsman who constructs something but also a shaman who lays himself open to the possibilities within the universe, is a favourite theme of Hoban, and it is this that makes Hoban so different from all other contemporary writers, and what makes him metafictional and metaphysical at the same time. Even as Orpheus talks about the freedom of the artist in manufacturing his own narrative, he also realizes that the artist is someone who is connected to something larger. He describes the way his songs came to him as something that was beyond his control: "I'd feel the ache in my throat just before the song came and my throat would open in a particular way as if I were an instrument shaped by the song that used me" (17). And that is why Orpheus repeatedly describes himself as a perceiver, as that which responds.

The artist as someone who is forced to articulate, forced to tell stories and hence to be at the mercy of language is also suggested by the way the head of Orpheus latches on to those who are willing to respond. It begins to tell its story by asking three times whether Herman wanted to hear the story and Herman says "yes" three times before it begins its story. It was thus "compelled to tell [its] story" (100). This is of course, the fate

of anyone like the Ancient Mariner, who felt a need to be released from suffering by articulating one's story. The idea of art as a solution is thus brought in. Both Herman and the Ancient Mariner have to voyage through strange and unknown lands and for both the sea is a vital experience and a source of knowledge. The solution to both, the falling away of the albatross from the Ancient Mariner's neck and the cure for Herman from the writer's block he is suffering from comes when they realize the interconnectedness of everything in the universe. For Herman too, like Orpheus, has to tell his story, in order to exorcise the fear of the unexpressed, the unconscious, the Kraken.

Herman's condition in the novel is paralleled by that of Gosta Kraken, the filmmaker who makes *Codename Orpheus.* Both have been loved and left by Luise and both are fascinated by the Vermeer girl. They meet at the John de Witthuis Museum to which Herman has gone in search of the Vermeer girl when he realizes that she has disappeared from the prints back home. Gosta Kraken speaks to him in the same unintelligible language that the Kraken had used in his conversations "Nnvsnu rrndu" (85). For him the Vermeer girl is the proto-image of the femaleness of things: "Always [he has] spoken to her in the whispering of the night, in that warm, and creatureful darkness where the flickering of the here-and-gone shows its little uncertain flame" (86).

He thinks of reality in terms of film-making but it meshes perfectly with Hoban's ideas of reality as something flickering, as something that is present and absent:

> Being is not a steady state but an occulting one: we are all of us a succession of stillnesses blurring into motion with the revolving of the wheel of action, and it is in those spaces of block between the pictures that we experience the heart of the mystery in which we are never allowed to rest (87).

Gosta Kraken who knows that Herman is suffering from a block goes on to warn him that if he is not careful he will be lost in the spaces that constitute reality. Significantly it is now that Medusa appears for the first time in the story. Herman's understanding of the nature of Medusa will of course be his cure. Ironically, it is Gosta Kraken who will later be destroyed because he falls prey to the same deeps that he had warned Herman about. After the head of Orpheus leaves Herman it latches on to Gosta Kraken (he undergoes Fallok's treatment too) and Kraken is later found dead with a tin globe in his lap. Gombert Yawncher, the other character who worries about articulation, also dies in hospital. Herman manages to survive the pressure of a world pressing in on him because he discovers Medusa and understands that there is no need for any lament about the inability of language to create a world.

Herman survives and is cured because he makes the right connection and this is, of course, the end that Hoban's novels look forward to. All the novels under the purview of this study, are about people who have lost their connections and who are whole again having made the right connection. In Herman's case this happens when he realizes that there is no need to encompass the whole of reality, no need to master or to conquer.

Luise leaves him because, as she says in the note that she leaves for him, she trusted him with the idea of her and he lost it (16). Fidelity becomes a central aspect of Herman's resolution of his crisis. "Fidelity is what is wanted", Orpheus tells him (33) and being truthful to one's perception becomes a statement of one's relationship both with art and reality. This is also associated with being faithful to the woman in one's life. Once created by the artist there is no end to meaning and it continues so long as the perceiver has fidelity to oneself and the faithfulness to articulate one's response. For Herman, initially, fidelity is linked only to the woman in his life. He makes the connection between art and fidelity only when Orpheus tells him that he lost Eurydice when he stopped perceiving her (118). And thus in a neat reversal of the traditional story of Orpheus, the singer becomes someone who lost Eurydice, not because he turned to look at her, but because he didn't look at her long enough. Fidelity is a matter of perception, the head tells Herman:

> Nobody can be unfaithful to the sea or to mountains or to death: once recognized they fill the heart. In love or in terror or in loathing one responds to them with the true self; fidelity is not an act of will: the soul is compelled by recognitions. Anyone who loves, anyone who perceives the other person fully can only be faithful, can never be unfaithful to the sea and the mountains and the death in that person, so pitiful and heroic is it to be a human being (33).

Later the same words are thrown back at Orpheus by Herman (70), indicating both that Orpheus has always been part of Herman and that Herman has come a long away in his perception of what fidelity is. "Eurydice was a big perceiver", Orpheus tells him (71), and the idea of Eurydice as always faithful is linked to the idea of Eurydice as "Wide Justice", as that is the etymological meaning of the Greek Eurydike. This conjunction of Eurydice as faithful perception as well as universal justice or natural law makes her a symbol of reality as well as the art that is abstracted from it. Herman is saved when he realizes that it is impossible to capture the whole of reality and that writing is possible only when one accepts the spaces and places that will always elude him.

His cure had begun when at the Johan de Witthuis Museum he had tuned into Medusa. "You have found me, she [had] said. I trust you with the idea of me" (90). Medusa, who in

myth had gifted the alphabet to mankind, is associated with language in the novel and therefore to tune in to the Medusa Frequency is to be cured of his writer's block. Later the head of Orpheus says, "Behind Medusa lie wisdom and the dark womb hidden like a secret cave behind the waterfall. Behind Medusa lies Eurydice unlost" (96). Herman's reply to this is that Orpheus is wording it to death. Medusa here becomes the way, the only access to the unknown, the unconscious and to the reality itself through language. To word Eurydice, is to word it to death, for the narration of Eurydice is to admit to the absence of Eurydice. But to someone who has tuned in to the Medusa Frequency, Eurydice is always there behind Medusa, unlost. To bring her into the realm of language is impossible only when one tries to capture her, to keep her. Fidelity is only mastering her. Herman is reminded of the words of H.P. Lovecraft: "The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents" (134). It is suggested that Gosta Kraken is destroyed because he tries to do this and Herman's block too is a result of trying to capture the whole of reality. And reality as the unarticulated woman is a symbol that recurs throughout the novel.

The fact that Herman is about to be cured and that the cure is related to his discovering Medusa is indicated by the 'angina' that he suddenly suffers. When he is admitted to hospital, the

night nurse there is clearly identified with Medusa: Her face is in shadow, her white cap flickers, becomes writhing and a hissing silence. She looks up, her shadowy gaze is on me. The silence crackles with its brilliance, her mouth is moving as it moved about the pinky dawn water between the beach and the Island Tamaraca (126).

The Island Tamaraca was the place where Herman had first seen Medusa and the description of the night nurse echoes the description of his first sight of Medusa. Later when he talks to his computer, it is Medusa who answers and she repeats the exact words of the night nurse, thus linking her both to his cure and to language itself.

Herman's recovery from the writer's block is reflected in this attitude towards language itself and in the concluding chapter "No More Klage", there is no more lament about language's inability to create the world. There is only the lament about the loss of Eurydice which is skillfully created through language. Hoban skillfully ends the novel with the girl from Tirana reading Rainer Maria Rilke's poem "Orpheus, Eurydike, Hermes" over the radio and the section she reads is the one in which Orpheus laments the loss of Eurydice and how out of the lament, a whole world of forests and valleys and paths and hamlets is created. This poem was one that Luise had once

translated and which later Melanie was trying to translate. The voice of the girl from Tirana was the one he thought the Vermeer girl would speak with, if she ever spoke.

Thus the ending skillfully brings all the major strands of the novel together in a confident assertion of the ability of language and for the first time the novel focuses on what language can do in reproducing reality. The poem clearly conveys the impression that there is a world that comes out of the lament of the loss and it is a world very similar to the physical world around. There is no tension between artistic achievement and reality. The unbearable thought of loss that accompanies every attempt to capture reality in a language that becomes a refrain in the Orpheus story, is missing here. Gone is the sense of loss, not only of Eurydice, but the loss that is inherent in every story. Rilke, confident and happy with what he had achieved, is the antithesis of Orpheus. He is not haunted by what he might have missed or the fact that what he had achieved falls short of what reality is actually like. When Herman looks at the Vermeer girl it is not the girl who is always lost that he finds. Instead it is Medusa "flickering and friendly, trusting [him] with the idea of her" (143). The cover of *The Medusa Frequency* shows this with Vermeer's girl looking at the viewer but with her hair being turned to Medusa's, snakes hissing out of her blue and gold head-

scarf. Herman realizes that, with Medusa, the Vermeer girl is always there unlost and unfound.

Herman has also regained his control over language and it is obvious that now he can deal with reality and create it in language in an effective way because Medusa trusts him with the idea of her. Like the hero who goes to the underworld and has strange experiences and comes back radically changed with the most important treasure worth having, Herman has come like Hercules with language from Medusa. Yet as in many stories, the now conscious hero does not become some kind of a superman, the transformation is not something spectacular. He "willingly relaxes to whatever may come to pass in him; he becomes that is to say an anonymity" (Campbell 237). And therefore the Herman that we find is not someone who is writing a masterpiece of a novel, but someone who is using the materials of his journey in order to write comic strips for cereal boxes.

In *The Medusa Frequency*, Hoban explores the limits of language, reality and representation through the persona of Herman, who, suffering from failed inspiration, undergoes a crisis in his life and after a series of journeys through a mythical landscape comes back with the knowledge of the relationship among man and reality and language.

The Farther End of a Spectrum

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Chapter 7

The Farther End of a Spectrum

Fremder is the only one of Hoban's novels which can be easily classified as belonging to the science fiction genre although some of his other novels notably *Riddley Walker*, had elements of science fiction in them. But as is usual with Hoban, the science fiction background for him is merely the setting for what is essentially a search for a larger cosmic reality and in *Fremder* he comes up with a daring variation on the theme of the inspired shamanistic individual trying to connect with a larger cosmic or metaphysical reality – one shamanistic character literally connects to the cosmos to become part of the reality membrane.

Like his other novels, *Fremder* echoes many of Hoban's pet motifs and obsessions – the Vermeer painting of '*A Girl With a Pearl Earring* ; Elijah, the prophet, who pops out of nowhere and is fed by ravens by the brook, and a frightening future where streets are dominated by "roving bands of prongs, arseholes, funboys, the Adoption Agency and worst of all the shorties and their clowns " (13). It is his third novel after *Pilgermann* (Pilgrim Man) and *Kleinzeit* (smalltimer) to have an explicity German title – Fremder means stranger – and he uses a poem from Rilke,

rendered in German by a robot with the face of Vermeer's girl and the voice of Eurydice, to convey his idea of what the terror of existence is. But the point of departure for Hoban, is a vision of reality that Gosta Kraken, the film director who appeared in *The Medusa Frequency*, gives words to in his (fictional) autobiography, *Perception Perceived: an Unfinished Memoir.*

> The flickering of a film interrupts the intolerable continuity of the apparent world; subliminally it gives us those in-between spaces of black that we crave. The eye is hungry for this; eagerly it collaborates with the unwinding strip of celluloid that shows its twenty four stillnesses per second, making real by an act of retinal retention the here-and –gone, the continual disappearing in which the lovers kiss, the shots are fired, the horses gallop; but below the threshold of conscious thought the eye sees and the mind savours the flickering of the black (9).

This of course, is a cinematic expression of Hoban's view of reality as an essentially flickering one. "The real reality, the flickering of seen and unseen actualities, the moment under the moment, can't be put into words;" he has written, "The most that a writer can do – and this is only rarely achieved – is to write in such a way that the reader finds himself in a place where the unwordable happens off the page" (Moment i).

All of Hoban's fiction is an attempt to word this unwordable, to bring to light the series of darknesses that

connect reality. In *Fremder*, Hoban connects contemporary scientific theories with his flickering view of reality to come up with, in the not too distant future of 2052, a world dominated by Flicker Drive.

It is a world in which intergalactic travel is the norm, where Badr al- Budur is a planet in the Fourth Galaxy, a stopover on the way to other galaxies, a spaceport with MIKHAIL'S QWIKSNAK , a multilingual Cafeteria , a mini-cine, a cybercade and Q-BO SLEEP. Q – BO SLEEP is a place where you check in by inserting your card and punching in the number of hours you want to sleep. Then you get your Hi–REM or Dropout tab from the dispenser and "you're bye-bye until your jump to Erewhon or Xanadu or wherever " (2).

But Badr al-Budur is perfect for Hoban's philosophical concerns. As a stopover it is a place on the way to somewhere else, "an in-between place" (2). What Fremder Gorn, the protagonist likes about Badru is that "it's so much what it is, so much the appearance of itself printed on the very thin membrane that we call reality. On the other side of the membrane is the endless becoming that swallows up years and worlds (3). In other words all space and time being transformed in an endless becoming that is the essence of eternity.

What makes this world of Flicker Drive possible is an exploitation of 'Zoetic oscillations', a phenomenon that Fremdor Gorn's grandfather Elias Gorn had investigated as far back as 1969. Zoetic oscillations are the scientific equivalent of Kraken's flickering. Elias Gorn's investigations suggest that they might be the "universal communication pattern "(9). But unfortunately in the twentieth century he does not have the technology to put it into practice. That is left for his children Isodor and Helen to do. They make use of the technology invented by Victor Lossiter whose famous experiment with a rat in 2019 showed a film taken with a camera with a 'nanosecond quartz flash' which revealed frame after frame of an empty laboratory table, "thereby demonstrating that life and matter are not continuous but intermittent, a non-linear attention of being and non-being at varying degrees in the ultraband" (10). Helen Gorn's investigations result in the invention of the flicker drive, the driving force behind the world of 2052, a world in which the great locomotives have thundered into oblivion and the automobiles have spluttered to a halt in gridlock.

Helen Gorn does not live to see her son. She commits suicide when seven months pregnant and it is through ultra-modern medical technology that Fremder Elijah Gorn survives. He spends the last two months in an artificial womb with the sound of his mother's recorded heartbeat in his unborn ears.

Fremder begins with a literally chilling scene in which Fremder Gorn in a blue coverall tumbles towards us through the frozen space and darkness of the fourth Galaxy. He has no spacesuit, no helmet, no oxygen. He does not know what has happened to his spaceship, the *Clever Daughter*, nor to its seven-member crew. The scientists in- charge of course want to know what happened. For Fremder and for Russell Hoban, it is the beginning of a journey into the past and an attempt to connect with a larger cosmic reality. How had he been able to hold on to the world when the others had lost their grip on it? "When I say 'the world', I don't mean Planet Earth," Fremder says, "I mean everything this side of the reality membrane " (4).

Hoban connects many of his deeply held views on the nature of reality with some of the models of quantum reality in this novel. Because this is a science fiction novel, he is able to devote more space than in his other novels to a scientific rendering of his vision of reality. Fremder himself is obsessed with the nature of reality from childhood on. "Early on in my childhood I sensed the thinness of reality and I became terrified of what might be on the other side of the membrane: I imagined a ceaseless becoming that swallowed everything up "(15). In a society that is sharply divided into shorties and clowns who menace the streets (they once attack Helen and Isodor, raping her and leaving him a cripple) and the class A citizens who use

locked, elevated walkways to get around. It is the nature of circumscribed social realities that interests him: "Reality envelopes interest me", he says. Each event in his life makes him construct a reality that has constantly to be dismantled or reconstructed. During his affair with Judith she asks him whether he is part of her reality and he replies, "Always" (28). But even that reality changes. "Things between Judith and me dwindled month by month until we were no longer part at each other's reality" (32).

When Lowell Sixe comes to Fremder with the shattering details of his part and of the secret Elijah Project that Helen and Isodor were involved in, he brings a paper written by Isodor about the constructed nature of reality:

> Centricity of event as perceived by a participant in the event is reciprocal with the observed universe: the universe configures the event and the event configures the universe. Each life is a sequence of event- universes, each sequence having equal reality subjectively and no reality objectively. Objective reality is not possible within the sequence, therefore subjective reality, regardless of consensus is the only reality" (144).

Later when Katya Mazur, with whom he had fallen in love, is discovered to be a creation of Pythia (the Darwinian intelligence of 23.7 billion photoneurons that had come online in

2034 to cope with the flood of data arising from flicker drive) he feels his "reality envelope beginning to come apart" (175). And then passively he begins to ruminate:

> Perhaps this world that in us, this world that we're in, was never meant to be fixed and permanent; perhaps it's only one of a continuous succession of world ideas passing through the world-mind. And we are, all of us the passing and impermanent perceivers of it (175).

This theme – the idea of reality being one mind – is a constant one in Hoban and in his later works is seen in conjunction with reality as a flickering one – a reality of light and darkness, appearance and disappearance, presence and absence. "More and more I find life is a series of disappearances followed usually but not always by reappearances; you disappear from your morning self and reappear as your afternoon self; you disappear from feeling good and reappear feeling bad " (32). The tongue in – cheek humour is of course trademark Hoban, but it express a theme that Hoban pursues in different variations throughout the novel.

In *Fremder*, it is connecting with the flickering moments of blacknesses that connect one with reality. This connection, like the quest of the hero in *Riddley Walker*, is also a journey into the past – the story of Helen and Isodor Gorn – that will help

Fremder to come back with the knowledge that will help him to harmonize with the present. But because Helen and Isodor were pioneers in the art of flicker drive (the ability to enter the flickering moment of darkness and travel to other galaxies before the moment of light appears), it means connecting with the darkness in between the light, the stillness in between the action too.

Fremder feels the need to connect with what he calls the Mind from the time that he beats up the bully, Albert Stiggs as a boy. It was then that he felt that his Mind spoke to him for the first time. "I knew even then that it wasn't my mind in the same way that my brain was my brain", he says, "this was a mind that had been here long before I arrived on the scene and it would be here long after I was gone "(17). This glimpse of a Mind that once spoke to him and doesn't speak to him for a long time thereafter is the beginning of a lifelong obsession. There is an emptiness in his life that he always wants to fill and his becoming a deepspacer (an inter-galactic astronaut of the future) is because of a need to connect the emptiness within with a vast emptiness without, the blackness within with the darkness without. "I felt a craving in me for deep space, but most of all I wanted to make friends with that mind that had spoken to me " (17).

Although the Kraken which dominates *The Medusa Frequency* is never mentioned in *Fremder,* it is obvious that one aspect of the Mind is indeed this beast which symbolizes the terror of being. When Isodor's Amygdala is subjected to analysis, he smells a purple-blue that is "like a great beast, ancient and forgotten" and he says that "only the brain stands between us and it" (22). Fremder is sure that the 'It' that Isodor refers to is what he'd "been trying to get in touch with ever since the day [he] broke. Albert Stiggs nose but [he] still hadn't learned how to get [his] brain out of the way" (23).

It is this terror of being that he incoherently talks about during the investigation into how he survived in deep space at 4^0 Kelvin without oxygen; "If you can hold on to the terror you can hold on to the world " (35). Later, taking to Waldo Simkin he quotes a line from Rilke's First Duino Elegy, "Beauty is nothing but the beginning of terror" (37), and suddenly for the second time in his life he connects with the Mind and the Mind bellows in his head:

> SAY IT, SAY THE EVERYTHING-FEAR, THE ALL-TERROR; I TOO FEAR EVERYTHING. I FEAR MY LONG-AGO, BEGINNING AND THE AWAKENING OF DREAD, I FEAR THE UNCEASING ... BECOMING OF ME. I FEAR THE HUGE AND THE TINY, THE FAR AND THE NEAR OF ME, AND I FEAR THE MOMENT THAT IS NOW AND NOW AND NOW WITHOUT RESPITE (37-38).

Pearl, the robot on the asteroid A373, modelled on Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring,* had recited to him the first of Rike's Dueno Elegies a couple of years before in a "Eurydice voice, low and breathy and full of shadows" (66). Rilke is of course, an important poet for Hoban and we have seen him earlier in *The Medusa Frequency.* Fremder himself thinks of Rilke's angel in the poem as "the ultimate degree of perception, in the same way that terror is the ultimate degree of beauty, living at the farther end of a spectrum in which we find closer to us, the never-to-be answered question in the eyes of the girl with the pearl earring " (67).

Rilke himself had written about the angels in a letter dated Nov 13, 1925 to Witold Hulewicz:

> The angel of the Elegies is that creature in whom the transformation of the visible into the invisible, which we are accomplishing, already appears in its completion....that being who guarantees the recognition of a higher level of reality in the invisible – therefore 'terrifying' for us, because we, it's lovers and transformers, still cling to the visible. (Rilke 317).

In that sense, not only is Rilke's angel close to Hoban's Mind or It, but also to Isodor Gorn whose face stretched across the Fourth Galaxy is the shocking twist to Hoban's tale – a concretization of the material becoming the spiritual. Rilke

himself had more to say about beauty as the beginning of terror in a letter dated Apr 23, 1923 to countess Margot Sizzo- Noris – Crouy :

> More and more in my life and in my work I am guided by the effort to correct our old repressions, which have removed and gradually estranged from us the mysteries out of whose abundance our lives might seem truly infinite. It is true that these mysteries are dreadful and people have always drawn away from them. But where can we find anything sweet and glorious that would never wear this mask, the mask of the dreadful? Life – and we know nothing else -, isn't life itself dreadful? But as soon as we acknowledge its dreadfulness (not as opponents: What kind of match would we be for it?), but somehow with a confidence that this very dreadfulness may be something completely ours, though something that is just now too great, too vast, too incomprehensible for our learning hearts-: as soon as we accept life's most terrifying dreadfulness, at the risk of perishing from it (that is, from our own Too-much!) - then an intuition of blessedness will open for us and at this cost, will be ours, whoever does not, sometime or other, give his full consent, to the dreadfulness of life, can never take possession of the unutterable abundance and power of our existence; can only walk on its edge and one day when the judgment is given, will have been neither alive nor dead. To show the identity of dreadfulness and bliss, these two faces on the same divine head, indeed this one single face, which just presents itself this way or that, according to our distance from it or the state of mind in

> which we perceive it, this is the true significance and purpose of the Elegies and Sonnets to Orpheus" (Rilke 317).

It is of course no wonder that Hoban quotes the entire section from the *First Elegy* in *Fremder* and from *Orpheus, Euridice, Hermes* in *The Medusa Frequency*. Fremder survives the disaster of the *Clever Daughter* because he holds on to the terror which is also the beauty. It is the terror of Bach's *Art at Fugue* that Fremder holds on to when the *Clever Daughter* disappears from around him (45).

This terror is concretized in a mind-boggling way during the Pythia Session. Connected to the Data Evaluator (Autonomous Response) in order to go back to the past, Fremder begins to dredge up memories. This is of course an important stage in the Quest of the Hero as detailed by Joseph Campbell. One has to go to one's past or the underworld or both in order to receive the invaluable wisdom, which will help one to come back to the world, a renewed person. And Pythia itself is the name of the priestess of Apollo who at Delphi pronounced her oracles – being one who was connected to the universe and its secrets.

Fremder's terror is connected to a giant mantis shrimp which is capable of converting it into pixels on a screen and as the terror that Fremder felt when the *Clever Daughter* disappeared surges up in him, the pixels on the screen become a

degree of screaming purple blue, the same colour that Isodor Gorn saw in Session 318.

Fremder's journey, like the journey of so many other Hoban heroes, is an ontological adventure that goes all the way down to the fear that quivers at the core of human consciousness. To connect with reality is to connect with this darkness. "Flicker with me, Fremder, in the place we know so well," Pythia tells him, "the place you have been afraid to go to, flicker with me in the black and come to me" (80).

This blackness, this terror is an essential aspect of humanness, "the dark needs your humanness," Pythia tells him, "Elijah was fed on darkness, that was how the lord kept him alive by the brook Cherith" (81).

Elijah is an important symbol of realization in Hoban and Pilgermann at the moment of self-fulfillment is seen as both Elijah and Christ. For Hoban, the Biblical image of Elijah on Mt. Carmel, waiting for rain becomes a symbol of man waiting to make the right connection. "What was Elijah waiting for on Carmel?" Fremder wonders: "Pain, yes, but more than that he was waiting for the big hook-up that would make him the full Elijah, that would let him be himself" (16).

Fremder, as one who has been baptized Elijah, also waits to get connected to the darkness, so that he can be his full self too. The ravens that fed Elijah by the brook Cherith, hence become the darkness that feeds humanness and blackness itself the flicker with which one has to connect. In the photographs of Isodor Gorn, he looks as if "a blackness inside him was trying to join up with a blackness outside" (19). During Helen Gorn's therapy session, after the first unsuccessful suicide attempt (with significantly a Dr. Schwartz, Schwartz being German for black), she says, "Before we're born we're integrated with the black. Birth tears us loose from that and disintegrates us into life. So I thought, Why not reintegrate?" (63). In one of Isodor's notebooks there is the following entry two months before his death: "The black is all there is. That's why you build your house on the black it'll last forever" (64).

For Hoban, the wavelengths of darkness and frequencies of silence are the flicker at the heart of things. Vermeer, for Hoban, is important because he had noted this flicker: "Looking past the illusory continuity of image, he had seen the alternating being and non-being of his model" (104) and as Fremder looks at the hologram of Vermeer's girl he finds it impossible to see her continuously: "She was here and gone, here and gone, her questioning face, like the music I was hearing, always now and

partly remembered" (104). For Helen Gorn too, reality is never continuous. In her notebooks she writes:

> When I ask people whether they experience being as a smoothly continuous state or as a flickering one, they all say, its smooth and continuous for them. For me its always been flickering. Not visually – I've never actually seen the black between the pictures in my eyes, but I've sensed it in my brain and for that reason I don't make any assumptions about reality (126).

This flicker is not one between darkness and light, or stillness and action, or music and silence alone. Even to construct his story is difficult for Fremder because of the flicker at the heart of things: "The past and present flicker together in my mind and it isn't easy to sort through the different strands of story to find one that is only mine" (61).The idea of the Mind or Reality looking out of one's eyes is one that recurs again and again in Hoban and Vermeer's girl is important to him because of the fact that her look seems to him to come from the flicker at the heart of things (102). But it is something that Fremder sees everywhere. At the Loughcrew Passage-Tomb cemetery he sees the carved stone that is like the body of a cephalopod marked all over either concentric circles with deep holes at their centers. And immediately he is reminded of the beast that is named the Kraken in *The Medusa Frequency*. "There were so many eyes

everywhere," he notes, "And out of all of them looked the great animal of the everything" (106).

If Fremder is the Elijah who, in the Bible suddenly appears out of the nowhere because the action needs him, he is also the flicker at the heart of things because he is always here and 'Gorn'. Gorn even when present he is a concretization of the being/non-being complemantarity that to Hoban makes up the fabric of reality. "Here and gone, the music; the mind shielding it from the winds of forgetting; holding what is partly now and partly remembered," Fremder muses, "here and gone, the whisper of vox humana in the stones of darkness"(19). On his last night at Hubble Straits, he goes to the Hubble Bubble with Caroline Lovecraft who has unsuccessfully tried to get him to remember what actually happened on the *Clever Daughter* and listens to Warny Flim's song: "Here and Gone / the picture of you in my eye / our voice, your laughter and your walk" (59) and it is an image of both his vision of reality as well as his unconnectedness at that stage.

His is a slow journey to the very depths of consciousness – a journey from Fremder to Elijah. Sometimes he doesn't seem to be connected even to himself. "Stranger is my name and there are times when I'm a stranger to myself," he says(120). Earlier Caroline accuses him of this lack of connection: "You're the most

alone person I've ever met." And she understands that the reason why he escaped the *Clever Daughter* disaster was because of this. "You were'nt connected to your ship or to the others; When they went you stayed alone." She tells him, "And you never connected with me although you stick your male part into my female one" (59).

His path towards Elijahdom comes with Lowell Sixe's revelation of the terrible secret of Helen and Isodor's involvement in the construction of alternate worlds in the Elijah project. While Hoban's characters are all essentially potential shamans who in the end connect with an essential part of their past or/and the cosmos, his novels are characterized by the way he connects his private vision to current contemporary literary and scientific theories. If in *Riddley Walker* and *Pilgermann* he connects the visions of Ridley and Pilgermann to nuclear and quantum physics, in *Fremder* he connects Fremder's quests to the bizarre world of multiple universes.

Helen and Isodor's experiments to make a probability wave for initially a rat and then for Isodor himself and then to make the wave function collapse into another reality, immediately take us to the frontiers of the Copenhagen interpretation of the quantum theory and the still controversial though mathematically impeccable explanation of Hugh Everett.

According to the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics the unmeasured world is just what the quantum wave function represents it to be - a world of unrealized potential. At the moment of measurement, one of these tendencies is magically granted a more exciting life style, being transformed into the world of actuality as an observed phenomena (Casti 452). Eugene Wigner and John Von Newmann have argued that only special types of measuring devices – those possessing human-level consciousness – can collapse wave functions (Barrow 166). This results in a solipsistic world where reality is constructed by the conscious self and this extremely suggestive theory has been echoed in the works of many contemporary writers like Hoban.

But in *Fremder*, Hoban goes one degree further in bringing in the resonance of Hugh Everett's many-worlds interpretation. Everett, dissatisfied with the traditional view that required wave functions to collapse magically when observed, came with the still more controversial theory that the wave function does not collapse into one alternative when measured, but that all the alternatives exist in different worlds. "What happens when we make a measurement at the quantum level is that we are forced by the process of observation to select one of these alternatives, which becomes part of what we see as the "real" world, the act of observation cuts the ties that bind alternative realities together and allows them to go on their separate ways" (Gribbin 237).

The consequences for philosophy as well as for science are extraordinary:

> Like a world designed by Borges, everything that can happen does happen. There are worlds in which we never die. The evolution of life in the universe, no matter how improbable must occur. Each of us will continue to exist for as long as there is space and time, for even if we die in this world there is another where we do not, ad infinitum (Barrow 170).

At an intensely personal level, Helen wonders about that day when she was raped and Isoder left crippled by the shorties and the clowns. "In an infinite number of possible worlds there must have been one in which I had a gun and shot the lot of them. The quantum wave happened to collapse in the wrong universe for me" (134).

However it is this very idea that makes her think of the Elijah Project. Elijah for her had always been the prophet who suddenly appeared out of nowhere because the action of the time needed him – the stranger who suddenly appeared. She thinks of Elijah as a "collapse of wave function, his world precipitated from an infinite wave of possibilities suddenly he's there bringing her reality that is now the only reality" (128).

Her subsequent experiment to create a wave function for a rat and then to make it collapse in an alternate universe goes

horribly wrong – only half the rat disappears leaving a horrible mess in the cage. But even this does not prepare us for the truth about Isodor – that Isodor sets up a similar experiment for himself and the same thing that happened to the rat happens to him. And it is this head that disappears into another world that Fremder sees stretched right across the universe when *Clever Daughter* disappears.

In a novel that is radically different from his other novels, in that the climax is a series of shocking revelations, Fremder connects with the cosmos when he discovers what he has been questing for all his life – who his father was. The fact that Isodor, his mother's brother was in fact his father is yet another of the terrible revelations that make this novel unique among Hoban's works. But even this does not prepare us for the final shattering revelation that Pythia, the Data Evaluator (Autonomous Response), a Darwinian intelligence of 23.7 billion photoneurons is in fact the brain of Helen Gorn, taken care of by her successor Irene Heale and now developing into a bigger and bigger mind because of all the connections it is making.

Her invitation to him to flicker again and join her and Isodor so that they would have a second chance to be the family doesn't work out in quite the way she expects. And the novel

ends exactly as it began with Fremder once again floating in deep space without oxygen, drifting towards Badr-al – Budur.

"Reality is the responsibility of those who perceive it," Helen had told him (181) and his first escape had been because he had been confronted by two realities – the reality of 'Clever Daughter' and the reality of Isodor Gorn's face stretched out across the Fourth Galaxy – and he had leant towards his father. Like all the mythical heroes and Hoban's own protagonists Fremder had gone to a place, far away in both time and space, made the right connections and come back with the wisdom of the 'well connected'. After his second comeback he wakes up in the Intensive Care at Hubble Straits and asks his mind whether it is there and it replies YES (183). The mind does not go away and they find a lot to talk about. He reconnects with Caroline who had left him after complaining of his unconnectedness. In his own way he has become Elijah.

In one of her notebooks Helen had written: "Elijah is more than a specific individual; Elijah is a state of things, a condition, a convergence of possibilities, a coming together of scattered possibilities that manifest themselves as sudden and unpredicted action" (154). The climax of the Elijah story in the Bible is when Elijah goes up into heaven in a chariot of fire and a whirlwind, Fremder Elijah Gorn too has his brush with eternity in a

spacecraft that goes up literally in fire and whirlwind and it is on such a journey that he finds himself.

During his sessions after the first escape there had been an emptiness in his vision. " I was getting ringed centres of bright emptiness in my vision, circles of nothing. They kept expanding and wiping one another out do new circles of nothing could appear" (37). Later after the session with Pythia when he sees the face of his father stretched out he realizes that the circles of bright emptiness are gone (178). By the end he "can see [his] way much clearer now that the circles of emptiness are gone" (184).

In *Fremder*, the attempt to question and go beyond the conventional understanding of reality is given a new dimension by relying on the generic features of science fiction. But whereas the writer of science fiction usually engages with the technology of the future alone, Hoban connects the know-how of space travel to his ideas about the essential nature of reality, and how consciousness itself is altered by changes in technology. *Fremder* thus becomes less a novel about the mechanics of space travel than about its implications for the nature of man and his relation to the universe. Hoban links this futuristic world with his concerns for the problems of representation by ingeniously integrating it with the mechanics of motion pictures. The crossovers between the various kinds of arts that have fascinated

Hoban here assume a larger resonance due to the connection that he makes between stillness and motion that is the scientific basis of the movies, between absence and presence that informs much of current critical theory and between the seen and the unseen that lies at the heart of philosophy and religion.

Conclusion

Chapter 8

Conclusion

Russell Hoban's career suggests a very eclectic mind that is perfectly at ease with modern theories that are voiced both as the crisis and the recovery of the protagonist. The pattern of crisis that the previous chapters have studied is a condition where Hoban is concerned with sudden losses that the characters have experienced. These losses are generally those of love, commitment, creativity, modes of artistic expression, and history and are very often accompanied by losses of a bodily nature. Hoban's prime concern is to communicate man's fear of unrelatedness not merely of a social nature with its question of commitment but of a metaphysical one with its questions of reality, of language, of memory, and of recurrent narrative patterns like myth. The recovery and growth of the protagonist is dependent on the connections that he makes between bodily ailments and the condition of unrelatedness, between the past and the present into which its continuities extend and between various forms of artistic representations. Connections are also made with the characters and expressions of a cultural past, (literature, art, music) and a collective past(religion, myth,

nature).The escape from unrelatedness is an escape into a number of connections, often reflected in a number of contemporary theories but also suggesting the awareness of many perennial questions. His novels repeatedly attempt to see life as one where one undergoes a crisis of a personal as well as an artistic nature but which can be overcome by a condition where consciousness is receptive to a larger order of existence. This integration is a return to a condition of restored ability – both artistic and personal. From myth to painting and from film to poetry, the hero journeys in his search for connections that proliferate, making the boundaries of human existence and expression very deceptive. The novels of Hoban are about the loss of connections, but they are also about the connections of losses, which ultimately turn out to be instrumental in reaffirming the potential of man.

The analysis has found that *Kleinzeit* in which Russell Hoban came into his own, is a novel about a crisis related to the breakdown of an identity, especially of an artistic nature, and the process of surmounting that crisis through a series of experiences and patterns of understanding. These experiences run back into the personal past defined by memories of childhood, that are integrated into a landscape bound by the seasons and the death of people very near to the person who suffers the crisis but who are not within the control of the person who suffers the crisis.

The absence of an ordering principle of memory is symptomatic of the crisis. The experience is that of a mind acutely conscious of the lack of connection between these experiences of the past and the meaningless present. The novel with its image of the hospital, a number of deaths and the cure of the protagonist creates a pattern that the study has traced to the last novel that is brought within the scope of the study. It has further been substantiated that the Orpheus myth, which is central to the recovery of Kleinzeit, is a pattern that is repeated in *The Medusa Frequency*. The Orpheus myth becomes the larger narrative that acts as a remedy that helps Kleinzeit to integrate himself into a larger order of reality, since myths invariably point to experiences, fears and desires that are vital to humanity. In *Kleinzeit* through its idea of the Orpheus myth as the central organizing principle, the motifs of the underworld and the underground (the London Tube) are incorporated, creating a vision of life where the past is connected to the present. This connection is made through a play on the word "remember" with its major connotation with memory and also its association with "re-membering" or a coming together of parts. Aided by memory, Kleinzeit moves from dismemberment, a condition of disorder, and a failure to achieve meaning to a coherent consciousness that is able to acknowledge and arrange experience. The recovery of memory is a recovery of a landscape from the past and this connection with the past is

essential for attaining a larger consciousness about the nature of reality, language and the possible ways of representing that reality. This is an idea that surfaces again and with greater elaboration in *The Medusa Frequency.*

It is also seen from this study that *Kleinzeit* introduces a very different idea of the notion of a hospital where the crisis, a failure in articulation, not essentially the result of a medical condition, gets treated as an artistic and metaphysical problem. This redefinition of the idea of the hospital generates a convenient space where questions of health, death, language and notions of the endless deferral of meaning, create a complex web in which Kleinzeit experiences harmony. The progression, it was found, is one where the hero regains his health and language, which inspire him to draw a circle, a symbol of totality and perfection. His return to normalcy is also an acknowledgement of the importance of articulation as a kind of remedy since he achieves harmony when he hears the lines from "L'Allegro". Hoban seems to convey that in the past language has aided artists to achieve harmony and Kleinzeit remembering Milton's line also becomes an artist connecting with the literary and artistic past. *Kleinzeit* thus establishes the idea that language is both the cause of the crisis as well as its cure as the identity of every person especially of an artist is to a great extent vitally determined by his understanding of language. From the feeling of

an inadequacy of language in the hospital, the hero returns with a renewed faith in himself for which renewed conviction in the ability of language is responsible.

Turtle Diary, it was found, is a continuation of *Kleinzeit*, in that it elaborates the desire to realize the existence of a larger order in one's life. But the nature of the order that is desired and the ways of realizing that order differ markedly from the previous novel. *Turtle Diary* stands apart from the novels that came earlier and later, because the female protagonist is unique. Like Kleinzeit, Neaera is an artist, a writer of children's stories who has a writer's block. The idea of a solution through some artificial stimulation which will aid in the visiting of the places in the head that one has not visited so far which receives a more elaborate treatment in *The Medusa Frequency*, makes its first appearance here.

Both William G. and Neaera H. undergo a period of crisis and attempt to find a solution to the problems through a sophisticated environmental consciousness. As in *Kleinzeit*, the past is there, but it is summoned in a radically different way. If the return to the past in *Kleinzeit* was merely an act of remembrance, in *Turtle Diary*, the journey to release the turtles becomes a physical return to one's actual place of birth itself. In *Kleinzeit*, the return to the past was found to be a return to a

personal past, and the larger order was suggested in terms of myth. In *Turtle Diary* the impulse is to get to the beginning of everything and it finds a wonderful correspondence in the behaviour of the turtles. In a way, this functions as a kind of myth, since the turtles are controlled by instincts that can be seen as a manifestation of certain primordial urges. This suggests the possibility of certain types of experiences that refuse to be erased by history and geography. The sea too, stands as an image of a primordial experience and this image recurs in *The Medusa Frequency*.

By presenting similar thoughts in the diary jottings of the two protagonists, Hoban conveys the idea of an inter-relationship that exists even when one does not realize it. The-desire to share a larger order is against the aesthetics of the diary with its personal connotation of closed spaces. In *Turtle Diary*, the diaries of the two characters become the diary of the turtle when they take the turtles and release them into the sea.

The threat of death that was a theme of *Kleinzeit* surfaces in *Turtle Diary* in the form of other characters like Miss Neap who suffer from the same crisis as the protagonists, but who succumb to it. The use of Thucydides and *The Four Quartets* also suggests the larger order of history and artistic achievements to which connections have to be made to effect a cure for the crisis.

Like *Kleinzeit*, *Turtle Diary* ends with affirmation of life and the continuance of cyclical rhythms, but the ending is extremely muted in contrast to the exuberant one of *Kleinzeit.*

Written from the perspective of a twelve-year-old boy, with he narrative beginning on his twelfth birthday, *Riddley Walker* is the only professional "connexion man" in Hoban. The reconstruction of the post-holocaust world is simultaneously a reconstruction of the word. The future, as in the earlier novels, is dependent on the past. The gradual building up of the world offers Hoban the context to return to beginnings. The crisis described in the novel is found to be the result of the social role of a shaman assigned to Riddley on the death of his father. The role is forced upon him and Riddley feels that his identity which is defined by the expectations of the society in which he lives is at stake since he is not able to decipher and communicate the connections that are implicit in certain performances that have attained the status of a ritual. Language, the study has shown, is the most pressing concern of the novel as it is of the protagonist. Riddley's crisis is a result of his need to construct a past from fragments which are a puzzle to him. Further *Riddley Walker* shows in an effective way the absolute necessity of myth and connections with a larger reality. The dependency of man on myth is such that even when all myths are destroyed man will

keep on inventing new ones. But they are also a result of the stories within him.

Hoban plays upon the idea of the infancy of language, which is supported by the image of the little boy. The boy's name effectively fuses the idea of 'Riddle' and its associations with cryptic language and lost meaning with the idea of 'Quest' in the image of walking. Hoban's intention, the study has shown, is to explore the problems of a particular period in human history where a shift from the spoken word to the written word took place. This is also the stage when literature in the literal sense of 'writing' actually originates.

The idea of the rational, orderly, causal approach used to connect with the larger order is replaced by the notion of the irrational, the spontaneous, the dreamy and the trance-like, a pattern which appears regularly in Hoban's novels. Though the Eusa myth is a religious remnant, it is explained in such a way that the connections that the boy perceives are related to nuclear fission. The novel ends with an affirmative note even though the discovery of gunpowder may suggest that a new cycle of violence and destruction is going to be unleashed, since it also ends with the image of Ridley becoming the first writer in human history. The discovery of violence is balanced by the discovery of writing with its notions of permanence.

Pilgermann continues with the idea of the quest but the theme of the quest is found to be firmly placed within the pattern of a pilgrimage. Religion is all-important in this novel and the past remains very relevant to the quest. History and tradition bear heavily on the novel. More than in any other novel of Hoban, in *Pilgermann*, history and religion impart to the hero, the feeling of being whole. The fate of Pilgermann is decided by the image of the Fall and through him Hoban works out the theme of disobedience, fall and redemption. His crisis, in this case castration, is forcibly committed on him, while in other novels the condition of absence is not a result of punishment. It is also not a result of a shaken belief in one's artistic potential as in the case of *Kleinzeit* or *Turtle Diary*, but the result of a transgression. The secular journey in *Turtle Diary* is replaced by a religious one *Pilgermann.* Pilgermann becomes a pilgrim because he has ceased to be a man. The crisis that he experiences is central to his definition of himself, that is, he has defined himself by his sexual desire. Thus, the unmanning of Pilgermann which on superficial terms might look unlike that of heroes of earlier novels, on a close scrutiny of the text is found to be equally to central to the notion of identity.

Pilgermann elaborates the idea that the world is a result of a series of binary oppositions, an idea that was treated at length in *Riddley Walker*. Hoban has tried to underscore the problems of

binary thought through the figure of Pilgermann who cannot be understood in terms of an either/or position. The search for wholeness in this novel is the search of a religious jew, the only one to be found among Hoban's Heroes (Fremder Gorn is not a traditionally religious person). The sense of a lack of wholeness is understood in terms of sexuality but the solution offered is not anything that can be understood in terms of a renewed potency. The wholeness desired and offered is seen as the logical culmination of religious enterprise. Unlike *Riddley Walker* where problems of language are foregrounded as a precipitating factor and a symptom of the hero's condition, language ceases to be a major concern in this novel. The search for harmony and wholeness takes Hoban to the world of painting and sculpture. The violence done to Pilgermann's body is duplicated by a series of images of violence and his death as a man is further reflected in his final death along with the scenes of death that he witnesses on his way to Antioch. Art operates as an organizing principle reflecting the violence of life, and of death, stressing the strangeness and unreality that is seldom acknowledged but lies very near to our day-to-day experience of reality. Another interesting insight that was revealed is that, though language as a concern is not foregrounded in the novel, Hoban has used a number of geometrical patterns in the narrative to imply that the

idea of wholeness and harmony includes the visual patterns that are not generated out of verbal representations alone.

With its elaborate use of the Orpheus myth Hoban in *The Medusa Frequency* has interrogated many of the orthodox images of the artist, reality and language. Herman Orff, the protagonist, suggests both Hermes, the messenger of the gods and the conveyor of meaning, as well as Orpheus, the archetypal artist trying to represent reality. The dynamics of *The Medusa Frequency* is that of a journey that echoes the mythical journeys of Orpheus, the quintessential artist in search of Eurydice, the ever-elusive meaning. These journeys are counterpointed in the present by Herman's quest for the right language that can truthfully represent reality, a quest that is haunted by the image of a lost female figure who keeps changing from Luise to Melanie to Vermeer's "Girl with a Pearl Earring" to Eurydice to Medusa.

These female figures are ultimately associated with a definition of reality and meaning that stresses absence rather than presence. Hoban skillfully imposes the image of Orpheus yearning for meaning in the form of Eurydice onto Herman Orff's quest for Luise. Herman's crisis is both a crisis in his personal love life and in his career as a writer. Loss is at the heart of everything that one finds in *The Medusa Frequency* : loss of creativity, loss of voice, loss of sanity, loss of language, loss of

audience, loss of body, loss of being, loss of love and the loss that is at the heart of every artistic encounter.

Herman's cure is aided by the connection he can make between the past and the present through artist figures(Orpheus, Istvan Fallok, Gosta Kraken, Herman himself) and the object of their quests (Eurydice, Vermeer's Girl, Luise, Melanie).

The Medusa Frequency foreshadows *Fremder* in its preoccupation with the flickering nature of reality and the realization of this insubstantial nature of reality is vital to the surmounting of the writer's block that Herman faces. He is cured of the writer's block only when he makes the right connection, which demands a willingness to submit to the unknown, the unconscious and the unarticulated. Herman's search for the right connection becomes a narrative of the ways in which the artist has to struggle, to find a space that will generate its own narrative which will resist and be a variant of the dominant readings of certain narratives. Representaion is possible only with the realization that the vast sea of the unsaid allows only small waves of the articulated. Through out *The Medusa Frequency* there is a bifocal vision that focuses on a world of known language and a world of non-language or no language. Through the various stories of Orpheus, Hoban displays a very

sophisticated consciousness that is aware of the inevitable falsifications that determine and that lie at the heart of every narrative.

The quest for connections, as in the earlier novels, traces a route through myth thus lifting both Herman's crisis and its cure to a timeless plane. Herman's progress towards language and the confidence in its ability to represent reality are haunted by the death of people like Gom Yawncher and Gosta Kraken who experience similar problems.

Hoban's search for the right connection also becomes a context to elaborate certain theories of romantic inspiration. In Herman's attempt to find the right connection, the Vermeer Girl makes him aware of the underlying feminine principle that connects all the women in his life with the figures of the mythical past and which in the novel is constantly equated with meaning. From loss and failure and lament, Hoban, through the figure of Rilke and the poem "No More Klage", moves to a state of affirmation and confidence in an artist's creativity. The novel ends on a note of optimism with the final image of Medusa as language and representation, behind and beyond the Vermeer Girl and Eurydice.

Fremder, the last work which falls within the scope of this study carries further the themes of *The Medusa Frequency* like the ones of stillness in movement and absence in presence. Its narrative is found to be greatly determined by the idea of reality as flickering and discontinuous. The ontological positions are those derived from the theoretical basis of motion pictures. It relies heavily on the idea of reality as frame-by-frame experience where the blanks and absences are what give motion to still pictures; that reality is a condition to be realized in the spaces that lie in between. But this is also suggestive of Derridean notions of language where meaning resides in gaps and silences.

The Orpheus myth does not figure in a major way in *Fremder* and here the temporal orientation is towards the future. Its narrative structure relies on science-fiction idea of journeying through space and making physical contact with other worlds. The desire to be connected as in the earlier novels is linked to images of the paintings of Vermeer, the poetry of Rilke and the voice of Eurydice. All these merge in the figure of robot Pearl, modelled on Vermeer's "Girl with a Pearl Earring" who recites the first of Rilke's Duino Elegies in a Eurydice voice. The idea of danger and death as implicit in the search for a higher order is one that is seen in the fate of the minor characters. This danger may range from suicide to disintegration.

The pattern that underlies the novel is similar to that of *Riddley Walker* since in both, the attempt to find a larger order, connection and harmony is linked to the idea of the parent figure but he idea of parenthood which received a traditional treatment in *Riddley Walker* here gives way to very unorthodox pattern that includes incest. The redefinition of his identity that is a result of his attempt to make connections, is a result of revelations that are physically as well as psychologically traumatic for the hero.

The presence of Gosta Kraken in the novel connects it to the world of *The Medusa Frequency* and the notion of life as a series of appearances and disappearances. The idea of living in two worlds, a theme that connects all the novels that are brought under the purview of the study is made literal in science-fiction terms in *Fremder*.

Though *Fremder* continues the pattern of the earlier novels in terms of crisis, making connections and recovery, it differs in the way the final realization occurs as a very physical, literal one, when Fremder sees the face of Isodor Gorn stretched across the Galaxy. *Fremder* as an explicitly science-fiction novel presents a conclusion that is in harmony with its generic qualities. The final image of the novel suggests the distance that Hoban has travelled from the mythical past that provided the solutions in

Keinzeit to the futuristic world that provides the answers in *Fremder*.

Hoban, at seventy-seven still continues to entertain his admirers with his explorations of reality where part of the attractiveness comes from a richly allusive style of writing. His novels convey the impression that the primary concern of every novelist is to voice the condition of man in the world and his need to define himself as part of a larger order of reality. This merges with man's need to represent himself, to articulate the stories that constitute his identity. Ever conscious of the possibility of the play between different forms of representation he remains refreshingly unorthodox in the manner he exploits them in his writing. The desire to connect with a larger order and the questions of representation are also themes which take him to a mythical as well as historical past, a post-nuclear as well as science-fiction future and an ecological, religious and literary consciousness. Never opinionated, his receptiveness lays him open to an eclectic range of influences.

The world of Hoban is a world of pain, anguish and suffering, peopled by lonely figures trying to come to terms with the loss of love or the loss of one's ability to create. They transcend this loss as a result of the connections they make with the mythical, religious or literary past and these connections are

made a result of metaphorical or actual journeys through a variety of landscapers. The landscapes may range from the underworld of the Orpheus myth, the underground of the contemporary London, the crusades of medieval Europe to a devastated world twenty three centuries after the nuclear holocaust and the deep space of a science-fiction future. It is also a world where meaningful connections can be made through a number of religious traditions ranging from the monotheistic traditions of the Middle East and the pluralistic traditions of the East to the shamanistic ones from around the world. Connections can also be made from a literary tradition that includes Thucydides, Milton, Eliot, Coleridge and Rilke.

Hoban's writing is part of literary tradition that is conscious of the problems of representation and these are explored through a trial that leads to the world of advertisements, films, comic strips, graffiti, paintings, tiled patterns and museum brochures apart from canonical literature. The process of writing or artistic production is foregrounded in his work and there is a refusal to take away attention from the constructed nature of language that is characteristic of post-modern or metafictional writings. His writings also evoke many of the most contemporary literary theories like structuralism, post-structuralism and reader – response without losing sight of traditional romantic theories of inspiration.

Hoban's novels are also written against the background of twentieth century scientific theories that take into consideration uncertainity, multiple probabilities and the importance of the conscious observer. His favourite themes of the stillness in the movement and the movement in the stillness, the hereness and the goneness and the absence in the presence are related to both contemporary literary as well as scientific theories.

Hoban's writings are an attempt to engage with the stillness at the heart of movement, the absence at the centre of presence, the moment under the moment, the unseen and the unsaid. As he continues to create new novels, it is obvious that there are places in the head he still has to go to, to make new connections with a larger order. This larger order of the unsaid or the unrealized is one towards which he never ceases to move.

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