"FREELANCE MYSTIC": INDIVIDUATION, MYTHOPOEIA AND METAFICTION IN THE EARLY FICTION OF RUSSELL HOBAN

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an exploration of three interrelated modes – the psychological, the religious or mythopoeic, and the metafictional – in the early novels of Russell Hoban. It investigates the relationship between Hoban's religious vision and his literary style, through the lens of his 'fictional philosophy' as it is presented in his essay collection *The Moment under the Moment.*

In Chapter One, *Kleinzeit* is analysed to illustrate Hoban's portrayal of a contemporary crisis of meaning. It includes an introduction to the pattern of individuation and an exposition of Hoban's unique notion of heroism as embodied in Kleinzeit's journey of self-discovery. Hoban's mythopoeic impulse is elucidated with particular reference to his use of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth. Finally, in an attempt to demonstrate Hoban's ideas on the relationship between language and reality, various metafictional techniques are examined, especially in relation to the theme of transcendence.

In Chapter Two, the individuation theme in *The Medusa Frequency* is considered as a work of mourning, portraying Herman Orff's movement towards reconciliation and creative renewal. Following Paul Ricoeur, the Orpheus and Eurydice myth is seen as a myth of fault, embodying a primal transgression, and a source of the creative arts. The metafictional style is examined, especially the narrative mode, in order to show how Hoban dissolves the everyday world of reality into a fantastic realm of myth.

Chapter Three focuses on the individuation pattern as initiation in *Riddley Walker*, charting the hero's growth into adulthood. Various myths in the text are analysed to show how they portray human development and the nuclear catastrophe as a mythic Fall. The chapter argues that through Riddley's quest Hoban evokes a redemptive and regenerative fertility myth. The unique literary style of the novel, including the characteristics of 'Riddleyspeak' and the complexity of the process of interpretation is studied.

In Chapter Four, which deals with *Pilgermann*, the final phase of individuation – preparation for death – is discussed. Hoban's religious vision is dissected in relation to his mystical impulse as exemplified in the construction of the Hidden Lion pattern. Hoban's notion of God is investigated in relation to the philosophical problem of evil and suffering. Finally, *Pilgermann* is shown to be Hoban's most experimental literary novel as it activates his recurring metafictional techniques, investigations into narrative, and the relationship between language and the sacred.

This thesis concludes that Hoban's fiction is best understood holistically with both his religious and literary concerns inextricably entwined. Throughout his novels Hoban explores the human condition in modernity affirming the paradoxical, dialectical and mysterious nature of being.

CONTENTS

NOTE ON REFERENCES AND ABBREVIATIONS

I have followed the MLA guide to referencing in this thesis. See Gibaldi, Joseph. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers.* 6th Ed. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2003.

The following abbreviations are used when referencing works by Russell Hoban:

LBJ	*The Lion of Boaz-Jachin and Jachin-Boaz*
K	*Kleinzeit*
TD	*Turtle Diary*
RW	*Riddley Walker*
P	*Pilgermann*
MF	*The Medusa Frequency*
MUM	*The Moment under the Moment*
F	*Fremder*
MRCO	*Mr Rinyo-Clacton's Offer*
AG	*Angelica's Grotto*
AMND	*Amaryllis Night and Day*
BT	*The Bat Tattoo*
HNWL	*Her Name Was Lola*
LA	*Linger Awhile*

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DECLARATION

This thesis is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this thesis from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

M I Rumbold

24.04.2007

INTRODUCTION

Hoban's career: reputation and reception

When Russell Hoban turned eighty on 4 February 2005, his fan club 'The Kraken' hosted a "Some Poasym"[1] in honour of this unique and fascinating writer. Loyal fans gathered to celebrate the career of a talented yet little known novelist, who until 1969 wrote best-selling children's literature – including the classic *The Mouse and His Child* (1968) – and since his move from the United States to London has produced fourteen adult novels, two collections of poetry, a collection of essays and a libretto. The fact that, as many reviewers have noted, every year at this time pieces of yellow paper[2] with quotes from his novels are left in odd places around cities all over the world, attests not only to Russell Hoban's slightly bizarre following but that as a rare, inspirational writer Hoban is "the most intimate of geniuses" (Martin 20).

Martin notes that Hoban's "unique, oblique, animistic viewpoint on love and the world has won him critical panegyrics and legions of devoted fans, but he remains a word-of-mouth writer" (Martin 20). Despite many favourable reviews for his novels, including his more recent works *Fremder* (1996), *Amaryllis Night and Day* (2001), and *The Bat Tattoo* (2002), as well as various awards (*Riddley Walker* won him the 1982 John W. Campbell Memorial Award) Hoban remains a largely neglected contemporary novelist. In his 2002 review and interview for *The Guardian*, Nicholas Wroe comments that "Hoban's current status as a novelist" is "hovering somewhere between a cult and a mainstream writer" (Wroe n.pag.).[3]

There are various possible reasons for Hoban's lack of critical status and for the apparently polarised or contentious reception of his work. First, his novels seem to be written from the margins, "from a strange area" (Dipple 161). Christine Wilkie, who has written the only significant published monograph, *Through the Narrow Gate: The Mythological Consciousness of Russell Hoban* (1989) observes that "Hoban's writing does not fit easily into any contemporary patterns of Euro-American literature" yet has affinities with writers such as Pynchon, Vonnegut, Coover and Barth (Wilkie 16). Professor Alida Allison says, "part of the reason he hasn't had greater success is that he is '*sui generis*; he is from no real literary tradition and when academics and critics try to place him in one they

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[1] Taken from Hoban's most famous novel, *Riddley Walker*, this translates from 'Riddleyspeak' as 'symposium'. See the *Russell Hoban Convention Site* online.

[2] References to Hoban's favourite choice of paper are found in *Kleinzeit* and other novels.

[3] In an interview earlier that year, Hoban jokingly laughs, accepting his status as a 'cult writer' (largely as a result of the success and appeal of *Riddley Walker*): "If by cult writer, you mean very narrow appeal" (Hopkin n.pag.).

often find it impossible'" (qtd. in Wroe n.pag.). Reviews on the dustcovers of all his novels advertise that Hoban is "unclassifiable" (*Sunday Times*), an "Ur-novelist, a maverick voice that is like no other" (*Sunday Telegraph*). The novels' puzzlingly odd allegorical style and intertextual connections within his oeuvre as well eclectic allusions to art (music, sculpture, painting, film), myth, religion, philosophy, science and physics can make them difficult and demanding – Hoban has wryly described them as not expressly "esoteric" but "not for people whose lips move when they read" (qtd. in Hopkin n.pag.). Sara Hudston, reviewing *Amaryllis Night and Day*, sums it up: "Hoban makes use of a number of genres, including magical realism, fantasy and historical fiction, but his work resists categorization" (Hudston 22).

Secondly, Hoban's unconventional route from children's literature has "unjustly impeded his subsequent acceptance as a serious broad-ranging fictionist" (Dipple 161). Compounding this, as American-born but living and writing in Britain, Hoban's "outsider's position" in a field where "nationality can be seen to have much to do with the trends, forms, and reputations of the writers in various contexts and countries" has resulted in his being "largely ignored in America" (162). Meanwhile, in his new home his "indomitable reputation as a writer of children's books" has led to slightly misplaced comparisons with C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien. This has unfortunately meant that "so far Hoban has not yet received the place he deserves within a serious account of fiction in Britain and the United States in our time" (162).

A third, perhaps more fundamental reason concerns the nature of his novels and Hoban's unique literary vision. Hoban's novels embrace the metaphysical, spiritual, mythic nature of the human condition alongside often threatening or deconstructive aspects of literary theory (post-structuralism and postmodernism). Thus again, Hoban resists simple critical categorisation: while he may be described as an "experimental-metaphysical writer" like Samuel Beckett, or shown to be part of a postmodernist poetic with playful language games and exploring provocative epistemological and ontological problems, Hoban also writes "with a peculiar, complicated generosity of reference that connects him with an easy directness to the fantastic, fabulous, and mythic" (Dipple 162). Studies of Hoban's work have tended to be either Jungian based, complementing the spiritual, mythological nature of Hoban's writing (for example Branscomb and Wilkie) or they have tended to be linguistic, concerned with Hoban's use of language and his amenability to various trends in contemporary literary theory (Lara Dunwell's MA thesis, "'We make fiction because we are fiction': Displaced Authorities in the work of

Russell Hoban" provides a theoretically based critique of the early work of Russell Hoban, primarily through the lens of post-structuralist theory, especially that of Jacques Derrida).

Reviewing *Linger Awhile* (2006), which characteristically sees Hoban playing with notions of reality, Lucy Atkins writes:

> This is all distinctly postmodern: indeed, you can almost hear the PhD theses being tapped out in English departments across the nation. "There isn't just one reality, there are lots of them," says Irving, then changes his mind. "No, there's just the one and it contains all the others. It's a polyhedron and each plane is a window to a different reality." (Atkins n.pag.)

Here Atkins classes Hoban in the generalised and often misunderstood, ill-defined category of 'postmodernism'. While I agree that Hoban is unavoidably immersed in the postmodern condition or what is more specifically defined as 'postmodernity',[4] it is potentially misleading to simply label him without qualification as a 'postmodernist'.

In the first respect, the term 'postmodernism' is highly elusive, contentious, and ambiguous. Walter Truett Anderson notes that while 'postmodern' is a "puzzling, uppity term" (Anderson 3), the "word 'postmodernism' is floating around rather freely these days, and it means different things to different people" (7). Linda Hutcheon warns,

> Of all the terms bandied about in both current cultural theory and contemporary writing on the arts, postmodernism must be the most over- and under- defined. It is usually accompanied by a grand flourish of negativized rhetoric: we hear of discontinuity, disruption, dislocation, decentring, indeterminacy, and antitotalization. (Nicol 301)

Not only is the term 'postmodernism' often vaguely and incorrectly used, various literary historians have suggested the "co-existence of different types of postmodernisms" which ultimately "reflect the ideological positions of the critics" (Onega 184) as well as deep divisions and even incompatible views of the various facets of the movement. Onega, invoking Hal Foster, suggests at least two possible types of postmodernism: one, "related to poststructuralist theory, would be profoundly anti-humanistic in its metafictional critique of representation", while there is a second, "neo-conservative in politics and

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[4] In his Introduction to the *Fontana Postmodern Reader*, Walter Truett Anderson makes this distinction between the terms 'postmodernity' and 'postmodernism' clearly and succinctly by stating that the first is "the time (or condition) in which we find ourselves, the second being the various schools and movements it has produced" (Anderson 6-7). In characterising the salient features of this era, I refer to this as a 'contemporary crisis' (See *Kleinzeit* chapter p 19-26). In using Charles Taylor's analysis of what he calls the 'modern malaise', I am aware of potentially misleading and problematic definitions of complex overlapping terms.

deeply humanistic in its claim to return to history" (184). She also points to Hans Berten's description of three postmodernist trends: "avant-gardist postmodernism", "poststructuralist postmodernism" and "architectural historicism" (185). In another distinction between trends in postmodernism pertinent to Hoban's oeuvre, Charlene Spretnak distinguishes a nihilistic negative deconstructive postmodernism from a more creative and regenerative ecological version (see Spretnak 12-22). Brian McHale, commenting on this perplexing situation of myriad definitions and theories, concedes that because the definition is plural, complex and varied, "depending upon our strategic purpose in using the term, so there are a number of postmodernisms" (Nicol 279).

Secondly, for our 'strategic purposes' of understanding Hoban's fiction, one must be wary of such a broad descriptive term which may obscure his unique and distinctive qualities. While Hoban is clearly working within the paradigm of postmodernity and self-reflexively plays games with language and reality akin to postmodern writers exploring ontological boundaries,[5] he retains deeply held residual Romantic ideas of the author as inspired genius, shaman and seer as well as traces of the Modernist valuation of art as a substitute for religion with its faith in an underlying form or pattern which we aspire to reproduce in art and realise through epiphany.

Paramount in any sympathetic reading of Hoban is an acceptance of paradox: one cannot simply view his fiction within a deconstructive frame of reference but must seek to balance and show the affirmative inspired aspect of his work that seeks meaningful creative and unifying values. Thus Hoban is 'postmodern' if one acknowledges postmodernity's "own kind of Enlightenment project" which "are exercises in construction as well as deconstruction":

> People often miss this completely. Dazzled by that devilish word "deconstruction," they dismiss postmodern thought as simply nihilistic, having no purpose other than to undermine all worldviews, derail all quests for common ground. But it is much more than that: It is an attempt to map out a much larger landscape of the mind, and to locate a deeper commonality. (Anderson 215)

In a chapter which attempts to reveal Hoban's uniqueness within the overall trend of contemporary fiction and to explore his unique relationship with contemporary

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[5] Here I am accepting Brian McHale's distinction between modernist writing, which he argues is "epistemological", and postmodernist writing which is "ontological" and thereby "designed to raise such questions as: what is a world? what kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ? what happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated? what is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects? how is a projected world structured? and so on" (Nicol 284).

theory and criticism, Elizabeth Dipple has brought to the fore a significant aspect in his fiction. For her Hoban is,

> a dramatic example of a novelist for whom character and plot are almost as secondary as they are for the metafictionalists, but who uses radical experimentalism and textual self-consciousness as tools to express both ideology and belief in a way that theorists must consider both old-fashioned and compromising. (161)

Dipple notes a fundamental tension in Hoban's work: on one level "his sense of the priority and limited signification of the word can align him to post-structuralist thought, and his insistence on the absolute, oblique deconstructability of any concept makes him seem ultimately Derridean" (165), yet his works also reveal "the near submersion of theoretical problems in his fiction under a religious apprehension of the world" (162). Dipple argues that Hoban's approach is "primarily to the spiritual world" and he "employs fiction with all its literary tools and anxieties as a primary means of working toward a theological knowledge" (165). However, she hastens to point out that "the opposite is equally true", for the various defining characteristics in his work "can be read as mere devices to deepen the possibilities of fiction as a primary *literary* experience which hungrily uses everything in its ken" (165).

It is my contention that while Dipple has highlighted a significant tension in Hoban's fiction and an extremely useful interpretative framework, the distinction must not be forced into a mutually exclusive dichotomy. As I hope to show, for Hoban, both of these religious and literary aspects are inextricably and complicatedly woven together in his idiosyncratic artistic vision or what I have termed his 'fictional philosophy'. Both these aspects, if taken simplistically, without one made to inflect the other, are potentially reductive. Thus, in order to avoid what are at best partially illuminating and, at worst, obfuscating misinterpretations of Hoban's fiction, it is necessary to integrate and amalgamate the readings of Hoban's early fiction into a holistic interpretation which takes full cognisance of *both* religious *and* literary characteristics.

Several questions arise from this formulation. What is Hoban's religious vision? Is there a sense of the 'sacred' in his novels, and how is this related to the human condition in a modern or postmodern context? How do his protagonists find meaning and achieve self-understanding and self-knowledge? How is this linked with language, and myth? Does this religious or quasi-mystical vision adequately resolve the tensions implicit in his portrayal of modern life in a state of crisis of meaning? How does Hoban's metafictional method and keen awareness of the nature and processes of

language fit in with this expression of a religious apprehension? Ultimately, does Hoban realise and succeed through his novels in attaining what T. S. Eliot calls "a further union, a deeper communion / Through the dark cold and the empty desolation" (Eliot, *Collected Poems* 191)?

In this thesis I show that, as Dipple rightly acknowledges, Hoban is a "writer demonstrating major theoretical positions, no matter how contradictory or confusing his stance may appear" (Dipple 165). I explore and elucidate the peculiar "ideology and belief" (161) exhibited in Hoban's early works. In one respect this will reveal the essential dynamics of Hoban's 'religious apprehension' as he works towards 'theological knowledge' by using a creative and imaginative mythopoeic method. Hoban taps into what now may be thought of as "old-fashioned" and "out of date" (161) ideas from Carl Jung, Joseph Campbell, and Mircea Eliade in order to make serious claims about the nature of the "metaphysically religious world" (165). At the same time I dissect the literary and especially metafictional devices with which Hoban expresses his artistic vision.

While "[s]eriously and riskily, Hoban typically enters a territory considered defunct or outrageous by most other writers whose theoretical aims are as extensive as his" (165), I would argue that this risk ultimately pays off. It is exactly Hoban's oddness, his willingness to entertain the strange and bizarre and to embrace the contradictions and paradoxes of the human condition, which sets him apart from other contemporary writers.

I would also argue that rather than a 'monologic' theoretical approach, an understanding and sympathetic reading of Hoban's own manifesto or "theory of fictional inspiration" (173), gleaned from his essays in the largely ignored collection *The Moment under the Moment* (1992), is essential in reconciling conflicting or reductive views of his novels. At this stage, then, it is necessary to delineate briefly some of the basic principles of Hoban's 'fictional philosophy'. As a widely read autodidact, Hoban in no way meant this manifesto to be a rigorous philosophical system. Rather it is meant to explain the relevance of significant ideas which dominate Hoban's writing, but which are all too often glossed over as merely rhetorical statements of an author's peculiar beliefs and lofty artistic methods and aims. These ideas are vital for a proper understanding of Hoban's fiction.

Hoban's 'fictional philosophy': some basic principles

In his Foreword to *The Moment under the Moment* Hoban outlines what may tentatively be described as a 'fictional philosophy'; that is, a set of guiding ideas on the nature of reality, the role of language, myth, and the purpose of his unique fictional creations:

> 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 human consciousness; the strangeness of life and death; the strangeness of what the living and the dead are to one another; and the strangeness of ideas – Orpheus and Eurydice, for example, Miranda and Caliban, King Kong and Fay Wray – that seem to have been with us long before the stories of them happened. (*MUM* Foreword)

The first principle, then, is that 'Reality' is mysterious and enigmatic: it is ultimately unknowable and beyond our human comprehension but we are nevertheless intertwined and immersed *in* it (it is not external to or separate from us). This is a consistent feature underlying Hoban's work: the slippery, resistant, perplexing, and disturbingly inscrutable nature of reality which confronts us *and* embodies us. At the centre of this formulation is a dialectic which will emerge in Hoban's fiction in various forms as a cyclical pattern of essential, eternal ideas embedded in consciousness and which are direct expressions of the mysterious, flickering nature of 'Thing-in-Itself'.[6] Thus, the 'real' reality is at once hidden and strange; it is a realisation of sacred terrifying energy and beauty which threatens to engulf and overwhelm human consciousness. Hence Hoban often invokes H. P. Lovecraft's saying, "The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents" (qtd. in *MUM* 179, *MF* 134). To accommodate and contain this 'strangeness' we build, on top of this abyssal primal 'real' reality, the everyday convenient structures we habitually call 'reality'. However, Hoban's stated artistic mission is to expose us once again to this unseen and repressed dimension of our being, revealing moreover that we are obliged to interact with this realm and that it is accessible within us.

In the second principle in his 'fictional philosophy', Hoban describes the ultimate nature of reality and source or origin of these 'ideas' in terms of a universal mind. Hoban uses Erwin Schrödinger's idea of a mind which is "by its very nature a *singulare tantum*"

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[6] This term, borrowed from German metaphysics, has a long complex philosophical history. Very simply put it can be related to Kant's notion of the noumena or '*Ding an Sich*', the thing or object-in-itself which cannot be perceived except through phenomenal reality. It can also be described as an aspect or element of the Real which carries epiphanic content. Several of these sacred ideas are found throughout his fiction; mentioned in this quote is Orpheus and Eurydice, which I treat in detail in Chapter One and Two.

and develops this to provide a basis for his understanding of reality and his ideas on the origin and nature of language.

> 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 for a transmission that was going on long before I arrived. It feels to me as if the total experience of the universe and every image ever imagined or seen, every word ever written or spoken, every thought ever thought is in this one mind, ceaselessly active. And I believe that whatever is in the one mind is in each of us. That being so, the total experience, not only of humanity but of the universe, is in each of us in this one mind that is always now. (*MUM* 166)

Thus, Hoban aligns himself broadly – and it must be noted not consistently and not without contradiction – to a form of philosophical idealism which variously emphasises elements of anti-realism, panpsychism and even pantheism. Everything, all reality and experience, for Hoban, is part of a cosmic universal mind or consciousness which is omnipresent, eternal, and immanent within the world and us. In this assumption Hoban finds a basis for the next principle which is intricately and inextricably related to this idea of a strange, timeless, and self-perpetuating consciousness.

The third principle is that everything *is* language. Hoban puts this idea forward in various ways throughout *The Moment under the Moment.* In the essay "Pan Lives", Hoban writes:

> To me it seems that everything that happens is language, everything that goes on is saying something. (126)[7]

Hoban enfolds everything into a process which he calls language: events, places, people, experiences, thoughts, images, stories and so on. In "Pan Lives", Hoban describes the scene from his window and asks:

> What is this language that I'm insisting on? The sky grows dark, the trains rumble towards Wimbledon, towards Upminster, boys play football in an empty paddling pond and I call that language. Why? Because there is a continual telling and asking going on, a continuous conversation that is trying to happen between everything around us and us. All of it is without words, much of it is silent. … 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; emphasis added)

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[7] Graham Ward in his essay "Transcendence and Representation" has noted an aspect of the work of Michel Serres which bears striking resemblance to this particular notion: "Creation is conceived by Serres as message-bearing, as doxological, so that psalms rise up from the shores and the rocks. Everything exists in complex intercommunication, a profound relationality. … We live in, and inseparable from, this continual interchange, this universal meditation that God opens up and establishes" (Schwartz 144).

Here Hoban envisions the universal consciousness manifesting itself in the form of an immanent, dynamic, and creative language. This fundamental idea is evident throughout Hoban's writing style.

For instance, instead of supplying a simple lyrical description of an objective event, Hoban infuses the passage with his underlying ideas about language and reality: the language simultaneously describes and creates, language mirrors and becomes part of the scene. This fusion or intermingling of an objective description with the language used becomes apparent in his description of boys playing football. Hence the boys are "black ideographs" (125). An ideograph or ideogram, with the root being '*ideo*' linked to idea, is a sign or symbol used in a writing system such as Chinese that directly represents a concept or a thing rather than a word for it ("Ideogram," *Collins*). In the short story "Schwarz" (*MUM* 30-40), Hoban shows his fascination and affinity with this vision of a magical language which creates reality as a world of symbols and signs. A poster of The Chinese Radicals, "startling in its beauty and compactness", grabs the speaker's attention (31). What is attractive is that words are closely and magically linked to their concepts: he sees "all manner of concrete and conceptual words with which to image a whole world" (31). The signs (ideographs) "seemed magical, as if the physical act of making the strokes in black ink on white paper had the power of calling up the physical being of what the character represented" (31).

Furthermore, they are a "*scrawl* of boys, a *scribble* on the dry grey concrete" (125). The effect stems directly from Hoban's idea of the world and everything as the becoming of language. The activities of observing, describing, and writing (also reading) are intricately entwined in symbiotic communication. There is no gap or dislocation between the thing described and the words used because the things described *are* words, *are* language. So, while also representing the movement of the players, the description "scrawl of boys" becomes a writing act, a sketch and a textual process. The word scrawl, coined in the seventeenth century, brings together 'sprawl' and 'crawl' but also means 'to write' ("Scrawl," *Collins*). Object described and language used are textually combined and created in a single fluid stroke described with religious fervour: "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" (128). Merleau-Ponty has written of this relationship between language and silence, observing and describing:

> When the silent vision falls into speech, and when the speech in turn, opening up a field of the nameable and sayable, inscribes itself in that field, in its place, according to its truth – in short, when it metamorphoses the structures of the visible world and makes itself a gaze of the mind, *intuitis mentis* – this is always in virtue of the same fundamental phenomenon of reversibility which sustains both the mute perception and the speech and which manifests itself by an almost carnal existence of the idea, as well as by a sublimation of the flesh. (Merleau-Ponty 154-55)

Thus, Hoban by yoking his two primary concerns together – religious or "theological knowledge" with the "possibilities of fiction as a primary *literary* experience" (Dipple 165) – finds great significance in St. John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (*MUM* 127). Hoban's conception, however, is not specifically Christian. The Word made flesh is "in us independently of Christianity; I think it's simply in us and inexplicable" (127). He invokes the notion of the Word as Logos, referring to it as order or an archetypal pattern, a master plan of creation which is "nothing less than God" (127). He emphasises his unconventional vision of God, noting that it is not "any particularised denominational God" but "the primal force and mover of the cosmos … the universal mind … whatever it is that pervades the universe and *requires us to take notice of it*" (127-28; emphasis added). Hoban makes the connection between his notion of God and language explicit – it informs his entire 'fictional philosophy' and is fundamental to his religious and metafictional method:

> 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 thinking. (128)

What lies beneath the description is a vision of the world *as* language, inseparable from reality. Hoban at this stage, however, begins to recognise a problem: what he calls a "language failure" (131). Hoban makes a distinction between the "big language of nightfall", which is often without words and is silent[8] (representing the inexplicable nature of reality in human modes of understanding), and "our little language of words" (126). There is a discrepancy between "our language of words" which can be "reductive" (129) and the perception of another language which while "speaking the mysteries of silence" (128) embodies an incarnate magical sacred relationship with a mysterious

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[8] Again Ward provides interesting parallels: he begins his essay by referring to George Steiner's observations in *Language and Silence*: "In much modern poetry silence represents the claims of the ideal" and Ward goes on to comment that, "Words dissolve into the purer notation of music; leaving the verbal behind is a positive spiritual act, cognizant of transcendence, trembling on the neon edge of immediate relation" (Schwartz 128). This is consistent with Hoban's aesthetic and primary goal to invoke the sacred "unwordable" (*MUM* Foreword) silence through language.

reality. Watching his son Ben learn the word 'flow' and matching it to the action of ink from a fountain pen, Hoban wonders, "Will he think less about what the word refers to now? ... Can there come a time when he will perceive only those things there are words for?" (130)

At this point post-structuralist readings of Hoban's work tend to emphasise the inadequacy of language in representing the sacred, the divorce of words from things, and the limited nature of signification as it is part of an endless process of deferral of meaning or *différance* (see Dunwell and Schwenger). Without disclaiming the relevance of this facet (Hoban is clearly aware of it), for the purposes of understanding Hoban's equally powerful religious apprehension, we must understand why and how he attempts to resolve these issues.

As such this is one of the most obvious places in which Hoban enters what Dipple has described as a compromising or outrageous area. Embracing a paradox central to his notion of language and reality, Hoban, in creating a fictive world, returns to a primitive, animistic and enchanted or sacred idea of creative language. This is in an attempt to preserve and renew what he calls a "religious ignorance" where "the person was in a respectful relationship to something not fully understood, the person was respectfully offering the mind to the thing" (129-30). Thus, unlike many postmodern writers, Hoban is not content to deconstruct and expose the fragile limitations of language; he will audaciously and paradoxically use the very potential of language to recreate the religious or spiritual purpose of the word as Word.

The fourth and final principle, the recognition of an underlying mythic and religious realm, provides Hoban with a 'manifesto' for his fiction. Some explication is necessary. Hoban repeatedly affirms that as a necessary and unavoidable response to the terrifying strangeness and incomprehensible nature of reality we have built up a vast edifice for "convenience" through which "work can be done, transport arranged, and essential services provided" (*MUM* Foreword). Hoban has termed this the '*limited*-reality consensus'.[9] Implicit is Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's social constructivist theory of reality. Reality is "a kind of collective fiction, constructed and sustained by the processes of socialisation, institutionalization, and everyday social interaction, especially through the medium of language" (McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* 37). The apparently

[9] Dunwell notes that the term 'consensus reality' is "Katherine Hume's term, which she uses to distinguish the world of the real from the fantastic" (Dunwell 50).

permanent and homogeneous structure of social reality is maintained through habit and the entrenchment of norms and conventions.

> Everyday reality is, however, for Berger and Luckmann, 'reality *par excellence*'. It imposes itself massively on consciousness so that, although we may doubt its reality, 'I am obliged to suspend this doubt as I routinely exist in everyday life' (qtd. in Waugh 52)

In Hoban's view, while we may be obliged for convenience to maintain 'everyday reality' or 'paramount reality',[10] this is potentially alienating, oppressive, and restrictive. Hoban claims that in our modern world, dominated by mass media, urbanisation, advanced capitalism, and an over-dependence on instrumental reason and scientific materialism, we have become disconnected from the language of the universe. This has entailed a closed-minded approach to the magical strangeness of the "*real* reality" (*MUM* Foreword) and a harmful separation from the hidden, mysterious, mythical consciousness within us. It has led us to declare 'Pan is dead',[11] and, as Hoban would have us believe, to the woeful treatment and degradation of nature, others, and ourselves. So, Hoban writes of a disengagement or disenchantment which is a "language failure": "nothing has a chance of working right when people won't listen to what it says and with the proper action say the right things back" (131). In another essay, "Household Tales", Hoban begins to look for a way to redress this imbalance, hinting at the unalterable presence of the universal mind within us whilst highlighting the negative aspects of the 'limited-reality consensus':

> Society relegates to superstition that range of signification that it cannot use in the reality frame of every day, but reality does not end at the limits of society's frail consensus; the unknowable thingness of things and the ideas that emanate from it are equally real with all things else. Myth and story have the practical function of keeping us in touch with the unknown and unknowable in ourselves and the universe. (*MUM* 152)

This is the basis for Hoban's paradoxical desire to resurrect and revitalise the mythic world of the imagination where we are connected to this presence of everything in the universe within us – if only we extend our consciousness to meet it. It also informs the basis of the other strand of "Pan Lives": the realisation that gods do not die. They are alive and, as in the Greek world of Thales, "Everything is full of gods". In his novels

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[10] Berger and Luckmann write: "Compared to the reality of everyday life, other realities appear as finite provinces of meaning, enclaves within the paramount reality marked by circumscribed meanings and modes of experience. The paramount reality envelops them on all sides, as it were, and consciousness always returns to the paramount reality as from an excursion" (qtd. in McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* 37).
[11] This in one respect echoes Nietzsche's famous statement and is also connected to a similar essay written by D. H. Lawrence, "Remembering Pan." in *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence.*

Hoban repeatedly attempts "to enlarge the limited-reality consensus" (198) so as to extend our habitual conceptions of reality though mythopoeic and metafictional techniques of disruption and subversion. His religious and literary vision is linked to an attempt to connect with a "language base" (137). Hoban describes this as

> a place where the *Thou* of things is perceived and the silence speaks. The best that words can do is to make a space in which the silence can speak, in which the language of everything can be heard. Humankind is naturally and properly religious, and I suggest that one definition of religion is that it is a mode of being and perception in which everything is *Thou* and nothing is *It*. Certainly we've tried the other way; we've tried making both things and people *It*, and we've seen the results. (138-39)

Echoing Martin Buber, Hoban invokes the idea of a special creative relationship that is a natural and religious one. This embraces numinous moments of recall or epiphany, a "state of aroused language response" (137), whereby one can connect with the universal communication. Recognising the limited nature of the signifying word (our little language), as well as its terrific potential, the artist must realise that the "best words can do is to make a space in which the silence can speak, in which the language of the everything can be heard" (138-39).

This is the compelling motive for the quest narratives of Hoban's fiction: his novels are layered and interwoven psychological, religious, and linguistic quests towards this language base. Finding this language base magically releases creative powers, manifesting itself in a quasi-religious experience which terrifyingly dissolves the conventional boundaries between reality and illusion. It gives a sense of unity beneath the multiplicity and fragmentation of appearances, is a fertile source of powerful images and symbols, and provides a path towards a realisation of a unified Self, a deeper connection with the universe.

Method and structure

Apart from grounding my discussion on the essays in *The Moment under the Moment,* I have limited the area of study to four of Russell Hoban's earlier works, *Kleinzeit* (1974), *The Medusa Frequency* (1987), *Riddley Walker* (1980), and *Pilgermann* (1983). There are several reasons for this. Firstly, they are the four most widely read, reviewed and critically appraised novels. This provides the best basis on which to engage the current criticism of Hoban's work, and to develop a more holistic reading of Hoban's oeuvre. Secondly, I would argue that these are the most rich, dense and allusive of his novels. Consequently

they are Hoban's most complex. Thirdly, just as the later novels form a series,[12] these books coalesce into a complementary cluster, developing and extending closely interrelated themes and areas of interest.

It is both useful and misleading to categorise Hoban's work into distinct phases: although *The Medusa Frequency* is written four years later than *Pilgermann*, it seems to complement *Kleinzeit* thematically and stylistically. In the same way, *Riddley Walker* and *Pilgermann* complement each other in genesis, theme and treatment. The best way to see the interrelationship between these novels, and indeed all Hoban's fiction, is using Dipple's description of a "nexus" (179) or a web which explores and manifests various aspects of Hoban's 'fictional philosophy'.

Finally, a note about the structure of chapters: in exploring these works and the published criticism of them I emphasise a common pattern underlying all these novels, *the quest towards the centre.* The quest hinges on the twin aspects of a pilgrimage, journey or search for origins: the Self, the centre, figured as a either a holy site or a metaphysical or spiritual centre; and the need to write, to self-consciously explore this through words, story and language. In exploring this pattern it is necessary to delineate three underlying but intimately related approaches. In each approach the notion of a centre is significant and can be interpreted in these three various ways: the psychological mode, the religious mode, and the literary mode.[13] It must be emphasised, while this structural division may be perceived to be misleading and to be perpetuating the polarities evident in current criticism on Hoban, this is a merely a means to the end of a holistic and integrated reading of the texts which takes into account Hoban's own 'fictional philosophy'.

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[12] These later works, especially *Mr Rinyo-Clacton's Offer* (1998), *Angelica's Grotto* (1999), *Amaryllis Night and Day* (2001), *The Bat Tattoo* (2002), *Her Name Was Lola* (2003), *Come Dance With Me* (2005) and the most recent publication *Linger Awhile* (2006), arguably form series of interconnected works where many of the same characters appear in different texts in a playful fictional world set in London.

[13] The structure and approach for the thesis is similar to one taken by Gisela Beate Hoyle in her thesis exploring a similar concept of the centre in the work of Ursula Le Guin, "Pushing out towards the limits, and finding the centre: The mystical vision in the work of Ursula K. Le Guin." MA Thesis Rhodes University, 1992.

I

Psychological Mode

"And quests for self-winding, of one sort or another come into my work a lot." (Myers n.pag.)

As noted by many critics (Dunwell, Wilkie and Branscomb) Hoban seems stongly influenced by Jung: in each novel the typical pattern of individuation as elucidated by Jung is employed in various ways to chart the journey of a protagonist from a state of loneliness, isolation and alienation towards a creative sense of self-knowledge and renewed self-understanding. While each novel has its own peculiar aspect (*Kleinzeit* focuses on comic heroism, *The Medusa Frequency* is a work of mourning, *Riddley Walker* is a bildungsroman of initiation, and *Pilgermann* is devoted to the preparation for death), through the path of individuation, mediated by powerful archetypes and symbols, the hero progresses towards the Self and ultimately finds a measure of enlightenment facilitated by a powerful epiphany and a greater compassionate reconciliation with the sufferings of life, especially its transience, loss and death.

II

Religious and mythopoeic mode

"I think the myth-making capability is an essential one … I think of myself as something of a religious writer, but not in any really definable way. … Freelance mystic, yes. That's a good way of putting it." (Myers n.pag.)

This personal individual quest is expanded and given form, rich depth, and cosmic resonance through the second mode: the religious and mythological. In this section the far-reaching and wide-ranging religious and mythical allusive nature of Hoban's work will be investigated. Each novel exhibits a unique aspect of Hoban's 'fictional philosophy' and embeds this in various mythic paradigms. For instance, in *Kleinzeit* and *The Medusa Frequency* Hoban explores his obsession with the mythical figure of Orpheus and also reveals his mythopoeic impulse as he rewrites and re-imagines the traditional myth to his own original and creative purpose. The myth is given special significance, as it becomes a vehicle for Hoban to express and illuminate his religious vision: a quest for transcendence in *Kleinzeit* and a myth of transgression in *The Medusa Frequency*. In *Riddley Walker*, the emphasis is on ancient and pagan religious influences in an adaptation of a Fall myth and fertility quest myth. In *Pilgermann*, a wide range of religious allusions are amalgamated into a demanding and complex philosophical novel in which Hoban explores the nature of religious perception, of God, and of the problem of evil. In each

of these novels the notion of a centre is essential as is Hoban's reliance on a 'dialectic' to express the paradoxical and contradictory states of consciousness and being. In this mode, Dipple suggests that "the best way of reading [Hoban's] fiction from a theoretician's point of view" (as opposed to solely poststructuralist) is to use "a semantic line of consciousness that goes from Søren Kierkegaard to René Girard and Paul Ricoeur", hence I have used Ricoeur's ideas in *The Symbolism of Evil* and rely heavily.on the comparative religionist Mircea Eliade.

III

Metafictional Mode

> Consider fiction phenomenologically. The word itself is derived from the past participle of the Latin *fingere*, to shape, fashion, form or mould. We take it for granted that there will always be fiction of one kind or another in the form of stories: forming; shaping. Why do we take that for granted? Why do we make fiction? Why do we say, 'What if?' (*MUM* 146)

The emphasis in this section in each of the chapters will be on connecting Hoban's mythopoeic vision with his unique literary style. In effect this subsumes the psychological and mythopoeic modes into Hoban's seamless artistic vision. As suggested above, since Hoban resists categorisation both in terms of genre and specific schools of theory, and because of his autodidactic elusiveness exhibited in the allusive quality of the novels themselves, I have chosen to foreground Hoban's metafictional tools and devices. By reading Hoban through the lens of broad metafictional practices, techniques and concerns, I have purposely avoided specific genre classification and a narrowly singular theoretical approach which strictly adheres to one theoretical reading or theory.

Dipple has set the framework for this part of my approach: while writing about *Riddley Walker* and *Pilgermann*, she notes that the two novels, because of their "stress on the nature of the narrating persona" (i.e. a metafictional device), are "pertinent to the central questions of narratology itself" (Dipple 170). It is clear that Hoban explores the nature of language and fiction within his novels and they do lend themselves to specific theoretical readings. However there is a real sense that while Hoban is aware of the trends in contemporary criticism he purposely keeps a wry distance from any obvious allegiance to them. In fact it is only in *The Medusa Frequency* that Hoban gets the closest to referring directly to various schools of literary theory: Gösta Kraken, who is treated somewhat disparagingly in the novel is a deconstructionist, and he uses Orpheus as "semiosis rather than as story" (*MF* 105).

What separates Hoban from other contemporary writers (over and above his peculiar religious apprehension) is that unlike "Calvino or Fowles, Hoban handles the subject [of language, and the problems of narratology] without palpable reference to the narratological or semiotic theories currently dominant in discussions of fiction" (Dipple 170). Thus, because, as Dipple goes on to argue, Hoban's "narrators' self-consciousness is not pointedly subtended by contemporary theories and is entirely self-referential within the text" (170), it is inadvisable and short-sighted to pursue only one critical theory in dealing with Hoban's work.

Finally, my overall aim in this thesis is to reveal Hoban's versatile, humorous, intelligent, creative verve which makes him a particularly fresh and innovatively rewarding writer. Unafraid to court absurdity, prepared to confront both the comic and darker aspects of the human condition and transmuting the everyday into a poetic, magical and exciting world of imaginative possibility, Hoban is, as Patrick Ness comments,

> the best sort of genius. Far too interesting to be shortlisted for major prizes, far too dynamic to be condemned as a national treasure, he seems to write books for the sole purpose of making sense of life, while never being too bothered that it rarely does. (Ness n.pag.)

CHAPTER ONE

Kleinzeit: Modern Transcendence

In an interview with Edward Myers in 1984, Russell Hoban said:

> *Kleinzeit*, I think may not be my best book as literature goes, but it's the closest one to my heart because that's where I found my characteristic narrative voice. (Myers n.pag.)

In *Kleinzeit,* Hoban lays the foundation for the themes and preoccupations that will dominate his writing most obviously up to *The Medusa Frequency*, but also through to his very latest novels. In *Kleinzeit* Hoban's unique style and interests emerge and it presents the best starting point with which to explore his fiction. In this chapter, through three interrelated sections, the basic framework for the thesis will be established by showing the patterns that will be altered, developed and reworked throughout the other three novels.

The first is the psychological mode in which Hoban uses and adapts Jung's process of individuation. In order to situate this process in the modern context, thereby explaining why Hoban sees the need for these imaginative quests, it is necessary to elucidate Hoban's underlying view of modern society. Thus, this chapter starts with a more general discussion of the contemporary crisis and Hoban's fictional response to it. Although it is related specifically to *Kleinzeit,* these implications are relevant in all Hoban's fiction. The section then goes on to explore Kleinzeit's role as a unique comic hero on a path of enlightenment. Since this is the first example of Hoban's appropriation of Jungian individuation it is necessary to include a brief theoretical synopsis.

This personal individual quest is grounded in, and given richness and depth through the religious or mythological mode. In *Kleinzeit* Hoban begins to explore his obsession with the mythical figure of Orpheus, revealing his mythopoeic impulse as he rewrites and re-imagines the traditional myth. Including a brief introduction to the salient features of and reasons for Hoban's interest in Orpheus, I will show how the myth of Orpheus is given special significance: it becomes the primary vehicle for Hoban to illuminate his religious vision. In this respect the key idea is transcendence.

Finally *Kleinzeit*'s stylistic characteristic of merging the real with the fantastic in a bizarrely self-sustaining story world sets the groundwork for *The Medusa Frequency* and indeed all his later novels. The close attention to language and the self-reflexive nature of the novel make *Kleinzeit* the first significant example of Hoban's metafictional voice and

express the originating ideas of his 'fictional philosophy'. Thus, the first part of this section explores *Kleinzeit*'s games with reality and language which destabilise common-sense notions of reality, while I elucidate Hoban's interesting ideas on the nature of his fictional language. The main aim of the rest of the section is to prove that Hoban envisages language as the beginning and end of 'reality': it constitutes us and we are immersed in the processes of language and creation through language.

Any reading of Hoban must take cognisance of both his religious and linguistic visions simultaneously. Given this relationship between language and a religious vision, the final section explores the implications of this in relation to the quest for transcendence. Thus I seek to answer several questions: how does Hoban reconcile his impulse towards individuation and mythic illumination with the obvious portrayal of the ubiquity of language and the complexities, confusions and ambiguities of creativity? Or, can one escape the 'prison-house of language'? Furthermore, what hope is there for transcendence within modernity and its instrumental attitudes towards language?

Contemporary crisis and myth

Hoban portrays the modern world as being in a state of crisis of meaning. Often in his novels, including *Turtle Diary* (1975) and the later works *Amaryllis Night and Day*, *Angelica's Grotto*, *The Bat Tattoo* and *Her Name Was Lola*, many of the characters are adrift and isolated in an alienating, threatening and overwhelming modern cityscape. The post-apocalyptic nuclear disaster novel, *Riddley Walker*, and the science fiction novel, *Fremder*, are vivid illustrations of the possible end results of a civilization in crisis. *Pilgermann* is a quasi-historical novel, ostensibly set in the Middle Ages but with far greater resonance with present themes of religion, identity and conflict. In a sensitive and powerful way Hoban is responding to a sense of despair, existential angst and insignificance symptomatic of the 'modern malaise'. Hoban offers a critique of the causes of the crisis and through the novels themselves suggests a possible, albeit paradoxical and tragi-comic, imaginative and creative reaction to the situation.

Philosopher Charles Taylor, in order to describe the condition many moderns find themselves in, that is, separated from viable, consistent sources of meaning and fulfilment, uses the term 'modern malaise'. Writing in his study of modern identity, *Sources of the Self*, Taylor argues that modern man is in fundamental crisis, which involves a "loss of horizons" or overall frameworks to attribute value and meaning in life; he thereby feels an acute sense of existential meaninglessness (Taylor, *Sources* 18). As Taylor

points out, and to a large extent Hoban reveals in *Kleinzeit* and *The Medusa Frequency*, this 'existential predicament' takes various forms.

One form, which is prevalent in the contemporary psychopathology of depression, is a fading sense of meaning and passion, leaving a sense of "'ego-loss', or a sense of emptiness, flatness, futility, lack of purpose, or loss of self-esteem" (19). Melancholy is another phenomenon which takes on specific modern form. In *The Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited*, Taylor elucidates this melancholy as a 'sickness', accidie or ennui which "arises in a world where the guarantee of meaning has gone" and "where all its traditional sources, theological, metaphysical, historical, can be cast in doubt" (Taylor, *Varieties* 39). A third aspect of the modern malaise is that for the modern individual there seems "no more room for heroism, or aristocratic virtues, or high purposes in life, or things worth dying for" (Taylor, *Sources* 500). Old paradigms of dignity, valour, honour and virtue, such as those espoused by the Ancient Greek culture's "warrior and honour ethic" (17) are no longer applicable or regarded as feasible in the modern age of relativism, narcissism and false individualism. A fourth formulation of loss of meaning is division and fragmentation. With its atomistic and isolating effects, there occurs an internal dissociation and spilt within the self; moderns are alienated and "cut off from the sources of meaning" whether these are nature, family or community (500). Finally, there is a loss or perversion of the sacred. As the old cosmic order dissolves, moderns lose a sense of the mystical, magical and inexplicable forces of the cosmos and the world around them. Either people are left dissipated and confused or they channel their spiritual energies towards transient fetish commodities and escapist distractions which use things, people and nature simply as means to instrumental and materialist ends.

The causes of this crisis in modern identity are controversial, complex and myriad. Taylor highlights one factor which is the centre of many theories of modernity and which resonates with Hoban's depiction of the predicament in *Kleinzeit* and later in *Riddley Walker*: "the disengaged instrumental mode of modern life" (499). In "an instrumental society" which is characterised by the predominance of the paradigm of disengaged instrumental reason[1] and scientific materialism, a "utilitarian value outlook is

[1] In *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Taylor defines "instrumental reason" as "the kind of rationality we draw on when we calculate the most economical application of means to a given end" and which is "also evident in the prestige and aura that surround technology" (Taylor, *Ethics* 5-6). This dominant place of technology, Taylor points out, is "thought to have contributed to the narrowing and flattening of our lives", where people "have spoken of a loss of resonance, depth, or richness in our human surroundings" (6). Thus, as

entrenched in the institutions of a commercial, capitalist, and finally a bureaucratic mode of existence [which] tends to empty life of its richness, depth, or meaning" and "threatens public freedom, that is the institutions and practices of self government" (499-500). Thus, modern society leaves the individual striving only for a "pitiable comfort" (17) in a banal consumer culture dominated by illusory pleasures of the mass media, without any sense of true enlightened individualism. Under social and political pressure, the individual is increasingly controlled, fettered and trapped in "quasi-coercive systems", what Weber calls "iron cages" (500).

This view correlates directly to Hoban's evocation of modern life. Pessimistic about society, which he caustically denounces in an interview as being full of idiocy, stupidity and pretension, Hoban singles out the dehumanisation and separation of individuals, as the "streets are full of people driving these iron boxes, and it becomes sacred to them not to be delayed" (Wilkie 108-09). In *Kleinzeit*, the urban setting, ostensibly London with its famous Underground, seems "the country of the dead" (*K* 98). Existence is vacuous. The newspapers carry the headlines: "NOTHING HAPPENED" and life is "like a television screen with the sound turned off" (98). Commenting on the desolation and artificiality of a media dominated society saturated by trivial information and images, Thomas A. Carlson cites Søren Kierkegaard, "who laments that in our 'age of advertisement and publicity' 'nothing ever happens but there is immediate publicity everywhere'" (Schwartz 108).

Thus, travelling through the Underground, a symbol of the dark, hellish nature of modern life, Kleinzeit is assaulted by harsh fragments of graffiti and advertising expressing the corrupt, debased nature of city life. As Kleinzeit sits on an empty seat, declining to look at his reflection in the window, the reader is plunged into the mindscape of character and city:

> KILL WOG SHIT, said a wall. KILL IRISH SHIT. KILL JEW SHIT. SHIT KILL. PEE KILL. FART KILL. SWEAT KILL. THINK KILL. BE KILL. LIVE KILL. KILL LIVES. ...
>
> KILL JEW SHIT. Angie & Tim. CHELSEA. My job is stultifying. ODEON. KILL COMES AGAIN. They were all dying to come with him! CLASSIC. COME KILLS AGAIN. My stult is ramifying. Uncle Toad's Palmna Royale Date Crunch. Whole chocolate, big date pieces, Strontium 91. Pretty Polly Tights. My wife refuses to beat me. (*K* 24, 35-36)

Marx wrote, "all that is solid melts in air" and we are increasingly part of a replaceable, transitory, quick and shoddy world of commodities and machinery (6-7).

Immersed in this violent and alienating world, Hoban's 'small-time' hero Kleinzeit exemplifies the condition of the modern man, as well as a writer of the modern age, struggling to find a stable, meaningful, creative identity. In this world there prevails a condition which

> Weber called 'disenchantment', the dissipation of our sense of the cosmos as a meaningful order, [and which] has allegedly destroyed the horizons in which people previously lived their spiritual lives. ... The world, from being a locus of magic, or the sacred, or the Ideas, comes simply to be seen as a neutral domain of potential means to our purposes. (Taylor, *Sources* 17, 500)

Without a viable and imaginatively resonant framework with which to orient and place one's life and values there arises

> what we call an 'identity crisis', an acute form of disorientation, which people often express in terms of not knowing who they are, but can also be seen as a radical uncertainty of where they stand. They lack a frame or horizon within which things can take on a stable significance, within which some life possibilities can be seen as good or meaningful, others as bad or trivial. The meaning of all these possibilities is unfixed, labile, or undetermined. This is a painful and frightening experience. (27-28)

This is precisely Hoban's portrayal of the modern displaced identity. Kleinzeit stands alone and in pain looking at himself in front of the mirror:

> I exist, said the mirror.
> What about me? said Kleinzeit.
> Not my problem, said the mirror. (*K* 7)

In searching for a stable, meaningful existence Kleinzeit at first does not receive self-validation or a coherent autonomous reflection of self-identity, but a series of dizzyingly destabilising and provocative challenges. Falling apart, with strange illnesses suggesting inner division and fragmentation, his life story offers no consolation, only "the overwhelming weight of the detail of a life remembered" (88). Exiled from his past, his family and to a certain extent himself, Kleinzeit is caught in this hostile world of mystery where the "confrontation is between [his] wish to understand the inexplicable nature of the world and the world that consistently resists his attempts to understand it" (Wilkie 41). At one point he bemoans his state, describing his seemingly forlorn quest for a separate identity in a world where "'Everything is *un*stuck, runs over into everything else. ... Is there an existence that is only mine?'" (*K* 134)

As Taylor remarks, this problematic condition results in a "relatively open disjunction of attitudes" whereby the "sense that no framework is shared by everyone, can be taken for granted as *the* framework tout court, can sink to the phenomenological status of unquestioned fact" (Taylor, *Sources* 17). There seems no longer to be an Absolute Truth or cosmic order into which individuals can fit their lives, identities and values coherently and neatly. On the contrary people are immersed in a world of many views, possibilities and conflicting and competing truths or frameworks. God, who in *Kleinzeit* is not the final arbitrator of a Grand Narrative, but a lonely, amiable, forgetful and bumbling character, makes this point as clearly as Jean François Lyotard.[2] God dismisses any naïve faith in transcendental certainty, divine providence, a *telos* or an ultimate meaning and our ability to foresee or understand life:

> I don't say you're *especially* lucky. Just a good ordinary everyday sort of luck. That's as much as I've got myself, and I don't know anyone who's got more. Universe, History, Eternity, anybody you talk to these days. We're all in the same boat. (*K* 187)

Similarly, God replies to the appeal of Kleinzeit's nurse, Sister, to his supposed omniscience and omnipotence:

> No, I don't [know], said God. I don't know anything the way people know it. I am what I am and all that, but I don't know anything really. (29)

Don Cupitt describes our predicament like this:

> Now the peculiar problem of our modern period, in which the culture has become superabundantly rich, highly differentiated, ever-more reflective, and dominated by the media, is the problem of excess. We have, set before us as options, a far wider range of possible actforms, lifestyles, faiths and philosophies than human beings have ever had to cope with before. What is to be done about this overwhelming flood, which appears to turn so many people into couch potatoes with glazed eyes? (Cupitt, *What is a Story?* 151)

Taylor and Cupitt have offered ways to engage with this situation. One way involves "holding a definite traditionally defined view with the self-conscious sense of standing against a major part of one's compatriots" (Taylor, *Sources* 17). Cupitt describes a similar response as "fundamentalism, which tries to restore the hegemony of one Grand Narrative, and therefore one world, a unified self and a moral order" which requires force, censorship and exclusion (Cupitt, *What is a Story?* 151). Alternatively, one may take

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[2] I am thinking of what many theorists have taken to be a defining statement of the postmodern condition: "Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard xxiv).

a "pluralist view" (Taylor, *Sources* 17) which relies on relativism and an unquestioned acceptance of multiplicity. This corresponds to what Cupitt calls "passive aestheticism" (Cupitt, *What is a Story?* 151), which is acquiescence to the complexity and diversity of the plethora of possibilities in lifestyles and values. Here the self "vanish[es] into the endless dance of appearances" so that "everything is dissolving into a dreamlike flux of images. Including us" (151).

Neither of these options is wholly appropriate to Hoban, who can rather be associated with Taylor's third possible response: seekers on a perpetual quest for meaning. Taylor finds special validity in an outlook which remains "tentative, semi-provisional" (Taylor, *Sources* 17). These seekers "come close to formulating what they believe, or to saying what for them seems to be the spiritual source they connect their lives with", but at the same time they are "aware of their own uncertainties, of how far they are from being able to recognize a definitive formulation with ultimate confidence" (17). They go "beyond the gamut of traditionally available frameworks" and while they "embrace these traditions tentatively", they also "develop their own versions of them, or idiosyncratic combinations of or borrowings from or semi-inventions within them" (17).

For Hoban this quest is subsumed in writing and the desire for self-expression.[3] Many of Hoban's protagonists are humble, open and receptive writers and artists. As they embark on their various journeys of self-discovery, they begin to find their own meaning in life through the therapeutic act of writing and becoming responsive to mythical, imaginative and creative forces. This aligns Hoban with one of Cupitt's suggested means of facing the modern crisis: art. Cupitt writes:

> In the face of a cultural avalanche that threatens to overwhelm the self, one way to fight back is to concentrate on trying to produce something of one's own. I try to become an individual through the struggle to express myself in a work that embodies my individuality. (Cupitt, *What is a Story?* 152)

In *Kleinzeit* it is through the "metaphysical anxiety of the writer who is also the experiencer, the quester, and the doomed" (Dipple 163) that Hoban is able to portray the fundamental modern condition. A provisional answer to our malaise is to write one's

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[3] Taylor writes: "But the invocation of meaning also comes from our awareness of how much the search involves articulation. We find the sense of life through articulating it. And moderns have become acutely aware of how much sense being there for us depends on our powers of expression. Discovering here depends on, is interwoven with, inventing. Finding a sense to life depends on framing meaningful expressions which are adequate. There is thus something particularly appropriate to our condition in the polysemy of the word 'meaning': lives can have or lack it when they have or lack a point; while it also applies to language and other forms of expression. More and more, we moderns attain meaning in the first sense, when we do, through creating it in the second sense" (Taylor, *Sources* 18).

story and author oneself. This task has its roots in "nineteenth-century thought" which sees art as a substitute for religion, as the "old other-worldly salvation" was replaced "with a new quest for self-realization through creative self-expression" (Cupitt, *What is a Story?* 152). Taylor, when describing this predominantly Romantic notion as an "Expressivist Turn", links it to radical individuation and argues that it has "become one of the cornerstones of modern culture" (Taylor, *Sources* 376). Art is the primary means by which this expression of the self takes shape and form. Taylor provides the grounding for an understanding of Hoban's Romantic and Modernist reliance on art to fill the void of a modern malaise:

> In our civilisation, moulded by expressivist conceptions, [art] has come to take a central place in our spiritual life, in some respects replacing religion. The awe we feel before artistic originality and creativity places art on the border of the numinous, and reflects the crucial place that creation/expression has in our understanding of human life. (376)

Throughout his writing and especially in *Kleinzeit* Hoban embraces the 'seeking' position with pilgrimages through art. Despite the complex and critical treatment of such an articulation of the self in language and story, Hoban does not shy away from the paradoxes of expressing individuality or lived experience through language. In fact this conflict forms the basis of his metafictional method.

The most inspirational source of material with which Hoban is able to focus and centre this quest is through the use of myth. Hoban's novels are quests engaging with various myths from a variety of sources. In *Kleinzeit* and *The Medusa Frequency* it is predominately the Greek mythological tradition, especially the Orpheus and Eurydice myth. In *Riddley Walker*, Hoban constructs an idiosyncratic mythic superstructure from the fragments of contemporary society blasted by a nuclear holocaust. By grounding his novels in myth as an artistic response to a modern malaise, Hoban is engaging in a modernist mythopoeic tradition. Like Yeats, Joyce, Pound and Eliot, Hoban subscribes to the belief that "modern man must return to the mythic voice if he is to heal the divisions in his soul" (Young xv).

Myth lends itself to dealing with the particular aspects of our loss of horizons, namely the over-dependence and reliance on disengaged instrumental reason and the sense of modern alienation from unconscious sources of meaning. Michael Bell, in his book *Literature, Modernism and Myth*, sees myth, (as world-view or ideology) as a "supremely significant foundational story and a falsehood" which, through this paradoxical characteristic, expresses a peculiarly modern "double consciousness" where

we are "living a world view as a world view" (Bell 1-3). Hoban uses myth not only in an Eliot-like manner,[4] in order to control and structure his novels, providing resonant archetypes and motifs to make sense of an increasingly fragmented, turbulent and contradictory modern situation, but also to explore the myth-making nature of the modern creative consciousness. Indeed, the malaise has in many ways deepened and ramified since Eliot's time. Hoban returns to the crisis and injects it with his own characteristic voice which often juxtaposes very new modern phenomena, the language and gadgets of technology, with this ancient, mythic substructure.[5]

Bell's observations of myth are apposite to Hoban's mythopoeia. In his view, myth is "felt as a running conflict between the spirit of dogmatic authority and the relativity of values and convictions" so that "modernist mythopoeia is a way of combining radical relativity with the apodictic nature of conviction" (4). By making this running conflict central, even part of his method, Hoban in his novels expresses power of myth to guide and make sense of our lives as well as the fragile contingency, relativity, malleability and changeability of myths themselves. It is this mythical method which shapes the quest for individuation and meaning, providing Hoban with powerful archetypes and symbols to express his psychic exploration of consciousness.

Furthermore, the use of myth can evoke the hidden, non-rational types of knowledge and ways of being in the world which are increasingly marginalised in a scientific, commodified and materialist world. Bell writes that myth has been re-evaluated since the nineteenth century and it emerges as a "controlling factor" and a singular "means of recognition and route to truth" (12). For Hoban, described as a writer who patiently explores a mythological consciousness (Wilkie 13), myth "represents an interpretation of life, reflects the enigmatic visage of life itself and increasingly the true meaning of myth [seems] to be at a more unconscious level" (Bell 12). Hoban and Bell would agree that "the true function of myth is to avoid conceptual fixture and to catch the transitory relation to Being" and that "mythos' [is the] sole appropriate kind of relation to Being in its appearing" (168).

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[4] Most apposite is Eliot's elucidation of a 'mythical method' in his essay "*Ulysses*, Order and Myth": "It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (Eliot, *Selected Prose* 177).

[5] Brian McHale defines this genre as "interface fiction", which draws heavily on the discourse and language of technology and computers for its metaphors and expression of literary ideas, as an "*independent but parallel development* in SF and postmodernist fiction" which fuses "cyberpunk's characteristic motifs, materials, and even stylistic effects" with their own postmodern poetics (McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism* 237).

The role of myth in Hoban's work has profound implications for our knowledge of the human condition and also a wider universal or cosmic significance. As Paul Ricoeur notes, in his notion of myth and possibility, myth goes beyond being merely 'false explanation' – a common criticism of myth from Plato to the demythologising of the Enlightenment – and he affirms the "symbolic function of myth which has the power of discovery and revelation" (qtd. in Coupé 8). Myth reveals an "exploratory significance", making a contribution to human understanding which is often mysterious and difficult to explain away. Ricoeur writes that myth involves "the disclosure of unprecedented worlds, an opening on to other possible worlds which transcend the established limits of our actual world" (8).

Thus Hoban is interested in expressing the flickering glimmers of consciousness outside what the disengaged reason has created as limited consensus reality. His novels reflect characters on a passage beyond the normal consciousness of habitual thought and discourse: they are trying to reveal intense, vivid connections of a mythical consciousness with which to revitalise and regenerate their lives. Hoban patrols the frontiers of consciousness, trying to shape, order and control through language and story the hidden psychic content of the unseen dream life. Myth, he suggests, is the best tool to approach and express this dimension of being.

I

The Comic Hero's Path of Individuation

Given this overall description of Hoban's approach, we can now focus in detail on the salient characteristics of the psychological mode. In his article "The Quest for Wholeness in the Fiction of Russell Hoban", Jack Branscomb describes the central feature of the psychological mode in Hoban's novels. He writes:

> The central subject of all the novels is the individual's quest for knowledge of self and psychic wholeness. The protagonists, usually middle-aged men, find themselves cut off from parents and wives – the past – and from children – the future. They develop, not towards conventional happiness, but toward the reintegration of the self, recovery of the past, openness toward the future, and freedom to act in the present. (Branscomb 29)

Kleinzeit is a comic, quasi-allegorical tale, drawn from Hoban's own stay in hospital,[6] about the eponymous hero's journey of self-discovery in order to find a deeper sense of

[6] To Christine Wilkie, Hoban says, "The next novel was *Kleinzeit*, and I got into that when I was in hospital – I'm diabetic and I was in hospital to be put on a controlled diet and tested to get my sugar balance better

creativity and harmony of Self. At the beginning of the novel Kleinzeit is a lonely, timid and dissatisfied character suffering from a host of strange medical disorders: he is estranged from his family, has little or no real connection to or memory of his past life, and is occupied in an unfulfilling advertising job. Through the course of the novel, however, Kleinzeit becomes his own hero: he quits his job to live independently by busking in the Underground, writing poems and telling fortunes; he battles his illnesses and is admitted into Hospital only to escape with the allegorical figures of Action and Pain Company; he falls in love with his nurse, Sister; he begins to write creatively – this is reflected in the love-hate relationship he has with the yellow paper, personified as a lover, an errant trickster rival and wild creature to be tamed. Kleinzeit also experiences several profound moments of illumination. Kleinzeit finally faces up to his own seeming insignificance and mortality and reconciles himself with the transience of life and the inevitability of death – this again is reflected through an allegorical relationship with Death who appears at first threatening, but eventually as a companionable chimpanzee.

Two strands of the psychological mode best exhibit Hoban's response to the contemporary crisis in *Kleinzeit*: the theme of the hero as comic fool, writer, lover, and mythic type; and the path of individuation.

In an age of 'modern malaise', the individual has "lost something important along with the larger social and cosmic horizons of action" so that there has been a consequent "loss of a heroic dimension to life" (Taylor, *Varieties* 3-4). Archaic models of heroism based on a proud "heroic temper" have been founded on the ideal of the "honoured and revered" hero of noble birth with great physical prowess, capable of bold, fierce and adventurous acts of will, as well as exhibiting "craft, cunning, adaptability, flexibility of mind, skill in all manner of obliquities" (see Brombert 1-5). However, Hoban portrays this as an increasingly outmoded, impossibly unattainable, and even dangerously destructive and debased response to the contemporary crisis.

Consequently in *Kleinzeit*, Hoban portrays a unique comic modern heroism based on the necessity of a courageous, resilient exploration of the Self and a valiant and dignified acceptance of human weakness, suffering and mortality. In an alienating world Kleinzeit's heroic quest is to find out "What's the difference who I am or if I am?" (*K* 8), "Am I possibly a hero?" (15), "Am I Orpheus?" (146). Through Kleinzeit's quest, Hoban plays with various types of heroism, from the epic hero, the warrior hero, the romantic

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– and I was in a ward where there were terminal cases and all sorts of horrible things. And that got me going with *Kleinzeit*" (Wilkie 98).

hero, and the mythic hero, finally transcending all these to create his own "idiot hero" (164).

Kleinzeit, though characterised as a meek, sickly and insignificant everyman, nevertheless embodies the qualities of the modern antihero whose very failures, insecurities and limitations are the source of his true value and worth. Commenting on the association of paradox and revolution in Dostoevsky's idea of the antihero in *Notes from Underground*, Victor Brombert writes that the "deliberate subversion of the literary model is associated with the voice from the underground challenging accepted opinions" (Brombert 1). Brombert goes on to reveal the underlying force and power to which we can also attribute Kleinzeit's status as anti hero: as "a perturber and disturber", the "negative hero, more keenly perhaps than the traditional hero, challenges our assumptions, raising anew the question of how we see or wish to see ourselves" so that the "critique of heroic concepts [involves] strategies of destabilization" and "carries ethical and political implications" (Brombert 2). *Kleinzeit*, then, while critiquing and parodying false notions of heroism, presents us with the only suitable model of heroism given our loss of horizons: a comic antihero. In *The Comic Hero*, Robert M. Torrance underlines this particular aspect of the modern hero:

> The twentieth century, with its cataclysmic breakup of age-old social orders, has been pre-eminently an era when the comic hero (along with his more obstreperous cousin the revolutionist) has been almost the only authentic hero of any kind to emerge from the rubble. (Torrance 8-9)

Hoban's unusual and quirky combination of two different figures, the Fool and Orpheus, is the primary means by which he is able to express his own appealing and alluring version of heroism. Hoban writes in "The Bear in Max Ernst's Bedroom", an essay from his collection *The Moment under the Moment*:

> A writer sitting at a desk is nothing very heroic and yet you have to find ways of feeling heroic because the effort required certainly is. I want a heroic image to end this with, so out of the dust of mortality and the darkness of the magic wallet I bring … (*MUM* 199)

For Hoban, the Fool has a close affinity with the writer, and hence with Kleinzeit and his journey of creative self-discovery and self-expression. In the essay, Hoban uses Arthur Edward Waite's representation of the Fool as a symbol for the writer. Waite's Fool is "the spirit in search of experience" whose wallet has "dim signs, to show that many subconscious memories are stored up in the soul" (qtd. in *MUM* 196). Aligning his hero

with the "privileged domain of the heroic soul" which is "associated with a world of darkness and transgression", as the hero is "a central figure who yields to the temptation to 'step over the threshold of the invisible'" (Brombert 5), Hoban describes the Fool's quest as follows:

> The wallet is a magic one, he himself doesn't know what's in it but it's heavy with the past, present, and future of the universe; in it is a jumble of unformed words and images, of colours and sounds and strangeness, continually arranging itself in new combinations wanting to be worlds. His real journey begins when he opens the wallet and it swallows him up in its darkness where he must make his way through time and chance, must keep himself empty and knowing nothing so that in that magic darkness the universe can continually fill the Zero of him with itself. He must persist in his folly until, as William Blake said, he becomes wise. And that wisdom lies in knowing how and when to know nothing and be open to everything. (*MUM* 197)

The idea of the Fool and his cyclical journey through the darkness of nothingness and death while embracing rebirth governs the novel's comic mode. This association of comic heroism with the Fool's passage bears a striking resemblance to Edgell Rickword's characterisation of a "distinct brand of mythopoeia" (Coupé, *Myth* 43). In reaction to a mythopoeia often linked with T. S. Eliot which tends to be tragic, elitist, and repressive in its strict adherence to form, tradition and absolutism, Rickword conceived of the modern comic vision in his essay "The Returning Hero". The values propounded by Rickword are deeply resonant with Hoban's notion of the hero and his own mythopoeic method:

> A Hero would seem to be due [one who is] exhaustively disillusioned [but] who has yet so much vitality [to create] an unbiased but self-consistent, humorous universe. … just as the death-defying wire walker in the circus is led into the ring by clowns who mime his tragedy. Perhaps the Hero will be one of those loons himself, for the death-defying gesture is demoded luxury in the modern State. So long as the social mind has no coherent expression like that given it by a supernatural explanation of the universe, the fantastic and the comic, disintegrating forces, will continue the most reputable of styles. They need by no means be inimical to heroic poetry, to which not dignity is essential, but a conception of power. (qtd. in Coupe, *Myth* 44-45)

Thus, as an expression of the vital, life-affirming and regenerative aspects of the human condition, this comic vision values "Aristotle's designation of the human being as 'the laughing animal'" and argues that "mankind's only hope is a cult of comedy" (Burke qtd. in Coupé, *Myth* 43). Comedy grew "out of primitive rituals celebrating rebirth and fertility" (Torrance 10) and given this mythic paradigm of fertility which is, as we shall

see, implicit in all of Hoban's texts, the hero that is to emerge finds dignity and renewed life in facing death and the anarchic, chaotic and often turbulent aspects of existence while inspiring serious esteem, courage and power through the "force of human laughter" (Coupé, *Myth* 46).

In trying to find the Self and be creative Kleinzeit embodies the qualities of this image of the Fool, especially his paradoxical foolish wisdom, his social outsider status, his wandering and journeying nature. Much of Kleinzeit's humorous appeal is due to this mock-heroic treatment set in a comic world of the fantastic and bizarre. Characters and objects alike speak. Kleinzeit presents a "totally animistic world of magical terror which hinges on states of humour and horror" (Wilkie 36). Many of the characters are writers of sorts, "people who write a few chapters" (*K* 119), trying to find meaning and a purpose to their lives. Kleinzeit represents the normal, everyday individual, overlooked in a brash, hostile modern culture, who is forced to act heroically and courageously. His name in German means 'small-time', exemplifying his inadequacy and benign nature, but to Sister, the nurse he has fallen in love with and is trying to impress, he claims it means "hero" (15). Through this "he re-creates himself in an act of re-naming" and in transforming himself "from a small-time player to a hero" (Dunwell 19), Kleinzeit becomes the hero-writer of his own story.

Hoban is able to use Kleinzeit as an anti-hero to parody and critique other forms of heroism prevalent in contemporary culture. Kleinzeit, like Eliot's J. Alfred Prufrock, is physically weak and lacks self-esteem. He is bullied, cajoled and threatened by others.[7] Crude forms of imaginary heroic success bombard him. Heroes in the popular media, "Prong Studman" and "Maximus Jock", are glamorised for their violent and aggressive exploits and their pornographic sexual prowess. Celebrities have a profoundly negative effect on Kleinzeit, who while regretting lying to Sister about his name, compares himself unfavourably with them: they "have that peculiarly intrepid look", are dangerous, forceful, are "never afraid of anything" and are the object of worship, adoration and lust whereas "I'm not a hero, I'm afraid of too many things" (*K* 26).

Despite what Kleinzeit thinks, Hoban parodies the explicit masculine physical convention of the hero by portraying it in such an overtly vulgar and offensive manner,

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[7] Victor Brombert notes: "Nineteenth and twentieth century literature is moreover crowded with weak, ineffectual, pale, humiliated, self-doubting, inept, occasionally abject characters – often afflicted with self-conscious and paralysing irony, yet at times capable of unexpected resilience and fortitude. Such characters do not conform to traditional models of heroic figures; they even stand in opposition to them. But there can be great strength in that opposition. Implicitly or explicitly, they cast doubt on values that have been taken for granted, or were assumed to be unshakeable" (Brombert 2).

highlighting the corruption of the epic hero's ancient and honourable warrior code in a modern context. By centring his novel on an antihero figure who is not young and physically fit he displaces this delusory ideal. Brombert notes that the "rejection of hero worship" and the "denunciation of the heroic code, a code often associated with war, violence, and the cult of manliness" is a common trait of the antihero throughout literature (Brombert 3).

In his attempt to be a hero, Kleinzeit aims for Athenian and mythical heroic glory but arrives at comic absurdity. He takes Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* to Hospital to provide him with a means of solace and defence against the difficulties of life. In this "incongruous image of the patient arming himself" Kleinzeit is "the stereotype of the bookish weakling" (Dunwell 20). Kleinzeit's pathetic attempt at valorising and mimicking the heroic qualities of Athenian heroes humorously undercuts the epic heroic mode whilst foregrounding his own antiheroic virtues. It is a satiric and ironic treatment of the over-reliance of the will, and of the belief that the hero can master his own destiny, regardless of obstacles, through pure strength of force or cunning effort. A more complex and ambiguous notion of heroism emerges as Hoban portrays the need for hope and courage in the face of adversity as well as a realistic and life-affirming understanding of human nature.

In this respect, we find Kleinzeit, the struggling artist, gaining the solidarity and inspiration for the heroic effort needed for him to write his first chapter entitled HERO after reading Thucydides. The Athenians are characterised as innovators, bold, daring and decisive. Even if they run precariously close to doing things beyond their resources they are relentless and tenacious in their energies in defeat or victory (*K* 106-08). In whatever he does, busking in the Underground, trying to escape Hospital, going for a run or marshalling his energies to write, Kleinzeit invokes the fearless spirit of the Athenians. Of course, Kleinzeit strives beyond his means and capacity to "Think Athenian" and suffers several major setbacks: he is repeatedly put back into Hospital despite his various attempts to break out and maintain a fit, healthy and active lifestyle; his rampant fight with the yellow paper comes to nothing when what he has written disintegrates before his eyes, words falling off the paper like dandruff (167). Thus, all his attempts to assert himself through pride or wilful self-assertion are shown to be mere hubris.

Nevertheless, despite his weakness and failures, Kleinzeit retains a fragile yet immense sense of dignity as he battles to become the hero of his own tale. Other characters rely on him and respect his valiant attempts to escape Hospital. Kleinzeit

teaches them to overcome human limitations by accepting them and by struggling to gain stoic happiness in life. Thus, ironically Kleinzeit is for the most part unaware that the Athenians ultimately lose the war, yet, paradoxically, he continues to use the defeated as victorious role models.[8] Kleinzeit realises that,

> Athens has been defeated, he said. We mourn the loss of comrades and brothers. Looked at in another light, however, Athens has not lost, Sparta has not won. 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)

Here emerges the ultimate absurdity of his heroism, as well as its passionate hope in life's ongoing perpetual struggle. Kleinzeit must trust that creativity and success in life is rare and not wholly of our volition. Life is ultimately ironic, tragi-comic and forlorn. Hence Kleinzeit also reads Ortega y Gasset's *Meditations on Quixote*: his affinity with Quixote connects him with the parody of the Romantic hero. It also places him in the realm of the absurd. For as Wilkie writes, Hoban links Kleinzeit with another modernised archetypal antihero: Albert Camus's existential hero, Sisyphus:

> [In] the pattern of Sisyphus as an exemplary figure, Kleinzeit is to become something of the classic *l'homme absurde*. He is to recognize, through his intellect and feelings, the nature of his absurd destiny over which he has no control. He is to discover that within the meaninglessness and the absurd lies the basis for his positive response to life; and he is to achieve this by his ultimate acquiescence in the multiple possibilities of the present moment. (Wilkie 41)

Therefore Kleinzeit emerges as the antihero who proudly transforms ongoing defeat into victory, weakness into strength, failure into success while surpassing in dignity, charm and power many of the traditional heroes who threaten him (see Brombert 6).

In creating a unique antihero Hoban draws upon a vast array of representations of heroes and modes of heroism and in many ways his method is based on satire, parody and ironic play. However as Brombert notes, this type of response is a "critique of vicariousness [even as it] implies the diagnosis of a moral void as well as the paradoxical nostalgia for heroic values and models no longer relevant" (Brombert 5). Hoban purposely attempts to fill this void by searching through the collective memory for a

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[8] Writing about the antiheroic elements in the work of Max Frisch, Brombert notes that "this preoccupation with death and defeat also takes on a positive value … . The courage to see one's own weakness and translate it into strength is repeatedly viewed as a high attribute" (Brombert 82).

suitable heroic image. Brombert, noting that the significance of "the very notion of the 'antihero' depends on such a memory", writes:

> The reason is that such a memory acts as more than a foil; it suggests a yearning, perhaps even a quest. In an age of scepticism and dwindling faith, an age marked by the pervasive awareness of loss and disarray, the deliberate subversion of the heroic tradition may betray an urge to salvage or reinvent meaning ... [and these types of works] in opposition to traditional heroic models may well reflect a moral and spiritual thrust. (Brombert 6)

In this vein, the figure of Orpheus is the most resonant and striking heroic archetype for Kleinzeit to aspire towards. There are several key reasons why Orpheus is such a suitable heroic archetype for Kleinzeit to remember.

Orpheus' heroic status is not because of his physical strength or because he is an 'action hero'. Traditionally, the Homeric hero had two capacities "to be a speaker of mythoi and a doer of deeds" (Dowden 4). Orpheus is a hero by virtue of his singing ability and his spiritual nature. W. K. C. Guthrie comments that Orpheus was regarded as a "weakling" and initially there was doubt as to whether he could sail with the Argonauts (Guthrie 28). Orpheus was taken on the Argonauts' quest as a priest so he could use his music to charm the Sirens. So it is through the "magic power of his song that he earns his place among the heroes" (28). Orpheus was in "all religious matters the leading spirit of the expedition" and the theme in "both his songs is of the origin of all things, of the birth of the world and their gods" (29). Joseph Falaky Nagy contrasts Orpheus' poetic prophetic role with the other common role of the physical, martial hero noting that "the peaceable figure of Orpheus – poet and mystic" embodies "qualities that make him in crucial respects the opposite of the warrior-hunter of myth" (Edmunds 208).

Thus Orpheus, "noted for taming wild creatures" with the "power of music, not the power of physical force" as well as his "'shamanic' feat of gaining entrance into the world of the dead" (209), inspires Kleinzeit to become the modern-shaman-artist on the heroic path of self-discovery (see Wilkie 41). Orpheus becomes a radiant symbol of the inspired artist and his journey into the Underworld becomes a metaphor for the creative process of exploring the subconscious mind. In *Kleinzeit*, the focus is also on Orpheus' tragic story of love and loss thereby activating another aspect of heroism: the romantic hero as lover.

All these heroic types, the Fool, the comic anti-hero, the absurd hero, Orpheus as mythic hero, lover and shaman, figure in Kleinzeit's path of individuation. Some theoretical background is necessary to understand this process. A Jungian interpretation

of the hero is as a "symbolic representation of the whole psyche, the larger and more comprehensive identity that supplies the strength that the personal ego lacks" (Jung, *Man and his Symbols* 101). Thus,

> the essential function of the heroic myth is the development of the individual's ego-consciousness – his awareness of his own strengths and weaknesses – in a manner that will equip him for the arduous tasks with which life confronts him. (101)

The journey of individuation the hero embarks upon can be described as "the conscious coming-to-terms with one's own inner centre (psychic nucleus) or Self" (169). The Self in Jungian terms is a centre, the fundamental basis underlying the whole psyche. It is a transcendent objective unity from which, paradoxically, the most inner sense of subjectivity springs. The Self must not be confused with the ego, but seen as an inner totality, an entity that ties the ego with the unconscious. It has been described as the "organizing center from which the regulatory effect seems to be a sort of 'nuclear atom' in our psychic system" as well as "the inventor, organizer, and source of dream images" (161).

This means that "the image of the hero evolves in a manner that reflects each stage of the evolution of the human personality" (102). Thus, the cycles of birth and death, with their adventures, tasks and sacrifices, are of deep psychological resonance in the process of becoming and searching for the Self. This often culminates in a visionary illumination or epiphany. The Self is manifested through these profound moments of enlightenment in symbols of transcendence. These frequently appear when the "psyche needs to be unified" as they are "compensatory symbols of wholeness generated by the self when the psychic system is in danger of fragmenting" (Stein 159). Thus, Jung observes that "experience shows that individual mandalas are symbols of order and they occur in patients principally during times of psychic disorientation or reorientation" (qtd. in Stein 159). The essential nature of the Self is its wholeness, a union of opposites. The goal of individuation and the Self is harmony, balance and unity and this is exhibited in the many various representations and symbols of the Self: as animals, stones, a divine musician, a wise man or woman, a youth, the Cosmic Man, or the symbol of the circle or mandala. Stein writes that Jung's ideas of the Self develop from the apprehension of the mandala as a symbol representing the underlying ordered wholeness of the Self:

> The mandala is a universal symbol that expresses the intuition of ordered wholeness. To name the archetypal factor that is operative in the psyche

> producing this goal and this pattern, Jung chose the term the self, following the Indian Upanishads in their designation of the higher personality, the *atman*. (156)

As we will see the mandala is explicitly evoked in *Kleinzeit*, as are almost all the symbols listed. We can start by taking Kleinzeit's quest as lover, in order to illustrate the underlying journey of individuation and quest for the Self. Kleinzeit's relationship with Sister is a significant part of his rehabilitation and represents the possibility of a pure, creative and passionate loving relationship in a world where much of the romantic and sexual nature of humans has been corrupted through debased depictions in the media. Sister has her own quest and becomes a more developed character than Eurydice, who was originally the love object which drives Orpheus' quest. Sister as a nurse is a maternal, caring figure who looks after sick men. She embodies the qualities of attractive elegance and of calm self-possession, and she is associated with beauty, health and natural images:

> Sister woke up, got out of bed, rose like the dawn. Rosy-fingered, rosy-toed, rosy-nippled. Tall, shapely, Junoesque. (*K* 10)

Unlike the tortuous, fragmented identity with which Kleinzeit struggles, indicated by the identity confusion with the mirror, Sister is confidently self-assured and exudes harmony and grace:

> Ward A4, please, she told the shoes. They took her there. What a pleasure to see her walk! The walls were cool and fresh with it on either side, the corridors smiled with reflected Sister. (10)

Sister is a vital presence as a contrast and necessary complement to the sick male condition. Her opinion is that "nobody is healthy", in particular men, who are all sick in some way (19). Her quest is difficult for her to verbalise: indeed, she does not rely on language to express herself and thus perhaps presents a different manner of being in the world, unmediated, natural and spontaneous. She says to God,

> I can't say exactly what I mean, said Sister. It just sounds stupid. What I mean is, it isn't a matter of finding a well man, it's a matter of finding one who makes the right use of his sickness. (19)

Sister patiently waits for her 'prince' to arrive; Kleinzeit becomes this heroic figure who is able to use his sickness properly. Sister sees her own identity grow as a Eurydice figure when Hospital orders her to "Think of Eurydice" (49). She is inextricably bound to Orpheus' quest and the deeper significance of the Orphic pattern that is to unfold. The relationship between Sister and Eurydice develops in parallel with Kleinzeit's discovery

and quest to remember Orpheus. After an ecstatic moment during their lovemaking, Underground repeats the question to Kleinzeit, "Are you Orpheus?" (86). Where he had earlier doubted, now Kleinzeit affirms this,

> No question about it, said Kleinzeit, in time extending infinitely forward, backward. Who else could be this harmonious, this profound? (86)

It is an extremely important moment on Kleinzeit's path to wholeness and self-discovery as sexual passion involves an ecstatic illumination:

> Kleinzeit, overwhelmed, became nothing, disappeared, reappeared, from nowhere entered, inventing himself as theme, as subject. Answered by Sister he sounded deep chill, silence, all beneath him, raised Atlantis, golden domes and oriental carpets, central heating, dates and pomegranates, mottled sunlight, stereo. (86)

This moment of being is regenerative and miraculous. It represents the culmination of Kleinzeit's heroic journey as lover. Hoban characteristically mingles odd references from modern culture and the ancient world of myth. The experience, evoked with a sense of warmth, eroticism, and exotic fullness of being, spontaneously fuses form and content and is also described in tones of religious fervour. It is a dissolution and rebirth of the self involving the heightened awareness of Self and union of the opposites of the male (Kleinzeit as Orpheus) and female (Sister as Eurydice) aspects of being. The transcendent nature of the experience is expressed through the domes and oriental carpets – both mandala symbols of perfection and unity and ultimately the Self. While being in stereo expresses Orpheus' harmonising music and Kleinzeit's clear reception of a lover's energy as sound, the reference to the pomegranate seed invokes the myth of Demeter and Persephone. This hint of an underlying fertility myth structure will become more prominent in the later novels.

The love relationship is not the end of Kleinzeit's passage. He must battle the yellow paper alone to assert his creative identity as a writer and realise the insignificance of his life in a "cyclical pattern larger than himself" (Branscomb 31). It is shown throughout the novel that Kleinzeit can only create something meaningful and worthwhile when he has bravely found love; come to terms with his mortality (Death); learnt the lessons from Hospital concerning Orpheus; and in a process of renunciation of the meaningless ephemeral clutter of a commodifed disparate modern existence, journeyed into the Self where he must accept nothingness and emptiness as reality and as a source of creative inspiration.

Thus the novel ends with Death comically figured giving Kleinzeit – fully realised as the comic fool, writer, lover and modern Orpheus – his marriage present. Death looks over Kleinzeit's shoulder as he is seated at a "plain deal table in the bare sitting-room" (*K* 190) and he is able to successfully represent his inner realisation of the unity and wholeness of the Self on paper:

> Kleinzeit touched the paper with the brush, drew in one smooth sweep a fat black circle, sweet and round. (191)

Kleinzeit experiences completion of an inner circle of Zen-like perfection and his "*whole* organism was strong and sweetly *rhythmic* with the perfect *health* of it" (180; emphases added). The circle Kleinzeit draws is that mandala figure which "appears in times of psychic confusion and intense conflict", ordering and holding chaos and confusion within a protective circle (Ulanov 65). As a transcendent moment in Kleinzeit's journey, the mandala appears "after long periods of psychological development as if to symbolise release from the conflict of opposites and to convey the numinous impact of their reconciliation" (65). It is the culmination of an intensely heroic struggle against the forces of dismemberment, dislocation and fragmentation where he is able to fit together all his disparate, decaying and malfunctioning parts into a harmonious, healthy whole.

In the psychological mode, then, Hoban uses the hero archetypes to his own idiosyncratic ends to explore the nature of the Self, portraying the path of individuation through inner darkness, isolation and emptiness towards a sense of wholeness and psychic harmony and fuses these into a vision for the heroism of the writer. This is best evoked by the image found in both *Kleinzeit* and *The Moment under the Moment* – that of the writer, alone at a desk in a bare empty room. Once there,

> We must go into the dark and magic wallet of time within which we shall find that bleak and dreadful room where the paper bear waits to gobble us up. We must go into all the scary places to find ourselves, we fools, we must encounter all that lives there, and if we never find our way out again it will still have been a risk worth taking, more than that: it's the risk we're born for, made for. (*MUM* 197-98)

II

Approaching Orpheus' Gaze

In "Certain Obsessions, Certain Ideas", another essay from *The Moment under the Moment*, Hoban writes that certain "images persist in the mind" and "as soon as you define a special field of attention all the gods and demons and all the creatures of myth that ever were and will be" jump in and take hold of our consciousness because they require a "reciprocity of awareness" (*MUM* 238). Amongst images such as the Kraken, Hermes, Medusa and Vermeer's "Head of a Young Girl", Orpheus is one of these obsessions of Hoban's imagination. It manifests itself in strange descriptive pieces on the raging of the singing head of Orpheus, an interview with the head found at low-tide near Putney Bridge, and its metamorphosis into a surreal floating island-head which engulfs him, while below the Kraken lurks in an ultimate deep of crushing and terrific blackness (242-43).

Often Hoban is unable to draw action or a narrative from the transfixing images of Orpheus: he writes that, "they mostly aren't ideas that I can do anything with, most of the time I can't get stories out of them, for long stretches all I can do is think about them" (239). However, the endless yet fluctuating fascination with Orpheus is a major source of inspiration for *Kleinzeit* and *The Medusa Frequency*. In these novels he is able to spin a narrative, connecting images together, re-writing and adapting these visionary moments in multiple forms, thereby revealing a complex mythopoeic creative imagination and religious vision.

Hoban is able to extract so much meaning from Orpheus because of the enduring suggestiveness of the myth itself. The tradition of Orpheus in literature is rich and has a long history of creative interest in Western culture, part of an enduring archetypal expression of human creativity which is rooted in the collective consciousness.[9] In an anthology of Classical Mythology in English literature, which

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[9] William Doty argues that although the "quest for the earliest or purest version is often fruitless", one "may be able to posit a hypothetical primal version (an *Urtext*) by inference from transformations and variations" and this can be done in a similar way as "one analyzes the variations of musical themes within a complex composition" (Doty 12). Despite much controversy, certain key elements of the Orpheus myth, which Hoban has inherited from Virgil and Ovid, stand out: his uncertain origins in Thrace, where his mother was Calliope, the muse of epic and heroic poetry, and his father said to be either a king, Oeagrus, or the god Apollo; his part in the epic journey of Jason and the Argonauts; his love for and the death of a nymph named Eurydice; his heroic journey to the underworld in order to find her; his powerful music charming and entrancing Hades and Persephone, who allow her to return with him on one condition, that he does not look back; the loss of Eurydice; his melancholy and inconsolable return to the world where he shuns humanity and especially the company of women; his death at the hands of a crazed band of Thracian

devotes a section to Orpheus with extracts from Virgil and Ovid through to Hoban himself, Geoffrey Miles writes,

> Orpheus is the archetypal poet and the archetypal musician; beyond that, he can be seen as the embodiment of 'art' in its widest sense, of all kinds of creative activity, all human attempts to find or create harmony and order in the world, through literature, music, art, philosophy, science, politics, or religion. In his unsuccessful attempt to reclaim his wife Eurydice from death, and his own death at the hands of an angry mob, he embodies the limitations of art in the face of mortality and human irrationality. (Miles 61)

Scholars have questioned and investigated the true nature of Orpheus, his actual historical existence, his role in myth, poetry, religion and philosophy, and what emerges from the many explorations is a figure whose origins and significance are elusive and impossible to define. W. K. C. Guthrie in *Orpheus and Greek Religion* comments on the difficulty of finding the origins of Orpheus and uncovering an authentic story:

> As we try to trace him back through the ages he becomes more shadowy, more elusive, more Protean in his aptitude for slipping away from anyone who tries to lay actual hands on him and make him tell just what he is and what he stands for. (Guthrie 1)

The basic elements of his story can be summarised but are by no means authoritative. Guthrie goes on to warn us that,

> We must not expect to find the legend of Orpheus told as a simple and single story, without variations and without inconsistencies. That would be surprising, if we consider the different people who have told it, the variety of the motives which prompted them, the remoteness the times to which they believed their stories to refer, and the ever-present doubt whether even the basis of those stories, the one-time existence of the hero, is a historical fact or not. (25)

This is one of the aspects of the Orpheus tradition which attracts Hoban and provides a basis for an understanding of his mythical and literary method. Orpheus's origins and the circumstances of his life, the legend of his underworld journey and role in forming a cult are sufficiently shrouded in doubt for Hoban to be able to re-write and re-imagine the legend according to his own idiosyncratic personal vision. Miles also recognises the narrative and dramatic power of the story on which Hoban relies, as it is "movingly tragic and ironic" and thereby "invites constant retelling and constant reinterpretation of the motives and feelings of the two principal characters" (Miles 61).

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women and the dismemberment and singing of his head as it travels towards Lesbos along the River Hebrus. Sources amalgamated from Miles, Guthrie, Bulfinch and the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*.

The portrayal of Orpheus in *Kleinzeit* and *The Medusa Frequency* reveals Hoban's mythopoeic urge, which is characterised by a tendency to "create or re-create certain narratives which human beings take to be crucial to their understanding of their world" (Coupé, *Myth* 4). As O'Flaherty notes, the art of myth-making is revealed to be an on-going process of inspiration and interaction with a system of archetypes and symbols – what Lévi-Strauss terms "mythemes" (Segal, vol. 3 300-01). These various elements of the myth are the building blocks out of which a new myth and an innovative, vivid interpretation of the myth can be constructed. The artistic process is similar to Lévi-Strauss' *bricolage*, employing an endless play and variation of patterns and mythic elements. Hoban operates in the role of a

> *bricoleur* who builds out of the mythemes of his culture and his own individual genius a kind of metamyth; responding truly and artistically to patterns in the myths, tossed up by some fertilizing influence in his own experience, he creates out of a true symbiosis of his personal theme and some depth of meaning that he has discovered in the myth. (301)

Hoban however has a strong Romantic conception of the artist as a visionary and a seer, who explores the collective unconscious and imagination and mediates this sacred reality through art. He infuses this belief with his interest in Orpheus, thereby giving the artist-hero (Kleinzeit, Herman Orff or Riddley Walker) a shamanic and heroic function in sympathy with his mythic subject. By invoking "the theme of shamanism that is to become the kernel of his writing" (Wilkie 41), Hoban shows that the creative process involves inspiration and discovery of underlying essential forms, ideas and patterns rather than merely a mechanical putting together of parts. Hoban also transforms the story of Orpheus into a metafiction and a metaphysic, where the myth is a way of exploring the nature of the creative process as well as developing his quasi-religious concerns.

Hoban's varied treatment of Orpheus in his novels, especially drawing on his role as shaman-musician as well as his journey into the Underworld to search for Eurydice, is part of a greater project: a self-conscious search for origins, for a still centre of being, a sacred place and time (Eliade's *in illo tempore*), for inspiration. This is a quest for transcendence and a transgression which approaches the limits of human expression. In Maurice Blanchot's words his journey represents "the inspired and forbidden" gaze of Orpheus (Blanchot 174) as the artist-hero seeks to grasp the sacred, the strangeness of

human consciousness and the "unwordable" real reality and to translate this into art (*MUM* Foreword).[10]

Kleinzeit and *The Medusa Frequency* approach the myth from different perspectives and have different focal points: Hoban thus suggests the relativity and unreliability of story telling. There is no objective order and account of the myth, only different versions adapted for Kleinzeit, Sister and Herman Orff. Hoban conceives the Orpheus and Eurydice story as a dynamic circular energy system:

> No system is static; it is always in the process of becoming what it is not. Any putting-together charges whatever is put together with the energy that will tear it apart. The winding-down of one system is the winding-up of another. The condition is circular: it doesn't matter where you apparently enter the cycle. Be Eurydice lost, and the energy of that system will put together the Orpheus who has lost you and the music with which he will gain entrance to the nether world. Be Orpheus, and the energy of that system will be scattered when the Thracian women tear you apart. Be the Thracian women, and your tearing-apart of Orpheus will release the energy that puts him together again with Eurydice unlost. Eurydice and Orpheus and the Thracian women are only the costumes: the actors are the being lost, the losing and the finding, the gathering and the scattering. The actors are the action cycles continually moving in us and in all things. (*MUM* 148)

In *Kleinzeit*, the focus of Hoban's adaptation of the Orpheus tale into a myth of creative transcendence is towards three nodes: the Orphic quest, the Orphic epiphany and the Orphic conflict. In order to accentuate these aspects, Hoban alters the traditional myth in various ways. He reworks the order of events, alters the significance of key elements of the tale, and changes certain motifs or roles the characters play in the myth. The figure of Hospital articulates the creative re-imagining of the Orpheus myth, inserting himself into the myth itself, narrating these significant alterations and explaining a unique underlying significance of Orpheus and Eurydice to Kleinzeit and Sister.

As an ambivalent allegorical figure in the novel, Hospital on one hand is a *memento mori*, associated with suffering and death. Hospital is personified either as a beast-like clawed lion creature (*K* 39); or "one infinite black mouth" ready to devour all human civilisation into blackness and nothingness (39-40). Not only does he always remind Kleinzeit of mortality and of the insignificance, hardship and fragility of existence, but it is to Hospital that Kleinzeit's fellow writers go, and where they are extinguished. In this respect, Hospital, who is everywhere in the text, is a Foucauldian node of power and control evoking the modern de-centring of subjects in an increasingly technological and

[10] Various influences in this interpretation must be acknowledged: Jung, Eliade and more recently Maurice Blanchot's reading of the Orpheus myth in *The Space of Literature* (Blanchot 171-76).

alienating environment. This aspect is most evident in the dehumanisation of the patients in Ward A4. Kleinzeit sees an individual who is so entangled with machinery that "the man seemed no more than some kind of junction fitting, secondary to the machinery in which he was only a link in the circulation of whatever was being drip-fed, pumped, filtered and condensed" (51). Thus, much of the novel sees Kleinzeit vainly and forlornly trying to escape Hospital's web. He cowers in fear, terrified that "he too might suddenly find Hospital growing on him like a mechanical man-eating vine" (171).[11]

On the other hand, however, Hospital becomes, as the novel progresses, the place of rehabilitation, the place from which he must struggle to free himself, from which he receives a vital lesson to aid him in his path to remember himself, and from which springs a stoical understanding and courageous acceptance of the challenges of life and death. Hence, like Kleinzeit's necessary exploration in the darkness of the Underground, Hospital is the source of his insights into the significance of Orpheus.

When Hospital asks Kleinzeit about Orpheus, Kleinzeit hazily supplies the bare details of the conventional tale:

> Orpheus with his lute made trees and all that, said Kleinzeit. And then Eurydice in the Underworld, he nearly got her out with his music but he looked back and lost her. He wasn't meant to look back. (142)

Already the importance of the arts is implicit in Kleinzeit's first impressions. The creative power of the music "makes trees" (142). Kleinzeit is suggesting that the music not only could redeem and save Eurydice from the Underworld but also transform reality. According to this version – the image of Orpheus on Greek vases playing to the trees and stones and wild animals is behind this fragmentary allusion[12] – Orpheus is the civiliser who through his art and wisdom can order the world around him. Kleinzeit also focuses on the didactic element of the tale. Orpheus is a failed hero: after succeeding in regaining Eurydice from the Underworld he transgresses and loses her.

Hospital's reaction to this account is disdainful. Hospital suggests a creative re-imagining and engagement with the details of the myth:

> It's just as I thought, said Hospital. A lot of schoolboy claptrap. Let us look in upon Orpheus. I don't say the story has a beginning, I don't even say it's a story,

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[11] This image will re-appear in a slightly different form in *Riddley Walker*. The Green Man, a similar symbol of life and death, has vines which grow like these tubes and fittings out of the mouth. See p 150-51.

[12] Guthrie notes that this aspect of Orpheus was a "favourite subject of early Christian art". Here often depicted was "the common representation of him sitting surrounded by beasts wild and tame who are lulled into amity by his music" which "suggests naturally the picture of the lion and the lamb lying down together" linking Orpheus to the "symbol of the Good Shepherd" (Guthrie 23).

> stories are like knots on a string. There is however a place, a time where I like to look in on Orpheus. (142)

This prompts Hospital's peculiar cyclical narration of the Orpheus tale which explores a hidden, non-rational and quasi-mystical underlying meaning beyond the traditional narrative elements of the myth.

The Orphic Quest

The place and time on which Hospital chooses to centre his telling of the myth is encapsulated by the image of "the severed head of Orpheus, eyeless, sodden and rotting, blackened and buzzing with blowflies, lying on the beach at Lesbos" (142). For Hospital, the head of Orpheus is "the very heart and centre of the matter" (143). Hospital is transfixed by the singing head whose voice is strange and mysterious, one that is paradoxical, being both vague yet on some other level "burningly clear" (143). Hospital describes the voice, "Quivering forever on the air" as it "begins to rage and curse" (143). It speaks of an immortality and yearning for wholeness, as it is beset by grief over the loss of Eurydice and the pain of Orpheus' own death and dismemberment.

This is not without precedent in Orpheus tradition, for in some versions the head is an oracle and a poetic vehicle for supernatural knowledge. Joseph F. Nagy comments that "the severing of the singer's head from his body creates a supernatural aftereffect of continuity: Orpheus's head according to some strands of the tradition, continues to sing and becomes an oracle, protected by Apollo, or a cult object" (Edmunds 213).[13] Orpheus' song is like many 'supernatural' messages which evoke a feeling of timelessness and is inexplicable but emotionally highly charged. In *The Moment under the Moment*, he describes the voice as,

> Diapason, a full volume of various sounds in concord. But more than that a palimpsest. One image, one word on top of another. One cry by solitary night or crowded passion. On top of another …This raging, this palimpsest sound, this diapason of time. Various times not at first in concord. The raging head of Orpheus is not to be understood. That is not the nature of it. (*MUM* 239)

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[13] Nagy has finer differences in interpretation. He argues that Orpheus' head becomes a self-sufficient entity and does not necessarily seek for its body as it becomes more effective in its role. Thus the head represents a different mode of life after death as the singer "continues to live through part of himself" (Edmunds 213). He stresses the power of Orpheus' spoken word which disrupts the conventions of real and unreal, living and dead, breaks social decorum and notes that "Orpheus's mode of life after death, however, would seem to indicate that the singer, his performance, and the tradition he represents potentially form a closed system, grounded in an autonomy and invulnerability of music and speech" (213).

Orpheus' divine voice forms part of a wider association with music. The musical metaphor, developed in *Kleinzeit* with reference to the 'medical' condition of a faulty "diapason" (*K* 7), relates to the Platonic notion of the music of the spheres. Here, Hoban uses this music as a paradoxical cosmic expression of underlying harmony, order and pattern in the universe in conjunction with chaotic, strange and potentially overwhelmingly confusing manifestations. Significantly the song is also a layered and complex transmission of images and words. As a palimpsest it is the plurality and totality of language as a signifying system. Orpheus' head is the shamanic vessel through which an enchanting message is partially channelled, translated and transmitted. Through the singing head the universe is expressed as a language-producing entity, endlessly creative, productive and seamlessly interconnected.

By concentrating on Orpheus' severed head and beginning his version at the end of the usual tale – Lesbos was the place where the dismembered head of Orpheus was washed up after he was torn apart by the Thracian women – Hospital radically changes the impetus of Orpheus' quest. Hospital's re-ordering and reshuffling of events focuses Orpheus' quest not on finding Eurydice in the Underworld, (this is a subsidiary corollary in Hospital's version) but on the heroic quest of the head as it struggles to find and gather the disparate parts of its body together. Hospital claims that he "was there because the beach at Lesbos was hospital for Orpheus" (143). Hospital here more broadly represents the end place, the apparent point of no return which threatens annihilation but promises rehabilitation, necessary in the hero's cyclical journey from life to death and miraculous return.

Hospital's use of the head's quest for its body is the inspiration for Kleinzeit's quest for wholeness and creative harmony. Thus the idea of the disembodied head as it searches for its body symbolises Kleinzeit's inner fragmentation and estrangement from his society and so his urge for reunion and reconnection with a greater whole. It becomes a mantra by which to guide his search to remember himself and motivate his quest for individuation. Hospital asks Kleinzeit to imagine the blind head swimming night and day out against the tide towards the place of his dismemberment:

> Think of the head of Orpheus...You hear something...You feel the air on your face, you feel with your face the passage of something between you and the river. There is a sighing perhaps, you can't be sure. Someone unseen walks away slowly.
>
> He's found his members, said Kleinzeit. He's remembered himself.
>
> What is harmony, said Hospital, but a fitting together? (143-44)

Here linking the notion of harmony and music to the different senses of the word "remember" is crucial. With a sexual pun, suggesting an act of heroic virility, Kleinzeit observes that Orpheus has found his members and become a whole man. Hoban also uses re-membering in the sense of putting together fragments and discordant elements into a harmonic sequence or order. Hoban's use of Milton's "L'Allegro" encapsulates this sense of the word, as the joyful moment of the soul fitting together in harmonic concord is expressed through intricately interlinked strains of music, song and verse:

> Lap me in soft Lydian Aires,
> Married to immortal verse
> Such as the meeting soul may pierce
> In notes, with many a winding bout
> Of linckèd sweetnes long drawn out,
> With wanton heed, and giddy cunning,
> The melting voice through mazes running; (179)

Thirdly, remembering is conceived as exploring backwards into the past and into the collective memory for archaic traces of mythic gods and special knowledge. This is the regression towards an origin that Hoban speaks of when he writes that Orpheus is an image that "moves *forward* as action and *reaches back* to origins that *change* as the idea changes for me" (*MUM* 243; emphases added). The remembering-and-finding quest is figured as action *forwards*, suggested with the movement of a narrative driven by the severed head's upstream search for its body and/or the Underworld quest for Eurydice and/or Kleinzeit's need for self-knowledge. It is also an arduous movement *backwards* against the tides of time, through layers of memory into primordial origins. Both these movements are ultimately towards the centre of being and the sacred regenerative mythical time of absolute reality innate within us. It is a place of inspiration and a source of creative harmony and union. The Jungian basis of Hoban's fiction is clearly apparent here, as Jung writes:

> There is a thinking in primordial images – in symbols which are older than historical man, which have been ingrained in him from earliest times, and, eternally living, outlasting all generations, still make up the groundwork of the human psyche. It is only possible to live the fullest life when we are in harmony with these symbols; wisdom is a return to them. It is neither a question of knowledge, but of the agreement of our thinking with the primordial images of the unconscious. (Jung, *Modern Man* 129-30)

This movement is given more significance when considering the special role of memory in *Kleinzeit* and elsewhere in Hoban's fiction. Memory is a key to hidden structures and

ideas, and is integral to our identity and life in the world. In his essay "Mnemosyne, Teen Taals, and Tottenham Court Road", Hoban writes:

> Through memory we refer, we connect, we recall, we retain, we bring back, we hold on to. Mnemosyne is Memory and she is the mother of the nine muses because all of our arts and sciences – all of what we are and where we are – comes from the womb of memory spiralled in the doubled helix of human genetics and the collective unconscious and unconscious experience of the human race. (*MUM* 219)

Implicit is an almost Platonic notion of learning and understanding. For Plato "knowing amounts to recollecting" (anamnesis) the traces of pure and perfect Ideas which lie "latent and incarnate in man" and which had been forgotten when "in the course of being reincarnated, the soul drinks from the spring of Lethe" (Eliade, *History of Religious Ideas* vol. 2 198). Philosophy sought to preserve wonder, astonishment and to help us recall and remember the eternal, essential truth (in Greek *a-letheia*) from the effects of ignorance, forgetfulness, and mutability (Young 215). Although for Plato this was achieved through reason and mystical apprehension, not poetry, myth or art, Hoban is appropriating this religious basis of ancient Greek philosophy and linking it with a Romantic conception of the power of art to inspire and enlighten.

For this purpose Orpheus is the perfect mediating figure. There is a close connection between this Platonic notion of knowledge and epiphany and the figure of Orpheus as a religious shaman. Dudley Young explains that both "religious remembrance and Platonic philosophy seek to renew the world's wonder by re-membering its origins" and he goes on to note that the "'religious' basis of [Plato's] philosophy was conspicuously promulgated by the Orphic sects and the Pythagoreans, who drew their inspiration from Thracian shamans" (215). Thus it is "memory's magical power to recall and repair what is significantly past" that is the basis of the shamanic rituals and the primitive belief in sympathetic magic (214).

The Orphic Epiphany

Through his journey from death to re-member himself, Orpheus experiences a regenerating epiphany which produces a creative outpouring:

> When Orpheus remembered himself, said Hospital, he came together so harmoniously that he began to play his lute with immense power and beauty. (*K* 147)

By recasting the object of Orpheus' quest, Hospital foregrounds the source of Orpheus' famous musical ability, linking this charming and entrancing power which could move rocks and trees and pacify wild beasts to an Orphic epiphany. The effect of the music inspires passion, "making him a tremendous lover" (147), but also a mystical state of ecstasy and transcendence. Thus, castigating Kleinzeit's insistence on asking, "Am *I* Orpheus?" Hospital dispels the adherence to the self or a singular individual identity asserting "I, I, I. What a lot of rubbish. How could any one *I* be Orpheus. Even Orpheus wasn't an *I*" (146). Blanchot, writing about the paradoxes of Orpheus's gaze, notes that in his "glance back he is absent" (Blanchot 172). In this 'primal scene'[14] Orpheus loses his selfhood. Through the Orphic epiphany he confronts death, night and "the ultimate disaster, which is to have lost the right to say I" (194). His song, hence all art, demands that he who is devoted to it become nothing (197). Paradoxically by finding oneself there is concomitant dissolution of the self into a greater cosmic union. Hospital describes it:

> Sometimes you couldn't see Orpheus for the rocks and trees around him. He was tuned into the big vibrations, you see, he and the grains of sand and the cloud particles and the colours of the spectrum all vibrating together. (*K* 147)

This description of the Orphic epiphany is further elucidated when Hoban combines the notions of a creative harmony embodied in Orpheus' music with the hero's re-union with Eurydice. This demands further changes from the traditional myth, so that the nature of the characters transforms, as well as variation of order and event. Orpheus is able to make such wonderful music only when he has remembered himself and he *then* is able to find Eurydice. In other words, his music is a product of finding his body and a sense of wholeness and then travelling into the Underworld where he meets Eurydice. Hospital illustrates the point by once more dismissing the conventional tale:

> More schoolboy rubbish, said Hospital. Orpheus met Eurydice when he got to the inside of things. Eurydice was there because that was where she lived. She didn't have to get bitten by a snake to go there. With the power of his harmony Orpheus penetrated the world, got to the inside of things, the place under the places. Underworld, if you like to call it that. And that's where he found Eurydice, the female element complementary to himself. She was Yin, he was Yang. What could be simpler. (*K* 147)

Here the epiphanic and transformative power of art enables Orpheus to meet Eurydice. The moment of creative harmony is conceived as a movement inwards towards a hidden, dark, creative point of origin and source of primordial fascination and

[14] See Kevin Hart. "Blanchot's 'Primal Scene'." Schwartz 149-74.

numinous power. This quest, underlying all Hoban's fiction, represents the ultimate and inexpressible goal of his characters and his own writing itself: attaining the 'real' reality or the 'Thing-in-Itself'. In this approach towards the sacred, Blanchot writes of Orpheus' quest:

> When Orpheus descends toward Eurydice, art is the power by which night opens. Because of art's strength, night welcomes him; it becomes welcoming intimacy, the harmony and accord of the first night. But it is toward Eurydice that Orpheus has descended. For him Eurydice is the furthest that art can reach. Under a name that hides her and a veil that covers her, she is the profoundly obscure point toward which art and desire, death and night, seem to tend. She is the instant when the essence of night approaches as the *other* night. (Blanchot 171)

In *Kleinzeit*, Eurydice becomes more than a person or a beloved nymph whom Orpheus meets in any merely physical sense. Eurydice represents rather a strange, elusive and mysterious state of being intrinsically part of a desired inner space. Orpheus too becomes a state of being or archetypal expression of artistic energy, searching for the inspirational feminine complement.

As union of the yin and yang of male and female, the Orphic epiphany is also a "fitting together" (*K* 144) of the male and female elements of Orpheus and Eurydice. It is described by a sexual metaphor, the male insertion into the depths of a feminine creative and timeless space in a regenerative moment which inspires life and fecund creativity. Hospital creates a duality between the feminine and masculine. These elemental states of being are combined in moments of enlightenment in an image of unity and wholeness, as expressed by the Taoist symbol of yin (dark, feminine) and the yang (light, masculine).[15]

There are two significant corollaries of this image. Firstly, the Orphic moment of harmony, figured as union of the opposites of male and female, represents other dualities in consciousness. Ulanov writes that the "polarity which encompasses in its symbolism all the psychic polarities is the masculine-feminine" (Ulanov 13). Thus various other antithetical poles evident throughout Hoban's fiction are momentarily combined: movement and stillness; time and timelessness; outer and inner; day and night; profane and sacred; fullness and emptiness; form and formlessness; rational and non-rational

[15] The inspiration here is clearly from Zen Buddhism (see p 65) but could equally be drawn from Hoban's familiarity with the Gnostic Gospels: They said to Him: Shall we then, being children, enter the Kingdom? Jesus said to them: When you make the two one, and when you make the inner as the outer and the outer as the inner and the above as the below, and when you make the male and female into a single one, so that the male will not be male and the female (not) be female … then shall you enter the Kingdom (qtd. in Baring and Cashford 675-76).

modes. Secondly, the relationship between the antithetical poles of being expressed in the epiphany is based on "mutual dependence" where rather than just creating opposites and having them resolved in a static reconciliation there is also the underlying emphasis on their "complementarity, where the separation of each from the other makes possible the perception of both at once" (Baring and Cashford 674). In this way, while there remains a duality, "the distinction is provisional, alternating, continually in play" (674).

The Orphic Conflict

Given this dynamic cyclical tension inherent within the Orphic epiphany, Hospital goes on to expound a complex and paradoxical conflict at the heart of the myth, which inevitably involves yet another radical re-interpretation of it. According to tradition, Orpheus loses Eurydice when, after having made a deal with Hades and ascending from the Underworld with her, he breaks the pact in a moment of weakness by looking back to check if Eurydice is behind him. However, for Hospital "looking back or not looking back wouldn't have made any difference" (*K* 148). Rather there is a more fundamental reason than merely defying a prohibition. Inadvertently Kleinzeit stumbles upon the Orphic conflict when he points out that if Underworld was home for Eurydice, and Orpheus' quest was not to bring her back to life (as in the traditional tale), why did he not simply stay with her; why did he bother to "try get her out of it?" (148). Hospital explains "the essence of the Orphic conflict":

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

The Orphic epiphany is characterised by paradoxical ambivalence and an irresolvable conflict: while it is a profound recognition of inner peace and fulfilment, an overwhelming experience of transcendent reconciliation of dualities and a creative illumination, it is transient and ephemeral. Furthermore, it reveals an essential cyclical pattern between two elemental states of being. It is Orpheus' restless nature as hero of the 'outside of things' (external world and conventional reality) to be bound to action and movement in the world of becoming. He is unable to maintain his presence in the intimate darkness and still world of being, which is characterised by nothingness, stasis, and a 'feminine' timeless introspection. Dipple writes:

> Eurydice in the Underworld can be read or interpreted as representing the "inside of things, the place under the places." Orpheus's need to live actively and progressively in the present world of time is in deep contrast to Eurydice's opposite anti-time complementarity. (Dipple 164)

So while Orpheus strives for the centre and realises a brief detached moment of enlightenment, and is absent from the turbulent world of desire, suffering and action, when he achieves it, he can not, and indeed in this version *will not*, grasp or try to hold on to it. He returns from the inner realm of the Underworld to the outside with special hero status, but in the process loses Eurydice. Hoban alters Orpheus' transgression – traditionally focussed on the looking-back motif – and like Blanchot locates the 'fault' in Orpheus' forbidden desire: he "does not want Eurydice in her daytime truth and her everyday appeal" but yearns for "her in her nocturnal obscurity" (Blanchot 172). However this is, as Blanchot writes, "an infinitely problematic movement" which Orpheus' daytime realm "condemns as a form of unjustifiable madness, or as exonerating immoderation"; it is "excessive" (172). The hero is both glorified and chastised in his quest for the sacred. It is "inevitable that Orpheus transgresses the law which forbids him to 'turn back', for he already violated it with his first steps toward the shades" and especially when "he saw her invisible, he touched her intact, in her shadowy absence, in that veiled presence which did not hide her absence, which was the presence of her infinite absence" (172).

If Orpheus cannot stay in the realm of Eurydice, then neither can Eurydice be brought above and be a part of the outside world. Thus, although Dipple writes that "Orpheus's absolute need to live in the present of the world, to be fully human, takes him rapidly and perpetually to death" (Dipple 164), Sister has her own ideas about the loss of Eurydice and the 'looking back' motif. It entails another paradoxical reading of the myth. She shifts the blame from Orpheus onto Eurydice:

> 'It came into my mind,' said Sister. 'In the story Orpheus looked back and lost Eurydice, but I don't think that's how it was. I think Eurydice looked ahead and lost Orpheus. I don't think Eurydice should've looked ahead.' (*K* 164)

Sister's Eurydice falls prey to the human concern with time passing. Beset by anxieties about the future and unable to retain her own sense of calm, inner peace and stillness, she harangues Orpheus, "wondering how it's going to be now, wondering if anything can ever be the same" until he simply decides to forget the whole idea and lets go of her (165). The blissful fulfilment in "the place under the places" (148) is inevitably fractured

by a linear time-bound consciousness. Eurydice looks *a-head* – a pun foreshadowing Orpheus' decapitation – and loses Orpheus, having to return to the Underworld. Thus, Orpheus, back outside, is then torn apart by the Thracian women and the head, thrown in the Hebrus, lands at Lesbos. In an absurd version of Eliade's myth of the eternal return, the elements of the story are inextricably entwined but not interchangeable: they are complements that can be put together only in moments of unique enlightenment and are destined to break apart, setting off the Orphic action cycle once again.

Finally, the Orphic conflict involves a reworking of the dichotomy between male and female modes of consciousness. Yet another adaptation Hospital relates to Sister affirms this: the Thracian women were *not* responsible for tearing Orpheus apart. His death is due to the essential, intrinsic nature of Orpheus and men in general. It is Orpheus who "fell apart" (150). He cannot evade this perpetual fate: he is "Hell-bent on falling apart" (150). This inexorable process towards death, described by Kleinzeit as a "constant reduction going on" (94), is confirmed by God when he tells him that this is cosmic, a "gradual falling-apart process … Entropy and all that" (95). This condition is part of the "original sickness" which Sister has observed all men suffer from. Hospital explains:

> Life is their sickness. Life is the original sickness of inanimate matter. All was well until matter messed itself about and came alive. Men are rotten clear through with being animate. Women on the other hand have not quite lost the health of the inanimate, the health of the deep stillness. (150)

Hospital recasts the male-female dualism in terms of the sickness of animate life (flux) and the health of inanimate stillness (stasis). The masculine consciousness is diseased and alienated from a sense of feminine well-being associated with a primal source. As an "original sickness" Hospital is reinterpreting the notion of original sin, not as Eve's but as an elemental, essential masculine condition. It suggests aspects of Pythagorean tradition: the fallen soul – once pure and conventionally feminine – is incarcerated in the tomb of the material body, doomed to exile in a strange, alien world with the only respite from the immersion in the perpetual cycle of death and rebirth being through ritual purifications of liberation and recollection of the unity and harmony of the cosmos (see Armstrong 36). A Gnostic strain is evident too:

> [Gnostics] held matter to be a deterioration of spirit, and the whole universe a depravation of the Deity, and taught the ultimate end of all being to be the overcoming of the grossness of matter and the return to the Parent-Spirit, which

> return they held to be inaugurated and facilitated by the appearance of some God-sent Saviour. ("Gnosticism," *Online Catholic Encyclopaedia*)

Here the Orphic Conflict reveals the underlying quasi-religious basis for the Orphic quest. All the elements are interrelated and interconnected to the fundamental quest for transcendence: to remember the fragments of a dismembered body, to search for and discover Eurydice, and to produce harmony and celestial music, are all part of the same cycle of the heroic journey towards a mysterious and elusive yet sacred and renewing source.

Hoban's adaptation of the Orpheus myth has profound metaphysical resonance for Kleinzeit and the reader. Dipple notes that Hospital's interpretation of the myth refers "as strongly to a metaphysically religious world" as it does "to a literary construct" (Dipple 165) and that:

> This turning of the myth yields a strong contemporary image of the Orphic artist and, by the direct and generous association Hoban automatically makes, of mankind in general living in a death-oriented present (which is seen as a place) on the outside of some profoundly beloved but impossible inside space. (164)

As a self-confessed "free-lance mystic" (Myers n.pag.), Hoban uses the Orphic eschatology combined with an eclectic range of religious allusion to respond creatively to the contemporary crisis in its "death-oriented present" (Dipple 164). Modern society threatens fragmentation, dissolution and annihilation; however, Hoban shows that within this "[p]lace of dismemberment", which is "[e]verywhere, all the time" (*K* 182) and with the knowledge his hero Kleinzeit has gleaned, one may be able to re-invigorate life and re-collect scattered moments of harmony from the Hall of Records of individual and collective Memory.

Thus, through playfully suggesting an allegorical or figurative aetiology of the soul in the material world, *Kleinzeit* portrays the possibility of an artistic quest for meaning which works towards "theological knowledge" (Dipple 165) concerning the nature of epiphany, the conflicts and paradoxical polarities of human consciousness, and the human desire for spiritual transcendence.

III

Metafictional Play: *Kleinzeit*'s games with reality and language

In her article, "The Mythical Impulse in British Historiographic Metafiction", Susana Onega writes about the tendency for contemporary British writers to turn to myth in their attempt to "transcend the gap between self and world":

> Through the application of a dualistic logic that recalls the findings of the New Physics, Jungian psychology and the mythical tension between chaos and cosmos, these novelists use parody, pastiche and the metafictional undermining of realism-enhancing mechanisms to suggest the fragmentation and isolation of the self while simultaneously attempting to transcend this isolation and fragmentation in mythical and archetypal terms. (Onega 187)

Hoban's mythopoeic impulse also manifests itself in this way. Through the self-conscious return to myth, Hoban not only explores the need for meaning, wholeness and transcendence but in his unique eclectic style grounds this in the exploration of the nature of reality and of language itself. The two aspects of religious mythopoeia and literary self-consciousness are inextricably entwined as they intersect in Hoban's 'fictional philosophy'.

In its self-conscious quest for transcendence, *Kleinzeit* in style and theme presents a sustained attempt to dislocate, disrupt and undermine the 'limited-reality consensus', rendering it fragile and unreal. While highlighting this aspect, this section attempts to show the primary devices which Hoban employs in order firstly to create a fictional universe in which 'everything is included',[16] and secondly to show the world to be constituted by and immersed in language. Wilkie argues that Kleinzeit's

> universe dislocates the structures which would lend pattern and meaning to an otherwise conventional unquestioned and unquestioning world. These now dislocated structures give way to other inner structures and Hoban explores and exploits to the limits the frail and fine divisions between these two. (Wilkie 38)

As Wilkie states, Hoban explores the relationship between 'real' and 'unreal' while simultaneously moving towards new structures – what Hoban would call a "language base" (*MUM* 132). Furthermore, these techniques enable Hoban to pursue some fundamental literary questions. The intentions of such fiction are characterised as follows:

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[16] Dunwell notes that Hoban "rejects conventional generic labeling, claiming that any distinction between fantasy and reality 'is meaningless to me. Everything includes everything' (personal communication, 27 March 1994)" (Dunwell 106).

> Whatever their philosophical view of fiction, aestheticians and metafictional writers, in exploring the relations between 'fiction' and 'reality', all address themselves to two problems: first, the paradox concerning the identity of fictional characters; second the status of literary-fictional discourse (the problem of referentiality). (Waugh 90)

These aspects, found throughout Hoban's work, will be explored through the operation of two levels, reality and language (Wilkie 38). Ultimately, Hoban seeks to reveal the interrelationship between reality and language and emphasise the process through which language mediates reality whilst retaining the aura of the ungraspable strangeness of the real flickering reality of the moment under the moment.

In *Kleinzeit* what may be considered a conventional or normal reality frame is consistently bombarded and shattered through a startling and playful dislocation of conventions of realism. The novel's style challenges traditional realist elements of detailed objective description, strong characterisation and linear plot. The reader is confronted with many voices and multiple realities, layered intertextuality, shifting time references both personal and mythic (through prolepsis and analepsis), and a fluid relationship between the 'real' and 'unreal'. Various metafictional techniques are used, such as parody and pastiche of Greek mythology (the Orpheus reworking is only the most prominent instance), and infusion of the fantastic, frame breaks, self-reflexive names and puns.

By merging the 'paramount reality' of the everyday and transmuting it into the fantastic, by mingling metaphorical and literal worlds and by inserting the ancient mythical world into a modern cityscape, Hoban creates a shifting, quasi-allegorical world which asserts its own status and importance. The familiar immersed in a strange realm consists of overtly personified figures: speaking mirrors, talking beds, conversations with a glockenspiel, Hospital, Death and so on. As Wilkie writes, Kleinzeit is "surrounded by their voracious presences, each insisting on its own verbosity, its own distinct and inescapable presence, its own particular perspective, and its own individual brand of realism" (Wilkie 37). Indeed Kleinzeit's world is unsettling and threatening to a coherent stable view of reality. As we have seen, even the self is challenged.

A major part of Lara Dunwell's thesis is devoted to exploring the crisis and terror of authority and identity in such a world where "consensus reality is dissolved into an uproar of conflicting voices, each authorised by the fact of its individual subjectivity to create reality" (Dunwell 31). While this dissolution of reality may reflect fragmentation, focusing solely on the problems of identity and authorship in the novel can ignore the

underlying connections within Hoban's 'fictional philosophy' which attempts to transcend the self through the invocation of an underlying language base. Hoban does not portray the world according to a rationalist, empirical, materialist paradigm but rather through a primitive, animistic and magical lens where everything is alive and actively ready to communicate and be taken notice of, often in surprising and frightening ways. Contrary to the one "straight people live in" – where only objects such as chairs, tables, and aeroplanes are real and the "inexplicable and ungraspable and nameless isn't real" – *Kleinzeit* portrays a world where the "writer has to listen to those voices" (*MUM* 189) and imagine a state where "there is a continual telling and asking going on, a continuous conversation that is trying to happen between everything around us and us" (128). Hoban's purpose in *Kleinzeit* is to ground it in his realisation "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" (137).

One example may suffice. While *Kleinzeit* is narrated with the trace of authority and control of the third person, within the text many characters suffer from the dissolution of boundaries between reality and illusion, which in turn upsets the overarching frame of which the reader comfortably assumes some degree of reliability. In Hospital with his fellow patients, Kleinzeit hears how one of them, Nox, also ended up in Ward A4. Nox, while working in a Glass and China Shop, notices an attractive display of Spode, in particular a piece depicting a pastoral scene: a bucolic image of sheep, a ruin, trees, and amongst them a reclining girl, an approaching shepherd and a figure ruminating in a cave. Nox is "possessed by a strong desire to get into the picture" and despite his employer's reproaches to stop "contemplating infinity" he is transfixed so powerfully that he, "more and more inclined, quite literally" toward the lady, crashes into the shelf, breaking the crockery (*K* 130).

The overwhelming power of the world of illusion which impels Nox results in a major collision between the real and the imaginary. The "idea of getting into that pretty blue picture absolutely fascinated" him (130-31) and Nox, already a self-reflexively named character in a story, wishes he could translate such an effect into story. Of course, while one may argue that this is a simple lesson of the dangers of daydreaming, we must consider that the scene, which struck Nox as "more mystical than the other pieces" (131), is of one of Hoban's 'living gods', Pan, and enacts his idea of creative inspiration. Hoban is playing a subtle game with the reality frame of everyday, suggesting the possibility of interaction between two realms: the real and 'unreal' mythical world of gods

between which art mediates. (Complementing this instance, in *The Medusa Frequency*, while gazing at a painting by Franz Post, Herman Orff experiences a quasi-mystical moment of illumination as Medusa *comes out* of the artwork into the world of 'reality'.)

The interaction between the world of the reality consensus and the fantastic becomes so extensive as to render the traditional distinction inoperable. In this respect, Hoban's novels fall into that category of metafictional texts which, while "resisting assimilation into the terms of the everyday", aim to "radically unsettle our notion of the real" and inevitably "move towards a breakdown of the language system, presenting reality as a set of equally non-privileged competing discourses" (Waugh 52). Whereas in *The Medusa Frequency* and *The Lion of Boaz-Jachin and Jachin-Boaz*, which clearly depend on a clash between real and fantastic, *Kleinzeit* successfully blurs these categories into a self-referential fictional zone. One could characterise this as a typically postmodernist zone using McHale's reference to Foucault's "heterotopia":

> the disorder in which fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension ... in such a state, things are "laid", "placed", "arranged" in sites so very different from one another that it is impossible to find a place of residence for them, to define a *common locus* beneath them all ... Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language ... (qtd. in McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* 44).

However, despite the diverse array of shifting orders, realities and languages which undermine reality consensus, in Hoban's fictional universe there is an underlying, albeit re-imagined, mythical frame. Similarly McHale argues that in the heterotopia all these zones find cohesion in the "projected space of the fictional universe" (56). McHale highlights the zone's "intertextual space", where the "relations among two or more texts" allows for, in Eco's words "transmigration of characters from one fictional universe to another" (qtd. in McHale 56-57). This is the basis for Hoban's later work which develops this fictional universe in various ways with recurring characters and intersecting events.

Perhaps it is better to conceive of Hoban's fictional universe as a "heterocosm", which Linda Hutcheon defines as "another cosmos, an ordered and harmonious system", a "fictional universe" which is "not an object of perception, but an effect to be experienced by the reader to be *created* by him and in him" (Hutcheon 88). Thus it is Kleinzeit's and the readers' quest to engage with the chaotic and perplexing world of the text, and in finding a 'common locus' transmute it from a heteropia into a heterocosm. Through this process we gradually realise that "fiction is a reality in its own right and has rules or codes of which the reader becomes gradually aware" so that literature becomes

"a self-sufficient aesthetic system of internal relations among parts that *aim* at an Aristotelian harmony which the reader actualizes" (90; emphasis added).

The text then reveals that this process occurs through the operation of *language* itself and sets about creating its own linguistic space: an "alternative fantastic world of words" (Waugh 108). In *Kleinzeit*, Hoban shows that not only is the reality consensus a fragile and tenuous construct but also that everything is fiction and everything is language. In this manner it performs the function of a metafictional text which is "self-consciously anxious to assert that although literary fiction is only a verbal reality, it constructs through language an imaginative world that has, within its own terms, full referential status as an alternative to the world in which we live" (100).

Here Hoban engages with the problem of referentiality and through this we can understand his unique ideas about language itself. For Hoban, literary language is different from the debased forms that pervade modern society. Literary language carries magical creative possibility. In this sense, for Hoban, language is not what Peter Ackroyd terms "humanist" (qtd. in Onega 189): a transparent utilitarian or functional medium. Rather Hoban's language is closer to what Ackroyd calls "modernist language": an "autonomous entity, a self-begetting universe of discourse without referent or content" (189). The playfully misleading allegorical figure of Word in *Kleinzeit*, an active expression of St. John's Gospel, best encapsulates Hoban's notion of language as a cosmic self-perpetuating creative force or energy.

Hoban asserts his own solution to this problem of referentiality and approaching it from a different angle requires a qualification concerning the nature of the referent in his language of fiction. Hoban's metafictional method of creating a fantastic world of words, with clever and playful use of language,[17] persistently draws attention to itself as language while still affirming its own special referentiality or reality. Hutcheon writes that as "literary language creates its object; it does not have to describe an object outside itself" and as such this language "has a kind of fundamental reality of its own" (Hutcheon 93). Literary language points to a "fictive referent" where the "the actual referents of those words are not necessarily real" (90). Furthermore, considering Hoban's extension of the reality frame, the language of *Kleinzeit* purposely seeks to undercut the "intransigent belief of many critics and readers that the referents of fictional language are real, that is that they are of necessity part of the empirical world, *as if* there actually were a stable and objective reality 'out there'" (88; emphasis added). In fact Hoban goes beyond

[17] Wilkie observes that this occurs primarily through Hoban's "choice of the actual words and phrases" and through the use of "rhythms, assonances, dissonances, ambiguities, and rhetoric" (Wilkie 38).

this by subsuming objective reality into the world of fiction, which Hoban believes to be as 'real' and as important as the 'reality' designated by instrumental language (see *MUM* Foreword).

Through the inversion of the 'real' and 'unreal' Hoban manages to combine and elevate the fictive referent to the status of a heterocosm or fantastic world which rivals the 'limited-reality consensus'. Only such a "language can allow us to conceive of the absent, the unreal, the supernatural" and have "the power to make the reader formulate meaning and build these imaginary worlds" (Hutcheon 98). These "fictive referents form an increasingly complete heterocosm of referential tonalities by means of a process of semantic accumulation" (97), or in other words by the very act of reading. This process is self-reflexively thematised and enacted within the text as Kleinzeit struggles to make sense of his world around him and write his own story.

Perhaps the best example of this linguistic game is in Kleinzeit's search for the hidden meaning to the seemingly random and odd phrases, "Harrow full of crocks" (*K* 20, 56), "Arrow in a Box" (23), "YARROW, fullest stock" (26), "Morrows cruel mock" (47), "Narrow, cool. The flock" (129), "Sparrows rule the clocks" (131). Dunwell has made much of these phrases in terms of Derrida's theory of *différance*. She has argued that Kleinzeit, in his search for ultimate meaning and origins in the form of a transcendental signifier, is inevitably and indefinitely "puzzled and frustrated by the apparent meaninglessness of these strings of words" (Dunwell 25-28). However, it is essential to view this attention to language as part of Hoban's fictional philosophy which aims at 'theological knowledge' *and* literariness.

It is in her insistence on a Derridean analysis at the expense of refusing to fully acknowledge the reference to a mythical framework or an underlying 'fictive referent' of a quasi-religious nature that leads Dunwell to state short-sightedly that these signs are wholly meaningless and enigmatic. This may be true on the surface. They are odd sounding words and parodic phrases with 'apparently' no meaningful referents. They accumulate haphazardly and confuse Kleinzeit as they build on each other through sound association while reflecting and refracting the things and places he sees around him.

However, in the context of the albeit bizarre codes and rules of the novel, they do carry deep significance.[18] As Kleinzeit delves deeper he is able to make sense of them

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[18] In her review of *Amaryllis Night and Day*, Sara Hudston notes the same process at work in the naming of the "nightmare bus bearing the destination 'Finsey Obay'" (Hudston 22). Thus she writes that the "terrifying bus is part of Hoban's wider attempt to find names and handles for ungraspable concepts" and as such while the "actual words 'Finsey Obay' remain an empty signifier" and "proves unrelated lexically"

and they each carry an imprint of their own mutation of an original and highly charged meaning which is gleaned from Milton's line "Hidden soul of harmony". This "mnemonic" (*K* 161), Dunwell claims, both rightly and wrongly, is "valued not because of its meaning at all, but because 'It sings'!" (Dunwell 30) According to her critique – and as Word admits in the novel – the relation between the signified and signifier is arbitrary; the mnemonic sounds nothing like the thing it is to remind one of (*K* 161). However, it must be added that the nature of Word *is* as a transcendental signifier. As a machine from god, Word in a sexual act of creation or conception successfully injects like "thunder and lightning the seed of Word" into yellow paper impregnating the meaning necessary for Kleinzeit to write his novel (160-62). Furthermore, the Orpheus myth *is* the ultimate referent of these bizarre phrases and while it is another set of signifiers it *is* some form of hidden language base, or 'presence of meaning' and a common locus to which Kleinzeit does arrive at joyously and ecstatically.[19]

Unwittingly Dunwell mentions the singing allusion but only in passing and progresses past its importance straight to post-structuralist conclusions. It is essential to note that multiplicity and indeterminacy of meaning does not necessarily mean an absence of any meaning. Perhaps the allusion to singing and music is key to uncovering Hoban's intent. Not only does it suggest Hoban's actual writing process,[20] it suggests Hoban's attempt to capture in his novels:

> words that twist and moan and dance and sing 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 in us. (*MUM* 198).

Hoban's notion of words and music and their capacity to invoke hidden mysteries is essential to his creative vision. Proving that following the chain of signifiers, or the apparently random series of mnemonics is only part of the intended process within his art, Hoban writes about the effect of a Bach fugue carrying one towards a mystical apprehension:

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she does concede that eventually "when the destination is finally revealed as Beachy Head, it has great resonance" (22).

[19] Complementing this, Hoban implies in "Footplacers, London Transport Owls, Wincer-Boise" that there is a hidden underlying meaning below the surface of words and their apparent meanings so that "LEB means LONDON ELECTRICITY BOARD" and it can mean "LET ENTROPY BE" or "NTGB means NORTH THAMES GAS BOARD" and it means "NOTHING TO GO BACK" (*MUM* 216). Thus Hoban invokes the idea of a language base which suggests the possibility of "traffic between the underness and the overness of London" (216) or the flimsy surface of the 'limited-reality consensus' and the mysterious realm of the unseen real reality.

[20] See Hoban's comments on the origins of 'Riddleyspeak' (*RW* 225). See also p 162.

> we find ourselves not so much retracing a track of note-by-note sound as experiencing a mode of being to which sound is a rite of passage and a way of the spirit to a place beyond music, a place where memory cannot reach, where every time is now. (*MUM* 220-21)

Hoban's language as a "rite of passage" intends or aims at producing the effect of epiphanic harmony and timelessness beyond itself. This is in Hoban's view a sacred hermeneutical act of uncovering what is hidden. As such Kleinzeit *is* the perplexed reader who gradually opens to mystical textual illumination. In this respect Hoban would agree with this summary of Moses Maimonides's hermeneutical method which argues that

> esoteric meanings exist, though they can often only be glimpsed before fading back into obscurity – which [Maimonides] believes, is as it should be. The meaning of sacred texts is not always accessible to the vulgar but can be understood only by the perfect (virtuous) person, one who is prone to being perplexed. ("Maimonides", *Norton Anthology* 211)[21]

Thus Word claims that the mnemonic should never "be the same as what it reminds you of" as you do not want to "keep a nice thing ...out in plain view all the time ... with the virtue getting rubbed off" (*K* 161).

In Hoban's unique literary style this illumination is also achieved through self-conscious linguistic play that inevitably works through a seemingly hazardous and gradual process of reading "fictive referents" or what Ricoeur calls "'non-ostensive' ones – those which project a fictive universe, aware always of its verbal reality" (Hutcheon 95). This process of foregrounding language itself in an almost religious and self-fulfilling manner is evident in Hoban's creative self-awareness with characters' names and naming.

Names in *Kleinzeit*, and indeed all Hoban's novels, are patently weird and eccentric. In this respect they call attention to themselves as linguistic signs. The choice of characters' names also functions on several other levels. Within the text and thematically they are chosen with specific purpose: to connect with a wider intertextual set of mythic references, to sound out of the ordinary, absurd or amusing, and at their obvious level of meaning be self-fulfilling so the names reveal the very essence of the named. Hence, Folger *Bash*an the bully (emphasis added); Dr Krishna, the Hindu physician; Maximus Jock, Prong Studman, Immensa Pudenda, Monica Bedward, Gloria

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[21] Furthermore Word's divine act of creation and the myriad flashes in the cosmos resembles Maimonides's conception of insight into a spiritual text in which "truth flashes out to us" like lightning illuminating the obscure darkness (Maimonides, *Norton Anthology* 216).

Frontal, the vulgar Hollywood celebrities; Nox who knocks the china; and Flashpoint, Kleinzeit's unfortunate "imminently combustible" fellow patient (*K* 21).

Through this metafictional play with names, Hoban addresses the "question of the ontological status of fictional characters" which is "ultimately inseparable from that of the question of the referentiality of fictional language" (Waugh 93). Again Hoban's perspective here is particularly inventive and idiosyncratic. As expounded in "Pan Lives" (*MUM* 128), through the process of naming Hoban connects the name with the named. He treats this connection as if it were "inviolate" (Dunwell 19).

Of course, much can be made of this in terms of post-Saussurean linguistic theory and Dunwell elucidates this area successfully. However, one can more profitably link such observations to Hoban's own 'fictional philosophy'. Thus, Dunwell cites David Lodge on "the arbitrariness of the sign" and uses his note that the attempt to link name and named represents an attempt to recover "that mythical, prelapsarian state of innocence in which a thing and its name were interchangeable" (qtd. in Dunwell 18). Dunwell's theoretical position constrains her to regard that "a return to this Edenic unity of sign and signified is impossible" that this "nostalgia for a unified whole serves only to highlight the irretrievable and to emphasize the widening gap between word and object" (18).

Hoban, however, whether he can or not, intends to reach precisely this nostalgic "mythical, prelapsarian state of innocence" (18) in his creation of a self-reflexive fantastic fictional universe which reaches towards an underlying "language base" (*MUM* 138). Despite contradiction, the whole tenor of his fiction and literary manifesto is towards this sacred connection which attempts to view language and reality as inseparable, entwined in a sacred reciprocal communication (see *MUM* 138-39).

Furthermore, Hoban's peculiar use of language and names serving specific metafictional and religious ends is evident in the panoply of diseases with which the characters are afflicted: skewed hypotenuse, malfunctioning diapason, distended spectrum, hendiadys, blocked stretto, chronic ullage, ontogeny, hyperbolic asymptotes, and slipped fulcrum. The diseases have referential significance within the text in thematic terms of a wider psychological or spiritual relevance. The strange names of the conditions not only indicate the alienating effect of a medical and scientific discourse, which in a sense creates them as they name them, but also evoke a sense of a separation from the processes of the body. Unknown body parts are understood, conceptualised,

objectified in an abstract often mathematical terminology and all the syndromes have to do with problems of imbalance, discord and dissonance.

However, these diseases have a dual function: their own referential import within the fictional world indirectly hints at possible human problems as well as being overtly reflexive linguistic signs. Thus the reader, aware of the disjunction between the character's knowledge and his or her own understanding of the meaning of the conditions, realises that the diseases are also manifestly *textual*. They are language problems or "language failures" (see *MUM* 131). Their very names reflect this double function: Schwarzgang, who suffers from a disruption in his *ontogeny* or the "entire sequence of events involved in the development of an individual organism" ("Ontogeny," *Collins*), is "too weak for complete sentences" and manifests his condition in verbal aphasia or gaps in his speech (*K* 51). Flashpoint, whose identity is unstable and flickering, tenuously linked to the blips of light of his heart support monitor, suffers from a distended spectrum and at any point may burst into flames if "hendiadys sets in" (16). '*Hendiadys*' is an obscure grammatical term defined as "a rhetorical device by which two nouns joined by a conjunction are used instead of a noun and a modifier" ("Hendiadys," *Collins*). As hendiadys sets in, Flashpoint dies after sputtering staccato examples of this grammatical error, "Bowls and gold! ...Velvet and hangings ..." (*K* 22). Kleinzeit's own skewed hypotenuse is figured as a linear message between two points or an impulse along a line of communication. It is a "clear brilliant flash of pain from A to B" which is like a "signal along a wire" (*K* 7).

This dual function requires us to read the text on at least two levels simultaneously. If one reads *Kleinzeit* only as a Jungian-inspired work the diseases become psychological, thereby the reader attaches physical presence to fictional characters. Or by simply considering them as non-referential, arbitrary and endless chains of signifiers they become disconnected from their intended "fictive referents" in Hoban's complex fictional heterocosm.[22] The key is to understand *Kleinzeit* and its characters' names and their diseases from a metafictional perspective which combines both these aspects simultaneously. The important feature to note here, and it ties directly in with Hoban's literary (metafictional) and religious motives, is that the "symbolic action is metaphoric,

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[22] A different angle on this debate is between the "purist, semiotic" view which sees characters as merely words, images not to be extracted from their context, or psychoanalysed as if they were real people, and the "realist" position which sees characters as imitations of people, thereby treating these figures as if they had minds, motives, feelings and being. Rimmon-Kenan also attempts a compromise between these two extremes and locates it in the subtle difference between story and text. (see Rimmon-Kenan 31-34) See also p 106.

abstract and aesthetically based" (Dipple 163). The self-reflexive reading process foregrounds the "anti-realist protagonist Kleinzeit" and the "palpably metaphoric reality-unreality" (63) of his diseases so that the text functions on *both* the level of character as being *and* self-consciously on the level of character as language.[23]

Thus, these names and conditions show the twin processes of fiction in creating a world and also revealing its fictional status of the world as words. Hoban is reaffirming his idea that we are fiction and stories through underlining a typically metafictional concern with the status or 'health' of literary characters. Waugh notes that metafictional writers are keen to assert that fictional characters are "literally signs on a page before they are anything else" (Waugh 56). Waugh points out that these writers play with the notion of the presence and absence of the fictional character which "both exists and does not exist; he or she is a non-entity who is a somebody" (90-91).

Kleinzeit himself is a quasi-referential figure whose name points both to an everyman of the modern condition and also to his own textual being. His illnesses are all metaphorical conditions that indicate his disordered, fragmented and chaotic state and Hoban figures this spiritual and existential anguish as problems with language. In so far as Kleinzeit is a textual creation and everything is language, these terms relate to the metafictional theme of writing and the heroic attempt to pull oneself together to author the self. Thus the characters' various conditions are deadly serious. They will be terminal as they "lead to death, the absolute absence-of-presence" (Dunwell 28) or in other words they will either disappear into nothingness or merely be part of someone else's story and not their own. As the patient-authors vainly try to write a few chapters and thereby author themselves, they become fatally obsessed with Yellow Paper and its cryptic demands which can kill them. This inevitably results in their admittance to the 'paper sized' *Ward A4* battling for their lives or their independent story existence.

Hoban is whimsically reflecting the hazardous process of writing which involves the creation and destruction of various characters whilst obliquely pointing to 'real' problems of the human condition bound to language itself. Ultimately, Hoban is engaging with a fundamental paradox of metafiction, dealt with by various authors attempting to self-consciously "transcend the gap between self and world" through mythic, archetypal and symbolic terms (Onega 187). A reformulation of the problem is: if

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[23] For a very similar formulation of this argument see Susana Onega's observations on John Fowles's novel, *A Maggot* (Currie 96-101). Here she notes two interpretations of the text, one from "a psychological perspective" representing, similar to *Kleinzeit* and all Hoban's novels, the "hero's quest for a new totality of the self" and another "strikingly opposed interpretation" which foregrounds the character's identity as a "literary character" made up of words, ideas serving the author's ends (Currie 98).

these characters can only partially refer to Being and as signs they point to *nothing* outside themselves, what of reunification, wholeness and absolute presence? Or put another way, if, as Hoban suggests, there is nothing outside language and that reality and language are entwined in an immanent process of change, and endless cycles of vision and re-vision, how does the writer faithfully portray the desire for transcendence and escape?

Kleinzeit as Zen anti-story: transcendence in language

Thus, at this point it is necessary to consider the implications of Hoban's linguistic universe for the underlying quest for transcendence as embodied in *Kleinzeit*. Hoban, like many contemporary writers, tries to find "alternative ways out of the 'prison-house of language', by attempting to recover the transcendental or mythic dimension of writing" (Onega 189). In *Kleinzeit* Hoban integrates his religious quest with his literary quest, thereby exemplifying his notion that "any thinking about language will necessarily be religious thinking" (*MUM* 127-28). In this way *Kleinzeit* is similar to a paradoxical Zen story of transcendence and becomes a vehicle for spiritual wisdom as the novel charts the absurd and impossible, but nevertheless comic and joyful attempt to escape from language into epiphany and enlightenment.

When introducing the idea of 'transcendence' Regina Schwartz, while warning that it is an "overdetermined word with a long complex history", has delineated two distinguishable senses of the word: a "vertical" and a "horizontal" transcendence (Schwartz x-xi).

In the first sense, "vertical transcendence" suggests "leaving the immanent world, leaving the phenomenal, for another world, either in a transascendence to the heights or a transdescendence to the depths" (Schwartz x). Transascendence – 'climbing out', 'going above' – involves the often inarticulate and inexpressible belief in the movement beyond a limited experience or state of being towards another possible state of affairs: a realm which is in some way more perfect and blissful, or a more meaningful enlightened condition, or in the re-union with a superior Being or Godhead. Transcendence is a movement from the world of change, impermanence, suffering and death to one that is eternal, timeless, perfect in its absolute truth. Transcendence may also be manifested in a reverse movement: 'transdescendence' as a return and regression backwards towards a lost trace of golden age glory, an Edenic paradise, or a place of primordial origins.

This type of "vertical" transcendence can be characterised by a mystical religious experience, an epiphany, associated with a heightened state of consciousness, feelings of

intense joy, calm, fulfilment, peace and harmony. Generally the urge to transcend is derived from both a feeling of present unhappiness, meaninglessness or any condition of lack or suffering, a desire to escape from a tragic condition or an aspiration for perfection. Connecting this religious impulse with fiction, the theologian Don Cupitt writes:

> Our religious problem is that we are discontented. We cannot reconcile ourselves to the flux of appearances, the transience of life and the approach of death. We dream of an impossible Beyond in which we will find certain Truth, eternal happiness, absolute reality. The task of religion is not to gratify this incoherent yearning, but to cure us of it by telling us stories. (Cupitt, *What is a Story?* 133)

Given the dynamic of this mode of transcendence "as a negation of immanence, as beyond this world", Schwartz notes that it is "fraught with contradiction" (Schwartz x): it either collapses back into immanence or dualism. She cites Hegel's critique of this "bad infinity" by showing its inconsistency: even if we transcend this world for another in "reaching it, it becomes immanent, hence transcendence is not beyond the world", but rather a "passage from one world to another" (x-xi). Furthermore, Levinas reveals that this transcendence remains caught in a dualistic opposition where "the transcendence of negativity" does not open "a reality infinitely distant from my own, but only defined by my own" (xi).

While grappling with the desire for transcendence through language, Hoban encounters these very problems. All Hoban's works, but especially *Kleinzeit*, explore this fundamental urge to transcend a world bound by language, stories and myth. The ultimate search for origins and the need to express moments of revelation and epiphany are unavoidably immersed in the impermanent and fluid processes of language and writing, which by its very nature can only partially achieve its aims. As Cupitt observes language,

> is not just temporal, but temporizing. It is shifting, ambiguous, evasive and always open to various interpretations. Language won't play straight. It is never wholly with you. It gives and at the same time it's also taking away" (Cupitt, *The Time Being* 135).

Moreover, and as Hoban reveals in the novels, language is "processual and temporal", bound to the very conditions of flux and temporality humans are trying to escape (60).

In *Kleinzeit* the two Orphic movements of regression, a turning back, and return into memory in an attempt to remember an original archetype and the inexorable

journeying forwards which involves the movement of narrative and the endlessly fluctuating chains of words reflects this contradictory transcendence as transdescendence and transascendence. As a movement towards a primal stasis and fixed centre of meaning any epiphany of the hero pattern in discovering and telling the Self is never fixed, but is shifting and elusive, as the origin or centre is always hidden just beyond the reach of our limited "little language of words" (*MUM* 126). The impulse to transcend, to create and to author the self is both towards and away from an origin and centre of meaning.

Embracing these contradictions, Hoban finds an intriguing paradoxical approach in the affirmations and denial of transcendence as evoked by Zen Buddhism. In so doing Hoban aligns himself with Schwartz's notion of "horizontal" transcendence: the "project of self-transcendence" which reveals "the understanding that we are incomplete" thereby "thrusting ourselves into an incomplete future" where our "encounter with our death is such a transcendence, the heroic grasping of the last possibility" (Schwartz x).

Hoban's affinity with Zen, especially at the time of writing *Kleinzeit*, is documented in interviews where he has commented that there "was a time when I was reading a lot of Zen Buddhism, and that found its way into my work, certainly" (Myers n.pag.).[24] *Kleinzeit*, while reminiscent of Zen in writing style with its short chapters, imagistic clarity and precision, and subtle use of haiku (Kleinzeit sells them in the Underground), is predominantly concerned with the Zen revival of "the teaching of Buddha that liberation is the essential criterion of spiritual authenticity" (Cleary 80). As the "purpose of Zen is to pass beyond the intellect" (Humphreys 180) the primarily non-rational and experiential[25] doctrine pursues various "technique[s] for the 'sudden' path to Satori" (183) including meditation and/or engagement with brief but perplexing and paradoxical stories, sayings, riddles and conversations called *koans*. Characterised by verbal playfulness and elusive spiritual ingenuity, koans are "exemplifications of the

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[24] In another interview revealing the essence of simplicity of everyday lived experience of Zen enlightenment as well as a faith in a mysterious transcendent reality beyond the self, Hoban says, "I suppose if you accept as religion the feeling that there's something beyond one's immediate self, then it's religious … . And it's mystical in that it involves a mystery. But for me it's a matter of day-to-day experience" (Martin 21).

[25] Shigenori Nagatomo notes that "if the term 'philosophy' is taken to mean the establishment of 'the kingdom of reason'" then Zen is an "anti-philosophy" which "maintains among other things that reason in its discursive use is incapable of knowing and understanding *in toto* what reality is, for example, what human beings are and what their relation to nature is. For this reason, Zen contends that physical nature and human nature must be sought in an experiential dimension *practically* trans-descending, and hence transcending, the standpoint of ego-consciousness. Instead, they must be sought in the depths of one's *psyche* and beyond" ("Japanese Zen Buddhism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online*).

transcendent principle, received silently from the Buddha himself, and, as such, beyond logic, beyond transmission in writing, and beyond measure by reason" (Hoffman 16).

In Zen there is an emphasis on ideas of nothingness, emptiness, openness and transience; an inherent doubt concerning human endeavours to grasp absolute reality, including the capacity of language, reason and other forms of knowing; a cultivation of harmony, peace and simplicity combined with the ascetic detachment and freedom from the enslavement or bondage to aspects of the world of appearances including material existence, things, people, and mental attitudes, emotions and desires, ideas and abstract philosophies; and the attempted escape from a world of appearances and flux into pure awareness of enlightenment. Don Cupitt writes:

> Zen is undoubtedly clever. It is religion – anti-religion pursuing its path to religious awakening (*satori*) by deliberately renouncing almost everything that people in the West seek from religion – objective reality, guarantees, authority, consoling myths. Instead Zen aims to precipitate the student suddenly into the truth of universal emptiness, the insubstantiality and lack of any permanent identity that pervades everything, and the failure therefore of words to latch on to any reality. (Cupitt, *What is a Story?* 134)

Writing about Zen, language and the human impulse for transcendence, Cupitt identifies a special fictional response to our religious malaise and postmodern condition. It is one that sheds much light on Hoban's own 'fictional philosophy'. Cupitt puts forward an intriguing mode of theological insights adapted to the breakdown of master-narratives; the realisation of plural selves, truths and ubiquity of language; the impossibility of accessing an eternal, timeless, universal Truth or an omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent God. Rather, Cupitt calls for 'fictionalism' and a "Fictional theology" (Cupitt, *What is a Story?* 124) which succeeds through the inventiveness, creativeness, transformative and productive power of language and of stories to act like Zen stories, riddles and koans as "a consciousness-raiser and school of intelligence" (137).

These ideas and values are best expressed in a 'anti-story' which is "merely human, fictional, has a 'non-realist' status" and which acknowledges absurdity and delights in "frivolity, artifice and playacting" (131). Cupitt argues for a new-found freedom in the endless play and creativity of language, interpretation within language and the world of 'here and now'. Rather than yearning solely for a timeless afterlife and realm of perfect truth, Cupitt wants to value the "mysticism of the insubstantial, of the senses and of the fleeting moment" (Cupitt, *The Time Being* 2). Interestingly he favours a fictional approach to life and values the artist's carnivalesque power of the imagination. Religion

must now be fictionalised and not regarded as the Word of God but be "continually criticised and refictioned" so that the "storyteller's imagination is necessary to the life of religion" (Cupitt, *What is a Story?* 129). He at all points stresses the nature of human beings and its ineluctable proliferation within language:

> The world of signs comes first. It is outsideless. It is endlessly flexible, fertile and proliferating. It produces language, time and narrativity as the milieus within which we live and within which, we are constituted. And so we begin to see our life as a flowing stream of jostling stories. (150)

What is most valuable is an ironic and open awareness of the human condition which acknowledges that the urge to transcend and escape, through myth and dreams of the Golden age or of Providence, is still bounded by the limits of language. Cupitt finds joy and comfort in Zen. An essential part of these teachings is mistrust in language and a humorous and comic vision of humanity's attempts to escape from the world. Thus it is Zen which constantly "dreams of escape" to a "non-narrative realm of timeless changeless silence and emptiness" while embracing the paradox of language and the recognition that "stories of escape are still stories" (134). Furthermore,

> More than any other faith Zen has recognised the absurdity of attempting altogether to escape from language. There is Nothing outside language, there is nothing outside language, there is no thing outside language ... (136)

All that is left is the comic and therapeutic effect in recognising the folly of the myths of transcendence and writing a new "anti-story". This "anti-story" is similar to Zen: in its attempt to "use language to transcend language", it opens " the abysses of reflexivity" of language in order to revel in the delight of "the dialectics and the paradoxes of religious thought" (137). The maxim to keep in mind, a new *memento mori*, for both Hoban and Cupitt is "You strive after Heaven in order to learn the wisdom of the return to earth" (139). This reveals that the "quest for the transcendent is a *felix culpa*, a happy fault, a life-enhancing mistake that we need to keep on making" and is therefore "mind-stretching, humorous and revitalizing" (139).

Kleinzeit enacts this very process of comic transcendence becoming a kind of 'anti-story'. Kleinzeit goes through the process of Zen-like enlightenment until he is left "simplified, economical, stripped down" with "Nothing out of the Way" (*K* 185). This journey sees him lose his job, his house and all its furnishings and he becomes an impoverished busker. He realises the impermanence and fleeting nature of his mortal

existence. Memories of family are meaningless and only amount to the clutter of a modern existence. Kleinzeit also learns to overcome his fear of nothingness:

> There's nothing to be afraid of, said Shiva.
> Right, said Kleinzeit. Nothing's what I am afraid of, and there's more nothing every day.
> Whatever is form, that is emptiness, said Shiva. Whatever is emptiness, that is form. (89)[26]

Kleinzeit receives Hospital's harsh but Zen-like words of advice, "Nothing is special about you. Nothing is special about everybody" (172). He eventually relies on Nothing, choosing to "think about nothing" because behind "nothing danced yellow paper" (164). Ultimately Kleinzeit learns that all inspiration is from the dark, hidden source of inner emptiness and nothingness; the no-place, under-world, or the moment under the moment.

Furthermore, *Kleinzeit* by exhibiting a Zen-like scepticism towards words suggests that any dream or hope for definite, fixed, absolute meaning in a world immersed in language and endless interpretations is naïve, misguided and ultimately impossible. Kleinzeit has to go beyond his childish insistence for "answers to everything, everything explained, meanings and whatnot all laid on" (57). Thus, when Kleinzeit asks, "What does it all mean?" Hospital replies, with a sceptical voice that carries hints of a postmodern rejection of master narratives and any ultimate truths:

> How can there be meaning? said Hospital. Meaning is a limit. There are no limits. (148)

A combined sensibility towards Zen and the limits of language are clearly evident in the way that the various moments of enlightenment are described in the novel. Not only are they ephemeral but they are textual and fictional – they relate to the nothingness outside of themselves as words. In this instance, Hoban again employs a "contemporary reflexivity" which implies an awareness both of consciousness (hence transcendence theme) and writing (metafictional theme) (Waugh 24). This means, as in Joyce, "the epiphanic moments are usually connected with a self-reflexive response to language itself" (25).

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[26] Although Hoban conflates different Eastern traditions (Shiva is a major Hindu god) this error reveals his particular affinity for this Buddhist sutra which he repeatedly quotes in later novels, including *Her Name Was Lola*: "Here, O Sariputra. Form is emptiness and the very emptiness is form; emptiness does not differ from form, form does not differ from emptiness; whatever is form, that is emptiness, whatever is emptiness that is form, the same is true of feelings, perceptions, impulses and consciousness" (*HNWL* 17).

By referring once more to one of Kleinzeit's moments of epiphanic transcendence, Hoban illustrates this reflexivity and "mystically textual self-consciousness" (Dipple 163). The moment in particular is the inner sense of calm when Kleinzeit, like Orpheus, arrives at the "stillness and calm at the centre of things" (*K* 148). He is inspired by Milton's Orpheus – the rhythmical reading of poetry invokes the Zen technique of meditative breathing to produce 'satori' – and he feels inside him, "a pause, as of an uplifted hand" and then "it was as if a fat brush drew with black ink in one perfect sweep a circle, fat and black on yellow paper" (180). Purer than thought and more fleeting, Kleinzeit's attempts to grasp this moment of enlightenment fail: "Stay that way! he thought, felt it go as he thought it" (180). This activity of drawing a circle is an instance of "free action as a purposeless purpose, as an actionless action"; "Zen calls it '*samadhi*-at-play,' where there is no individual *qua* the trans-individual, but what there is is just 'play,' for the Zen person is *absorbed* in the activity when engaging a thing of the everyday 'life-world'" ("Japanese Zen Buddhist Philosophy," *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy Online*).

The circle that Kleinzeit draws is a sacred and religious moment of ecstatic transcendence. However, most importantly it is revealed also as a textual configuration.[27] Indeed the experience itself is a textual one, immersed in complex and reflexive word play. Hoban balances the apparent "unwordable" (*MUM* Foreword) and timeless nature of the moment of epiphany with subtle references to the linguistic status of the moment. So, paradoxically, it is the "voice of the words" as they move in a world of time and becoming "from lapping of the soft Lydian Aires" (*K* 180), which untie and untwist and fit together again revealing a hidden timeless moment of harmony. The moment is directly conceived as writing, drawing and creating in language. The instance is described after an empty pause of inspiration "*as of* an uplifted hand" (180; emphasis added). For a brief, almost unregisterable moment the creator of the text stops, escapes language, transcends and is uplifted. Of course the text flows on and moves into metaphor and simile in an attempt to capture the epiphany in words. It is described "*as if* a fat brush drew" a perfect circle. Here the remembering which Kleinzeit has accomplished albeit

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[27] Again Onega on Fowles is especially instructive as she writes: "The archetypal quality of Mr B's journey is what confers on him his representative character. Mr B's essential transformation is applicable to every man, and so may be interpreted as evidence that Man has finally achieved his reunification with the universe in the figure of Cosmic Man. However, as the interpretation that reduces Mr B to an unfree literary character paradoxically indicates, this reunification of Man and Cosmos is only temporarily achieved within the boundaries of the paper walls of John Fowles' novel. So, in accordance with the puzzling contradictory nature of historiographic metafiction, Fowles simultaneously affirms and negates the validity of this reunification" (Currie 99).

briefly can only be translated in a simile, linking it to the Zen-like creation of a circle which expresses a fluid state of enlightenment and perfection. Transcendence is an artistic act of creation, not only of the novelist, but also of Kleinzeit himself as author.

Kleinzeit as a textual being is involved in his own attempt at textual transcendence. He is not only trying to escape his social conditions and the pressure of the everyday paramount reality, but he is also trying to escape the prison house of language itself. The answer he finds to his quest is ambivalent and paradoxical. It is embodied in Zen: the mystical figure of the circle; the relationship between emptiness and form; and the limited capacity of human understanding for true enlightenment. Through a quasi-religious sensibility Kleinzeit is able to experience moments of presence and meaning but they are fleeting *and* fictional. In this world of language, Kleinzeit is always drawn back into the world of narrative and mortality and can only glimpse passing moments of eternity. Hoban introduces his idea of cyclical patterns and movements in this ironic absurd myth of transcendence. Cupitt again explains the value of this kind of story and justifies such a forlorn quest:

> The aspiration after transcendence and then the subsequent return into immanence is a dual movement of the spirit that we need to keep on making. ...There is here a repeating and almost mythic cycle of objectification and return, dualism and non-dualism. (Cupitt, *What is a Story?* 138)

Kleinzeit ventures forth into the realm of myth and connects with an Orphic cycle. However, like Orpheus who cannot abide or stay at the centre with Eurydice and is inevitably drawn back to the outside, so Kleinzeit can only experience fleeting instants of transcendent joy, beauty and harmony. As a culmination of the heroic quest, the epiphany is both revelation and return, reflecting the doubling process of writing and creation as a movement towards and away from a perpetually hidden and transitory centre of being and meaning. The hero and writer struggle with the threat of dissolution, fragmentation and nothingness. Yet out of this nothingness and emptiness comes form and pattern. As Picasso has said, "The painter passes through states of fullness and of emptying. That is the whole secret of art" (qtd. in Hirschfield 37).

The movement of the hero and the archetypal hero pattern and the actual movement of the text itself is part of an underlying absurd "action cycle" of creation and destruction; tearing apart and putting together; forgetting and remembering; fragmentation and wholeness; emptiness and fullness. This ongoing dialectic will become

the basis for all Hoban's later novels, which continue to play with dualities in this comic cyclical mode.

CHAPTER TWO

The Medusa Frequency: Transgression, loss and art

The Medusa Frequency was written in 1987, four years after *Pilgermann* and over ten years after *Kleinzeit* (1974). However, I will treat *Kleinzeit* and *The Medusa Frequency* as complementary novels. Both novels are intimately linked in mood, style and theme and also have many intertextual connections. Hoban returns to the world of myth, and he mediates this through the journey of creative self-discovery of another 'small time' writer-hero in London, Herman Orff.

In *The Medusa Frequency* we see the emergence of a new cycle of books. Characterised by a lighter, whimsical and comic mood, Hoban's fiction will evolve into an interconnected web-like fictional exploration of characters searching for love and facing loss, and become a layered self-sustaining metafictional world. So not only do the characters of the later novels often recur in several of the books but they also explore many of the same themes in an open self-reflexive fictional universe. To a certain extent, as with all Hoban's novels which are to some degree auto-biographical, *The Medusa Frequency* mirrors Hoban's own preoccupations and evolution of ideas in his writing, reflecting his progression beyond the themes (especially the religious ones) which have so dominated his fiction. This development is reflected in *The Medusa Frequency* through Herman Orff's attempts to reconcile with his past, his reluctance to pursue the Orpheus myth after he has heard the head of Orpheus' version of the story, and his desire to start a new creative project. This is exemplified in his brave move to go it alone with an original and slightly bizarre work, 'The Seeker from Nexo Vollma' (137). *Fremder* is a later expression of this innovative movement in Hoban's oeuvre.

On many levels *The Medusa Frequency* is concerned with the past, memory, and loss as well as an attendant need for creative transformation and growth. In the psychological mode, I will show how the pattern of individuation is adapted into a 'work of mourning'. While I do not intend to ignore or gloss over the fundamental differences between Freudian psychoanalysis and Jungian psychology, I have found it useful to invoke a particular essay written by Sigmund Freud entitled "Mourning and Melancholia" (Freud 143) while maintaining a Jungian frame of reference.

In *The Medusa Frequency* it is clear that the journey of individuation is also a means of exploring a mythical consciousness. While Hoban develops a unique and complex creative mythology which embraces a range of figures (Hermes, the Kraken, Medusa) I

have chosen to focus (for continuity and parallels with *Kleinzeit*) on Orpheus and Eurydice. Hoban returns to his favourite mythical obsession, Orpheus, and in a similar way to *Kleinzeit* the myth is re-shaped and altered. In this instance it becomes a myth of transgression expressing essential patterns in human consciousness and exploring another formulation of the dialectic of the sacred. Again Hoban's mythopoeic method works towards discovering our fundamental spiritual condition while understanding the roots of the mythologizing impulse itself. In this way, Hoban explores the roots of the mythic impulse, linking it to his own myth of transgression and loss.

Finally, *The Medusa Frequency* is Hoban's most self-consciously postmodern and metafictional text. This novel exhibits a clever and playful exploration of the nature of writing, commenting on its own processes and interrogating theories of fiction and the nature of language in an intelligent and typically 'Hobanish' fashion.[1] In this chapter I show the ways in which he disrupts the 'limited-reality consensus' in order to establish his mythopoeic vision. By charting, in this novel, Hoban's dissolution of the worlds of everyday reality into a mythic realm through self-reflexive metafictional techniques, I link both the postmodernist and mythic dimension of his writing.

I

Individuation as a work of mourning

'It came to me', said the head, 'that when people fall in love they entrust to each other the idea of themselves.' (*MF* 70)

Luise: 'I trusted you with the idea of me and you lost it.' (*MF* 16)

As all Hoban's novels embrace a "quest for self-winding" (Myers n.pag.), so *The Medusa Frequency* enacts a pattern of individuation characterised by a visionary experience which resolves and enacts a transformation and rejuvenation. This "quest for knowledge of self and psychic wholeness" is reflected in another of Hoban's typical protagonists, who are "usually middle-aged men" and are "cut off from parents and wives – the past – from children – the future" (Branscomb 29). Hermann Orff, as with Jachin-Boaz, Kleinzeit, and other of Hoban's later characters,[2] is an isolated and lonely, unhappy and unfulfilled man who is still suffering from a broken relationship with a younger girl named Luise. Like Kleinzeit, Herman Orff is a marginally successful writer who works in the

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[1] See Dipple's observations on this aspect: Hoban questions "narratology itself ... without palpable reference to the narratological or semiotic theories" and the narrator's self-consciousness "is entirely self-referential within the text" (Dipple 170). See also Introduction p 16-17.

[2] These include Harold Klein (*Angelica's Grotto*), Peter Diggs (*Amaryllis Night and Day*), Roswell Clark (*The Bat Tattoo*).

commercial writing business. Symptomatic of a wider 'modern malaise' in a banal contemporary society, he has an uncreative hack job in which he adapts great classics for mass consumption and advertising purposes, converting these giant works of literature into byte-size comic books. Hoban is developing the familiar twin facets of his main characters: the antihero as lover and as writer strives and seeks a source of meaning and value. In this way, then, *The Medusa Frequency* describes Herman Orff's dual quest for love and for an original inspirational creativity.

Unique to *The Medusa Frequency* is the emphasis on a sense of personal memory dominating the present, a profound feeling of loss and entrapment in the past. While it maintains the typical features of the heroic journey, the realisation of life's transience, human frailty, and mortality, *The Medusa Frequency* is a more dream-like "story about love lost and found" (Wilkie 79). Caught up in memory, Hermann Orff represents the individual's attempt to reconcile the loss of love, beauty and intimacy with the need for self-knowledge, psychic growth and a regenerative imaginative creativity.

In this respect, *The Medusa Frequency* enacts what Freud called "*Trauerarbeit*" or "the work of mourning whereby the psyche seeks to detach itself from a lost love-object" (Bleikastein 46). In his essay "Mourning and Melancholia", Freud defines mourning as "the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one", and links it to the "distinguishing mental features" of melancholia (Freud 143). Along with typical melancholic feelings of "inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings", profound mourning can be characterised by:

> feeling of pain, loss of interest in the outside world – in so far as it does not recall the dead one – loss of capacity to adopt any new object of love, which would mean a replacing of the one mourned, the same turning from every active effort that is not connected with thoughts of the dead. (143)

Herman Orff exhibits many of these symptoms. Overwhelmed by the loss of Luise von Himmelbett, his past lover whom he has betrayed, Herman Orff despondently spends late-night vigils at his computer, immersed in a private fantasy world or transfixed in nostalgic and sentimental reverie. Disaffected and disassociated, he is desperately struggling to write his third novel, in between translating adaptations of *Treasure Island*, *War and Peace* or *Ivanhoe* into the speech balloons of a comic book formula. In an unheroic, mordant, and self-defeatist tone he says, "I hewed wood and drew water at

Classic Comics but I led my muse into insolvency elsewhere" (*MF* 12). Orff can feel that there was life in his head and that there "were all sorts of things going on in it" (13). However, he is unable to connect with this inner activity and create an original and exciting new novel. He remains in a realm of fantasy and dream which fluctuates between memory and unfulfilled desire. The mood is marked by inertia and fragmentary moments of creativity which are incomplete meditations on the dialectic of "hereness and goneness" (14). One such failed piece is inspired by the haunting gaze and mysterious quality of Vermeer's "Head of a Young Girl" which Herman Orff associates with Luise' lost beauty.

Plagued by the ghost-like presence of Luise, as the "rain intensified the colours of the present and called up the past that always waits" (21),[3] Herman Orff wistfully remembers and relives his relationship with a semi-delusional idealisation of the past. During that blissful period in his life when "nothing was burdensome" and "nothing was too much trouble", Herman Orff found himself in love. With Luise as his lover and muse, he was highly creative and productive and had his future confidently planned: "I imagined waking up and finding her there every morning, I imagined page after page coming out of the typewriter" (18).

However, after two years the relationship ended with Luise leaving Orff because had betrayed her trust – the details of the break-up are vague but hinge on Orff's betrayal of the "essential idea" of Luise: whether this involved a sexual infidelity or not, he failed to keep the idea of her intact (16, 70). As a consequence of this transgression Herman Orff is left in a state of bitter regret, beset by feelings of guilt and recrimination. All too aware of the emptiness and loneliness of the present twilit night, he imagines "THE LITTLE TRIBUNAL OF THE DUSK", in which the "shadows, voices from otherwhen, faces from time lost" force him to remember everything and ultimately find him guilty (77). Orff consequently seems unable to participate meaningfully in another relationship. Afflicted by that "painful dejection" and "abrogation of interest in the outside world" associated with the obsessive fixation with a past love, Orff has suffered the "loss of the capacity to love" another person (Freud 143). A relationship with Melanie Falsepercy confirms this as he cannot help thinking of Luise and colouring the present with the past in a destructive and sadistic manner. Melanie Falsepercy herself challenges him:

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[3] In a later novel, where this theme becomes all too pervasive, Peter Diggs talks to his lover Amaryllis about ghosts. Peter says, "Has it ever struck you that people are mostly composed of the past? Every new moment immediately becomes the past, and the next moment, which is the future, does the same thing. There's not much *now* to be had" (*AND* 21).

> 'Maybe bondage is what you really like. You seem to enjoy harnessing yourself with regrets and chaining yourself to the past.' (*MF* 109)

Given this state, Hoban prepares his protagonist for a deeper exploration of the Self. As in Freud's description, the "*Trauerarbeit*" sets the groundwork for both the conflict and the difficult nature of the passage towards reconciliation and rejuvenation. Freud writes:

> The testing of reality, having shown that the loved object no longer exists, requires forthwith that all the libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to this object. Against this demand a struggle of course arises – it may be universally observed that man never willingly abandons a libido-position, not even when a substitute is already beckoning to him. This struggle can be so intense that a turning away from reality ensues, the object being clung to through the medium of a hallucinatory wish-psychosis. (Freud 144)

In this respect, Herman Orff's first attempt to break away from his love melancholia and writer's block casts him into a surreal and terrifying psycho-machia. After taking part in an EEG experiment offered by Istvan Fallok at Hermes Soundways which involves a Fairlight Computer, Orff undergoes a powerful mind-altering and hallucinatory episode. Marked by the twin movements of a descent into the unknown and the forward action of a battle for deliverance, it is an experience which is fraught with danger and tinged with madness taking Orff into a world of memory, imagination and myth. It leaves Orff profoundly affected, dislocated and even mentally disturbed. The effect is of a vivid and transforming remembrance of the past:

> In the Hermes music the particles of time past coalesced into sunlight on the island of Paxos[.] (*MF* 25)

Hermann Orff is here remembering a special visit with Luise to the Greek Islands. Importantly, this visit alludes to Hoban's own stay on the island referred to in "Pan Lives" (*MUM* 135-8). It informs a significant aspect of Hoban's artistic vision in which he explores a "mythological consciousness" (Wilkie 13) as well as exhibiting intertextual connections in Hoban's fictional universe which suggest an intimate connection between collective memory and metatextuality. The description of the island, some donkeys, and especially a grove of olive trees becomes a gateway to the underworld and the hidden archaic material of the unconscious. It becomes a "state of aroused language response" and a "communion" which gives Hoban "a language base more advanced" than he had experienced (*MUM* 137). Thus the olive tree is a "Persephone door" (*MF* 26) which becomes a transformative symbol in Hermann Orff's consciousness, described as a

"flickering of the Thing-in-Itself" (47). As a portal it leads Herman Orff and Luise into the "Underworld" (26). This is not just a hell or a place for the dead. It is a primordial aspect of consciousness which is strange, inviting and inspiring. It is a widening of what we perceive reality to be. Persephone tells Luise:

> 'What we call world is only that little bit of each moment that we know about – underworld is everything else that we don't know but we need it. Underworld is like the good darkness where the olive tree has its roots.' (26)

Echoing Orpheus's journey, Hoban is again exploring the mythic imagination through Herman Orff's passage of self-discovery downward into memory and a dark Underworld of creative possibility beyond the 'limited-reality consensus'. Hermann Orff, influenced by the EEG and the presence of the Vermeer Girl, describes the disorienting descent: he is "dropping, dropping, faster and faster through the darkness, down, down, into the blackness at the bottom of the sea" (27), to a place where there is "no rest, no ease, no comfort" (27). This overwhelming combination of feelings of dread, awe, terror, excitement and passion are similar to Rudolf Otto's description of experiences of the numinous.[4] Submerged in the abyss in a movement which enacts Eliade's shamanic passage to the cosmogenic centre (*Cosmos and History* 18), Herman Orff regresses deeper through collective memory to a cosmic primeval revelation of the "first great terror of Creation" and the place of blackness that is the origin and end of all life (27).

In this terrifying space, linked elsewhere in his fiction to the painter Odilon Redon's essential quality of the colour black which "draws its excitement and vitality from deep and secret sources of health" (*AG* Epigraph), Hoban emphasises the invigorating and regenerating power of such a visionary experience. In "Blighter's Rock" – an essay concerned with the debilitating nature of writer's block and the attendant need for a courageous deep exploration of reality – Hoban writes that in "trying to take hold of" the "ungraspable isness of what is", the mind, "hungry for that terror", faces "the incomprehensibility of itself and the original terror of Creation, the bursting into being of something out of nothing" (*MUM* 180-81). Furthermore,

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[4] Rudolf Otto writes about the range of non-rational religious feeling: "Its nature is such that it grips or stirs the human mind with this and that determinate affective state" (Otto 12). Being such a powerful and overwhelming emotion it can only be described through the lens of analogy or symbol. The feelings, part of the *mysterium tremendum* can found in different forms. It can "come sweeping like a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship"; or might be "a more set and lasting attitude of the soul" being "thrillingly vibrant and resonant"; or it may "burst in sudden eruption" with "spasms and convulsions" which lead to the "strangest excitements, to intoxicated frenzy, to transport, and to ecstasy"; or it can be "wild and demonic" its origins being "crude and barbaric"; or it might develop into something more refined "something beautiful and pure and glorious"; or it may be hushed, trembling, and speechless humility" in the face of a powerful and awesome mystery (Otto 12-13).

> In the original terror is the vital energy that is the beginning of beauty and everything else – perhaps even a better understanding of the human situation. (182)

With this movement the surreal and phantasmagorical invades Herman Orff's world. The irruption of the head of Orpheus into Herman Orff's world represents the first movement in his heroic journey of individuation. As in many of the novels Hoban underscores the individuation quest with a playful allusion to Joseph Campbell's Hero Monomyth. According to Campbell's comparative interpretation of culture, myth and religion this is a basic pattern from which all variations and elements of hero tales are developed:

> The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: *separation-initiation-return…*
>
> *A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow men.* (Campbell 30)

In the first trial on his "rite of passage" Herman Orff encounters the giant, rotting head of Orpheus which is a whale-like island floating, "green-slimed and barnacled" (*MF* 27). Beneath the 'floating-island-head' Orff sees "rising a vast and ivory nakedness and a woman's face of terrifying beauty" (28) which transforms into his various feminine objects of obsession: Eurydice, Luise, the Vermeer girl, and Melanie Falsepercy. In this strange vision, Orff nearly drowns in the depths of an "ultimate deep" and is almost swallowed by the great cavernous mouth of the head of Orpheus. Similarly to Kleinzeit's confrontation with Hospital, Herman Orff is like Jonah "the hero [who] gives in to the monster" and is "swallowed by a sea monster that carries him on a night sea journey" (Jung, *Man and His Symbols* 111). Herman Orff's descent and immersion shows the hero symbolically going "into darkness, which represents a kind of death", thereby beginning a cycle of renewal (111). As Orff faces death he seeks psychic rebirth and escape from entrapment in a bleak mental and emotional state of being. The vision also contains both powerful masculine and feminine images and the underlying experience seeks to unify and reconcile the discordant elements within his unconscious.

From this experience the head of Orpheus becomes attached to Herman Orff. Intent on telling him his story, the head will continue to obsess and pursue him throughout the novel, appearing suddenly in strange forms: a cabbage, a football and a grapefruit. Orpheus' head becomes like the lion in *The Lion of Boaz-Jachin and Jachin-Boaz:*

it is a way of embodying and mediating powerful feelings of emotional attachment, guilt and love as well as the realisation of detachment and loss.[5] As a psychic symbol, the head of Orpheus is a "complex", made up of associated personal and archetypal images frozen by repressed traumatic emotional energy. Jung asserts that such a complex has a "powerful inner coherence [and its] own wholeness", exhibiting a "relatively high degree of autonomy" and "behaves like an animated foreign body in the sphere of consciousness" (qtd. in Stein 49). Spontaneously and uncontrollably, the head disrupts Herman Orff's normal waking life, threatening "psychic disintegration, dissociation and fragmentation" (50). The head demands attention as it manifests itself in bizarre moments of traumatic and irrational visions, inflating Herman Orff's consciousness as he struggles to control overwhelming unconscious feelings.

Through Hermann Orff's vision and ongoing dialogue with the head of Orpheus, Hoban is re-enacting a variation of another hero motif archetypal pattern which Jung has termed "the battle for deliverance" (Jung, *Man and his Symbols* 110). Although not clearly a physical battle with a dragon or any obviously personified force of evil or darkness, this encounter with the past and the fantastic intrusion of the head of Orpheus into Herman Orff's consciousness represents his struggle as a hero with the shadow and an animus or anima possession of a deep unconscious complex. Obsessed by a deep yearning to re-unite with a lost love and a blissful state of happiness, Herman Orff must grapple and come to terms with the head of Orpheus and its story in an attempt to achieve a greater awareness, explore the collective unconscious, and overcome the dangers of a regressive pattern of failed relationships. According to Jungian theory:

> In the developing consciousness of the individual the hero figure is the symbolic means by which the emerging ego overcomes the inertia of the unconscious mind, and liberates the mature man from a regressive longing to return to the blissful state of infancy in a world dominated by his mother. (111)

Jung has a broad idea of the maternal archetype – it is not to be taken as solely instinctual but conceived of a "longing for the paradise of childhood" (Stein 66).[6] There can be no psychic development and progress until Herman Orff is able to free himself from this degenerative attitude of fantasy wish-fulfilment through a commensurate "desire for

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[5] In this earlier novel Boaz-Jachin, racked by feelings of anger, resentment, betrayal and loss, wills into existence a lion which haunts his father, hunting him in London until he faces and accepts responsibility.
[6] A broader definition is possible: the hero is given the "role of creating consciousness. The hero is a basic human pattern [and] demands sacrificing the 'mother', meaning a passive childish attitude, and assuming the responsibilities of life and meeting reality in a grown up way. The hero archetype demands leaving off with childish fantasy thinking and insists on engaging reality in an active way" (Stein 91).

union and transformation" – what Jung called *Auseinandersetzung* or "taking something to pieces" (143). This cathartic process involves "dialogue and confrontation" with powerful feelings so that the subject is able to "dismember the illusory world of unconscious fantasy" (143). By "raising consciousness" and "becoming aware of projections" the "most romantic and carefully guarded illusions" are challenged and explored (143). So the melancholic sets about converting his vivid and disturbing unconscious dream world into a therapeutic story and a list of Dramatis Personae (*MF* 46-48). This process is further achieved through the conversation and confrontation with the head of Orpheus and becoming aware of the implications of his story, which, in this variation, concentrates on the love and loss of Eurydice and the necessity for fidelity.

Ultimately the work of mourning is facilitated through a night sea journey as Herman Orff travels to The Hague to search for Vermeer's painting, "Head of a Young Girl". Again in a state of despondency and mired in a writer's block, Herman Orff feels a deep sense of emptiness, lack of inspiration as his "room filled up with a desolation that drained the virtue out of everything" (78). The myriad objects on his desk that once were full of action and energy "stopped looking right" (78). Herman Orff especially notes the absence of the Vermeer girl with which he powerfully associates Luise.

Beginning the second movement, the phase of "initiation" which takes him on a journey of discovery, Herman Orff receives a "Call to Adventure" (Campbell 30) when the music on the radio fades into the erotic and intimate voice of a female radio presenter. Herman Orff is lulled into a deep, quasi-mystical state of non-rational receptivity. Accentuating the motifs of frequency, fidelity and perception, he receives a pure image of the feminine, echoing the previous idea of a submerged Eurydice. Through this characteristically modern translation of a classical "Supernatural Aid" (30) Herman Orff is "able to let go of all comprehension so that she came to my ear naked, giving me, unvitiated by any surface meaning, the sound that signified only herself" (*MF* 79). Hoban is attempting to evoke the alluring purity of a transcendent language of absolute presence through faithful perception of a sacred message.

Gradually Hermann Orff receives the call to embark on a quest for the Vermeer girl, whose "sweet voice" is heard by him "beckoning wordlessly in the moving waters under the moon" (79). This is typical of Hoban's quests, inspired and guided by images of the moon, the sea and seasonal cycles so that desired movement towards transformation is evoked with a sensual, erotic feminine enticement and emphasis on

natural fertility. It is another of Hoban's "variation[s] of character and event that presents the patterning of male ego-consciousness in pursuit of its lost anima self" (Wilkie 79).

Hoban describes the night journey lyrically and evocatively as he fluidly blends language and event, movement and stillness, animate and inanimate in a strange provocative 'liminal' atmosphere: under dim and "darkling" twinkling lights "travellers manifest themselves halfway between chiaroscuro and silhouette"; the night "showed itself"; in "the uncelebrated moment" illuminated clockfaces are heralds which "trumpet silently with their luminous faces all departures, all arrivals"; the various objects he passes are communicating, "marine articulations offered their detail growing smaller, smaller" and the darkness of the night train offers Herman Orff a meditation on the paradox of movement as a "succession of stillnesses ... in which your seeking face is mirrored" (*MF* 80-81). Here Hoban is re-creating in a sacred quest what he has called the "big language of nightfall" in which "everything that happens is language, everything that goes on is saying something" (*MUM* 126).

During this passage, and like all Hoban's protagonists, Hermann Orff recognises and embraces the transience of life and his own mortality whilst affirming a sense of place and identity. Writing about *The Lion of Boaz-Jachin and Jachin-Boaz*, Elizabeth Dipple has uncovered a central preoccupation in Hoban's quests towards place. Whether to Cambry, Jerusalem, Paxos or The Hague, the quests all

> illustrate that the primary external signposts that mark our whereabouts must give way to an intensive *haecceitas*, or intensely experienced thingness of the present world, as it touches all the powerful, substantial, often mystical structures of the restlessly perceiving mind. (Dipple 166)

Thus, despite the apparent dissolution of time and space – the flickering blue and white lights tell Orff that there is no permanent place and try to overwhelm him with the strangeness, emptiness and fleeting nature of existence – he responds openly, resolutely, heroically and yet fatalistically:

> I have always found place, I have always had places. Death as it follows me takes away one place after another; sometimes it's like the breaking of a string of beads; the beads all rattle on the floor, some roll into dark corners. But my places are not yet all gone. (*MF* 81-82)

As shaman or questing pilgrim, Herman Orff "Crosses the Threshold" (Campbell 30) and moves into a magical, almost supernatural, timeless and mythic realm, ready to be initiated and transformed. It accentuates a common feature of all Hoban's novels: the

process of individuation is mediated through the profound experience of perceiving different works of art.

Moreover, this stage in the hero's passage reveals the influence of Hermes. Hermes' presence in *The Medusa Frequency* is reflected in Herman Orff's name, which like Melanie Falsepercy's, is built on a combination of "morphological analogy and mythological allusion" (Dunwell 22). Thus Hermes' name is hidden and embedded in the protagonist's name thereby fusing Hoban's twin mythical obsessions: Hermes and Orpheus.[7] Hermes is characterised as the "whisperer in the darkness, the guide of souls and the god of thieves and roadways and journeys"[8] and Hoban's personal god of the artists (*MUM* 163). The quest is a sacred hermeneutical one: it involves a mystical act of apprehension of hidden signs and messages. Elsewhere Hoban has characterised certain writing and works of art as exuding a quality he associates with Hermes.[9] As seen with the Hermes music, the fundamental nature of the Hermes experience is of change and creation; of new roads taken and new connections and probabilities arising from visions originating through art. As a messenger figure, Hermes becomes a tutelary figure and conduit to the realm of beauty, terror, darkness and ultimately the "Thing-in-Itself" (*MUM* 181). While as a trickster figure Hermes distorts, disorients, and confuses, he ultimately acts as an enchanting and magical tool for the mind to forge new ideas and realities. Characterised by an ineffable aura of strange ethereal energy, Hermes is that process of defamiliarisation which opens the doors of perception into the underworld of dreams, archetypes and symbols.

Thus, as in the providential meeting in the Victoria and Albert Museum in *The Bat Tattoo*, Hoban sets the scene for Herman Orff's visionary illuminating moment in the Johan de Witthuis Gallery. Searching for the Vermeer girl and desperately trying to re-establish an irretrievable relationship, Orff finds that the painting is inexplicably on loan in America. With typical wordplay which prepares for the mystical nature of the experience, the Vermeer girl's absence is figured in an acronym "GBG ('Girl Becomes

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[7] Dunwell writes extensively on the meaning and the process of naming in both *Kleinzeit* and *The Medusa Frequency*. See chapter on *Kleinzeit* p 61-64. Her reading of Herman Orff's name differs from mine in that she argues that "Herman Orff is – despite an ironic distance – an Orpheus forever enslaved to a woman (her man)" (Dunwell 22).

[8] Hoban is engaging with Hermes' traditional "role as the guide of souls" (Brunel 531) and "keeper of a particular type of knowledge, or rather a way of achieving knowledge – divine, Gnostic, eclectic, 'transdisciplinary', or all of these at once" (532). It involves "discovering hidden treasures" which is "the prerogative of hermeneutics" (532).

[9] In "I, that was a child, my tongue's use of sleeping ..." Walt Whitman's poem, "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" is a "hermetic lyric" and Edward Hopper's painting of a Maine gas station is suggestive of "the realm of Hermes" (*MUM* 163).

Gone')" (*MF* 84). Spun from the gallery's name "Witthuis", Herman Orff conceives of her disappearance as a movement "beyond the reach of the intellect"; it is a non-rational escape, "Out of her Witts" (84).

Dejected Herman Orff is now ready to face the reality "that the loved object no longer exists" and which now "requires forthwith that all the libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to this object" (Freud 143). The mourning process of detachment and transformation begins as Herman Orff receives inspiration from other paintings, including a diptych by G. David of a bucolic rural scene and a thick, dark and inviting forest. Again, echoing Dante, one of Hoban's characters finds himself in a shadowy wood in an atmosphere of confusion and magical enchantment. Orff's imagination is activated 'in the forest'; he transmutes his experience into a fictional metaphysical and mythological quest set up by Hermes. Certain that the quest is not merely chimera and trickery, Orff still mysteriously feels the presence of the Vermeer girl, acknowledging to himself: "she herself had told me to come and find her and in some way not yet revealed to me this was the place where she would be found, I could feel it" (*MF* 84).

Trusting his intuitive knowledge, Herman Orff successfully fends off his nemesis, the arrogant and outspoken filmmaker who was also one of Luise's lovers, Gösta Kraken. Gösta Kraken is the embodiment of 'The Mysterious Stranger' who "pretentiously ... reminds [Orff] of people who get there before" he does and "who knows something he does not" (47). He also represents a type of reading: the destructive deconstructionist mode which Herman Orff resists in preference for a quasi-religious hermetic method of inspiration. By defeating Gösta Kraken, Orff overcomes feelings of inadequacy and jealousy and, while learning some unsettling truths, he moves on to discover the revelation of Medusa.

The third and final movement, centred on the Medusa transformation, begins here. Orff, finding himself standing before an "apparently artless" painting, "*Gezicht op het Eiland Tamaraca*" by Frans Post (89), apprehends a strange phenomenon despite its mundane content:

> a presence looking out at me, I could feel it in the buzzing and the swarming of what was gathering itself. I could feel myself approaching the correct frequency, I held myself carefully tuned to it when it came. (89)

In a similar epiphany to Riddley's in the "woom of cambry" (*RW* 160) there is the intense activity and energy evoked through an idea of buzzing and swarming. Conjuring the image of bees and hence Eurydice, who has been depicted as the Queen of the Bees

(*MF* 117), Orff opens himself to receive a mysterious quasi-mystical message. At this point we see Hoban's recurrent affinity with Romantic notions of artistic inspiration and revelation.[10]

Herman Orff's moment of enlightenment is unique to himself and activates the final stage in the process of mourning: the re-channelling of the libido or life energy from the lost-love object onto a new object of fascination. Freud writes:

> The task is now carried through bit by bit, under great expense of time and cathectic energy, while all the time the existence of the lost object is continued in the mind. Each single one of the memories and hopes which bound the libido to the object is brought up and hyper-cathected,[11] and the detachment of the libido from it is accomplished. (Freud 144-45)

Hence Herman Orff witnesses a vivid metamorphosis of Luise from a "naked and shining" image of Eurydice rising out of the water, "quivering like a mirage" as it becomes a "face loosely grinning, with hissing snakes", and finally is revealed as the "Gorgon's head, the face of Medusa, [which] shimmered luminous in a silence that crackled with its brilliance" (*MF* 90).

Fascinated with another mythical head, Hoban translates and transmutes Orpheus' gaze into the startling stare of Medusa. Both are intimately concerned with "the mystery of 'origins'" and with a "mesmerizing stare as something which conceals the secret of the sacred" (Brunel 779). Like the Orphic space, the "Gorgon also represents what cannot be represented, i.e. death, which it is impossible to see or look at" (779). Characteristically, Hoban dramatically re-writes the conventional myth: Medusa, who was slain by Perseus, was a figure which evoked terror and fear as who ever looked upon her was turned to stone. However, in a radical revision, Hoban changes the representation of Medusa from "the terrifying Other, of absolute negativity" (780) into a more sympathetic, regenerating and inspiring figure. Thus, the once threatening, petrifying and horrific gaze of Medusa is now inviting and a source of renewed creative energy.

The Medusa has a profound effect on Herman Orff, who in a direct reversal of the myth visualises himself emerging reborn out of a cracking stone egg:

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[10] See Conclusion p 212-17.

[11] Freud uses this psychoanalytical term in connection with "the regulation of the flow of psychic energy" and to "designate an additional charge of instinctual energy cathecting any already cathected psychical element" ("Hypercathexis," *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* vol. 2 767). Thus it originates from the basic process of "cathexis" defined as "the process that attaches psychic energy, essentially libido, to an object, whether this is the representation of a person, body part, or psychic element" ("Cathexis," *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* vol. 1 259-60).

> Around me ceased the sounds of the day; the stone of me cracked and I came out of myself quite clean, like a snake out of an egg, nothing obscuring my sight or my hearing. (*MF* 90)

This is an eerie and moving image of self-transformation, re-growth and renewal. Hermann Orff has not only experienced a quasi-mystical moment of transcendence but he has also undergone a process of dramatic change, which sees him detach himself from his past and leave it behind. The fruition of the process is figured in the image of the egg. It evokes a sense of fertility and rebirth and of the hero's apprehension of the totality of the Self. When conceived of in terms of a pregnancy, this image is a symbol or primordial image of the hero's new self. Stein writes:

> The real psychic purpose of the conventional man's affair with his very unconventional anima woman is to produce a symbolic child, which represents a union of opposites in his personality and therefore is a symbol of the self. (Stein 139)

This visionary experience is followed by an equally powerful but more real chance meeting with Luise. This meeting is a reunion, but more importantly it completes Herman Orff's process of acceptance and acknowledgement of his loss. The moment of realisation is also described as an epiphany of sorts: time ceases to be an automatic progression: "the present moment exploded into millions of sharp-edged fragments and nothing followed" (*MF* 91). Finally Herman Orff faces reality and is able to recognise that Luise has gone – he concretely and ritualistically establishes this when he asks her to sign her name and the date on a piece of yellow paper. She also tells him she is married happily. The news is not without irony: Lars, her husband, is a successful computer programmer and sails on a forty-foot ketch significantly named '*Eurydike*'. Despite this, Hermann Orff understands the meaning of the vision and the meeting:

> Seeing the actuality of Luise married and gone for ever, was that what the stone had cracked and freed me for? (92)

At this point in the journey Hermann Orff finds himself in the same place as Hoban's other protagonists, with a new sense of creative spirit and a freedom to write, act, and live. Hermes, the journeying god of roadways who inspires the recognition of "the darkness below all history and all legend, the darkness that is not only death but the womb of that mystery out of which comes new becoming" (*MUM* 165) is at the centre of this sentiment:

> I could feel that something had happened, I could feel the Hermes of it, could feel myself on a night road to somewhere else. One couldn't ask more than that – to be sometimes on a night road to somewhere else. (*MF* 92)

Hermes, who embodies mysterious creation from loss (see *MUM* 164), has become in the text a catalyst or a "mode of event, a shift in the relativities of the moment, a new disposition of energies" (*MF* 44) and Orff as "telegrapher at a lost outpost" (9) has received this "frequency of probabilities when complementary equivalents offer and anything can be anything"(44) which allows him (and Hoban) to meet Medusa and thereby explore new areas and images of the unconscious.

The vivid figures of Hermes, Medusa, Persephone, and Eurydice are all archetypal images which have functioned as a bridge or a door to the Self. Most significantly, the startling figure of Medusa displaces and substitutes the obsession with Eurydice and the Vermeer girl. As Herman Orff finally grasps the idea of Medusa he has engaged creatively and openly with the anima or the female aspect within himself. Importantly, the feminine is no longer conceived of as a monstrous emanation of the terrible woman who is horrifying and dangerous. Orff establishes his fidelity in the Medusa – unlike her victims – thus showing himself to be worthy of the Medusa: the "break need not necessarily be made by a Perseus, but by a man who is able to maintain dangerous and intimate relations with the terrifying monster, with the submerged feminine, without letting himself be deluded by the mask" (Brunel 786).

Although Orff has learnt that there is "only one femaleness" (*MF* 99), he realises a new relationship which accepts "the unknowableness of the Medusa, rather than yearning for the familiarity of the loss of Eurydice" (Dunwell 49). Herman Orff gives himself fully and completely to the Medusa and recognises her special significance as an aspect of the feminine which accepts and rejoices in ceaseless change, artistic creativity and sacred transformation:

> Behind Medusa lie wisdom and the dark womb hidden like a secret cave behind a waterfall. Behind Medusa lies Eurydice unlost. (*MF* 121)

After finding a deeper source of inspiration in Medusa, the work of mourning is completed as "the ego becomes free and uninhibited again" (Freud 143). With that Herman Orff begins to write fresh and original material and the final moments of the novel reiterate his new state of consciousness. Reading Luise's translation of Rilke's

"Orpheus, Eurydike, Hermes", Orff is not catapulted into despair. He replaces sorrowful loss with open reception of change and the necessity of trust and fidelity:

> 'Right,' I said, 'no more *Klage*,'[12] and when I looked up at the Vermeer girl it was Medusa I saw, flickering and friendly, trusting me with the idea of her. (*MF* 143)

II

Orpheus and Eurydice: a myth of transgression, loss and the creative arts.

As seen in *Kleinzeit*, Hoban finds the story of Orpheus and Eurydice an extremely rich and malleable myth, adjusting the tale to his own metaphysical and metafictional purposes. While both novels enact the pattern of the 'Orphic action cycle', *The Medusa Frequency* concentrates on the birth of Orpheus, his status as eternal musician and archetypal creator, the invention of the lyre, the meeting and implicit loss of Eurydice.

Similarly to Hospital in *Kleinzeit*, the myth is re-articulated by a bizarre and fantastic figure: this time it is the head of Orpheus itself. After making a magical pact with Herman Orff, Orpheus' head persists in relating his story, but it is clear that it is a strange variation. It is a mixed, repetitive and ambiguous version where events are told in a circuitous, dream-like and layered prose. Full of lament and loss, the head attempts to recreate and remember mythic experiences in an almost ritualistic language of poetic intensity. Orpheus often portrays scenes from the myth in rich visual, sensual and dramatic tableaux. The painterly description of Eurydice, recalling the opulence and extravagance of Romantic and pre-Raphaelite art, presents a seductive image of "pathetic and savage splendour" which in the "leafy shade ... lay all huddled and forlorn, the red-gold hair, the ivory of her" revealed by "her garments all disordered offering to the eye her shapeliness, her long and rounded limbs" (*MF* 61). She becomes the embodiment of art, "splendid and sculptural she was, like a broken winged victory" (61).

This kind of language has the double effect of poetic lyricism and ironic distance: despite the beauty of the language, these set pieces remain fragmented, disconnected and somewhat forced, thereby emphasising the narrator's position from a place of loss. Although it is a narrative prone to circumlocution and reverie, the fundamental elements become clear and Herman Orff, like Kleinzeit, learns of a hidden meaning within the

[12] Translates from the German as 'lament'.

tale. Through this Hoban portrays a mythopoeic vision unique to the novel which weaves the story into a myth of transgression and of the origin of the arts.

The Myth of Transgression

In *The Medusa Frequency* Hoban transmutes the story of Orpheus and Eurydice from a tragic love story into a mythic account of human sin, punishment and exile. At the heart of Herman Orff's tale is a betrayal of 'the idea of Luise', and, as in the traditional myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, Hoban is able to pursue a transgression (Orpheus looks back) and inevitable loss (Eurydice returns to the Underworld). At one point in his narration of the tale, the head of Orpheus says:

> ... 'EURYDICE whose loss is the judgement, whose loss is the reckoning, and the punishment.
> 'The judgement, the reckoning, and the punishment.' (118)

We can fruitfully situate the myth in *The Medusa Frequency* using Paul Ricoeur's ideas as expressed in *The Symbolism of Evil.*[13] It is through mythic language and symbols that we "re-enact in imagination and sympathetically the experience of fault" (Ricoeur 161). He characterises three functions of myths of fault or myths of evil: "concrete universality, temporal orientation, and finally ontological exploration" (163).

The first function is "to embrace mankind as a whole in one ideal history" where time and character are made concrete yet eternal (162). Ricoeur writes:

> "man" is manifested as a concrete universal ... Thus experience escapes singularity; it is transmuted in its own "archetype." Through the figure of the hero, the ancestor, the Titan, the first man, the demigod, experience is put on the track of existential structures: one can now *say* man, existence, human being, because in the myth the human type is recapitulated, summed up. (Ricoeur 162-63)

Hoban is able to embrace the universal aspect of mankind by accentuating the archetypal and cosmic nature of Orpheus and Eurydice over and above their existence merely as characters. They are states of being or aspects of the universal consciousness, what Hoban calls "termini" (Wilkie 101). The head of Orpheus, which acts as one of these

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[13] The ideas on myths of evil as well as the nature of symbol and myth form an important background to the thesis and will be used to understand the various myths in *Riddley Walker.* Of the link between the theories of Ricoeur and Hoban's work, Dipple has written: "the best way of reading his fiction from a theoretician's point of view is probably by exploiting a semantic line of consciousness that goes from Søren Kierkegaard to René Girard and Paul Ricoeur" (Dipple 165).

"termini" (or channels) portrays himself as the archetypal poet and musician and directly links himself with Herman Orff when he introduces himself:

> 'I am the first of your line. I am the first singer, the one who invented the lyre, the one to whom Hermes brought Eurydice and perpetual guilt. I am your progenitor, I am the endlessly voyaging sorrow that is always in you, I am that astonishment from which you write in those brief moments when you can write.' (*MF* 33)

In the symbolic use of Orpheus as archetype, Hoban is fusing two connotations of archetype put forward by Régis Boyer in the *Companion to Literary Myths, Heroes and Archetypes*. Orpheus is the *prototype*, the "first real example" and an "eternal model" of the artist; he is "like an inexhaustible ideogram that is infinitely suggestive and ever-renewable in ways that depend on the imagination and sensibilities of the individual" (Brunel 111-12). Orpheus is a symbol, an original atemporal model, with the imprint of the primordial beginnings, *in illo tempore*, on which other subsequent artists' being is based. As an archetype of initiation and inspiration, Orpheus is the "primal image, whose elements humankind tries constantly to reconstruct" (112), what Boyer terms the *supreme type*:

> the absolute, the perfect image that transcends particular circumstances because it goes straight to the essential point wherever one chooses to tap it whether the context is religious, mythical or fictional. (114)

Similarly, Eurydice is a manifestation of "only one femaleness, whether it's called Eurydice or Medusa or Persephone or Luise" (*MF* 99). Eurydice, a primordial source of darkness and fecundity, is associated with natural images such as the sea and she is an expression of the endless rhythms of birth, life and death. Eurydice describes herself to Herman Orff:

> 'There's no end to me, no limit, no way to define or measure me … . There is an endless surging and undulating of me, an endless cycle of ebb and flow: that is called the sea.' (48)

Her underlying essential cosmic significance as Mother Goddess is embodied in her name: Eurydice, from '*Dike*' or '*Dice*' means "Wide Justice, justice everywhere, universal natural law" (46). Through these symbolic presences, Hoban evokes aspects of underlying universalities of being.

Secondly, according to Ricoeur, myths of evil weave this universal man into "movement" or "narration" where there is a significant *beginning* and *end* of the fault by

which "the myth confers upon this experience an orientation, a character, a tension" (Ricoeur 163). Since a fault without some form of redemptive teleology is merely misery, this narration will to a varied extent become a form of eschatology embracing a history from "Genesis to Apocalypse" traversing the "essential history of the perdition and salvation of man" (163). As in *Kleinzeit*, these archetypal elements are given what Ricoeur calls 'movement' or 'orientation' through the dynamics of the Orphic action cycle. The Orphic eschatology in *The Medusa Frequency* is closely connected to *Kleinzeit* and it is also evident in *Riddley Walker* as the structural and archetypal pattern corresponding to the mythic fertility quest of the sick, fragmented male part (Orpheus) seeking reunion with the healthy unity and wholeness that is the Mother Goddess (Eurydice). This mythic paradigm is explicitly evoked in a conversation with Gösta Kraken, Fallok and other Orpheus-obsessed artists:

> 'Here's to Eurydice and Orpheus, 'said Forthryte as the waiter filled our glasses.
>
> 'It's entirely correct that you should name them in that order,' said Kraken, 'Eurydice being the whole of which Orpheus is the part.'
>
> 'Would you say that she's the sea in which the blind and voyaging head of Orpheus swims?' I said. (*MF* 114)

Thirdly, and most importantly, Ricoeur argues that "the myth tries to get at the enigma of human existence, namely, the discordance between the fundamental reality – state of innocence, status of a creature, essential being – and the actual modality of man as, defiled, sinful, guilty" (Ricoeur 163). Using a narrative technique to account for this transition from innocence to experience, the myth "has an ontological bearing: it points to the relation – that is to say, both the leap and the passage, the cut and the suture – between the essential being of man and his historical existence" (163). Ricoeur sums this up by noting:

> In all these ways, the myth makes the experience of fault the center of a whole, the center of a world: the world of fault. (163)

In Hoban's variation of Orpheus and Eurydice in *The Medusa Frequency*, the primal fault is portrayed through two interrelated acts of evil or transgression: the killing of the tortoise to make the lyre, and the betrayal of the world-child. The movement of the narrative is to piece together the significance of the fragments of the myth and understand their meaning in an attempt to reconstitute a lost fullness of being. Orpheus, manifesting for

the moment as grapefruit, says this about the fragments of the story written on pieces of clay by Aristaeus:

> 'Broken pieces want to come together,' said the brain, 'they want to contain something. … or perhaps EURYDICE is the first word and in the empty space next to it there appears the TORTOISE. Or first THE TORTOISE, yes of course, THE TORTOISE first because it is the *centre of the universe*, because it is the world-child; THE TORTOISE first and then EURYDICE who is again the world-child-tortoise (*MF* 118; emphasis added)

During its first conversation with Herman Orff, the head of Orpheus relates the story of the killing of the tortoise to make the lyre. The act of killing the tortoise and scooping out its entrails becomes a means to evoke the nature of art and its origin in a primal fault, thereby releasing the dialectic of the sacred and profane, the loss and the finding, the emptiness and desire for fullness.[14] The deed is visceral and violent. Orpheus describes the idea for the "sound-box", how in the presence of a warning and foreboding stranger, Aristaeus, he goes ahead and sacrifices the tortoise to construct and make a human artefact:

> 'The entrails were mysterious. I think about it now, how those entrails spilled out so easily when I made an emptiness for my music to sound in. Impossible to put those entrails back.' (37)

The universal and irreversible significance of the slaughter of the tortoise is immediately apparent to Orpheus. Killing the tortoise is a variation of the eating of the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden. It is also similar to the killing of the albatross by Coleridge's Ancient Mariner.[15] It will haunt Orpheus and Orff, as they are condemned to "perpetual guilt" and "endlessly voyaging sorrow" (33). Thus through his crime Orpheus becomes a figure, linked to Hermes, of initiation and transition or change condemned to ceaseless restlessness and wandering. As René Girard

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[14] See discussion on the killing of the 'Littl Shynin Man in the Adom' which releases the 'Master Chaynjis' in chapter on *Riddley Walker* p 136-37.

[15] There is a direct reference to Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" in *The Medusa Frequency*:

> Like one, that on a lonesome road
> Doth walk in fear and dread,
> And having once turned round walks on,
> And turns no more his head;
> Because he knows, a frightful fiend
> Doth close behind him tread. (*MF* 52)

Here Herman Orff is speaking of the relentless and harrowing head of Orpheus. However through the allusion to Coleridge's poem many motifs are echoed: Orpheus' turning and loss of Eurydice; a profound sense of haunting and inescapable culpability linked to an act of transgression; the eternal wanderer on the road; the feelings of fear and dread closely associated with the numinous, and the albatross's death as a omen and symbol of a separation from nature.

has noted, at the heart of the sacred and in any powerful myth or work of art there is violence and sacrifice. The slaying of the tortoise represents the separation of humankind from a state of innocence because of an act of sacrificial violence. Myths such as these describe in figurative terms the process where humans are rent from nature and wholeness. This opens up a profound emptiness and a yearning for a return, manifested in quests from exile through rites of passage to renewed wholeness (Brunel 735-6).

In terms of Ricoeur's ideas on myths of evil, the killing of the tortoise is also the primal act of sinful separation condemning man to guilt and punishment. The action is "the centre of the world of fault" (Ricoeur 163). In a self-conscious manner, Orpheus explains and accounts for the origin of the offence, and reveals the myth's own status and aetiological function:

> 'You know how you'll hear a sound while you're asleep and there comes a whole dream to account for it and in the dream there are things that happen before and after the sound – might it be that the whole universe has no purpose but to explain the killing of the tortoise? Do you see what I mean? Perhaps the universe is a continually fluctuating event that configures itself to whatever is perceived as centre.' (*MF* 38)

This central moment of transgression is the birth of Orpheus' music which itself then attempts to understand, heal, remember and sublimate the primal trauma and violence of separation. It is from the tortoise shell that the lyre is formed. Orpheus' song is expressed in a visionary moment of sympathetic experience in which the agony and cruelty of the killing of the tortoise is relived in a vivid imaginative epiphany:

> 'There rose in my throat a terrible ache and in that moment the world became me and I became the world-child who knows nothing and believes whatever it is told; I was the world-child whose innocence binds the world together, whose innocence betrayed will unfasten the world. Oh yes, I thought, and as I listened to the weeping of the unseen woman in that golden, golden afternoon I became the tortoise I had killed. I felt my own cruel knife enter me, felt my life spurting out, felt my still quivering body being dug out of my shell. In an explosion of brilliant colours I suffered the many pains of death as underworld opened to me, underworld and the moment under the moment. I suffered the many pains, the many colours of death and I knew everything. The colours were swallowed up in blackness, there came a stillness and I found myself weeping by the river with the lyre in one hand and the plectrum in the other.' (*MF* 40)

Orpheus' music is born of a symbiotic identification with loss, suffering and pain. The overwhelming hallucinatory auditory and visual moment described by Orpheus is a powerful recognition of the implications of the killing and it becomes the foundation for all acts of violence. The re-creation necessarily involves a realisation of, and personal

identification with, many deaths and universal pain, as it is the primal act of evil from which all other evils, knowledge of sin and experience originate. Since the epiphany opens up the realm of the underworld, it allows Orpheus to meet Eurydice, who is seen invitingly but ominously "weeping in that golden, golden afternoon" (40). This powerful experience also heralds the emergence of the figure of the world-child. This complex multivalent symbol becomes inextricably linked with the tortoise as part of a lost, sacred and sacrificial object and with the love and intimate relationship with Eurydice. Ultimately it is another centre of fault which encapsulates the dialectic of fidelity and betrayal.

The image of the world-child is found throughout Hoban's work from *Riddley Walker* to his essays and sketches in *The Moment under the Moment.*[16] In *Riddley Walker* the image is connected to the Master Chaynjis and is a means to describe an essential structure embodying both aspects of duality and unity and fragmentation and wholeness.[17] It suggests the idea of the preservation and safety of an essential sacred mystery,

> Which is the hart of the Girt Chyld of Every Thing and the worl aint nothing only a idear in the mynd of that chyld. Which that chyld wants us to think all the diffrent parts of that idear to keap the worl in good hart and healf. (*RW* 191)

The idea of the world-child amalgamates Hoban's desire for wholeness, health and vitality, with his fascination and treatment of the child in his writing. Accentuated by Hoban's successful career as a children's writer, the child embodies the innocent, playful, imaginative and magical qualities of human nature. The child also carries deeper philosophical and ultimately religious preoccupations made explicit in *The Moment under the Moment.* Noting that "sympathetic magic originates in the mimetic play of children" (Young 144) and that it has been observed that children exhibit the behaviour, patterns of speech and interaction with the world that may be called animistic, Hoban's interest in the 'primitive' and archaic mentality intersects with the Romantic conception of the child's virtue and various theories of developmental psychology. The child epitomises a natural, spontaneous and holistic view of the world, untainted by experience and

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[16] Wilkie has also noted this, commenting that through it Hoban "is moving more refinedly towards exploration of the questions that have been gnawing away at him since his earliest writing: about the nature of time and being; about the quest for reconciliation between the agreed upon appearance of things and an idea of reality; about the nature of the mind and consciousness that 'looks out through the eyeholes of the face'" (Wilkie 65).

[17] The relationship between these mutual opposites is similar to the way Hoban uses the symbol of yin and yang in *Kleinzeit* and complementary opposites. See chapter on *Kleinzeit* p 49-50.

alienation that seems to trouble the adult. Hoban writes that we are "children of the mystery that inhabits us" and with an "innocence of becoming" we should invoke the child's perception (*MUM* 166-67). This will reveal "a *religious* ignorance – [where] the person was in a respectful relationship to something not fully understood, the person was respectfully offering the mind to the thing, was holding the mind open to all of the thing" (130).

These associations are directly related to the world-child and the attendant notion of fidelity and betrayal in *The Medusa Frequency*. On one level the world-child – a symbol of sexual union and male and female unity – is identified with the erotic, intimate and sensual love bond between Orpheus and Eurydice. Eurydice asks Orpheus to "be the world-child with me" and in a loving embrace Orpheus enters "the mother-darkness and the mystery" and is united with Eurydice in a moment of transcendent sensual delight (*MF* 69).[18] On another level the world-child symbolises both psychological union *and* metaphysical wholeness and it becomes an image of ultimate unity with no differentiation of self. Thus, the world-child "perceives the lover as the whole world, the world-child is greedy for the sea and the mountains and the death that live in the person who is loved" (100). It is the "energy of this belief that binds the world together" and the force of the world-child gives reality fullness and presence as it "holds in its mind the idea of every single thing" (98).

In both these senses the world-child is bound by Hoban's peculiar notion of fidelity: a full and faithful perception of the other and the world. The head of Orpheus says,

> 'Alone and blind and endlessly voyaging I think constantly of fidelity. Fidelity is a matter of perception; nobody is 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 the 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.' (33-35)

Implicit, however, as Orpheus, lost and dismembered, voyages endlessly and sorrowfully, is the reality that the world-child, inextricably connected to the violence of the tortoise, is itself inextricably linked to evil and betrayal. While it is the world-child's innocence which binds the world together it is this very innocence which "betrayed will unfasten the

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[18] Dunwell has noted that Hoban uses sex as "a double-doored portal to the mysteries of life and death" and to "symbolise extreme self awareness of both the physical and the psychological body" (Dunwell 76).

world" (40). Thus in another re-writing of the traditional myth, Orpheus transgresses as he is unable to be faithful to Eurydice and maintain the world-child with her. In this version, Orpheus says,

> 'In the stories they always say I turned around to look at her too soon but that isn't how it was: I turned away too soon, turned away before I'd ever looked long enough, before I'd ever fully perceived her.' (33)

The destruction of the primal unity and state of innocence through the killing of the tortoise and Orpheus' unfaithfulness or inability to perceive Eurydice fully symbolises the heart of the myth of transgression. As in *Kleinzeit*, this fault is intrinsic and unavoidable. Orpheus states that loss is implicit and necessary:

> 'Hold a pomegranate in your hand and tell me where is the beginning of it and where is the end. The name of this pomegranate is Loss: the loss of Eurydice was in me before I ever met her and the loss of me in her the same.' (39)

In this interconnection of loss and finding, of part and whole, is the realisation that "the ideal of the sacred is generated by the reality of the profane" and that without "the feeling of having fallen, paradise would not make sense" (Coupé, *Myth* 59). The profane is necessary and simultaneous with apprehension of the sacred just as Orpheus recognises that the loss of Eurydice and the passing of beauty is inevitable in their love. Furthermore, "the very dialectic of sacred and profane produces the discovery of a coincidence of opposites, by which the sacred is apprehended anew out of, and in tension with the profane" (59). The idea is fundamental to Hoban's entire mythopoeic vision and it manifests itself repeatedly in various forms: in *Kleinzeit*'s Orphic conflict, in *Riddley Walker*'s notion of the Fall and the link between '1st knowing' and 'clevverness'; and in *Pilgermann*'s more religious notion of good and evil.

What emerges, then, is that because of this fateful killing of the tortoise or the betrayal of the world-child, the quest for Eurydice is both the means towards reconstituting and putting together the pieces of the 'tortoise-world-child' as well as the very expression of the impossibility of this desire: she is always "the lost one, the gone one, the one who cannot stay" (*MF* 46). Eurydice is intimately linked with wholeness and harmony as well as loss and elusive transience. This "existential structure", which simultaneously represents "the transition from an essential nature to an alienated history", carries the ontological bearing of "both the leap and the passage, the cut and the suture" (Ricoeur 163). Hoban describes it in the Orphic action cycle as a dual tension

of opposites and an ongoing repetitive dialectic around a fluctuating centre which his fictional web seeks to reveal and enact.

Loss and the creative arts

"Is not all art a celebration of loss?" (*MF* 68)

While Hoban works simultaneously towards theological knowledge and an understanding of the nature of myth-making itself, Hoban's re-writing of the Orpheus myth performs both 'gnosis' as an impulse to uncover hidden knowledge as well as the urge to discover and reveal what Ricoeur terms "the whole enigma of the symbolic function of myths" (Ricoeur 166). Again Ricoeur provides a useful point from which to understand this complex and paradoxical movement in Hoban's mythopoeia. This illustrates the way in which Hoban, obsessed with the fluidity and ubiquity of language itself, moves beyond Eliade and Jung in their 'essentialist' conceptions of the mythological consciousness, to ask fundamental questions about the relationship between myth, language and the sacred.

On one level, in *Kleinzeit* and *The Medusa Frequency*, Hoban seeks to use the Orphic myth cycle in the same way that Ricoeur describes the "phenomenologists of religion" (including Eliade) sought to interpret and approach myth. Thus, these interpretations focus on the return to a:

> mythical structure which would be the matrix of all the images and all the particular narrations peculiar to this or that mythology, and relating to this diffuse mythical structure the fundamental categories of myth: participation, relation to the Sacred, etc. (Ricoeur 167)

This means the dissolution of the "myth-narration in an undivided consciousness that consists less in telling stories, making myths, than in relating itself affectively and practically to the whole of things" (166).

However Hoban, who is so self-conscious in his use of language and mythical structures to express the Sacred, seems equally aware of Ricoeur's need to take into account two characteristics of myth: "that it is an expression in language and that in it the symbol takes the form of narration" (166). Here Hoban enacts another movement in his fiction, one that creates a paradoxical tension with his spiritual goal of wholeness and unity or of registering the 'unwordable' numinous epiphany. Thus while the "phenomenologists of religion" seek to "go back from the narration to the pre-narrative root of the myth", Hoban *also* traces a similar movement which Ricoeur has described as an attempt to "follow the opposite course from the pre-narrative consciousness to the

mythical narration" (166). In this way Hoban explores the genesis of sacred myths themselves, teasing out the paradoxes and complexities of Ricoeur's question: why should it be that "consciousness, structured lower than any narration, any fable or legend, nevertheless breaks out into language under the form of narration?" (166) In following the course from the mysterious pre-narrative elements of a mythic consciousness towards the birth of language and narration, Hoban is aware of obvious absurdities and impossibilities, therefore he couches such rhetorical attempts in the fantastic alternation of the real and unreal and through the creative defamiliarisation of humorous and playful linguistic creativity.

The figure of the Kraken is one vehicle of such intent. The Kraken is described as "one with the terror of the original chaos of undifferentiated preconsciousness before the birth of the individual consciousness into differentiated being" (Wilkie 77). With its garbled pre-linguistic burbles, "NNVSNU TSRUNGH ... NNVSNU RRNDU TS'IRNH TS'IRNH NNGRH" (*MF* 8) and its pronouncement of the terror of absolute Beginning as well as its original act of self-aware creation from the "TERROR OF WHAT MIGHT BE, OF UNIVERSES AND WORLDS THAT MIGHT BE" (10), the Kraken reveals Hoban's closest attempt to access the absolute and primal pre-narrative origins of consciousness through the use of mythic and symbolic language (see Ricoeur 163). It is at his computer struggling for inspiration that Herman Orff communes with the Kraken as "words come out of a green dancing and the excitation of phosphors" (8). The Kraken represents the birth of a primal consciousness which is the bedrock for the development and regeneration of Hoban's creative mythology, including a family of gods and mythical figures: Hermes, Persephone, Orpheus and Eurydice and so on.

Hoban also tracks the emergence and birth of myth itself through the head's recitation of the story of Orpheus and Eurydice. This is doubly layered as the story invades and takes over Herman Orff's world and he becomes an exemplar of the myth. Hoban describes 'Orpheus' and 'Eurydice' existing in a blissful, idyllic and intimate nameless space before they knew their identities as mythical characters. The figures are terrified of the stories that are "always waiting ... always listening for names" and when the stories "hear the names they're listening for they swallow the people up" (69). Inevitably the characters, including Herman Orff, get caught up in the cyclical progression and unfolding of the myth and narrative which ultimately determines their tragic and glorious status. By exploring what Ricoeur calls "pre-narrative consciousness" (Ricoeur 166) or what Hoban terms the "consciousness that looks out the eyeholes of

my face" (*MUM* 166), Hoban goes to the root of the origins of myth and story, figuring it as a sacred space. He thereby partially answers Ricoeur's question. In an interesting variation of Hans Vaihinger's philosophy of "as if" (McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* 37), Hoban gives expression to the genesis of myth from a pre-narrative source and amplifies it with his notion of a universal mind which seeks self-awareness and self-expression through myth and story. He 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 were people?' A word, perhaps, whispered in the undulant amorphous ear of the primordial soup: 'What if there are people, hey? What if?' (*MUM* 146)

Ultimately, Hoban is exploring the relationship and interconnection between myth and the Sacred. In this both Ricoeur and Hoban uncover the central paradox and problem of symbolic language and of our human condition when faced with the power and limits of these mythical structures. The central problem is this: how do myths ever hope to represent the Sacred, or indicate "the intimate accord of the man of cult and myth with the whole of being" and thereby signify "an indivisible plenitude, in which the supernatural, the natural, and the psychological are not yet torn apart?" (Ricoeur 167) One may argue that Hoban answers in a similar way to Ricoeur: myth cannot. Myth can only point to paradox and loss. Then through the power of symbols which "opens up and discloses a dimension of experience that, without it, would remain closed and hidden" (165), the myth attempts to re-establish the link with the Sacred. Ricoeur writes:

> The essential fact is that this intuition of a cosmic whole, from which man is not separated, and this undivided plenitude, anterior to the division into supernatural, natural and human, are not *given*, but simply *aimed at*. It is only in intention that the myth restores some wholeness that man re-enacts and imitates it in myth and rite. The primitive man is already a man of division. Hence the myth can only be an intentional restoration or reinstatement and in this sense already symbolical. (167)

Hoban reveals this exact discovery: our condition of loss, separation, and alienation is basic and intrinsic and the role of art is *towards* symbolic remembering of the sacred wholeness. The head of Orpheus acknowledges the state of loss and fragmentation and becomes what Ricoeur calls "an unhappy consciousness" for whom "unity, conciliation are things to be *spoken of* and *acted out*, precisely because they are not *given*" (Ricoeur 167-68). Hence the dialectic of the Orphic action cycle of loss and finding is closely connected to the ritual killing of the tortoise which creates the necessary emptiness for

the archetypal instrument to fill with music (*MF* 37). Orpheus reiterates the true connection of art and loss:

> 'We were the two parts of a complementarity of loss, and that being so the loss was already an actuality in our finding of each other ... What am I if not the quintessential, the brute artist? Is not all art a celebration of loss?' (*MF* 68)

Furthermore, Ricoeur's formulation accounts for the diversity, multiplicity and endless possibility of mythical expression and forms manifested in Hoban's own variations of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth. Ricoeur notes:

> Now, in manifesting the purely symbolic characters of the relation of man to the lost totality, the myth is condemned from the beginning to division into multiple cycles. (Ricoeur 168)

Hence Hoban's Orpheus is condemned to re-tell and re-live his story as he tries to piece together the fragments of the tortoise-world-child complex and reconcile with his betrayed love. The "surplus of signification" (170), evident in the many versions of the myth which Hoban spins exists and is necessary because the Sacred or the totality is elusively "floating" (168). Thus the Sacred "takes contingent forms" and it "cannot be divined except through the indefinite diversity of mythologies and rituals" which are exhibited through an experience of fault which expresses this fundamental "origin in relation or tension with a totality of meaning, with an all-inclusive meaning of the universe" (168-70). This is precisely the reason why the head of Orpheus in his meandering, periphrastic narrative says,

> 'Perhaps the universe is a continually fluctuating event that configures itself to whatever is perceived as centre.' (*MF* 38)

Hoban's Orphic cycle reveals that the creative process that drives narrative is loss, emptiness, and a desire for the fulfilment of the loss. All writing in these terms is concerned with a lament and is a work of mourning working towards and searching for the lost love object or centre of being in an ambivalent act of reconstitution and resolution. André Bleikasten commenting on William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* equates Caddy as a lost figure, a Eurydice, for the author and for the various characters and he quotes André Green:

> Writing presupposes a wound, a loss, a bereavement, which the written work will transform to the point of producing its own fictitious positivity. No creation goes without effort, without a painful labor over which it carries a pseudo-victory. It

> can only be a pseudo-victory because it is short lived, because it is always contested by the author himself who feels the tireless urge to start again … . Reading and writing are a ceaseless work of mourning. If there is a pleasure to be found in the text, we always know that this pleasure is a surrogate for a lost gratification, which we are trying to recover through other means. (Bleikasten 46-47)

In the same way that *Kleinzeit* is a 'Zen anti-story' of transcendence exploring the paradoxical urge towards harmony and union, so *The Medusa Frequency* is an 'anti-story' of transgression and loss. It reveals the conflicts and contradictions in the relationship between the Sacred and mythopoeic language and sets it in another formulation of an ongoing dynamic tension between opposites ultimately grounded in the fertile source of emptiness of art.

III

Metafiction and myth: narrating the dissolution of reality into myth

> We make stories because we are story. The fabric of our myths and folk-tales is in us from before birth. The action systems 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 no one knows what, stories beget people to live them. We are the offspring of immeasurable ideas. (*MUM* 146)

In *The Medusa Frequency* Hoban self-consciously explores the genesis of story and myth, revealing their powerful shaping influence on our identity and reality. The mythical basis of reality is paramount. Hoban writes that myths are in us and are "the dynamics of the thing-in-itself acting itself out in the collective being and consciousness of which each of us is a particle" so that these immutable action cycles of mythic stories "will live us according to their need because we are a fiction, a continual forming and shaping" (*MUM* 147-49).

As seen in *Kleinzeit*'s metafictional games with reality and language, Hoban disrupts the 'limited-reality consensus' and returns to myth, using the "parody, pastiche and metafictional undermining of realism-enhancing techniques" which Onega ascribes to other modern British writers pursuing similar mythic impulses (Onega 187). Dunwell notes that both "*Kleinzeit* and *The Medusa Frequency* foreground Hoban's metafictional concerns" to explore the themes of "writing, reality and identity" (Dunwell 11) and that both novels seek to "expose the fragile fabric of reality" by making it "vulnerable to invasions by characters whose existence is fantastic" (12).

Dunwell argues that the use of magical realism is the most significant technique Hoban uses to "introduce the idea of conflicting realities" (12). In this particular case,

then, while I concede that Dunwell's reference to the genre in this example and for those reasons, I find the overall definition of Hoban as a magic(al) realist writer problematic, confusing, and misleading. The term may be apt when broadly used as it describes works which "offer a way to discuss alternate approaches to reality to that of Western philosophy" (Bowers 1) and that the "disruptive is suited to exploring … and transgressing … boundaries, whether the boundaries are ontological, political, geographical, or generic" (Zamara and Faris qtd. in Bowers 4).

However, given the complicated, contested history of the term, with its varied contexts from different periods, continents, and media, Bowers in her account of the development of the term admits, "many of the problems of definitions arise because of the frequent difficulty of placing texts into narrowly defined genres and categories" (29).[19] In this way the term can be "erroneously" linked to "fantastical writing" (25). In addition, if we categorise Hoban as a magical realist in company with Salman Rushdie and Gabriel Garcia Márquez, we will not find in his work the post-colonial aspect – a point on which the link between them breaks down.

In this section, I elaborate more fully on Hoban's skilful use of metafictional techniques in *The Medusa Frequency*, arguing that it is not just through magical realism that Hoban disrupts notions of the 'real' but also through his self-conscious exploration of myth and story and the processes of writing and language. The novel must be considered first and foremost as a complex and layered metafiction. Patricia Waugh has defined metafiction as:

> a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text. (Waugh 2)

Thus by concentrating solely on specific metafictional techniques, we can not only pursue Hoban's ultimate aim towards a dissolution of the 'real' and 'unreal' into a dynamic, fluid, self-perpetuating world of myth, but also investigate and discover the processes of fiction and narratology. Hoban uses metafictional techniques "simultaneously to create a fiction and to make a statement about the creation of that fiction" (Waugh 6). This works towards the realisations, encapsulated in Hoban's 'fictional philosophy' (*vis-á-vis* realism's

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[19] Dunwell, aware that there "is no theoretical consensus" (Dunwell 14) on definition, uses a particular definition from critic Angel Flores.

materialist, positivist and empirical assumptions of known reality beyond language), that "reality or history are provisional: no longer a world of eternal verities but a series of constructions, artifices, impermanent structures" (7) mediated by language, and Hoban's case in particular, by myth. Furthermore, through a reading of *The Medusa Frequency* as metafiction we realise Hoban's literary aim which provides a "better understanding of the fundamental structures of narrative" (9).

Whereas in my reading of *Kleinzeit* my focus was on the aspects of reality and language, in *The Medusa Frequency* I focus on the way in which it foregrounds its textual and constructed status through many typical metafictional techniques.[20] It is its peculiar mode of narration which best expresses the sustained exploration of narrative and the process of fusing of fiction and reality.

This facet of the novel can be broken down into three interrelated features as they each highlight various aspects of the creative process and the nexus between fiction and reality: the narrative mode as a self-begetting novel, the obvious presence of Herman Orff as narrator, and the nesting of different narrators within the novel. The novel incorporates a consistent investigation into the nature of narrative itself, where Hoban develops several images or metaphors of narrative and story which have been evident throughout his earlier fiction.

In terms of narrative style *The Medusa Frequency* may be defined as a 'self-begetting' novel.[21] It may be described as:

> an account usually first person, of the development of a character to a point at which he is able to take up and compose the novel we have just finished reading (Kellman qtd. in Waugh 14)

The "self-begetting novel", also called the "introverted novel" (Waugh 14), is dominated by the presence of the first-person narrator. Although this may not be a new literary phenomenon, "more modern textual self-preoccupation differs mostly in its explicitness, its intensity, and its own critical self-awareness" (Hutcheon 18). As in many of Hoban's

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[20] Patricia Waugh outlines many of these, including: explicit dramatization of the reader; Chinese-box structures; total breakdown of temporal and spatial organisation of narrative; infinite regress; dehumanization of character, parodic doubles, obtrusive proper names; self-reflexive images; critical discussions of the story within the story; continuous undermining of specific fictional conventions; use of popular genres; explicit parody of previous texts whether literary or non-literary (Waugh 21-22).

[21] Waugh qualifies this term in the light of the complexities and various definitions of this type of metafiction which range from terms such as the introverted novel, surfiction, the anti-novel, irrealism (Waugh 14). Thus it is also useful to consider that Robert Scholes in his book *Fabulation and Metafiction*, has a similar term which would describe *Kleinzeit*, *Riddley Walker* and *Pilgermann*: "a portrait of the artist, *Künstlerroman*, about a character in a book who is writing a book in which he is a character" (Scholes 29). See my *Riddley Walker* chapter where this aspect is discussed as a variation of Bildungsroman p 118-29.

novels, his main protagonists are author-characters both participating in and writing the text, while at the same time attempting to interpret, read and understand their bizarre experiences.

This is the basis for the densely layered and progressively self-reflexive characteristic features of the novel which can sustain many levels of irony, humour and implication. Capturing something of the dizzying multiplicity of frames of story within story which this type of fiction generates, Wilkie describes the movement of the novel towards the creation of Herman Orff's story of NEXO VOLLMA released on the backs of cereal boxes:

> This is the beginning of the story that comes toward the end of the story that has been telling us, the willing readers, how the story has been trying to find expression. (Wilkie 76)

The subject of *The Medusa Frequency* is concerned with Herman Orff recounting how the story he is about to tell is trying to get written. The text is made up of Herman Orff's attempts to understand his experiences through the art of writing. It is composed of fragments of fantastic dialogue with Orpheus, direct experiences relating visionary illuminations and also Herman Orff's own failed attempts at writing a play and the odd unfinished pieces of writing – for example, an attempt at a story about the Vermeer girl and a strange evocation of Eurydice.

In this mixture of actual, possible and impossible writings, Hoban blends the worlds of real and unreal, public and private, modern and mythic. He also enacts his belief that "writing is as much process as product" and that, given his aims "to write in such a way that the reader finds himself in a place where the unwordable happens off the page", one must accept that most of the time it does not happen as intended (*MUM* Foreword). Despite this pretence of disorganisation and fragmentation, Hoban deftly and ironically holds the novel together through self-conscious attention to the very process of writing and creation, weaving these various 'languages' together even as the novel "displays the process of [its] construction" (Waugh 4).

The notion of a 'self-begetting novel' explains the circularity and a paradox within the multiple time frames in *The Medusa Frequency*. The text begins at the end with Herman Orff relating to us the circumstance of Gösta Kraken's death. He retrospectively starts writing the novel as a means of understanding the past events, yet assumes he can relay the spontaneity of events as he experiences it:

> I'm going to tell about what happened last November and early December. Whether it'll be of any use to anybody I don't know but I've been getting it all down on paper as it happened so here it is ... (*MF* 7)

Attempting to find a didactic purpose for his book, Herman Orff also uses the narrative form to make sense of and describe his experience of inspiration and passage of growth towards renewed creativity. At the end he presents the book as a guide or handbook for all authors in difficulty:

> I feel that way about these pages: I hope that this little volume may be a *vade mecum* not so much for the specialist as for others like me – the general struggler and straggler, the person for whom the whole sweep of consciousness is often too much. (134)

Implicitly collapsing the distinction between creation and criticism, the use of an over-intrusive narrator, like Herman Orff, "explicitly and overtly lays bare" the novel's own "condition of artifice" and "consistently displays its conventionality" (Waugh 4-6). Thus Herman Orff is an extremely self-aware and visibly inventive narrator often inserting direct authorial comment, criticism and obvious involvement in his work. This draws attention to the text's production and raises interesting metafictional concerns – for instance the gap between the experiencing consciousness and the controlling, organising or authorial consciousness. Herman Orff's preparatory comments justifying the novel shatter the possibility of verisimilitude or faithful contemporaneous transposition of experience "as it happened" (*MF* 7). The specific use of the self-conscious narrator as author of the very text we read has other effects which tie in with Hoban's overall concerns with language and reality.

Firstly, through Herman Orff's efforts to write the novel and answer the question "Is there a story of me?" (*MF* 46), Hoban aligns himself with other metafictional writers in method for whom "the most fundamental assumption is that composing a novel is basically no different from composing or constructing one's 'reality'" (Waugh 24).

Secondly, in a similar way that the process of naming works to foreground the character's role in the novel as well as underscore his/her textual nature, the interruption and repeated insertion of the narrator in the text, especially when unreliable or patently creating, suggests the fictionality of the character itself. Waugh writes:

> Through continuous narrative intrusion, the reader is reminded that not only do characters verbally construct their own realities; they are themselves verbal constructions; *words* not *beings*. (26)

Furthermore, the effect of such a technique reveals Hoban's realisation of the ubiquity and essential function of story in shaping and constructing our reality and our identity. Linda Hutcheon writes that novels "which show a character looking at – that is, creating – the novelistic world, mime the mind's ordering process of coding and decoding, ciphering and deciphering" (Hutcheon 90). This links directly to Hoban's belief that we *are* story and fiction and everything is language (*MUM* 146).

Thirdly, by focussing self-consciously on the process of narration, Hoban also expresses an ambivalence and awareness of the effect of story as it constructs reality but also displaces and fails to capture lived experience. At one point Herman Orff realises the futility and limited nature of autobiographical writing or of translating experience into language and especially story. After trying to write a fictional account of his passionate night with Melanie Falsepercy, Hermann Orff notes:

> Suddenly the idea of turning one's experience into a story seemed not only bizarre but perverted; the idea of such a thing as page one seemed at the very least a monstrous vanity. Where was the beginning of anything, how could I draw a line through endless cause and effect and say, 'Here is page one'? Well of course either one was a storyteller or one wasn't, and it looked as if I wasn't – all I could do was describe phenomena as I experienced them. (*MF* 76)

Apart from a disgust at the self-indulgent nature of writing about oneself, the main concern Herman Orff expresses is the reductive linearity of narrative given the myriad complexities of human experience. While "fictions are indeed man's way of dealing with the discrete brute facts of chaotic reality" and an author necessarily attempts to construct "ordered worlds" through "mental structures which humanize time by giving it the form of narrative plots" (Hutcheon 88), Hoban suggests the limitations of narrative. Creation and its objects of creation are both part of a continual process.

In *The Medusa Frequency* we are in effect actually reading a novel, a work of fiction that describes Herman Orff in the hazardous process of translating his own lived 'real' experience or reality into fiction in the form of this very story or narrative. However, by stressing the fictional act itself, the fundamental distinctions between reality and fiction are being purposely blurred – so much so that they are rendered fluid and entwined in a single process of creation. Thus a simple metafictional technique of foregrounding the insecure hyper-conscious author and the processes of authorship becomes a way for Hoban to engage in both ontological questions concerning the nature and existence of reality mediated through language, and epistemological questions concerned with the problems of how we know this reality if it is mediated language and story.

The technique of foregrounding the narrator is amplified and developed through multiple narration within the text. *The Medusa Frequency* is made up of a series of nested narrators and artists of various kinds. As all sorts of characters jostle and compete for fictional space and their own voice, there is also a proliferation of references to different types of media and modes of literature. *The Medusa Frequency* embraces the visual worlds of film, art and the graphic novel and also evokes music and sound, poetry, drama, and narrative prose. This suggests the notion that the very nature of reality is "artifice, a web of interdependent semiotic systems" (Waugh 9). Through this embedding of different narrators all obsessed with Orpheus and attempting to re-tell and translate the myth, Hoban constructs layers of story within story. Not only does this highlight the shifting and infinitely variable nature of story and language, but Hoban also thereby plays with and continually displaces the 'reality frame' of the text.

The most important vehicle of the nested narration is the story told by the head of Orpheus. Dunwell, correctly suggesting that *The Medusa Frequency* explores the theme of reality and fantasy, has argued that the invasion of the mythical head of Orpheus into Herman Orff's everyday world is a form of magical realism (Dunwell 12-17). Thus, she suggests that Herman Orff's strange conversations with the head of Orpheus fulfil several conditions or characteristics of magical realism. Firstly, there is "the introduction of supernatural events into the narrative in such a way that they are accepted without disbelief by the characters" (15); secondly, that the "fantastic be portrayed as objectively real" (15); and thirdly that magical realism is "often episodic in nature, occurring in short bursts of alternate perception" (16). This narrative method, Dunwell argues, "naturalises the bizarre" and she describes *The Medusa Frequency* being made up of a

> highly complex series of games in which the 'real' is played off against the 'fantastic'; [so that] Herman Orff's apparently predictable, intelligible universe is gradually dissolved into one where the usual categories no longer have any validity. (Dunwell 13)

However, treating Hoban's use of the Orpheus myth as an intelligent and subtle metafictional technique provides a more nuanced understanding of his literary method.

Firstly, Orpheus exhibits Hoban's typical narrator's self-consciousness and reflexive self-awareness of writing and language which is manifest through critical commentary within the story, playful parody and inversion of the traditional mythical elements and a keen interest in the limits of narrative. Motivated by the need for catharsis and purgation, Orpheus is single-mindedly focussed on telling *his* story while being aware

of both his inability to do so and difficulty of accomplishing a faithful translation. Orpheus warns Herman Orff, who had "expected the story to be finished in one telling" (*MF* 41), and openly admits his inept unreliability:

> 'I'm not very sure of anything; I may be lying or I may even be making it up as I go along. I was a good musician but I'm not reliable in any other way. Sometimes I can't make the distinction between how things seemed and how they actually were.' (36)

Orpheus' narration is pervaded by an evasive scepticism, a mordant awareness of inevitability and tangled self-consciousness that frustrates Herman Orff and provides the reader with a typically humorous and circuitous form of narrative. While expressing the natural problem of interpretation of experience from a single perspective where appearance and reality may be confused, the use of the uncertain and doubtful narrator calls into question the status of his (and hence all) narrative. This also self-reflexively parodies and mirrors our own act of reading and deciphering meaning from the text while suggesting that this is in fact how we ourselves go about the daily process of constructing our identities and life narratives in a world immersed in multiple levels of reality.

Secondly, Orpheus's narrative is circular, fragmented, repetitive and endlessly varied. Just as Herman Orff struggles to "draw a line through endless cause and effect" and say, "Here is page one" (*MF* 76) so Orpheus also finds it impossible to construct a linear narrative of beginning, middle and end. He says:

> 'My story is not a sequence of events like knots on a string,' said the head; 'I could have started with the loss of Eurydice and ended with the killing of the tortoise – all of it happens at once and goes on happening; all of it is happening now and any part of it contains the whole of it, the pictures needn't be looked at in any particular order.' (39)

Encapsulating another function of metafictional comment on narrative, this circularity of narrative engages in "explicit discussion of the arbitrary nature of beginnings, of boundaries" (Waugh 29). More importantly, however, here as in *Pilgermann*, Hoban locates the genesis and origin of myth and story in a timeless present. This can be apprehended through quasi-mystical illuminations, a "state of aroused language response" (*MUM* 137). It also is revealed with the dissolution of the 'limited-reality consensus', which opens and widens our habitual modes of perception to receive messages, patterns, images and stories from a hidden mythic realm. Orpheus' story, made up of various parts and fragments, each containing the imprint or trace of the whole,

evolves and revolves from a fluctuating unattainable centre. Orpheus becomes the story itself and cannot "cease to be": he is "the response that never dies" and despite his continual and multiple manifestations "there is no picture" for what he is (*MF* 33). Hence the artists engrossed by Orpheus try to capture Orpheus in their different creative forms – music (Istvan Fallok), film (Gösta Kraken) and words (Herman Orff) – and try collaborating for "Mythos Films" on a piece entitled "*The Tale Retold*" (104). The head realises the duplicitous and diverse nature of story and hints at the endless production and re-production of his story:

> 'The story is different every time,' said the head, 'and every time there are difficulties – I always need help with it and I'm always afraid it won't go all the way to the end.'
> 'Different each time. How can that be?'
> 'How can it not be? A story is a thing that changes as it finds new perceptions, new ideas.' (100-101)

Orpheus articulates Hoban's continued exploration of the quasi-mystical origins of narrative by using several of his recurring metafictional images of story: narrative as knots on a string (39); stories and names as little moments (like buoys) with "lines drawn before and after" floating within an endless, mysterious, fluctuating sea of measureless and limitless being personified as Eurydice (48); stories as "black peaks rising from a white obscurity" (117); and as "patterns, certain arrangements of energy from which events and probabilities emerge" (117).[22]

Finally, Orpheus' narration within *The Medusa Frequency* delineates Hoban's complex use of framing. The narration reveals a complex series of embedded frames, worlds within worlds, which all act together to disturb, disrupt and defamiliarise the reader's conceptions of real and unreal. Waugh, underlining the fluidity between reality and fiction, writes:

> Contemporary metafiction draws attention to the fact that life, as well as novels, is constructed through frames and that it is finally impossible to know where one frame ends and another begins. (Waugh 28)

Patricia Waugh uses the *OED* definition of frame as a "construction, constitution, building; established order, plan, system ... underlying support or essential substructure of anything" combined with Erving Goffman's ideas of framing in his book *Frame Analysis* (28). More specifically "overt frames involve a confusion of ontological levels

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[22] For discussion of this aspect of Hoban's metafictional method see my chapter on *Pilgermann* p 208-10.

through the incorporation of visions, dreams, hallucinatory states and pictorial representations which are finally indistinct from the apparently real" (31).

Some of the most startling examples of these in the novel include Herman Orff's EEG experiment, which dissolves the boundaries between consciousness, memory and reality and infuses: the everyday with mythic timelessness, Herman Orff's dialogue and writings with the Kraken, the conversation between Herman Orff and Melanie Falsepercy which comments on the dreamlike quality of Rousseau's 'Sleeping Gipsy', and, most astoundingly, the night journey to The Hague led by the call of the Vermeer girl and through which Herman Orff interacts with several paintings. An especially obvious fusing is the emergence of Medusa from Frans Post's painting (*MF* 89-90).

There is also a subtle interplay between multiple narrative frames which progressively move towards a total breakdown and fluidity between frames. The main 'reality' frame is the story Herman Orff is telling us which situates the reader in the common sense world of everyday normal activity. The second most obvious frame is the disturbing presence of Orpheus as the head tells his story. The Orpheus story, indicative of the transfixing power of the mythic and fantastic, is the main device by which the reality frame is destabilised. Orpheus' story itself contains further levels of frames as it is embedded with other stories and reported dialogue from Hermes, Eurydice and so on.

The use of Orpheus' story within the text constitutes what Waugh has termed a "major frame-break" which sets out to "*expose* the ontological distinctiveness of the real and the fictional world" and "ultimately to *destroy* the illusion of reality" (Waugh 32). The frame break makes the reader aware of the process of fiction and story-telling while also revealing the fragility of our distinctions between reality and fiction until, finally, neither is clearly distinguishable. For Hoban, these frame breaks are the primary means by which the influence of fiction on reality is enacted while they also reveal the interpenetration and fluidity of myth and reality.

Perhaps the best example of this is through a series of complex alternations between frames as the novel tracks the movements between imbricate layers of reality, fiction and myth. The first movement, already embedded in the main fictional frame, encompasses Orpheus' narration of his passage from the nameless to the mythic while *also* suggesting a return from the mythic to the banal and ordinary. Again Hoban conceives of being and identity (as well as stories) in a vacillating dialectic between poles: mythic and everyday. Thus Orpheus speaks of his fear of stories, as "they're waiting to happen, they crouch like hungry beasts impatient for their day" (*MF* 69). This process

hinges on the question of naming and it is clear that from the name stems narrative determinacy (see Dunwell 38-39). This enchainment or 'displacement' of identity into narrative implies a loss of freedom and individuality as one becomes an endlessly recurring collective archetype. As with *Kleinzeit*'s Orpheus, it also reflects the failure of his desire to remain "in the inside of things" or within the sacred Orphic space with Eurydice (*K* 148) and implicitly heralds his loss of a blissful edenic intimacy. The exchange between Aristaeus and Orpheus serves to illustrate this process:

> "'My name is Orpheus," I said. Still he seemed to be listening for something else.
> "What are you listening for now?" I said.
> "'The olive trees whisper," he said. "I always listen. You are the one who is Orpheus."
> "'I've just told you that."
> "'Not just your name," he said, "You're going to do it, you're going to be Orpheus."
> "'What else can I be?'
> "'You are the story of yourself," he said. With his finger he traced figures in the air.
> "'What's that you're doing?" I said.
> "'Your name. You are the story of Orpheus." "'How can I be a story? I'm a man, a live person."
> "'You're a story."
> "'Not a story," I said. I began to run. (38-39)

Orpheus tells of the very process himself when he meets and falls in love with Eurydice and becomes part of the inexorable mythic pattern which gives birth to the archetype. Orpheus begins his tale as a mundane ordinary 'live' person but is soon named, concretised and chained to the Orphic action cycle. However, he does suggest that there are gaps in his knowledge and memory where there is no story and also that he inevitably – and ironically, given the mythic status of the hero – lapses back into the banal and mundane. Thus, after losing Eurydice because he had "stopped perceiving her", she simply "went to live with Aristaeus" (118): with the bathos and melancholic resignation of a retired hero, Orpheus disregards his death and downheartedly tells Herman Orff that "as far as I'm concerned the personal story of me came to an end when Eurydice moved in with Aristaeus and both of us were swallowed up by the commonplace" (12). As such Blanchot notes "He is Orpheus only in the song: he cannot have any relation to Eurydice except within the hymn" (Blanchot 172).

For Hermann Orff there is a dramatic influence of the story on his world of everyday reality. In the same way that Orpheus gets swallowed up by the archetypal story, so the 'real' world of Herman Orff gets subsumed in a mythical pattern of Orpheus-

Eurydice. Thus "no sooner is Orpheus caught up in the 'story of himself', than Herman Orff feels a similar horror of the same thing overcoming him" (Dunwell 39). Not only is Luise a Eurydice figure, but in a marvellous ironic conversation between Melanie Falsepercy and Herman Orff, Hoban spins, inverts and fuses the frames of reality and myth together. Rather than just viewing it as an instance of magical realism, the conversation can be fully appreciated with an understanding of Hoban's dexterity and playful metafictional self-awareness. After catching Herman Orff talking to the cabbage/head of Orpheus, Melanie Falsepercy asks:

> '… What are you going to do with that cabbage?'
> 'I don't know. Maybe I don't have to think about it just now.'
> 'Maybe after I leave it'll be the head of Orpheus again.'
> 'I can't say what it'll do, we haven't known each other that long.'
> 'You and the cabbage or you and I?'
> 'The head of Orpheus and I.'
> 'I shouldn't like to come between you.'
> 'I think we are all in this together, you and I and the head of Orpheus.'
> 'In what?'
> I was about to say, 'This story,' then I decided not to. 'I don't know.'
> 'For a moment I thought you were going to say, "This story." I'm glad you didn't.'
> 'So am I.' (*MF* 74)

Although dialogue may be a weakness in Hoban's writing –in this novel especially we often lose track of who is speaking in such long exchanges – what is so ingenious and clever about this example is its overarching metafictional implications. Given its place in the novel, it complements and parallels a very similar conversation that Orpheus has with Eurydice at the beginning of the same chapter. Also apparent – perhaps the confusion of speaker maximises this – is the inversion of and slippage of real and unreal. There is subtle subtext between the two characters, as well as ironic meaning between the reader and Hoban as author. What the two characters are unaware of is their place in the becoming of the story of themselves and the fact that as they have this very conversation, hesitating about the label 'this story', the reader realises the implication that they have just become swallowed up by another crouching beastie: they become another variation of the story of Orpheus and Eurydice and are also subsumed in the story of the novel which we are reading.

Here Hoban's overall aim in *The Medusa Frequency* is, as Dunwell justly notes, to blur the "distinctions between reality and fantasy" and "question the conventional categorisation of reality" so that there is the final "realisation that Orff is just as much a

fabricated character in the story of his own life as Orpheus is a character in an ancient myth" (Dunwell 13). However, I would contend that Hoban achieves this primarily through the narrative techniques and use of multiple frames akin to metafiction rather than through magical realism.

Ultimately, through the metafictional interplay of frames and the interfusion of a fantastic world at the expense of 'limited-reality consensus', Hoban is exploring the mythic basis of reality and of fiction. Although writing about Borges (with whom, despite differences, Hoban has an affinity) Robert Scholes describes a process which seems relevant to *The Medusa Frequency*:

> Thus reality is a thing which fades into mythology with the passage of time. Or rather, most of reality fades into obscurity, and what endures is transformed into mythology. Truth vanishes. Fiction endures if it partakes of that reality beyond reality, which enables it to survive as myth. (Scholes 16)

If myth has been described as a "cosmic map of the intersecting territories of reality and fantasy" (Segal vol. 3 280) then the overarching purpose of this interplay between real and unreal in *The Medusa Frequency* (as manifested in metafictional games) is to explore the boundary between myth and reality. Hoban moves fluidly between metafictional techniques which destabilise the distinctions between reality and unreality to expose and "lay bare the magical nerve in apparently everyday phenomena" (281). His primary concern in all his fiction, but especially in *The Medusa Frequency*, is to "peel back the cover from ostensibly 'real' experience, and progress from there to the reality of ostensibly mythic experience" (281). Not unlike the effect of Hindu myths of maya and the illusory nature of existence, the succinct Zen koan,[23] and other stories about dreams and myths, *The Medusa Frequency* seeks to "deliberately obfuscate the understructure of common sense in such a way as to leave the reader uncertain which is the 'real' level" (285). Hoban's ultimate project in using myth is to show that, in O'Flaherty's words, "myth arises out of reality and has an effect on reality, there can be no particular starting point or end point: it is a cycle" (289). Finally it opens us to the realisation that:

> Mythic events seem to happen more often to people who believe in the mythic dimension, who seek it out and allow it to break in on them; or perhaps people who live through many such events become converted, even against their own common sense, to a belief in the reality of myth. Though the myth does not tell us what to do in such situations, it does at least enable us to recognize them, to value them and ultimately, as Rilke says, to let them change our lives. (299)

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[23] Hoban's favourite is Chang Tsu's dream of the butterfly. It is the epigram to *Amaryllis Night and Day* which itself concerns the fluidity of dream and reality.

Furthermore, by including the "life of ideas and half-ideas, of glimmerings and flashes and indescribable atmospheres of the mind" (*MUM* 156), Hoban stresses the underlying theme of this section: that of the magical effect of art on reality and their intimate relationship in the world of myth and story. Thus, emphasising the profound influence this realm has on healing our fractured and disenchanted modern identity, Hoban writes: "That's how art affects life; we use it to be more what we are and to become what is in us wanting us to become it" (*MUM* 156).

CHAPTER THREE

Riddley Walker: De-creation and Re-creation

Riddley Walker is regarded as Russell Hoban's most outstanding literary achievement, earning him critical acclaim and cult status. In his Introduction to the Twentieth-Anniversary Edition, Will Self argues that "*Riddley Walker* is still alive and kicking" (*RW* vi). Countering possible claims that the novel might "become dated" due to the "nuclear holocaust angle" and the "inherent problems of futuristic fiction", Self continues,

> *Riddley Walker* isn't out of date at all. On the contrary, it reads as fresh and vivid today as it has since it was first published. My hunch is that given the book's particular (and near unique) attributes, this extent of survival indicates that it will stride on further into the future and become that most unfashionable of things, a classic. (vi-vii)

The novel is relevant for a post-Cold War, twenty-first century society in which nuclear annihilation remains an ominous threat as past disasters – Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Chernobyl – remain etched in the collective consciousness and the dangers of nuclear proliferation continue to trouble international politics.

Since every "generation gets the end-of-the-world anxiety it deserves; it used to be transcendental, then it became elemental, and *now it's environmental*" (vi; emphasis added) *Riddley Walker* is adaptable and remains deeply resonant. The novel portrays the mythic, universal dimension of the human condition and performs the enduring work of myths which are "necessary imaginings, exemplary stories which help our species to make sense of its place in the world" (Bate 25). *Riddley Walker*'s vivid expression of the bleak outcome of nuclear fallout is fundamentally part of a larger project in which it becomes "a book about the delusion of progress, a book about the confused collective dream that humanity terms 'history', a book about what consciousness might be" (*RW* vii).

In this chapter I situate the various critical responses to the novel in terms of Hoban's mythopoeic style. Drawing on Branscomb's Jungian reading, I show how *Riddley Walker* is another adaptation of the quest for self-knowledge, specifically through initiation. In the second section, I concentrate on the mythical aspects of the novel and in particular focus on the myths as expressions of humanity's fall from a 'state of nature' (see Bate 31) with which Hoban uses to critique modernity. Resurrecting a primitive Mother Goddess mythology and a fertility quest myth, Hoban seeks to redress and

rebalance the negative effects of human progress. In this way, I hope to supplement and corroborate the views of Nancy Dew Taylor and Lara Dunwell who see *Riddley Walker* not simply as a doomsday novel of pessimism and despair, but one which offers some hope, placing value in the role of art and myth to remember imaginatively and so to reconnect with a regenerative source.

Riddley Walker not only portrays the catastrophic effects of nuclear fallout on civilisation by imagining its regression into a Neolithic culture which struggles to progress beyond its desperately harsh material and social conditions, but it also reflects this cataclysmic event within the very language and form of the novel. While creating a strange, hostile world with lost traces of a ruined civilisation in which "the lines of communication have been tangled by time and by radiation" (Dowling 181), Hoban's novel in Riddley's own speech patterns vividly "encapsulates a place and a time and a world-view" (Myers n.pag.) – that of a post-nuclear holocaust. Dipple writes:

> In creating a world utterly separated from ours and by coding or even encrypting its meaning, Hoban allows himself formidable access to ways of exploring the various geneses of fiction. From beginning to end of its experimental procedure, *Riddley Walker* questions the major issues of reality and knowledge within any civilisation (text) as it gropes toward expression and/or meaning. (Dipple 171)

The striking and inventive language of the novel has drawn the most critical attention. Various aspects have been discussed: the general stylistic features (see Maynor and Patteson); mysticism (see Lake); the language as related to the nuclear theme (see Porter); and poststructuralist implications (see Schwenger, Dunwell and Dowling). I seek to amalgamate and integrate these approaches into a further exploration of Hoban's overall 'fictional philosophy' and metafictional style, commenting on 'Riddleyspeak', the problems of interpretation, and implications for the reader. Overall, I will emphasise Hoban's uniqueness as a writer. While Hoban clearly suggests that the nuclear disaster vividly reflects the fragmenting and disintegrating aspects of the postmodern condition, he still retains a desire for wholeness, wisdom and ultimate values.

I

Individuation as initiation

In *Riddley Walker,* the protagonist-narrator is a twelve-year-old boy who lives in a distant future world devastated by the effects of a nuclear bomb. Written by himself in his own form of 'Riddleyspeak', the narrative charts Riddley Walker's adventures towards enlightenment in a bildungsroman of "tryl narrer" (*RW* 119).[1] Thus *Riddley Walker* is a "novel of formation" or "novel of education", whose subject is

> the development of the protagonist's mind and character, in the passage from childhood through varied experiences – and usually through a spiritual crisis – into maturity and the recognition of his or her identity and role in the world. (Abrams 120)

Furthermore, *Riddley Walker*, with its central hero's role as a shaman-artist and the novel's preoccupation with story-telling, may be classed as a "Künstlerroman" – an artist novel which "represents the growth of the novelist or other artist into the stage of maturity that signalizes the recognition of artistic destiny and mastery of artistic craft" (120).

In the course of his narrative, Riddley Walker gradually matures and grows into adulthood. In this coming-of-age story he achieves self-knowledge in the manner of Jung's passage of individuation. Through his journey of self-discovery, Riddley strives for wholeness, integrating the discordant elements (male and female, individual and collective, conscious and unconscious, death instinct and love instinct) of the psyche. In this specific quest for individuation, best described as "a process by which a person becomes a psychological 'in-dividual,' that is, a separate indivisible unity or 'whole'" (Ulanov 71), Riddley learns to think, feel and act with independence and resilience while realising his "innermost uniqueness" (71). Thus, this exemplifies individuation as "becoming one's own self, as differentiated from having only a collective identity, as a member of a certain family, or group of people, or nation" (71).

As with the other individuation patterns examined in previous chapters, Riddley Walker's archetypal journey resembles Campbell's hero monomyth. Like Kleinzeit and Herman Orff, Riddley Walker is a little hero who displays remarkable courage and dignity in embracing the suffering and difficulties of existence without following the traditional warrior-hero ethic. Riddley Walker's individuation is reflected in many ways: through his newfound role as 'connexion man'; through the development of Riddley's relationship

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[1] In 'Riddleyspeak' the word translates as 'trial and error' but has connotations of scientific experimentation and the dangers of the narrow path towards enlightenment.

with the pack of dangerous wild dogs that roam the desolate landscape; through the realisation of the complexity of his identity; through various formative relationships with others, especially Lorna and Lissener; through his understanding of his position in relation to the political and social forces that encroach on his sense of self; and through a cosmic and religious insight he acquires into the nature of power and the kind of knowledge that is manifested in an epiphany.

The novel opens on his naming day. According to his tribe's tradition, the first stage of his initiation into adulthood is performed through a ritual killing. Riddley describes the death as he "gone front spear and kilt a wyld boar" (*RW* 1) with a restless note of bathos and cynical formality. In an unheroic action marked with a sense of fate and suffering Riddley merely does what is "reqwyrt" (1). Unimpressed by the size and condition of the pig – "he wernt all that big plus he lookit poorly" (1) – Riddley learns a harsh lesson about the cycles of the natural world: "Your tern now my tern later" (1). The act signals Riddley's difference and special nature, expressing his dissatisfaction and an implicit yearning to explore beyond the narrow conventions of his group. He feels the "woal thing fealt just that little bit stupid" (1). Riddley soon embarks on his journey, "asserting his individuality" and striking "out alone to seek the answers to the riddles that confuse him" (Dew Taylor 27).[2]

Riddley's "Call to Adventure" (Campbell 30) is described with intriguing mystery. The coincidence of several significant events convinces Riddley that there is an unknown force at work in his life and this sparks off his retracing of the 'Fools Circel' towards Cambry. This signals the "separation of the young man from his society" (Branscomb 34).

Firstly, Riddley talks with Lorna, his mistress and mentor. Not only does Lorna mark the beginning of Riddley's passage into manhood, which is in Hoban's fiction usually "precipitated by a sexual experience with a woman" (Dunwell 57), but she articulates for him strange feelings he has had in his mind of a presence that seems beyond language: it is "some kynd of thing" that "aint us but yet its in us" and is "looking thu our eye hoals" (6-7). This fascination with and attraction to the idea that "I ben all ways thinking on that thing in us what thinks us but it dont think like us" and the notion that "Our woal life is a idear" motivates him to travel, collect and record myths and write his own story.

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[2] In order to avoid confusion between Charles Taylor and Nancy Dew Taylor, I include her full name in parenthetical references.

Next is the accidental death of Riddley's father in a digging accident as the men try to haul out a remnant of the distant civilized past. The dark description of the straining treadwheel crane as it creaked with "the roap gone iron hard and the girt big thing coming up out of the muck all black and rottin unner the grey sky" (10) sets an ominous scene. The death is presaged by the call of a crow beckoning the weight to fall. As a signal of loss and a harbinger of change it is a harrowing instance of an omen prefiguring the hero's journey. Riddley feels acutely his own responsibility and complicity in his father's death, desperately crying,

> 'It wernt Widders Dump done it to him it wer me I los my footing and I pult you with me. It wer me made the woal of us lose our perchis.' (11)

Such a disturbing event is the catalyst in the individuation process. The "conscious coming-to-terms with one's own inner center (psychic nucleus) or Self – generally begins with a wounding of the personality and the suffering that accompanies it" (Jung, *Man and his Symbols* 169). Thus, the hero's quest is often away from loss and discord through a process of atonement and expiation towards self-realisation, reconciliation and understanding. Dowling observes that Riddley's "pilgrimage is not so much towards Cambry as away from the site of his father's death" (Dowling 186).

On their way home, the digging party find out that a baby has also mysteriously died. As a symbol it is related to Hoban's notion of the world-child, in this instance representing Riddley's own loss of innocence. This progression from innocence toward experience is made clear in the sacrifice of the leader dog of the wild pack to Riddley. It is a moment of dreamlike entrancement and timelessness which leaves Riddley profoundly affected as "tho every thing begun to look diffrent" (*RW* 14). As Riddley stands ready with his spear, the male dog runs onto his spear. In a description echoing the formative image of the lion and chariot wheel in *The Lion of Boaz-Jachin and Jachin-Boaz*, Riddley observes that

> It wer mor like he ben running for ever in 1 place not moving on jus getting bigger bigger til he wer big a nuff to be in front of me with his face all rinkelt back from his teef. (13)

At this moment the face of his father, the boar of his naming day, and the dog's face "flickert to gether" (13) and are connected in a visionary moment of significance. Jung describes the "meaningful coincidence between psychic and physical events" as *synchronicity*. It reveals hidden patterns in apparently random chance events and

meaningfully unites unconscious and conscious knowledge of psychic and physical realities (Stein 210).[3] The coincidence disturbs and puzzles Riddley. He asks others to help him find their import. Among the interpretations that people sympathetically give is the advice that Riddley begin to make his own decisions about the meaning of his life by taking over his father's role as 'connexion man'. Reckman Bessup tells Riddley to trust his own instincts and explore his own abilities:

> 'You said it I dint. I dont say no farther you best tel your own self on from there. No use asking other peopl they dont know no moren you do. Now your dads gone youwl be connexion man at How Fents people wil be asking you instead of you asking them. You bes start putting things to gether for your self you aint a kid no mor.' (*RW* 14)

Thus, a major part of Riddley's development is to gain confidence as a connexion man. This is a shaman figure in the tribe described as "part of local government and part priest" and whose job is "to explain the deeper meaning behind apparently random events" ("Connexion man," *Riddley Walker Annotations Online*). In a ritual ceremony, in which an 'E' is imprinted on his belly, Riddley is initiated into the "privileged 'clergy'" of the connexion men whose social function is to "interpret the meanings hidden in the sacred reenactments of the Eusa myth" (Mustazza 20). This role means Riddley "must set himself apart from the community while serving it" (20).

Riddley must first attain a measure of existential freedom in a harsh primitive world. Alone and "sturgling" with very little guidance and help, Riddley finds himself caught between the machinations of Goodparley and the other political figures and the hidden, paradoxical truth of 'the idea of himself' that he is compelled to express. In his quest, Riddley is forced to "tel his self" by finding significances in apparently meaningless events, collecting stories and trying to figure out the motives and allegiances of various characters on his way to the "senter" Cambry (the old Canterbury). Riddley's role as connexion man is an important means for Hoban to express the way we all try to piece together and construct an identity and a coherent meaningful pattern in our lives.

Riddley matures in the manner of a conventional novel of education: he gradually learns lessons through the "blyps and syns" as well as through the process of recording,

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[3] Hoban reveals his affinity to this very idea in a later novel, *Her Name was Lola*, and develops it for his own purpose in order to assert that not only are events connected but they are experienced together collectively in one cosmic mind which transcends individual identity and history: "Synchronicity! Nobody owns the passing moment. It isn't exclusively yours or anyone else's. This very moment (already past) as you read these words is shared by every creature living and dead, by every stone and leaf and door, by the trackless seas, the deeps of space, and whatever vast and trunkless legs of stone may be standing out in the desert" (*HNWL* 131). The passing allusion to Shelley's "Ozymandias" echoes the theme of a broken and shattered civilization.

decoding and "terpitation" of the myths and legends he discovers (Dew Taylor 31). In becoming the hero of his own story (which is the very subject and enactment of the narrative) Riddley accentuates his rebellious outsider status, his willingness to take risks, to escape his "fents" society and go "roading" and exploring – becoming in the process what Goodparley calls a "mover" and a "happener" (*RW* 118). Nancy Dew Taylor argues:

> Riddley is also a picaresque saint. He is the creative rogue and law-breaker who strives to find meaning in a broken, seemingly hopeless world … Riddley manages to eke out some sense of meaning, of purpose, for the life of the individual, despite the conditions in which that individual lives. (Dew Taylor 30)

Riddley is on the margins of his society, learning to see in new ways. This is most apparent with the intimate and sympathetic connection he has with the dogs. After the sacrifice by the old leader, the strange bond is strengthened and deepened when Riddley makes his break from the "fents peopl" and begins "Running oansome with them dogs" (*RW* 74). Riddley gains respect for their loyalty, intelligence, alertness, and natural ability in the wilderness. He is amazed that it "wer like magic how 1 minum they wernt there and the nex they wer it wer like they come out of no where" (74).

On the road the dogs follow, guide and protect him. With Hoban's typical touch of fusing modern computer or technological jargon with archaic forms of expression, he describes Riddley as able to communicate with them, noticing that the black leader "cernly had some program he wernt jus randeming" (74). The dogs have "1st knowing" (18) and initiate Riddley into this vital shamanic knowledge, thereby fostering a spiritual link with the animal kingdom. The dogs, a liminal pack skirting the boundaries between human civilisation and the wilderness, are a perfect totem for Riddley as he wanders on the margins of a fallen and destroyed civilization, attempting to reconnect with the natural world (and as argued later, to become an agent of renewal in the wasteland). In the more intense moments of Riddley's mystical and visionary experience at Cambry, the dogs' bizarre behaviour of standing and howling on two legs provides a 'tribal' fulfillment of the rumours of a dog people.

Here Riddley fits the classic role of the heroic shaman. The shaman bravely travels into strange and dangerous territory, whether that is psychic and spiritual, or, in a real physical sense, on pilgrimages and fasts. Having been separated from the order and habits of the society, the shaman figure is transformed, and returns with a special knowledge and message for his tribe. Hoban also reveals this interest in shamanism

through his description of another character, William G. in *Turtle Diary*, who quotes Mircea Eliade:

> Eliade says in his book on shamanism:
>
> > In the beginning, that is, in mythical times, man lived at peace with the animals and understood their speech. It was not until after a primordial catastrophe, comparable to the 'Fall' of Biblical tradition, that man became what he is today – mortal, sexed, obliged to work to feed himself, and at enmity with the animals. 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 so many signs that the shaman has re-established the 'paradisal' situation lost at the dawn of time. (*TD* 72)

Riddley becomes part of the pack: he begins to respond and react like the animals and is drawn towards Cambry with a keen animal instinct:

> The black leader wer looking the same way I wer. I movit my head and han a little like you wud out foraging and giving some 1 the syn to move up closer. That dogd all ready be come so much like regler crowd I jus done it without thinking. No soonerd I give the syn nor off he gone like we ben foraging to gether our woal lives. (*RW* 102)

At one point Riddley questions the true nature of the black dog. While trying to connect with him, he "wunnert what the name of him myt be" (85). Uncertain of how to address the dog, Riddley attempts to go beyond language in order to understand the black leader. By establishing a non-linguistic connection with the animal, Riddley is "preparing for his ecstasy" and becomes open to different modes of being and communication. If language is the defining characteristic of human beings, Riddley undergoes a dramatic journey to abolish the human condition. In Eliade's words, he is trying to rekindle some form of "friendship with animals" and "knowledge of their language" which does not involve the dangers of linguistic ownership and abstraction. Riddley concludes that the dog is like the nameless vital presence of phenomena in the natural world. Despite being beyond human attempts to define and control through language, the presence of the dogs remains powerfully magical, fascinating, and engaging. Riddley writes:

> I knowit he dint have no name the other dogs callt him by nor I wunt try to put no name to him no moren Iwd take it on me to name the litening or the sea. I thot his name myt be a fraction of the nite or the numbers of the black wind or the hisper of the rain. A name you myt play on boans or reckon up in scratches on a stoan. (85)

Openness and willingness to experience the unknown is an essential lesson Riddley learns through his adventures. In this respect Lissener, a deformed, blind member of the Eusa tribe who has suffered genetic disorders caused by radiation from the nuclear blast, is another important tutelary figure. Through a sympathetic and close attachment, Riddley's "blyn moon brother" (97) provides Riddley with support and guidance during his walk through his personal unconscious. This aspect is confirmed if one considers Lissener's blindness as indicative of prophetic wisdom associated with inner knowledge and experience through suffering. As such he is linked to other traditionally blind teachers: Homer, Tiresias, and even the tragic figures in Shakespeare's *King Lear*.[4] Branscomb describes Lissener as Riddley's "Jungian shadow" or the "repressed part of his own personality which he must recognize as part of himself" (Branscomb 34). Lissener as the Ardship of Cambry is also part of a wider web of interconnected doubles and linked characters. As emanations of Jung's wise old man, and the idea of a double self, the figures of Lissener, Granser and Goodparley are enmeshed together in Riddley's process of individuation. The cyclical pattern which shows the characters to be entwined in relationships of power and dependence is characterised by passing on knowledge and a mutual demand of respect and assistance alongside cruelty and the infliction of pain and suffering on each another.

Thus, "dog frendy" (85) Lissener gives Riddley the secret to rekindling this link with the animals. He must "lissen" and as the "Ardship said he pult the dog and the dog pult me" (85), Riddley bravely desires this same action and mode of being. Riddley "wantit to be pult too" and says, "I didn't know where to nor what for but I wantit to go with it" (85). He learns invaluable lessons including: a rich source of inspiration for a non-rational "vantsit theary"[5] (107); a new interpretation of the Eusa myth (80-84); adding two new myths to his collection; and the vital realisation that "I wer some kind of lissener as wel. Being with Lissener brung it out and brung it on" (101). Nancy Dew Taylor writes that from Lissener and the dogs Riddley discovers "1st knowing, how to be a lissener (discern truth), and how not to get ahead of oneself (the dogs refuse to let him return to Granser until he has experienced what Cambry has to teach him and until he

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[4] Dowling makes this connection between *King Lear* and *Riddley Walker* illustrating various echoes "from the desolate English countryside to the cruelly blinded (Lissener), and blinding leading to insight (Goodparley)" (Dowling 186). Thus, through Riddley's stumbling attempts to find enlightenment the reader "begins to wonder whether *Riddley Walker* is not so much a detective thriller as an absurdist play in the tradition of *King Lear* and *Waiting for Godot*" (186). Notably, Pilgermann's identity as a "poor bare tuned fork" (*P* 26) also echoes *King Lear* along with the harsh material and physical decay and degeneration necessary for the spiritual growth of Hoban's heroes.

[5] This is a special 'advanced' form of ecstatic religious 'transmission' or communication and expression, a "hy telling and trantsing" (*RW* 107). It suggests connotations of transit, trance and theory.

has fulfilled his moon brother responsibilities to the Ardship)" (Dew Taylor 32). He gives advice not to "worrying your self with little myndy askings" (*RW* 98) and to keep in tune with himself. Lissener prepares Riddley for life:

> 'I know I soun like Im trying to littl you down but that aint what Im doing Im trying to bring 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 your oan Ardship.' (98)

Here Lissener shepherds Riddley into the adult world of the individual and demands of him independence and courage. Implicit in this advice is Riddley's role as 'connexion man' who has valuable secret knowledge about the hidden inner nature of reality. He then becomes an agent of renewal, a vehicle for remembering and healing a broken culture. Lissener, by trying to "bring [out] that seed of the red" in Riddley, invokes a vivid image of growth and imagination. He also demands that Riddley accept the harsh nature of life's suffering and trials and changes as he "rise your hump" (98). Some critics have commented on the meaning of the hump in the novel and one has written that,

> Another way to make oneself right through paying for what one has done wrong is to accept and bear one's hump. The hump is sin, guilt, the fall, the 1 Big 1, Bad Time; it is each man's recognition of his individual and his collective guilt. The hump becomes the symbol of accepting responsibility for one's acts; accepting one's hump is one way of paying. (Dew Taylor 34)

Thus, Riddley must manfully begin to accept his condition and nature and go through the 'Master Chaynjis'. This sensibility is reflected in a paradoxical sense of personal individuality and collective responsibility which Riddley appreciates when he re-traces the steps of his childhood with Lissener. Travelling to his birthplace, Fork Stoan, now a deserted town, Riddley feels a sense of dislocation, nostalgia and encirclement, as he encroaches on memories of his personal past:

> Stil it takes you strange walking in your old foot steps like that. Putting your groan up foot where your child foot run nor dint know nothing what wer coming. (*RW* 97)

Here the thrust of Riddley's "psychological journey necessitates an ordering and understanding of the past in order to negotiate the opportunities presented by the future" (Dunwell 58). From this private reflective moment of recollection, Riddley broadens his consciousness and accepts himself as part of humanity. He sheds childish dependence and gains an insight into the condition of the individual as part of the whole.

While Riddley is dependent on Lissener in the early stages of the pilgrimage, he later realises that their diverging paths are necessary to his growth as an individual. Although he can still communicate and connect with Lissener, Riddley realises that he is on his own and must find his own answers. This relationship opens up the dialectic of the part/whole and establishes the paradoxical quest for individuation which sees Riddley both as a separate individual and also inextricably linked to a greater whole, including his moon brother, society, and the natural world. His identity arises out of the tension between these forces.

Lissener and Riddley are moon brothers, born on the same day and therefore form a whole. At one point, while explaining the "some poasyum" ('symposium'), which is a sort of religious orgiastic ritual or "gethering" (108) similar to Dionysian ceremonies and shamanic rites of passage through which ecstatic transcendence is achieved, Lissener gives Riddley this bit of inside information:

> Weare jus like scatter peaces of a broakit pot them peaces wont hol water without theyre gethert nexy and glewt ferm in the shape of holding dont you see. I cant make the shape of holding oansoome. (*RW* 108)

Lissener leads Riddley to the Power Ring, the decayed relic of a particle accelerator. With both of them "sniffling and snuffling", Riddley gets an inkling of an idea of the glory of the past civilisation, "O what we ben! And what we come to!" and also realises the powerful desire to return, "How cud any 1 not want to get that shynin Power back from time back way back? How cud any 1 not want to be like them what had boats in the air and picters on the wind?" (*RW* 100). Thus with Lissener Riddley laments the loss of good time and learns something of the "awesomeness of intellectual achievement and domination of Nature represented by control of atomic energy" (Branscomb 34). However, despite this essential advice, Riddley "ultimately rejects Lissener's aims" (34). Riddley realises that Lissener is "abstract, a seeker of power" (34) and is entrapped in the 'Fools Circel'. Riddley, who is rather "a talker, an explainer of riddles, and potentially an artist" (34) knows that they will have to go "2 different ways" (*RW* 108). The nature of this relationship, of both dependence and independence, recurs in Pilgermann's friendship with the mystic and ascetic Bembel Rudzuk where again Hoban favours the "experiential" (Branscomb 37) aspect of being.

Once they do separate, this keen sense of mutual feeling Riddley feels is now transformed into empowering freedom and independence,

> Swaller me up or spit me out I didnt care I didnt have no 1 on my bak only my self. Only my self! Looking at them words going down on this paper right this minum I know there aint no such thing ther aint only my self you all ways have every 1 and every thing on your back. Them as stood and them as run time back way back long long time they had me on ther back if they knowit or if they dint. (111)

In developing a sense of self, Riddley also learns responsibility beyond his own existence by invoking a wider collective and universal empathy. His sense of self is twofold: it entails an acknowledgment of both himself and of the suffering of others. Dipple writes that Riddley is charged with the task of putting things "together in an act that is both self-reliant and infinitely shared by all human sensibilities accessible from both the present and the past" (Dipple 171).

This notion of the paradoxical and conflicted yet inseparable relationship between self and society is reflected in the ambivalent relationship that Riddley has with Goodparley and his political aspirations. As such, despite much suspicion and an awareness of the latter's dangerous and potentially destructive motives, Riddley has a deep sympathy for Goodparley. Thus, in the same way that Riddley must accept his partial role in his father's death, he cannot avoid being caught up in the turbulent political events around him. As a "happener" he is part of violent, dangerous and explosive collisions with Goodparley, Granser, Erny Orfing and Belnot Phist as each struggles for power and a way to restore 'good time'. However innocent, unwitting and accidental it may seem, Riddley is inevitably complicit in the others' pursuit to rediscover gunpowder or "yeller-boy stoan" (*RW* 146). Riddley may be on an individual quest, but his journey also suggests a complex way of being in the world. On this level, Riddley has no freedom, and "cannot emancipate himself from history" (Dew Taylor 30); he is mired in the upheavals of his society and his individual existence is interlinked with the greater unfolding of events. Riddley is acted upon rather than free to act independently and, to a certain extent, finds himself repeating the 'Fools Circel'. This aspect reflects the loss of individuality of many of Hoban's heroes: Kleinzeit and Herman Orff in their society, Orpheus to the pre-determined Orphic action cycle, and – later – Pilgermann's castration by history.

However, Riddley still asserts his individuality. He "disavows any interest in" the power games and race for weapons and "gives up the yeller-boy in order to protect his Punch figure" (32). The Punch figure, which Riddley finds in the peat after his father's death, becomes one of his totems and as a 'connexion man' he transmits this message through public performances. As an artefact which has survived the blast and continues

to be part of Riddley's mythology and Eusa show, for Riddley it is also representative of art and is essential to his new show which seeks to reveal basic truth about the destructive and creative aspects of human nature. By favouring this relic and giving up the "yeller-boy" (sulphur necessary to make gunpowder), Riddley frees himself from the search for the '1 Big 1'. Riddley realises that Goodparley and Granser's single-minded will to power and desire to find the '1 Big 1' is misguided and tragically forlorn. It will inevitably fail, leading to self-harm and another cycle of human violence and destruction.

This spurs Riddley on to find his own religious and peaceful understanding of power. This unique vision is triggered by the black dog leader. In a moment of transformative sympathy, echoing Orpheus' experience of the killing of the tortoise, the dog "pusht his nose in to" Riddley's hand and he experiences cathartic release:

> Him what lookit like Death on 4 legs with his yeller eyes what dint even care if he livet or dyd and he wantit me to pet him. That's when I cryd for the dead. (*RW* 196)

Riddley has reached a point of collective understanding that embraces the history of humanity, with the terror of the rise and fall of empires and the suffering of countless individuals. It is at this moment that Riddley stares into the eyes of death and realises that "THE ONLYES POWER IS NO POWER" (197). In a self-effacing, accepting and open way he writes of a Taoist concept of power associated with harmony:

> Its the not sturgling for Power thats where the Power is. Its in jus letting your self be where it is. Its tuning in to the worl its leaving your self behynt and letting your self be where it says in Eusa 5:
>
> > ... in tu the hart uv the stoan hart uv the dans. Evere thing blippin & bleapin & movin in the shiftin uv thay Nos. Sum tyms bytin sum tyms bit. (197)

In a crescendo of spiritual ecstasy, Riddley finds himself on the road again, happy to go through the changes and movement of the universe, and happy to accept the constant movement of the dialectic of opposites, life and death, male and female and "bytin and bit". He cries out, "SPIRIT OF GOD ROAD WITH ME!" (197)

As Nancy Dew Taylor has noted, once Riddley has learnt these lessons he must act (Dew Taylor 37). He does this by maturing as a connexion man and performing his new show, "Walker & Orfing" (RW 202). Thus, from the shameful failure of his first 'tel' which brings him ridicule, humiliation and embarrassment, Riddley becomes more proficient, sensitive and adept at his craft. Now, by not being so controlling and cautious of the message he needs to reveal and transmit, Riddley understands the creative process.

He has intuitively discovered and recovered the "old figgers" of the Punch and Judy show and realised each figure, show, word and story "got its oan chemistry and fizzics" (205). By learning a profound respect for the mystery of his art, Riddley notes that everything is in flux and has a life of its own: these things "have ther knowing and they have ther saying which you bes lissen for it you bes let it happen" (204).

With his new confidence and vision Riddley is able to break the 'Fools Circel': he performs his first show at Weaping Form, thereby suggesting, "the fracturing of the cycle" as the place is "not a part of Fools Circel 9wys" (Dew Taylor 36). His show is not mired in political propaganda and determined by the Eusa cult for which the search for the '1 Big 1' was the primary goal. Fulfilling his destiny as shaman and connexion man, and engaging with the idea of himself, Riddley says assertively and proudly, "May be the idear of it ben waiting all them years for me to come along and be it" (*RW* 207). With this experience Riddley, "fealt like sitting to a table with a candl and putting some words on paper. That ben the beginning of this writing and Im sitting at that same and very tabel now" (202). Bildungsroman meets Künstlerroman: like Kleinzeit at his plain deal table, Riddley becomes the tribe's first novelist or scribe – writing the very story we read.

It is in the last true moment of individuation as a hero-shaman that Riddley faces his past and future with a ready courage. He is flexible and open to difficulty and change and carries within him the experience of his path of individuation as initiation. So Riddley writes when preparing for the new show (one senses Hoban's voice at its strongest here):

> Ready to cry ready to dy ready for anything is how I come to it now. In fear and tremmering only not running a way. In emtyness and ready to be fult. Not to lern no body nothing I cant even lern my oan self all I can do is try not to get on front of whats coming. Jus to try to keap out of the way of it. (204)

Like all Hoban's characters the end moment of their individuation process is of realistic but positive acceptance of life's struggles, suffering, and ultimately death. Thus, Nancy Dew Taylor rightly concludes:

> What Hoban offers us in the novel is what heroic art has always offered us: an example of the individual's refusal to knuckle under to fate without a fight. That fight, that struggle – though it may end in total or partial defeat – allows the individual some sense of worth and of dignity within his own life. Such individuals change the course of history – or die trying. Such individuals are the only hope of any society, Riddley's or ours. (Dew Taylor 31)

II

A post-apocalyptic mythopoeic vision

'I think that the myth-making capability is an essential one, and it's a resource that is not used enough. Rational thinking is not enough to get us through what we have to get through. If the heads of governments, East and West, could perceive events more in a mythic way, they would be in better shape for working things out.' (Myers n.pag.)

While *Riddley Walker* presents the journey of a young boy into adulthood and also as a hero-shaman, there is a deeper underlying mythopoeic, religious and cosmic pattern in Riddley's rites of passage. My principal claim is that *Riddley Walker* is a variation of an archetypal fertility myth which fuses with and subtly echoes various aspects of a regeneration myth of renewal and rebirth.

In pursuing this mythic paradigm, the novel performs a double function. Born out of the tension of the Cold-war era (it was first published in 1980), the novel is a dark cautionary tale which explores and critiques the possible dire consequences of modernity and the impact of the negative values of the Enlightenment. Through the central myths of Riddley's culture, Hoban judges and analyses the assumptions of modernity: the belief in progressive linear history, faith in scientific materialism, technological advancement, and rationalism as the ultimate goals of human development. The unavoidable Grand March of progress is revealed to be divisive, embroiled in the machinations of political power and forlorn and destructive in the context of a post-nuclear-holocaust world.

The second, related, aspect attempts to temper and balance this negative dynamic. Here Hoban resurrects a primitive paradigm based on lunar vegetation or fertility myths. The common feature of his novels, a search for the centre and a religious vision, is here developed to express a more complex vision of humanity's place in the natural world. Riddley lives in a blighted landscape ravaged by the effects of a nuclear holocaust which is similar to the wasteland of the Fisher King myth or the barren winter landscape of an incipient fertility myth cycle. Riddley fulfils the role of a courageous, noble, innocent and pure questing knight embarking on a quest to the sacred and holy site of Cambry. The knight's quest for the grail or the Philosopher's stone is transmuted into the basic desire to find primordial origins and new knowledge in order to activate a renewal which will bring order and growth to the fallen world.

Given this double function of the myths, I will explore Hoban's critique of the modern will to power as it is expressed through two of Riddley's foundational myths, 'The Hart of the Wood' and 'Why the Dog Wont Show Its Eyes'. I will then chart the progression of Riddley's quest as he attempts to re-enact a sacred fertility myth, and will

pay special attention to moon imagery, the nature of Riddley's visionary experience in the crypt at Cambry (with its evocation of the feminine consciousness) and the significance of the Greenman figure. Since 'The Eusa myth' has been adequately analysed elsewhere,[6] it will only be briefly mentioned. I will focus on these less prominent myths in order to show how Hoban's mythopoeic method and wide allusive range enable him to create a tragic myth of origins, transgression, and suggest possible reconciliation and redemption. Thus, again, Hoban uses his notion of a cyclical dialectic to express the paradoxes and conflicts within man's relationship with the natural world. Thus, the relationship embodies both separation and the urge towards reconnection, the Fall and an imaginative quest for redemption.

Riddley Walker's myths of the cataclysmic fall

Riddley Walker develops Hoban's depiction of a contemporary modern crisis to its bleakest possible end. In a vision of a world after a nuclear holocaust, Hoban explores the evolution and ultimate devolution of humanity through various myths of cataclysmic and apocalyptic fall. As portraits of a blasted world which recalls only fragments of a lost past, the myths represent a culture struggling to piece together and make sense of the violent and catastrophic nuclear fallout. The aetiological myths – 'The Hart of the Wood', 'Why the Dog Wont Show Its Eyes', and 'The Eusa Story' – which Riddley's people have kept alive by oral tradition form an "an elaborate and creative myth of original sin" (Cowart n.pag.). Similar to the myth of transgression in *The Medusa Frequency*, all these myths are an account of the ways in which humanity has become fragmented and torn from a primal unity.

'Why the Dog Wont Show Its Eyes' is an account of the pitiful fallen state of Riddley's people. Opening with a standard rhetorical device common to fairy tale ('Once upon a time') and thereby situating itself in Eliade's *in illo tempore* or sacred mythical time of beginnings and eternity, the myth describes the quick cycle of humanity's loss, alienation and exile:

> Time back way way back befor people got clevver they had 1st knowing. They los it when they got the clevverness and now the clevverness is gone as wel. (*RW* 17)

Woven into the opening is a regressive circularity as Riddley's narrative spirals into the distant past "back way way back" towards a place and time of "1st knowing" (17).

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[6] See Dunwell, Mustazza, Dowling, Cowart and Schwenger.

Inextricably linked with this state of '1st knowing', however, is the inevitable loss of it – indeed, like the implicit nature of loss in the Orphic myths, one state is bound to and cannot be described without the other. The myth is written from a fallen condition, looking back and yearning towards expression of a past age. It presents a double loss: of a primeval state of being or the '1st knowing' and also what destroyed this, a state of "clevverness" (17). Hence there will be two thrusts to the quest in the novel: Riddley will seek '1st knowing'; while Goodparley and the others will try to regain the lost 'clevverness'. Both these impulses, towards recovery of lost wisdom ('1st knowing') and the urge towards progress and material development, are thereby conceived by Hoban as necessary parts of a more complex dynamic within the human condition, "power, knowledge, and, in a way, the urge to preserve and the urge to destroy" (Myers n.pag.) being ultimately interrelated and interdependent.

'1st knowing' is a type of "participation mystique" and an instinctual experience of "élan vital" (Young 82). Charles Taylor describes this 'primitive' paradigm as an "enchanted world view in which we feel spirits, magical and spiritual forces in the things around us" (Schwartz 1-2). It is an apprehension of the essential unity of the universe where individual consciousness is not separated or differentiated from the environment. Neither empirical knowledge based on sense data nor a rational faculty, '1st knowing' is manifest in the "shape" or in the idea of night where one "cant see the shape of nite nor you cant think it" (17). This mysterious, intuitive form of knowledge is recovered when "you put your self right" and can be expressed in an intimacy with the animal world (17). In an Edenic "good time" (18) the archetypal man and woman in the tale receive a glimpse of '1st knowing' when around a fire they "made a contrack" with a wild dog (18). They live in harmony with the natural world as "they roadit on to gether with the dog and foraging together" (18).

'1st knowing' is superseded by 'clevverness'. 'Clevverness', later emerging in the Eusa story as Mr. Clevver, is a means for Hoban to explore the dynamic change in human consciousness that came with the evolution of culture. In both myths, 'The Hart of the Wood' and 'Why the Dog Wont Show Its Eyes', Hoban describes and critiques human development from its origins as nomadic tribes of hunter-gathers to the growth and birth of civilisation with the invention of agriculture. Like Rousseau, Hoban sees man losing a connection with the natural world as society and civilisation expands. According to Rousseau, this exile or severance from a natural state is characterised by a

fall into language, property, deforestation, and meat eating (see Bate 42-49). Hoban's vision of the fall in these myths enacts and illustrates a similar pattern.

Rousseau's ideas on meat eating and deforestation[7] are suggested in 'The Hart of the Wood'. This is a disturbing illustration of the harsh conditions after the bomb and in mythic terms explains the shape and existence of the heart-shaped charcoal burners Riddley's people have developed for fuel. A small family are desperately struggling to eke out an existence in a freezing, inhospitable environment when they meet Mr Clevver. With cold calculation and enacting a ritualistic primal sacrifice, this avatar of rationalism, technical knowledge, and progress trades the knowledge of fire with the family for the life of their only child. The couple go on to eat their child and listen to Mr Clevver as he says,

> 'Cleverness is gone now but little by little itwl come back. The iron wil come back agen 1 day and when the iron comes back they will bern chard coal in the hart of the wood. And when they bern the chard coal ther stack wil be the shape of the hart of the child.' (4)

While 'The Hart of the Wood' is similar to the other myths, which are "usually tragic … small etiological narratives" which involve "transformations" and "account for various mundane phenomena" (Mustazza 19), it also expresses humanity's fall. As a primal act of fault linked to the killing of the tortoise in *The Medusa Frequency*, the child's death is a visceral symbol of the sacrifices made for technological progress as humans are rent from wholeness and unity with nature.

'Why the Dog Wont Show Its Eyes' emphasises the disastrous effect on humanity of the rapid development of property and advancement of technology. Through the notion of 'clevverness' – akin to Taylor's "disengaged mode of instrumental reason" (Taylor, *Ethics* 5-6) – Hoban evokes an acquisitive, abstracting, and destructive rationalism which is contrary to '1st knowing'. Thus, '1st knowing' is destroyed when, with intimations of force, domination, and an objectifying gaze, the humans "think on it a littl", and begin to use their dangerously inquisitive and avaricious nature to "cawt other goats", making a "fents and pent them up" (*RW* 18). After this there is a rapid movement into agriculture as they start to "gethert weat and barly they had bread and beer then they wernt moving on the lan no mor they startit in to form it" (18). Humans no longer roam free living in a sympathetic symbiotic relationship with nature and the

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[7] As far as deforestation is concerned, Robert Pogue Harrison's book *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* confirms that "imperialism has always brought with it deforestation and the consuming of natural resources" (Bate 87).

animals. Instead they begin to shape the land themselves, farming it and controlling it through building and crop production.

From being around a fire staring at the night sky with awe and reverence or a "religious ignorance" (*MUM* 130), humans now "wernt outside in the nite no more they wer inside looking out" and the "nite jus lookit dark to them they didnt see nothing else to it no mor" (*RW* 18-19). This describes the first dwellings and growth of settlements and signals a fundamental shift in human consciousness. Possibly Hoban suggests the vast difference between a primitive and archaic sense of self and the modern Cartesian notion of an internalised objective rational consciousness. Alienated from the darkness and the night, humans develop a distinct subject-object relation with the world around them. Consciousness is not fluid and dynamic but is now stagnant, objectifying and abstract, split into dualities. Where the human with '1st knowing' "knows that shape can go in to the nite in the nite and the nite in the day time" (*RW* 18) now humans are detached from the night, seeing no significance in it at all as they are "stoppit in 1 place" and are "inside looking out" (18). Bate, writing about the "Enlightenment privileging of 'mind'", quotes Robert Pogue Harrison: "The new Cartesian distinction between the *res cognitans*, or thinking self, and the *res extensa*, or embodied substance, sets up the terms for the objectivity of science and the abstraction from historicity, location, nature, and culture" (qtd. in Bate 87). Furthermore, Harrison argues that what is key for Descartes is that he "sought to empower the subject of knowledge" so that "humanity could achieve what he called 'mastery and possession of nature'" (87).

Accompanying this process of separation and domination there is a loss of a sense of the sacred and of mysterious religious wonder. Echoing Martin Buber (see *MUM* 138-9), the relation to nature has shifted from the 'I - thou' perception to the 'I – it'. Writing about animism, Young notes that "the animist believes that every object he encounters is alive just as he is" and is thereby in an 'I-thou' relationship (Young 142). This is opposed to the 'clevverness' of the 'I-it' relationship "in which man operates upon objects in the light of the scientific laws (such as gravity) that control and predict their behaviour" (142). Young's comments on Buber are just as relevant for understanding Hoban's *Riddley Walker*:

> Buber's book, ultimately an existentialist plea for keeping some religious wonder alive against the dehumanizing tendencies of the scientific mentality, can also be seen, more simply as a plea for a judicious retrieval of primitive animism. (142)

Thus Hoban's myth reveals that night, standing for all Nature and a Mother Goddess figure in her immanent living presence, has been devalued in the spiritual sense and re-valued as a means to an end in a "disenchanted" (Taylor, *Sources* 17) utilitarian functional system. The 'nite' is not respected, but is rather depersonalised and regarded merely as a threat to material possessions:

> They said, 'What good is nite *its only dark time* it aint *no good for nothing* only them as want to sly and sneak and take our parpety a way.' They los out of memberment *who* nite wer. (*RW* 19; emphases added)

Unwittingly, Riddley describes the ills of a modern urban society from a position in a bleak post-nuclear holocaust world. The history of civilisation and progress produces fear, restlessness, and a maniacal concern for material possessions, while it desacralises humanity's relationship with the natural world.

In the myth, rather than keeping in mind the spiritual knowledge of the shape of the night, humans "worrit for ther parpety they myt get snuck and raidit" (19). The dog does not sleep alongside man, as in a Golden Age, but is coerced into protecting and guarding his property. The fall into ownership, inequality, and acquisitiveness is also a fall into anxiety, neurosis and obsession. People now "have no res" as they "wer stressing ther self and straining all the time with counting" (19). The fact that humans now "wantit day time all the time" (19) intriguingly refers to the invention of electricity and the growth of a man-made, controlled artificial environment, and suggests the detachment of humans from the seasons and rhythms of nature.

Alienation and separation from nature is embodied in the abstract fixation with counting and the accumulation of goods. Riddley describes the development of modern society's preoccupation with a detrimental rational scientific materialism and technological invention:

> Counting counting they wer all the time. They had iron then and big fire they had towns of parpety. They had machines et numbers up. They fed them numbers and they fractiont out the Power of things. They had the Nos. of the rain bow and the Power of the air all workit out with counting which is how they got boats in the air and picters on the wind. Counting cleverness is what it wer. (19)

According to Adorno and Horkheimer's great critique, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Enlightenment brings progress (liberation from precarious dependence on natural world) but with it a multitude of evils (enslavement spiritually and possible destruction of the natural world). Thus the process Hoban alludes to in his own myth may be described more theoretically as follows,

> Myth turns into enlightenment [*sic*], and nature into mere objectivity. Men pay for the increase of their power with alienation from that over which they exercise their power. Enlightenment behaves toward things as a dictator toward men. He knows them as far as he can manipulate then. The man of science knows things in so far as he can make them. In this way their potentiality is turned to his own end. (qtd. in Coupé 77)

The Enlightenment's mastery, subjection, and domination of nature is achieved at the expense not only of the natural world but is also reflected within the human psyche which becomes split, dissociated, and fragmented. Adorno and Horkheimer write that the "disenchantment of the world is the extirpation of animism. … Animism spiritualized the object, whereas industrialism objectifies the spirits of men" (qtd. in Bate 78).

Furthermore, the underlying implications of these myths indicate a deeper criticism, setting out a position Dudley Young calls "scientism" (Young 26). In his criticism of science and the scientific outlook, Young describes the 'myth of the bad scientist' which is similar to the figure of Mr Clevver. In this contentious view, science is responsible for deconsecrating Mother Nature into a material mechanism. The scientist is separate from the processes of nature and free to experiment, explore, and abstractly reduce nature to a set of mathematical formulas and laws. Invoking the classic Romantic attack through Wordsworth's words "We murder to dissect",[8] Young writes, "the damaging abstractions of science arose in the Renaissance, when it became experimental and mathematical" (13). Science and power become entwined as many of the theoretical advances made by the leading scientific figures opened the way for the invention of gunpowder and ballistics (13).

In *Riddley Walker* the ultimate consequence of this process is manifested in the horror of nuclear power and the catastrophic '1 Big 1'. Extracting information and exploiting the secrets of nature, here invoked by the term "Master Chaynjis"[9] (*RW* 19),

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[8] More apposite to our purposes perhaps is Keats's "Lamia" in which there is the following criticism against rationality: "cold philosophy" can "Unweave a rainbow" as "Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings, /Conquer all mysteries by rule and line," so that the "awful rainbow once in heaven" is reduced to a "dull catalogue of common things." (lines 230-38). Hoban reflects this linguistically: people fractioned out "the Nos. of the rain bow" (19). "They had the Nos. of the sun and moon all fractiont out and fed to the machines" (19). An important lucid and impassioned corrective to this attack on rationality and scientific method has been made by Richard Dawkins, *Unweaving the Rainbow: Science, Delusion and the Appetite for Wonder*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999.

[9] Hoban in his glossary or guide to Riddleyspeak defines "[Master] Chaynjis as The big transformations; also means infinity and the mysterious origins of everything." It is the ultimate source of life and end to which we return after death. Thus, 'When Brooder Walker dies he goes 'into the dark, into the 1st knowing and the Master Chaynjis'" (*RW* 233).

humans reductively reify and codify the elements of nature into figures and formulas until

> They put in the 1 Big 1 and woosht it roun there came a flash of lite then bigger nor the woal worl and it ternt the nite to day. Then every thing gone black. Nothing only nite for years on end. (19)[10]

The effects of the nuclear fallout are further explored in the "central etiological myth of the culture" (Mustazza 24) written down by Riddley as 'The Eusa Story'.[11] As an official and sacred myth to Riddley's people the myth performs various functions, becoming part of a hierarchal system of government ('Mincery'), control and organisation (the Eusa Show). While the Mincery uses the myth as an alchemical allegory to find out the secrets of the '1 Big 1' and Riddley explores it as a source of spiritual knowledge, it is primarily an explanation of the fall epitomised in a primal act of transgression by Eusa.

While on a quest for Mr Clevver, Eusa ventures into the "Hart uv the Wud" (30) where he encounters a stag with a "Littl Shynin Man in the Adom" between the antlers. Searching for the power and knowledge of how to make the '1 Big 1', Eusa plunges into violence and cruelty, killing the Stag, pulling the "Littl Shynin Man" apart and slaughtering both his dogs. The killings are the culmination of an aggressive death-instinct and urge to power which ultimately destroys '1st knowing' and sows the seeds for the ruin of civilised 'clevverness' itself. When tearing apart and torturing the Littl Shynin Man the Addom, Eusa greedily delves into the depths of a sacred mystery. In the process of discovering he splits the whole into fragments and dualities:

> 13. Eusa was anger he wuz in rayj & he kep pulin on the Littl Man the Addoms owt strecht arms. The Littl Man the Addom he begun tu cum a part he cryd, I wan tu go I wan tu stay. Eusa sed, Tel mor. The Addom sed, I wan tu dark I wan tu lyt I wan tu day I wan tu nyt. Eusa sed, Tel mor. The Addom sed, I wan tu woman I wan tu man. Eusa sed, Tel mor. The Addom sed, I wan tu plus I wan tu minus I wan tu big I wan tu little I wan aul I wan nuthing. (32)

There are religious and scientific implications. The story "describes the splitting of the atom as a Pandora's box instituting the 'Master Chaynjis' of the two and the one" and

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[10] This suggests the nuclear fallout was caused by an accident with the accelerator rather than a bomb.
[11] Apart from suggesting USA, the actual source of the image is from the Legend of St. Eustace found in the *Legenda Aurea*: *The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints* (1275) In this legend Placidus, a rich English nobleman, while out hunting deer (hart) in a wood receives a vision of Christ on the cross appearing between the horns of a hart. He is converted to Christianity, but the story – resembling that of Job – becomes one of faith and suffering as Eustace loses his family and is at the mercy of the devil. Riddley's myth draws on various elements in the Legend including the vision, the loss of family (including Eustace's sons) and the terrible sufferings of the Saint. (*Riddley Walker Annotations Online*)

through it Hoban refers to "a computer binary system" as well as the "theological problem of the duality and the unity of the universe" (Dipple 173). While the tearing apart of the Addom reflects the scientific process of splitting the atom involved in the process of nuclear fission and alludes to Leonardo da Vinci's famous etching, there are traces of Adam the First Man which invoke the Judaeo-Christian myth of the fall in Genesis as well as Christ's crucifixion. More generally, Hoban evokes the separation of man from nature, portraying "the sense of the Edenic world that existed prior to the fall and the irreparable damage done to that world" (Mustazza 21). David Cowart writes that 'The Eusa Story' is a

> Blakean myth of the primal error as a fall from unity into division, from a human unity with nature, that is, to the human exploitation of nature, the transgression focussed in the splitting of the atom. (Cowart n.pag.)

The consequences of this act are devastating for Eusa and the whole world. From this action Eusa gains the knowledge and ability to make nuclear weapons. Once the Littl Man in Addom has been split a great "shyningnes in wayvs in spredin circels" releases a vision of nuclear atomic energy and from this Eusa "riten down thay Nos. uv" the '1 Big 1' putting it into "barms" (*RW* 32-3). The destruction wrought by the '1 Big 1' leaves Eusa, the "archetypal eater of forbidden fruit" and "central sacramental figure of the culture", wandering "from city to city, mutilated, blinded, and finally killed" (Branscomb 33-34). In the ensuing war it indiscriminately "kilt as menne uv thear oan as thay kilt enemes" (*RW* 33). The natural world is left desolate, barren and polluted, the water and air poisoned. This is the beginning of "Bad Tym" (33), leaving survivors struggling and "starveling" as they "go afeart by nite and afeart by day" (19-20). Despite the darkness lifting and a return to a diurnal cycle, the effects remain, as the environment is "never like it ben befor" (19). This is evoked in a haunting image recalling long term radiation sickness (associated with disasters such as Chernobyl) and unnatural distortion and reversion: "Day beartht crookit out of crookit nite and sickness in them boath" (19).

Riddley Walker explores the future primitive culture's various *de-creation myths.* David Cowart and Leonard Mustazza note that this society mirrors the Iron Age on the verge of a movement into another epoch. Mustazza argues that *Riddley Walker* charts "a society on the verge of, from an anthropological perspective, dramatic change – change from a nomadic hunting-and-gathering society into a culture of permanent agricultural units and towns, and, even more significant, change from a primitive into a modern culture" (Mustazza 17). Cowart sees *Riddley Walker* as describing the movement towards

an "agricultural order" which represents the inevitable pull of a progressive civilization. He writes that the "death of the last wild pig, with which the story opens, represents the passing of wilderness and even heralds the accelerating displacement of animistic religion (the Big Boar and the Moon Sow) by more sophisticated cults like that of Eusa" (Cowart n.pag.). Thus Cowart writes that Hoban has created a "post holocaust future when humanity, well into its second Iron Age, begins once again to pursue knowledge that will destroy it" (Cowart n.pag.). Furthermore, in imagining "a primitive society surrounded by evidence of its more civilised origins" Hoban portrays a "culturewide yearning to know the more splendid past" (Cowart n.pag.).

It is true that Riddley and the other characters in the novel are in different ways desperate to recover and remember a better past. For Goodparley and the Mincery, the key to this quest is in finding out the secrets of gunpowder. They believe by following alchemical-allegorical readings of 'The Eusa Story', the ritual of 'Fools Circel', and by discovering the components of gunpowder they may not only gain political power but also re-initiate material progress and development. In so doing, Goodparley says they can return to the

> Good Time which I mean every thing good and every body happy and teckernogical progers moving every thing frontways farther and farther all the time. You name it wewl do it. Pas the sarvering gallack seas and all that. (*RW* 48)

Riddley's quest inevitably intersects with the search for gunpowder – he provides the "yeller-boy" used by Granser and Goodparley in the disastrous farcical experiment the "1 littl 1" (188) – but diverges from it when he embarks on a more redemptive and spiritual journey.

The possibility of redemption in the myths is debated amongst critics. Some, like David Cowart, see the Eusa myth as "unbutressed by myths of creation or redemption; consequently it offers little to those who embrace it" (Cowart n.pag.). Like many other critics,[12] he argues that *Riddley Walker* is ominous, fatalistic, and hopelessly pessimistic. By imagining a world destroyed by a nuclear bomb, Cowart argues that Hoban presents the fear that history has no transcendent rationale or purpose – what Eliade has termed the 'terror of history'.

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[12] In her positive article seeking to redress the balance of opinion, Nancy Dew Taylor cites Benjamin Demott's review, Jack Branscomb and Jennifer Uglow as unnecessarily harsh in their criticism of *Riddley Walker*'s apparently bleak and pessimistic outlook. Notably these negative readings are contrary to Hoban's personal view as he sees it having a "note of optimism – it ends with the human spirit prevailing" (Myers n.pag.).

This idea of humanity's history is definitely a factor in the novel, as Hoban does not shy away from the effects of the ultimate weapon of mass destruction – the nuclear bomb – the history of humanity *is* presented as "a bloody ebb and flow of human events" with an "appalling record of mass killing and meaningless bloodshed" in which one seems forced to "recognize intimations of a blind, oppressive, random yet deterministic mechanism" (Cowart n.pag.). In this sense the efforts of Goodparley and Lissener are seen to be forlorn and circular. They are caught in a twelve-year repetition of a strange ritual based on the "Fools Circel 9ways" hoping that some transcendent message will initiate a return to Good Time. Lissener expresses this confused need for rejuvenation, mired in a failed re-enactment of myth:

> 'Becaws Goodparley and them they dont know how to do nothing with it no moren I do. They jus keap hoaping some time some Goodparley wil ask the right asking and some Ardship wil say a anser whatwl break them thru the barren year.' (*RW* 84)

Thus Cowart writes:

> In *Riddley Walker* humanity gropes – vainly, for the most part – for some such rationale to order its relationship to the past and the future.

He also argues that "Riddley's people lack a myth adequate to their spiritual needs" and are mired in a fragmented and shattered culture in which "two historical models, linear and cyclical, exist in a debased form" (Cowart n.pag.). Cowart concludes that the novel offers "a tragic destiny in humanity's inability to recapture either [of these historical models] in its original vitality" (Cowart n.pag.).

However, Cowart allows room for debate. The "question of historical redemption and the prospects for escape from the terror of history" depend on several points: the significance of Riddley's final visionary experience in the crypt; identifying the historical Eusa; "the role of the artist in a world potentially or actually destroyed by nuclear war", and a consideration of "the myth of the Waste Land in *Riddley Walker*, especially as it complements Hoban's version of the fall" (Cowart n.pag.).

Firstly, it seems possible to answer the problem of Eusa's identity as well as that of the role of the artist by taking into account Hoban's mythopoeic vision. Crucial to Hoban's entire mythopoeic method is his lack of concern about the truth or falsehood of myth. Hoban goes beyond the notion of myth as 'untrue fiction' and disavows the approach which sees myth as merely 'childish', a collection of 'primitive' tales of the

fantastic to be relegated as a fanciful means of understanding the world in the face of rational discourse and scientific method. Rather than worrying about the Eusa story being "degenerate or factitious" (Cowart n.pag.), we should see the myth as part of Bell's "double consciousness" as both a "supremely significant foundational story and a falsehood" (Bell 1). Both Cowart (who underestimates the regenerative aspects of mythical elements in the text) and Mustazza (who forces a linear model of historical development without noting the cyclical mythic paradigm[13]) have fallen into the trap of not considering Hoban's unique view of myth.

For Hoban, myth is open to change and re-invention and it always remains an intrinsic part of the human need to understand the world. While necessarily fragmented and mixed with partial fact and much fictitious re-imagining, myth is still an extremely valuable tool for human understanding and deeper cosmic knowledge. Furthermore a mythic understanding of the world is extremely important in a predominantly rationalistic age and necessary to re-imagine and reconstruct a broken and shattered culture. Re-iterating Hoban's point that gods do not die, *Riddley Walker* strongly shows the endurance of myth, mythic expression, and mythical figures. Thus, as witnessed in Riddley's maturation into a hero-shaman epitomised in the very work we read and as evidenced throughout Hoban's fiction, the artist is the key figure in articulating the quest for transcendence and redemption.

Secondly, in presenting *Riddley Walker* as a variation of a fertility myth, I would like to respond to Cowart's considerations concerning the myth of the Waste Land and the importance of Riddley's journey to Cambry which culminates in the epiphany in the crypt. By focussing on the powerful feminine role of the Mother Goddess figure manifest in ubiquitous moon imagery, as well as the strange figure of the Greenman, I argue that although Cowart has mentioned the "profoundly religious experience in Cambry" he is misguided in dismissing it as part of an unsuccessful "traditional sacralization" which is in this "blasted future, imperfect and degenerate" (Cowart n.pag.). Thus along with the figure of the Greenman, Cowart has undervalued the importance of several key elements in Riddley's redemptive quest.

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[13] Mustazza writes that the "remarkable achievement of *Riddley Walker* lies, not so much in the ways it departs from recognizable models but in the ways that it beautifully mirrors the movement forwards of the species" (Mustazza 17). He also (I think mistakenly) suggests that the mythic dimension of the culture will be discarded, "the sacred myth of origin will soon lose it prestigious centrality" (despite Riddley's new show) and that the "ruling powers are ready to cast off the primitive superstitions of the past" as they continue in their "movement forward ... decisively toward the progressive-minded future" (25-26).

This is Hoban's method of confronting and attempting to transcend the "terror of history". Agreeing with Edward Myers that *Riddley Walker* inspires both the "hideousness of history" and the "tremendous beauty in living and in the world", Hoban responds:

> Horror at the actuality of history and joy in being alive and conscious go together quite naturally ... my fascination with the action outweighs any optimism or pessimism, the trip is worth while just in itself. (Myers n.pag.).

Riddley Walker's redemptive journey to Cambry: re-connecting with the Mother Goddess

It is vital to note in *Riddley Walker* the confluence of myth, a feminine consciousness epitomised in a Mother Goddess figure, and the impulse towards regenerative links with nature in the face of disaster:

> From a mythological perspective, the goddess myth can also be seen in the attempts of many human beings to live in a new way, allowing their feeling of participation with the Earth as a whole to affect how they think about it and act towards it, aware of the urgent need to comprehend the world as a unity. Einstein is the spokesman for this need: 'With the splitting of the atom everything has changed save our mode of thinking, and thus we drift towards unparalleled disaster.' (Baring and Cashford xiv)

By imagining this "unparalleled disaster" Hoban also returns to the ancient belief in Nature as a Mother Goddess. Throughout history this is an archetype "that inspires and focuses a perception of the universe as an organic, alive and sacred whole" and embraces a vision of all life "woven together in one cosmic web, where all orders of manifest and unmanifest life are related, because all share in the sanctity of the original source" (xi). In *Riddley Walker* Hoban invokes a mythic quest of rebirth and regeneration towards an understanding of a primordial original unity dominated by the feminine.

This is partially achieved through the setting, in which Riddley's culture is primarily modelled on a primitive Neolithic or early Bronze Age society. Here the moon is a powerful mediating symbol which evokes the presence of the Mother Goddess. In his book, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, Eric Neumann writes:

> The favoured spiritual symbol of the matriarchal sphere is the moon in its relation to the night and the Great Mother of the night sky. The moon, as the luminous aspect of the night, belongs to her; it is her fruit, her sublimation as light, as expression of her essential spirit. (Neumann 55-56)

For Neolithic people the cycles of the moon were a way to understand the mysteries of birth, growth, decay and death all being part of a greater cycle of infinite life. The moon

was associated with a primordial darkness and the birth of a mythical imagination through which humans were able to formulate the meaning of the passage of their lives in relation to a cosmic entity. The changes of the moon in the night sky and its "rhythmical phases of light and darkness" gave rise to a mythic pattern linked to "growing and decaying endlessly renewed" which inspired wonder, awe and "trust in life" (Baring and Cashford 19). This cycle was an aspect of the Mother Goddess, the "goddess of vegetation and the fruitfulness of nature, whose womb is the depths of the earth: from her new life comes forth and back to her that life grown old returns" (49). The primacy of the moon is summed up as follows:

> The moon was undoubtedly the central image of the sacred to these early people because, in its dual rhythm of constancy and change, it provided not only a point of orientation from which differences could be measured, patterns conceived and connections made, but also, on its perpetual return to its own beginnings, it unified what had apparently been broken asunder. As the great light shining in the darkness of the night, the moon, in all mythologies up to the Iron Age (*c.* 1250 BC), was regarded as one of the supreme images of the Goddess, the unifying power of the Mother of All. … She was an enduring image both of renewal in time and of a timeless totality, because what was apparently lost with the waning moon was restored with the waxing moon. Duality, imaged as the waxing and waning moon, was contained and transcended in her totality. So, analogously, life and death did not have to be perceived as opposites, but could be seen as phases succeeding each other in a rhythm that was endless. (21)

Riddley is depicted as living in a similarly lunar-based culture. This is most obviously expressed in mythic terms in 'Why the Dog Wont Show Its Eyes', where the moon is explicitly feminised and linked to primordial origins or '1st knowing':

> You know what they got 1st knowing of. She has different ways she shows her self. Shes that same 1 her moon self or she jus shows her old old nite and no moon. Shes that same 1 every thing and all of us come out of. She is what she is. Shes a woman when shes Nite and shes a woman when shes Death. The nite bearths the day. Every day has the shape of the nite what it come out of. The man as knows that shape can go in to the nite in the nite and the nite in the day time. The woman as knows that shape can be the nite and take the day in her and bearth the new day. (*RW* 18)

Here the waxing and waning of the lunar cycle charts the phases from the full moon, "her moon self", through to the empty sky of the "old old nite" (18), where the moon has disappeared and died only to be reborn in the form of the new moon. Despite this flux there is an emphasis on a hidden totality and consistency: "Shes the same 1" (18) who is an ultimate source of all life and death.

This cosmic pattern is linked to human fertility and sexuality which knits humans and nature together in an endless web of life. The rhythms of the moon, which are related to the menstrual cycle, as well to cycles of day and night, are associated with the passage of human life from conception to death. Thus the creative act of life involves man going into the "nite in the nite", a dark space of primal fecundity and union, which will later be connected to the womb, and woman can "take in the day" and giving birth to a new day or human life (*RW* 18). Ultimately it is connected to that creative space beyond the phenomenal world referred to throughout *The Moment under the Moment* which represents the source of inspiration for all Hoban's quests. More scientifically, this essential underlying reality can be linked to David Bohm's notion of an "implicate and explicate order" which argues that the "manifest diverse three-dimensional world we see is enfolded in an unmanifest implicate order" (Baring and Cashford 680). Akin to Hoban's 'Master Chaynjis', Bohm speaks of a "holomovement, whose movement is a folding and unfolding, emphasizing 'the unity of the unity and diversity', and 'the wholeness of the whole and the part'" (680).

Given this mythological and practical lunar presence, Riddley uses the moon to mark significant moments in his life. For instance he notes the "Ful of the Moon" when he meets Lorna (*RW* 4); he records the date of his father's death according to the moon as it was "only jus the 2nd mooning of the year and winter long in going" (9) setting the background for the seasonal renewal of fertility myth; he judges his birthday, the same date as his 'moon brother', in relation to a lunar event as he turns "12 at Ful of the Moon" (13); Durster Potter is killed by the Black Leader " 5 days pas Ful of the Moon" momentarily after he has accused Riddley of being "dog clevver", invoking the legend and rumour amongst the tribe of the existence of "dog people", who "come Ful of the Moon ...[and] all run to gether in the Black Pack" (14); Durster Potter also finds an ominous coincidence in Riddley's father "dying in the Ful of the Moon and then theres 1 mor in the Black Pack" (65-67).

Throughout Riddley's journey he will continually record the moon's movements to the extent that it becomes a compelling force which guides and influences his moods, his capacities and his whole being. He is instinctively drawn towards the "senter" (97-99) like an animal on heat and registers this in relation to the moon. When Riddley progresses towards Cambry, he passes through Fork Stoan and experiences overwhelmingly powerful feelings, which in his excited state he associates directly with the presence and influence of the moon. Some people "feal ther mooning in them"

which allows them to connect with the "moon of ther getting and all" or, in other words their conception and birth (101). Therefore it links them to the cycles of the Mother Goddess or Moon Sow in a very similar way to a menstrual cycle. Riddley writes about his being possessed by a strange feeling which accompanies the phases of the moon, and which evokes metamorphosis and a sexual response as he crosses over or changes into a different realm of consciousness:

> Some times Iwl feal the cross over in my sleap and it takes me strange. I ben got in the las thin sickle of the failing moon and I ben bertht in the Ful. When Im in my ful bearthing moon Im wide on and sharp strung. When Im coming off it to my getting moon Im reaching on and hungering for that nex Ful. (101)

This lunar movement relates directly to an archetypal lunar myth of "loss, searching and finding" (Baring and Cashford 385). Thus it can be argued that Riddley's pilgrimage and visionary experience in Cambry re-enacts a "great myth of the Bronze Age" (147). Riddley embodies the *bios* or the finite individual life which is an immanent part of a greater totality or whole or *zoe*, which is a representation of infinite and eternal being, personified by the Great Mother:

> The Great Mother served as the image of humanity's wholeness and her son as the image of the part separated from the totality that once was all. When the cycle of the moon is experienced mythically, the part, which is the son, dies and is reunited with the whole, and a new part is born from their union. The myth gives the reassurance that death is not final, simply one phase of a greater cycle. This myth and all the imagery of the goddess can be seen as arising from the human need to belong to the whole and the fear of becoming irrevocably cut off from it. (163)

This quest for cosmic wholeness and reunion takes Riddley to Cambry. At this holy centre which has been characterised as the "world's navel or "omphalos" (Eliade qtd. in Cowart n.pag.), Riddley embraces the essential primordial darkness of the original source. This "zone of absolute reality" or "*axis mundi*" (Cowart n.pag.) is also the confluence of all time and space. It is, as Cowart hints but does not wholly affirm or deem successful, part of a regenerative transcendent ritual which "restore[s] the human community to a cultural dawn, obliterating the intervening time and cancelling any spiritual debts" (Cowart n.pag.).

Thus the culmination of the meeting with the Mother Goddess occurs at Cambry, the site of the nuclear bomb blast, or Ground Zero. Encapsulated in various connotations of 'centre' – both Eliade's sacred cosmogenic centre of creation which has ancient religious significance, as well as its more sinister profane connections as scientific

research centre – Cambry is a place not only of primordial beginnings but a place that is also a site of devastation and destruction. As Riddley journeys to the site, he strives for the realisation and the reconciliation of the fragmentary oppositions and dualities that have been unleashed by tearing apart the Littl Shynin Man of Addom. He will then become an agent of renewal and be part of breaking the 'Fools Circel'. Hoban's description of the nature of the site is extremely important for our understanding of this quasi-mystical experience which is so pivotal to the whole mythic movement of the book.

As he approaches the site, Riddley describes "fealing the place rise up in me wylst I movit in to it" noting that the "dark is all ways there" and allows perception of the "shape of the nite what beartht the day when Canterbury dyd" (*RW* 157). Riddley moves inwards and backwards, interpreting the '1 Big 1' through the myth of the primal darkness. Delving deeper and deeper into the mystery of the place, Riddley again finds himself in the "Hart of the Wud in the hart of the stoan" (157) and, by placing himself at the mystical centre, he soon realises the interconnectedness of everything: he "cud feal how every thing is every thing" (158). Riddley is beset by waves of sadness until "every thing emptyd out of the worl and out of me" (158). This symbolic form of death initiates a *via negativa* or a path of mystical enlightenment involving a loss of self and a merging into a greater cosmic awareness.

In this heightened and receptive state Riddley first receives a "funny fealing" associated with a Power he calls "Big Old Father" (158). Riddley is travelling backwards into myth and connecting first with the patriarchal god of the sun. Immediately he receives a sensation of aggressive masculine sexual power and the urge to dominate and destroy. Riddley describes the experience as rape, paradoxically empowering and disempowering him simultaneously: "Fealt like it wer the han of Power clampt on the back of my neck fealt the Big Old Father spread me and take me. Fealt the Power in me I fealt strong with it and weak with it boath" (158-9). Riddley is experiencing on a cosmic scale the violent, abusive pattern of sexual exploitation associated with patriarchal structures as embodied in the relationship between Goodparley and Granser and the 'Fools Circel'.

However, Riddley's most compelling realisation, a full meeting with the Great Mother, follows and supersedes his experience of the masculine force. This confirms the

quest's basis in a fertility myth paradigm.[14] We must remember the surroundings: an immense ruined cathedral with green, rotted, and fractured pillars to Riddley may seem very much like our experience of ancient sites such as Stonehenge or Avebury.[15] Thus, guided by the moon into exploring a cave-like tomb structure, Riddley interprets his pilgrimage in much the same way as an ancient shaman might have as he journeyed into the depths of human consciousness and the spirit world. Space, time and setting become extremely significant as they map and symbolically represent cosmic patterns and archetypes. Riddley is not just entering a cave: he is moving into the darkness of the cosmic womb and deeper into the mysteries of primordial origins.

Riddley describes the outline of the cathedral as "her woom in Cambry" (159). The dogs, profoundly affected, begin to run around the site. The shape of the route that the frenzied dogs run is not a circle but is in the form of a pregnant female, resembling many of the ancient artefacts used to signify the Great Mother. Interestingly, Riddley describes it as a "dolly shape" which is "like the woman dollys they hang over where a womans bearthing" (159). Using images of creation, pregnancy and fertility, Riddley compares the dogs' ritualistic movement to the form of artefacts such as "woman cakes" and "a jug or a flask with a little roun head" (158). In a direct reference to common representations of the Mother Goddess in ancient society, the "dolly" shape is linked to sheela-na-gigs.[16]

In an "orgasmic moment of revelation" (Dunwell 77) Riddley, in the depths of the "woom" and overwhelmed by powerful sexual feelings, undergoes a re-enactment of an ancient orgiastic fertility ritual in which men and women could partake in the essence of the Great Mother or the Original One and experience a revitalising "experience of cosmic sexual power and flow" (Sjöö 159). He feels "juicy for a woman" and "Not jus my cock but all of me it wer like all of me wer cock and all the worl a cunt and open to me" (*RW* 159).

Paradoxically, in a site marred by death and destruction where the nuclear bomb had "glattent the werst" and "the wite shadderd stood up over every thing" (158),

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[14] Some of following ideas come from both Monica Sjöö's book *The Great Cosmic Mother* and Baring and Cashford's study, *The Myth of the Goddess*.

[15] Rudolf Otto's study of the apprehension of the numinous notes that this powerful feeling is often induced "in the atmosphere that clings to old religious monuments and buildings, to temples and to churches" (Otto 12).

[16] This artefact is described as an "instantly recognizable type of small female stone figure characterized by a short rounded body, a wide-eyed expression, and a giant vulva held open with both hands". Its origins and role is uncertain but it is thought to represent "a goddess or class of goddesses, or the general idea of fertility or sex or good luck" ("Sheela-na-gig," *Riddley Walker Annotations Online* <www.graphesthesia.com/rw/s-sheela.html>).

Riddley is still able to search beneath the layers of history and engage in the mysteries of spiritual transformation and regeneration. As a "happener for that Big Power" he begins to conjure or "lissen up" the sound of "a swarming" which seemed like "a humming like a millying of bees" (159). The bee is another image of the "Great Goddess of regeneration" and in various ancient rituals (especially in Crete) the "intense drama of epiphany" suggests that "the humming of the bee was actually heard as the 'voice' of the goddess, the 'sound of creation'" (Baring and Cashford 118). The experience of the swarm of bees is one of the primal experiences of sacred ecstasy, a manifestation of the divine life force or spirit, *pneuma* in movement. So the bee becomes what Jung would call a symbol of transformation and evokes the abundant and energetic power of the divinity to change and create (Young 224-32).

At this moment Riddley connects his visionary experience in the cathedral with the image of the Mother Goddess represented in the myth of 'Why the Dog Wont Show Its Eyes' as the essential "nite". The "millyings of bees humming the emtyness" and humming "what Id los" (*RW* 160) identifies Riddley as the figure of the lost son rediscovering and reuniting with the Great Mother. Thus he can "keep this in memberment" (6) and reunite with the whole and so recover lost '1st knowing' which Lorna described as:

> the manying and the millying its all 1 thing it dont have nothing to gether with. You look at lykens on a stoan its all them tiny manyings of it and may be each part of it myt think its sepert only we can see its all 1 thing. Thats how it is with what we are its all 1 girt big thing and divvyt up amongst the many. (6)

In a brief and transient yet rejuvenating and enthralling moment Riddley exclaims that, "Id knowit the shape of nite Id gone in to the nite in the day time" (160).

The visionary experience does not end with this moment of reconciliation with the Mother Goddess. Riddley explores deeper amongst the ruins until he finds himself in the crypt of Canterbury Cathedral which has pillars intricately carved with the patterning of trees, leaves and moss and decorated with figures of the legendary Green Man. Riddley places himself at the inmost centre of the sacred site and receives his final vision. In an act of supplication and reverence, Riddley falls to his knees and is rendered inactive in the presence of the "stoan wood unner the groun the hart of the wood in the woom of her what has her woom in Cambry" (161). Through the repetitive incantation Hoban is suggesting the inner cyclical rhythms of the force of Mother Nature as well as revealing the inadequacy of language to express the epiphany. Riddley realises the 'Master Chaynjis' are present. In a moment of beautiful transformation the stone (which is a form of a

tombstone hinting at death as well as a symbol of the Self) moves interchangeably with the living sacred wood. Thus he writes,

> Wood in to stoan and stoan in to wood. Now it showit 1 way now a nother. The stoan stans. The stoan moves. In the stanning and the moving is the tree. Pick the appel off it. Hang the man on it. Out of the holler of it comes the berning child. Unner the stoan. See the bird boan. Thin as grass. Be coming grass. (161)

Within this dense and complex description are layers of mythical allusions and connections which suggest a unique renewal and regeneration. The wood of ancient sacred temples is fused with man-made stone temples as wood becomes stone through geological time. The stone, which within it contains the dance of the universe and the 'Master Chaynjis', contains and reconciles opposites of life and death, movement ('moves') and stillness ('stans') which reveal the unfolding of the universe in a constant interplay and dialectic of opposites. Through the "stanning and the moving" the stoan is transformed into the archetypal tree of knowledge. The tree[17] is the source *both* of the Primal Fall from the Garden of Eden (and hence invokes Adam and Eve's sinful eating of the apple as well as the fall of the '1 Big 1') *and* it is metamorphosed into the tree or cross upon which Jesus was crucified, representing the Second Adam's death and resurrection and humanity's ultimate salvation. Notably Jesus, who is now only a confused fragment of Riddley's collective unconscious, re-emerges as the archetypal cosmic man.

From "Out of the holler" or from the void and the dark emptiness of the strange space within the tree where Riddley is "lissening" or communicating from, comes the image of the "berning child", recalling the myth of the 'Hart of the Wood' and Hoban's vision of the innocent wholeness of nature embodied in the idea of the world-child. The suggestion of salvation, purification and transfiguration is clear. It is not, however, a human salvation or one which is specifically part of a Christian eschatology. Jesus has disappeared and with this the idea of a transcendent heaven. Rather the notion of resurrection is evoked in a strikingly spare image of continual natural change. Thus, "Unner the stoan" and within the mysterious processes of the natural world (and, Hoban implies, in the moment under the moment), a bird bone decays and is gradually and delicately transformed into grass as it becomes part of an ongoing natural cycle.

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[17] The tree also becomes a part of the image from the tarot of the Hanging Man, which is used again in *Pilgermann*. One can also connect this to the olive tree as emanation of the 'Thing-in-Itself' and opening to the underworld in "Pan Lives" and *The Medusa Frequency*. See p 78-79.

Having experienced this in the cosmic womb, Riddley is free to conceive his own creative spiritual message. It is not concerned with the feeble and misguided attempts to return to Good Time that occupy Goodparley and the Mincery. Rather it is knowledge that is redemptive and insightful and that will break the 'Fools Circel'. It involves a unique and individual vision of recognition of the "idea in the hart of every thing" (162). Riddley re-emerges with a special understanding of "NO POWER" which transcends human endeavour and feeble attempts at progress. He writes,

> If you cud even jus only put your self right with 1 stoan youwd be moving with the girt dans of the every thing the 1 Big 1 the Master Chaynjis. Then you myt have the res of it or not. The boats in the air or what ever. What ever you done wud be right. (162)

It is from this conception of a different way to find 1st knowing that Riddley as shaman begins to create through art. Hence Hoban introduces an alternative to the urge to power and material progress.

The most powerful and resonant symbol of this transformation is the redemptive image of Greenvine. Greenvine is Riddley's name for the carvings of the Green Man found in the crypt of Canterbury Cathedral. The origins of the Green Man suggest that, far from being "mere shabby mechanism, something scarcely removed from the vegetable world" as Cowart wrongly suggests, this archetype has its roots in various fertility rites and rituals and is connected to mythical heroes such as Dumuzi, Tammuz, and Attis. The Green Man is associated with "archaic fertility rites" "found in the European spring festival of the first of May" (Baring and Cashford 410-12).[18] The image of the Green Man, found in many carvings which are enmeshed in vines and leaves known as the foliate head, has several values integral to the understanding of Riddley's quest and his invocation of it as an artistic totem. The transfixing gaze of the face of the Green Man plays a part in "redeeming nature from the pall of sin that had descended on her with the idea of the Fall, and invoking that more ancient knowledge of the relationship of the goddess to her son, incarnate through him as the life of the earth" (412). Furthermore, to quote William Anderson, the Green Man might have been a mascot for the masons as it is symbolic to them of "the energy they had to transform, the energy both of living nature and of the past stored in the collective unconscious" or express "the spirit of inspiration, the genius in created things" (412). The Green Man is

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[18] According to Baring and Cashford the spring festival celebrated seasonal change which ushers in growth and rebirth. It involved dancing around the May Pole and a sacred marriage between the May Queen and her partner the 'Green One' (Baring and Cashford 411).

also closely linked to alchemy which is found in the traditional figure Mercurius "whose power for self-generation, self-transformation and self-destruction was described by the alchemist, who understood this energy to be the divine life in all nature, ever changing, yet ever the same" (412).

All these possible meanings are implicit and activated by Riddley's fascination and 'connexion' between the face of Greenvine and his new spiritual knowledge. It is from this face "with the vines and leaves growing out of the mouf" that Riddley begins to see that it "wer every face" (*RW* 166). Carrying this image of collective humanity he changes his course, rejecting the material search for "yeller boy and the pig shit in the hart of the wood" (161). Riddley no longer pursues the "Hy Power" but as the feeling grows like a "grean sea" realises that "THE ONLYES POWER IS NO POWER" (167). This idea is truly regenerative, and from it Riddley intuitively finds a buried Greenvine figure which he will eventually incorporate into his new Eusa Show. The emphasis here is on a redemptive artistic imagination through which Riddley as shaman becomes the heroic figure who in a small way provides an alternative to the road of power, progress, and 'clevverness'. Despite being complicit in finding it, he resists the knowledge of gunpowder and, after warning them of the dangers of their dabbling with explosive concoctions of sulphur and saltpetre, he actually outlasts Goodparley's and Granser's failed attempt to make the '1 Big 1'. Having relentlessly pursued the secrets and means to make gunpowder they end by blowing themselves up in a parody of their intended mythic ritual of renewal (192-94).

Thus the "Fools Circel is broakin" (292). The Mincery is in disarray without a leader or an 'Ardship of Cambry', who is killed when the mutinous "hevvys" rashly throw the "gready mints" or ingredients of gunpowder into a fire thereby blowing apart and killing the Eusa folk (*RW* 200). Riddley's people are thrown further into chaos as various sects of "hevvys" are set "luce" (201) trying to acquire the means to make gunpowder. Despite the possible onset of another cycle of civilisation and 'clevverness', Riddley has succeeded in his own spiritual pilgrimage and confirms what Orfing mentions about the vast difference between Goodparley's misguided material quest for power and Riddley's spiritual quest:

> 'Wel Riddley if I brung him down for any thing it ben becaws he thot you cud move the out side of things frontways and leave the in side to look after its self. Which I think its the in side has got to move every thing and its got to move us as wel.' (203)

Riddley goes on his own endless 'roadings' and becomes a questing knight figure who heralds the regenerative power of nature and enacts a renewal and rebirth. During a conversation with Orfing, who is to become Riddley's new roading and show man partner, we see the last connections to the fertility myth being made. Here Riddley, who becomes the "Asker of the Worl",[19] receives an answer that suggests the enduring power of nature and also hints at the irrelevance of human actions in the endless natural cycles. So Riddley asks Orfing,

> 'Is this HOAP OF A TREE then?'
> He said, 'Yes it is. Which theres hoap of a tree if its cut down yet itwl sprout agen. And them tinder branches theyre of wil not seaze. Tho the root of it works old in the earf and the stick of it dead on the groun yet even jus only the smel of water and itwl bud and bring forit bowing like the plan ... Inland may be cut down yet them branches wil keap coming. People may try to kil them branches only itwl be the peopl what fall down and dy them branches wil grow out of ther moufs which that's our blip and syn." (175-76)

Riddley, in the last moments before they begin their new show, is able to answer Orfing when he asks the same question. Thus Orfing asks, "'Riddley dyou think theres hoap of any thing?'"(198). Riddley replies, "Theres new earf on the barrens all the time" (198).

In conclusion, given the weight of imagistic allusion to an underlying fertility myth, it becomes essential to view *Riddley Walker* as constituting a hopeful – albeit unsentimental and starkly grim – portrayal of human progress. In "Portknockie", an essay charting his personal pilgrimage to a sacred place, and the vision he received there, Hoban provides us with a glimpse of his intentions in *Riddley Walker*. At the appropriately named Green Castle, staring out to sea, Hoban felt a deep, joyful gratitude which he identified not with "the Father and the light" but with the return to "darkness and the Mother – the Old Mother, Great Mother, Mother Goddess, womb of everything and nurturing body of earth" (*MUM* 211). In this return to "womb of the sea and the darkness of death" Hoban unexpectedly found a "lively feeling" and he explains that "emanations of origin make us glad" (211). In this special space which is perhaps the "soul of the universe", Hoban is "the organ of reception required by that soul" and he connects with the "power of the potential, the power of one continuous rhythm of immanent change and permutation that vibrates behind the appearances of things" (212). Most apposite for us is his next comment, which is the crux of the motivation for

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[19] This refers back to the myth Lissener told Riddley, 'The Lissener and the Other Voyce Owl of the Worl' (*RW* 85-86). Possibly also hinted at is the Grail legend which sees the questing knight having to ask a specific question to initiate the rejuvenation of the Waste Land.

Riddley's fertility quest and its true significance: "Indifferent to us it is, inhuman; yet to tune ourselves to it feels good, gives us a sense of *release* from the hard bargain of moral contract" (212; emphasis added).

Finally, it is necessary to stress the complexity of Hoban's vision in *Riddley Walker*. In resurrecting a fertility myth, Hoban is careful not to fall into the trap of 'primitivism' and nostalgia for a supposed idyllic state of nature. Not only is the regression into a Neolithic culture portrayed as nasty and brutish, but Riddley's culture is no more moral or harmonious than any human culture in human history – his tribe cannot be conceived as an evocation of a blissful return to a society of an idealised rustic pastoral idyll or the Golden Age. Thus, while listening to what Rousseau called the "voice of nature" (Bate 35), Hoban is aware of the dangers of the "urge to go 'back to nature'" (36). This critical awareness is evident if one considers Rousseau's methods of a possible 'return to nature' in relation to Hoban's work.

Rousseau's first response to the "voice of nature, "the dream of a transformation for all humankind, through the overthrow of that very institutionalized despotism which defines society as the opposite of nature" (38), is rejected in *Riddley Walker*. Hence Goodparley's aspirations and fate, and indeed the political structure of Riddley's society, reveal that the attempts to return to 'good time' are ultimately dangerous and counter-productive. Here Hoban exposes a central paradox of Rousseau's on which Bate has commented: "our very freedom to transform and transcend the state of nature is the source of our enslavement" (45).

Some hope is found in the similarity of the spirit of *Riddley Walker* to one of Rousseau's other responses. Thus Hoban, through the wandering and solitary Riddley Walker, portrays the self in a way similar to Rousseau's ideal: the individual is "set in reaction against society" and "takes refuge in reverie", gaining reconciliation with nature "through memory, through imagination, through the reorganization of his mental and emotional world" (41). However, Riddley still yearns for the 'good time' of material and technological progress (see *RW* 100), and inevitably returns with his new vision to his society still fraught with conflict.

At the mythic level, Hoban is redeploying his dialectical vision in order to explain the central paradox of this situation of alienation or primal fall from nature. Echoing the discussion of the dialectic of the sacred and profane in *The Medusa Frequency* and foreshadowing the evocation of good and evil in *Pilgermann*, Hoban reveals that the fall

and the impulse for return are inextricably linked and that a strict opposition between '1st knowing' and 'clevverness' is misleading.

Slavoj Žižek comments on Colin Wilson's book *From Atlantis to the Sphinx* and his underlying New Age project of "'recovering lost wisdom of the ancient world'" (Žižek 84) shed a helpful light on Hoban's related pursuit in *Riddley Walker*. Thus, Žižek notes that "Wilson opposes two types of knowledge: the 'ancient' intuitive, encompassing one, which makes us experience the underlying rhythm of reality directly" and the "modern knowledge of self-consciousness and the rational dissection of reality". However, while presenting us "with the prospect of reuniting the two halves" (84), Wilson interestingly rejects both the "premodern view" that sees modernity and rationalism as "mere aberration" and advocates a "return to the old wisdom" *and* the view of "'synthesis' that would somehow maintain the balance between the two principles, enabling us to keep the best of both worlds" (85). In a better response to the dilemma, and one which has clear parallels with *Riddley Walker*'s quest, Wilson emphasises "the force of imagination" (85). Here it is essential to note that the very "Western principle of self consciousness and individuation also brought about a breathtaking rise in our imaginative capacity, and if we develop this capacity to its uttermost, it will lead to a new level of collective consciousness, of shared imagination" (85).

Furthermore, we should read Hoban's evocation of the fall and redemption as an interrelated and inseparable dialectic; the potential solution is to be found in our imaginative and mythic capacity to conceive of a forever-lost wholeness and harmony. Thus, in Žižek's terms, "the moment of the Fall (the forgetting of ancient wisdom) coincides with its exact opposite – with the longed-for next step in evolution" (85). In a complex paradoxical mode of argument, Žižek expounds a formulation very similar to Hoban's own conception of the Orphic action cycle of inherent loss and finding, of the myth of fault as expressed in Eusa's killing, and of the dense explication of Riddley's epiphany in the crypt:

> the Fall is in *itself* already its own self-sublation, the wound is in *itself* already its own healing … . The problem with the Fall is thus not that it is in itself a fall, but, precisely, that, *in itself*, it is already a *Salvation which we misrecognize as a Fall.* Consequently, Salvation consists not in our reversing the direction of the Fall, but in recognizing Salvation in the Fall itself. To put it in simplified narrative terms: it is not that we must first make the wrong move, introducing a split, so that we can then heal the wound, and return to a higher unity: the first move is already the right move, but we can learn this only too late (87).

Hoban conceives man's relation to nature and a sacred wholeness as ambivalent and paradoxical with the possible re-unification only enacted or aimed at through mythic imagination or the proper recognition of our fundamental situation. Žižek writes that it is the "very gaze" which creates and perceives evil and as such we must realise that it is "not that things went wrong, downhill, first with Adam, and were then restored with Christ" but rather that Adam and Christ are *one and the same*" and therefore "all that changes for us to pass from one to the other is the perspective" (87).

Lastly, Owen Barfield's distinction between 'original' and 'final' participation is key to understanding Hoban's dialectical vision which avoids 'primitivism' and portrays our complex urge for re-union with an underlying unity in the face of our obvious separation and alienation from nature. Thus the original participation which encompassed a "common identity" is replaced by "final participation", which is "the only participation possible after the long process of withdrawal" and it "recreates through the 'systematic use of the imagination' the old participative relation to nature" (Baring and Cashford 676). Thus it involves a "dual relation to nature, in which our contemporary experience of nature as separate from us is honoured but transformed by a conscious act of participation in which our identity with nature is experienced at a new level of unity" (676).

III

A post-apocalyptic literary vision

In this section I will explore two aspects of *Riddley Walker*'s unique and highly successful experimental style: the language of 'Riddleyspeak' and the problem of interpretation as experienced in not only Riddley's but the reader's linguistic quest for origins and meaning. I will show how Hoban depicts a decayed and distorted world view, where language and meaning is obscure and oblique as it has "suffered a kind of radiation sickness" (Cowart n.pag.), and yet triumphantly resurrects the power of artistic expression.

Furthermore, following the development of my exploration of Hoban's metafictional style as integral to his 'fictional philosophy', I will illustrate how *Riddley Walker* enacts "Hoban's theory of fictional inspiration" (Dipple 173). I will argue that *Riddley Walker* faces up to and answers critics of metafiction who may see the mode as narcissistic and introverted, as a literature of devastation and exhaustion (Hutcheon 20, 35), and heralding the death of the novel. In this respect, by presenting a post-nuclear

holocaust world which is "postmodern with a vengeance" (Kelley 274) and enacting yet resisting the ultimate threat of extinction of the creative novel, *Riddley Walker* exemplifies Robert Scholes' definition of structural fabulation or "future fiction". Thus, similarly to Hoban's other works,[20] *Riddley Walker* can be classed specifically as "fiction of essence" which, "concerned with the deep structure of being", is "that allegory which probes and develops metaphysical questions and ideals ... is concerned most with ethical ideas" and is "characterized by an act of faith, by a leap beyond behaviour toward ultimate values" (Scholes 26). Riddley's own narrative voice emerges out of the waste land both to question and answer the complexities of language and meaning.

'Riddleyspeak': the language of nuclear consciousness[21]

In *Riddley Walker* Hoban has invented a form of expression unique to Riddley's post-nuclear world. Here not only has the '1 Big 1' shattered and fragmented "habits of living, political structures, and religious beliefs" but language too has undergone a profound change (Maynor and Patteson 18). 'Riddleyspeak' is a degenerate primitive hybrid of English embodying humanity's lapsed state. Like Maynor and Patteson, who quote Hoban saying that 'Riddleyspeak' is "one of the protagonists of the story" (19), Jeffrey Porter highlights the importance of the "remote", "bizarre" and "forbidding", "neobarbaric language", claiming that it is "probably just as significant as the action itself" (Porter 451). It is a language that "knows things people do not" (451). Its "linguistic complexities ... indicate that language has a life of its own" (Dunwell 93) and this means it exerts a powerful independent and structural control within the novel. Porter describes the characteristics and creative potential of 'Riddleyspeak':

> Comprised of archaisms, computer jargon, substandard English, cockney slang, and odd neologisms, the fragmentary and hybrid speech of *Riddley Walker* evokes a powerful image of mutation and decomposition, demonstrating how meaning survives its own distortions. (Porter 451)

As it is arguably the novel's "most arresting feature" (Maynor and Patteson 19), many characteristics, effects and implications of this new lexicon have been described and

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[20] I am thinking specifically here of *Fremder*, Hoban's other most obvious science-fiction novel, as well as *Pilgermann*, which, in the next chapter, will be shown to draw elements from the science-fiction genre. In each instance, Hoban is using different genres and modes of literary and non-literary expression to suit his purposes, which I argue are primarily 'spiritual'.

[21] The phrase "nuclear consciousness" (Porter 459) is taken from Jeffrey Porter's brilliant article, "'Three Quarks for Muster Mark': Quantum Wordplay and Nuclear Discourse in Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*" and develops the implications of Hoban's use of language given the theme of nuclear physics.

analysed by various critics. David Dowling concentrates on the poetic quality and rich inventiveness of the "nukespeak", listing ten literary features of the language:

> -phonetic spellings (**lykens**/lichens, **sepert**/separate, **pernear**/pretty near)
> -homonyms or puns (**'it seams'**, **minum**/minute, **fizzics**/physics)
> -metathesis (**sturgling, parper, arnge**)
> -childish pronunciation (**nindicater, amminals**)
> -onomatopoeia (the dogs '**grooling and smarling**')
> -archaic English (**withering, glimmers**)
> -computer jargon (**puter leat**/computer elite, **to input** and **pirntout**)
> -contemporary slang (**just so much cow shit, pressurs little barsted, pissing down, that's a larf innit**)
> -Clockwork Orange-ese (**vackt, zanting**) (Dowling 182)

One motivation for 'Riddleyspeak' is to construct a plausible devolution of modern English which reflects society's regression into a primitive brutal state. Although Maynor and Patteson argue that "there is no such thing as a 'primitive' language or dialect" and there is "no correlation between the language used by a group of people and the cultural evolution of that group", they claim Hoban has still been able to "suggest a primitive culture by distorting the English language" as he attempts to (in his own words) "corrupt the language in what seemed to be a natural and believable way" (Maynor and Patteson 20). While explaining the deviation from a standard lexicon "that most readers will view as lacking education and sophistication", they comment on 'Riddleyspeak's' "heavy reliance upon the concrete, and its child-like phonology and syntax", errors in "spelling and punctuation", specific speech patterns and registers (20). They also note the literalness of the language and the inability of Riddley's people to represent or describe the abstract. This, they argue, implies a childlike level of linguistic ability and the "speech habits of lower classes of society" (20). They reiterate this point, arguing that the language seems to suggest the type of speech 'level' termed a "restrictive code" which "relies heavily on context, on tangible objects" and is, they note, characteristic of the "lower socio-economic levels in English and American society" (20).

This observation is only partly correct: much of Riddley's speech and writing reveals a profound understanding of the abstract. Maynor and Patteson seem to neglect a more fundamental implication underlying the use and nature of 'Riddleyspeak'. While Hoban might be suggesting through the language a great decline in material conditions after the nuclear fallout, Maynor and Patteson miss the point of the metafictional impulse in his writing and the value of such an innovative style. As well as being integral to the evocation of a nuclear consciousness, the linguistic experiment reveals an

exploration of the epistemological and ontological status of language and reality in constructing an alternative world of words (see Waugh 108). Porter notes that 'Riddleyspeak' is an example of what M. A. K. Halliday calls an "antilanguage": an "alternative and anomalous speech which operates by utilizing elements excluded from language by normal discourse" (Porter 450). In a similar way to other playful and experimental languages which use "slang, neologism, nonsense, wordplay, onomatopoeia, homophony, paronomasia, homonymy, catachresis and other tropes held in contempt by normative critics" (450), 'Riddleyspeak' can be viewed as part of Hoban's ongoing linguistic attack on the 'limited-reality consensus' – which he has explicitly linked to a language failure as well as to an ethical failure which leads to violence and destruction (*MUM* 131, 139). Porter writes:

> By suspending realist notions of meaning and by breaking the common rules of discourse, these stories project verbal counterrealities wherein the values and norms of official language are criticized and ultimately disrupted. (Porter 450)

Furthermore, more obviously than in any other of Hoban's metafictional texts, *Riddley Walker* exhibits Hutcheon's notion of linguistic narcissism.[22] While Hoban creates a self-actualising future heterocosm (other world) in language, the sheer strangeness of the texture of the language, with its different phonetic features, syntactical structures and stylistic formulations, concretely and directly celebrate the productive processes, the inventiveness and elusiveness of language itself. 'Riddleyspeak' patently draws attention to its own linguistic status and foregrounds the evolution (and devolution) of words in shaping and constituting reality. The complexity and "linguistic plurisignification" (Hutcheon 119) common to such subversive metafiction is embodied in the very nature of 'Riddleyspeak'. It evokes the transformative and generative power of language so that the "act of reading words becomes one of structuring fictive worlds" (118). Thus, the purpose of 'Riddleyspeak' is not only to be descriptive, as the language "reflects with great expressiveness and subtlety, the world in which it exists" (Cowart n.pag.), but also

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[22] I am uncertain of where to place Hoban's texts in Hutcheon's distinction between overt and covert narcissism (see Hutcheon 17-35). Hoban's works exhibit some of the most obvious features of overt narcissism: they do not hide the processes and self-conscious features of narration nor do they mask the palpable play on words which thematises and self-reflexively draws attention to the linguistic status of the work and highlights the activity of reading in constructing meaning. However, in terms of Hutcheon's distinction, Hoban's texts are also covert in the sense that they never directly address or openly refer to the reader but actualise certain narrative structures, especially the detective, fantasy and erotic and in terms of covert linguistic narcissism tend towards highly experimental self-reflexivity through jokes, puns, riddles, anagrammatic play, which generates, structures and constitutes the work. Despite the risk of inaccuracy I will loosely refer to *Riddley Walker* as displaying features akin to both overt and covert types of narcissistic metafiction.

to engage in a metafictional exploration of the genesis of words and their creative power, thereby reflecting the "productive character of language" (Eagleton 136). 'Riddleyspeak', in its strangeness and mixed form, is composed of what "Barthes describes as the 'double sign' which points to its material existence at the same time as it conveys its meaning" (136). 'Riddleyspeak' confirms that Riddley's world *is* language.

More than this, in its odd hybrid form, it affirms duplicity, complexity and multitudinous fictive possibilities. In terms of the genre, *Riddley Walker*'s language boldly challenges and stretches the conventions of the novel itself even while facing its "unthinkable" annihilation.[23] Far from signalling the death of the novel through the horrific possibilities of the future of nuclear destruction, this type of experimental writing invokes Hutcheon's description of the radical *nouveau nouveau roman* which stimulates a "more productive, active concept of reading, as well as writing" (35). Such novels move from the "traditional realist interest of fiction, away from the story told to the story telling, to the functioning of language and of larger diegetic structures" so that there is a return to the language itself:

> Language becomes material with which to work, the object of certain transforming operations which give it meaning. There is a self-conscious recognition of the multiple contextual significances yielded by textual selection and organization. (35)

In this respect the language of 'Riddleyspeak' is "not merely a decorative twist" but is a "protagonist in the book in its intrinsic relationship with theme and setting" (Maynor and Patteson 21). As a language, 'Riddleyspeak' powerfully evokes a nuclear consciousness which mirrors cataclysmic change, destruction and creation, fission and fusion. Dowling comments that just as "several characters ransack language for its half-life of scientific knowledge, much of the language itself reflects the devolution of post-disaster society into brutishness" (Dowling 182).

This interrelationship of form and content is evident in the pervasive image of fragmentation, decay and mutation and is indivisible from the related need for wholeness, recovery and regeneration. Riddley's people are desperately attempting to uncover and recover the vestiges of a lost civilisation. The main characters in the novel are "searching language for a key" and they "dig in it, as fiercely as they dig in the muddy

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[23] The phrase "unthinkable" is used by Peter Schwenger in his article "Circling Ground Zero" to illustrate the impossibility and paradoxical attempt to come to terms with the destructive potential of nuclear power. What *Riddley Walker* does to the language of the novel in facing the unthinkable consequences of nuclear war, *Pilgermann* does to the narrative possibilities of narration in the novel when it explores the ultimate unthinkable: narration after death. See p 172-75, 203-10.

ground to unearth relics of the nuclear age, bits of machinery that are frustrating traces of a former order and power" (Dowling 183). Through this process each word carries the muddled, entangled residual traces or historical evidence of its origins and the changes it has undergone. When Hoban writes that "language doesn't stand still, and words often carry long-forgotten meanings" (Afterword *RW* 225) he expresses his "proclaimed interest in language as archaeology" and he describes words as archaeological objects – "full of the remnants of the dead and living pasts" (qtd. in Hudston 22).

Indeed Porter has highlighted this aspect of 'Riddleyspeak', noting that mutation is an abiding metaphor in the novel:

> The world has been poisoned by radioactive decay, and words as well as people are no longer what they once were. ... the word, like enriched uranium, is fissile material. Just as atomic nuclei fissioned long ago in nuclear catastrophe, words have split in two and, by altering their form, have changed their meaning. (Porter 456)

Porter gives many examples of this process throughout Hoban's text but perhaps the splitting of the atom and fragmentation brought about by the '1 Big 1' as reflected in the broken and disrupted language is most apposite in the division of 'together' into 'to gether'. This is not only a broken adverb which can no longer describe a whole unified world but is also an active verb (meaning 'to gather'), which reveals the need for this wholeness and coherence that is implicit in the novel. Further elucidating the intricate connection between language and theme, Porter writes:

> Human life, now deformed and degenerate, has changed dreadfully. Nothing has escaped mutation, not even language. Like the atom, language too has come apart, split explosively by history, and has lost its semiotic stability. Set free, the signs of Riddley's world split and recombine to form new meanings. (Porter 453)

For Porter the nuclear consciousness expressed through language is best encapsulated by wordplay, and in particular the use of the pun: "to speak the language of the atom is to speak the language of the pun" (451). Porter's study of 'Riddleyspeak' focuses largely on the nature of the pun in its vital and inventive role as well as a tool towards critiquing nuclear consciousness. It becomes not simply a post-modern form of wordplay but incorporates a reconstructive and creative aspect. The puns evolve or mutate from a "belief that life has been betrayed by technology", so Porter stresses the moral power of the pun to "add an ethical and ontological dimension to a term" (460). Examples of this are 'greedy mints' for ingredients, 'masheans' for machines, and 'Saul and Peter' for saltpetre (460). The pun provides an ethical "perspective by incongruity" where through

a new juxtaposition of terms and meanings the word can "reorder our customary categories" (460). Porter sums up the regenerative ethical dimension of 'Riddleyspeak':

> In Hoban's polygot novel, the postatomic pun redefines the text of annihilation by creating an oxymoronic alternative to the language of the bomb, thus restoring to language what was omitted by an earlier atomic world: the qualitative relations of human existence. (461)

'Riddleyspeak' also is directly linked with Riddley's spiritual quest. As David J. Lake has argued in his article "Making the Two One: Language and Mysticism in *Riddley Walker*", puns "assert the mystical union of concepts we normally keep separate" (Lake 157). Highlighting multivalent possibilities of meanings in the key words 'wud', 'hart' and 'Addom', Lake reveals the underlying "central paradox of the mystical philosophy: the Unity is in multiplicity" (165) and shows 'Riddleyspeak' as enacting the "original/ultimate unity of all being, and the pragmatic disunity of beings" which is "at the heart of the philosophy of inland" (164).

Once again, as with *Kleinzeit* and *The Medusa Frequency*, one may note the inherent tension within Hoban's use of language while celebrating the life of the linguistic imagination: on the one hand, to invoke for religious purposes the intimate relationship between words and things and the power of language to generate mystical knowledge of unity and wholeness; and, on the other hand, to play with the radical malleability and infinite possibility of meaning through words. While Hoban may attempt to treat mystically the connection between sign and signifier as "inviolate" (Dunwell 19), he also affirms and revels in the fact that the pun is an example "of the instability of linguistic systems" and that "wordplay always reminds us of the inherent duplicity of language" (Porter 463). Wary of this contradiction, perhaps the best way to approach this is through the lens of (Zen-like?) self-conscious linguistic paradox and play. In this way the pun self-reflexively disrupts unashamedly to "enforce ambiguity", leaving the reader "endlessly oscillating in semantic space" (Attridge qtd. in Porter 463). The puns also yoke or juxtapose "incongruous" meanings together, so that "the pun holds its opposite meaning simultaneously, compelling the reader to see double, to reside in two worlds at once" (Porter 464). Hence Dowling (and Porter 464-65) writes that *Riddley Walker*'s 'nukespeak' is founded in Einsteinian physics and the uncertainty principle: it is an "oscillation" or a "demonstration of a game of variability and indeterminacy" (Dowling 186).

Finally, 'Riddleyspeak' is poetic and evocative in its mingled strangeness and familiarity. In its very difference and difficulty the argot of *Riddley Walker* intrigues and perplexes the reader while self-reflexively pointing to the power of language. Its function is similar to the process of defamiliarisation which uses the techniques of alienation, shock, or the purposeful attempt to 'make strange' in order self-consciously to 'lay bare the device' (Waugh 65). Thus, in showing that "the locus of strangeness in Hoban's postatomic world is language itself", Porter writes that "Hoban has defamiliarized the speech of his characters" so that "the altered shape of future speech evokes an even profounder sense of the unfamiliar and the unknown, introducing the reader to a people whose universe is hauntingly unlike our own, even though they share the vestiges of our discourse" (Porter 456). 'Riddleyspeak' as a fantastic language attempts to speak the unspeakable and imagine the unimaginable.

Riddley's linguistic quest: 'the curse roads of terpitation'

One of the most obvious functions of 'Riddleyspeak' is to challenge the reader so that it not only distances the reader from an unambiguous and clear understanding of a devastated world but reflects and refracts meaning through the words themselves thereby drawing attention to the act of reading itself. Thus, as with the narrator's struggle to find meaning in a hostile and resistant world, the reader too has to engage in a shift in consciousness and begin to learn to decode an unfamiliar and often perplexing linguistic code. Will Self writes in his introduction to the novel that

> Riddley wrestles sense out of the inchoate written language, and in so doing demands that we do the same. ... The sensation of groping in the dark that you'll have while deciphering this text is exactly what it is all about. True fictional praxis. (*RW* ix)

Indicative of "modern identity", Self argues that *Riddley Walker* is a difficult novel to read as it forces the reader to slow down[24] and shatters "one of the most prosaic delusions of this most neurotic age": the notion of simple, immediate and lucid comprehension through language (viii-ix). This overt activation of the reader's role in deciphering the

[24] This confirms Hoban's own intentions in constructing Riddleyspeak: "Early on the language began to slide towards Riddleyspeak; I like to play with sounds, and when alone in the house I often talk in strange accents and nonsense words. ... One thing led to another, and the vernacular I ended up with seems entirely plausible to me; Riddleyspeak is only a breaking down and twisting of standard English, so the reader who sounds out the words and uses a little imagination ought to be able to understand it. Technically it works well with the story because it slows the reader down to Riddley's rate of comprehension" (Afterword *RW* 225).

text is a typical metafictional tool. It encapsulates Hutcheon's central paradox in which readers are "distanced, yet, involved co-producers of the novel" (Hutcheon xii):

> Metafictions ... bare the conventions, disrupt the codes that now *have* to be acknowledged. The reader must accept responsibility for the act of decoding, the act of reading. Disturbed, defied, forced out of his complacency, he must self-consciously establish new codes in order to come to terms with new literary phenomena. (39)

Given the metafictional foregrounding of the reading process, *Riddley Walker* problematises and interrogates not only language and narrative but the very act of interpretation of the structures through which we glean meaning and values. Dipple observes that the reader must "take on a hermeneutical task – one that necessarily concentrates on the constant pressure of narrative experiments and possibilities this novel struggles with" (Dipple 170). What emerges from this complex interaction between the reader, writer and critic is a "composite identity" (Hutcheon 138). All identities are immersed in a creative process of interpretation where the distinction between creator and critic is dissolved.

In the "near equation of the acts of reading and writing" (27) *Riddley Walker* becomes an example of Barthes' term: a 'writable' or 'scriptable' text (141). Through the covertly narcissistic techniques of defamiliarisation through language, disruption of the conventions of reading, and an obvious parallel identification of reader with Riddley as self-conscious questing narrator engaged in the difficulties of interpretation, *Riddley Walker* highlights the reader's participation in creating meaning from the text. It forces him to accept responsibility toward the text (27) and despite being "unsettled", openly and imaginatively to "scrutinize his concepts of art as well as his life values" (139).

Thus Riddley's quest is linked to the reader's. It is a layered Bildungsroman and Künstlerroman in which character and reader learn and shape the fictional world together. Dunwell encapsulates this complex facet of *Riddley Walker* well:

> ... both Riddley and the actual reader of the novel are, in a sense, readers in the text. Riddley 'reads' remnants of the reader's culture; the reader reads Riddley's reading critically, only to find this criticism being redirected at her own conventions of reading. ... the redoubling (reader reads Riddley reading traces of reader) which constitutes the act of our reading is illustrated thematically in the novel. (Dunwell 79)

Thus Riddley Walker's very name and self-conscious narration enact the linguistic quest while continually pointing out its own materially constructed existence:

> Walker is my name and I am the same. Riddley Walker. Walking my riddles where ever theyve took me and walking them now on this paper the same. (*RW* 8)

Two roles are fused and interrelated: Riddley is "narrator and quester" (Dipple 171) or "riddler and story teller" (170). As a first-person narrator revealing his quest for meaning through his personal story, Riddley has been described as "humbly ignorant but constantly thoughtful" (174). Riddley's quest is to become a 'connexion man', for a sense of self is implicit in the act of writing and struggling with language. The frequent self-referential commentary Riddley provides as he describes his journey collecting and interpreting various myths, generates textual awareness. This works towards literary knowledge, exploring the limits of language, and "enacting Hoban's theory of fictional inspiration" (173). One example may suffice. Here Riddley expresses his manifesto as a connexion man and explains the process of the "reveal":

> Getting back now to my 1st connexion I dint want no I to think I wer trying to be a nother Brooder Walker nor I didn't want to come on with nothing flash. I had in mynd to take it slow and make it solid. Put 1 thot to a nother like ring poals in poal hoals and rafters to holders and the reveal on top of it all like thatch. So you could all ways go back from the reveal and get a good look at how the woal thing ben bilt and that wer going to be the Riddley Walker styl. (*RW* 60)

Here in a brilliant moment of self-reflexivity, Riddley is not only describing his own narrative processes and the construction of the novel itself but is unwittingly the voice for Hoban's entire philosophy of fiction. By trying to find the threads of coherence and meaning in the myths, events and world around him in ritual form known as a 'tel' or a 'reveal', Riddley describes the broad process of constructing a coherent narrative or stable self. However there are different forms this 'tel' can take, and while he wants to find a clearly defined communicable 'tel' (for us expressing the desire for a linear plot or stable identity) Riddley's first humiliating connexion is what Lorna calls a "trants reveal" (62). This is a mystical form of communication which he can barely translate into language, and which is closer to the strange spontaneous and inspired forms of ecstatic speech Lissener produces when he 'gethers'. Hence Riddley's first shamanistic 'reveal': "EUSA'S HEAD IS DREAMING US" (62).

Riddley's ambiguous and mysterious 'connexion' gives expression to Hoban's ideas of a universal mind and the interfusion of dream and reality. Here Hoban may be suggesting that the world is a fiction dreamed up by Eusa who is in this instance an unknown, mysterious and mythic artist figure or demiurge. We are the products of this

endless process of Eusa going through the 'Master Chaynjis' or the infinite permutations of action that is 'reqwyrt by the idear' of us in his cosmic consciousness. Dipple writes that underlining these "oneiric, idealist theories" is the "idea that the details of the plot have been worked out by an Other (Eusa, or whomever), and the human agent is merely its transmitter" (Dipple 177).

The 'tels' also express two different ideas of the source and creation of fiction. The first is fiction as craft, writing as intentional, planned and constructed artifice, hence the methodical description of constructing the 'tel' like a building. However, the construction of a linguistic structure and pattern has to try to incorporate and translate the second notion of fiction as a divine madness and epiphanic inspiration. Here Hoban is able to comment on the relationship between writing in words and fictional modes and the powerful visionary moments of the imagination which often seem to be inexpressible.[25] Elsewhere Riddley will acknowledge the limitations of language for expressing an epiphany. During his experience in Cambry, he interrupts his description of the vision to tell the reader that,

> I dont have nothing only words to put down on paper. Its so hard. Some times theres mor in the emty paper nor there is when you get the writing down on it. (161)

While Riddley begins to realise the limitations of language, he also begins to uncover the variety of interpretations and sources of the myths of his culture, especially 'The Eusa Myth'. This in turn reveals Hoban's mythopoeic impulse:

> In this process, everything he discovers is connected to a past set of ill-understood but supremely insistent mythologies; it is Riddley's job to interpret these, while he compulsively builds up new ones for transmission. Like many major fictions, *Riddley Walker* may be said to have as its subject the production and exploration of mythology. (Dipple 177)

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[25] Strangely this echoes Hoban's inspiration and writing process of the novel itself. He claims he received the kernel of the idea for the novel in a moment of illumination while in Canterbury looking at the painting of St Eustace. Hoban comments "as far as I can remember, when I saw this painting, I think the thing jumped into my head pretty well complete: that of a time when our civilization is gone, our technology has gone, and the inheritors of the wasteland that has been created have a traveling puppet show to carry on the state religion, such as it is" (Wilkie 99). However, the shape and form of *Riddley Walker*, including its language, took many years of writing and re-writing and was only completed several years later after five drafts. Thus to Myers he repeats the almost epiphanic birth of the novel as "the whole world of Riddley Walker dropped into my head" but also describes the creative process as a dialogue, wrestling with the idea of the story as an animate thing. Hoban says that after illumination it "was a matter how to grasp it, how to get it to be what it wanted – what it wanted from me" (Myers n.pag.).

Inevitably this process rebounds on us as it "destabilises the reader's confident authority in her own reading strategies" (Dunwell 80). So while in the text "human survival is primarily a hermeneutic problem", because in order to "rise out of the misery that darkens their lives, postatomic men must interpret the vestiges of a vanished culture, [though] the traces are little more than riddles" (Porter 452), the reader necessarily faces this dilemma as well. For just as Riddley is constantly confronted with the inexplicable multiplicity and duplicity of the myths and interpretations of them, so too is the reader forced to negotiate the contradictions and ironies of what seem to be misreadings and interpretative errors. If Riddley, living "in a deconstructed world where no position is privileged, no code to decoding apparent", faces "a deconstructionist nightmare" (Dowling 183), then the reader must also handle the tasks of reading a bewilderingly complex and unstable text. If "Riddley has to "choose between an endless regression of traces and the metaphysics of presence" (183) then the reader is in the same precarious position. Dowling also extends this situation to Hoban himself and his entire oeuvre:

> Hoban has dramatised his own creative dilemma: whether to present transparent fables of discovery and harmony, or scatter opaque clues that gesture but leave the mysterious heart of things intact. (183)

At the "curse roads of terpitation" (*RW* 41) writer, reader and character meet and face the task of making meaning. In one respect the hazards and difficulties of interpretation are obvious. As the "characters try to rescue surviving texts and rediscover lost meanings" the reader (necessarily complicit) realises that "the effort to do so, to find what is lost, is at best an ironic adventure" (Porter 452).

Perhaps the best instance of such is Goodparley's allegorical misreading of 'The Eusa Myth'. While to the reader this is obviously merely a brochure, the text revered by Riddley's people as gospel generates "tragic irony" as we follow the "intricate and logical deliberations of Riddley and Goodparley as they struggle to make sense" of the artwork describing and depicting St. Eustace (Dunwell 79). Thus, Goodparley's "imagination runs wild" and without a clue as to the original referent he transforms this "irretrievable text into a secret recipe for atomic power" (Porter 458). Of course, as both Dunwell and Porter note, the reader cannot remain smug, confident and judgemental as he/she is implicated in the process of interpretation. Thus, for readers "the irony cuts both ways" as "these mistakes betray something more serious" and while readers "correct the mistakes of Hoban's characters … [they] must submit to paronomasia, to postatomic wordplay, which often implicates [us] in the nuclear crime that brought Riddley's world

so low" (Porter 458). Furthermore, as Dunwell notes, through this misreading Hoban focuses the "reader's attention to her own vulnerability to the existence of a multiplicity of readings, and the possibility of misinterpretation" and, as a result, "the reader's own cherished, conventionally acceptable cultural myths" are problematised and subverted (Dunwell 85-6).

Similarly Peter Schwenger's article 'Circling Ground Zero' deconstructs 'The Eusa Myth' using Derrida's concepts of structure, presence and absence, *différance*, and free play of signification. Schwenger introduces the concept of 'Ground Zero' (Cambry as site of nuclear bomb blast) as an "oxymoronic term" expressing the paradox and terror of absence and presence (Schwenger 251-2). He delineates the 'The Eusa Myth' as a parable of the rupture between sign and signifier (hence the tearing of the Littl Man the Addom), thereby causing an "epistemological equivalent of an explosion" (257). Evoked through the idea of the 'Master Chaynjis', this displacement and substitution of a central presence, a point of fixed stable origins and meaning, results in the perpetual ambiguities, flux and deferral of meaning in language – what Derrida terms "dissemination" (Eagleton 134). Thus the potentials of free play or *différance* are described as "the endless fission and fusion of ideas, substitution and supplementation, infinite extension in infinite process" (253).

What this means for Riddley and reader is that his quest for origins, for knowledge of myths, for absolute meaning and values are rendered naive and ultimately forlorn. For Riddley "words replicate and mutate dizzyingly even as he contemplates them" (Dowling 183). His attempts to decipher the significance of 'The Eusa Myth' leads to many possible interpretations and he is torn between Goodparley's attempted pragmatic instrumental scientific readings of myth and the mystical or spiritual inflections within these tales. Riddley's desire to write his experiences down as he thinks on "whats in us lorn and loan and oansome" (*RW* 7) or to discover the nameless absent presence "looking out thru our eye hoals" which is "some kind of thing it aint us but yet its in us" (6), produces the realisation that:

> I dont think it makes no diffrents where you start the telling of a thing. You never know where it begun realy. No moren you know where you begun your oan self. You myt know the place and day and time of day when you ben beartht. You myt even know the place and day and time when you ben got. That dont mean nothing tho. You stil dont know where you begun. (8)

Here knowledge (of the self, narrative, origins) "is hidden, possibly absent, and in any case unspeakable" and as a consequence it is "to be found nowhere in the narrative – and

everywhere" (Schwenger 254). In the pattern of Riddley's journey and narrative it is revealed that "a circle does not originate in a governing center but in a line that is continuously deflected from itself" where the "circle produces itself in a void, going through its changes without knowing how many of them there will have to be for it to return to itself or even whether there will be a return to self" (258).[26] Even Riddley as authority and mythmaker or *bricoleur* is deconstructed into doubt and paradox. Riddley is at the mercy of overarching systems of language which constitute and displace him (apparent in the repetition of the 'Fools Circel'). This means that the notion of the *bricoleur* as "absolute origin of his own discourse" being the authority to "construct the totality of his language, syntax and lexicon" is itself a "myth of origin" (254).

Despite these facets of misreading, misinterpretation and the limits of language, *Riddley Walker* delights in the vicissitudes of signification. While the postatomic free play of the sign may be endless, annihilating the chance of total transcendence or ultimate traces of origins, Porter has convincingly shown that this is a radically inventive condition" (Porter 457). The "mutation of language lies at the very heart of meaning" (450) and in this 'fallen' condition language is "permeable and open to expansion and absorption, is essentially intelligent" (451). The "spontaneous decay of language" signals "wordplay", but this mutability and instability does "not diminish speech": rather new meaning is created as language assimilates a broken world, adapting to its discontinuities, reshaping both itself and its users, mingling the mangled, finding relationships where least expected" (457). Furthermore, for the reader the

> amazing, unique verbal texture of Riddley Walker reminds us that wherever we walk we will inhabit text, with all its information, its ambiguities, its recipes for disaster, but above all its energy and invention. (Dowling 187)

Thus, the floundering allegorical misreading is unavoidable and actually creative. Rather than to "insist on Goodparley's 'error'", Kelley emphasises the "dark pathos of allegorical interpretation – the fact that it will and must go on constructing meaning and finding patterns in a world where there are no fixed guides" (Kelley 276). As such it teaches us about our mythopoeic nature and is a testament or "compelling story of how and why allegory survives and of the necessity of that survival" (276).

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[26] This conception of a circle and a line which approaches but never meets bears remarkable similarity to the figure of the asymptote, one of the 'medical' problems in *Kleinzeit*. It can be taken as a means of conceptualising Hoban's entire fictional movement. Therefore the asymptote, the mathematical figure of a straight line closely approached by a curve so that the distance between them decreases to zero as the distance from the origin increases to infinity is a means to understand the pattern of the novel.

I would also argue that in some ways Hoban's language is ecological and elemental,[27] necessary to re-imagining the unity with nature while not avoiding our obvious separation from it. As Baring and Cashford claim, a "new *poetic* language" is a vital tool in imagining reunion with the Mother Goddess: it can "allow back into consciousness a sensibility that is holistic, animistic and lunar in origin, one that explores flux, continuity and phases of alternation, offering an image not of exclusive realities, nor of final beginnings and endings, but of infinite cycles of transformation" (Baring and Cashford 676).

The true spirit of *Riddley Walker* is embodied in its hero. He "challenges the vertigo of unresolvable equations by listening to and telling stories – finally, by becoming the hero of the one he is telling us" (Dowling 183). Thus his biography is essential, as it charts "a steady evolution from a faith in received meaning and encoded connection, to an acceptance of mystery and an extreme epistemological scepticism" (185). Through his new Punch and Pooty show, Riddley embraces faithfully the dangers and problems of language openly and joyfully. He not only has resisted Goodparley and an instrumental power but has created a show which celebrates "the human belief in the power and promise of words, in the dogged conviction that discourse is indeed significant *action*" (Gannon 34). Riddley's true home is on the road with Death or "Drop Johns ryding on his back" (*RW* 220) endlessly journeying and receptive to change and the mystery of the paradoxes of the human condition: "Why is Punch crookit? Why wil he all ways kil the babby if he can? Parbly I wont never know its jus on me to think on it" (220).

In conclusion, *Riddley Walker* is a regenerative post-apocalyptic tale which faces our worst nightmare and yet resurrects a belief in the ongoing exploration of the possibilities and contradictions of our being. Rather than exhibiting what Charlene Spretnak has termed the "nihilistic disintegration of all values" of a destructive "deconstructive postmodernism", *Riddley Walker* exemplifies "an ecological or reconstructive postmodernism" which "seeks opportunities for creativity and growth" (qtd. in Coupé, *Green Studies Reader* 7) retaining hope for the totality amongst the fragmentation and dissolution of frameworks. It is an excellent example of what Robert Scholes calls structural fabulation which is best suited to our present understanding of future human nature, society and literature:

> Man exists in a system beyond his control but not beyond his power to rearrange. The fall of man is neither a myth from pre-history nor an event at the beginning

[27] See Will Self's comments in his introduction to the twentieth anniversary edition (*RW* v).

of human time. It is a process that has been occurring for centuries, and it is not so much a fall into knowledge as into power – the power to work great changes in ourselves and our immediate environment, the power to destroy our planet in various ways, slowly or quickly, or to maintain it and put life upon it for some time. On various levels of activity, man's ability to exert his power in self-destructive ways exceeds the ability of his feed-back systems to correct his behaviour. The great failures of our government in recent years have been failures of imagination. What we need in all areas of life is more sensitive and rigorous feed-back. The role of a properly structuralist imagination will of necessity be futuristic. It will inform mankind of the consequences of those actions, feel them in our hearts and our viscera. The structuralist imagination must help us to live in the future. And this task, this great task, as it makes itself felt, will work its changes in the system of literature. New forms will arise, must arise, if man is to continue. (Scholes, *Structural Fabulation* 16-17)

CHAPTER FOUR

Pilgermann: "The Final Vision"

Pilgermann is Hoban's most difficult, strange and disturbing novel. As it is so complex, allusive, and experimental it is also the most risky in terms of conventional fictional practice. Hoban has described the novel in an interview with Christine Wilkie:

> Now *Pilgermann* is, I think, much less integrated in that way because it's true to say this has been my farthest-out book and most enjoyable writing to date. And I think I'm drifting in the direction of improvisation. I care more about going wherever the thing takes me and letting it branch out into little odd spaces where perhaps one mightn't think anything was happening in terms of story. (Wilkie 104)

Pilgermann is almost like "an unperformable research project" into the vast time and space of human consciousness or "this place called time" (Dipple 178).

Pilgermann has been linked with *Riddley Walker*, by both the author himself and critics. Branscomb writes that it "is legitimate and useful to treat the two books as complementary" (33). Hoban in the acknowledgement to *Pilgermann* writes:

> *Riddley Walker* left me in a place where there was further action pending and this further action was waiting for the element that would precipitate it into the time and place of its own story. (*P* 10)

Pilgermann followed closely in the footsteps of *Riddley Walker* and its origins reveal a similar mode of creation. True to Hoban's style of fictional inspiration, the genesis of the novel is described as part of an actual quest for revelation and discovery: Hoban's visit to the "ruined stronghold of Monfort in Galilee, built in the twelfth century by the knights of the Teutonic Order of Saint Mary" (10). Hoban's vision of the stars "burning and flickering" between the Virgin and the Lion "with their upward swing like the curve of a scythe, the stare into the darkness" and the imposing scene of the "hooded eagleness" of the fort in the early dawn, "precipitated Pilgermann into his time and place and me into a place I hadn't even known was there" (10). With the Romantic zeal of divine imagination, Hoban grounds his fictional method in the language of pilgrimage to an awe-inspiring sacred place.

Hoban has also commented on the area which *Pilgermann* would explore:

> [f]urther thinking about the human condition. The concerns that were developed in *Riddley Walker* expanded in *Pilgermann*, and that pretty well wound up that cycle

> of thought, I suppose. … *Pilgermann* integrated all the other elements that had come forth. (Myers n.pag.)

This chapter examines *Pilgermann* as the culmination of Hoban's work in this phase of his writing. *Pilgermann* explores and expands many of the themes, motifs, and ideas of Hoban's previous works as he develops the threads of psychological, cosmic, and metafictional patterning into an erudite, recondite, and multifaceted novel. Hoban described *Pilgermann* to Myers as "sort of a deepened broadened *Kleinzeit*. And that's the one where I made friends with death, which is a big turning point for any middle-aged person" (Myers n.pag.). Thus the books both deal in different ways with death. *Kleinzeit* is more comic while *Pilgermann* is profoundly darker, more serious, and philosophical.

Dipple writes that *Pilgermann* "risks a great deal in terms of both language and formal coherence"; it is a "formidable novel, and its evocations more extensive than those of its predecessor[s]" (Dipple 179). Without underplaying the unique and peculiar qualities of Pilgermann as an achievement '*sui generis*' I pursue the various consistencies and continuities in relation to Hoban's other novels, showing that *Pilgermann* is a "nexus from which all of Hoban's fiction can be read" (179).

Pilgermann is woven around the most ambitious transcendent individuation quest of all Hoban's novels: the individuation process is superseded, deepened and broadened, becoming a universal allegorical quest through all history. Thus, despite the disparate appearance of the text, I chart Pilgermann's pilgrimage as Hoban redeploys familiar patterns in his protagonist's quest for self-knowledge and point out underlying thematic coherences between the novels. Branscomb sums it up:

> [Hoban's] protagonists come to realise that they are fragmented or incomplete. They launch themselves or are thrust into searches for wholeness which turn out to be circular, leading them into the past before allowing them to escape into the present. Ultimately their quests lead them to acceptance of their place in time, reintegration, and painful self-knowledge. (Branscomb 30)

The final individuation pattern is complemented by Hoban's most exhaustive exposition of his religious sensibility. Here, endeavouring to reveal Hoban's eclectic and idiosyncratic conception of God, I show how Hoban explores the "human condition and the human position in the universe relative to God as either him or as it" (Myers n.pag.). Two examples of this complex religious sensibility are discussed: the Hidden Lion Pattern and the evolution of the idea of God in the text, in order to discover whether Hoban reveals a coherent religious vision as a counter to certain relativist, pessimistic, and nihilistic strains of postmodernism. Furthermore, I seek to explore the nature of this

religious facet, in this case its relation to the particular problem of human suffering and evil. Finally, I conclude by showing how, as Hoban's most stylistically inventive novel, *Pilgermann* eludes easy categorisation yet continues to explore metafictional themes in creative, relevant and original ways.

I

Individuation beyond death

> *With each year what is at the centre of the self grows stronger and compels more recognition. Death is of course at the centre, waiting to attain its full growth when it can throw away the used-up body and join with history. Being a Jew I recognise more and more the deaths of all the Jews before me, singing, dancing, dying in flames, living in words, always in the moment that is now.* (*MUM* 156)

Pilgermann presents a complex and intriguing adaptation and modification of the individuation theme that runs throughout Hoban's other novels. If *Kleinzeit*, *The Medusa Frequency*, and *Riddley Walker* present the heroic journey towards self-knowledge and wholeness, the integration and realisation of the Self, then *Pilgermann* is written from a strange place where this has been already achieved and is only partially recovered and related to us. Individuation in these previous novels prepares the protagonist for the trials of life. In *Pilgermann* individuation is reversed and extended into the next phase, recounting and exploring the protagonist's preparation for eventual death. Branscomb writes,

> In *Pilgermann*, Hoban returns to Riddley Walker's quest and explores the second phase of the process of individuation, in which the individual, having established his ego in relation to the external world, begins to turn inward to explore hitherto unrealized areas of the Self. (Branscomb 36)

While this is an astute and valid assessment, there is a sense that in *Pilgermann* Hoban has gone beyond the traditional process of individuation. Branscomb writes that Pilgermann, as "narrator and central character", has "left ego so far behind that he no longer remembers his historical name and exists as 'waves and particles'" (36). This is important as it places Pilgermann in a unique narrating position. Revealing an odd endurance of consciousness, the narrating 'he' has partially transcended the ego and moved into a rarefied and diffuse realm of identity beyond death and beyond any conventional idea of the self. If anything the narrator as a "disembodied consciousness" (Dipple 178) speaks from the vague and uncharted area of the collective unconscious. Wilkie has captured the essence of this extraordinary narrative perspective:

> Pilgermann is the 'energy of an idea' (P, 39); a fragment of the infinite cosmic memory and being; the waves and particles of a onetime embodied, sometime disembodied consciousness of a onetime Jew. ... He speaks to us from a timeless nowhere; the time of origins; from the 'strange brilliance of total Now' (P, 47), where there is no before or after, no past or future tense. He tells his story in the continuous present of the universal mind. (Wilkie 72-73)

So the novel opens with the voice of the narrator from an obscure and indeterminate place and time:

> Pilgermann here. I call myself Pilgermann, it's a convenience. 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. When I want to appear I turn up as an owl. (*P* 11)

Although – like Hoban's other protagonists – Pilgermann is searching for wholeness, he is quizzically attempting to remember and recognise his past pilgrimage from a place beyond the particulars of space and time; from a place of ultimate fragmentation and dissolution. All that remains of Pilgermann is a 'terminus' (Wilkie 101). Having been previously animated by the presence looking through the 'eyeholes of his face', 'It' has since cast him off, leaving only a trace or echo of his past mortal existence.[1] In this state, as a phantom shaman, aided by the "persistence" (*P* 69) of the collective memory, Pilgermann attempts to transmit his message and "send[s] the idea of his being questing back" (99). Pilgermann invokes Memory as his Muse:

> 'Now help me, Memory!' Only a little space from here I have heard myself speak these words. But as the words and pictures of my thoughts go out on those few millimetres of waveband assigned to me I begin to understand that I myself am a tiny particle of Memory. (102)

The recall of those defining moments of Pilgermann's life and death which are still accessible exhibits the fragmented and disparate remnants of a typical individuation pattern, even if it is narrated from after the action. In fact, according to the narrator it is only

> after the hurly-burly of mortal life is over can one have a really good look at what has happened; unburdened by choice and unthreatened by consequences one is able to sort through the half-glimpses of a life-time and find perhaps one or two workable fragments of recognition. (183)

Self-knowledge is expressed in the need for perspective so that one might "see if this fragment and that fragment which do not fit together may yet both belong to a shape

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[1] This reveals the final endpoint of the development of the idea originally from the essays in *The Moment under the Moment* and through to *Riddley Walker* (see *MUM* 166 and *RW* 6).

which might be recognizable if seen entire" (183). Paradoxically, though, even in death Pilgermann does not see his life entire and as a result he is an oddly limited narrator, omnipresent but not omniscient.

However, Hoban's familiar theme of remembering and recovering the self is intensified as Pilgermann attempts to retrace the last years of his mortal life. Thus, although he has already died and exists in the ether as a "disembodied consciousness" (Dipple 178), the underlying projection and obsession of the narrative is the recollection of the pilgrim's journey to the sacred site of Jerusalem in order to achieve atonement and peace.

Significantly, a single historical individual's life is enmeshed and transmuted into a complex multifaceted symbolic and allegorical work. Thus already vague historical facts, including names and identities (even Pilgermann's name is uncertain) are transformed self-consciously into allegory while Pilgermann's narrative is interspersed with the impulses and echoes of multiform images, the meandering philosophical ruminations, and the thoughts of a consciousness that has since transcended its narrow historical context. An intricate web of religious figures and symbols is part of Pilgermann's need to remember and relate his quest for transcendence and recognition.

Through this journey, which resembles a bizarre, contorted and grotesque Pilgrim's Progress (Wilkie 72), Hoban weaves a difficult and demanding negotiation with Death. The pilgrimage can be divided into three phases (Dunwell 117): the first phase of the pilgrimage in Germany which begins in AD 1096, the second recounting his time as a slave in Antioch, and the final phase which describes his last brief renewed efforts to go to Jerusalem and his death in the Frankish siege of the Muslim stronghold during the First Crusade, AD 1098. During the journey, different ways of understanding suffering, evil, and death are represented: the way of renunciation, the way of mystical knowledge, the way of devotion, the way of works, and the way of sacrifice (Hebblethwaite 21). Ultimately *Pilgermann* is a portrayal of transcendence which is typically Jungian:

> One of the commonest dream symbols for this type of release through transcendence is the theme of the lonely journey or pilgrimage, which somehow seems to be a spiritual pilgrimage on which the initiate becomes acquainted with the nature of death. But this is not death as a last judgement or other initiatory trial of strength: it is a journey of release, renunciation, and atonement, presided over and fostered by some spirit of compassion. This spirit is more often represented by a "mistress" rather than a "master" of initiation, a supreme feminine (i.e. anima) figure such as ... Sophia in the Christian-Gnostic doctrine. (Jung, *Man and his Symbols* 147-50)

Pilgermann's pilgrimage (1):
Transgression, Sophia and Christ, and Pilgermann's dark night of the soul

In common with Hoban's other fictional quests, the origins of Pilgermann's pilgrimage are found in loss, violence, and a primal transgression. Pilgermann the Jew, living under oppressive conditions in an unknown Medieval German village in the late eleventh century, has a brief affair with Sophia the wife of a Christian tax-collector, who subsequently is responsible for an anti-Jewish pogrom during which Pilgermann is attacked and castrated.

The forbidden act of adultery is the defining moment of Pilgermann's being and quest. As an "image of such power as to confer unending Now upon the mind that holds it" (*P* 14), Sophia's beauty reveals a predestined yet prohibited epiphany which still radiates transcendent energy. The primal act of fault (see Ricoeur 163) is evoked with passion and illicit pleasure and carries universal implications. In a moment of ex-stasis at "the centre of time", Pilgermann is outside "the forbidden garden … waiting in expectation of a miracle, this waiting in a state of transcendental desire, in a state of sin made holy by its purity" (*P* 15). Pilgermann's "lusting" after Sophia "the vision of naked Wisdom" (14), and his unlawful consummation with her becomes an allegory representing both miraculous transcendence and simultaneously the sinful fall from grace.[2] Dunwell writes that Pilgermann's

> sexual transgression becomes a metaphor for the search for divine knowledge (and consequent authority) exemplified by the symbolic Sophia. … Pilgermann's Fall from the ladder (literally propped up against Sophia's window) is a fall from Eden which banishes him to the desolation of castration, where he can no longer commune freely with his God. (Dunwell 110)

As with all Hoban's epiphanies, Pilgermann's fulfilment is brief and intrinsically connected to loss and pain: on his way home from the paradisiacal "land of milk and honey" (*P* 13) and "fresh from attainment of Wisdom" (17), he is set upon by an angry Christian mob and brutally castrated.

The castration changes Pilgermann's life irrecoverably. After his stealthy act of virility and pleasure, Pilgermann is left unmanned, homeless, and cut off from his community and roots. All Hoban's heroes are "physically damaged" and Pilgermann's loss is compounded as his "wound is doubled: he is initially wounded into Jewishness through circumcision, and this primal mark of difference is occluded by castration"

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[2] For a similar formulation of an intrinsic and interconnected fall and salvation see the comparison between the Fall in *Riddley Walker* and Slavoj Žižek's ideas p 154-55 above.

(Dunwell 107-08). Ostensibly because of the sin of adultery (we later find out that the desire which seeks reward also yearns for retribution), the castration is also a mark of Pilgermann's judgement, condemnation, punishment, and exile. Similarly to the killing of the tortoise or the 'Littl Shynin Man the Addom', Pilgermann's castration separates him from wholeness and innocence, releasing an echo of the 'Master Chaynjis': torn from a sacred unity, Pilgermann hums like a "poor bare tuned fork" with opposites and dualities, "I am something, I am nothing, I am here, I am gone" (*P* 25-26). Foreshadowing death, the castration also symbolises his own mortality as the "premature impotence of castration is representative of man's final impotence in the face of death" (Dunwell 114).

Pilgermann's castration not only emasculates and alienates him but also inaugurates his spiritual quest. Branscomb writes:

> The story he tells of his pilgrimage to Jerusalem is also an account of his exploration of himself, a process of self-sacrifice by which the pilgrim must lose the things he values most in the physical world to discover new areas of the spiritual world. (Branscomb 36)

Hoban again undercuts the typical hero-myth's reliance on a strong, physically powerful hero. His "loss of physical potency, contrasting with the recovery of sexual power by Jachin-Boaz and Kleinzeit, emphasizes the exclusively spiritual nature of Pilgermann's quest" (37). Pilgermann learns that his castration was essentially necessary and inevitable and even that he willed it into happening. On his journey of sacrifice and renunciation he begins to experience life in a meditative and profound way, with a greater intensity of mingled joy and suffering. Pilgermann realises that "had I my proper parts I'd not be on this road" but would be trapped like Kleinzeit or Herman Orff in the predictable and drearily comfortable habitual routine of work, finding "what pleasure I could in life" (*P* 55). Loss is necessary for creativity and action.

Thus while at first Pilgermann bemoans his state as a eunuch, he does act bravely. After killing an attacker he remarks in surprise, "When I had balls I didn't have this much balls" (48). Learning the cyclical changeability and transformative nature of life, Pilgermann notes that "there is life to be got from death and for me there is the life of my present state arising from the death of my past one" (55). In an exclamation of self-growth and faith in a process of renewal, Pilgermann finds a heroic pilgrim's zeal, inner understanding and purpose when he leaves behind a past life of closed-minded narrowness:

> Thinking, thinking, and I can't think how I could have gone on living without coming on this pilgrimage, without being as I am being now. When I had my proper parts I must have been blind and deaf, the world had not come alive for me, I had never talked with 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. So, Pilgermann, let your heart have balls, and on to Jerusalem. (55)

Pilgermann's pilgrimage to Jerusalem is mediated and guided by the figures of Sophia and Christ. As a tutelary presence in Pilgermann's spiritual development, Sophia is an echo of Eurydice and the Mother Goddess so prominent in *Riddley Walker*. She is the universal archetypal image of the "Holy Spirit of Wisdom" which "embraces all human experience, inspiring trust in the capacity of the soul to find its way back to the source" (Baring and Cashford 609). The association of Christ with Sophia shows the influence of the Gnostic tradition as an underlying frame of reference throughout *Pilgermann*.[3] For the Gnostics, Sophia and her "dramatic myth about the fragmentation and reintegration of the soul" (618-19) was the "inspiration, guide and goal of a spiritual quest of overwhelming numinosity" (611). Her task was to "draw the human soul to her as to Christ" (611) and together with Christ was "the ground of their [Gnostic believers'] being and the wise presence of a directing consciousness within the soul" (615). Pilgermann is influenced by Sophia throughout his quest and despite her various appearances as maiden, hag or Mother Goddess she embodies the principles of life.

On the other hand, Christ, appearing in a vision when Pilgermann bloody, angry and in agony cries in vain to his Judaic God, seems to embody the force of death and destruction and the energy of antinomies. Pilgermann is "subject always to Christ the redeemer, the ransom, the sacrifice, victim, torturer, murderer, bringer of death. Iesous Christous Thanatophoros. Kyrios" (*P* 26). This amalgamated illumination of Christ is manifest in a layered and fluid set of associations which present Christ as the "great dead Lion of the World"; as a burning emanation of the Holy Spirit evoked by the flaming lion kite; and, transcending a Christian frame of reference, as a proliferation of images around a Hindu mandala figure of circular radiance, "three hundred and sixty avatars dancing" around the "live black body of Christ radiant in the centre of the great circle of fire, the burning world circle" (24-25). As a stern moral force, Christ commands over the straight action of the last judgement in which each day is the Day of Reckoning (21). He

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[3] Dipple has commented, "In a religious context, this novel appears to be connected to some sort of Gnostic doctrine (I am here thinking specifically of Valentinus's account, where Sophia appears in the thirtieth 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.)" (Dipple 180).

sets Pilgermann on the pilgrim's road of humility, expiation and atonement where the ultimate end is fusion with Jesus manifesting as ceaseless energy. Foreshadowing Hoban's Hermes in *The Medusa Frequency*, Jesus explains,

> '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.' (26-27)[4]

Through Pilgermann's transgression and the figures of Sophia and Christ the spiritual nature of Pilgermann's quest is revealed. It is ultimately centred on the Holy City of Jerusalem. After hearing a Bath-Kol,[5] Pilgermann is commanded to go to "Jerusalem! Thou pilgrim Jew!" (32). With purely religious intentions, realising that his old God has disappeared, and exposed to the corrupt nature of man, Pilgermann takes up a penitential mission to preserve the connection between the human and the divine. Understanding his spiritual mission, Pilgermann says:

> There came to me the thought that the world is full of mysterious, unseen, fragile temples; it was in these many temples that God used to dwell among us; they are easily destroyed, these temples, as I had destroyed the temple of the tax-collector's privacy in his wife. How many of them still remained? ... Quickly, quickly must something be done before all the temples were gone. (32-33)

Pilgermann's "physical journey of psychic self-discovery" (Dunwell 107) takes him through the archetypal wood where he experiences a horrifying dark night of the soul. In the process of spiritual renunciation, self-sacrifice and expiation, Pilgermann must confront the sordid, terrifying, violent and vicious aspects of his (and human) nature. During this part of his pilgrimage he must acknowledge the consequences of his sinful actions and atone for them. This becomes embedded in a wider universal exploration and understanding of evil and suffering; consequently Pilgermann contemplates the notion of salvation and Judgement.

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[4] The source of this quote must be the Gospel of St. Thomas. Hoban quotes it in "Portknockie" (*MUM* 211).

[5] A Bath-Kol is as Pilgermann suggests "a voice that spoke within me: not so much a voice as the daughter of a voice" (*P* 32). It is defined by the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia Online* as: bath'-kol, bath kol (bath qol, "the daughter of the voice"): Originally signifying no more than "sound," "tone," "call" (e.g. water in pouring gives forth a "sound," bath qol, while oil does not), sometimes also "echo." The expression acquired among the rabbis a special use, signifying the Divine voice, audible to man and unaccompanied by a visible Divine manifestation. Thus conceived, bath qol is to be distinguished from God's speaking to Moses and the prophets; for at Sinai the voice of God was part of a larger theophany while for the prophets it was the resultant inward demonstration of the Divine will, by whatever means effected, given to them to declare. It is further to be distinguished from all natural sounds and voices, even where these were interpreted as conveying Divine instruction. ("Bath Kol," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia Online* <http://www.bible-history.com/isbe/B/BATH+KOL/>.)

In the nightmarish forest Pilgermann stumbles upon the "stinking maggoty corpse" (*P* 44-45) of the tax-collector who has been beheaded and strung upside down from an oak tree. Accidentally Pilgermann kills Udo a relic gatherer and meets Udo's wife, a terrible feminine manifestation of a Sophia who is violent and "lustful and murderous" (Branscomb 37). He slaughters an anthropomorphised sow, also an aspect of the Mother Goddess, in a gruesome act of murder and coupling. Later on the road he joins up with the dead creature and its owner Konrad from whom he finds out about anti-Semitic atrocities (the sow is used to rout out Jews and desecrate their corpses). Pilgermann comes across a tortured Bear and his sadistic owner and while saving the bear from hanging meets Hoban's most sinister evocation of Death: Bruder Pförtner. Through Bruder Pförtner, who appears in various manifestations throughout the journey, Pilgermann first acquaints himself with his own young death waiting to come to full term.

In Pilgermann's passage through this hellish and surreal underworld, Hoban portrays human nature at its most corrupt and disturbing thus emphasising our inherent capacity for torture and abuse. Quite rightly Dunwell has linked this portrayal to the literary mode of the grotesque (see Dunwell 141-50). Hoban's descriptions are pervaded with perverse, visceral and savagely morbid details: the tax-collector's hanging corpse is a "stench of rotting flesh", "the remains of the corpse is bloated and writhing with maggots", the body's member "sticks out stiffly", "tumescent with rot" (*P* 44); the sow's "trickle of blood from her mouth and the red line round her throat made her seem a creature enslaved by lust" (78). Gross sexuality is fused with murderous brutality: Bruder Pförtner is lascivious, unrelenting and insatiable; his acts of sodomy, bestiality and onanism, while representing our mortality and physicality, also epitomise a harrowing depravity, baseness and a boundless capacity for cruelty and violence.

Dunwell notes that one of "the most effective vehicles of *Pilgermann*'s liminality is the mode of the grotesque" (Dunwell 141) and that this "allies itself with fantasy" in order to "interrogate the parameters of the ordinary by its 'excursion into disorder'" (142). Potentially obfuscating Hoban's intent, however, Dunwell draws on Derrida's notion of the hymen and displacement in order to argue that the grotesque "seems to embody the spirit of deconstruction" (142) and uses this to explain the blend of comic and horrific effects in the novel. While Hoban does use Harpham's ideas of grotesque as a deconstructive means to "call[s] into question the adequacy of our ways of organizing the world" (qtd. in Dunwell 143) and to represent marginality – the archetypal wood is a

liminal space between fantasy and reality allowing "his texts [to move] into an interregnum which challenges the mutual exclusion of opposites" (128) – his use of such techniques is also 'spiritual'. This aspect needs to be stressed, in opposition to a narrowly Derridean analysis.

For instance the invocation and use of Hieronymus Bosch situates *Pilgermann* in the realm of the grotesque, providing the visual frame of reference for the monstrous figures of the wood and a significant religious milieu.[6] In this sense, admittedly, in the 'spirit of deconstruction', "of bringing the margin to the centre" (150), Pilgermann refers to Bosch's "virtuality as well as his virtuosity" as the "master of what is seen out of the corner of the mind, the essential reality behind the agreed-on-appearance of things" (*P* 46-47). However, notorious for harsh indictments of religious hypocrisy, Bosch's allegorical works also depict a fundamental religious human condition: the unavoidable existence of evil, decay and the degenerate aspects of being. For Pilgermann in particular, over and above Bosch's grotesque fusion of disgust, horror and satirical dark humour, he evokes an intense visionary quality which inspires epiphany. Thus, from the margins and shadows in a "flash of lightning" Bosch conveys the "preternatural brilliance" of revelation; the "condition of total Now" conveyed in "extraordinary lucence … that epiphany of light immanent in our being and experienced in certain heightened states as the light-as-bright-as-day within the night, the light as bright as lightning" (47).

As Dunwell implies, the grotesque, which has been defined elsewhere as "the unresolved clash of incompatibles in work and response" or "the ambivalently abnormal" (Thomson 27), functions in this regard to expose and break down "dichotomising, hierarchal" paradigms (Dunwell 143). However, she does not pursue the most significant of these distinctions which are religious dichotomies. One example is the theological problem of the body-soul dichotomy. Pilgermann interrogates the paradoxes and inconsistencies surrounding Jesus' corporeal existence and the banal yet repressed question of Jesus' physicality (*P* 51),[7] while also fundamentally critiquing the separation

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[6] A helpful book in this respect is Peter S. Beagle, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. New York: The Viking Press, 1982.

[7] See Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* for an exposition and definition of 'kitsch' (which is opposed to the grotesque) as "the absolute denial of shit, in both the literal and figurative sense of the word; kitsch excludes everything from its purview which is essentially unacceptable in human existence" (Kundera 248). The "damnable dilemma", which "the great Gnostic master Valentinus resolved … by claiming that Jesus 'ate and drank, but did not defecate'" (246) is illustrated in a conversation between Sophia and Pilgermann. It ironically undercuts the commonly held view that Jesus was exempt from peculiarly human and base bodily functions, while comically exposing the absurdities of certain religious hypocrisy, corruption and prejudices:

> 'Then Jesus he wasn't,' she says. 'Jesus wouldn't have a smell, that's how you'd know him.'

between body and soul. Bruder Pförtner, who is not the "dignified manifestation as Goodman Death" but comically grotesque, "full of jokes and fun" (65), constantly thinks lewd thoughts about copulation. He points out that man's sexual physical nature is as powerful a part of his being as his soul. While Pilgermann looks at an idyllic rustic scene Bruder Pförtner harshly responds with an image of the peasant fornicating:

> 'Don't talk nonsense,' he says, 'that man hasn't got a mind, he's perfectly healthly; minds are a sickness. All he's got is a soul and his soul is in his scrotum.' (65)[8]

Pilgermann's examination of his "flesh-and-blood days" (41) is portrayed with "a sadistic pleasure in the horrifying, the cruel, the disgusting" so that the grotesque refers "to the body and bodily excesses and [celebrates] these in an uninhibited, but essentially joyous fashion" (Thomson 56). Hence its purpose is primarily to show Hoban working towards 'theological knowledge'. From the degenerate decay and horror of the scenes emerges revelation and epiphany. Thus the tax collector is both repulsively disgusting and the Tarot's Hanged Man, a figure of "redemptive self-sacrifice" (Branscomb 37) representing life in turmoil or suspension (rather than death), wisdom, intuition and divination (see *The Tarot* 66-68). It is "in the darkness on the wet and maggoty grass under the headless naked body of the tax-collector" that Pilgermann experiences the " total Now, that moment without beginning or end in which all moments are all contained" (*P* 47).

Pilgermann's experiences in the wood allow him to reconcile with his torturer and victims. He learns necessary lessons about dark, hidden unconscious aspects of human nature: including the inextricable link between good and evil, joy and suffering – existence as "the knife of joy" (88) – *eros* and *thanatos*, the inevitability of pain and suffering, and the intrinsic interconnectedness of everything. Weeping and opened up to a cosmic enlargement of sympathy, a purgation and catharsis, Pilgermann realises the ubiquity of the "ur-pain" which like the Kraken "swims in its monstrous bulk" below all human agony and loss (87). Pilgermann attains a new spiritual sensibility, accepting the impossibility of creation without destruction, sacred wholeness without desecration:

> 'Everybody has some kind of smell,' I say.
> 'Well I know it,' she says. 'That's just why Jesus would be different; he's the Son of God, isn't he? Do you think things came out of him like ordinary people when he was on earth? Do you think he made turds?'
> I say, 'Well, he ate and he drank and he bled so I suppose he must have done the rest of it as well the same as anyone else.'
> 'There you show your heathen ignorance, thou child of darkness,' she says. 'If Jesus has made turds they'd never have corrupted like ordinary ones and they'd be in little golden jeweled caskets in churches.' (*P* 51)

[8] We also witness a return to Hoban's familiar theme of human existence as a sickness.

> 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; I know that the dome and the woman both are manifestations of something elemental that is both beauty and wisdom and it is forever in danger, for ever being lost, torn out of our hands, violated. It is impossible to keep safe. … Altars are made for smashing. That thing in us that waits to jump up and smash, it stands looking over our shoulder as we build the altar. It rages, it smiles, it laughs deep in its belly, it dances on cloven hooves at the consecration of the altar, it looks ahead to the time of smashing. (89)

Pilgermann emerges from the forest with his "dead colleagues" and his "immature death" "not yet ripened to term" (88, 90) and continues on the road to Jerusalem under the great "spirit-bowl" of the sky of the "God-Mother" with a sense of purpose presided over by fragile yet resonant images of a regeneration quest inspired by Sophia as Wisdom, Beauty and the Egyptian sky-goddess. This is yet another trace of Riddley's fertility quest. Here it is lightly and less obviously suggested but it is a recurrent motif and will appear again nearer Pilgermann's demise.

Pilgermann's Pilgrimage (2): Antioch as Jerusalem, the Way of Mystical Knowledge, Devotion and Works

Unlike Riddley reaching Cambry, Pilgermann never reaches the centre: he fails to arrive at Jerusalem. He is captured by pirates and then sold as a slave to Bembel Rudzuk. Pilgermann is befriended by this benevolent and kindly, liberal esoteric open-minded Muslim, who is a traveller and trader with no attachments except to his recondite philosophy. Pilgermann is taken to Antioch and helps Bembel Rudzuk to design a complex patterned tiled surface for a courtyard with a tower at the centre which Pilgermann names the Hidden Lion. Pilgermann remains in Antioch until his death during the Christian siege, AD 1098.

During this time Pilgermann's understanding of his pilgrimage is radically transformed. This is most clear in his changing notion of Jerusalem as he faces death and acknowledges he will never achieve his goal (indeed that it had been misguided). Previously his objective had been conceived as an actual journey in historical space and time to a particular temple as an attempt to reinstate the authority and hold onto a vision of the sacred and holy, which he saw as being eroded by ignorance and sin. Trapped in Antioch and deeply affected by Bembel Rudzuk's eclectic mysticism, especially his intriguing inquiry into patterns and consciousness, Pilgermann achieves a new realisation concerning his quest. To a large extent this phase of Pilgermann's pilgrimage represents

an attempted escape from the violent conflicts of history into the sanctuary provided by detached mystical exploration.

Thus, Pilgermann's exile and alienation exacerbates his castration and crisis of being. He is a "dry tree", "cut off" from history and generation, unable to have children, he feels removed from a sense of identity and roots: Pilgermann has no place where he "knew where [he] was" and is dislocated from "a whereness to be in" (*P* 112-13). However, Bembel Rudzuk presents a challenging alternative to Pilgermann's previous concept of the self and pilgrimage, suggesting that there is a more enduring and everlasting memorial in the mysterious nature of patterns in which there is "a continuity that is not cut off" (113). In constructing the Hidden Lion, Pilgermann transcends beyond self into a cosmic identity and mystical connection with a unified hidden reality. The self dissolves into pure perception as "the very particles of our being are continually active with an unimaginable multiplicity of patterns, all of them contiguous with infinity" (114). Bembel Rudzuk teaches Pilgermann that the beauty of patterns are that they give "you a whereness to be in" so that

> '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 ever been, all places where you will ever be, and all places where you never have been and never will be.' (114)

The pattern as a mandala of wholeness and harmony transforms Pilgermann's idea of Jerusalem and connects him to the Self. Pilgermann, articulating a profound shift in perception of the nature and purpose of his pilgrimage says,

> 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 has done when he ceased to be He. … And what for me had been Jerusalem was equally to be found wherever I joined the motion of the hidden lion. (163)

Here Pilgermann is shedding the ambitious physical goal of his journey and replacing it with an inner mystical transcendent understanding. Jerusalem becomes a state of being and an eternal shifting idea accessible within. Pilgermann admits that his "original idea of attaining Jerusalem before it was too late, before Jesus withdrew from any further possibility of manifestation", was misguided and impossible – a foolish illusion of grandeur which "now seemed like those fond hopes of childhood that even a child recognizes as being made of that kind of mental sugar-candy that melts in the hard sunlight of reality" (185).

Pilgermann has developed through the stages of wish-fulfilment and immature and naïve belief, progressing towards enlightenment. Pilgermann's involvement in the construction of the pattern reveals the basic acts of ascetic renunciation and sacrifice, thereby "acquiring mystical or devotional release" and liberation from the cycle of rebirth and its endless struggles (Hebblethwaite 22). As an act of devotion and sacrificial work Pilgermann not only gains mystical insights but atones, repents and submits to a moral and spiritual law (29). This self-less and fatalistic philosophy is encapsulated by the repeated refrain which was first uttered after the children in the dark wood had been raped and killed by Bruder Pförtner: "Jerusalem will be wherever we are when we come to the end" (*P* 64, 163).

Pilgermann's Pilgrimage (3): Renewal and Death

However, after a brief respite in Antioch where the tone and pace of Pilgermann's narrative is meditative and contemplative, the mood intensifies, once again becoming dark, apocalyptic and dominated by suffering and death. In the cyclical phases of Pilgermann's journey which has taken him from the horrors of the wood to the rarefied mystical heights of contemplation in the experiments with the Hidden Lion, Pilgermann once again returns to visceral absorption in a bloody, material historical progression. This atmosphere of danger and threat is expressed in the intensification of the Frankish siege of Antioch, several violent skirmishes between the warring factions, and the culminating bloody genocide where hundreds of Christians are slaughtered in an act of vicious revenge by Yaghi-Siyan.

Along with the gathering insistent force of Bohemond the famous Frankish general, Pilgermann's own inevitable death is ominously signalled by the reappearance of the tax-collector whose message Pilgermann knows is to "give me notice that my life would soon be required of me" (165). As he awaits, preparing for a noble, proud death Pilgermann's dreams are now dominated not by Sophia's nakedness but "the obscure face of my young death; the shadowy form of actuality to come" (165). Finally all Pilgermann's fellow pilgrims return to haunt him, warning him of his transient life and impending death: they are "intensified, they are more than themselves, they are more than philosophies; they are geographies, histories, they are sciences and guides for a soul sore troubled and perplexed" (218). Pilgermann stoically resigns himself to imminent death.

However, this is complicated when during a visionary "sleep-travel" or "night journey (216) Pilgermann, facing his "young death, naked but complete", sees in his own death the "face of my child's soul" (217). The premonition, which alerts him to the existence of Sophia who has given birth to a child, reinvigorates and renews Pilgermann's quest to Jerusalem, creating a tension between the forces of history, cause and effect and mortality and Pilgermann's desperate urge to survive and find Sophia and his offspring. Echoing the images of rebirth and regeneration in all his other novels, Hoban underscores this rediscovery of life-affirming purpose by invoking familiar images: as "the new moon of the risen Tammuz hangs in the morning" "under the inescapable reality of Mount Silpius", Pilgermann appeals to the ancient cyclical fertility myth of Dumuzi and the Goddess Inanna (220). Tragically Pilgermann is too late and, enacting the opposite 'action-cycle' to *Riddley Walker*, Pilgermann faces death not life. He is left "impaled on history", feeling only "the dark and chill of winter in the light and heat of summer" and while he "stands on the "barren tiles of Hidden Lion", cursing the "infirmity of purpose that has kept" him in Antioch, he begins to resent and hate Bembel Rudzuk (220-22).

Pilgermann's final moments reflect a truly heroic acceptance of death. At first he faces his fate with Bembel Rudzuk, who approaches death through meditation and patient immersion in the space of a "silent desert" where "nothing is required" as he remains "shrouded in unutterable mystery" (233) and is passively detached from the carnage outside. Rather than remaining imprisoned in a cell, Pilgermann finally rejects Bembel Rudzuk's ascetic mysticism and escapes into the world, actively seeking Bohemond the "Questing, the angel of death" (212). Thus, after his loyal friend's death on the Hidden Lion, Pilgermann, bravely and forlornly challenging the mighty warrior Bohemond, raises his arm and strikes with his sword. He sees it "shatter like shards of ice as the great sword of Bohemond makes a rainbow in the night, in the dawn that is coming" (236).

With powerful images of death and rebirth, the sword's lightning, the rainbow, and the night's approaching dawn, Hoban suggests the cyclical action of the universe. Even the destructive image of the great sword evokes ongoing life: Pilgermann as narrator beyond death has asserted his presence and identity as "whispering out of the dust" and "dried blood on a sword and the sword has crumbled into rust and the wind has blown the rust away but still I am" (11). The allusion to the rainbow, traditionally a sign of God's covenant, recalls Pilgermann's pact with God "between the pieces,

between the one fire and another" (12). Pilgermann returns to the stars in an image of perpetual cosmic brilliance and of death and rebirth. Described as the movement, patterning and reconciliation of the opposites, his last flash of life is the "Virgin and the Lion wheeling in the darkness, in the light" (236). This is the visionary experience to which Hoban attributes the conception of the novel.

Pilgermann's last words most deeply express this culmination of life in death:

> But I cannot see Bohemond in this night and dawn of brilliance, of purple-blue luminosity. No, as the great sword makes another rainbow in the pale dawn where hangs the new moon of Tammuz, the last thing that I see with my mortal eyes, very, very high in the sky and circling in the overlapping patterns of the Law, is that drifting meditation of storks that I have known from my childhood, each year returning in their season to their wonted place. (236)

Returning to the mysterious and distant ongoing cyclical path of the stork with tranquil emotion, the natural seasonal flight of the birds suggests transcendence and the soul's passage into another realm. The lyrical evocation somehow tempers and even effaces the violence of Bohemond and the harsh actuality of history which has ensnared Pilgermann so that there is also a sense of final return and immortality.

The description beautifully reiterates Hoban's vision of the hero in a violent yet delicate and intricate image of reconciliation and transcendence. Revealing a "sense of paradoxical affirmation" similar to "Hoban's earlier heroes, but transcending them" (Branscomb 38), this is a culminating moment in Hoban's fiction. Through the three phases of the pilgrimage once again Hoban portrays a dynamic dialectic between polarities and presents a challenging concept of the self, which is unstable, fluid and "prepersonal and pluripersonal (or more exactly, omnipersonal)" (Barnaby and D'Acierno 322). From the universal mind Pilgermann relives his mortal life, narrates the ecstasy attained from both grotesque decay and from mystical patterns. In the final movement of his narrative ultimate transcendence is immersed in a perpetual cycle: Pilgermann, like Orpheus, Kleinzeit and Riddley, rejects total escape and liberation and bravely and actively re-engages with history and conflict. Ambivalently and paradoxically, by dying into life Pilgermann strives for immortality through the process of "finding himself by losing himself in the cyclical patterns of existence" (Branscomb 38).

II

Unity at the heart of the multiplicity

'My alchemy seeks no yellow metal; it is a continual offering to the Unity at the heart of the multiplicity.' (*P* 109)

While characteristic of all Hoban's fiction, *Pilgermann* to a far greater extent is a fascinating blend and transfusion of religious ideas into a spiritual quest of continual discovery. If *Kleinzeit* and *The Medusa Frequency* explored the vital resurgence of Greek gods for spiritual purposes in a disenchanted modern context, and if *Riddley Walker*, set in the future but projecting us backwards portrays a 'primitive' or archaic sacred and mythic vision dominated by a Mother Goddess, then *Pilgermann* represents a syncretistic approach to our spiritual nature. The novel contains a profusion of religious allusions mainly from the Judaeo-Christian and Islamic traditions but also from Gnosticism, Zen Buddhism, Hinduism, the Occult and the Tarot. Searching out affinities between various traditions that transcend narrow established dogma, Hoban as a "freelance mystic" (Myers n.pag.) weaves a unique and idiosyncratic religious vision.

Hence his hero Pilgermann, a Jew caught in a Muslim city besieged by Christians, negotiates his ambivalent religious identity in an open and challenging way. Like Bembel Rudzuk who is "not devout in the usual sense of the word" (*P* 135), Pilgermann acknowledges that "Matters between God and me have gone beyond synagogues and congregations" (135).

Beyond esoteric allusion and references to religious traditions, the novel deals with the difficult relationship and the inherent conflict between religions throughout history. *Pilgermann* chronicles the horrific violence perpetuated in the name of religion. It is a harsh indictment of anti-Semitism, which for a twentieth-century reader brings to mind the Holocaust but also has parallels in other atrocities fuelled by ideological and religious fundamentalism. Despite this, Hoban seeks some reconciliation, ethical, (more problematically) ideological and metaphysical. *Pilgermann* goes to the root of intolerance exposing the demonisation of the Jews as 'Other' and deconstructing the binary of victim and oppressor. Pilgermann as victim and perpetrator of sin, describes the tax collector as "such a man as that cannot live without a Jew to be other than" and that, "If there were no Jews he would invent them he would dress up as a Jew and flog himself" (14). However, they both end up on the road of expiation, reconciliation and pilgrimage. In Antioch, struggling with religious turmoil, Pilgermann as a castrated outsider, thinking the mixed "heavy thoughts" of isolation, persecution and the need for community (137),

is tentatively able to reconcile conflict with laughter (true to Hoban's humour it is not wholly comic but ambivalent, partly satirical and partly reconciling). Pilgermann realises the similarity in simultaneous Holy Days,[9] fusing Pagan, Judaic and Christian traditions:

> I found myself laughing because it suddenly came to me that it was not only Passover for the Jews but Easter for the Christians; Christ having been crucified at Passover the two moon-coupled festivals were for all time chained together. (137)

In seeking to express a unity at the heart of multiple religious traditions Hoban risks a great deal. However, I would argue that despite limitations and controversy, Hoban does develop a coherent vision which embraces and celebrates difference, contradiction and paradox, while always asserting the mysterious power of religious comprehension. Two facets of this vision best encapsulate this in the novel: the Hidden Lion pattern and the development of the idea of God, especially in relation to the problem of evil.

The Hidden Lion: a parable of human spirituality

The Hidden Lion is Hoban's most abstruse and complex expression of his religious vision. With a rhetorical combination of eclecticism, inspired vision and the eternal verities of mathematical patterns, Hoban seeks to amalgamate his ideas on consciousness, creativity and mystical apprehension. While in *Pilgermann* the Hidden Lion is the "central motif of the novel" and "functions as a symbolic encoding of the mysteries Pilgermann seeks" (Dunwell 118), it can also be considered as one of the defining aspects of Hoban's whole oeuvre. It can therefore be read as a parable of human spirituality through which Hoban explores all the polarities and interrelated aspects of the mysterious nature of being.

From its inception the Hidden Lion pattern has specific aims. Bembel Rudzuk, fascinated by patterns which are "contiguous with infinity" and which fuse the concepts of potentiality and actuality (113), commissions Pilgermann to help design the tiled surface as a demonstration, expression of and enactment of the "Thing-in-Itself" (117). Elsewhere in Hoban's fiction the "Thing-in-Itself" has been conceived through

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[9] Pilgermann notices the synchronicity of various religious festivals: "One day followed another through months that bore different names, numbered themselves by the sun or the moon and ended on different days in the Muslim, Jewish, and Christian calendars. Strange, to live again one's life and death in three calendars! Soon after the Lailat al-Qadr of the Hijra year 490 in the month of September of the Christian year 1097 came the Jewish High Holy Days, the Days of Awe: Rosh Hashanah, the New Year's Day of 4858, and ten days later Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement" (160).

metaphor or figures such as the olive tree as gateway to the underworld and the primordial deep of the Kraken in *The Medusa Frequency*, or as the sacred inner space represented by Eurydice in *Kleinzeit* or for Riddley Walker in the "woom of Cambry". In each respect the "Thing-in-Itself is a philosophical construct" which "refers to that which cannot be perceived – that is the numinous" (Dunwell 121).[10] With its roots in German philosophy, Hoban adapts this construct to suit his purposes: it is the mysterious and elusive source of ultimate reality, absolute possibility and sacred transformative creative energy. Its flickering, ungraspable nature eludes language and expression and it is "not to be seen nor is it to be sought directly" (*P* 117). In almost all of Hoban's work it invokes powerful non-rational religious feelings of terror, joy, and awe as the unfathomable "Thing-in-Itself" is revealed in brief moments of illumination. Slavoj Žižek, in his Lacanian analysis of the notion of the Real (the thing-in-itself) characterises this particular description of the Real as the

> terrifying primordial abyss that swallows everything, dissolving all identities ... another Centre, a "deeper", "truer" focal point or "black hole" around which symbolic forms fluctuate; ... where the Real is "the Thing that forever eludes our grasp, and on account of which every symbolization of the Real is partial (Žižek 66-67).

While still pursuing the "Thing-in-Itself", in *Pilgermann* Hoban's emphasis is different. He attempts to uncover the essential pattern and deep structure of reality through the creation of a complex patterning of geometrical shapes and figures. In the manner of a phenomenologist of religion, Hoban desires expression of the very essence of the nature of consciousness. He suspends the symbols and archetypes though which the "Thing-in-Itself" is manifest (for instance the Orphic action-cycle) and attempts to grasp the intrinsic and dynamic quality of religious perception. This is a bold attempt to transcend the limitations of "our little language of words" (*MUM* 126) which, tending to displace and defer ultimate meaning, can only partially express the "Thing-in-Itself", and so delve into the eternal forms and underlying essences of Ideas themselves. T. S. Eliot expresses this idea in "The Four Quartets":

> Words move, music moves
> Only in time; but that which is only living
> Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
> Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
> Can words or music reach

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[10] See Introduction p 7, Chapter One p 49, Chapter Two p 79.

> The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
> Moves perpetually in its stillness. (Eliot, 'Burnt Norton' *Collected Poems* 181-82)

Bembel Rudzuk's investigations into patterns are firstly to demonstrate the nature of motion, which is "transitive and intransitive", and thereby elucidate the paradox of movement in stillness; and secondly to try to observe the "point at which pattern becomes consciousness" (*P* 118). Complementing these philosophical metaphysical queries, Bembel Rudzuk and Pilgermann have ritualistic religious motivations. Dunwell writes that through the Hidden Lion "Pilgermann attempts to provide a witness to God" (Dunwell 120). Bembel Rudzuk is drawn to the creation of the pattern as if he were on a holy quest or pilgrimage. When he first sees Pilgermann's design he utters the words of a penitent Muslim "spoken only on pilgrimage to Mecca" and at this point they could both "feel the power of the centre" (*P* 120). Echoing the motif of Eliade's cosmogenic centre of creation found throughout Hoban's oeuvre, the Tower or observation point is located at the centre and is the world's navel or omphalos, a place of cosmic significance and a symbol of "absolute reality" (Eliade, *Cosmos and History* 17).[11]

Hoban is again fusing the processes of creation and pilgrimage into a unified vision where art is a quest which captures and expresses sacred mysteries. Pilgermann becomes the archetypal shaman artist who with both active imaginative engagement and passive reception intuitively creates a pre-existing pattern. While conceiving of the pattern almost as being a certain *a priori* philosophical truth, Bembel Rudzuk also realises that the process is shrouded in mystery, ignorance and doubt. As with Kleinzeit, the creation of form must come spontaneously from an empty mind. Pilgermann realises,

> I had become more and more strongly aware that the visual manifestation of a pattern comes only after the pattern is already in existence and already infinite: the visible expansion is only a finite tracing of what being infinite, cannot further expand. (*P* 149)

The pattern expresses the unseen base or foundation of creative inspiration. Within it are manifest the entire possibilities and polarities of existence. The pattern attracts the people of Antioch, instinctively conjuring the imagination as "it excites in people and in things a desire to shape themselves to it, to meet it and move with its advance" (149). It inspires many different reactions:

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[11] A side note here might corroborate this view. When Pilgermann refers to the great twisting serpent Hoban may be alluding to the example of the cornerstone laid at the centre of a temple in India which pegs the head of the great cosmic snake down. The snake, representing "chaos, the formless and non-manifested" (Eliade, *Cosmos and History* 19), is secured and pegged down in a renewed act of creation which re-enacts the original Creation out of chaos and formless existence.

> 'One of the virtues of this simple but at the same time complex design,' said Bembel Rudzuk, 'this design in which we see the continually reciprocating action of unity and multiplicity, is that it suits its apparent action to the mind of the viewer: those who look outward see the outward pre-eminent; those who look inward see the inward.' (139)

To Bembel Rudzuk the pattern is wonderfully successful in expressing his metaphysical objectives. His first lesson is that the "heart of the mystery is meant to remain a mystery" (142). Bembel Rudzuk elaborates on the significance of the pattern in elevated and circling rhythmical prose reminiscent of Buddhist sermons:

> 'This power that we see is the motion of the Unseen,' said Bembel Rudzuk. 'This power that we can 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 motion is there before the pattern, the pattern is only a mode of appearance assumed by the motion; consciousness also 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. ... It offers itself modestly and reverently to the Unseen and the Unseen takes pleasure in it.' (146)

Thus for Bembel Rudzuk the pattern guides one to the origins and core of the "Thing-in-Itself" which is manifest in eternal patterns described as windows ('eyeholes' or 'termini') for its own ceaseless expression. This perception of sacred motion, the action or energy of divine consciousness as it transforms into phenomenal appearances and patterns, enacts the dynamic reciprocal or symbiotic movement of consciousness itself. Underlying this observation are concepts inherent in Hoban's idealist philosophy: the cosmic mind, the continual metamorphosis of archetypes and the interdependent relationship between becoming and Being, subject and object, motion and stillness, finite and infinite, and finally multiplicity and unity.

Similarly, the pattern inspires in Pilgermann "a wild surge of terror and joy as virtuality, correctly named, leapt into actuality" (123). The design is changeable and fluid, it can be predictable and orderly while the next instant it bursts into riotous "enclaves of apparent disorder" which themselves soon disappear into more alternating shapes and forms (123). At one point Pilgermann is immersed in the shifting flux, the next moment he is detached, perceiving a certain shape or form. Vibrating between antinomies, the pattern holds within it multiple possible meanings and images where Pilgermann can always find "new and unwritten names of God: The Tiptoeing; The Sidewise-Jumping; The Hopping; The Leaping; The Dancing; The Whirling" (147).

Firouz, a highly placed official in Antioch whom Bembel Rudzuk calls a "turning sort of man" (138),[12] provides a fascinating response to the pattern. While Firouz is officious and irascible, initially treating the project with contempt and taking offence at Pilgermann's Jewish involvement, he is tempered, being "magnetically drawn" to the pattern and states:

> 'It turns, ... there is a turning in it: the turning of the sun and the moon and the stars; the turning of the wheels of fate and fortune. Thus do we see that at the centre of the universe there is a turning, there is a turning at the heart of the mystery.' (143) [13]

Firouz's tile is christened "The Watchful" as he expresses the mystical, non-rational, unifying, self-effacing essence of the Hidden Lion. The pattern is "thoughtless absorption" where blissfully and ecstatically "one simply becomes one with the everything, one is free for a time from the burden of one's self" (151). The pattern inspires transcendence of self and an enchanting wholeness and harmony beyond limitations of self and language. Thus, Firouz also expresses the central paradox of the pattern:

> What bliss! And yet, and yet – returning to the world and its burdens one puts names to things. So it is that I have lost myself in this pattern, but returning to the world I look at this abstraction with which I have merged; I turn my head this way and that way, I see twisting serpents, moving pyramids; suddenly there leaps forward the face of a lion, then it is gone again. (151)

Pilgermann also expresses mistrust and is wary of the relationship between words and his pattern. He resists Bembel Rudzuk's and the other characters' need to name and label the work and the tiles. Pilgermann, preferring to avoid symbolism and organised religion (127), is forced to give it a name but maintains that he cannot write on the tiles justifying himself by saying that "God for me is beyond naming" (147, 153). Pilgermann is simply a designer and witness to the construction of the pattern. Unlike the others he offers little in the way of erudite speculations and philosophical possibilities over the creation. (This is surprising considering his constant conjectures as narrator throughout the novel. It is one place where Pilgermann attempts to remain silent.) Rather Pilgermann implies that it may not be necessary or advisable "to study this pattern or observe it methodically"

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[12] Bembel Rudzuk tells us that Firouz was a Christian and converted to Islam (*P* 138). Interestingly the historical Firouz is a quisling and as suggested in *Pilgermann* betrays Yaghi-Siyan to Bohemond and the besieging Franks by allowing them to enter the city over the walls and towers he is in charge of. (see M. W. Baldwin, *A History of the Crusades: The First Hundred Years*. vol. 1 316-18)

[13] There again is an echo of Eliot's "Four Quartets" in the expression of the mystical centre "At the still point of the turning world." (Eliot, *Collected Poems* 179)

(146). For him the best way of approaching it is to "simply take it without any thought and to enjoy it in the presence of the Unseen" (146).

This is a recurring tension in all Hoban's work which has worked itself out in various ways, from Kleinzeit's mnemonics to Riddley's acquiescence to the Mother Goddess, and now finds its final expression in the Hidden Lion. Dunwell pursues this theme by comparing the construction to that other forlorn human attempt to "see the face of God": The Tower of Babel (Dunwell 121). She argues that both constructions "are used as vehicles for speech, or for speech confounded" (122). Thus, quoting Patrick Fish, she notes that the "pure language" of the Babel myth, "reminiscent of the divine speech" or Logos in St. John's Gospel,

> stands as a Utopian promise, language so pure, so quintessential that to discover it again will ensure a semantics not about life but of life. The promise of this primal language is that we will no longer have to harness words, batter and barter with them. (qtd. in Dunwell 123)[14]

Dunwell focuses on these fables, emphasising in them "the nature of the struggle for authority over language" (125) while suggesting the corruption and degradation of the Hidden Lion: what was "intended as a symbolic representation of the face of the infinite is corrupted into a site of murder and retribution" (122).

Thus through the creation and destruction of the Hidden Lion we witness Hoban's final evocation of the dialectic between the sacred and the profane. While the site is a direct expression of the sacred in visual form offering transcendence, ecstasy and visions of the eternal timeless patterns, the place cannot avoid being "mutilated" as "the integrity of the work is marred physically and spiritually" (*P* 148). Thus "literal language is written onto the tiles" (Dunwell 124) and, worse, money and charms are inscribed into the once pure abstract work. Hoban underscores this lapse into the profane by targeting a closed-minded and distorted attitude towards the religious. As an extension of the loss of "religious ignorance" (*MUM* 130) evoked in *Riddley Walker* through the fall into 'clevverness' and also treated in the sadistic and perverse relationship between Udo and his pet bear, Hoban criticises a spiritual reductionism, fetishisation and domestication whereby the sacred 'Thou' is made into a profane 'It'. The Hidden Lion becomes a place of superstition, omens and charms for material benefit. Analogous to the debased urban space in *Kleinzeit*, in its disfiguration into "primitive good-luck commerce" (*P* 148), the Hidden Lion is desacralised, becoming immersed in the history and generations of the

[14] Of course this impossible desire resounds with Hoban's own artistic manifesto expressed in "'Pan Lives". Also see Chapter One p 62.

city's rituals and habitual living. With the "surge of its action ... obscured by the action of every day", the original intention is distorted and ignored (157). Finally the ultimate corruption and evil is perpetrated: Yaghi-Siyan commits a vicious act of retribution as he slaughters Armenian and Syrian Christians. The tiles of the Hidden Lion are stained with blood and mired in the cruelty of human history and conflict.

Yet, Hoban shows that the link between the sacred and profane is necessary and unavoidable. Bembel realises the foolishness of the grand intentions of the pattern which attempted to transcend human weakness. He says with a humble note of regret, "Striving too hard after wisdom has made me a fool" (149), and refuses to wipe the blood away from the pattern. Mired in the commerce of blood – the violent give and take of lives – the Hidden Lion is now a "labyrinth" and site of death, seen as a "violation", a "provocation and an insult ... an idolatry for ignorant people to whom prayer is only a kind of begging" (181). Bembel Rudzuk concedes that they have obscured the mystery of the Unseen and "have put the rubbish of the seeable and the touchable between them and Allah" (181). While initially providing access to the hidden sacred mystery, "the hope of the Garden", the pattern's "connexions extend to things and places we know not of, we cannot imagine the vastness of the web to which Hidden Lion is an entrance and a passageway" (181). It becomes part of the inevitable chain of human evil and history's cause and effect or "the Fire" (181). As with all Hoban's religious evocations the Hidden Lion is a place of both mystical enlightenment and history's horror and despair. It is the most testing exploration of the paradox of unity and multiplicity.

The idea of God and the problem of good and evil

Elizabeth Dipple has written that in *Pilgermann* "the idea of God as a specific entity is much more important than anywhere in Hoban's earlier work" (Dipple 179). She observes that, "Job-like, the narrator asks question after unanswered question, partly to build up a theology of an unanswerable God" (179). Through *Pilgermann*'s meandering and tentative philosophical speculations about the nature of God, Hoban confronts the problem of evil and suffering. As a quasi-theodicy,[15] *Pilgermann* is a novel which attempts to understand the existence of evil and the nature of judgement while trying to reconcile this with Hoban's shifting ideas about God.

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[15] It can only be partially considered a 'theodicy' in a loose definition of the term: "the branch of theology concerned with defending the attributes of God against objections resulting from the existence of physical and moral evil" ("Theodicy," *Collins*). Hoban's version does not conform to a rigorous traditionally Christian theodicy and, as we shall see, he adjusts both his conception of God and the nature of evil.

Unlike any of the other novels which rely largely on striking non-rational moments of illumination, *Pilgermann* is dominated by a thinking and reasoning consciousness who is prone to probing philosophical questions and exegesis. From his disembodied floating consciousness, Pilgermann undergoes a more cerebral journey of discovery. Frequent fragments of pseudo-philosophical argumentation, theorising, and abstruse metaphysical suppositions mark his enquiry into the nature of God and the problem of evil. Much of this may be criticised as clumsy and laboured, consisting of circling *aporia*, and there is a sense that Hoban is on less certain ground when attempting to elucidate philosophical arguments.

Hoban engages in philosophical discourse with humour, irony and scepticism – essential tools in critiquing rational answers and solutions to the problem of the existence of God and the nature of evil. Pilgermann notes, "I may well be reporting nothing more than spiritual mirages and metaphysical illusions" (*P* 205). Here Pilgermann, as with Taylor's seeker in the face of shattered frameworks (Taylor, *Sources* 17), expresses a condition of radical doubt beyond dogma or tradition:

> Who is this Pilgermann, this drifting wave-and-particle vestige of a castrated Jew, who is this Pilgermann to have an opinion on the matter? From where I am now I see the universe isotropically 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 Scriptures offer answers. Theologians and fathers of the Church cannot confound me, they have no firmer ground on which to stand than I. (*P* 73-74)

Despite these doubts, Pilgermann's conjectures are necessarily connected to various philosophical proofs that have been offered for the existence of God, especially the ontological argument, the cosmological argument, and the argument from design. Ultimately, while thinking about God, especially His supposed omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence, Pilgermann is presenting a theodicy or explanation of the presence of evil.

J. L. Mackie in his essay "Evil and Omnipotence" writes that "in its simplest form the problem is this: God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; and yet evil exists" (McCord Adams and Merrihew Adams 25). Introducing the problem of evil, Simon Blackburn has argued that the traditional idea of God requires "love and concern" and "includes moral perfection" so that God is "all-powerful, of course, all knowing but also all-caring" (Blackburn 168-69). However, this conception of God runs into the bare facts of the existence of evil in an imperfect, harsh and unfair world. Blackburn quotes Hume:

> *His power, we allow, is infinite; whatever he wills is executed: But neither man nor any other animal is happy; therefore, he does not will their happiness. His wisdom is infinite; he is never mistaken in choosing the means to any end; But the course of nature tends not to human or animal felicity: Therefore, it is not established for that purpose. Through the whole compass of human knowledge there are no inferences more certain and infallible than these. In what respect, then, do his benevolence and mercy resemble the benevolence and mercy of men?*
>
> *Epicurus' old questions are yet answered.*
> *Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?* (169)

Blackburn goes on to point out that any proof by inference of an omniscient and perfect, all-caring God from the reality of the world is going to be difficult. J. L. Mackie sets out some tentative and only "adequate solutions" to the conundrum: "If you are prepared to say that God is not wholly good, or not quite omnipotent, or that evil does not exist, or that good is not opposed to the kind of evil that exists, or that there are limits to what an omnipotent thing can do, then the problem of evil will not arise for you" (McCord Adams and Merrihew Adams 26). Blackburn also describes another typical solution to the problem of evil: to "take refuge in the mysterious and incomprehensible nature of the divine mind" and to simply accept that humans lack an understanding of divine goodness, intention, perceptions and understanding (172). This view, however, leaves us under no obligation to accept the existence of God and certainly does not provide any reason to accept the notion of God that traditional religions would have us believe. Blackburn puts it this way when he criticises one of Hume's philosophical characters:

> Demea's problem is going to be that having got himself to an utterly mysterious deity, he can not reap any consequences. You can check into the Mysterious Mist, if you so wish, but you cannot check out carrying any more than you took in with you. (173)

In *Pilgermann*, Hoban develops his own idiosyncratic 'adequate solution' to the problem of evil based on an amalgamation of several of these positions.

Firstly, it is Hoban's contention throughout his fiction that God is, in Blackburn's words, "an utterly mysterious deity" (173). His novels are written in many ways to validate the "Mysterious Mist" (173) as the primary manifestation of theological knowledge. Thus Hoban will emphasise the inscrutable, unknowable and incomprehensible nature of God, even in the face of serious cases of evil. In a subtle reformulation of Ivan Karamazov's famous refutation of a benevolent God and a

teleology that he finds irreconcilable with suffering,[16] Pilgermann directly after his castration receives an awesome and humbling vision of God's inexplicable power:

> Jesus says, 'Can you contain even the thought of knowing the will of God? I speak not of the knowing; I speak only of the very thought of knowing?' ... 'If it be God's incomprehensible will that the universe shall flower to the end of all things and from that end of all things will seed itself anew, will you question the slaughter of the Jews?' (*P* 22-23)

Pilgermann has no reply and no opinion. He merely submits himself, and hence individual and even group concerns, to the cycles of creation and destruction of the universe. Hoban acknowledges a universe with pain and suffering that is necessary and inescapable.

Secondly, in a way more fundamentally connected to the vision of God in the novel, Hoban is willing to sacrifice traditional conceptions of a personal God who is beneficent and all-powerful and all-knowing. Thus, unlike *Riddley Walker* which "ends with the human spirit prevailing", in *Pilgermann* Hoban's "point of view", including his conception of God, "gets less anthropocentric" (Myers n.pag.). The progression of this line of thought in Hoban's work is clear when we consider that Hoban has been playing with the ideas of God since *Kleinzeit*, where in this parody, God appears as a limited fictional character, with more of the qualities of a humble and ineffectual vicar than an awesome all-powerful deity. In a later novel, *Mr Rinyo-Clacton's Offer* (1998), Hoban has a character sum up his development of the idea of God and interrelated themes of individual fate and suffering (unwittingly offering homage to *Pilgermann* as a turning point in it):

> O God, I thought, if only I could turn back the clock to the other day when I hadn't met Mr Rinyo-Clacton. Actually I don't believe in a God that can be talked to, prayed to, haggled with, and so on. There might be something dreaming the universe or even consciously thinking it but I very much doubt that its eye is on the sparrow. Maybe it thinks in waves and particles and patterns, and one of the patterns is Mr Rinyo-Clacton. (*MRCO* 91)

More specifically, within *Pilgermann* this process can be tracked by noting the various ideas of God presented in *Pilgermann* as they shift from the Judaic Yahweh

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[16] Ivan asks his brother Alyosha to what ends would he allow God to go in his divine plan for happiness, and salvation in the future, "Is God's purpose worth the tears of one tortured child?" ... "tell me yourself, I challenge you – answer. Imagine that you are creating a fabric of human destiny with the object of making men happy in the end, giving them peace and rest at last, but that it was essential and inevitable to torture to death only one tiny creature ... and to found that edifice on its unavenged tears, would you consent to be the architect on those conditions?" (qtd. in Hebblethwaite 5)

through the conceit that God is a scientist, to God as an artist figure, and finally God as idea and as 'It'.

Infused with a sense of Jewishness, it is to God as Yahweh that Pilgermann initially appeals in his moment of agony. He cries out for a voice, for help, for understanding of man's insignificance and suffering in the face of His tremendous eternal presence. To these imploring demands Pilgermann receives nothing. There is no word from this God, simply the empty blue sky with traces of smoke. Pilgermann finds himself in a world where the God as he knew – or thought he knew – has disappeared and remains beyond all human comprehension and understanding. In Yahweh's place Pilgermann receives a compellingly different and perplexing theophany: the figure of Jesus Christ, but a Christ evoked through various traditions and as an almost inhuman and paradoxical figure exemplifying action, energy and motion.

Pilgermann speculates about God as a scientist, thereby implying a deist conception of God, a clock or machine maker with the qualities of distant yet rational, flawless design where "he knows everything and, having all the time there is, he demonstrates everything including his actual non-presence" (*P* 39). Risking absurdity and testing the bounds of logical impossibility, Pilgermann goes on to explicate a complicated disproof, or at least re-evaluation of the idea of God based on the existence of evil and imperfection and God's awareness of all events in time past, present and future. God's omnipresence is shown to be absurd and contrary to his supposed benevolence. In a purposeful confusion of teleology, Pilgermann imagines the possibility that God in his omnipresence and omnipotence must have an awareness of all events simultaneously as well as the power to re-order significant events such as retributive Jewish slaughter and the redemptive Jesus' crucifixion. By disrupting causes and effects and hence their *telos* and their ultimate meaning, Pilgermann renders God's power absurd and almost nonsensical.

In another reformulation, Pilgermann asserts that God may be "some lowly novelist" who has to edit and re-write scenes, or one who has little control over his characters and material as they presume too much, taking on a life of their own and being somehow beyond his control or patience (40). Pilgermann extends his analogy of God as artist as he tries to comprehend whether the universe or God as the Unseen has "a purpose or a destiny" (97). Developing this line of metaphysical possibility about the nature of God, Pilgermann again runs into the problem of evil. Pilgermann says,

> Is it God's destiny to turn the wheel until every potentiality has become an actuality? ... Will there ever be an end to it all, is the end one of the possibilities? God doesn't know. God created all the possibilities of variation and permutation but he cannot calculate them. (97-98)

Here in the face of the infinite possibility, hence necessarily including evil and suffering, Hoban is prepared to sacrifice God's omniscience for the idea of a mysterious, paradoxical demiurge figure immanent within creation yet not wholly in control of or able to alter it. Pilgermann is openly aware of the paradoxes and difficulties of such a view; after all this is just conjecture. Thus he maintains that God cannot be both all-knowing and not understand his creation but, on the other hand, he cannot be all-powerful if he cannot create something beyond his own understanding (98). Pilgermann momentarily settles for the possibility that "God is of an artistic temperament and has therefore chosen to let his own work be beyond his understanding" (98).

From this point Pilgermann moves to a final evocation of God. God has ceased to be a 'He' or even a '*thou*'. The anthropomorphic conception of God is defunct. God is an amorphous, impersonal source of infinite potentials – an 'It' immersed in the process of becoming and creation. Pilgermann notes:

> I think this may well be why he has abandoned the He identity and has moved into the It where he is both subject and object, the doer and the done. God is no longer available to receive or transmit personal messages; he has been absorbed into process and toils ignorantly at the wheel with the rest of us. (98)

It is important to note that the novel deals with this aspect in a clumsy, uneasy and sometimes contradictory fashion and philosophically this move is tantamount to equivocation or stretching the limits of the definition of God so far that it becomes redundant.[17] Thus, Hoban is never fully able to shake off the 'He' personality and Pilgermann admits, "I too out of habit still thought of him sometimes as He but mostly I recognized him as It, the raw motive power of the universe (167). Perhaps it is better to compare the identity of God with the undecidability of Pilgermann's own being. As Pilgermann vacillates and oscillates between waves and particles, so then does God alternate between a 'He' and an 'It' in a relative dynamic flow of energy:

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[17] One good example of this is during a conversation with God. Pilgermann has to qualify himself by saying, "God has of course not actually been speaking here because he is no longer manifesting as He; but God as It has put these words into my mind" (*P* 201). For a philosophical rebuttal of such "half-hearted solutions, which explicitly reject but implicitly assert one of the constituent propositions" (see J. L. Mackie's essay in McCord Adams and Merrihew Adams 27-37).

> And God, we think that because he is all-powerful the amount of available power is always the same; but it changes, it wavers, it shifts from the kinetic to the potential, varying with the action of the universe, the action of the world, the action of the individual. (62-63)

Allowing the possibility of individual interaction with the force, Pilgermann expresses the change in God's form emphasising an almost symbiotic artistic communicative process of co-creation. God becomes a presence inhabiting and looking out through creation in the form of "a manifold idea" (163). God as 'It' is impersonal, violent, terrifying and very different from a humanised 'Father God' figure, yet this presence evolves and mutates and we can connect, channel and participate with 'It'. Pilgermann says,

> From that unimaginable violence which is God as It has come all that there is: all the world, all the universe. I know this in many ways but I need to know it in more ways, I need to put myself where the idea of It is (164)

The idea of God shifts through the text, involving a fatalistic allowance for evil, until finally Pilgermann in the midst of the genocide conceives of the will of God as containing all time and space, all history and possible events. Contemplating the will of a God who would allow killing, Pilgermann drives deeper to find a first cause in "the original bursting into being of the universe" where all possibilities are conceived in a primal act of creation (181). Free will seems to disappear in this cosmic unfolding of events. Pilgermann describes the moment of creation as setting in motion all "planes of virtuality and actuality that might at some time intersect", where "everything that could be already was" (181-82). God is part of this process of becoming, as "the will of God was simply that everything possible would indeed be possible" and that God was a presence "in us, one couldn't get away from Him, that was the fire of it" (182).

This conception has dramatic consequences for the nature of evil, the assumed benevolence of God, and the eschatology of salvation or damnation. As far as evil is concerned, Hoban resists the Hindu or Buddhist denial of suffering, pain and evil as mere *maya* or illusion, and seeks rather to fuse good and evil into an ongoing Blakean dialectic.[18] Pilgermann sees the inextricable link between Judas and Jesus (like Orpheus and Eurydice) as a mutually dependent "binary entity of Jesus/Judas alternating and inseparable" (74) bound to a deterministic unfolding of events that demands fidelity *and* betrayal. Furthermore Pilgermann in entertaining these thoughts dissects what Slavoj Žižek has called the "hidden perverse core of Christianity":

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[18] Many Blakean echoes are apparent: one is from "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" and its infernal aphorism, "Without Contraries is no progression" (Blake 149).

> If it is prohibited to eat from the Tree of knowledge in Paradise, why did God put it there in the first place? is it not that this was part of a perverse strategy first to seduce Adam and Eve into the Fall, in order to save them? … A similar obscure ambiguity surrounds the role of Judas in Christ's death: since his betrayal was necessary to his mission (to redeem humanity through his death on the Cross), did Christ not need it? (Žižek 15)[19]

Hoban similarly interrogates the separation between Heaven and Hell, Gan Eden and Gehinnom, good and evil but he transmutes these into an eternal oscillating process:

> It is in the rotation of eden and gehinnom that we feel the cosmic dance that is the motion of the universe …Because all eucharists are double – this is what I know now, this is why I am easy between the grinding of eden and gehinnom in the mill of the universe. (*P* 68, 71)

The problem of evil is subsumed in a cosmic process and so to a certain extent is individual suffering and humanity's history. Humans are seen as increasingly insignificant or marginal in a universal cosmic experiment. In the midst of the horrors of the siege Pilgermann reveals that:

> Certainly we are the slaves of that which looks out through our eyes, and it is nothing simple, that outlooker; does it want to live, does it want to die? … I am afraid to be there but what looks out through my eyes wants to be there, it doesn't want to be left out of anything, it wants to be everywhere at once, it wants to be included in all matters of life and death (188)

Hoban notes that "*Pilgermann* is a look at the human condition and the human position in the universe *relative* to God either as him or as it" (Myers n.pag.; emphasis added). This is key in understanding Hoban's ultimate project. Pilgermann asks whether 'It' has purpose or destiny and asks what significance the 'It' has for the individual, for history and ultimate meaning. While the answer he gives is a deeply ambivalent and difficult one, it is not relativist nor does it deny evil. Written from the vantage point of eternity, *Pilgermann* puts forward a radical idea of a mysterious God omnipresent and omnipotent but not omniscient. 'It' is a "mystery that even God cannot fathom" *but* "he needs us as divers, wrestlers and speakers for him to express and help with the mystery" (201).

From the progression of the ideas in the novel Hoban is developing an idea of a divinity that is neither benevolent nor malevolent, but rather a determined process of

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[19] For exactly this articulation of the problem note Pilgermann's questions: "Ay! Judas, Adam and Eve, the Jews – what was to be expected of them? What did God as He, God as Logos, God as Christ, want of any or all of them? How were Adam and Eve to resist the fruit that God created irresistible? … How was Judas not to betray Jesus … [Jesus] required of Judas that betrayal that Judas, powerless to do otherwise … enacted … his necessary part of the story" (*P* 71).

becoming through all events and history. Often the individual will find himself in conflict with this progression. Yet he must find a heroic way to embrace this fate. God puts it this way: if all of us are "castrated by mortality", "made nothing" by the "blackness before and after life", the only way to live in this "tiny history of tiny days" is to courageously face it, fight, and "see if you'll grow yourself some balls and jump into the mystery with me" (200-01).

Hoban comments:

> I don't think that we're necessarily the last word in evolution or in manifestations of consciousness. In the new Scientific American, I read that our present universe may just be part of a much larger universe. So I think this is just a little bit of action going on in this corner of the universe. Everything is not necessarily going to come out all right – it may just be an experiment that is a dead end. But to me, the whole thing is worth it for the action. (Myers n.pag.)

Thus to a far greater extent *Pilgermann* negotiates the tensions between individual and the cosmic presence which inhabits and looks out through the eyeholes of our face. The basis for the idea began, somewhat benignly and inspirationally in mystery and intrigue, as a fictional manifesto (*The Moment under the Moment*) and developed into a powerful intuitive and hidden power by which to be guided and to recognise in moments of transcendent illumination (*Riddley Walker*). In *Pilgermann* Hoban explores the consequences of the idea for humanity and history: we are enslaved in this cosmic process. Here there is a much darker side to this presence which is propelling the action of the universe and is using us as "clothes" (*RW* 6) or "actors" (*P* 225). We are immersed in an infinite process of constant becoming; of both creation and destruction where the "Unseen might at any moment make use of any pair of eyes to see everything in an altogether different way, a way never thought of before" (156).

III

Pilgermann: an 'unperformable' literary experiment

In *Pilgermann*, obviously his most religious novel, Hoban also stretches the limits of the conventions of contemporary fiction. While some critics have argued that Hoban is only partially successful in this experiment, *Pilgermann* does reflect certain key aspects of Hoban's metafictional exploration of language and narrative which dominate all his other works. In this section I will show how the strange form of the novel, the peculiar narrative position, and especially its presentation of the idea of narrative itself, reveal Hoban working towards his most daring exposition of his 'fictional philosophy'. Thus

it may be suggested that *Pilgermann* can be construed as a failed project. However, by considering seriously Hoban's often lofty religious-literary aims, I argue it is his most unique and exemplary work.

To a far greater degree than any of Hoban's other works, *Pilgermann* resists easy categorisation. In one respect, *Pilgermann* retains the pretence of being a well researched historical novel, presenting the life of an anonymous pilgrim caught up in the turbulent events of the First Crusade, with some authentic names, dates and events, and a series of legitimate sources referred to in a bibliography. However, the novel deliberately obscures certain facts and patently gets many wrong; clearly historical accuracy is not an overall concern. Thus, given the bizarre verbal contortions and malapropisms (Pope Urban suffers this ridicule as Pilgermann variously misremembers him as Urgent, Umbral, and Unguent) and Pilgermann's own obscure identity, Hoban draws the novel into a strange realm hovering between historicity and allegory. This problem of genre is further compounded not only by the bizarre narrative position but also the strange rambling content and form of the text which might easily be considered as a collection of sceptical philosophical musings around a shifting central narrative presence.

Leonard A. Cheever, writing about the enigmatic oddity of *Pilgermann*, has endeavoured to categorise the novel as science fiction. While this categorisation is clearly apt for *Fremder*, it is only partially successful in capturing *Pilgermann*'s complexity and place in Hoban's oeuvre. In many respects, quite rightly and fruitfully, Cheever aligns the novel with Robert Scholes's concept of fabulation. Cheever argues that far from being a historical novel, *Pilgermann* is an "anti-historical novel" (Cheever 335) which rather like speculative fiction, engages in imaginative realisations of alternate worlds, past and future, while also asserting its own ideas concerning 'reality' and the present. Hence Cheever's apposite invocation of Scholes's definition:

> It is my contention that modern fabulation grows out of an attitude which may be called "fallibilism," just as nineteenth-century realism grew out of an earlier attitude called positivism. Fabulation, then, means not a turning away from reality, but an attempt to find more subtle correspondences between the reality which is fiction and the fiction which is reality. Modern fabulation accepts, even emphasizes, its fallibilism, its inability to reach all the way to the real, but it continues to look toward reality. It aims at telling such truths as fiction may legitimately tell in ways which are appropriately fictional (qtd. in Cheever 336-37)

Despite the useful connections made in this definition (they form the basis of much of the discussion of the thesis), there is a danger of merely using Hoban's text as grist for the establishment of an unfairly beleaguered genre. Cheever ignores the relevance of the

historical setting of the novel and more seriously, Hoban's aims as expressed in his 'fictional philosophy'. By downplaying the historical aspects of the novel and dismissing Hoban's statement of intent at the beginning of *Pilgermann* – "the implication that the author is a passive medium through which certain actions transform themselves into stories seems at best merely playful or superficial, and at worst deliberately misleading" (334) – Cheever risks misunderstanding the complexity of Hoban's intentions. It is my contention that an understanding is best achieved not by genre-based analysis but by paying attention to Hoban's specific religious-literary aims. These are Wilkie's observations:

> *Pilgermann* is the linguistic expression of an artistic consciousness that might have otherwise been expresses as surrealist, cubist, or abstract art, or as atonal music[20] or avant-garde drama. ... *Pilgermann* offers a diminution of plot in favour of thought and image. As a work of literature it doesn't fit easily into any recognizable genre of either fiction or non-fiction. It sits indeterminately between fact and fiction ... It has no intentions of presenting itself as story ... It combines elements of historical novel, allegory, philosophic essay, Dantesque vision, and pilgrim narrative. (Wilkie 72)

Taking into account, then, the "uneasy co-existence of apparently mutually exclusive modes of narrative" and Hoban's typical rejection of "conventional generic labelling" (Dunwell 105), I explore *Pilgermann* in relation to Hoban's self-confessed style. Here I briefly deal with the language and form of the novel, the narrative position, reflections on narrative, including several metaphors of narrative developed throughout Hoban's oeuvre; and the relationship between the sacred and language.

While the language of the novel is not as experimental as in *Riddley Walker*, it is typically self-reflexive and stylistically interesting. Not only does it draw attention to itself in the mode of Hutcheon's linguistic narcissism,[21] thereby achieving the same ends as the anti-realist language of *Kleinzeit*. It also, in tone and register, aims at a religious and philosophical prosaic mode of incantation and supposition. Dipple has quite rightly commented on the "peculiarities of language in the novel", describing it as a "linguistic quest" (Dipple 178-79). She criticises the novel for its "lofty rhetoric of traditional prayer", a style which she finds "rather precious and purple-patched" (179). This combination of "highly descriptive poetic power with artificial word inversions and

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[20] This description is particularly apposite given Hoban's love for Jazz and his comments in interviews about the writing of the novel as improvisation (See Wilkie 99, 100, 103, 104) as well as his reflections on Thelonious Monk in *The Moment Under the Moment (MUM* 205).

[21] See previous chapters, *Kleinzeit* p 54-65 and especially *Riddley Walker* p 158-59.

attempts at a religious ritualization of language" is somewhat unsuccessful and discordant "in our expressively mean-spirited time" (179).

This is a valid judgement as *Pilgermann* is by no means an easy novel to read. However, what the language of *Pilgermann*, in its strange inclusiveness, does evoke is still necessary to the novel's ambitious narrative position. The language, if it is to reflect Pilgermann's "total experience", needs to embrace, or at least aspire to capture

> Every thought image actually imagined or seen; every word written or spoken; every thought that moves through that mind and through our world, ceaselessly mingling and combining with every other and joined by new ones every moment. (Wilkie 101)

Thus, Pilgermann's speech is a mixture of archaisms and advanced technological scientific language.[22] Consequently, the language may seem discordant and jumbled, but it reflects the exact state of Pilgermann's being as he narrates from the 'Eternal Now' of past, present, and future. Furthermore, in the somewhat abstruse and even specious philosophical musings, Hoban with self-conscious irony conveys language and rational discourse straining to grapple with perplexing metaphysical concepts.

In this "linguistic quest" (Dipple 179) Hoban is being especially adventurous: his writing shatters and challenges the reader's expectations for unity, coherence, and plot in the novel. This may be only partially successful due to clashes in tone, but this risky experimental form is a "vast rhetorical feat" (179) which Hoban himself is aware may not satisfy conventional readers. Dunwell writes that *Pilgermann* is "in many ways, an unsatisfying reading experience" as the reader is often "confused by the contradictory symbols" and his/her frustration is only allayed "when the text is read as a *bricolage* of ellipses and contradictions, rather than an attempt to discover/create a sense of coherence" (Dunwell 129).

I would argue that there is a thread of coherence in the novel manifest in Pilgermann's individuation. However, the self-reflexive form of the text (exhibited in strategies of fragmentation, obstruction and scrambling of story and text) deliberately foregrounds the processes of reading thereby mirroring and enacting the difficulties of decoding and constructing meaning while also highlighting the processes of language. Hence *Pilgermann* in its very self-conscious difficult and experimental nature serves to reinvigorate the reading process and accept the challenges of a disjointed worldview. Also essential to recognise is Hoban's mission to undermine the 'limited-reality

[22] Perhaps this is an extension of the McHale's category of "interface fiction" that will result in novels such as *The Medusa Frequency*, *Fremder* and *Angelica's Grotto*.

consensus' and disrupt conventions of the novel through the invocation of an inspirational and non-rational creative impulse. In this long quote he unashamedly defends his work:

> *Pilgermann*, for example, could easily be open to a number of critical charges – of being self-indulgent, of the material being introduced arbitrarily. But my answer is that as the line of this book developed, as the thread of it unwound, certain thought clusters arose at particular places and so they're introduced at those places. I'm not in the business of making clockwork novels which go from A to B when you wind them up. 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. That's 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 or I understand it is secondary. ... Maybe Pilgermann isn't a novel, maybe thought material is more important than the narrative. It could well be a progression of fragmentary essays rather than a novel. (Wilkie 122-23)

This radical approach is exemplified in the narrative position. As mentioned above, Hoban's most audacious self-conscious narrator speaks from a strange space beyond death. McHale has commented on the implications of such a narrative perspective in relation to themes which fascinate Hoban: escape and transcendence. Where death "marks the limits of representation" (McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* 228) many fictions are built on the necessity of their continued existence by delaying death. In other words, life and story are entwined and dependent: death is the termination of both. For example through Scheherazade's endless survival instinct for story-telling she escapes death. However, McHale links Hoban's *Pilgermann* with various other novels in which postmodern writers have "attempted to imagine transcendence; filibustering fate even beyond the supposedly ultimate limit of death itself, [as] they project discourse *into* death" (230).

Expanding on McHale's observation, we see that through Pilgermann's "voice beyond the grave" (230) Hoban explores a "posthumous discourse" which is "queasily double-edged" in its implications (230). Like *Kleinzeit* – the novel in which he "made friends with death" (Myers n.pag.) – on one level Pilgermann affirms transcendence, as he claims "to have successfully filibustered fate, to have transcended death" (230). On another level, the novel suggests annihilation: Pilgermann, has lost his humanity (*P* 69) and writes "more or less in a void", and he becomes "the voice *of* death itself, death personified and made articulate" (McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* 230). Thus as an "allegory of death and writing", *Pilgermann* may be compared to Blanchot's *L'Arrêt de mort*, in which, as McHale notes, "writing figures both as the uncanny *repetition* of life" (hence

Pilgermann's posthumous need to repeat and relive his mortal life through enunciation far beyond the place and time of its happening) while also being paradoxically "the sign of death" (230) and a manifestation of our inevitable end.

Furthermore, *Pilgermann*'s preoccupation with death and narration is the culmination of all Hoban's typical metafictional strategies. Thus we may note that "texts about themselves, self-reflexive, self-conscious texts, are also, as if inevitably, about death, precisely because they are about ontological differences and the transgression of ontological differences" (231). In this way, as McHale argues, "every ontological boundary is an analogue or metaphor of death, of making death, the unthinkable, available to the imagination, if only in a displaced way" (231). *Pilgermann*'s fantastic mode of narration "models or simulates death; it produces simulacra of death through confrontations between worlds, through transgressions of ontological boundaries, or through vacillation between different kinds and degrees of 'reality'" (232).

In a typical self-reflexive exploration of ontological boundaries, Pilgermann is fascinated with his narrative identity and the idea of narrative itself. Instances of this self-reflexive narration abound:

> Although my action continues I don't actually know who I am. By now I am only the energy of an idea; whoever is writing this down puts the name of Pilgermann to the idea, says, 'What if?' and hypothesizes virtualities into actualities. (*P* 39) ...
> 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 force of idea: there is no Pilgermann distinct from anything else; why should there be? (69) ...
> I am a microscopic chip in that vast circuitry in which are recorded all of the variations and permutations thus far. (102)

These quotes neatly highlight the metafictional themes already dealt with by the intrusive narrator in *The Medusa Frequency*. Such themes include: challenging the "conventions that the narrator should either be both omnipotent and omniscient, or else both impotent and unknowing" (Dunwell 112); the disruption of the reality frame; the suggestion of the fictionality, fluidity and mystery of the self and identity; the ubiquitous and constitutive nature of language; the limitations of language and naming; the centrality of collective memory as a mode of authorship and creativity, and finally, Hoban's own evocation of the inspiration of fiction.

More specifically, *Pilgermann* develops and draws together several abiding metaphors or images of narrative scattered throughout Hoban's early works. In each respect these metaphors expose the 'limited-reality consensus' and attempt to expand

and stretch language and story - beyond its means at times – to encompass different modes of being. Thus, where in *Kleinzeit* narrative is figured as "knots on a string" (*K* 142), and in *The Medusa Frequency* it is variously conceived of as buoys on the ocean (*MF* 49), or mountain peaks rising from black obscure depths (*MF* 117), the root image of all these images is developed in *Pilgermann*. Expressing his manifesto, Hoban writes:

> what the world needs more of, although my royalty statements indicate that it doesn't as yet recognise the need, is writing that tries to find out what's what by paying attention to the images that live under the picture-cards that we conventionally exchange and the images that appear beyond where we ordinarily look, the occulting glimmers under the reasonable thought and beyond the ordinary range of thought, the words that twist and moan and dance and sing 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 in us. (*MUM* 198)

Pilgermann, one of these "occulting glimmers" (198) refers directly to the picture-cards in expressing his suspicion of narrative's ability to capture the essence of existence. Situating himself in-between the picture-cards where he embodies mysterious dancing pattern and movement or "action" but his "understanding is patchy" and uncertain, Pilgermann maintains that a story is "a coherent sequence of picture cards" which leaves out vital action (*P* 38). He illustrates this with the example of a butterfly in "Samson's field of vision" which is ignored in the story of Samson's feat of tearing the lion apart (38). Thus story, which Pilgermann associates with coherency, order and reason, misses the irrational, ephemeral and inexplicable aspects of being.

As cosmic 'action' Pilgermann is denied the capacity for coherent narrative. Dunwell explains that this is due to his castration and emasculation and that through this Hoban sets up an "apparent dichotomy between narrative and action" (Dunwell 111). Thus she argues that "Pilgermann's assertion that 'a story is what you have when you leave most of the action out' gives the impression of narratives being somehow 'fixed' or immutable" (Dunwell 111). This is most certainly true, as in his fiction Hoban consistently enacts the progression of experience into narrative with ambivalence. Hence, Orpheus and Eurydice's resistance to becoming story as they cower from stories as "hungry beasts" (*MF* 69) or Riddley's partial entrapment in the deterministic narrative of the 'Fools Circel'. Pilgermann also is apprehensive about the constraints of narrative, and concomitantly he fears names. Symbolically and literally Pilgermann resists his enslavement by trying not to acknowledge the slave ships' names – the "*Balena*" and "*Nineveh*" and finally "*Sophia*" – and he admits that he "preferred not to be aware of any

further names of significance for a time" and "wished if possible to be reabsorbed into the ordinary" (*P* 111). Furthermore, the pre-existing patterns in the Hidden Lion and its contiguity with creation and destruction imply a limitation of freedom and enchainment in signification. Thus, Hoban again may be classed with Robert Scholes' "fabulators" whose "rejection of existentialism and its ethic of freedom" is expressed in "their stress on system as proof that metafiction is structurally inspired (in its assumption that man exists in a system 'not necessarily arranged for his benefit')" (Hutcheon 19).

However, Pilgermann, while revealing this failure of language, does not despair. Indeed Hoban's entire message throughout his fiction is that despite language's inadequacies, its malleability and necessity outweighs its limitations. In fact, it is the very gap, the actual void and the inability of the sacred and language to ever fully meet which drives the creative process. Pilgermann expresses this ambivalent position, which may be read as a statement of Hoban's own religious-literary vision:

> I cannot say less than I must but I dare not say more than is permitted; for the first time in this narrative it comes to me that words are images, and what is sacred cannot be imaged. Still there is the obligation of the witness: though the world should pass away, what has been seen has been seen; the voice that does not speak is denying God. (*P* 170)

CONCLUSION

Russell Hoban still lives in London and writes interesting and even stranger novels. Since the publication of *The Medusa Frequency*, Hoban has managed to publish a novel nearly every year. These books form a series of works extending from *Mr Rinyo-Clacton's Offer* (1998) to his most recent *Linger Awhile* (2006). He continues to be a valuable and profoundly intriguing writer committed to the exploration and disruption of the 'limited-reality consensus' and whose deftness and whimsical style incorporates allusion to a broad variety of intertexts from popular contemporary culture (music, from opera to pop, and film, from classic to avant-garde), and the persistently wide range of literary, mythological and art references, as well as an increasingly technologically influenced fiction.

For example, *Angelica's Grotto*, which focuses on another foolish hero, Harold Klein, is about the aged art critic's dark and bizarrely humorous explorations of the Internet. *Amaryllis Night and Day* makes complex use of patterns and labyrinths found in an assortment of images: a sentient bus, the Klein Bottle and the Möbius Strip. *Linger Awhile* revolves around the fantastic conceit of duplicating a beautiful actress from an old black-and-white 1950's western film using 'visual DNA' and the high-tech trickery of Istvan Fallok. Indeed this is the other consistent feature of the later works: they all use and re-use the familiar stock of images, ideas, and characters developed from his short stories in *The Moment under the Moment* and found throughout his earlier novels.

However with a few exceptions, notably *Fremder* (1996), *Amaryllis Night and Day* (2001), *The Bat Tattoo* (2003) and *Her Name Was Lola* (2004), I believe that, in diverging from more serious religious and philosophical exploration and concentrating on largely similar interconnected stories of love and loss in the strange dream-like city of London, Hoban's later novels have lost some of the intensity, depth of resonance and power of the early works. I think that Hoban loses his 'spiritual' emphasis and in some respects his novels become, despite eclectic oddness, formulaic. They often rely on the same quest pattern, but, without the concentrated mythopoeic aspect, they become slightly maudlin at times and less convincing. Hinting obliquely at the diminution of the religious aspect in his work over the years, Vicky Hutchings, while reviewing *Mr Rinyo-Clacton's Offer* notes, "Hoban's magic is still there, but struggling to survive in a postmodern 1990s awash with cultural references: Oprah, The Rubaiyat, Home and Away, Schiller, Berlioz, Mind the Rap" (Hutchings 68). While in the 1970's and 1980's Hoban's "genius was to combine a dry wit and piercing insight into the heart of things, rolled up in a strange

magic that was all his own", Hutchings sums up the weakness of later works succinctly: the "old Russell Hoban used to hit the right note every time" (68).

Shamanic Fidelity

> WHO sends the mind to wander afar? Who first drives life to start on its journey? Who impels us to utter these words? Who is the Spirit behind the eye and the ear?
> It is the ear of the ear, the eye of the eye, and the Word of words, the mind of mind, and the life of life. Those who follow wisdom pass beyond and, on leaving this world become immortal.
> There the eye goes not, nor words, nor mind. We know not, we cannot understand, how he can be explained: He is above the known and he is above the unknown. Thus have we heard from the ancient sages who explained this truth to us.
> What cannot be spoken with words, but that whereby words are spoken: Know that alone to be Brahman, the Spirit; and not what people here adore. (Kena Upanishad)

As a culmination of the works that fuse religious, mythopoeic, and metafictional elements, the essay "Mnemosyne, Teen Taals, and Tottenham Court Road" provides an insightful expression of Hoban's overarching 'fictional philosophy' on which to conclude.

In it Hoban begins by describing his own writing method, which he has conferred upon Herman Orff and has transmuted into Pilgermann's being as waves and particles. He stays up late at night listening to 'All India Radio' broadcast through his short-wave receiver radio on his desk in Fulham. Sometimes, when the reception is clear, "the chromatic splendours of the classical Karnatak style build palaces of sound" and Hoban's room is magically transformed, while at other times, when "the ionosphere is unfavouring", "polychrome demons dance" and the room is filled with roaring and crackling and chaos (*MUM* 217). Like Orpheus' inspirational music which is a raging palimpsest of both chaos and concord (239), this cosmic music from "Shiva's drum" "beats time and creates sound which is the vehicle of speech and the conveyor of revelation, tradition, incantation, magic, and divine truth – all of which rely on or collaborate with memory" (219). The most important message transmitted through the airwaves which Hoban as receiver-author wishes to channel is the mysterious origin and rhythm of the universe. Hoban sees special significance in the symbol of Shiva, the Lord of the Dance, which yokes together Sound and Ether and which can "signify the first, the truth-pregnant moment of creation, the productive energy of the absolute, in its pristine cosmogenetic strength" (Heinrich Zimmer qtd. in *MUM* 219).

It is in this characteristic "exalted mysticism or Romantic passion" (Dipple 180), which is the basis for his artistic manifesto that Hoban grounds all his fiction and through it his novels exhibit a religious source of inspiration. While going on to describe

Tottenham Court Road with its vast array of supremely sophisticated technological sound and visual equipment, Hoban reveals what I consider to be an important idea essential in an integrated understanding of the mythopoeic, religious and literary facets of his fiction: the notion of *fidelity*. Faced with the realisation that the "moment will not stay" (*MUM* 223), or that "memory delays and is delayed, prohibits and is prohibited, troubles and makes trouble" (220), Hoban confesses an "aberration" or an "affliction that consumes me" (226). In a desperate "hope to grip the slippery sea-goddess moment that slides so smoothly through our longing, through our lusting and our lonesome fingers" Hoban seeks to capture, store, record, and replicate moments of epiphany with "hardware, with machines, with steel precision, with nickel-cadmium, with digital readouts and light-emitting diodes" (223). Here, not only satirically critiquing modern consumer culture, Hoban also expresses the fundamental urge of his artistic vision as he seeks "High fidelity":

> Never have I had fidelity of sufficient height, and I crave it. I require the fidelity of hundreds, of many, many symphony orchestras, all of them faithful from twenty to twenty thousand hertz … . What I'm after is that the reproduced sound be more original than the original. The original came and went like everything else; it was no more than a fleeting murmur in a doubting ear … . I want to duplicate the world. I want to have in reserve a second world that does not pass away. I want in sound and image the equivalent of that map Jorges Luis Borges tells of, that map that was the same size as the country it was a map of. (225)

The use of the word fidelity in all its connotations carries both religious and literary resonance and it appears implicitly and explicitly throughout Hoban's oeuvre. Through fidelity Hoban seeks to create and re-create fictional worlds which preserve, re-present and re-member a sacred vision.

In the first sense 'fidelity' is defined as devotion to duties, obligations, and loyalty or faithfulness to a person, lover or cause ("Fidelity," *Collins*). It is in this sense that Hoban uses the word in *The Medusa Frequency*: Herman Orff is unfaithful to Luise, he betrays her trust and in his process of individuation he has to learn to reconcile himself to a deeper understanding of 'fidelity'. However, Hoban gives this concept religious value and cosmic scope, when the head of Orpheus links the notion of fidelity to faithful observation of reality and of pure moments of epiphany. Fidelity is "a matter of perception" and, activated by the "true self", fidelity is "not an act of the will", or the reasoning self, but is an act of the "soul [which] is compelled by recognitions" (*MF* 33-35). Through fidelity Hoban's quests strive for what he calls a "paradigm of *virtue*" and they have a special spiritual dimension (MUM 226; emphasis added). Hoban uses another

word which has both 'spiritual' and artistic connotations: virtue obviously implies all the religious and moral qualities and also has connotations of "an effective, active, or inherent power ("Virtue," *Collins*) and is used by artists to describe the vividness of colour or by musicians to describe the intensity of sounds. As all Hoban's 'small-time' heroes seek a vital connection with the beauty, terror, and awe of primal origins beyond the flux and debris of a fragmented and debased contemporary culture, they find that fidelity (and virtue) to the mystery of being is an essential quality of their heroic individuation or leap of faith into the Self.

In the second sense of the word 'fidelity', Hoban activates his characteristic self-reflexive literary qualities while providing a basis for a description of his work as 'interface fiction'. Here, from electronics, fidelity is the "degree to which an amplifier or radio accurately reproduces the characteristics of the input signal" ("Fidelity," *Collins*). Throughout his fiction Hoban maintains and consistently deploys this metaphor to describe the artistic process of inspiration, 'creation' and transmission of the ideas and obsessions which take hold of his consciousness. The idea of fidelity as electronic reception is almost always combined with a shamanic inflection. Hence, as an author, Hoban connects himself with the shaman who, as a "mystical, priestly, and political figure" is also a "visionary and seer" (Coupé, *Myth* 51). The shaman becomes a "conductor of forces who is able to bring art back in touch with its sacred sources" so that through the shaman's "own personal self-transformation, he develops not only new forms of art, but new forms of living" (51). Furthermore, to underscore the various meanings implied in Hoban's use of the word 'fidelity' we may note that Coupé uses Marshall McLuhan to expound on the manifestation of postmodernist neo-shamanism in contemporary popular culture: "Electric circuitry confers a mythic dimension on our ordinary individual and group actions. Our technology forces us to live mythically, but we continue to think fragmentarily, and on single separate planes" (qtd. in Coupé, *Myth* 52).

In *Kleinzeit*, the modern author seeks to become Orpheus, the archetypal musician. Kleinzeit, from a state of discord, dissociation and disunity must re-member himself as Orpheus to find concord, harmony and unity. He does this through an absurdist faith and belief in the mysteries of Zen-like transcendence and creativity. In *The Medusa Frequency*, Hoban makes the connections between fidelity and art explicit. It is the writer as "telegrapher" whose duty it is to patrol the boundaries of consciousness and receive messages from everywhere, who must acquire the perceptive fidelity figured as

Eurydice or the Medusa so that the author may be able to write from that hidden place of eternal wisdom, darkness, and fertility (*MF* 9, 121-22, 134). In *Riddley Walker*, the hero is a shaman on a journey to rediscover lost sources of wisdom and act as an agent, or vessel for regeneration. As such Riddley must trust in his own vision of power, 'lissen' without 'inner fearents' (interference and/or inner fear) and he finds faith in the performance of a puppet show in which the 'chemistry and fizzics' of the puppets transmit their own energy. In his disastrous allegorical interpretation Goodparley, perhaps unwittingly stumbles upon the sense in which Hoban values the notion of fidelity, he claims *fidelity* is "some kynd of paint" which depicts a Legend which is all that is left of a "blipful seakert pictert" or "dyergram" which has been lost (*RW* 124). In *Pilgermann*, Hoban tunes directly into the universal transmission as Pilgermann, who is a "poor bare tuned fork, humming with the foreverness of the Word that is always Now" (*P* 26) broadcasts the "words and pictures of [his] thoughts [as they] go out on those few millimetres of waveband assigned to" him (*P* 102). Through this signal Hoban contemplates the universal matters of God, history, evil and suffering so that we may discover what it means for us "to be a particle of the universal consciousness" (Myers n.pag.).

All these interrelated movements are for Hoban parts of a single artistic expression of cosmic mind:

> We are the hunting and seeking animal; we are the sorting and pondering animal; we are the perceiver of the perceptible and the pursuer of the imperceptible and our perceptions change us. It is in us to be continually more fine-tuned than we are, and the fine-tuning wants to happen. (*MUM* 231)

Dipple has noted that in the progression of Hoban's early fiction "the existential self is lost for higher aims than self-expression, and indeed language and form are constantly on the verge of tumbling into a primordial creative maelstrom" (Dipple 180). She cites *The Medusa Frequency* to show that "one of his primary devices is away from the subjective center of the self that dominates Modern and Postmodern fiction" with Hoban instead moving into "another realm of intersubjectivity where every human idea is part of a narratable whole that may and doubtless should help his readers in the task of becoming human perceivers in the preset place where they live, called Time" (180).

I would argue that Hoban's notion of *shamanic fidelity* is the best way of encapsulating this idea of the "realm of intersubjectivity" and, as such, it expresses not only his religious persuasion, but also accommodates his literariness, which deals with the

paradoxes, contradictions, and complexities of translating or transmitting the sacred into language, especially in the context of modernity.

Finally, returning to "Mnemosyne, Teen Taals, and Tottenham Court Road" we find Hoban on a familiar quest, during which he sees a powerful and awesome bull at a monastery at Evangelistrias. By experiencing "total reception of his significance" and finding that the "monastery bull was the heart of the place [and] a place of the heart for me" (*MUM* 227), Hoban has reached a "language base" (126). This is another word with multiple connotations relevant to Hoban's project: a base is the bottom or supporting structure, it is the fundamental principle or starting point as a centre for organisation, it is, in linguistics, the root or stem of a word, and alluding to the vital connection between Hoban as shaman receiving and conveying signals from the cosmic transmission, in electronics the base is the region in a transistor between the emitter and collector ("Base," *Collins*).

However, Hoban also expresses the deep ambivalence he has when he attempts to capture or duplicate the numinous presence of the bull in a photograph. As he is only able to reproduce a "diminished image of the bull" (*MUM* 230), Hoban realises that he has somehow transgressed: he has "interfered with something that doesn't want to be interfered with" (231). Furthermore, Hoban conceives of his transgression with the camera as part of an overtly sexual male "fragment of a fantasy" in which a sniper targets an object: he has been unfaithful and destructive; sacred perception becomes voyeuristic betrayal.

Here Hoban reveals the central paradox and dialectic which mediates his entire religious and literary vision. On one hand, he is driven by a powerful spiritual impulse to connect with a mysterious and inexplicable force greater than himself, while, on the other he realises that this very desire is dangerous, especially when it is manifested in a fantasy of control and fear which attempts to grasp, hold and reify through human modes of expression (the 'limited-reality consensus', or photographs, or language). The core of this paradox is the source of Hoban's complexity and diversity. This means that in his fiction neither religious nor literary aspects are given undue emphasis, nor do they ever completely compromise themselves. In other words, if Hoban tends to get too prosaic or overbearing with religious or spiritual significances there are ample instances of paradox, ambiguity and playful self-conscious awareness of literary modes to balance or temper this. On the other hand, if one is tempted to regard his novels as examples of the dissolution of the subject into the chain of signification as an endless deferral of meaning

and a dizzying postmodern labyrinth, Hoban consistently reiterates his belief in the epiphanic transformative power of art, and he ultimately finds value in the resurrection of the mythic realm, and places his faith in the quasi-religious concept of a 'language base'.

It is with the paradoxical realisation that "the only keeping is a constant letting go" (226) that Hoban ends "Mnemosyne, Teen Taals, and Tottenham Court Road". This finally explains the momentum behind his idea of an ongoing dialectic requiring perpetual expression and it is merely another aspect of the other paradoxes discussed in this thesis and evident throughout his fiction: the Orphic action cycle of loss and finding, of emptiness and fullness; the dynamic of yin and yang, or male and female; the notions of wholeness and '1st knowing' and the need for inventive progress and 'clevverness'; the tension between the power to destroy and to create, between good and evil; the aspects of unity and multiplicity; movement and stillness and so on. Thus, finding faith in the process of the "*real* reality, the flickering of seen and unseen actualities, the moment under the moment, [which] can't be put into words" (*MUM* Foreword), Hoban concludes that in his imperfect attempt to find 'high fidelity', he must avoid holding on. For it is in the letting go, the release and the openness to change, that we become the "God-receiver, the self receptive to that which cannot be held at all" and thereby hope to "retain a consecration and a concentration" in our various humble artistic expressions (*MUM* 234-35).

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