

RHODES UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY

Cl. No. TR 77-34

Acc. No. 80/49

187041

THE TIGHTROPE WALKER

An Essay submitted in partial
fulfilment of the requirements
of the Degree of Master of Fine
Arts in Rhodes University,
Grahamstown.

by

JESSIE PATRICIA DILL DALE

1976.

NOT TO BE TAKEN AWAY
FROM THE LIBRARY

FOR MY FAMILY

C O N T E N T S:

SECTION I: THE TIGHTROPE.

SECTION II: FOR ARTISTS ONLY?

SECTION III: THE BALANCING POLE - TECHNIQUE AND WORK.

SECTION IV: THE DYNAMICS OF ROPE WALKING.

SECTION V: THE 'PERFORMER' AND THE SPECTATORS.

NOTE ON BIBLIOGRAPHY.

SECTION I: THE TIGHTROPE.

- (a) Two men set out on a journey. Though they could not describe what they were after, they were convinced that they would recognise it when they found it. They called what they were after 'truth'. After they had travelled for a while they came across a huge precipice too deep to descend and so wide that they could not see whether it had another side. They decided to follow the path along the edge in the hope of finding a way across it. Along the way they came across several towns, among them Science, Religion and Art. In each town they stopped and asked whether the drop was a precipice or a chasm, if there was any way to cross and what lay beyond. They received all kinds of answers. Some said that the drop had always been there; that there was no way across and that man should learn to live on the firm ground beneath their feet here. Others, fascinated by the depth, size and majesty of the drop were proud of the precipice and said there was nothing beyond it. Unconvinced, the two men travelled on. When they had walked as far as they could go without resolving the mystery they began to wonder.

At this point they met a stranger who, when they asked the questions again, answered that he alone had come from the other side of the chasm in order to make a way⁽¹⁾ across the chasm to the other side, so that any man who was searching for the truth could cross the chasm and would find all truth. He warned the men that the way was hard⁽²⁾ and that once they had started out across the chasm they could not turn⁽³⁾ back. The journey, he said, had to be made alone and could not be made by one for another. It would also mean that they had to want truth enough to leave the town, the security, the known, and journey into the unknown. He pointed to a thin rope that they had not noticed earlier because it was obscured by a huge billboard. The rope was secured to the edge of the chasm and

- (1) St. John's Gospel - Chpt. 14, vs. 6. The Jerusalem Bible, Gen. Editor Alexander Jones; Darton Longman & Todd, London, 1966.
(2) St. Matthew's Gospel - Chpt. 7, vs. 13 & 14. Jerusalem Bible.
(3) St. Luke's Gospel - Chpt. 9, vs. 62. Ancient Greek & Today's English Version. Editors, Kurtaland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger, Allen Wikgren. American Bible Society, 1966.

and looped out into the distance as far as the two men could see. He said that he would have to⁽⁴⁾ go ahead in order to make it possible for others to follow and to prepare a place for them on the other side. Before he left them he promised that if they believed what he said and followed him across the rope he would send them another⁽⁵⁾ expert who would lead them across the chasm into all truth. His authority amazed the two men. Then the stranger turned and walked towards the tightrope and out across the chasm and disappeared from sight.

Only then did they see what was written on the billboard. It advertised the comfort of the cities and offered citizenship on most favourable terms. Quick promotion if one followed the sensible rules and honour for those who reached the top. All a man needed or wanted was to be found within the bounds. The men recalled their stay in the towns and their memories supported these claims. Why then venture on the rope? There seemed so much support for the billboard's claims against one man's word that the tightrope seemed unnecessary, even ludicrous. They began to wonder if there really was any difference between this side and the unseen other and to question whether the truth they sought could not be found in the towns as one of the crowd.

As he became increasingly convinced, one man returned to the towns prepared to win his place in their scheme of things. But the second man, unable to deny the authority with which the stranger spoke or to believe that the crowd's answer was the truth despite all they could adduce, turned and slowly made his way toward the rope. Very soon after he had started to inch his way along the rope he found he could not balance with what he was carrying. He dropped his luggage piece by piece until he was left only with the stick he used as a balancing pole, and with it was able to make more headway along the rope. Each step involved a risk and walking was hard work but each step confirmed that the rope held and that what the stranger had said was true.

(4) St. John's Gospel - Chpt. 14, vs. 2 & 3. Jerusalem Bible.

(5) St. John's Gospel - Chpt. 14, vs. 16 & 17. Jerusalem Bible.

As he moved further and further out he lost sight of the crowd that had gathered on the edge to watch him fall or to see if, at the last minute, this tightrope walker would perform some new stunt to make his name in the towns. He even lost sight of the towns and then the bank itself. The tightrope stretched on endlessly. Exhausted the tightrope walker stood still, tottering in the middle of a vast unknown, alone. All the questions and accusations that he had seemed able to dispel before, now pressed so heavily even to stand was too difficult. As he fell he grabbed the tightrope, felt it tighten and hold his weight. He lost his balancing pole but found a new power flowing through him as he held the rope. He looked up and saw he was held by another, who identified himself as the expert the stranger had spoken of, who pulled him back onto the tightrope and set him walking again. He found a new balancing pole in himself and found that if he moved exactly as the expert directed he was able not only to move forward but also to look, no longer at his feet or at the chasm around and below him but, straight ahead. The task was just as difficult and required as much hard work as before but there was a new power and a new assurance both about the rope and about the other side. No longer had he to concentrate on how to walk and stay on the rope but only on obeying the expert's directions. He found that instead of moving in fear and uncertainty he moved with the excitement and carefreeness of one who was discovering and becoming more certain of the rope, the expert and the other side. Truth was beginning to gain content.

(b) Everything around me is the continual reminder and evidence that I live in a world of at least three dimensions; not in the isolation of a single dimension or in the cut-out world of a single plane. The world of three dimensions endless and unrepetitious in its diversity seems inexhaustible. This order has a place for the most gigantic form to the most minute.

There is a continual cycle of life, death and rebirth, the old is always stripped clean to make room for the new; the

day drawing down the night and the night sinks into the light of the new day; season follows season; planets tread out their orbits held in tension by some still more powerful force. This order where chaos should reign hints of a world not of three dimensions but of four. A power so vast that it can create form where there was only the void; light from darkness; that divides the heavens from the earth; dry land from the waters and whose power and love breathes life on that dry land; and who stamps each thing with a character of truth.

It is as part of that order that I have life and a place. Through every other part I find the reflection of the Creator's face. For in each part I find his nature stamped: one who holds all truth together in himself, is the origin of life and holds the purpose of mine. I have learned that the purpose of my life lies in the discovery of the truth, which is none other than the knowledge of God as He is in Himself. In such continuous discovery I believe lies also the key to the realisation of my full potential: to know my own place in this order, which knowledge is indispensable for achieving the ancient aim of 'know thyself'.

The search involves every part of myself. It demands the sifting out of all that is superfluous or contrary to this search. The discovery of truth has to begin with the stripping of the luggage. In this search I have become increasingly aware of the thin line between that which stops at the glory of man and that which passes beyond him and points to the power that generates life itself; the tightrope. He cannot undertake this search from the pedestal on which the Renaissance set him: he has to return to the standing stones and circles of pre-history as the patient watcher of the cosmos.

In the following pages I relate my struggle to discover the relationship between my experience as a Christian and my experience as a painter. As a Christian I know my response to the Word must be total because it addresses me about all I am. But I also find that painting is not something I do

with part of myself - it too, is total. Therefore the discovery of the relationship between them has been absolutely necessary, for unless they are compatible with each other I should be forced to choose between them. This would mean because I am a Christian I cannot be artist or if I am an artist, then I cannot be Christian because I must give to my art what I know Christ demands of me.

Art, I believe, is one form of the search for truth, the discovery of things as they are in essence and, therefore, is concerned with origins and with life. If it is not to do with these, then I believe it is not art but enters the realm of fashion which, said Baudelaire⁽⁶⁾ "is a sublime distortion of nature or rather a constantly repeated attempt to reform nature".

Here I am faced with the despair produced by the futility of forever trying to do what man in his own power is incapable of doing, to comprehend the incomprehensible and to express the inexpressible. I must choose between compromising the truth through being bound to lifelong flattery of 'court' fashion and so, with loss of integrity; or blindness to my own limitations which binds me to a life sentence of painting as a solipsist; or to look beyond myself to a power greater than I, able to take what is unknown and make it known and so to a discipline requiring obedience to a vision over and above the one that appears within myself.

Infinitely more important than 'success' or recognition in the eyes of the crowd is the search for truth; God as He is in Himself and the discovery of my relationship to Him. I must reject the first option. It is from the position of the second option that I discovered the all sufficiency of the third. Part of the nature of truth is that it brings light into darkness and makes mystery clear.

The small distance that I had travelled in my search for truth has brought sufficient light to show me something of my own

(6) Baudelaire as quoted in Time Magazine -- "American Notes - Madam Yves"; August 9, 1976. Page 16.

nature. What it revealed I knew as truth and saw with terrifying clarity the size of the chasm that separated me from the truth and from the Origin of all things - God.

I can allow myself to get trapped in the extravagance of my own thoughts and I often fool myself about my abilities. This is fine while I stand on the corner of High Street, my feet firmly planted on the pavement and look at the approaching pantehnicon. But there is a moment in which one sees the truth clearly when one stands a lone gladiator in the pantehnicon's path! Then I see the chasm clearly. I would be fool to deny the chasm and the impossibility of continuing the search until it has been bridged.

As a rabbit who comes out of the dark into the headlight of a country traveller's car stands petrified by the light and then in panic dashes blindly in every direction trying to get out of the light, so in man's fear of the the light truth sheds on the chasm, he dashes blindly grasping at one thing after another in the hope that it sheds a different light on, or establishes some means to fill up the chasm. In the end the rabbit either dashes headlong into the car - a corpse - or back out into the night. Yet there is another way if the rabbit would learn it. He can turn from the fear and run in the light, his eyes no longer limited by darkness and blinded by fear but able to see clearly as in the light. If he continues to run in the light⁽⁷⁾ he will learn to distinguish the light from darkness and will be led by that light through the chasm to his destination and the origin of that light - truth. Then too he will know life as it is and discover his place in truth.

I have chosen, therefore, the third alternative. Here, and here alone, have I found that the two quests - Christ's demands on me and art's requirements can converge. It is in obedience to Christ's demands that I discover the constitutive principle of the universe as well as its key force - Christ Himself. It is by moving in obedience to that Word

(7) St. John's Gospel - Chpt. 1, vs. 3-5: The Jerusalem Bible.

that I experience God and his acts and the acts of God and his being brought together - truth: the only being in whom word⁽⁸⁾ and character are one.

His Word to man makes known God to man; His gift of speech enables men to speak to each other. Those who hear that Word are enabled to cross the chasm. Thus art finds its content and painting its expression.

In making this assertion I stand in the face of a great deal of artistic and religious experience to the contrary. On the one side the Nietzschean 'Art for Art's Sake' and on the other the Iconoclast's judgement of 'Graven Image'. Yet there are those who have not found the two quests incompatible - in the wake of their search there remains the standing stones and circles of Pre-History, cave paintings and scribblings, Romanesque and Byzantine mosaics, Gothic cathedrals, Giotto's new life in a stylized world, Michelangelo's late emerging figures, Rembrandt's etchings and Gaudi crypts.

Because each artist himself is different, his 'journey' on the tightrope will in the end be individual and unique; for each must go back to the origin and out from there in the direction he finds indicated for him in the origin which is his origin as well as the origin of the rest of the world. It will enshrine his experience which will be part of humanity's but, because part of humanity's, intensely individual as well. For humanity is the word we use for the mosaic made of the tesserae of individual experience.

For every man has the gift and power of decision for himself, yet bears immense pressures on that decision. He is pressed to succeed but first must decide what constitutes 'success'. Wealth presses but first he must decide wealth's 'currency'. Position presses but first he must decide the circumstances of 'place'. Fear presses but he must decide whom to fear most. He is pressed to search but must first decide what to search for and how. In all these choices the decision lies

(8) St. John's Gospel - Chpt. 1, vs. 1 - 2. Jerusalem Bible.

between truth and falsehood; between the life offered by the crowd and that of the lone journey that the search requires. This search takes place in many fields of investigation and throughout the searcher is faced with having to discriminate between cosmetic and bone structure; between surface and essence; between truth and falsehood. However diverse men may be in their gifts and backgrounds, each has to reckon in his own way with the one way across the chasm. And paradoxically, the uniqueness of the individual's experience is not apparent until he has thus responded, yet his testimony is that he can affirm, in all the diversity, a universe.

SECTION II: FOR ARTISTS ONLY?

This experience of being 'in suspense', of having to move along a line the end of which is not in sight is not peculiar to the artist. True art, true science and true religion have a common origin and destination and common conditions, if not common means of getting from the one to the other. The same caves that contain paintings and animal drawings bear evidence of burial rites and the standing stones of Pre-History bear witness to the careful observation of cosmic powers and man's relationship with them. Men built temples with proportions that represented their understanding of relationships in the universe. Dimensions and settings were carefully chosen to correspond with the disposition of unseen powers so that people seeing these authenticated representations would act appropriately towards the powers themselves. The word 'temple'⁽⁹⁾ itself comes from a root meaning 'to cut'. Temples were 'slices' of the universe. By studying the sample, the worshipper could find his place within the whole scheme of things otherwise so incomprehensible. The temple was the product not only of religion, but of art and science as well. It was a community's understanding of and response to power.

Ever since Plato, the Greeks had been haunted by the contrast between the real and the unreal, the seen and the unseen, the temporal and the eternal. Plato had the idea of a world of perfect forms or ideas or patterns, of which everything in this world is an imperfect copy:-⁽¹⁰⁾

- (9) Greek word TEMENOS (from Temno) is a piece which has been cut or marked out. Its first meaning is that of a particular (demarcated) section of the sky within which the god reveals himself in the flight of birds or in the lightning flashes. This part corresponds to the whole sky in which omens are seen. - The Meaning of Religion, W.B. Kristensen (E.T. John B. Carman), M. Nijhoff; The Hague, 1960, Page 368.
- (10) With reference to 'The Letter to the Hebrews' - Commentary by Prof. W. Barclay. St. Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 1955, Page xiv - xv.

"The Creator of the world had designed and carried out his work according to an unchangeable and eternal pattern of which the world is but a copy."⁽¹¹⁾

Philo, who took his ideas from Plato, said:-

"God knew from the beginning that a fair copy could never come into being apart from a fair pattern; and that none of the objects perceivable by sense could be flawless which was not modelled after an archetype and spiritual idea, and thus, when He prepared to create this visible world, He shaped beforehand the ideal world in order to constitute the corporeal after the incorporeal and godlike pattern."⁽¹²⁾

When Cicero was talking of the laws men know and use on earth he said:-

"We have no real and life-like likeness of real law and genuine justice; all we enjoy is a shadow and a sketch."⁽¹³⁾

Many thinkers of the ancient world had this idea of a real world elsewhere, of which this world is only a kind of pale shadow, an imperfect sketch. Here we can only guess and grope; here we can only work with imperfect shadows and copies of the world as God conceived it. In Gnosticism our world was the creation of a less powerful and skilful god who botched a good deal of his work. His poor craftsmanship accounted for the woes we experience here. Salvation was the offer of a way of escape. The Greeks were aware of wisdom other than their own and tried to interpret it. They looked for and saw what underlay appearances thus their buildings celebrated the landscape, were of the land, not just in the land. They stood as symbols expressing an idea.

(11) Plato as quoted by Prof. W. Barclay: Commentary on "The Letter to the Hebrews". St. Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 1955, Page xiv; line 1 - 27 to 29.

(12) Philo as quoted by Prof. W. Barclay: Commentary on "The Letter to the Hebrews". Page xiv, line 30 to Page xv, line 1.

(13) Cicero as quoted by Prof. W. Barclay: Commentary on "The Letter to the Hebrews". Page xv, line 2 - 5.

For the Egyptians, adequate representation meant size. Only the colossal could properly represent the immensity of cosmic power - it stuns through its scale. The pyramids stand as the acts of faith of volunteer armies, 70,000 strong unified in effort and in belief.

Since the beginning of time man has been haunted by this search, and filled with the urgency of finding a go-between man and God. I speak specifically of artists because this has been where I have sought. But I am not claiming that this experience is unique to artists, rather I am asking others to confirm that something like this has occurred in their own field of investigation. If it has, then whatever line of investigation we may adopt, this common experience says something about our common search as man. We have isolated art and religion from science and power in a way which would have made impossible the search and expression of the ancient true artist. Because there is such a thing as false art, false science and false religion, each area needs the other as a continual check against falsehood. True art, science and religion do not seek to take the place of each other because they are involved in the same search. They are concerned first with the discovery, expression and communication of truth in a way that enables man to see his true relationship to God and therefore his true place in the universe.

Each of the three seeks to reveal, not to conceal, the truth. The search involves moving out into the unknown because of the conviction of the reality of things not seen and with the assurance of things hoped for which are also unseen. It involves making mistakes and often the repetition of mistakes. But it also involves discovery, and with discovery, realisation and through realising, releases truth and in the understanding of the truth defines the hitherto undefinable.

Before it becomes a vehicle of the truth each of the three ways needs purification. The searcher has to eliminate ruthlessly anything that has not part in truth; he has to learn to discern and to select the truth in a sea of distortion. Only thus can

he achieve the real stature and purpose of his way of searching as medium for truth rather than as an agent of social propaganda. If purification is necessary to make art, religion and science true vehicles of truth it follows that unless the searcher has been through the fire and water of purification, he will be foiled not only by his subject, but by himself. Here again a man is faced with the impossibility of the search. He can deal with only a fragment of truth and yet he seeks to point beyond this limitation to all truth. Yet if anything is taken from the whole and isolated the result is distortion; how can a part of truth be truly presented if isolated from the whole truth?

Just as man attempted to make 'slices' of the universe so that he would understand his place in the universe and identify himself with the power behind, God has moved towards man. His temple stands at once man and God, revealing the whole truth of God to man,⁽¹⁴⁾ man to God,⁽¹⁵⁾ and men⁽¹⁶⁾ to each other. Christ stands unique not as an arbitrary form but as the exact representation⁽¹⁷⁾ of God as He is in Himself and simultaneously of man as he was created to be; of man in his full potential - son of God. Not only does Christ stand as exact representative of God but also as substitute for man, as true sacrifice: the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.⁽¹⁸⁾ Thus He not only is temple but purifier as well. We find ourselves in His place as sons of God; He in ours as condemned criminal. As such He spans the chasm⁽¹⁹⁾ between man and God. No longer has man to walk as a prisoner exercising in the prison yard, forced by the nature of his captivity to tread the same paths again and again, caught by his limitations and only an echo of his full potential. So too, he is able to relate the fragments of truth to the whole truth and it no longer distorts but points beyond itself to the whole truth. 'Potential' has a long philosophical history, but natural scientists found it useful to describe the behaviour of electricity:

- (14) St. John's Gospel - Chpt. 1, vs. 14; Chpt. 14, vs. 17: Jerusalem Bible.
(15) St. John's Gospel - Chpt. 17: Jerusalem Bible.
(16) St. Matthew's Gospel - Chpt. 25: Jerusalem Bible.
(17) Colossians - Chpt. 1, vs. 15 - 20: Jerusalem Bible.
(18) St. John's Gospel - Chpt. 1, vs. 29: Jerusalem Bible.
(19) Hebrews - Chpt. 2, vs. 14 - 15: Jerusalem Bible.

A car battery contains a potential⁽²⁰⁾ energy powerful enough to move a car. The potential power of the car depends on the connection between the positive and negative terminals of the battery. Without this connection all the potential power is a dead force. There is a pressure created between the two terminals, the -VE having an excess of electrons and the +VE an electron deficiency. When the connection between the two is made there is a flow of electrons from the -VE (excess) to the +VE (deficiency) terminals and as a result the full potential of the battery is utilized. In the car this happens when the driver turns the key. By analogy our full potential is released when the connection between God and man is made. The key to this connection and release is Jesus Christ. Then the full power of man as sons of God is available for use.

By studying the Temple⁽²¹⁾ Christ, a man finds his place within the universe and understands that the essence and purpose of his life lie within the Creator of Life. He moves with the potential of a man who has identified himself with the constitutive⁽²²⁾ and key force of the universe and by such identification becomes himself the temple⁽²³⁾ of God's Spirit. As such he receives power to return, led by that Spirit, to God Himself, the origin of all things. This journey leads into the silence of the unknown and the silence of the unborn; it moves back through all truth to the origin. In returning a man finds the one in whose image he was made and who has the power to remake him no longer as image but as son.

"But to all who received Him, who believed in His name He gave power to become children of God; who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of God."⁽²⁴⁾

- (20) Ref. Definition of electrical potential difference.
(21) St. John's Gospel - Chpt. 2, vs. 19 - 22; Chpt. 14, vs. 1 - 7.
(22) Hebrews - Chpt. 1, vs. 2 & 3; Chpt. 2, vs. 10.
(23) 1 Corinthians - Chpt. 6, vs. 17 & 19; 2 Corinthians, Chpt. 6, vs. 16 - 18; John - Chpt. 17, vs. 23.
(24) St. John's Gospel - Chpt. 1, vs. 12. - The New Testament, Ancient Greek and Today's English Version (Editors: Kurtalund, Matthew Black, Carlom Martini, Bruce M. Metzger, Alan Wilgren.)

It is in this return and rebirth as a son that a man discovers the unrealised dimension of the waiting Father; ⁽²⁵⁾ in this realisation he reaches his full potential.

The artist's painting is an accumulation of all these stages of the search. With the artist the search develops its full potential as vehicle of the truth and as such points not only beyond itself to truth but becomes a celebration of what the searcher has understood in truth.

(25) St. Luke's Gospel - Chpt. 15.

SECTION III: THE BALANCING POLE - TECHNIQUE AND WORK.

The nature of the artist's work (again, in essence, no different from any other searcher after truth) requires not just skills but a certain character in the artist himself. A painting is the means by which the artist is able to give expression to the invisible content of his inner experience. As such it is an original language formed and given voice by the Spirit which is in the artist. Each painting is the accumulation of different stages of the artist's search and therefore each work is seen and tackled on its own basis. It is a language the vocabulary of which is continually growing and therefore moving into new depths of expression because the artist himself is living on the sinuous edge of the known and unknown. Like a language it needs ordering and selection if it is to communicate accurately what the speaker or painter has discovered. He needs a fluency and sound knowledge of the vocabulary so as to express as clearly as possible what he wants to say, not to chop experience down to fit the few words he has.

Technique is necessary as a means of the expression of an artist's insight. Whatever means are used, the artist remains in charge and keeps them as means to his ends rather than their taking control and becoming ends in themselves. This is not possible unless the artist is willing to learn and control technique, for although good servants, techniques all too quickly become unruly 'masters'. The artist overmastered by their effect lapses into gimmick and style. What begins as original is copied as clever fashion and ends as 'government issue' prison garb. Where uniformity sets in there is an exodus of art. The artist no longer is concerned with exploring. He has become 'tourist' whose 'oohs' and 'aahs' punctuate the erratic click-clicking of his camera. The pictures are insta-automatic.

A professional pianist's performance seems deceptively easy. The audience hears the concerto in which he draws out of the piano all that it can give and uses the range for what he wants to express. His command is such that he is able to play exactly the sound he hears within himself. It is not until the beginner sits down and attempts to play that he discovers not only that

he needs a score sheet but can only produce discordant and disconnected sounds, not the concerto. Then only does he realise the need for hours and hours spent playing scales and arpeggios, of going through a score note by note, section by section until it is perfected; of understanding and sounding the notes until he has made the instrument an extension of his whole being. Then only can he use the instrument with the absolute command of a master. So too with the artist. He has to draw and practise drawing until he is able to use any tool or medium to express exactly what is within him. He plods step by step along the tightrope probing and discovering; selecting and rejecting; building and destroying; placing and re-placing; feeling for something that has to be broken through until he finally arrives at an understanding and knowledge of the essence of the life he explores. He continually stores the information that this search reveals and returns each time with the eyes of a child seeing for the first time. Like a child he has to come without preconceptions and therefore has to 'unlearn' what he has learnt so that he can return able to see openly and honestly. Like a child he finds all creation a source of fascination, he celebrates the everyday, without looking for the extraordinary. Like a child he is single-minded and totally absorbed in what he tackles; not fearful but excited; not afraid to make mistakes, but as one who has seen the 'prize' mulberry, is concerned only with picking it. He is undeterred, even unaware of the height or of the feebleness of the branch which supports him or even of the falling because he has clutched at the branch that held the mulberry. Finally, like a child he possesses not only the idea but the energy and persistence to carry it through.

In order to stay on the tightrope the walker has to become so familiar with the way of the rope and his balancing pole that instantly he is able to sense the exact combination of his body and pole needed to make the next step forward. In art the only forward direction is to start where one is and work back to the origin. Art is not a system in which pictures are assembled for pictures' sake; it is not a play of colour or of contrasting tones; nor is it a play of lines or forms.

It is either a 'chunk' of life or else it is only a slick technical production. It is impossible to mask emptiness with technique. The artist paints not only what he sees before him but what he sees within him, his task is to bring the two together. As a seed must lie beneath the earth if it is to have life and to grow out into the light so too an artist must store his studies within him until they grow out of him as something more than vision and impression. He then paints from within himself and for beyond himself in obedience to the Spirit that is within him who alone is able to take impression and make clear the whole; to take his partial vision and enable the one 'seeing' to do so with his whole being.

The artist has continually to return to the origin of life in order to draw from Him the living waters that sustain and give growth to life. Only in this fullness of life can his paintings be 'chunks' of life for:-

"If the Spirit of God that raised Jesus from death lives in you, then He who raised Christ from death will also give life to your mortal bodies by the presence of His Spirit in you."⁽²⁶⁾

Each part of the painting is essential to the life as a whole. Thus the lines are living lines that attempt to describe life and reveal the essence of what they explore. His lines are economical; no more can be added, neither can any be taken away without destroying the life found and the truth pointed to. His paint is worked up paint. Not exactly chosen tone squeezed out of a tube but worked until the 'tube' is pushed out and life is drawn in. The artist has to grow green not chrome it. He takes paint and regulates it to nature; to the nature that is within him and so to the nature that grows, dies, sprawls, spreads, builds, eats, chews and makes paths. The artist's line and paint are living line and colour that give accurate expression to his inner experience of returning to the origin.

(26) Romans - Chpt. 8, vs. 11. Jerusalem Bible.

"Creation works ceaselessly through man but man does not create, he discovers. Those who seek out the laws of Nature as support of their work collaborate with the Creator. Those who copy are not collaborators. For this reason originality consists in returning to the origin."⁽²⁷⁾

Painting has to be a return to the origin, otherwise it is already at least once removed from the truth - and painting like gossip, when removed from the truth, spreads like wild fire.

In seeking out the laws of nature the artist does not isolate or take out of context. He selects and sifts. He is involved in elimination of the cosmetic but not in distortion; in simplification, not in exaggeration. He attempts at each stage and with each part to engage with totality and dispenses as far as possible with emphatic degrees of fragmentation and isolation. He is not an analyst who takes a tree into a laboratory and breaks it into components. He cannot, for the wind that blows through the tree and the ground in which it has rooted, through which it has pushed and from which it has drawn its sustenance is no less part of the tree. Painting is a search for the wholeness and the unity of what the artist sees and experiences. As a bird who has caught a worm too big to swallow in one mouthful keeps a keen eye on the whole worm, although he is limited to the segment he can cope with, so it is with the artist. At any one time he can only grasp one segment of the whole. Yet he must keep the whole in view otherwise the totality escapes. So too, he must draw and paint swiftly so as to cover as much of the totality as quickly as possible and yet not so fast as to make what he puts down mindless. What goes on in his thumb also goes on in his mind. It is an act of memory from mind to hand and that distance too must be covered as quickly as possible.

The artist paints as if he were riding a horse. He feels its mouth, not holding it back, but always there; he does not beat it like a beach mule; he draws out its full strength. A painting

(27) Antonio Gaudi - as quoted in "Antonio Gaudi - A Reappraisal." E. Cassanelles. Ediciones Poligrafa, S.A. Barcelona, 1965. Page 103, line 38.

is a sequence of developing expression. As he imposes sketch on sketch, decides what to retain and what to discard, one thing matters - to preserve its life in the process. That vitality dictates the changes, directs what is unfinished and in the end decides when the work is complete. Then the artist must leave the work, nothing more can be done. Further reworking leads down from this summit, not up. The final marks are as exploratory as the initial; they are made with the same attitude of mind: to discover, reveal and express. Thus painting becomes so much more than topographical description. It becomes the expression of what the artist knows in the mystery of what he does not. It is light not darkness because it is a continual seeing.

In this process the artist gradually peels away the superfluous and reveals the bone structure which shapes the flesh. From the bone structure the artist moves beyond to the force which moulded it. Here he finds the conditions that dictate and form the flesh; he also returns to find the aloe, the cactus and the thorn bush. In this way the artist returns first to the origin, to the Creator and former of things as they are. By returning he discovers the Creator's life-giving power behind the first appearance of things. Thus he is enabled no longer to copy but to parallel nature, not limiting his expression to nature but passing beyond to the Creator. In so doing, painting reaches its full potential: Vehicle of Truth and symbol of things as they are. The artist finds his true place - not creator but co-worker.

SECTION IV: THE DYNAMICS OF ROPE WALKING - THE SPIRIT OF THE ARTIST.

Because painting necessarily involves the experience of returning to the origin and observing development and is an attitude not only of mind but of the artist's whole being, the question of the possibility of 'rebirth' becomes crucial. It is at this point too that I am forced once again to look at the demands of Christ, for with the man Nicodemus, I too must ask:-

"How can a man be born again when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"⁽²⁸⁾

With him I realise how tough are the moulds into which we cast our experience, and how difficult to reheat experience so it can be cast into different ones. Rebirth thus depends on the possibility of dealing effectively with memory so that it does not block our attempts at returning to the origin and retracing our steps from there by sending us back along the habitual and familiar paths. This is beyond my power to do. The Spirit alone can help me here. He must brood again over the dark waters as at the beginning and remake our world in terms of true distinctions, and not according to the distinctions our distortions make. Particularly the Spirit will have to deal with the subconscious and unconscious parts of my memory, which by their nature are almost inaccessible to me, even if I try to objectify them, as for instance, in my painting.

I begin to understand why, when I paint, others read different meaning from my work partly because of the sub and unconscious aspects of which I am not aware and partly because of their own experience which is different from mine and therefore 'reads' into mine what may not be 'there' but is in them.

But since this process of the return through memory to the origin is paradoxically the way along the rope, it is not something I only do once - I repeat the process each time I paint. I have to face the apparent contradiction that the way 'forward' is the impossible journey 'back' first of all. Many are unwilling to take this journey because of the hurt they remember along the way; this guards the original garden like an angel with a flaming sword.

(28) St. John's Gospel - Chpt. 3, vs. 4. The Jerusalem Bible.

Jesus took Nicodemus back beyond the Law of which he was a master to the sign of the serpent in the wilderness. This meant facing the fact that the chosen people were disobedient at the beginning and had been ever since. The need for rebirth, which Jesus states is necessary for Nicodemus, was there from the beginning. As at the beginning⁽²⁹⁾ the people had to turn to the bronze serpent if they were to live, so now the people would have to turn to the Son of Man, lifted up, if they were to live. They had to face the fact that their manner of life was such that they deserved to die. Yet the sign of the plague was no less the sign of healing. Snake venom slew, but still more venomous was disobedience. Obedience would heal the lesser as well as the greater poison.

As Jesus faced Nicodemus then with the origin of the Law by which God's people have life, so Jesus faces me with the origin and condition of life.

"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."⁽³⁰⁾

At this point I believe that art and Christ's demands have to meet. Art is concerned with life otherwise it is not art. But what sort of life? Because the content of art is life it necessitates this return to origins in order to discover the power which gives life before life can become its content. I am faced too with the failure of my own attempts to return to the origin and my arrogance in assuming I can do what God alone has the power to bring about. I discover that instead of the childlike⁽³¹⁾ qualities that one requires both for the return to origins and for the discovery of life, and therefore for painting, I am full of the childish. The former has the necessary qualities of openness, willingness to be reassured, to trust, to explore, to be disciplined and corrected and to start again. The other is the natural response when the adult does not get what he wants

(29) Numbers - Chpt. 21, vs. 4 - 9. Jerusalem Bible.

(30) St. John's Gospel - Chpt. 3, vs. 14 & 15. Jerusalem Bible.

(31) St. Luke's Gospel - Chpt. 18, vs. 17; St. Mark's Gospel - Chpt. 10, vs. 15. Jerusalem Bible.

and is used to - his own way. He is blind with rage or stubbornness and cannot be taught. He bears all the symptoms of a spoilt child's 'my will be done' and learns the use of sophistry and deceit. Childlikeness is not regression but rebirth. It is willingness to learn from the Spirit who is a humble spirit not a proud spirit. The other tries to force its own way 'back' and has continually to cover and defend itself and therefore has no place either in life or in the artist. If the artist takes the Spirit as teacher he will be led into all truth and will discover life as it is for he will discover God as He is in Himself. Thus it becomes possible for a man to return to the origins and in retracing his steps from there is able to express what then becomes familiar paths. By this he records each time his discovery of the power that gives life (the result of his search for the origin and his inner experience), then, because he has been led to the origin, he is able to order and express his understanding and his painting is the result of that ordering and experience and therefore points beyond itself to the power that gives life. Painting receives content and purpose.

Because the artist is sensitive to things as they are, he is able to set down his vision in terms that others recognize as 'prophetic' because when with the passage of time, what the prophet foresaw has come to be, people realise that he saw truly. Thus the true artist has also been prophet. But what is not so clearly realised is that the artist differs from his contemporaries in the quality of vision. He saw things as they were, they did not. The penetration and discernment of the artist are thus gifts of the Spirit of wisdom and discernment, who is also the creator Spirit who brings the future into being and links past, present and future. We are most often aware of the discontinuity between ourselves and the past, ourselves and the future. That is why Jesus promises that the Spirit "will bring all things to your remembrance"⁽³²⁾ (thus bridging the gap with the past) and "will lead you into all truth"⁽³³⁾ (thus bridging the gap with the future). The artist shares this

(32) St. John's Gospel - Chpt. 14, vs. 26. Jerusalem Bible.

(33) St. John's Gospel - Chpt: 16, vs. 13 - 15. Jerusalem Bible.

quality of bridge building insofar as he also shares the Spirit.

I do not think that the artist is always aware of this process or articulates it in this way. He may not be able to, but observers may well truly witness to this happening in him. The artist has singlemindedly to search for the content of truth. Sometimes he will be able to 'see' - at these times he is consciously prophet. At other times, because his search has revealed a new face of truth, he himself will be shown. Then he is unconsciously 'prophet'.

Those who, because they saw, designed the Pantocrator all-powerful and throned above all creation are prophets in this sense, for they looked to a time when the Lord of the Church would rule the world. But equally so were the iconoclasts who foresaw the corruption of idolatory where images consorted with illiteracy. Where people did not know how to read the word, the image itself became the object of their adoration and not the symbol signifying the truth beyond, to which it pointed.

Giotto's vision in what had become a stylized and stagnant 'sight' speaks again of life and of true vision and as such foresees man's renewal of his search for truth. The Renaissance foresaw the domination of man; while Caspar David Friedrich relegated him to a tiny fragment of the cosmos. Rembrandt's recoil from the mighty and Goya's devastating comment on imbecilic aristocracy, in their own way, spoke of what was to come in the way they depicted the present. Each penetrated the present and in seeing what is saw also what shall be. In these works the artist will remain prophet, his art not only symbol pointing beyond itself but also prophecy because by seeing things as they are he declares the Word of God in the circumstances of the time: God as He is in Himself and as He shall be.

SECTION V: THE PERFORMER AND THE SPECTATORS.

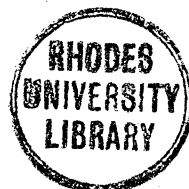
Inevitably the tightrope walker, because of the nature of his search, becomes a performer. But he is not a clown, bound to produce successively more impressive performances or lose his patrons to newcomers able to give novelty and keep the crowd from what it most fears - boredom. Here I refer specifically to the artist, but stress that the experience is not unique to artists but has parallels in every line of investigation that searches for truth.

The performer finds himself separated from the crowd by the nature of his search and by the skill that he has had to develop in order to express his inner experience resulting from this search. The crowd admires or rejects him for what they cannot do or will not risk. The artist has to bear the pain of this separation or deny his gift and stop his search. Thus when a viewer says "I wish I could paint like that", the artist is helpless. The remark stresses the gap between artist and viewer. It may also be saying that the spectator refuses to enter into the search with him. Worse is when the viewer may say "What's that all about?" For here, there is no community between artist and viewer. The spectator may also be questioning the artist's place through questioning his painting. As long as both of these questions arise - and they are the commonest forms of expression in an exhibition - the crowd is likely to remain crowd instead of becoming a community in which artist and viewer share: the artist remains 'performer' where he could be communicator and his work remains 'pictures' in the eyes of the crowd where they might be vehicles transporting the spectator through the gap and plunging him into the artist's own struggle and thus enabling them to 'see' where the artist has been.

But this separation is important in order that artist and viewer discover their place and role within the cosmos and in relation to those groups around them. It is at this point that it becomes possible for 'crowd' to become community and 'performer' to become communicator. For this separation corresponds with one part of the work of the Spirit in creation. Creation proceeds

by dividing one thing from another. The power of fission is immense and important, we cannot ignore it. Yet it is only part of the truth. The Spirit separates so as to bring order out of chaos and form where there was void. It is by his separation that each part of creation is given its specific place and purpose and it is this ordering that creates the unified whole. To discover and understand this order the artist must himself break down and separate. At the same time, he must also reorder into a unified whole this inner experience. Thus he has to understand in order to paint but then paint in order to understand more fully and in doing so becomes a communicator. He is not satisfied until he is able to communicate that which draws the separated (and unskilled) viewer into community not just with himself but also with that which he has communicated. Thus the artist invites the spectator to overcome his sense of separation and join his search. In so doing, the artist says "judge for yourself what I have seen" and offers his work for scrutiny. Simultaneously the spectator is enabled to discover his place as critic.

Critics are indispensable to artists, for the true critic is one who has entered into the artist's own struggle and comments upon it in a way that the artist may not be able to set out because of his own involvement. The critic's involvement has to be as great, but it is the involvement of another. Thus, just as there are good artists and poor, so there are good critics and poor. The latter are lazy, interested more in their own reactions than in the work of the artist and mirror the same faults as are found in the poor or lazy artist. For just as there is technique and work in painting, there is technique and work in criticism. No less than the painter, has the critic to be master of the means at his disposal and of his subject. Because a good critic is able to enter into the artist's struggle in a way that few people can or are willing to risk, he in turn becomes 'artist' as he attempts to express his criticism. In this way critics have often helped a community to 'see' what the artist has seen. Good criticism builds community between the artist and the viewer. It is also part of the Spirit's work



of securing conviction:-

"The Spirit will convict the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgement!" (34)

Community, in fact, is only possible in the light of that commonly received judgement. Appreciation is another name for thanksgiving. But the hallmark of poor criticism is its uncritically sour rejection or sugary acceptance. The artist does not fight for a place within the crowd that will be determined by changing fashions and secured by using his industry, skill and knowledge with aggression, cunning or deceit. He has discovered and knows his place as one made for him before the foundations of his life were laid.

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." (35)

He does not survive on the food of the crowd's praise, nor does he depend on their power. He moves by the direction of the True Spirit who alone can lead him into truth and life; who alone can make known to man God as He is in Himself.

Art has become a vehicle in my search for understanding of God as He is in Himself and painting the expression of this inner experience. My paintings mark stages of the Spirit's conviction of me and each bears part of my slow learning. They hold the mistakes and embody the inadequacy of my attempts to give expression to that terrible majesty, the nearest bounds of which are beyond my comprehension. They stand as celebration of that which I have seen, of my amazement at those parts I have understood a little, and of thanksgiving for the growing understanding of the nature of the waiting Father.

"But I do desire to understand a little of your truth which my heart already believes and loves. I do not seek to understand so that I may believe, but I believe

(34) St. John's Gospel - Chpt. 16, vs. 8. Jerusalem Bible.

(35) Jeremiah - Chpt. 1, vs. 5. Jerusalem Bible.

so that I may understand; and what is more, I believe that unless I do believe I shall not understand."⁽³⁶⁾

I know that I must assert in my own work and life the place of a discipline of obedience to 'the heavenly vision', the leading of the Holy Spirit and not just to that which appears in myself. I believe that my work as an artist is to bring the two together. While I am aware that this assertion seems to contradict the experience of others who have laboured in art and religion, I cannot deny what I have seen.

(36) St. Anslem - "Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm."
Editor: B. Ward; Pub. - Penguin, London, 1973.
Page 78.

NOTE ON BIBLIOGRAPHY:

In addition to those already cited in the footnotes, the following have influenced directly the theme of this essay. It has been worked out in 'discussion' with them.

"ART AND TOTALITY

Prof. Brian Bradshaw,
Rhodes University, 1969.

"PHILOSOPHY OF ART"
Lecture Notes

Prof. Brian Bradshaw,
Rhodes University, 1972 - 1975.

"FACE OF GLORY"

Address in connection
with the celebration of
25th anniversary of the
founding of the Johan
Carimus Art Centre.

Prof. C.W. Cook,
Rhodes University, 1974.