

SAMUEL PALMER AND ROMANTICISM

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by

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INTRODUCTION

This introduction and ensuing essay are something in the nature of a personal confession. Deemed as such what I have written concerning Samuel Palmer has not, in any way, been written as an exercise, but rather for the purpose of self-edification. This I will elaborate upon while disclosing my motive for writing on Palmer.

Palmer's works - when I first saw them - were something of a revelation. They seemed the alpha and omega of my own artistic endeavour. Perhaps the term which best describes the euphoria I felt is 'deja vu', because although it describes a connectedness of sorts, the words have in their sound an exotic ring. There is in it an implied equivocation - and equivocality best describes my understanding of Samuel Palmer at that juncture. This euphoria I felt dimmed with the realisation that by purportedly claiming, as I was, Samuel Palmer's visionary landscapes as my goal I was treading on sacred ground; I'd arrived, as it were, in another's Paradise. The effects of this upon my own creativity were completely negative. Worse still, I lacked the necessary means to extricate myself from Palmer's paradisiacal visions. His influence was incapacitating and convoluting my own growth. It was obvious then that I had to be rid of Samuel Palmer.

Turning a blind eye helped as a temporary measure; however, neither this nor the pursuit of technical excellence proved dependable allies in the fight to free myself. Purpose became the only worthwhile means by which to extricate myself. Further, I realised I'd have to ingratiate myself with the false paradise; saturate myself in its twilight but for one purpose only - to wrench from it that which was intrinsically my own. This feat would have to be achieved with alacrity for it was all important to come away, or surface as whole as humanly possible.

At this moment I do not know how I fare with and against Palmer. All that is clear to me is that I am well within the labyrinth. Thus I have not come away, neither have I surfaced yet, nor am I cured or whole. This I feel is motive enough for writing on Samuel Palmer. And hence my rejection at the onset, of all this being merely an exercise. Those parts of the essay dealing with Palmer are parts of the process of self-edification - a process indivisible from the painterly exploration I undertake. The writing reveals part of the search, but remains indivisible from the painting. My writing and my painting are the mediums I employ in the search I call creative. The writings are offered as testimony to that and their readability, my closest attenuation of academicism. I must reiterate here that that which is written is for the purpose of self-edification and as such the writings are as much mine as they are the reader's.

Within the labyrinth I am left entirely to my own devices in order to make sense of Palmer, for it is one thing to be talking about paintings and quite another matter being in them. The problem of having no tailor-made dialectic has been compounded by my foolish desire to "talk Palmer" as I would "paint Palmer". Other than those which were up for grabs and could be manipulated, any system or style extraneous to myself would merely hinder the process of understanding. In short, no system but my own could finally free me from Palmer.

For the most part, what I have used as far as dialectics go has pre-empted my own thoughts. My first point of departure came via the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss and his summation of structuralism. He says that the structuralist's approach is "... the quest for the invariant or for the invariant elements among superficial differences".<sup>1</sup> These superficial differences of which

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1. Levi-Strauss, Claude. Myth and Meaning, p. 8.

Levi-Strauss talks are similar to those of the two vehicles at my disposal - paint and words. However, more important, the summation seemed to indicate a common-sense way of handling the diversity that is Romantic painting. Implicit in both Romanticism - as we shall see - and the structuralist's way of thinking is a concern for total order, a conjugation at some point, not so much of differing disciplines as such, but of the common motive which, possibly, science and mythology might seek.

Alongside all this I have used the term polysemy and associated meaning. Polysemy explodes quite conveniently the funnelling effects which the structuralist's concept seems to have. That conjugation which is purported by Levi-Strauss is the central idea I have carried into my thoughts on Palmer and Romanticism. This essay has avoided any formal dialectics which may posit or dictate understanding of Romantic painting, rather the essay allows the paintings to substantiate themselves.<sup>1</sup>

I see Palmer's work as a totality, as a religious whole, not simply the product of but a paradigm of the Romantic age, because it seems his work is preoccupied with a fusion of opposites.

In order to show something of this totality, two further concepts have been elicited. They are cosmology and eschatology. Let me explain: Palmer by creating a totality is creating a world within a world, a structured order

1. The point is not as fatuous as it seems. One indication of the modernity of Romantic painting vis-a-vis Neo Classicism is the former's demand for evaluation entirely on its own terms, on its "pictoriality" as Jean Clay<sup>2</sup> states. This endorsement is not entirely the invention of twentieth century criticism, but of Romantics themselves.

In 1797 Schiller wrote: 'Diderot is too preoccupied for my taste with matters that are outside art and pays too little attention to the object itself and its execution.' To which Goethe replied: "Diderot has not seen fit to rise high enough to understand that the culture flowing from art must go its own way." 3.

2. Clay, Jean. Romanticism, p. 4

3. Ibid.

both sacred and profane, in short a cosmology. The theoretical name for the understanding of this creative procedure is cosmogeny. Here it is made analogous with Palmer as a creator.

The second term eschatology deals with the after-life; death, judgement and eventual entry into Heaven. This procedure has always been associated with the creative process - the journeys of Ulysses being an obvious example.

There are two objectives to this essay: firstly it is hoped that this creative process will reveal a little of Samuel Palmer, the Shoreham Visionary.

The second objective is to hope that at the end of it all I will have covered enough ground to allow me to disregard all that is written here as redundant.

This is antithetical perhaps, however Palmer himself has taught me this much ... he knew too well that art was the medium between life and desired paradise and that to mistake the means for the end - perhaps to grasp paradise - is fatal to a creative person.

In conclusion are two pertinent quotes from the man whose paintings and insights are those of a philosopher, Pablo Picasso: "What does it mean for a painter to paint in the manner of so-and-so, or to actually imitate someone else? What's wrong with that? On the contrary, it's a good idea. You should constantly try to paint like someone else. But the thing is you can't. You would like to. You try. But it turns out a botch .... And it is at the very moment you make a botch of it that you're yourself."<sup>1</sup>

"Oh no!" exclaimed Picasso, "Don't ask me to repeat myself. My past doesn't interest me anymore. I would rather copy someone than repeat myself."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Ashton, Dore. Picasso on Art, p. 53.

2. Ibid. p. 52.

SAMUEL PALMER: Brief History

Born in 1805, Samuel Palmer was a precocious child who never satisfactorily integrated either into school or society. His formal schooling was a brief mishap after which he was allowed to return home. There he spent his days indoors reading his favourite poets and shedding what he called "delicious tears" at the sound of organ music.

The influences on his life were many and varied, some more positive than others. Both parents, Martha and Samuel senior, encouraged the child's art although they were Conformists - which would imply a certain distain for any mystical practice such as art. Samuel's father was a bookseller with no business sense, but a real love of books. It was he who awakened his son to the literary arts. Mary Ward, the boy's maidservant, was also instrumental in kindling within the lad an awareness of his creativity. She was an exceptional woman, for in an age when most woman servants were illiterate, she was surprisingly well read. She gave Samuel his deep and enduring love of biblical prose and Milton's poetry.

In 1822 at the age of seventeen, Palmer met John Linnell, the first major artistic influence on his life. "It pleased God," wrote Palmer, "to send Mr Linnell as a good angel from Heaven to pluck me from the pit of modern art."<sup>1</sup>

Linnell may well have been the "good angel" for certainly he encouraged Palmer's religio-artistic outlook: He curbed the boy's enthusiasm for the moderns and impressed upon him the need for a personal exploration of nature. However, given time, he was to prove himself to be a real thorn in the flesh. Linnell was a self-made man and proud of it, a dogmatist whose religious

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1. Lister, Raymond. Samuel Palmer: A Biography. p. 32.

views were most unorthodox. All this he never failed to impress upon his family, his wide circle of business associates and his meagre band of friends. His outspoken dogmatism did little to win him the respect of fellow artists and as such he was never offered fellowship to the Royal Academy. There can be little doubt that John Constable, who was a member at the time, voted against Linnell - he detested the man. This was partially unjust, for as his works testify, Linnell was a brilliant draughtsman and a highly competent painter. The exclusion embittered him and probably fuelled his maverick contempt for art and artists (including Samuel Palmer) which he expressed in his old age.

In 1835 Palmer married Linnell's daughter Hannah. From this time on there was nothing but misunderstanding and contempt on Linnell's part for Samuel Palmer. He persistently undermined Palmer's authority both as husband and as a professional artist. The blame for this, however, cannot rest entirely on Linnell's shoulders. Palmer was often to blame by making both his art and his marriage subservient to Linnell's authority - and this subservience was anathema to the self-made man John Linnell was.

The foundations of Palmer's religio-artistic outlook are enigmatical. At an early age he had revealed a love for the Church of England, but why this should have been is not explained for his father was a Particular Baptist while his mother was a Wesleyian and many of her family Catholic. Perhaps the atmosphere and ritual associated with the Anglican Church stirred within him the subconscious desire for a lasting and substantial faith. After childhood, however, Palmer never again attended a church service.

Probably the most profound influence on his life was William Blake who Palmer met through Linnell in 1824. He described Blake as "one of the Antique patriarchs, or a dying Michael Angelo" making "in the leaves of a great book

the sublimest designs for his (not superior) Dante."<sup>1</sup>.

Thus Palmer was immediately aware of Blake's originality and genius. Perhaps he felt a kindred spirit in the old man, for he showed Blake some of his own work. Blake gave him "Sweet encouragement", "(for Christ blessed little children)."<sup>2</sup>.

Palmer and Blake saw a great deal of each other until the latter's death in 1827.

This essay concerns itself with Palmer's Shoreham period from approximately 1824 to 1832. Although Palmer did not move to Shoreham from London until 1826, he had already visited the Dulwich Valley and had anticipated in his drawings the visionary glimmer that was to be Shoreham. In Shoreham, Palmer gathered about him a fellowship of young idealists who shared something of his religio-artistic aims. Including Palmer, the group comprised eight members. Francis Oliver Finch whose work, in Palmer's words, conjured up "happy and beautiful lands where the poet would love to muse:- the moonlit glade, the pastoral slope, the rocky stream, the stately terrace and mouldering villa."<sup>3</sup>.

Others in the group included George Richmond; Frederick and Arthur Tatham, sons of the architect Charles Heathcote Tatham; Henry Walter, a water-colourist; Palmer's cousin, the draughtsman and engraver Welby Sherman; John Giles, a stockbroker, and Edward Calvert. "They called themselves 'The Ancients' from John Gile's repeated claims that ancient man was superior to modern man."<sup>4</sup>.

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1. Grisson, Geoffrey. Samuel Palmer's Valley of Vision, notes, p. 17.  
 2. Ibid.  
 3. Lister. op. cit. p. 29.  
 4. Ibid.



BLAKE. Ghost of a Flea.

BLAKE'S INFLUENCE ON PALMER

Every aspect of Blake's personality provided Palmer with the revolutionary and exemplary hero he needed. He offered Palmer a brilliant distillation of history and in every way exhorted the young man to new heights of spiritual awareness, to new heights of technical innovation. Their meeting was prophetic, for Palmer was quick to recognise Blake for what he was - "The Maker, the Inventor, one of the few in any age."<sup>1</sup>

Blake, the apostate Neoclassicist developed his hermetic space by subverting the classical role of the medium as message carrier; he squeezed the gap between means and meaning. The Ghost of a Flea, c. 1819-20, or Glad Day, c. 1788, amply illustrate this. In the former work a Michaelangelesque colossus strides across a jewelled sky of infinite depth. This figure is hewn from a glistening, telluric matter, not made up of that smooth marbling we find in Classical art. This tendency to exploit the means is not entirely the invention of the Romantic Age.- there are many examples in pre-Romantic English painting. In English portraiture, Gainsborough's relaxed, fluid handling of paint shows unprecedented concern for the medium and as Jean-Jaques Mayoux<sup>2</sup> has pointed out, his method calls to mind the paintings of Francesco Goya. No Romantic painter - Delacroix included - surpasses Goya's scintillating balance of paint and form. Never threatening to override attention to the form, we are made aware, in Goya's works, of paint having a tactile form in its own right.

Blake was doubtless aware of the landscapist Alexander Cozens and that artist's blot method<sup>3</sup> assisting the invention of landscape formations. The exegencies

1. Bindman, David. Blake as an Artist, p. 206.
2. Mayoux, Jean-Jaques. English Painting from Hogarth to the Pre-Raphaelites, p. 81.
3. Cozens' blot method was the random daubing of paint onto paper. The artist would then build these marks up into a recognisable landscape.

of Blake's work required oblique means; his private vision required a personal technique never static, but organic and jewelled in effect. Blake's technical innovativeness helped to free Palmer from the use of water-colour in the traditional sense and consequently helped him to realise his personal visions.

Much in evidence in his Shoreham pastorals is a highly personalised technique. When Palmer says: "For a bit of nature, however small, refuses to be copied by any impatient dab or idle spread of colour. Think of a gray stone with lichens and mosses, rich as a cabinet of gems"<sup>1</sup>. he is equating his work with what he sought in nature: The textural richness of his work with the organic processes and tactile wealth of nature.

Blake demanded that art should vivify the spirit; should be truth itself and above all it should be linear. This predilection for a linear art was not stylish, but spiritual and it originates in his life-long love of Gothicism.

"As a young man he had drawn the Gothic monuments in Westminster Abbey, and the experience was one that he never forgot. To an artist of lesser sensibility it might have been merely an exercise in copying, but to Blake it opened the mind to the intoxicating splendours of the Gothic world. To work there in the shadowy magnificence of the Gothic building with its richness of stained glass and its intricacy of carving, was to live again in the spiritual climate that had inspired it."<sup>2</sup>.

For Blake the triumph of line over shadow was the triumph of good over evil - a point which the "Antique patriarch"<sup>3</sup>. impressed upon Palmer. "Blake re-echoes the words of the angel Raphael explaining to Adam that spirits (and our Vision

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1. Peacock, Carlos. Shoreham and After, p. 50.

2. Peacock, op. cit. p. 75.

3. Palmer's term for Blake - Grigson, op. cit. p. 17.

of them) are not cloudy vapour, or a nothing; they are organised and minutely articulated beyond all that the mortal and perishing nature can produce."<sup>1</sup>

As far as Blake was concerned chiaroscuro was the devil's work which confounded vision. Chiaroscuro as a science based on the despised vegetable world was all too cursory a thing for a man who looked through nature for ideal form. This is one of the reasons Blake railed so against Reynolds and the Dutch style that, that academician imported.

Blake's Gothicism impressed itself upon Palmer. We see this happening in Palmer's sketchbook of 1824. Many of these little compositions are dominated by the symmetrical design of church spires and Gothic arches. The lattice-work of treetops and boughs heavy with fruit, lean towards one another so as to form Gothic arches, framing moons and fields below them. Palmer borrowed Blake's patriarchal figures and framed them in highly ornate Gothic arches. These figures are proportioned in accordance with the symmetry of Gothic spires and the natural elements of Palmer's compositions gather themselves around these symmetrical designs. These motifs preoccupied Palmer's mind throughout his life and were used to best effect in the Shoreham pastorals. Elsewhere in this sketchbook of 1824 among the sensitive, meticulous studies of leaf silhouettes against moonlight, there leap the fiery line and content of Blake's cosmic beginnings. Cumulonimbus clouds roll back to reveal huge moons and suns - the source and attraction of all energy, fixed centres of fire and light around which a vortex of bodies and strange constellations move. And islands of paradise float by against decorative fields of stars.

From a vast height we look into endless valleys. Space is vast, bleak and at times filled with howling winds. These are Blake's primordial events affecting the beginnings of the world. These drawings are prophetic, for here are the

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1. Mayoux, op. cit. p. 186.

seminal beginnings of Palmer's own cosmogenic pursuits. The drawings showing Blake's influence are in sharp contrast to those in which Palmer reveals a little of himself, that self which marvelled constantly at the benefits of nature.

Unlike Blake moving outward from the centre of himself, Palmer moves inward through nature. He wonders at the infinity of the world around him: "I saw in my spec. glass the most wonderful minature, which I note well nor heedlessly let it slip. In it these 3 textures struck upon the eye instantly, 1st the firm enamel of a beautiful young face, with 2nd going down from the forehead smooth and unbroken over the shoulders, hair, wondrous sleek and silkily melting (in long hairs more thin than man can do) into 3rd a background of the crisp mosaic of various leaved young trees ...."<sup>1</sup>

We must be cautious, however, of seeing Palmer simply as a Blakeian clone. This is not the case. While he may appear to be cast in the latter's mould, there are fundamental differences. Palmer's experience of the world is clearly not Blake's - there is a certain sagacity about Blake, a certain reconditeness of spirit not to be found in Palmer.

Alongside Blake's esoteric and eclectic borrowings Palmer's mysteriousness seems naive and childlike - a child in paradise, ecstatic in the visions he creates. Further, unlike Palmer, Blake never bothered with what he termed the vegetable world. In his world the fusion of self-consciousness and God-consciousness is direct and there exists no intermediary stage of nature. In Palmer's world, nature is the all-important fulcrum between the spiritual and the material. William Blake's visions afforded mystical communication with the great thinkers of previous ages. He was contemporaneous with their thoughts and as such his symbolic art is highly eclectic. This universality gives his work a sense of dynamism. Another important difference to be made

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1. Ivmy Sketchbook, p. 88.

between Blake and Palmer was Blake's matter-of-fact attitude to his visions. If they were central to him, they were not the goal of his creative self, rather they are an intrinsic part of that creative self - a vehicle for his eclecticism and insight. The dynamism of Blake's art manifests itself in his figures. Unlike Palmer's passive shepherds these giants leave in their wake flickering trails of sparks; they are restless and will not be contained within a single painting or thought.

"The figures of Mr Blake" said Palmer, "have that intense, soul-evidencing attitude and action.

That elastic, nervous spring which belongs to uncaged immortal spirits."<sup>1</sup> Fundamentally, Palmer was a man of instinct rather than intellect. It was only during the highest moments of the Shoreham period that art and spirit fused. More often than is thought, art was an effort for him. "I feel" he wrote, "ten minutes a day the most ardent love for art, and spend the rest of my time in stupid apathy, negligence, ignorance, and restless despondency; without any of those delicious visions which are the only joys of my life."<sup>2</sup>

In the latter part of his life he was "without any of those delicious visions". Intellect took the place of vision; we see him fussing over little effects that for all their accomplished charm merely emphasise how mundane he had become. The overall effect of many of these latter works is one of naturalism. His love of natural variegation, made apparent by complex surface texturing had been exhausted of any mystic glimmer by 1835. Technique became a virtue in itself.

The visionary Palmer of Shoreham had appreciated the dangers of technical excesses when he said: "There are many mediums in the means - none, O! not a

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1. Grigson. op. cit. p. 18.

2. Grigson. op. cit. p. 11.

shadow of a jot, in the end of great art .... One must not begin with medium, but think always of excess and only use medium to make excess more abundantly excessive."<sup>1</sup>.

Always there had been in Palmer a little of the Christian materialist, which became more and more pronounced in his later works.

By way of a favourable contrast we can introduce John Constable as a Christian materialist, however it is precisely because Constable knew his limitations and worked his art to the fullest within them that we can admire his humble excellence.

"My limited and abstracted art" wrote Constable, "is to be found under every hedge and in every lane."<sup>2</sup>.

Unfortunately Palmer never realised his limitations and hence the inconsistency of his work.

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1. Grigson, *op. cit.* p. 18.

2. Honour. Hugh. Romanticism, p. 68.

RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE:

The sources of Palmer's visionary art stems from the matrix of Platonist thought. This philosophy of religion indicates more evidence of Blake's influence.

Axiomatic to our consideration of Palmer as a religious artist is this constituent of neo-Platonic thought, as stated by Dean Inge: "The Platonist loves .... Nature, because in nature he perceives spirit creating after its own likeness. As soon as the seen and the unseen worlds fall apart and lose connection with each other both are dead."<sup>1</sup> Following from this quote, David Bindman says, "It is a neo-Platonic idea that man can reach the Eternal world through imagery as well as through the scriptures."<sup>2</sup> Blake's Platonism touched the Ancients, particularly Palmer and Calvert. The fervour of these young men's visions waned as did Blake's influence after his death. Palmer's art suggests his religious feelings were instinctive, Blake's suggests differently; it suggests that his acquisition of knowledge was dynamic and on going. The mystic writings of Boehme and Swedenborg and the art of the Platonist Michaelangelo prompted Blake's Platonism. In Swedenborg's writings, as Bindman suggests, "Blake would have perceived that the abstract qualities attached to mundane objects are not secondary characteristics but form part of their essential nature."<sup>3</sup> Further to this Bindman states: "For a man like Blake with intellectual roots in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, nature was equivocal and tainted by the Fall."<sup>4</sup> In contrast to Palmer, Blake rendered his spiritual art with exactitude. Cleansed of any ponderous half lights, or vegetable matter, Blake's landscapes are anthropocentric. Palmer appreciated Blake's Platonism, but as seen in his life and work it is no sure means by which to view him. Palmer

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1. Santayana, George. Platonism and the Spiritual Life, p. 2.  
 2. Bindman, op. cit. p. 51.  
 3. Bindman, op. cit. p. 50.  
 4. Ibid. p. 205.

relied on vision and vision alone was not substantial enough ground upon which to build his philosophy. Thus the spiritual intensity of Palmer's work fluctuates with the strength of vision. Lacking his vision, nature becomes all too profane; Palmer flounders pitiously into naturalism and castigates himself thus, "The least bit of natural scenery ... laughs me to scorn and hisses at me."<sup>1</sup> His Shoreham Valley becomes a "fen of scorpions and stripes and agonies."<sup>2</sup>

Palmer's spiritual concepts, unlike Blake's seem to rise out of the execution of his work. While it is true that Palmer's Platonism differs from Blake's, there is a surprising steadiness of religious sublimity in the Shoreham work. It follows from this that we can appreciate the most powerful of these works as neo-Platonic ideals upon nature.

The dense materiality of Palmer's work is evidence of his complex interpretation of Blake's Platonist idealism. In order to appreciate any succinct Platonist symbolism in Palmer's work we must look to his skies; The symmetry of the full moon (the harvest moon) rises above all else as Palmer's quintessential symbol of the divine in nature. Palmer worked upwards through the primal mass of his luxurious landscapes to that arbitrary divide between sky and land, the horizon. The horizon is Palmer's flimsy barrier between earth and heaven; between spirit and man. It is that psychological divide which this visionary continually strove to destroy.

The Shoreham works show that Palmer wished spiritual intensity to fuse with organic density, imbuing all with its mystic glow. The visionary's desire for the fusion of heaven and earth is evidence of religious consciousness; light denotes cognition.

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1. Lister. op. cit. p. 69.

2. Ibid.

We have focussed on Palmer's work in the light of Platonism, a focus set against a broader or more abstract backdrop of religious myth. The myth of the creation of the universe; the cosmogonic myth whereby societies understand the structure of their being in relation to the world they inhabit. This concern, which is the concern of all truly creative art, is at the heart of the Shoreham pastorals. "The copying of these archetypes ... (those of eschatology and cosmogony) ... betrays a certain discontent with one's own personal history; an obscure striving to transcend one's own local, provincial history and to recover some 'Great Time' or other - though it be only the mythic time of the first surrealist or existentialist manifesto."<sup>1</sup>

Looking through nature - Palmer's best works are never mimetic - the artist records the existence of the internal nature and its concern with truth; the truth of existence which lends itself to a vivifying religion. The continual search for this balance of inner and outer nature is fundamental to Palmer's religio-artistic existence. Thus Palmer's works carry us beyond the threshold of immediate history, ephemera of style and period costume falls away as the questions of our existence are timeless and universal. The attempt to convey a total world picture, the "totalitarian ambition" as Levi-Strauss calls it, is a passionate preoccupation of Romantic artists such as Palmer, Blake and Palmer's German contemporary, Friedrich.<sup>2</sup> In art the concept of totality must be polysemic for no amount of writing, no amount of paint and canvas can reveal to us the vastness of the universe. Art is therefore selective; is symbolic. Palmer's art is selective and symbolic. We need only look at those pastorals of 1825 in which he achieved the illusion of totality by schematising nature to see this. This is in itself evidence of the vital interplay of opposites Palmer employed in his

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1. Eliade. Mircea. *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, p. 33.  
 2. Caspar. David Friedrich. *German Romanticist, 1774 to 1840*.

work. These opposites coexist within the decorative inlay of Palmer's acuitous line. "The less an artifact interests our eye in imitation," says Kenneth Clark. "the more it must delight our eye in pattern, and an art of symbols always involves a language of pattern."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Clark, Kenneth. Landscape into Art, p. 3.

ROMANTICISMROMANTICISM IN GENERAL:

Having looked at Blake's influence on Palmer, let us throw more light on the latter's work by seeing it against a more general Romantic background.

Romantic painting allows the existence of many meanings to our interpretations of form and subsequent thought. The varying values we attach to both implicit and explicit meanings<sup>1</sup> behind Romantic painting, indicates something of the inherent tension and diversity of that age.

Polysemeous form and thought go to make up a basic tenet of Romantic painting. Any number of Delacroix's works illustrate this. His Lion Hunt of 1854 shows the surface play of reds which takes on a form and emotional meaning of its own, thus threatening the formal composition. Broad and abstracted areas of paint and their shapes allude to the animist spirit unleashed by the frenzy of horse, lion and man.

The impossible divide of technical and thematic considerations in Turner's Rain, Steam and Speed is another example of an implicit aura coming to the fore, demanding as much attention as the formal composition.

Consider Goya's monster paintings - The Saturn of 1821 - 23 in which we see uninhibited animism. The insoluble fusion of manipulation and meaning of paint causes this painting's anxiety - the Romanticist has invented the self. If one looks at the surface picture of Goya's painting we see that it does both vivify and threaten the formal composition.

1. The existence of many meanings - polysemy. Polysemy is bound up with Edwin Panofsky's pseudomorphosis and as such we must explain the latter to appreciate the former. Simultaneous to the appreciation of similar motifs in paintings from different eras is the tendency to draw the paintings together - telescope fashion, ahistorically; to make not only the motif, but the motive analagous. Historians such as Rosenblum, Clay and others have provided the structure for an ahistorical appreciation of painting. Pseudomorphosis and structuralism are analagous in that they both seek an invariant or common motive in different disciplines. Considered thus paintings are polysemic in that our interpretations are never static or exact. Romanticism makes difficult the divide of thought from paint. When divided we can appreciate that shape and content and the means that go to make them up - painting - are inherently polysemic. Chiaroscuro, for example, by virtue of its malliability is a polysemic agent in the hands of the painter.



DELOCROIX. Lion Hunt.



TURNER. Rain, Steam and Speed.



GOYA. The Saturn.

Perhaps of all the Romanticists, it is Constable in his cloud studies who shows sublime balance between objectivity and sheer subjectivity. These cloud studies show a fine understanding of, and balance between, Romantic spirit and empiricism. Coleridge could very well have been considering Constable's cloud studies when he said: "The moderns revere the infinite and effect the indefinite ... [clouds] ... as a vehicle of the infinite."<sup>1</sup> We find the quest for this balance in the best of Samuel Palmer's Shoreham works. those works in which we are awakened to a religious sense by his balance between means and meaning. At times Palmer managed to convey this heightened awareness with something of Constable's objectivity and acuity of line; at other times we see him building out of darkness and penumbric nuances. On another level we see this visionary nervously skirting the border between naturalism and the symbolic interpretation of nature. Blake's predilection for line and Palmer's instinctive faith in chiaroscuro are fused in the most successful of the Shoreham works. Blake's teachings challenged Palmer, helping him to realise in a mature fashion his love of things indefinite. Evidence of this love is recorded as one of Palmer's boyhood memories ... "When less than four years old, as I was standing with her ... (Mary Ward) ... watching the shadows on the wall from the branches of an elm behind which the moon had risen, she transferred and fixed the fleeting image in my memory by repeating the couplet:

Vain man, the vision of a moment made,  
Dream of a dream and shadow of a shade.

I never forgot those shadows, and am often trying to paint them."<sup>2</sup>

Later on as a prospective academy student, Palmer's love of the indefinite confounded his attempts at cast drawing. Of this he wrote:

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1. Badt. Kurt. John Constable's Clouds, p. 4.  
2. Lister. Samuel Palmer and his Etchings, p. 18.



PALMER. The Valley Thick with Corn.

"sedulous effort to render the marble exactly, even to the granulation led me too much aside from the study of organisation and structure."<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note how Palmer managed to accommodate within his Shoreham works Blake's linearity and his own partiality for chiaroscuro. Let us look at Palmer's The Valley Thick with Corn of 1824. In the foreground of this painting Palmer's insistent linearity has articulated each and every ear of corn. As these and other strata of growth ascend towards the horizon their parts become congested, finally melting into the viscous darkness that is chiaroscuro. Chiaroscuro is a mysterious energy source in Palmer's cosmos, it is in this respect similar to the moon and is usually used in conjunction with it. The interplay of light and dark, as we shall see, is fundamental to Palmer's painting.

The process of growth in Palmer's work is cyclical and infinite. Darkness is at once the source and receptacle of light and life.<sup>2</sup> Palmer felt a landscape to be incomplete without some silvery inlay of water, this he used in conjunction with the darkest recesses of his work, thus furthering the balance of light and dark, or acuity and diffusiveness.

Although largely partisan, the Romantic movement is, for convenience sake, grouped into two - namely English and French. The two represent opposite forces which have similar goals, namely the quest for an idyllic, or Golden Age. No matter how grandiose is the French order, its nostalgia is that of its English counterpart. To differentiate somewhat between the two, let us look at two paintings. Firstly, Antoine Jean Gros<sup>3</sup>. The Battle of

1. Lister, op. cit. p. 18.

2. Darkness, womblike: In Palmer's painting objects grow from fecund darkness into light and articulation.

3. Antoine Jean Gros (1771 to 1835) is both a pro- and proto- Romantic figure. Although subservient to David's classical theories, Gros' paintings clearly anticipate both in colour and in interpretation of man, Delacroix and to some extent, Gericault.



GROS. The Battle of Aboukris.

Aboukir painted in 1806 and later Samuel Palmer's Self Portrait in 1826.

Gros' is a work full of Romantic irony; in it two orders of French Romanticism clash - the grand order epitomised by Napoleon and the exotic order of north Africa and the near East. As this painting succinctly illustrates, it was Napoleon's campaigning which opened the second order to French artists. Artists such as Chasseriau and Delacroix drew endless benefit from this. In a real sense Napoleon is the creative spirit of his age. In retrospect Delacroix said of him: "Napoleon is the event of the century for all arts."<sup>1</sup> There can be little doubt that the painting was intended propaganda - its very scale daunts us, it is frieze-like and theatrical. These qualities Gros would have learned from his teacher, the master of propagandist art, David: In Gros' painting Napoleon's armies sweep in from the left, an indomitable mass of black strength. By these means Gros has shown both army and its figurehead with a measure of restraint suggesting an amount of civility, perhaps even compassion. for the defeated.

Bathed in sharp light the chaos of the falling Arabs contrasts with Napoleon's restraint. The civilising hero and the naked savage meet on this battleground where Gros makes quite obvious the "superiority" of the French. There is a beauty about this Arab section suggesting that it is the area of the painting Gros enjoyed most of all.

The apparent dichotomies in this painting reveal Gros' equivocal position in the history of French painting. Caught as he was between David and the realistic-Romanticism which came naturally to him, his paintings do more than any other Romantic. show the transition from neo-Classicism to Romanticism. Gros felt this dichotomy and the ensuing tensions were a direct cause of his suicide

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1. Clay. op. cit. p. 15.



PALMER. Self Portrait.

in 1836.

In his portrayal of Napoleon, Gros manifests the complex fusion of Romantic animism and humanitarianism. The plenary powers of Gros' hero are preordained. Richly attired this demi-god manages to appear as liberal judicial while his armies rout the enemy.

Unscathed and undaunted in battle, Napoleon gathers about himself the light of the painting. Hands reach out towards him as if to implore him to end the battle. In a gesture of total subjugation, the enemy's sword is handed to Napoleon unsheathed. Gros has given Napoleon the attributes of a deity. As Rosenblum points out, "... at that time the experience of divinity of martyrdom, of spiritual realms, was translated more and more into subjects that lay far beyond the pale of the Church. In France in particular, the political events of the Revolution and Empire demanded the transportation of Christian martyrs and deities to contemporary historical experience."<sup>1</sup>

Turning to Samuel Palmer's Self Portrait it is immediately appreciated that we are in the presence of a different kind of deification serving a different function. Unlike Gros' deity, Palmer's is neither the self nor a popular hero. Without any of the formal painter's theatrics and with the humblest of means - a little chalk and paper - Palmer provides an age of incertitude with living testimony to his pursuit and possible witness of the divine. Dominating the entire picture plane, the portrait rises hieratically before us. The rigid frontality, the symmetry of the face, the virtual lack of any pictorial depth, all these suggest something of Palmer's transmutation in the contemplation of the divine. This is a portrait which lays bare the metaphysical balance of spirit and materiality. There is a subliminal calm and composure about it, such as we find in his pastorals. Lighting has no extraneous source, but originates within the balanced and perfected state

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1. Rosenblum. Robert. Mod. Ptg and the N. Romantic Tradit., p. 15.

that is this portrait. Planes of skin are irradiated, the light modelling the facial features. This open face reflects no attitudes but calm resolve. For the artist it was something of an icon.

### GOTHIC ROMANTICISM

Napoleon provided ideal form for French Romanticists such as Eugene Delacroix. In contrast, English Romanticism manifested itself in a different way, that of Gothicism.

Spiritualists looked back wistfully to a Golden Age of Christian idealism. Pugin<sup>1</sup>. and Ruskin<sup>2</sup>. saw to the revival of Gothic architecture and the idealism which went with it. The spirit of Gothicism found expression in the poetry of Wordsworth; in Girtin's paintings such as the thought provoking and nostalgic Kirkstall Abbey. Although they were landmarks to a fashion conscious age, Gothic monuments were proof of a more substantial, permanent religion to those artists such as Palmer and Palmer's German contemporary, Caspar David Friedrich. For the age in which these artists found themselves "... was an age of speculation and collapse, of earthquakes, actual and social, of years of elemental turmoil, in which man felt as singular a sense of precariousness - with the globe groaning and heaving under their feet, and the meteors flashing and storms rushing about their heads - as we may suppose a race of ants to feel, when man comes with his candle and gun-powder to blow up their settlements. Amidst the conflicting forces of nature, man felt as powerless as they."<sup>3</sup>.

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1. Augustus Welby Pugin, 1812 to 1853. See Kenneth Clark's The Gothic Revival. chap. 7.
  2. John Ruskin. 1819 to 1900. Ruskin provided neo-Gothic architecture with a philosophical foundation. See Clark's The Gothic Revival chap. 10.
  3. Grigson, Geoffrey. Samuel Palmer the Visionary Years. p. 44.

The Romance of Gothicism is English but not exclusively so. The German Romantic Friedrich was likewise preoccupied with the transcendentalism that Gothic ruins and other monuments suggested. Friedrich's churches, as was the case with those used by his English counterparts, are monuments to an irretrievable past. As a student he studied at the Copenhagen Academy from 1794 to 1798. He moved to Dresden to join the romantic circle of painters and poets including Carus, Runge, Tiecke and others.

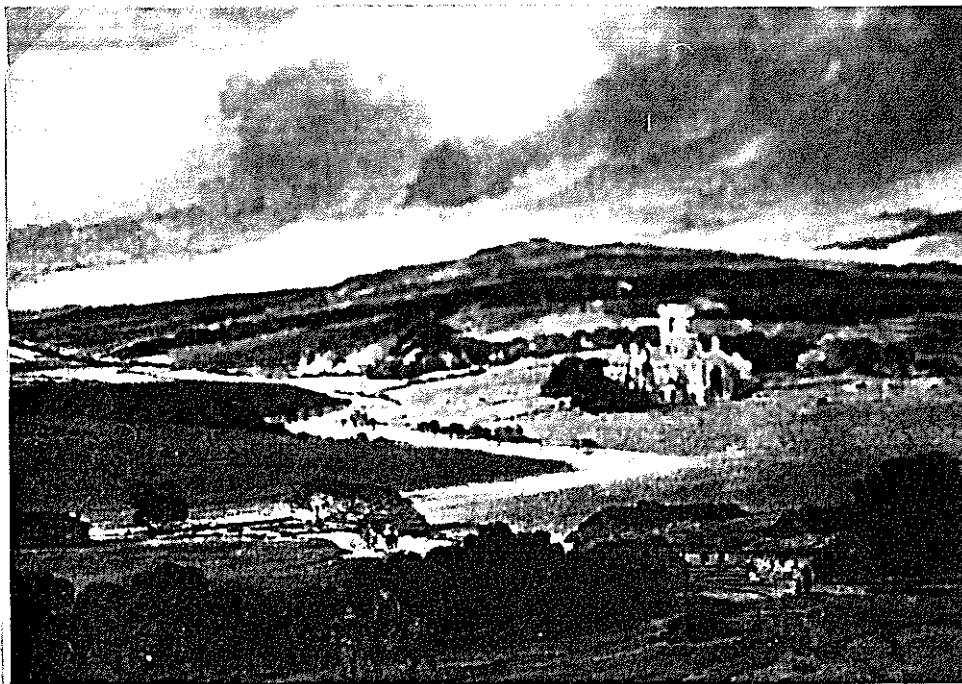
The work of Friedrich and Palmer belong to that mode of Christian art demanding careful evaluation. Their religious fervour - and fervour is not too strong a word for it - arose out of their dissatisfaction with the Church as they found it. Both painters do not concern themselves with traditional Christian iconography but with complex symbols of faith which are a synthesis of internal and external being. These archetypes<sup>1</sup> which they employ signify the transmutability inherent in the fusion of self-consciousness and God consciousness.<sup>2</sup> Their reference to Christian iconography are oblique as they did not simply transcribe or mimic those forms. Their usage alludes to the imminent presence of a new cosmic order, for they rejuvenate the intrinsic transcendentalism of that iconography.

The process of rejuvenation is part of the cosmogonic procedure they undertook

1. Archetype. "The concept of the archetype ... is derived from the repeated observations that, for instance the myths and fairy tales of world literature contain definite motifs which crop up everywhere." Jung, G.G. Civilisation in Transition. Coll Works, vol. 10. p. 847.
2. "It is only through the psyche that we can establish that God acts upon us, but we are unable to distinguish whether God and the unconscious are two different entities. Both are border-line concepts for transcendental contents..." And, according to Jung, "... it does not seem improbable that the archetype produces a symbolism which has always characterised and expressed the Deity .... The God-image does not coincide with the unconscious as such, but with a special content of it, namely the archetype of the self. It is this archetype from which we can no longer distinguish the God-image empirically." Jung, C.G. Psychology and Religion;, Coll. Works. vol. 11. p. 468.



FRIEDRICH. Ruins of an Abbey at Eldena.



GIRTIN. Kirkstall Abbey.

in their quest for a new Christian belief. Their work is perhaps testimony to the synthesis of God and self. The position of the Church in their art becomes equivocal, no longer the intermediary between the self and God (hence its ruination) the Gothic church does here symbolise at once the alienation of man from his God - the ruination of an old order - and the foundation of a new understanding between the two.

"Friedrich's professed ambition was to produce a Christian art divested of all Biblical imagery that had become attached to it since the Renaissance."<sup>1</sup> Friedrich said: "God is everywhere, in the smallest grain of sand. I also wanted to paint him in the reeds."<sup>2</sup>

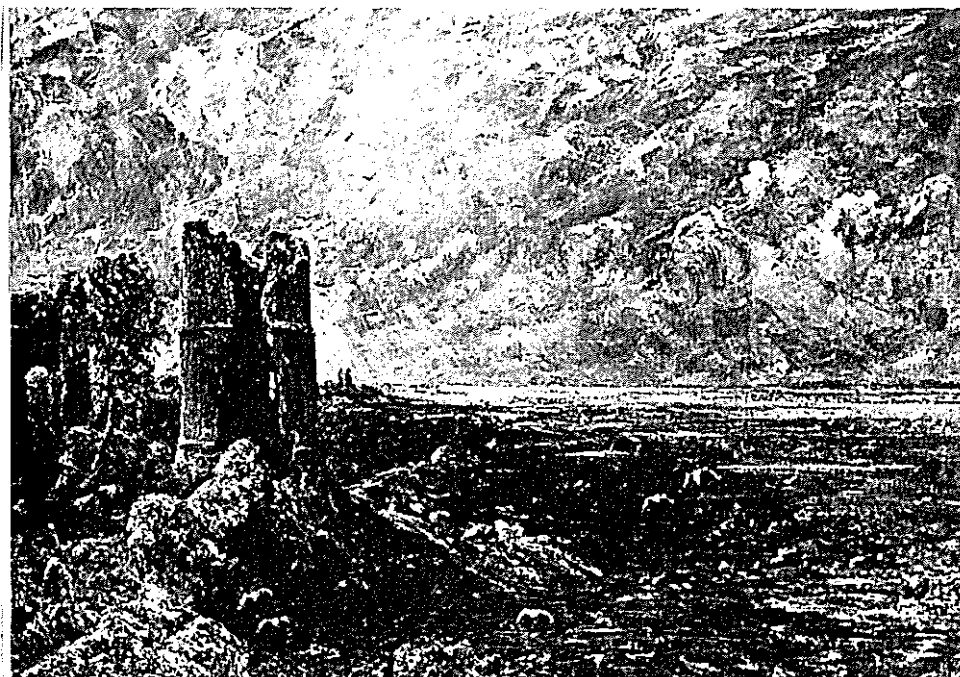
It was a turning back to pre-Renaissance, to the Gothic that we see in the works of Friedrich and also in that of his English contemporaries. In Friedrich's Ruins of an Abbey at Eldena, 1824, the artist makes use of a favourite Gothic subject as does Thomas Girtin in his Kirkstall Abbey, 1800. While Girtin's Englishness necessitates a lyrical, pastoral feeling, Friedrich on the other hand, shows the bare bones of a new archetype in painting, the God-self-consciousness we have discussed. There is more fervour in Friedrich's work; Girtin's view is essentially traditional.

Emotional qualities differ in the two works. Girtin's lyricism allows for a somewhat lighter emotion; he uses perspective to put a great distance between us and the abbey. Thus seen the abbey, bathed in light, seems a complete and architecturally sound structure. The effect then, is nostalgic; nostalgic but not in the manner of Friedrich whose abbey leaves us with a profound sense of gravity, even sorrow.

In Girtin's work we are transported by sentiment which has to do with nostalgia (the distance does it), while in Friedrich's work we sense the artist's direct,

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1. Clay. op. cit. p. 137.  
2. Ibid.



CONSTABLE. Hadleigh Castle.

immediate confrontation, with the ruins taking up most of the picture plane. One senses in Friedrich's work the pressing need to re-emphasise the needs of the age, namely the resurrection of a Golden Age. The artist's economy of pictorial space does not allow for any cushioning, we are forced to see through and beyond the ruins. Friedrich's work is didactic; Girtin's is picturesque.

For similar effects let us consider John Constable's Hadleigh Castle c. 1828. the solemnity of this work makes it analagous to Friedrich's metaphysical landscapes. Like Friedrich's abbey, Constable's picture is dominated by a solitary vertical structure standing before an endless vista. Although asymetrically placed, the tower demands contemplation as a potent symbol of the Romantic self in confrontation with nature. Gathering within it a column of brooding darkness, the opacity of this black column seems stronger than the crumbling architecture enfolding it. Blackbirds rise from the battlements against an impenetrable sky of endless cloud structures. The enfolded mystery of the tower, the closed sky and endless vista below it, all these elements give to the picture an air of imbibed melancholy.

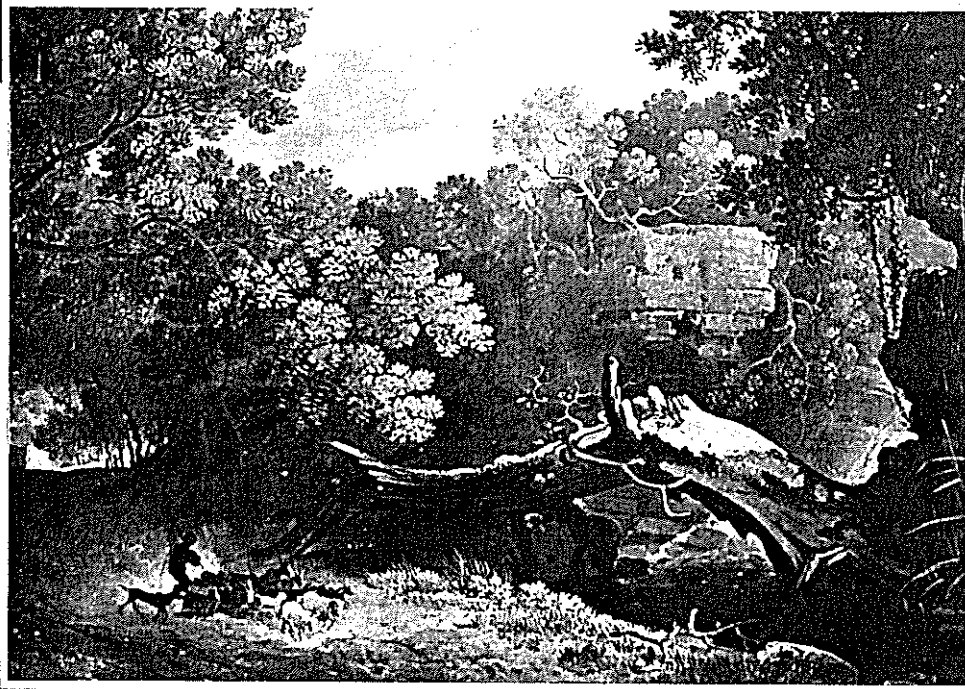
In contrast is Constable's impatient and vigorous application of paint. Constable manages to suggest a variety of textures and architecture out of monochromatic colour. In this he rivals Turner in subtlety.

This is an earthy painting, full of Constable's snow (the flecks of white used to illuminate the surface of his work). Brilliant flashes suggest and differentiate form; the squiggle of paint in the foreground representing a dog is fruitful testimony to Constable's drawing from nature.

Never feeling the urge to travel, Constable remained faithful to the Stour Valley and the nostalgia of the youth he spent there. We might say that the fastidiousness of his work bound him to his origins where his talent first awoke. In the fullest possible meaning of the word limitation, Constable

knew his limitations: He left facility to Turner.

In Hadleigh Castle the overall sombre tone is enhanced by the rich, blue-black modelling of middle and foreground. Lighter splashes and trowelings of ochre suggest tufted grasses and pathways. Perhaps no other Romantic offers such clarity of vision. Of all the English masters Constable shows the greatest understanding of chiaroscuro.



A BRIEF HISTORY OF ENGLISH LANDSCAPE PAINTING

With Samuel Palmer in mind let us look briefly at English landscape painting as it had been and was evolving at that time.

According to John Ruskin the history of English landscape painting begins with Richard Wilson (1714 - 1782) and his pastoral scenes. However, when in 1761, Horace Walpole had expressed his concern that a country "so profusely beautified with the amenities of nature as England has produced so few good painters of landscape .... Our ever verdant lawns, rich valleys, fields of haycocks and hop grounds are neglected as homely subjects whilst our painters draw rocks and precipices and castellated mountains because Virgil gasped for breath at Naples,"<sup>1</sup> it was Wilson he had in mind as an example of the artist who "neglected ... homely subjects."

Wilson's competent but formulised art has close affinities to the works of Claude Lorraine. The subtle interplay of light and dark (a predominantly Claudian device) is a major constituent of most of Wilson's work. We see this in his Aricca: Fallen Tree. Here the geometric simplicity of his dark foreground is occasionally lit by daubs of transparent white. Other Claudian devices in this painting are the bits of foreground scenery, the forested alcove - that mysterious haunt of god Pan.

Walpole's observations are exact, however they are ironic for the Virgilian aspects of Wilson's work anticipate the thoroughly English sentiment of Samuel Palmer.

Wilson's contemporary, Thomas Gainsborough, 1731 to 1783 comes closer to Walpole's sentiments, here are works cleansed of any mythological myopia. However, looking at Gainsborough's Mr and Mrs Andrews, c. 1748 it is clear there exists in English painting some psychological distance between the painter and his landscape, between his synthesis of figure and landscape, there is an

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1. Mayoux op. cit. p. 109.



GAINSBOROUGH. Mr and Mrs Andrews.



GAINSBOROUGH. The Artist's Daughter Mary.

uncomfortable hiatus between the foreground and the large expanse of green (a "verdant lawn"?) behind. Mr and Mrs Andrews appear to be pasted against the landscape; psychologically mute, their heavy-lidded gaze suggests boredom. This and a certain naivete in Gainsborough's posing of the couple hardly convince us of their reality. As Gainsborough has arranged the two models along with the tree dangerously close to the picture plane we skirt the perimeters of this painting nervously for fear of the arrangement toppling out of the picture plane.

Gainsborough is unsurpassed in English pro-Romanticism in his outstanding ability to synthesise motive and means; The Artist's Daughter Mary executed in 1777 is sufficient testimony of that brilliance. This artist is important for another reason, he anticipates John Constable who would certainly satisfy Walpole's yearning for painting made up of "homely subjects".

An interesting phenomena to develop in English painting was the advent of water-colours. Because it was not restricted by the academies water-colour was best suited to the Romantic artist. By the middle of the nineteenth century, water-colourists were so numerous and the medium so popular, it was thought of as an English medium.

Among the most illustrious names found within the English water-colourist tradition are Turner, Girtin and Constable. There are however, a host of Romantic water-colourists whose provincialism - for want of a better word - incapsulates them within the field of English painting and no further. The most distinguished of this group are loosely associated under the title of the East Anglian School, although there was never a school of painters as such. These painters do not fit into the broad stream of Romanticism which is dominated by the parallel considerations of those English and French painters who epitomise Romanticism as a whole.



CROME. Poringland Oak.

The East Anglian School represents the more nationalistic side of English Romanticism. A brief look at some of the painters of that school is pertinent here as they are of that cast of provincial Romanticism which incorporates Samuel Palmer.

John Sell Cotman, (1782 - 1843) and Francis Towne (1739 - 1816) must rate as two of the most underestimated painters within the water-colourist tradition. Both in their own ways are prophetic painters.

If we are prepared to look beyond Cotman's affinity to a particular place in time, then we can see that the superb fluidity of his pristine geometry anticipates Braque's Houses at Estaque, 1908. Towne's emphatic rejection of illusionistic devices make him no less thoroughly modern.

Another East Anglian painter who suffered under the stigma of provincialism is John Crome, 1768 to 1821. Crome's Pringland Oak of 1818 is compelling for a number of reasons, one of them being Crome's convincing synthesis of figures and landscapes they inhabit: The bathers quite literally wade into the landscape. The balmy atmosphere of this painting belies the scintillating balance the artist has struck between means and meaning. We are made aware at all times of the hand and heart of the painter behind this artifice. This work compares favourably with those by Turner for two reasons: We are not commandeered to swim through Turner's problematic vortex of allegory, neither do we have to engage that anorectic divide of means and meaning which Turner insists upon. Mayoux points out that "Crome's Pringland Oak anticipates the best of the Barbizon School by more than a generation."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Mayoux. op. cit. p. 140.

SAMUEL PALMER'S SHOREHAM WORKS

Looking at the Shoreham pastorals, it is quite remarkable to see how successfully Palmer has married stylistic and natural elements. The works are all the more compelling when we realise that Palmer has defied any logical perspective. Palmer's work shows the logic of an internal order which is spiritual and its clarity is evoked by Palmer's realisation of the world hieratically. His paintings show to what unique depths his psyche went in its collaboration with nature and natural form. But there is another more matter-of-fact reason for his spiritual perspective which is to be found in his sketch book of 1824-25. This was his practice while drawing from nature, of focusing and isolating objects, working them up so minutely that when these bits of nature are juxtaposed in the paintings they immediately give one the impression of being larger than life.

It would be a mistake to see Palmer's rejection of scientific perspective as simply a lack of training. One of his earliest recorded works, Hailsham, Sussex: Storm Effect of 1821 shows us that he had more than a passing knowledge of what concerned his contemporaries <sup>in</sup> of landscape. Vast and panoramic, the distance Palmer puts between us and the picture plane points explicitly to Turner's atmospheric studies and shows us the possible route Palmer may have taken had not Blake or Linnell come his way. There is no indication in this work of the intense linearity or the intense attention to detail which became the hallmark of the Shoreham period.

Palmer knew and admired Turner's work as early as 1819. At the Royal Academy exhibition of that year he had seen Turner's The Orange Merchantman on the Bar. He loved Turner's exotic colouring and mysterious atmospherics which have been described by Mayoux as "but a hymn of light subtly consuming the detail of form, not disregarding it, but on the contrary giving it a

higher kind of recognition."<sup>1</sup> Palmer was fascinated and preoccupied with transitory light. Many of his Shoreham works show how thoroughly he observed the first and last glimmer of light over the Dulwich hills. He left copious notes on these effects, even a poem entitled Twilight Time.

These effects quickened Palmer's spiritual eye to its appreciation of nature. The fragile, glowing light on nature was for him the presentiment of immutable Heaven. He said: "... considering Dulwich as the gate into the world of vision one must try behind those hills to bring up a mystic glimmer like that which lights our dreams. And those same hills (hard task) could give us promise that the country beyond them is Paradise -".<sup>2</sup>

Fused with late afternoon light the Gothic spires he describes are transformed into glowing symbols of Christianity. Incandescent light - moonlight - entirely removed him from the temporal world. We can appreciate from the following, the ontological mutation he underwent in the face of nature: "The green mountains that glimmer in a summer gloaming from the dusky yet bloomy east; the moon opening her golden eye, or walking in brightness among innumerable islands of light, not only thrill the optic nerve, but shed a mild, a grateful, an unearthly lustre into the innermost spirits, and seem the interchanging twilight of that peaceful country, where there is no sorrow and no night."<sup>3</sup>

#### A RUSTIC SCENE. 1825.

In the foreground of this painting a ploughman tethers a yoke to a massive ox. Surely we find the antecedents of this shaggy beast in Lascaux. The bull, which for Romantics like Goya, was a symbol of ferocious animism and individuality, submissively lowers its head and becomes, in Palmer's world, favourably associated with man and the virtue of work. Like all other ele-

1. Mayoux. op. cit.

2. Grigson. S.P. Valley of Vision. p.12.

3. Grigson. op. cit. p. 23.



PALMER. A Rustic Scene.

ments in the painting, the two - man and bull - are an intrinsic part of a greater whole.

The middle ground is a broad expanse of glistening wheat, ears of corn, symbolic in Palmer's world of the fecund earth. "Now," said Palmer, "I go out to draw some hops that their fruitful sentiment may be infused into my figures."<sup>1</sup>.

Everywhere evidence of the harmonious co-existence of man and nature is depicted. Golden fruits like three morning stars rise above the ploughman. Layer upon layer of articulated nature press forward defying any logical space. The giant sliver of a moon illuminates a distant hillock of exotic palm and pollard trees. "and over the distant line that bound this golden sea might peep up elysian hills, the little hills of David."<sup>2</sup>.

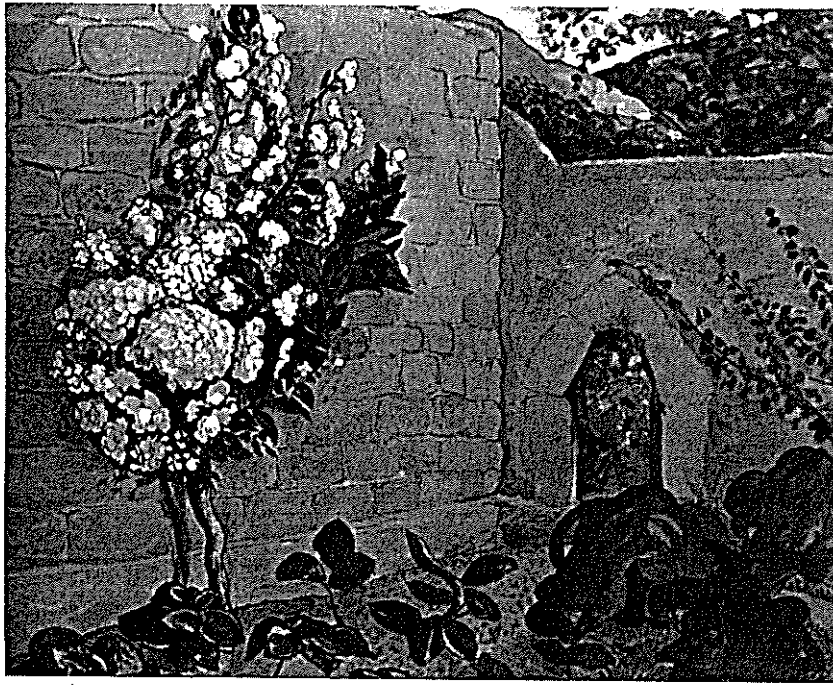
As one's eye travels over the plethora of natural shapes sandwiched between little inlays of white and tilled fields, rather than losing itself in this profusion, the effect upon it is hallucinatory, such is the clarity. Held together by an acuitous line, the balance of symbolism and naturalism is always perfect and must account in part for the feelings of plenitude and calm this Palmeresque work evokes.

PEAR TREE IN A WALLED GARDEN. 1829.

There are four major elements at work in this picture: Garden, wall, wilderness and sky. The four abstractions suggest the cardinal points of the sphere which will act as a paradigm of the work in its totality. This sphere is further divisible into the two opposites, garden and wilderness.

Palmer's finest works are convincing because they show the successful coexistence of opposites. The work at hand is a good example: Here a wall sym-

1. Grigson, op. cit. p. 20.  
2. Ivmy Sketch Book.



PALMER. Pear Tree in a Walled Garden.

bolising the psychological divide of the two spheres, separates the wilderness from man's idealised concept of nature, the garden. The garden has been described by Clark as "... one of humanity's most consistent, widespread and consoling myths."<sup>1</sup> Clark goes on to describe the garden as being "a flowery meadow cut off from the world of fierce accidents, where love, human and divine, could find fulfillment."<sup>2</sup> Not only does the wall in this painting serve as a buffer between opposites, it also serves to illustrate pictorial space. It would be wrong to see the wall as a distinct barrier, for the homogeneity of the picture depends on the interplay of shapes in both wilderness and garden. The wall must separate so as to bring order and yet it must not disrupt the cohesive interplay of elements. Considered thus its position is equivocal. Palmer's wall is plastic enough on both accounts and thus allows for an organic proliferation of polysemous shape and content. At all times we witness the dynamic synthesis of opposites.

The wall is punctuated by a little Gothic arch which serves at once to contain and reveal the glittering chaos beyond it.

At times the very line of the wall threatens to subvert itself by echoing the shape of hills and rolling clouds. Heavy boughs invade the garden space while vegetation bubbles on the face of the wall, threatening to dissolve it.

The vegetation within the enclosure seems to be in a conspiratory mood. Foreground greenery rooted somewhere below the picture plane surges upwards as if to obliterate pictorial space and the wall which creates it. A wall creeper in the right-hand corner of the picture moves to join the outline of the distant hills. The blossoming pear tree, in itself symbolic of the completeness of nature, continues this upsurge. The blossoms in both colour and

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1. Clark, op. cit. p. 4.  
2. Ibid.

form aspire towards the silvery inlay of white cloud gathered in the right-hand corner of the picture. In vain a gardener has attempted to arrest this exuberance by tacking the tree to the garden wall. This is significant for it symbolises the futility of man's attempt to subordinate nature. The overall tone of this painting is one of secrecy and silent marvel at the stillness but quintessential strength of nature.

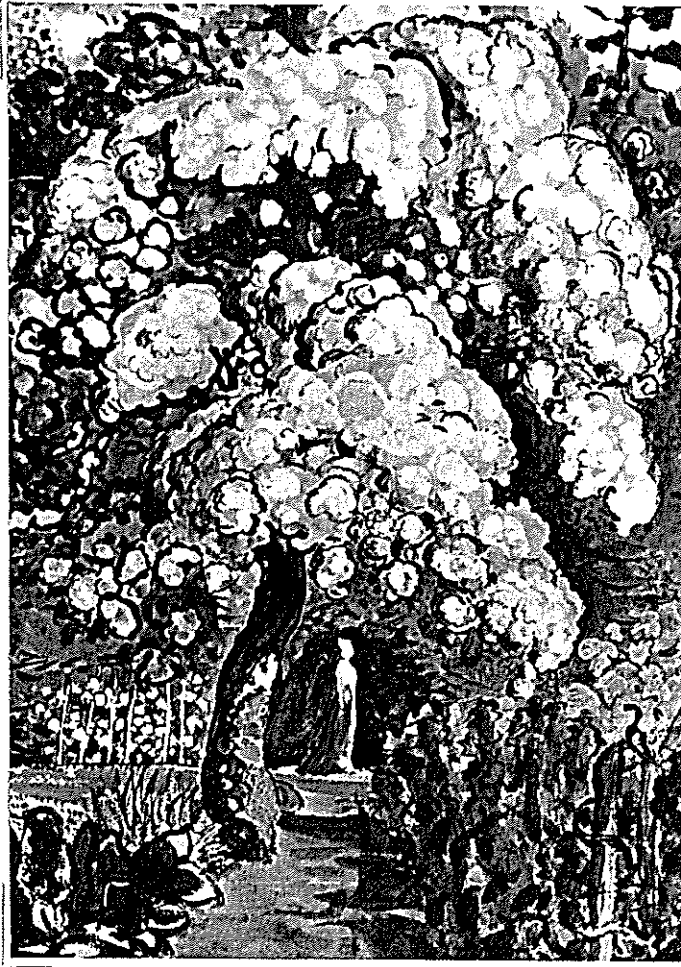
In his Pear Tree in a Walled Garden, Palmer produced a fine picture by marrying opposites. In the same year he painted In a Shoreham Garden, an even more impassioned extension of this concern. Here Palmer has allowed wilderness and garden to collaborate in destroying man's architectural impositions and to create a natural order of convolution and variegation. A blanket of green, sometimes pollarded, now stands as both impenetrable wall and fleshy extension of the garden. The work is testimony to his love of natural variegation; a clotted, coloured magma of alternating fat and wirey shapes surges upward blossoming in the giant apple tree which is constrained by nothing other than the frame itself.

The white and pink blossoms pile upon one another to suggest massive cloud formations. The slow arabesque of the tree heightens the sensation of upsurge and accompanying germinations. All these elements impart the warm sexuality exuded by nature. However, this sexuality is contradicted by one element of the composition - the figure of the woman.<sup>1</sup>

Before discussing her at any length we need a general idea of the figurative element in Palmer's world prior to this work, coming as it does at the closing stages of the Shoreham period.

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1. The figure bears strong resemblances to the figurative type used by Friedrich. Consider Friedrich's Woman in Morning Light, 1818. Also, the geometric outline of Palmer's figure bears similarities to the semi-divine Kore, i.e. the Hera from Samos c. 570-560 BC.



PALMER. In A Shoreham Garden.

Via Blake we find the antecedents of Palmeresque figuration in the work of the early sixteenth century master, Michaelangelo Buonarroti.

In Blake's illustrations these well-contoured figures are always set against landscapes of suitable metaphysical economy; consider his Thornton's *Virgil*.<sup>1</sup> Rather than copying Buonarrotti's prototype of man, Blake continues it. Palmer changed this emphasis.<sup>2</sup> We see this in compositions of 1825 such as Early Morning. Here stylised figures must vie for our attention with an abundant, swelling nature. Palmer incorporated the figure into the overall design of the picture. In The Valley Thick with Corn, 1825 and Early Morning also of 1825, recumbent figures echo the undulating hillocks surrounding them. Some sleep while others read, but they all seem to be unconscious participants of languorous mood of the pastoral scene they inhabit. We sense in these works a spiritual and physical well-being, a oneness with nature. Colinet, who in Blake's Thornton's *Virgil* rejects the pastoral as a temporal shade of true experience, does readily identify himself in Palmer's world with the pastoral and the experience of nature.

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1. Blake's Thornton's *Virgil*. In 1819 Blake was commissioned by Dr Robert Thornton to produce illustrations for the Ambrose Philips translation of Virgil's *Ecogues*.

2. This does not mean he rejected Blake's neo Platonism, rather he contemp-  
orised it and at this juncture he is closely aligned to the idyllic side  
of both Wordsworth and Constable.

"For Palmer, as for Wordsworth and Blake's German contemporaries, nature  
provided a way to the apprehension of the Divine, but for a man like Blake,  
with intellectual roots in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, na-  
ture was equivocal and tainted by the Fall." 3.

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3. Bindman, op. cit. p. 205.

The figure in Palmer's In a Shoreham Garden is not the redolent type of his earlier compositions. She is in many ways the enigmatic key to polysemic form and thought in Palmer's work.

Pictorially a dynamic element, her ruby coloured skirt dances jewel-like against the greenery; her upright posture a nice foil to the wavy motions of nature, particularly that of the tree which dwarfs her so. She stands in a hemisphere of luminescent green, a niche or conversely a vegetable halo which is symbolic of seminal creative thought, thus she is analogous to the germinating greenery about her. She is then a divine intermediary between "the physical and spiritual in a constant and indissoluble correlation...."<sup>1</sup>. She is both witness and manifestation of Palmer's ontological mutation in the face of nature. This duality and subsequent wholeness presupposes another important aspect, that of androgyny.

I do not wish to suggest any sexual ambiguity as such in Palmer's work; she is a divine intermediary between heaven and earth, she comprises a totality, a world within a world. Mircea Eliade explains: "Androgyny is an archaic and universal formula for the expression of wholeness, the co-existence of the contraries, or coincidentia oppositorum. More than a state of sexual completedness and autarchy, androgyny symbolises the perfection of a primor-

1. Goethe's mystic nature symbolism:<sup>2</sup>.

"In the infinite cosmos everything was for him ... Goethe ... 'in eternal and secure relationship, one thing producing another or being produced in alteration.' Every visible thing was a parable, a token for the living mind of the perishable essence (das Unverg ngliche), and of the relationship of all things to the Eternal. In this cosmos human existence was assured because man sees external and internal nature, the physical and the spiritual in a constant and indissoluble correlation ...."

2. Badt. op. cit. p. 18.





PALMER. A Kentish Idyl.



PALMER. Late Twilight.

dial, non-conditioned state."<sup>1</sup> Further, Eliade states: "Also androgyne are the great divinities of vegetation and fertility in general."<sup>2</sup>

This figure of Palmer's is the prototype of the standing figure he used during this period. We find her in other compositions of 1829 - 30 in works such as Shepherds under the Full Moon and A Kentish Idyl.

No longer the dormant type of his earlier Shoreham compositions, these figures reveal a growing refinement in Palmer's conception of man. This then indicates a marked change in Palmer's regard for the figurative elements in his work.

#### LOOKING AT PALMER'S LATE TWILIGHT OF 1825.

Darkness melts away from light into a viscosity of organic parts, the larger mass of this darkness is the hill. Here the fusion of organic line and dense vegetable growth is never solved. This is important for Palmer relies upon such effects to suggest the transitory state of things within and without himself. This Late Twilight is the idyl Palmer aspired to, midway between day and night this cosmos of jewelled earth and air is rich in symbol - symbol rather than fact, because things belong to the artist's pre-conscious state. The inexhaustible welter of shapes which Palmer offers is primal matter from whence evolve determinable forms or conscious thought.

In Palmer's world it is not so much a question of light defining things as light inventing and reinvesting nature. The light of the moon is the benevolent eye of the creator. God through the artist. The fusion of the two is problematic, however Palmer alludes to it via the intermediary symbol of the cross here atop the church spire. We have then a vertical line of moon, cross and man. This line coupled with that of a tree on the right forms a vertical of a crucifix, the horizontal of which is formed by the broad inlay of cloud. The base of this horizontal divides the two tiers

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1. Eliade. *op. cit.* p. 176.

2. *Ibid* p. 177.

of the hillside. This fairly symmetrical plan brings order of two sorts to the painting. On the one hand it brings a moral order to the fore. It is not in any way a superimposition, for at all times structure and implicit meaning are homogenously wrought. The cruciform plan of this painting is its psychic depth, yet its extremities pull towards the surface of the painting, bound inexorably as they are to the pulsating shapes which rise and fall to the rhythmical metre of light. We can talk here of a penumbra of sound and shadow.

From the viscous darkness that is the hillside emerges the figure of a man; he comes towards us through an avenue of moonlit corn; he walks towards the gate and the island of quietude which is situated in the lower left-hand corner of the painting. This island has its origins in the sketch books of 1824.<sup>1</sup> In that sketch book it appears as a free floating island of heavenly personages, dislodged from this earth as is everything else on that page. This has to do with the tremendous impact Blake had on Palmer at that time. In Late Twilight this island of heaven has come to earth. In Palmer's visionary vocabulary this is an island of completedness and as such it is essentially a non-conditioned world.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Ivmy Sketch Book, p. 60.

2. What is meant by a non-conditional world is a primordial state, essentially an autarchy which is untainted by this world, existing beyond sequential time, essentially in paradise, Christian or otherwise. This non-conditioned state is inexorably bound up with the question of what constitutes the sublime. Beyond Burke and into the twentieth century the sublime crops up as a major preoccupation of painters. In December 1948 Barnett Newman wrote an essay entitled The Sublime is Now. In it he states that he is not concerned with the sublime as a nostalgic afterthought upon history, but the here and now time. That time which fights for its existence between the future and the past. this metaphysical space, I take him to mean unladen with any precognitive thought and therefore non-conditioned. However, vis a vis Palmer, this link is at best tenuous because Palmer's 'non-condition' provokes historical recollections and an accompanying sense of deep nostalgia. More obviously aligned are Palmer and Mark Rothko in the metaphysical concepts of time and the sublime. The religious auras of the two make them familiars. Unfortunately, the difference in subject matter dissuades any firm correlation of the two. Robert Rosenblum (1) has forged a substantial link between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the question of the sublime.

1. Rosenblum, Robert. Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition.

This island is integrated into the larger cosmos that is Palmer's painting. It is raised from its surrounds upon a wedge of white earth bordered by soft grasses. One end is fenced off, the other opened to reveal sheep and shepherd. While there is a privacy of sorts which one would associate with sleep, the secrecy of the island, being partially revealed, is incomplete. This condition makes the island analogous to the hill behind it: Neither night nor day, but the transitory state of twilight, thus the face of the shepherd is defined, yet partially eclipsed like the moon above.

There are inextricable elements in Late Twilight, the content of which seems to be the manifestation of Palmer's longing for that "mystic glimmer" beyond what he called the "elysian hills". I am referring to the roughly pyramidal shapes which jut out against the skyline on the right-hand side of the painting. More mountain than cloud, these ice caps are physical signs of the meeting between vision and nature, hence they are signs of Palmer's Platonism. They are Palmer's compromise between two states that constantly bothered this visionary. Time and again Palmer alludes in his writing to the discrepancy he felt between his visions of nature and of nature itself: "The least bit of natural scenery reflected in one of my spectacle glasses laughs me to scorn, and hisses at me."<sup>1</sup>

These pyramidal shapes preoccupied Palmer for some time. They reappeared a year later in Hilly Scene with Church and Moon of 1826. Now more emphatic, but as oblique in meaning as their predecessors, these white pyramids draw us to the horizon and those hills which are the meeting place of heaven and earth, "... one must try," said Palmer, "behind the hills to bring up a mystic glimmer like that which lights our dreams. And those same hills (hard

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1. Grigson. op. cit. (notes) p. 11.



PALMER. The Valley Thick With Corn.

task) should give us promise that the country beyond them is Paradise."<sup>1</sup>

In Palmer's *Late Twilight* depth is the darkness of the personal hinterland, while light is the surfacing of consciousness.

LOOKING AT THE VALLEY THICK WITH CORN, 1825.

In *Late Twilight* Palmer used the tripartite arrangement of moon, cross and man to suggest a divine presence in the landscape. In this composition he uses a motif of similar design for the same effect. Here, too, is an island of quietude. This one situated in the centre of a broad band of band or hillock of corn. It is enveloped by corn on all but one side making it a place of secrecy and thought-provoking tranquility. A poet engrossed in his book is seated in the foreground of this painting, the creativity of his thoughts is symbolised by the moonlit pages before him and the halo of greenery behind him. The symmetry of this halo echoes that of the moon. In this we can once again appreciate the religious connotations of Palmeresque space and the Platonist idealism of the perfected symbol inherent in man. Although the poet aspires to heaven he is, unlike the figure in *In a Shoreham Garden*, a well integrated part of his surrounds.

Within the composition of this picture is shown the balance of agriculture and nature - wilderness and pasture. Bands of differing growth relieve textural monotony.

Palmer's horizon line is a complicated arrangement of hillocks upon which exists an intricate network of white inlays and roads which suggest the artist's familiarity with his Shoreham world. This network invites inspection of the furthest and wildest parts of the landscape. Palmer draws us along via gateways through gardens to cottages carefully constructed brick by brick. The roads perform another function; in conjunction with the lines of composition, they

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1. Grigson. op. cit. p. 12.

lead our eye to their convergent point - the moon, symbol of the spiritual beyond.

Although the uniformity of the Shoreham pastorals suggests otherwise, it is hard to believe that Palmer was in any way a formal composer. As it was with his intuitive religious understanding, so is his composing instinctive and we can see this from the unconventional structure of his pictures with their designs of knolls and bands of grass which have little to do with the actual lay of land. The field surrounding the poet is at once a hillock and a grotto of corn, the lines converging into the plunging V-shape of the larger hills.

From these fanciful interpretations of perspective we sense Palmer's instinct to be more tactile than pictorial. He arrived at a total composition via his means. His viscous mix of gum, cornflour and sepia<sup>1</sup> he likened to earthy matter. Structure - that is total structure - was arrived at as the parts were laid tier upon tier.

Neither is Palmer's lighting scientific. In this painting the soft light upon the cornfields and distant hills, fuses with the objects themselves, imparting a luminosity which suggests the mysterious growth of nature under moonlight.

In *The Valley Thick with Corn* the uppermost part of the closest hillock is an intricate design of different tree shapes which attempt to rise out of the picture plane in order to encapsulate the moon in a Gothic arch. Palmer used this motif in most of his Shoreham works<sup>1</sup> and it originates in his sketch book of 1824.

Palmer consciously sought a primitive conception of nature, this he felt to be, not only closer to the truth, but to God.

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1. This design is found in *A Hilly Scene* of 1826. In *The Skirts of a Wood*, 1825, we see two massive boughs circling a bird's nest which tilts towards the picture plane. In shape it is analogous to Palmer's moons.

Hence the Island of Quietude<sup>1</sup> in Late Twilight - a light defined shape - is a conscious manifestation of what Palmer felt constituted heaven. Although its extremities are defined its contents are symbolic and as such are polysemic.

Elsewhere we saw that the blossoms of his Pear Tree in a Walled Garden tried to affect the shape of clouds above them. Just as it was with the tripartite arrangement found in The Valley Thick with Corn. This unison, be it real or imaginary, effectively undermines our conceptions of space and our imposition of order in the landscape. Most of Palmer's Shoreham works break with illusionism and scientific space. The resultant free discourse between natural elements in his work allows for their hieratic scale and the true monumentality of both the macro and microscopic elements of nature therein.

Everything in Palmer's world moves seasonally and the pulsation of organic growth <sup>is</sup> in its logic. Slowly imbibed, Palmer's spirit mirrors itself in its surrounds. There is nothing of Turner's flash in his work, no suggestive splashings only the careful dotting and clotting of sepia and gum on paper - a fusty organic matter growing slowly on the page, shimmering her, rippling there beneath a benevolent, feminine eye, the lactiferous moon, "... I cannot think it other than the veil of Heaven, through which her divine features are dimly smiling; the setting of the table before the feast; the symphony before the tune; the prologue of the drama; a dream, and antepast, and pro-

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1. There are three paintings of 1830 in which Palmer concentrated on iridescent cloud formations in conjugation with the harvest moon. These clouds are an infinite field of island shapes and seem to be the sublime extension of the corporeal island of quietude found in Late Twilight. The three paintings are: A Kentish Idyl, Shepherds under the Full Moon and A Shepherd Leading his Flock under the Full Moon.

SUMMATION ON THE DISCUSSION OF PALMER'S WORK

Going over the main points which arose out of the discussion on Palmer's work we saw that Palmer's light was both metaphoric and materialistic and that light seemed to be a rhythmical metre whereby shapes would rise and fall from a matrix of primal darkness. Because this darkness was primal it was associated with pre conscious thought. Conversely, as we saw in Late Twilight, shapes approaching the picture plane were articulated by light; they grew with the light and hence were associated with conscious thought. Considered thus both light and dark in Palmer's work is mutable and the inter-relationship of these two arcs allows for the continuous flow of polysemous form and thought. The two forces define one another and both are dynamic sources of seminal growth; be it organic or metaphysical. The conjugation of these two poles is the basis of Samuel Palmer's work.

"The complexity of life - which is what art is about, is attempted to be contained in the religious philosophy of totalist Taoism, founded on ancient beliefs concerning harmony with the universe. The satisfactory movement of life comes from the blending and harmony of the two opposite principles. Yin - female, negative, passive, quiescent and Yang - male, positive, active and aggressive. The first concept of Taoism is that the physical constitution of the universe consists of two opposing polarities. The nature of things is accomplished by their union."<sup>1</sup>

Thus considered the perpetuation of form in Palmer's works depends on both light and dark. This, as we have already seen, implies equal plasticity of form and its interpretation to both light defined shapes and dark defined shapes.

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1. Bradshaw, Brian. Art and Totality, p. 8.



PALMER. Hilly Scene with Church.

scenium of eternity."<sup>1</sup> ... No sound just the passing silhouette of an owl. Thatched cottages overgrown with moss, from their midst rises the Gothic spire its lighted peak as a beacon. Churchgoers stand beneath canopies of light and leaves, articulated black and white by moon. "These leaves" said Palmer, "were a Gothic window, but sometimes trees are seen as men. I once saw a princess walking stately and with a majestic train."<sup>2</sup>

#### PALMER AND EXEMPLARINESS:

In the section dealing with religion we saw that Palmer arrived at a religious awareness via his work process. The point was furthered in the discussion baring directly on his paintings. Indicated in these arguments is the fact that the work itself provided the dialectic between spirit and man. This process differs from Blake's in which composition was the product of a sophisticated pre conception.

However, Samuel Palmer's paintings are idealistic and iconographic; they are steeped in mythology and purposely steer clear of any profane realism. The mythological bias of his work deals with those questions fundamental to our existence. The myths of eschatology and cosmogony pondered upon by Palmer and a kindred spirit such as Friedrich are relevant to us for they are the enigmatic source stirring up life and creativity.

The rejuvenation of an old order or the creation of a new cosmology involved Palmer in the question of morality. Palmer's religio-artistic philosophy signified a reality of which the artist became the initiator of a new model of existence and as such we see him as a moral figure. Palmer's reverence of Blake,<sup>3</sup> made obvious in the terminology he used to describe him indicates that Blake was the exemplary hero he carried within himself during the Shore-

1. Grigson, op. cit. p. 23.

2. Ibid. p. 13.

3. "... sat he up like one of the Antique patriarchs, or a dying Michael Angelo. Thus and there was he making in the leaves of a great book (folio) the sublimest designs for his (not superior) Dante." (1)

1. Grigson, op. cit. p. 17.

ham period.

Let us consider this myth of exemplariness in general. One of the oldest, most obvious examples of this archetypal myth of exemplariness is to be found in the Bible in which we find Christ's actions preordaining those of his disciples. Mircea Eliade tells us that Goethe's Faust is the creation of that artist's need for an exemplary personage. "... one of the chief characters of the myth," ... "is the creation of exemplary models for a whole society. In this moreover, we recognise a very general human tendency; namely to hold up one life-history as a paradigm and turn a historical personage into an archetype. This tendency survives even among the most eminent representatives of the modern mentality. As Gide has rightly observed, Goethe was highly conscious of a mission to lead a life that would be exemplary for the rest of humanity. In all that he did he was trying to create and example. In his own life he, in his turn, was imitating, if not: the lives of the Gods and mythical heroes, at least their behaviour. As Paul Valéry wrote in 1932: He represents for us, gentlemen of the human race, one of our best attempts to render ourselves like gods."<sup>1</sup>.

The point is further elucidated upon by Marcel Proust: "For a man of genius can never give birth to works that will not die unless he creates them in the image not of the mortal being he is, but of the example of mankind he carries within himself. In some way his thoughts are loaned to him during his lifetime, of which they are the companions. At his death they return to humanity and teach it."<sup>2</sup>.

In itself the myth of the exemplary hero is a creative one, furthermore the artist is morally bound by it to reveal that which is true and universal.

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1. Eliade, op. cit. p. 32 - 3.

2. Arnheim, Rudolf. in Kroeber. Karl. et al (ed.) Images of Romanticism, p. 11.

The eternal presence of this myth in art is ensured as it moves from one artist to another.

In abstract terms this universalism is a paradigm of the holistic state; that state of continuous energy found in art which I here wish to convey. On a more temporal level it is true that when art manages to marry the seemingly contradictory states of aesthetics and ethics it approaches the universalism associated with great art. Synthesised within the totality comprising motive and subsequent motif is the indivisible notion of technique. This is certainly one notion upon which the foremost painters of any age are in agreement. Because we are concerned with Romanticism, Delacroix speaks: "I have told myself a hundred times that painting - that is to say, the material thing called painting - was no more than the pretext, the bridge between the mind of the painter and the spectator. Cold exactitude is not art; ingenious artifice, when it pleases or when it expresses, is art itself."<sup>1</sup>.

Let us now consider the morality of Palmer's visionary Shoreham world. We might start out by stating that Palmer shows us how the world could be rather than how it is. As a Christian he would have wished the plenitude of his visionary world upon all mankind. Therefore it might be unfair, even scurrilous to consider him in the harsh light of social and political realism. Be that as it may, let us pursue.

Palmer opposed most vigorously the Reform Bill of 1832<sup>2</sup> and those earlier Acts of 1828 and 1829, which looked favourably upon the Catholics. We also know from his correspondence that he spoke harshly of the rick-burnings, which burst over the Kentish hills just as the last light of his visionary

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1. Goldwater, Robert. *Artists on Art*, p. 229 - 30.
  2. Palmer went to the extent of publishing and printing a reactionary pamphlet in which he condemned what he called the "English Radical", whom he made analaygous with the Gallic Jacobin, as did many English moderates at the time. Broadly the pamphlet appealed to national sentiment.

powers flickered. His correspondence suggests that he viewed the peasantry with a mixture of fascination and condescension. "... Are the many ever civilised?" asks Palmer in a letter.<sup>1</sup>

In general, the visionary power of Palmer's Ancients was lacking when it came to the peasantry whom they did not understand yet immortalised through their paintings. Never are we shown any of the poverty or hardships prevalent at this time which these farmers had to endure. In passing, Palmer's son has noted the erroneous construction of these farmer's implements in his father's work, e.g. the plough in The Solitary Reaper c. 1836.

Palmer's political affiliations were right wing and as such he was a reactionary. However, none of this invalidates as spurious myth, the Arcadian pastoral he sought so fervently but it is evidence of the insipient dichotomy between the Shoreham visionary he was, and the Victorian moralist he was to become.

Essentially the cosmological order Palmer envisaged was a return to that state of noncondition, the Golden Age before the Fall and the subsequent curse of work. His cosmology evades, then, any direct bearing on its society. Leftist criticism such as that offered by John Barrell might suggest that Palmer's visions are indirectly the product of this evasion.

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1. Lister, Raymond. Samuel Palmer A biography, p. 81 - 2.

GRAHAM SUTHERLAND: THE PALMER INFLUENCE

Having discussed the myth of the exemplary in order to indicate something of the inherent complexity to be found in the process of influence, we can appreciate that similarities in both motive and motif in the works of two like-minded painters (in this case Palmer and Blake) are at best not a matter of subject matter. Also, that the truly original artist is never an egoist, for he must be humbled in the face of creation. Thus originality is mercurial and one suspects that it would be foolish to try to define the essence of such a thing. Thinking of this sort is reductionalist; it debases the magic, the alchemy of inspiration.

It is hoped that this essay will be seen in organicist terms; the logical, structured ascent of civilisation having its paradigm in nature. The myth of exemplariness, as it is with the holism of Palmer's work, seems at odds with contemporary evolutionary or revolutionary socio-political concepts. Organicism, like Platonism, when seen in that light is idealistic. The virtue of idealism, like all ideas or philosophies on life, provides a means of coping with existence.

The myth of exemplariness is to be seen as a peculiar history of the growth of civilisation. Defying the temporal, it is at once all-embracing and infinite in its perpetuation. It is not surprising therefore, to discover that Samuel Palmer's exemplariness was continued.

Although acknowledged by the pre-Raphaelites, Samuel Palmer languished in obscurity throughout the Victorian era and what remained of the eighteenth century. He reappears this century as an acclaimed master in his own right. The resurgence of interest in Romanticism, particularly provincial sentiments, prior to the Second World War brought renewed interest in Palmer's work. During the "thirties" a host of English painters acknowledged him as an in-

piration. We find more than a hint of the Shoreham mystic in the works of John Piper. Henry Moore's occasional attentiveness towards pastoral sentiment recalls Palmer.

Samuel Palmer's fruitful influence is found in the works of England's most celebrated painter of this century to date, Graham Sutherland.

Sutherland began his artistic career in 1921 as a student at Goldsmith's School of Art, London. Finishing in 1927, he taught at the school from 1929 to 1939. The period 1924 to 1930 is the particular interest of this study, for it was during this period that Sutherland as an etcher fell heavily under Palmer's Shoreham spell.

It seems the first Palmer studies Sutherland saw were etchings, however his interest centred around the water-colour and gouache work of the Shoreham period. Sutherland's etchings have here been related generally to that period and not to Samuel Palmer's etchings executed in the latter part of that artist's life.

The Wall Street crash of 1930 had taken the bottom out of what had been a lucrative trade in graphic art from the United Kingdom to the United States of America. This and the fact that by 1931 Sutherland had exhausted his interest in Palmer, prompted him to begin his career as a painter. We leave him at that juncture to focus on the years 1924 to 1931.

Sutherland was introduced to the work of Samuel Palmer in the autumn of 1924 and as such no discernable change takes place in his etchings of that year. However, his Cudham, Kent and Barrow Hedges Farm of 1924 do anticipate something of Palmer's luminous blacks and jewelled whites. The latter etching is especially reminiscent of nature scenes by Ruisdael and Rembrandt. A mournful northern light hangs over winter trees. The dormancy of winter,



SUTHERLAND. Cray Fields.



SUTHERLAND. The Village.

the stillness of day's end - this is the nostalgia with which the artist concerns himself. We find here no major preoccupation with transcendental light of twilight such as we would find in Palmer.

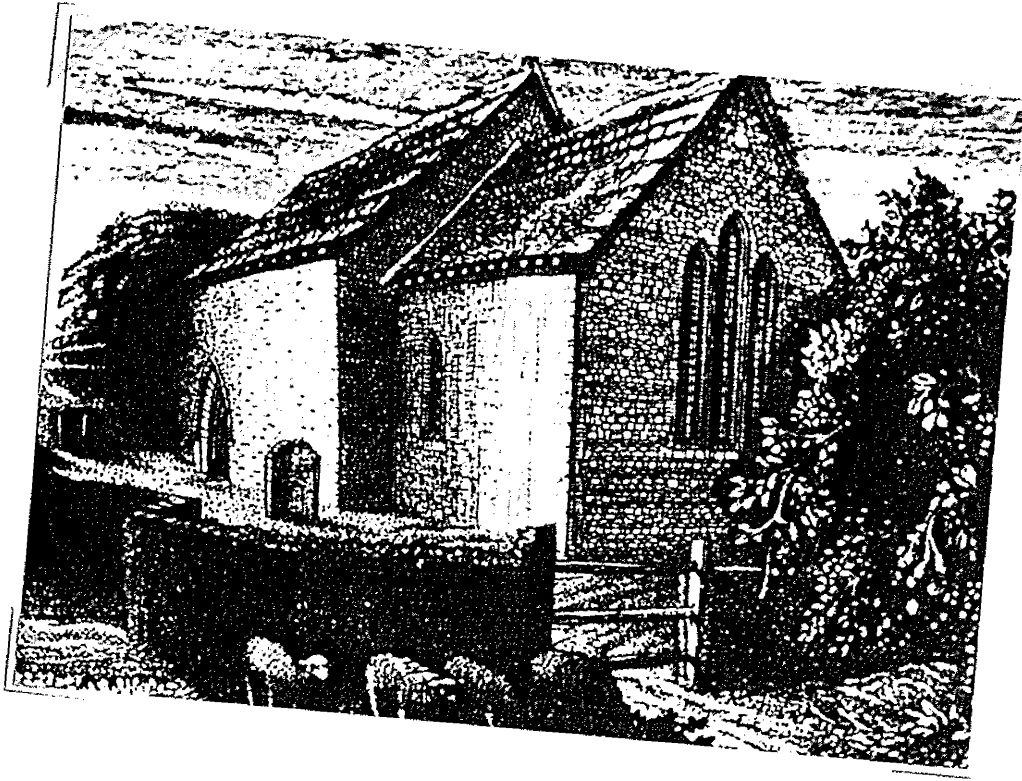
Cray Fields of the following year shows the first indication of Palmeresque influence. The rutted, fallow fields recall similar designs employed by Palmer. The late sun silhouettes a row of trees, its rays penetrate the foliage. This is not the gentle light of Palmer's world which takes infinite patience in defining the black silhouettes of leaf-shapes against light. We should also mention here that while it is true that Palmer's suns and moons are massive they do not account for all the mysterious light in his paintings. There are always half-tones, penumbras and evanescent reflections from inlays of white. Palmer's landscapes live upon such delicacies of light. In Sutherland's Cray Fields, light emanates from a single source, emphatic and descriptive.

In The Village of 1925, everything is well-integrated and Sutherland has managed Palmer's trick of getting parts to differentiate themselves while inextricably being from a common source. At times cultivated, at others fallow, the swelling earth forms a massive darkness which unlike Palmer's, is barely relieved by the light on its crest. The middle ground of trees - especially the one on the far right - are Sutherland's own, and anticipate his later concern with isolating pieces of nature in search of their grotesqueries. If anything these trees recall those painted by Van Gogh. Scientific perspective has removed from our inspection a line of far-off hills. This anticipates Sutherland's later compositional devices.<sup>1</sup>

In Palmer's work we saw that the furthest distance was close enough for our inspection and its parts clearly defined. There is never in his work re-

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1. In works such as Landscape with pointed Rocks, 1944 and Thistles of 1945, Sutherland abstracts the plane of hills behind objects into compositional devices to isolate the foreground.



SUTHERLAND. Meadow Chapel.

moteness or austerity. Associating parts in Palmer's painting is facilitated by this and allows the eye to travel inward and beyond. The austere elements - the distance - in Sutherland's work are signs of a personal hinterland which in time supplants naturalism itself.

Perhaps the most moving of Sutherland's Palmeresque etchings is the Meadow Chapel of 1928. The subtlety of the sky in this work recalls Palmer as does the intimacy of the green and dark shadowed groves. The scene evokes a sense of mystery and nostalgia such as we would find in Palmer's work. Look at the sheep portrayed here; they are a loose arrangement entirely Sutherland's. Palmer did not concern himself, as does Sutherland, with the specific characteristics of animals, but the total overall design of the flock.

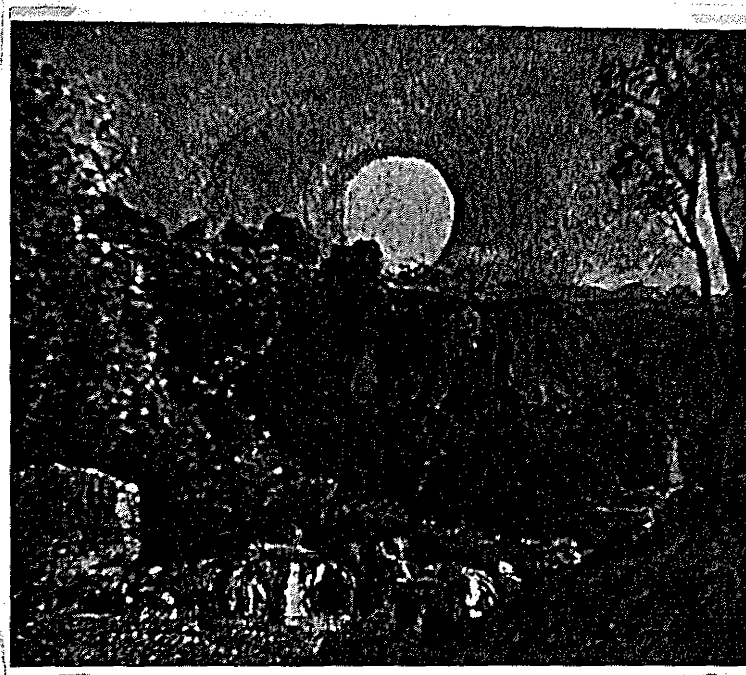
Pecken Wood of 1925 is probably Sutherland's most successful composition and balance between an austerity of parts, which is his own, and the familiar, which is traceable to Palmer. The Gothic solemnity about the forest in this work would probably not have agreed with Palmer, however the lower right and left of this etching would have pleased him. Here the yielding soil is lit by inexplicable means and has an incandescence all of its own. The faggot piles and thatched cottage recall Palmer. There is in this composition a man bowed down under a weighty faggot implying drudgery. In 1832 Palmer had executed a similar subject in his Man with a Faggot. Palmer's figure is upright, his gait is light and he manages the faggot under one arm. By comparison, Sutherland's figure is rooted to the spot, weighed down under its massive burden. Palmer's symbolism would never allow nature as burdensome in any way. When his figures do labour is in The Harvest Moon they do so languorously. The Shoreham pastorals do generally show man at rest in nature.



SUTHERLAND. Pecken Wood.



PALMER. Man With A Faggot.



PALMER. The Harvest Moon.

Sutherland's depiction of man indicates something of his equivocal appreciation of nature. For Graham Sutherland, nature is a force independent of man; "Sutherland never subscribed to the typical English view that when God made the world he intended it be a beautiful, fruitful and wonderful habitation for man."<sup>1</sup>

Though under Palmer's influence, Sutherland was thus advocating a personal interpretation of nature.

That Palmer's influence was on the wane is made obvious in Graham Sutherland's etching, Wood Interior of 1929. Here the Pantheist spirit of the primordial forest subverts the Palmeresque lines of fallow fields. Nature exists of her own accord, is wild and unrepentant in her indifference to man. Writhing thickets as black tentacles claw at the winter sky.

By 1931 Sutherland's transition from Palmer's to that of his own mode was all but complete; we see this in the significantly titled Pastoral of 1930. Saturated in deep, mysterious lights and darks which take on shapes and meanings of their own, this work indicates the entrance to a new hinterland, the avenue of trees suggests this.

Even at the height of Palmer's influence on him, Sutherland was indicating a personal passage through nature. Palmer as both man and artist was an exemplary figure indicating for Sutherland a means to an end.

Picasso says: "It is not what the artist does that counts but what he is. Cezanne would never have interested me a bit if he had lived and thought like Jaques Emile Blanche, even if the apple he had painted had been ten times as beautiful. What forces our interest is Cezanne's anxiety - that's Cezanne's lesson; the torment of Van Gogh - that is the actual drama of

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1. Cooper. op. cit. p. 3.



SUTHERLAND. Wood Interior.



SUTHERLAND. Pastoral.

the man the rest is sham."<sup>1</sup> This is reiterated in a condensed version when Picasso says: "Those trying to explain pictures are as a rule completely mistaken."<sup>2</sup>

What Picasso has done is momentarily to clear the decks and shift our focus from painting to painter. What is important is "Cezanne's anxiety", "Van Gogh's torment". This, says Picasso, is what "forces our interest". Thus the true artist and his work are in essence indivisible; *(Paintings are 'animate' because they are exposures of the self, not masks.)* he does not hide behind his act of painting; the artifice is an extension of self forming a totality. It is this intrinsic whole which concerns Picasso. He makes it clear that it is neither similarities nor dissimilarities in paintings themselves which concern him. What does concern him is the lesson; the exemplariness of Van Gogh and Cezanne. Further, he has concerned with the profound and great differences of soul between painters. These differences of soul are what he wishes to assimilate, and his childhood assimilation of Raphael is but one testimony to his genius.

When Sutherland says he found Palmer to be "a sort of English van Gogh"<sup>3</sup> he is mythologising in a fashion similar to Picasso.

Let us momentarily ignore Picasso, foolishly or otherwise, and as Douglas Cooper does in the following quote, try to explain pictures. Firstly, Cooper's observations on Van Gogh and Palmer: "both excelled at painting cornfields and night, both were subject to the spell of the sun and the moon, both revelled in the opulence of nature, both were inspired by religious sentiments and both relied greatly on symbolism in their pictures."<sup>4</sup>

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1. Ashton. op. cit. p. 45.

2. Ibid. p. 21.

3. Cooper, Douglas. The Work of Graham Sutherland, p. 7.

4. Cooper. op. cit. p. 7.



VAN GOGH. Ravens Flying over Cornfields.

From the above it is clear that the author has assimilated the two by correlating their similar motifs. My correlation of the two differs: While motif is discussed it is differentiated in order that we might follow and interpret Graham Sutherland's coupling of the two.

Let us begin by looking at Van Gogh's Ravens Flying over Cornfields of 1890. The corn consolidates itself into two impenetrable walls, these dominate the picture and do not form any homogeneous whole such as we may find in Palmer's work. The field threatens to devour the road which forms the schism. Unlike Palmer's roads which ingratiate themselves within the totality of the picture, this road does little more than lose itself. Nature is not animated by any exuberance of her own, but by a wild freneticism. We are made aware of Van Gogh's brush strokes. In Palmer's world there is always languorous dispersal of natural elements; time is organic and therefore slow, things seem to filter down and coalesce as their juices thicken. In Van Gogh's world an exodus of the parts is always pre-eminent. The form of things seem threatened and herald all manner of catastrophes. Obviously this is at odds with Palmer's holism.

Even the quietude of Millet's The Plough which Van Gogh copied in 1880 does not regulate that artist's freneticism. The original allows a sentimental journey through a long vista of fallow ground. Van Gogh's journey is a harrowing one for the master's frenzied brush strokes are continuously at odds with his attempts at illusionism.

Let us now look at Van Gogh's Country Road by Night, 1890. Alongside Palmer's Shepherds under the Full Moon, 1830, immediately we see a difference in the attitudes the two painters have towards the heavenly bodies. According to Van Gogh's lights, day pulsates into night; the moon is not a sister, but a fiery brother of day. It has the strength of the sun, for it makes



VAN GOGH. Country Road by Night.



PALMER. Shepherds Under the Full Moon.

the world beneath it writhe. Palmer shied away from intense midday glare which Van Gogh loved. Van Gogh's brush strokes are the energetic pulses of the sun. Also a portentous symbol of life, Palmer's Harvest Moon rises inexorably as it must. It is a symbol of the plenitude beneath. Certainly, a symbol of self, but not Van Gogh's shimmering beacon in the night. It is enough to look at the ponderous lines of Palmer's clouds; the subtle contraposto of his figures in conjugation with the agitated angularity of Van Gogh's burghers or trees to see a difference in the two painters.

Rather than Van Gogh's figures, it is Paul Delvaux's<sup>1</sup> figures who bear closer association to Palmer's shepherds and shepherdesses. Although Delvaux's intention or motive may differ, the physical and psychological attitudes of his figures bear remarkable similarities to Palmer's own. They too, affect an aura of non-condition, and stasis. Delvaux's figures are a mixture of candid beauty and complex thought. The enigmatic quality here engendered recalls the spiritual quietude prevalent in Samuel Palmer's Shoreham work.

Let us reconsider Sutherland's observation in which he states Palmer to be "a sort of English Van Gogh". We have looked at the work of both Palmer and Van Gogh and it is obvious that motif is no substantial link between the two. We may ask then, why it is that Sutherland has drawn the two together?

"I liked Palmer's drawings of the early years," said Sutherland, "because as a young man I was drawn to a strongly Romantic and so it seemed, independent approach to nature."<sup>2</sup> As a student Sutherland saw in Palmer's world a kindred yet independent spirit. This independence was exemplary; it exhorted Sutherland to similar freedom. Palmer indicated to Sutherland a way through nature. From the beginnings of his career Sutherland was in nature reenacting the timeless business of drawing from her. This practice is part of the legacy that is handed down to us from Cezanne; from Van Gogh and many of their predecessors, an example of the myth of exemplariness.

1. Paul Delvaux, Belgian Surrealist, c. 1897.

2. Cooper, op. cit. p. 7.

Instinctively, or otherwise, Sutherland perpetuated the ritual. Alongside these considerations we must bear in mind that Sutherland was out of touch with contemporary European movements. The British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in 1924 brought works by Cezanne and Matisse to London. Neither artist moved Sutherland. Considered alongside the sophistry of European movements in the thirties, Sutherland's practice of drawing from nature must have seemed antiquated.

It is not correlation of moons, suns or cornfields that link Palmer and Van Gogh, but the essential Romanticism. In fact Van Gogh is an antipodal figure via a vis Palmer. What Sutherland aligns is their originality, their exoticism and their uniqueness. These are the great differences of soul with which Sutherland grapples.

If we consider Van Gogh's undeniable influence on painters such as Matisse or Picasso, we see that Sutherland, by associating Palmer with Van Gogh, is sublimating his own quest for original expression. He is also contemporising the dilemma he felt to arise out of that schism between himself and mainstream art movements. Broadly, what he implies is that Palmer is not provincial, nor secular, but a universal artist.

At the outset of this essay Pablo Picasso was quoted so as to validate copying for it is my belief that to reenact what Eliade calls "Great events"; to mimick the exemplary hero this is to touch upon the humble origins of originality.

In retrospect this essay has, it would seem, concerned itself with the nature of origins more so than it has the nature of originality.

It has concerned itself with the mythic basis of exemplariness. In the context of the writing this has been seen as the enigmatic bond between artists such as Van Gogh and Samuel Palmer.

In my essay I have used the exemplary hero as a modal or type of man as

opposed a mode or fashion of man.

To conclude it would be convenient, to say the least, to have realised within myself some sweet expurgation of the Palmer influence. The vexed problem of influence started me off on the essay. No such fundamental change has occurred. Certainly, I am more familiar with that paradise. The nature of influence is insidious and at this moment in time I am not sure how I fare with and against Samuel Palmer.

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