

Comedy of Intensity: Wilson Harris's 'Black Marsden'

(a tabula rasa comedy), Faber 1972, 111 pp., £1.80

'I view the novel as a kind of infinite canvas, an infinity. By infinity I mean that one is constantly breaking down things in order to sense a vision through things'. These were the terms in which Wilson Harris defined the novel in an interview recently published by the University of Texas. One of his main pre-occupations since The Eye of the Scarecrow has been the exploration of the potential rebirth and development of twentieth-century man's imagination and sensibility through the analysis of an individual creative mind in which language is used as a means to develop consciousness. Like Malcolm Lowry in his intended Voyage That Never Ends, Harris sees the creative activity as a dialectical process that has the power to transform man's imagination and so his life. 'Infinite canvas' and 'breakthrough' remind us that there is no standstill on this journey, no complacent attachment to a particular position but only a relentless going forward through a labyrinth of dangerously fascinating and therefore paralysing states of mind.

Clive Goodrich, the main character in Black Marsden is, like his creator, writing his own 'book of infinity', and as he travels back and forth from the real social scene to the country of his imagination, he is faced with, resists and finally escapes the Medusa-like traps both without and within which he himself has helped to set up. The duality suggested by Goodrich's experiences alternately in the realms of reality and imagination is beautifully expressed in the descriptions of Edinburgh which serve as a background to those experiences. The city is omnipresent: rendered at once concrete by the description of its monuments and streets and slightly unreal by the evocation of its intense atmosphere, of the sea and its strange intimation of a subaqueous world, of the open sky and the quality of the light at different times of the day. The integration between the contrasting ancient and modern parts of the city, symbolical of 'a strangely subjective vision of reality' as an expression of the Scottish personality, prefigures, and shows the possibility of, a similar integration within the human psyche.

From the very beginning of the novel Harris conveys the contrast between the sense of life and movement which emanates from Goodrich's surroundings and the dead fixity in which twentieth-century man has imprisoned himself or allowed himself to be imprisoned. In the course of his journeys through Fife Goodrich has been aware of 'the harlequin cloak of the seasons spread far and wide into strange intimacies and dissolving spaces'. The metamorphoses in nature are present in his mind at the time of his all-important meeting with Marsden, whom he encounters, 'a curious frozen bundle', 'in a corner of the ruined Dumferline Abbey'. Goodrich, who, as his name suggests, is a wealthy man easily moved to compassion, takes pity on the beggar in whom he instantly recognizes an aspect of himself, a 'wildness of nature' which pierces him as 'from within himself'. Marsden's eyes, knives turning into quills, open the wound or fissure in Goodrich's conscience that is to give rise to his 'drama of consciousness'. Almost at once Goodrich is aware that Marsden's attitude is one of 'self-surrender' rather than 'self-conquest', that is to say that Marsden has allowed himself to be immersed in the elements in which he is frozen. But from that moment of recognition, Goodrich himself feels 'awkward and unfree'. His own 'inner frame' reproduces Marsden's outer 'shuddering stiffness', though immediately afterwards Marsden's posture as a harp evokes the harmony which it is in his power to achieve in conjunction with Goodrich who is 'metamorphosed into a kind of rib or spring stretched by the deepest pull of fascination'.

This last sentence hints at the beggar's power of creation; but as we shall see, 'Doctor Black Marsden', as he is called in the next paragraph is a false creator, 'a clown or conjurer or hypnotist extraordinary' who becomes linked to Goodrich only through the latter's readiness to be fascinated, like Marsden himself, by his own role in the world and by the instruments he wields. Just as it is a matter of chance whether one is born rich or poor, so Goodrich has come into his fortune by sheer luck since he won it, in a significantly trivial way, on the football pools. He now feels conscripted by history as a patron of the arts, and being conscripted makes it difficult for him to be sufficiently detached from his wealth to develop as a free human being. Whenever a difficulty arises, he offers people material help as if this were the panacea for the world's ills. What is important at the beginning of his association with Marsden is that even though they come together in their respective roles of beggar and benefactor, they are bound 'into conserving and fleshing within [themselves] the ritual skeletons of civilizations (walking knives or bent harps)'. This suggests that Marsden's instruments will help either to create and liberate man or on the contrary to imprison him depending on the use man makes of them. The beautiful Jennifer Gorgon in particular has it in herself to turn flesh into stone and subjugate men to Marsden, or on the contrary to become the muse who turns stone (men frozen into fixed attitudes?) into flesh, i.e. into life. And so through each of his guests Goodrich is offered contrasting choices.

The 'global theatre' which Marsden directs is a 'circus of reality' but it is an open-ended one and therefore offers a way out. Marsden can be the real doctor of the soul he claims to be but only so long as he is not engulfed, in Goodrich's eyes, by what 'the beggar' stands for: the ruined consciousness. Goodrich can become a real patron of the arts by giving his own imagination a truly creative impulse as he eventually does. But he is temporarily charmed into the sterile role of money-giver, happy to be able to assuage so easily his sense of guilt for being rich in a dispossessed world. "Abnormal luck calls for abnormal insurance", he tells his housekeeper. "It's better to pay than perish".

Because Marsden's strength lies in his understanding of the mechanism of the world and his capacity to explain it to Goodrich, he creates an illusion of authenticity. For instance, when he explains to Goodrich that, beautiful as it looks Jennifer Gorgon's brand new coat (which Goodrich has paid for) is actually filthy and old and he wonders why it doesn't fall to pieces on her back, we realize that in different guises she has always fascinated people with the same garment. But Harris also suggests that deadening as the Gorgon's influence may be, it is possible to break through it. And this Goodrich senses intuitively, realizing that if he unscrewed the head (making her stare powerless?) of the Gorgon's 'revolutionary French fashion plate' and 'looked down into the dark tube or garment she wore at the light of her soul within, he would ... be seized by the open-ended mystery of beauty which revealed and concealed all its intricate parts ad infinitum'. By this time Marsden the poor beggar has become Marsden the powerful hypnotist by whom Goodrich is 'thrilled to bits' as he says in the language of the crowd, a language startlingly different from that in which he has just described his potential breakthrough. He is hypnotized by Marsden's flash-bulb camera, a mechanical device which sends him into a trance of a dubious nature and whose substitute light sharply contrasts with the light of the soul within. He has been enrolled already as a potential participant in Marsden's 'global theatre', the twentieth-century man's substitute for a real community ('global' suggests the inner and the outer world but also carries totalitarian implications). Emerging from his first hypnotic spell, Goodrich is told by Marsden that he 'flaked out ... in the middle of a scene' as he was 'tipped into the tunnel'. "What tunnel?" asks Goodrich. "Ah", said Marsden, "the tunnel of civilization. O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark. It's part of the jargon of the trade. The commerce of love. Gorgon". Marsden's ironical appropriation of T.S. Eliot's line (which in the original introduces a disparaging reference to 'the generous patrons of the arts'),

his cynical allusion to the reduction of love to a commodity and to the power of his instrument, the Gorgon, the omnivorous overtones of his 'croaking laugh' make it clear that even at this early stage he takes for granted Goodrich's collaboration with his rule.

In spite of the threat Marsden represents to Goodrich's private existence, he is also an essential stimulus to his spiritual liberation. We have seen that soon after their meeting and as a result of Goodrich's awareness that Marsden needed help, the two became linked in a static relationship of beggar and benefactor, symbolical of the kind of relationship that prevails within and between most societies in our twentieth-century world. This static rapport and the need to transform it into a dynamic 'community' is the basic issue in the novel. In Black Marsden and his agents are crystallized the darker aspects of twentieth-century civilization. It is Marsden who makes Goodrich aware of the injustice in the world discernible in the polarization of men into 'haves and 'have-nots'. And it is also Marsden who draws his attention to the arbitrary working of memory and non-memory within the framework of individual and universal history: why indeed should some men be immortalized by our one-sided, over-selective appreciation of them in the name of virtue or freedom? And why are millions eclipsed biologically (in catastrophes such as Hiroshima), socially, economically or politically? Why in the name of love do we become murderers transforming the human theatre - that of the world and of our consciousness - into a desert? 'The very desert of human consciousness', says Marsden, 'cries out that tabula rasa is the theatre of the uninitiate'. In other words, we and the generations before us are responsible for reducing the world to a tabula rasa in which the 'uninitiate', the poor 'wasted' victims of our blind selfishness, vanish. It is this state of tabula rasa that modern humanity must outgrow so that out of our individual and common deserts a new living 'community' might be born. For the tabula rasa is in fact an illusion as Goodrich will discover in his voyage to Namless. It is an illusion because, however much we may ignore them or refuse to see them, the ghostly creatures we keep at bay within ourselves or in the world, endure, waiting to be brought to life again by the growing insight of our 'scarecrow eye'.

Marsden, who is at once director of the global theatre and director of the tabula rasa theatre, describes his own condition and that of the world with such objective clarity, he understands so well Goodrich's guilt-ridden conscience that the latter feels Marsden has the power of an omniscient god by whom he is both attracted and repelled. Marsden is indeed the new temptation to whom the rich man of the twentieth century is all the more inclined to surrender his autonomy in exchange for a good conscience as he feels like 'a prisoner on trial for an nightmare body of wealth he has accumulated'. As the novel progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that while presenting Goodrich with an apparently free choice, he actually behaves as if Goodrich were an obedient instrument of his. He has already produced from himself two powerful tools. One is the Gorgon, the 'virtuous Salome' who entraps twentieth-century man with the fascinations of love and freedom, and who would exact the head of the master she serves (and of the whole world) in their name: Isn't freedom a 'baptism in rivers of blood'? Perhaps in order to perpetuate herself she wants a child, though not a husband, and actually becomes pregnant by one of her 'depleted' lovers. Jennifer Gorgon stands for the repudiation of free choice. Unlike Goodrich, who is deceived into thinking that she wants to escape Marsden and who contemplates giving shelter to her and her coming child, she can never sever her link with Marsden because she needs him as much as he needs her since he provides the conditions in which she operates. The other tool is Knife, who, whatever his colour, has the same face all over the world. He has the power to kill, to slash the black cloth of Marsden's Camera, the most powerful instrument of all in the twentieth century, with which Marsden identifies himself. But Knife is passive and impotent even though, like Marsden and Gorgon, he can be an agent of awareness. He has a counterpart in Harp, who seems to embody Marsden's creative possibilities and

stimulates in Goodrich, who feels he has much in common with him, a fertile confrontation between immortalized and obscure personalities, 'saved' and 'damned' respectively by memory and non-memory.

The camera with which Marsden identifies is another metaphor for the theatre of life. The camera and the television studio have become the commonest contraptions by which man has access to the outside world. But instead of stimulating his imagination, it often confirms him in his stereotyped view of his fellow-men and in no way modifies his relationships with them. The camera is thus another cage which man has manufactured for himself. When Marsden the beggar appears in Goodrich's dream dressed in the black cloth of the now 'ritual' and hypnotic camera which he manipulates, he acquires a dignity and decorum which he did not possess before. He still begs ('Penny for the Guy'), and receives, but is also big enough to encompass within himself 'a hidden church or choir or theatre'. His consciousness of his own power induces him to snap his fingers at Goodrich in the certainty that the latter will satisfy his increasingly tyrannical demands. Goodrich, however, is all the time aware of the contradictions in Marsden which are also his own. He is aware that their beggar-benefactor relationship can be reversed for he has benefited from Marsden - in knowledge and insight - as much as the latter has from him:

He was indebted to Marsden as the most signal contradiction in his life - a shared community of goods and dreams. An enigmatic historical bank and beneficiary within whom the very act of giving became a receiving, a dangerous hypnotic legacy at times as well as a revitalized caveat of originality and community. (54-55)

It will depend on Goodrich alone whether Marsden will confirm his power and get Goodrich to surrender to his narcissistic sanctuary 'for the good of the state', or whether Goodrich will free himself from 'the overcompensation ritual' by which the rich man who hasn't the strength to develop his own vision and has little genuine feeling for the poor attempts to make up for his privileged state.

Goodrich is never entirely absorbed by the dual relationship of powerfulness and powerlessness which ties him to Marsden and vice-versa. For years he has been recording his thoughts and sketches in his 'book of infinity' and from the first he has the creative impulse to work through his conflict with Marsden by reflecting upon it in his book. The purpose of his inner questioning is to disentangle himself from the self-division which his ambiguous rapport with Marsden has provoked. The alternation in the narrative between, on the one hand, his life in the outside world ('the circus of reality') and his conversation with Marsden, and, on the other hand, his walks in Edinburgh, his dreams and his excursions in the book of infinity determine the structure of the novel. A dual viewpoint, objective and subjective, is also supplied by the alternative use of a third person narrator and Goodrich as an I-narrator. His involvement with Marsden and his book of infinity provide the contrasting perspectives through which Goodrich works his way to the decisive recreation of a trip to 'Namless' and then to real emancipation. In this manner Goodrich weaves his vision, the 'revised canvas of community' which Wilson Harris sees as the only hope if modern civilization is not to become fossilized in a self-destructive stasis.

Goodrich's dreams are an essential spur to his intuitive writing of his book and to his vision. Dreams reveal the unconscious, which is the deeper source of the creative impulse. They express a life beneath or beyond our fixed and limited understanding. What Goodrich remembers of his dreams makes him aware of what he knows unconsciously but cannot formulate for himself until the dreams set his consciousness to work when he tries to explain them in the diary and thus develops his insight. 'The passing seasons were saturated by one's dreams and turn into half-fossil, half-cradle - endless deceiving, revealing subjective/objective fabric or open-ended bias'. Goodrich thus realizes that his life in time ('the passing

seasons') can be given a dual, potentially fertile perspective when juxtaposed to the timeless substance of dreams. He has several kinds of dream which presumably represent several levels of intuitive reaction to his relationship with Marsden: he is sometimes half-waking, half-sleeping, sometimes fully asleep, or simply day-dreaming in his inspiring walks through Edinburgh.

In the first of his dreams after he has become host to Marsden Goodrich is aware that he is lying in a dark room (his own camera obscura?). Marsden comes in dressed as camera and Goodrich's frustrating rapport with Marsden in their roles of benefactor and beggar is played out, warning Goodrich that he might be 'entangled in a spell or net cast by Black Marsden's ritual camera'. Before falling asleep, however, he has been able to see the light of the moon through the window of his own dark room and 'a rectangle of light at the end of the room or road insinuated itself into his dreams'. The square of light in Goodrich's own room is to provide him with an outlet from Black Marsden's camera - black, because, though intellectually enlightened, he represents a spiritual darkness which he (as opposed to Goodrich) is apparently incapable of transforming into light. In chapter eight Goodrich is once more steeped in the evocative atmosphere of Edinburgh and standing on Dean Bridge (bridging remote spaces? The pole and the Equator through the legendary Hornby and Goodrich's stepfather lost in the Brazilian jungle?) he remembers that 'many a poor devil had taken his life here - leapt from this bridge; leapt from Sky into Creek, sudden pouring light into inexplicable darkness'. His awareness of man (the light) going forward into, and losing himself in, the darkness leads on to his apprehension of life as

a woven texture or chessboard of visibles and invisibles: the thought that here, somewhere out there in space beneath him were squares of light and darkness in which something moved, disappeared ... Something moved, reappeared, flashed again, darkened. (64)

The liberating movement in his vision confirms Goodrich in his poetic insight and reveals the meaning of the interplay of existences he has been recording and living through in his book of infinity:

For one lived many lives, died many deaths through others. There was a renaissance or flowering, or a deeper accent of eclipse upon buried personalities - actors in a tabula rasa drama - in every encounter once enjoyed or endured. Something died. Something was born. Each element of participation carried within it new and undreamt-of senses or constellations. (64)

Goodrich's day-dream is abruptly cut short by a driver shouting at him because he has stepped on the road and nearly been run over. But he has had his vision and now hears 'the unearthly sound of bagpipes' which will save him in Namless.

The journey across Namless (the longest and most continuous entry in Goodrich's book of infinity), though dream-like in content, is nevertheless written down as it rises to consciousness. Contrasting perspectives are thus combined, and the entry brings together and clarifies Goodrich's early intuitions so fruitfully that it transforms his conception of Marsden and attitude to him; by the same token it also enables him to achieve his final necessary repudiation of the Gorgon. The journey therefore requires close examination.

The circumstances in which he comes to write this section are themselves significant. The immediate stimulus is an encounter in the Botanical Gardens with Jennifer, who is so preoccupied with her male companion ('depleted of revolutionary authority' as her previous companion had been of 'spiritual authority') that she ignores Goodrich. Sensing that these enfeebled companions are in fact Marsden's-substitutes

for her, sexually potent but without Marsden's magnetic personality, Goodrich feels a sudden desire 'to strike Marsden; to set Jennifer free'. At this point he is still bound up with the pair, and of course murder would not free him imaginatively from his debased fascination with them. The solution lies rather in the inner journey he makes when 'aroused by the spectre of infinity' (the deeper, more illuminating role that Marsden, 'doctor of the soul'), always has had - the facet Goodrich has responded to in his resistive book of infinity) 'to look far and deep into the spaces he had attempted to bridge in his journeys around the globe'. This intention of looking 'far and deep' into himself at a moment when Jennifer has found him invisible recalls the metaphor of the 'tunnel of civilization' or 'tube' of the Gorgon in chapter one, where the coarseness and darkness of the tube itself, rendering invisible what is within, generates the desire to penetrate to the far light at the end. Here Goodrich is looking into and through his own invisibility the tabula rasa of Nam(e)less), so becoming accessible to his own insight: the inner globe therefore stands a chance of being bridged and redeemed from Marsden 'circus' conception of reality.

As the two-day journey through Namless takes shape in Goodrich's imagination, it emerges of course as a delineation of his own inner state: Namless, where he was born and his father disappeared, is the seat of his ruined consciousness, to which he has to return 'to try and sort out something, something oppressive'. The fact that his past initially manifests in consciousness as a storm-ridden, unpeopled landscape in itself indicates that a new beginning must be found here; while the 'blistering mountains' and 'shadow of a rock' reminiscent of The Wasteland cast the scene in imaginative perspectives far wider than the merely personal or the merely South American. Namless is a universal desert; at once the general condition into which twentieth-century man is born - a waste civilization - and the arid state of the individual psyche before it has contacted the dark forces within and freed itself from their oppression. The drama of consciousness enacted in the 'theatre of infinity' on these pages is Goodrich's quest for enlightenment, rooted in his desire to break through the weakness and confusion in which Marsden has trapped him. Illumination can come to wayfarer-Goodrich only as writer-Goodrich projects himself imaginatively into the kind of world he intuitively knows Marsden would establish given the chance. Under the guidance of Knife, who is unaware of the potential effects of his own revelations, Goodrich develops a strength of insight that protects him from the threats this world contains, threats of emotional sterility, hollowness, self-loss, alternations between submission and tyranny: qualities that only too evidently characterize Knife himself.

Knife's story on the first day belongs to the post-Industrial Revolution world and tells of 'the ravages of uprising and repression': how the original need the workers in Namless had to put a stop to their employers' exploitation of them by striking for higher wages, became, when the strike succeeded, an insatiable greed for more and more; which the authorities repeatedly indulged. 'The sky's the limit'. Over-indulgence after over-repression produced a mechanical process from which the workers, 'sleepwalking' themselves into one strike after another with an obscure sense of being 'pushed', could not escape. They were powerless in their power; while the authorities, confirming them now in their spiritual weakness as previously they had kept them to a low material level, deliberately paralysed them by giving in.

This story is punctuated by Goodrich's dismayed suspicion that there is a man clinging to a rock who needs help; but this shape turns out to be 'Marsden's ascension robot outlined against the sky', a concrete image of unreal, mechanical aspiration which not only duplicates the plight of the workers in Namless but also symbolizes Marsden the beggar both in his power to evoke misdirected compassion from Goodrich and in the escalating demands he makes when indulged. In being deceived again by Marsden in this sterile form Goodrich is indeed re-living and re-visiting his past.

The quality of Namless at this point on the journey is mediated to him by Knife's 'droning voice' and by the Namless beverage, but what is mediated is not understood: the story is puzzling, Knife's voice is hypnotic, the beverage is 'like an opium of the masses' and sickens him, the robot reminds him obscurely of his mother. Both story and robot, like Knife's contention that, 'Nothing here at Namless goes around in a circle. Everything is turning inside out', belong to the first exploratory stage, at which opposites in their confusing interplay are simply being approached and recognized to exist, not accepted as part of Goodrich himself.

The first night, however, brings the culminating dream. After the Namless beverage (already now sharpening his 'scarecrow eye' that perceives deeper realities) has been drunk, the robot is experienced imaginatively by Goodrich as an overwhelming force that affects his very existence as a sexual being. A blind woman, both mother and mistress, appears to him, and Goodrich finds himself thrust upward on the horns of 'the bull of night' (as in a blind fertility rite) into upright copulation with her. References to pinnacles, spire, 'the gigantic robot of sex' and 'the Strike of man against himself' make it clear that Goodrich has become both the workers and the robot, his opposites in the 'haves'-'have-nots' situation; while the question, 'had he pushed her or been pushed by her?' expresses the basic ambivalence of the spiritually uninitiated who are enmeshed in 'subconscious leagues' that they are too ignorant to control and that make them powerful and powerless at the same time. Just because Goodrich's utter powerlessness, however, is at the same time utterly powerful - just because the two facets of primal energy fuse in him as he unites with the woman - this is also the moment of complete union out of which he himself can be reborn. The 'pillars of night' that had 'uplifted him' are pillars that he is aware of having 'uprooted' with his own 'Samsonian avalanche'. The force of this reference is best brought out by comparison with Marsden's cynical 'O dark dark dark' in the first chapter when he was predicting that the open-ended tunnel would engulf modern man. Eliot was indebted for his half-line to an early passage in Milton's Samson Agonistes in which Samson, enchained and enfeebled, was lamenting his severance from both the light of day and the divine light. He shakes the pillars of the enemy's temple only after he has recovered his God-given strength. Goodrich here awakes exclaiming, "'Oh God," ... in new-born terror ... he felt the acute mystery of born, unborn existences'. The power that was perverted in his hypnotic relationship with Marsden and was symbolized by the robot has not been mechanical for him. It has been retrieved as organic, regenerative energy from the darkness of his own tunnel in the deepest of his dreams.

Penetration beneath ambivalence and confusion has purified the quality of Goodrich's perception. On the second day the conversation itself changes, becoming more transparent. Knife now describes not the way the authorities have gained their paralyzing control, but the way the revolutionary and guerilla movements that have followed can still be contained within the system by 'subconscious leagues'. He quotes from Dark Rumour, openly presented as a journalistic substitute for the 'private luxury' of independent thinking, suggesting that a 'totalitarian economic theatre' is on its way. While listening to Knife's 'dead-pan' but no longer hypnotic voice, Goodrich perceives that the rocks are taking on a 'subtle fleshing', that they are beginning to move, are on the point of collapsing in an avalanche and are in a 'helter-skelter embrace and plunge' that betoken 'seminal ruin, seminal catastrophe'. The release and new movement in his own psyche are figured in the now moving landscape. As a result, when they come to the circle of rocks enclosing a dry bed of sand, Goodrich, while aware of the 'charmed circles' of the 'timeless assassin' here - the sterile awareness propagated by Knife - can also see through this to a 'transparent sea' and the 'infinite movement within and beyond an almost overwhelming fascination with stasis'. He now stands outside his fixed, obscure rapport with Marsden and the murderous impulses he had felt at times within it, and instead is seeing straight through to an elemental completeness in movement. Though there are stages beyond the moment of pure vision, this in itself fulfils the promise of an earlier dream, in which he had been 'revitalized' with 'a validation of identity' by the knowledge that he himself had been completely 'seen through' by the blind

woman. The visionary power which she had then has now been reclaimed by Goodrich and centres in himself.

The strength of this new vision is instantly tested. A man (not, as on the first day, a robot) is seen lying beside the road, and proves to be dead: an intelligence agent, like Knife, who has been destroyed by the very system of which he was an instrument. Goodrich has no difficulty now in detecting 'the savage hollowness of Namless ... the dead-pan loss of all freedom of opinion or choice' in Knife's paradoxical reactions, and when Knife orders him to dig a grave his reply is simply, '" To hell with you"'. Nor will he accept Knife's humbler assurance that the whole episode has been planned and that Goodrich's defiance will please the Director-General; having emerged from the sense of guilt and desire for acquittal on which Marsden was playing earlier he no longer needs approval, and recognizes Knife's change of roles as an attempt to contain him still within the tabula rasa - a state Goodrich sees for the 'static illusion' that it is and has always been.

By the evening of the second day Goodrich is sipping 'the bitter clarity of Namless beverage', and many strands from the earlier part of the quest now cohere in his mind. He sees that in its political-social-economic context Namless leads to 'totalitarian nemesis', and that he must develop and act upon his own vision of life in isolation since the early disappearance of 'the head of the family' has left him 'the trauma of being alive' and the father-substitute or intellectual god Marsden has recently been for him has collapsed too into a 'fallen ruling head'. But this collapse accompanies the development of his autonomous vision: though grief-stricken, he is a fuller being than he was. When the piper beyond the Basin of Namless plays a lament into the night, Goodrich knows, with the unhesitating transparency of true insight, that its source-meaning - a warning not to advance that the original piper, captured by the enemy, was transmitting to his master at the cost of his own life - is still the true meaning and applies to himself no matter what irrelevant 'assurance' to the contrary Knife gives. Knife's Marsdenish reminder that the situation is 'open-ended' cannot fascinate him again. When he associates the warning music with 'the stifled lips of Marsden's dead agent' it is plain that his understanding - as distinct from merely intellectual recognition - of the issues involved is of an entirely different cast from that of Knife, to whom self-concern is of course impossible. The Namless passage ends here, with Goodrich's refusal to jeopardise his new-found self.

Although on his imaginary journey Goodrich has gathered his inner resources, has seen through Marsden's 'theatre' and has repudiated the temptation to self-surrender embodied in Knife, 'the assassinated book or dream and interrupted reality' has not yet freed him from his fascination with the Gorgon or given him a real, revised footing with Marsden. A further stage in disentanglement remains for the outer world. Jennifer is more beguiling than Knife in her agency for 'the malaise of the twentieth century - a bankruptcy of authority'. In her pregnancy and her apparent desire to free herself and the child from Marsden Goodrich mistakenly sees the life-giving muse. Marsden's loss of stature and authority confirms Goodrich in his 're-creative decision at the heart of a crowded world' and he feels equal to competing with Marsden for Jennifer on the 'post-hypnotic threshold to life' where both now stand. His purchase of the flame-coloured shirt expresses just this: the inner strength of his new vision, and 'intuitive fire music', needs to be earthed in his defeat of Marsden and union with the muse, and when he wears the shirt he feels 'the swirling currents of life come to a controlled head in him at last'. Jennifer, however, is the antithesis of the true muse. Her subjugation to Marsden makes her oblivious of Goodrich, blind even to his scarlet shirt, while Marsden's 'depletion', which reduces him to the state of Jennifer's 'depleted' lovers shows also the state to which Goodrich might even yet be reduced as an agent of Marsden's non-creativity. Trembling with rage and guilt at 'such an alarming irrational idea', Goodrich throws them both out; and Mrs Glenwearie, the housekeeper, returns:



He was relieved at her return, but though he welcomed her presence and felt armed by a strange inner tide of decision, a strange inner fire of secret resolution, he felt alone, utterly alone, as upon a post-hypnotic threshold at the heart of one of the oldest cities in Europe. (111)

If our reading of the book up to this point has been valid, the last sentence leaves us with several open questions: one, how far does Goodrich's rejection of his tempters carry the author's approval? It is impossible that Harris should be suggesting that the real plight of the dispossessed, with which Marsden is so strongly and evocatively associated, should be simply written off in this way. How far, then, is Goodrich actually responsible for the apparent irreconcilability between himself and the 'ritual conjuror'? He has rejected him in a fit of disillusionment, anger and guilt (another temptation to over-compensation?), a self-defensive act that parallels his refusal to go on in *Namless*. The reader is left wondering whether, by enduring 'the constraint of his bonds to the bitter end' (as Marsden in the last chapter hints he should do), Goodrich could have transformed his involvement with Marsden into fruitful co-operation. On the other hand, a facile reconciliation with Marsden and the Gorgon would obviously be too easy a way out of the conflict: Marsden cannot be allowed to stay.

The position in the final sentence, then, is this: even though he has revised his concept of community and seems to have the energy to pursue it, Goodrich is left 'utterly alone' through his conscious rejection of those parts of himself and of humanity that had been 'buried existences' and that he has recently idolized. The welcome return of his housekeeper, together with his revival of guilt a few minutes earlier, suggests some degree of backsliding. Goodrich is unaware of what he has done to himself in rejecting Marsden. But Harris invites us to see this very relegation of Marsden to oblivion as essentially comic ('one's very obliviousness ... was part of the fabric, part of the comedy of the fabric'). The important point is that, although the quest for infinity must be disappointed in a finite world, Goodrich now has the energy and consciousness to pursue it in spite of disappointments and failures and quasi-cyclical returns to starting points.

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