ROBERT WATSON:

THE POWER OF HIS COMMAND

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The whole series (image, metaphor, symbol, and myth) we may charge older literary study with treating externally and superficially. Viewed for part as decorations, rhetorical ornaments, they were therefore studied as detachable parts of the works in which they appear. Our own view, on the other hand, sees the meaning and function of literature as centrally present in metaphor and myth. There are such activities as metaphoric and mythic thinking, a thinking by means of metaphors, a thinking in poetic narrative or vision. All these terms call our attention to the aspects of literary work which exactly bridge and bind together old divisive components, "form" and "matter." These terms look in both directions; that is, they indicate the pull of poetry toward "picture" and "world" on the one hand and towards religion or Weltanshauung on the other.

--Austin Warren and René Wellek.
Theory of Literature. (New York, 1956),
p. 193.

Through his idiom speaks the poet to every man. Behind the language of poetry stand the master concepts--the poet's legacy--the gene pool, so to speak, of germinal ideas. Standing before the poetic mirror, the reader must relate himself and his world to the world reflected and subtly refracted by the poet's genius, as the light-rays of perception flash beyond the poem through its images, metaphors, symbols, and myths. Thus the poet meets and mates aesthetic emotion with discursive thought. The sequence

> image, metaphor, symbol, and myth may be said to represent the convergence of two lines, both important for the theory of poetry. One is sensuous particularity, or the sensuous and aesthetic continuum, which connects poetry with music and painting and disconnects it from philosophy and science; the other is "figuration" or "tropology"--the "oblique" discourse which speaks in metonyms and metaphors, partially comparing worlds, precising its themes by giving them translations into other idioms.[1]

Poetry is the best example of emotive language in the aesthetic continuum, for verse is characterized by "its radical particularity of reference, its presentative immediacy."[2] The language of poetry demonstrates precision of meaning: accuracy of image vivifies verse narrative. The effectiveness of the poet's themes rests in his success as a wielder of the <u>right</u> word. The primary domain of poetry is feeling. As such, poetic language parallels the primitive origins of language itself, for all language must have been originally emotive in nature. As technology advanced, so did the "scientific" use of language.[3]

Robert Watson is a poet of precision. He strays from use of general terms; he seldom deals with situations that defy the mind's eye to picture. In his dramatic monologues, the characters seldom discover "universal truths." Yet when Watson's specific observations are analyzed individually, certain themes reappear. Watson's best poems are intimate revelations. Each character is given a confined situation within which there is not space enough to allow a progression from problem to resolution. Characters or scenes are viewed from the standpoint of immediacy. Dramatic monologues and brief streams of consciousness are methods of presentation yielding quick and accurate depiction of character.

Not all of Watson's verse deals with character portrayal, but perhaps he is strongest in this realm. The poetry involving no specific people sometimes becomes too openly moralistic: "Nude Film at a Drive-in" might have had more impact had the film been remembered briefly by a lover caught in passion, yet aware of, "The modest / Beauty of bodies shorn of such / Vehemence of clothes . . . ." In contrast to "Nude Film," consider "The Voices from the Palace," which together sound a "moralistic" chord against cruelty. But that chord is forceful because it is compounded in the mind's ear of the reader who catches all the individual notes of the mother, the minstrel, and so on. No specific character of the poem bemoans the injustice or cruelty of being; each simply recounts a small part of his life. Yet every voice, every detail recounted, adds to the reader's shock upon encountering a world of such brutal reality until that final chord wails for a world where dreams do not have to become nightmares in order to come true.

This tinge of sadness runs through both volumes of Mr. Watson's

poetry. Once the titles of the books are understood, the pathos becomes evident. Thus all the poems of Watson's first volume are loosely united by the theme implied in the words Paper Horse. The poet divides his work into five sections within the book, the third section opening with the title poem. One part of the poem is Watson's elucidation of his title in which he explains that,

> In Tibet in blizzards, priests cut out paper horses and drop them down the mountainside, whereupon, it is said, they become live horses for the aid of persons lost in the storm.

The poem itself is the story of a boy-king in Tibet whose thousand-room palace burns, forcing the inhabitants to flee northward. The king rests after his journey among the "sword swinging Khambas" and receives tea from his rich lords. The royal party waits nervously, huddled together, until from the oracle comes the word to return. After journeying southward through snow, the party scales the "kingdom's ice-faced walls and down; / God descends from his heaven of snow and stone, / From his last kingdom, his last palace," there to discover that not everyone was fortunate enough to escape. The roof still burns; and the king's "bodies, salted, boiled in butter, face with gilded eyes, the snow and smoke packed wind." Not far away, a priest cuts paper horses for lost travelers. His cuttings are not blown to aid those writhing beside him on the roof.

This desolate Oriental tale does not encompass all the action of the poem. A parallel plot is developed as the narrator tells of his wistful daydreams of Tibet and of sleeping dreams in which scenes from childhood merge freely with scenes from his imagined kingdom. In his

mind the poet journeys to Tibet where he imagines himself asleep in a tent from which he can view the palace. His dreams link his existence to that of the escaping royal party; for like them he leans into the wind and trudges through drifts of snow before he can rest.

Parallel action may indicate parallels of theme as Watson relates the varying situations of the three worlds explored in "A Paper Horse": First there is the world of his present life and memory, his empirical world; then there is the empirical world of Tibet; finally he has a dream vision of Tibet. In each of these three realms burning occurs. After sledding down a hill in Passaic, Watson was greeted by his father who stood by a bonfire. In his adult dreams the hill from childhood merges with a Tibetan glacier; also as a boy he dreamt "of coasting down a steeper hill." In fact, the mature dreams result from "childish habits" of the imagination. The fire in empirical Tibet burns the boy-king's palace. Unclear is the position of the poet during the events of the Tibetan night: How much of that palace burns in fact, and how much burns in his dream vision, his imagination? Perhaps from his mountain tent Watson views the yellow roof ablaze. Perhaps in dreams he has seen the king's buttered tea and the buttered, boiled bodies on the roof. And as Watson sits in his "tent near Lhasa" he witnesses those paper horses cut by the priests as they drift on the wind toward his tent. Watson also is to be rescued, as once his father waited by the fire to take the future poet safely home to bed, away from cold and danger. Now Watson is a man: his "spirit shrinks in bed." There is no ready rescue, no fatherly consolation. He had fought the snow and ice of the world that god has fled. He lies awake, the too attentive insomniac, listening to

Turning prayer wheels
Turning oak leaves outside my bedroom window,
Turning clothes on the line my wife has forgotten.

But the turning wheels or leaves or clothes have power neither to save those bodies on the roof nor to lull Watson to sleep. The final view of the palace is of the smoldering yellow roof upon which mangled bodies remain unaided by a returning god. If even the last palace of the living God knows such hopeless agony, what purpose can the priest fulfill? The turning prayer wheel represents impotent ceremony, and each paper horse is no more than a plea for a miracle. Injustice and cruel reality blacken dreams and make the spirit shrink in bed, "Tonight the world's roof burns / The yellow roof of the last palace of a living God." The time is "tonight" in that the realization of evil is always present. The "world's roof" implies both the microcosm of a Tibetan palace and the macrocosm that is the actual "world," the universe. This poem is at once a narrative and a description of a man's state of mind. He feels that, as the travelers needed live horses, the world needs a miracle of deliverance.

Many of the characters introduced in Watson's other poems are trapped or lost awaiting their miracles. And the deliverance which they await must be appropriate to their situations. All of the other poems are set far from the land of the Paper Horse, and the storms confronted by the heroes are psychologically rather than physically painful. The narrator of "A Paper Horse" underwent such psychological pain as he confronted the fact of man's impotence in the face of nature, as he confronted the fact of his independence in the universe. No one could still his shrinking spirit because each individual must find his own "paper horse," an object of faith or strength to accompany him through the storm. A man

cannot depend upon the storming society or environment to supply a means of survival. His own best hope is a mind strong enough to accept and live within the troubled world. The miracle can come from within.

A glance at the poems in section I reveals a collection of dramatic monologues, most of which fall short of comedy as sad irony intrudes on the comic. Watson has given some of the people he creates senses of humor or placed them in innately funny situations. For instance, the speaker of "An Elderly Ghost Has His Say" has a decision to make: whether or not to brave the elements to celebrate a holiday. A trivial crisis is transformed into comedy as we realize that the old man speaking is long dead and disintegrated, a ghost, and that the holiday is Halloween. Although his monologue never loses its tongue-in-cheek quality, the ghost presents himself even more as a passive and timid man, desiring no identity, needing a stone to remind him of his name. Dead two hundred years, he has long known intercourse with earth, his "accustomed lover"; and he fears being separated from her and tossed into heaven or hell where he would be responsible once more as the person he was in life. He is suspended, trapped between life and death. This poem is suspended, too, somewhere between the light comic and the doleful deterministic.

The "Elderly Ghost" is not the only person in section I who has shrugged off identity and lost his personal responsibility. Each of these poems deals with anxiety and fear of death: each character shares the predicament of the ghost who never cared to know himself in life. The Texas oilman cannot sell his soul, for he has none: he eradicated it long ago. The judge who winds his clock "takes comfort in numbers," and yearns for greater ceremony. Living by numbered laws rather than by self-inspected codes of conduct, the judge has accepted other men's values

instead of claiming his own. Tongue-in-cheek, the poet has his judge face a greater Judge, presented as fellow follower of numbers and laws: the mortal judge's soul is summoned from earth to fill a divine quota. This ironic situation, as well as the rather unique presentation of God's methods, help lend humor to the poem. One less amusing story is that of the couple "going to Winter Park" who leave for Florida not because they want fulfillment or gaiety, but because the man with the sluggish arteries is following a mechanistic impulse in order to stay alive.

These characters from section I are like puppets whose strings are worked by social or primary needs. The speaker in "The Horn of the Goat" is in a similar situation, for his reactions are controlled by the contents of a bottle. Even the man watched by the drunk creates an unreal situation: the keeper of the dump assembles a bride of Frankenstein from trash and addresses her as a queen, saying, "All goods of this world are yours." Both men become subjects of the trash queen, citizens of a dump kingdom. Together the poems in this section present a dismal picture of human behavior in a mechanistic world where even God winds a clock and keeps a quota.

The picture of life gathered from this section is a uniform one. Job would have understood the deepest grievances of the men living in the dump or of the judge who meets a God too strange for human sympathy. The universe is chaotic, and materialism is the sole ordering force: one item to barter is the soul. This bleak existence arises as man's strength to imagine and create is subordinated to a deterministic Nature. Such existence is for each individual a trial and a storm in which he must prove himself not innocent but strong and then find shelter in his own strength.

Watson's Weltanshauung changes little in the second section of A Paper Horse. Into the chaos the poet-creator tosses characters of more ability than those encountered before. Previously the storm had battered men to positions from which their best hope was survival. In this second section the imagination of the characters sets to work, and they begin to find pleasant places of refuge. Their shelter is never permanent, for it is an edifice built not in the present chaos but in a better world of the imagination. As soon as the reality of the present moment forces itself upon the consciousness, imaginary oases collapse.

The poems "Birthday" and "Dating" each catch a lonely person whose chief torture is dissatisfaction with life at the moment. They imagine for a brief while that there could have been an escape and as their minds turn toward a time in the past, the actuality of their failure fades. They escape from a present routine. Both poems treat conventional, semi-melodramatic subjects; in "Birthday" a man recalls his love for a woman now a nun; in "Dating" a housewife pretends she has escaped her drudgery and become seventeen again. In each poem a physical situation calls the dreamer back to everyday reality. And Watson purposefully has chosen for his characters to return to trivial incidents of their daily life: the man returns to choose a tie; the woman, to scrub dirt from a tub. In days gone by these people could have chosen to do other things, perhaps to make their lives beautiful to themselves. Now their choice is between wistful remembrance and menial labor. Neither choice is truly constructive. These people are prisoners of lives they have wrought themselves. In as much as the characters are allowed the responsibility of their dreams, their temporary jaunts from factuality, they are not slaves to a mechanical cosmos. Daydreams are not the only means of suspension from the

present.

Watson has a fine appreciation of painting and the other plastic arts. The process of artistic creation differentiates man from uncontrolled nature. The act of creativity is an exercise of control for the artist; his work is perhaps the highest application of man's imagination. As the daydreamers were refreshed or made free by their dreams, the artist is fulfilled and made orderar by his artistry. Watson's usual concerns are not aesthetic but psychological; art can affect the human psyche markedly, as is demonstrated in his poem "Odalisque."

The "Whore with Trick" of the first section tells herself that she can rediscover who she is by opening her locket to the "magic mirror" on which is held her image; the situation of the "Odalisque" of section II relates to that of the whore. No information is given as to the model's character other than that she considers herself an object, an art object that is beautiful. Like the whore, the model earns her living by exploiting her body; they are both odalisques. The position of the model is unusual, for she does not see herself as a woman or a human being but as an object of art. "Odalisque" is primarily a statement of the artist's alienation from everyday life. Art is a transfiguring process through which a woman becomes young and beautiful. Her youth and beauty are no more as her function in the art process is no more. Within or beside the statement of artistic solitude is a comment on human isolation. A man and a woman are alone, yet they never see each other as human beings or sense each other's personalities. Their characters as individuals are suspended during the artistic process. Rather than a man and a woman, they are artist and subject. As the dreams of the housewife and the man with a tie transport them from reality, the creative process has trans-

ported the people of "Odalisque" from the everyday to the everlasting that is art. Yet both model and artist remain largely unaware of the eternal element inherent in their day's employment. The spirit of the poet enters the studio unseen; it questions if

> On viewing
> Her pearl skin, that wedge of darkness at her thighs,
> Does she despairingly sense the history of the womb,
> Those ancient shapes winding and unwinding on its floor?
> And looking at her breasts recall the fruit she ate
> When time began...? No. How can one so carelessly composed,
> Stretched out on that dusty coverlet of fading red,
> Ponder such thoughts in this cold north light?

These lines suggest that the model is an animated, impersonal force as woman, the bearer of life and knowledge. The artist, too, is a kind of producing force as he creates his picture. Neither is a full personality, for she does not think at all, and his thoughts are only those necessary for the completion of his task. He thinks of "her / As yesterday he thought of oranges in a bowl." The product of his creativity takes on a life quite independent of either model or artist, each of whom leave to satisfy the primary need of nutrition: time for dinner has come as the light fades.

As the characters depart, the poet's attention turns to the woman's portrait, which does not look realistic. He had painted an

> Unhuman woman, if woman at all, in a world not seen
> Even in our dreams, yet a world that must be everywhere--
> We will suspend you in our rooms and meditate
> Upon your simple shape winding there among the flowers.

The painting is soon to be suspended as were its creators from humanity

as it was made. Soon to be an object of meditation, the painting will rise to a higher position than did the living woman. The model's life is less significant to art than is that of the painting. The value scale of the world of art is not balanced to favor human beings as anything more than objects.

Once again the objectification of a human being occurs, again in a context of art, as the speaker of "Between Bars" allows his imagination to interpret the scene before him. He is removed from any active participation in the scene, so that his mental process falls into the category of daydreaming seen in the earlier poems "Dating" and "Birthday." Like the other characters from the second section of A Paper Horse, this voyeur has found pleasant diversion from routine existence as his mind creates a fuller imaginary world. The persona of "Between Bars" combines the techniques of the daydreamers and the artist in that his imagination is dominated by his sense of artistic form. The speaker of the poem catches a glimpse of a girl through the window of a bar or café. She is "preening for a dinner date," self-conscious of her feminine beauty. Like the model or the whore from the earlier poems, this woman knows that her chief stock in trade is herself. She is eager to defend her body from any force that might degloss its appearance: her fingers "grip the comb / As fingers clutch a shield before a Goth . . . ." Her solitary audience without the café peers in at her and joins her in indulgence of her beauty. He sees not a woman of varying disposition, but a creature pulchritudinous, whose sole emotional response would be an instinctive, defensive guard of her beauty.

The human character is less significant than her animal charm. The woman's mind is irrelevant to the man contemplating her as an animal and

art object. First the voyeur fancies her framed

> . . . naked on my wall (a gold frame
> Isolating your green serene repose
> From the chaos of . . . well, I'll say my room),
> A glowing odalisque combing her hair.

Her hair then becomes his focus of fascination: the hair style is soulptured, perfectly ordered. His interest in her as a thing of beauty is greater than his desire to enjoy her as a woman. His thoughts address her,

> Be calm, I am outside the laquer and the glass,
> Besides, my dear, I would not disarrange
> The perfect order of your pure coiffeur--
> To be engaged within your arms, to hear
> The pink fall, feathers swirl, a bass note struck.

Metaphorically she is a pink parakeet preening in a green jungle. She is another odalisque as well, isolated from chaos by her "green serene repose." This "repose" may not indicate a presence of peace of mind, but rather the absence of any sensibility, for in later verses she rests alone in bed as the voyeur visualizes her

> With loosened fingers over sculptured head,
> And may you draw into dreams of icy greens,
> While I unseen,
> A vandal, keep the vandals from your garden tomb.

Her green setting is not vibrantly alive: it is like a garden tomb; her dreams are "icy green." An element of the macabre surrounds the lady ready to enhance appearances and to exist with frozen greens.

With the other people introduced in section II of A Paper Horse, those from "Between Bars" know a world apart from society. Given another time or place, any of the characters presented might interact well among his fellow men. Each is captured here in a moment of solitude of mind. While the characters sketched in section I were alone and without control of their destinies, those in the second section are still alone, but with them is wit bright enough to color their points of view. Fate seems to suspend these people from puppet strings in which a limited amount of independent action is possible. Circumstance is the puppet master of the elderly ghost, the judge, and the others from the first section; these people have been towed by the current of existence flowing in a world governed by no manifest laws other than those of survival. Perhaps the same current carries the model and the painter or the man choosing his tie, but in the second section the characters are allowed free flights of imagination. Theirs is not a fulfilling life, for they subsist without communicating their dreams. Each mind explored is an islet distant from the coasts of society with other men.

Section III varies the setting more than any poem thus far, as Watson chooses to deal with foreign lands and temperaments foreign to his reader's understanding. Four of the poems in this section take place in or treat the societies of other countries; the remaining two poems call on the insane for principal characters. Loneliness, isolated minds, again dominate the moods of "Hamden" and "The Death of Napoleon Bonaparte." But the characters presented have a ready excuse for isolation from society: they are mad. "The African Shop" is a statement of the relative nature of cultural values, handled interestingly, complete in itself. Most poems of this section do not focus on character.

"Voices from the Palace" is a character study, however; the poem is a psychological probe and a presentation of methods for survival under the fist of tyranny. "Voices from the Palace" consists of four dramatic monologues and one poetic description. The five smaller poems together characterize a kingdom and its king. In this land murder is casually performed, force directs belief, and "stars have beauty only to a fool."

One of Watson's longest and best poems, "Voices" demands that consideration be paid to poetic devices and versification. Most obviously, the characters present themselves and their understanding of palace life through dramatic monologues, a technique at which Watson is proficient. A Mother to her Young Daughter typifies the monologues: the persona relates brief episodes which taken together span a long period of time. The queen's monologue is blank verse, rich with assonance. Most of the voices speak in that rhythm; the astrologer prefers iambic tetrameter. Each of the speakers voices his own experience of life in the palace; each vividly recounts the horror he has witnessed. The theme of injustice deepens with every story told.

The first story is the queen's, in which she tells of dreams relating to actual life; she assures her little girl that dreams come true. Dream life and waking life merge in the queen's experience, but her dreams are not a release from the present; she sees her present life as the "coming true" fulfillment of her past dreams. She had dreamt of a magnificent prince when she was a girl. Now she tells her own little girl that

> . . . the dreaming was not at all the same:
> Certainly the Prince on his charger came,
> But the hoof beats tearing earth were louder

And his eyes larger and wilder
When he took me than in my lifelong dream.
He rode away without saying a word,
Leaving servants to take me home--his home.

From the time she reached his castle she exerted herself. She would have the queenly strength of her young dreams. And to be a queen she uses violent power, the only means of gain in the palace world of brute force. She tells of a time when her

. . . Prince returned rich with captive women,
His eyes hot with fever, conquest and drink.
When I brought him his son, he did not know me.
When he did not come to me, I slew his women
And sent him their eyes on a small gold tray.
That night with laughter he called me his Queen.

Wise from experience, that queen softly tells her daughter that, "Your dream, as all dreams, as mine, will come true."

None of Watson's previous characters had gained such control over circumstance. She has achieved identity and a sense of power; but the achievement entailed a loss of her initial hopes and a growth of indifference to all traditional values. The other "Voices" echo the queen's, for they too speak from an intimate knowledge of cruelty; they resound the same tone. No longer bitter, no longer disillusioned, the deposed prince and the minstrel recount episodes of horror. To these people acceptance of anguish and unexplained brutality are facets of maturation.

The only voice that speaks in discouragement is that of the astrologer. He is the scientist, perhaps also the poet, locked in a tower apart from the palace life below. Although he gives his mind and body entirely to his work, he has not succeeded in suspending human feeling

as did the man and woman of "Odalisque." Instead, each act he performs with his telescope reminds him of the king's brutality. The astrologer's spirit is gentle; it suffers, unable to feel beauty or love. The horoscope he charts demonstrates his concept of reality as he predicts

> From a turning stone, sparks will fly;
> The stars are grinding up the sky;
> Milk will sour, meat mold, plague follow;
> What is today will be tomorrow.

The stone may be his equipment or a torture device of the king. As the king grinds up his meat, his subjects, his world, even the stars grind up the sky, causing pain. All the world is defiled: "What is today will be tomorrow." And in the yesterdays gone by, those who sought reality other than pain were destined to discover their futility:

> My mother told me in my sick bed
> The stone she prayed to and the stars
> Were gentle--and my mother's dead.
> Stars have beauty only to a fool.

Watson may have removed himself from the cruel realities of the palace to a dome of artistic isolation in which he views his subject matter as art, not as a projection of his thoughts. He may not join the voices in their statement of life's injustice. The palace setting is remote from Passaic. The poet created the people, and gave them feelings to be petrified. Along with the characters lost in impotency or ravaged by routine, the subjects of the cruel king need a miracle of deliverance. Desolation constitutes a common feature of the lives Watson portrays in or out of the palace.

The queen and her king gained command over the disordered universe of section I. Their command was effective: its fulcrum was savage strength. Is there a suggestion here that successful rulers reign by "natural" methods? A Tennysonian Nature red in tooth and claw is combatted in the palace by a man adept at forceful manipulation of people to his purposes. Whether or not he can be condoned, the king is a success within his realm. None of the weaker characters can be termed successful: the Texas oilman, the elderly ghost, the daydreamers and artist all fail to make any headway in the world, so passive is their adjustment. Those in section I were ready to take what life provided, to live in long sufferance under skies without warmth. No one who employed imagination to better his mental state actually lived in the social world. The queen was the first to twist the dreams of her imagination into a manageable way of living. She beat the fierce world at its own game.

None of the alternative ways of life presented by the poet have been very appealing. To surrender to desolation, to dream a life apart from desolation, or to conquer desolation by brute force: these are the choices. Yet better options are available. Man must have dignity and he must be able to cherish a reality of softness somewhere in the universe.

Most of the poems in section IV are comic or repetitive of earlier themes. But there are two especially effective poems in this sections which treat the theme of desolation. Both "Her Father Is Drunk in the Graveyard" and "Grandfather at the Playground during the Sabbath Hour" are poems featuring old men as principals. Although the exposition of their characters is handled differently, the poet makes clear that both men had surrendered to deterministic systems of life. The drunk's life's destination is the graveyard and death; the grandfather's is very different,

a release from routine to happiness and freedom.

One of Watson's most disconsolate poems, "Her Father Is Drunk in the Graveyard," is the graphic portrayal of an intoxicated man passed out in a cemetery. The daughter depicts her father's physical position: he is sprawled among the crooked grave markers, one hand stretched toward a dove, dead, "Under a bush, its wings outstretched, head squashed,/ With father's empty bottle lying beside." The stone hand of a statue now lies atop a sloping tombstone. Once that hand had pointed toward heaven though now it is directed at the man lying on the grass. The graves are improperly designated, for, "Age or vandals with these slabs have played / In time a crazy kind of dominoes . . ."

This preliminary sketch of the setting includes many objects and physical relationships traditionally associated with certain symbolic references. The stone hand points in emphasis or accusation at a man whose body has become part of the "crazy kind of dominoes." The positioning of the markers of the dead is disordered, as has been the drunk's life. This scene is one epiphany of that life: a man stripped of dignity, alien to the living, intimated by a broken piece of sculpture, a dead bird--and a bottle. The grave markers designate bodies of the dead, lying in sanctified ground. And disorder among the markers betrays a spiritual chaos; the fact that no one rearranges the grave stones indicates indifference on the part of men. Long a symbol of peace or the Holy Spirit, the dove lies with its skull crushed by a whisky bottle. At least two broad interpretations are possible: either the dead dove and the tipped stones manifest a divine carelessness that allows man to fall and suffer; or the drunk in destroying the symbol of the Holy Spirit, and his fellow men in allowing the cemetery to fall into ruin,

have employed human free will to damn themselves.

Although the former interpretation fits well into the atmosphere of the earlier poems in A Paper Horse, the latter is equally as appropriate to the aura of this poem. The old man acted in awareness, foreseeing his own ruin:

> When they stretch together in wet grass,
> Each pointing toward the other, I see
> That stone and dove and man's ends are the same--
> What father knew too well would come to pass.

Yet although he continued cognizant of the inevitable end of his course of action, he did not attempt another route. Each day he stumbled farther into a waking sleep, a drunken, dull, indolent existence. From this land of shadows the only escape is sleep, or the sleep of death. For in that sleep of death he knows a dream: across the river waits his lover, arms outstretched. And he is powerless to cross to her. He waits on the bank like a shade only half dead; Charon ignores him.

> And there he lies peering over the water,
> Weeping, without a passport for his crossing,
> Lies on the edge pretending he is dead,
> Ears stopped to cries of wife and daughter.

Still the daughter cries, questioning the forces that would allow her father to so long maintain his wretched state. She cries in doubt of men whose strength and love of living would rebel at death. Yet for her life's partner she will have such a man, "Who will outrage the other life and leap in this . . . . / Beat Death in dominoes before we kiss." The daughter's strength is great enough to allow her memory to move away from

her father's image: she will make her own life. And his goal as well will be realized when they part:

> Dear dreaming, wasted Father, floating
> Farther each day from my hardening memory,
> I will let you slumber here, let you be
> While I move further from you tenderly,
> O my dear, dying drunken Father, go floating
> Softly to her dark, winged kingdom waiting.

How different is the sentiment of these alliterative lines from that of the "Voices of the Palace" poems! The father and daughter each walk to hope. Will their dreams, as all dreams, come true? Is the daughter's voice as meaningful for its ray of hope as those voices from the palace are for their clouds of despair? Different as they are in theme, these poems are two of Watson's best. In the former a society is trapped; in the latter, the trap holding one man opens to free his dead body and his yearning soul. His daughter's freedom becomes a possibility as well. In choosing a seemingly damning course, the drunk chose one means to an end. He shackled himself to disrespect and alcoholism, knowing that only as a slave could he approach his vision. She across the water waited for a man who had worn and cast off the chains of mortality.

Mortality is a weight known by another old man, the hero of "Grandfather at the Playground during the Sabbath Hour." Like the drunkard in the graveyard, Grandfather is first introduced to freedom in his winter years. But the events and gay tone of this poem hint that the two aged men find different varieties of freedom.

A high-pitched, feminine scream opens the first stanza. Grandfather hears the sound and muses over the screamer's motivation. He sees "an

old bum," being pushed away by

> . . . policemen and conjectures
> Perhaps the bum had some buttons missing,
> Or committed an indignity to a tree.
> I saw an attendant cut the arm off a shrub
> For being a little wild.
> Only children can go wild
> Without being arrested.
> Only the smallest children, of course.

Yet this old gentleman has done exactly what he says he cannot: he too is "kicking loose and running wild."

Grandfather's mental monologue outlines his past life and present situation. At the moment, he is enjoying Sunday morning as spectator to his grandson's play. Once, he too had been young: then his father had written to him, advising

> "Caution, my son, caution,
> Save all letters, send none.
> And when you marry, marry one
> Not for mind or beauty,
> But for submission,
> The quick commission
> Of housewifely care.
> And remember when the bell tolls
> It tolls for cash."

Reminiscent of Donne's sermon or of Shakespeare's Polonius or John of Gaunt as they speak to their parting sons, this advice is archetypal. And here the archetype is materialistic self-concern. The advisor eventually hanged himself. But the son, Grandfather, could not disregard his father's counsel, living an upright life, existing in dull restraint. His bride was suitably housewifely; his trade too was commonplace. For Grandfather had done as he was told: "I stuck under his thumb, / And

changed money in a bank for forty years," never losing a penny.

He remembers his father and understands the suicide, a good man who too late took drastic means of achieving new perspective. Now as Grandfather nears death, his own new perspective is attained in less desperate fashion, sharing the world of his grandson, the domain of freedom and innocence. Unlike his grandfather or the drunkard in the graveyard, the hero of "Grandfather at the Playground" has achieved a great measure of peace without leaving his accustomed life. From his new perspective he has made wonderful discoveries. Among them are,

> When time is money, life is locked
> Inside an iron box inside an iron room . . . .
>
> Time is what you're doing and now . . . .

He adds that his freedom is founded in a new innocence, a literal second childhood:

> . . . life is a made-up affair;
> All the little children know this.
> But I forgot, forgot what innocence was,
> And always, always followed the rules.

His statements suggest that the governing principle of his new and freed existence will be unrestrained, unfrugal life in the moment. Like the children, Grandfather understands that, "life is a made-up affair." Innocence is making-up what you do, living through imagination more than rules. Grandfather can experience life thoroughly in the present

if his mind is attuned to imaginative enjoyment. His attitude is self-satisfaction.

Looking backward over a collection of individuals gathered from a dump, a palace, a snowstorm, or a graveyard, one observes a varied group of people. Not many of them are self-satisfied. Even Grandfather's acceptance of the state of things is a function of his imaginative, make-believe cover-up; he does not see rules, of man or God. He sees time as it presently manifests itself, his dull past fading into make-believe. He need feel no responsibility for that past that he molded. Inasmuch as he abandons the notion of personal responsibility for the past, he joins the camp of those characters from "The Horn of the Goat" or "The Elderly Ghost Has His Say." These are the passive nonresisters.

Responsibility is met in one of two ways throughout the poems. First, there are those who do not believe in a human being's responsibility to himself, the passive nonresisters. These people let fate and/or heredity and environment control their lives. The limited power that these people do exercise extends over their dreams, not over their accomplishments. Drunkards, old men, and bored suburbanites are included in their ranks. Secondly, there are the believers; these men force their wills on nature and their fellow men. Dreams bloom into creative action. Such men are sometimes kings and queens. Sometimes they are artists. The creators are not favorably portrayed in A Paper Horse. The rulers are masters more of terror than of their subjects' loyalty. And the artist of "Odalisque," worked as a master of his endeavor, but he failed to integrate his artistry with the rest of his existence. The Texas oil man and the judge both created a satisfactory social position for themselves, from which they exercised control. So they were rulers and

creators; each lived by rules of the marketplace rather than by his imagination: they did not dream. The courtroom, the oil fields, or the palace hall are as dreams for the rulers; for theirs is the power to dominate these places. Once human responsibility cannot encompass a domain, there is nothing left in which to trust for survival. The storm then rages.

Even for those who have power or dreams, cohabitation with the evils of existence is inescapable. The cruelty these people see is naked life. Watson tries to present no delicate mirages of beautiful being. Instead, each man must discover a tolerable route through the storm. Each man must find a paper horse. His search may lead him to denial of responsibility or loss of identity. But when these possibilities are explored in section I, they prove fruitless. Instead, each person must know brutality and injustice and learn to cope with these heavy realities. Only the daughter of "Her Father Is Drunk in the Graveyard," and Grandfather, sitting on his Sunday bench, have known and now hope to arise from such pain. She will confront no more dreams. He will confront only dreams.

The tally of empty hearts seems endless, for once again Watson tells of a man dissatisfied who feels, "There must be something more than this," even as he recounts his accumulation of wealth, women, and power. He lies next to the woman he has chosen while realizing that his apparently perfect life is incomplete:

> Everything so right I want wrong . . . .
> The worse,
> The best over, done. Every dream
> Of swimming, I swam, but the one
> Up that last black, blank sealed
> Stream.

Once again, a man dissatisfied. Once again, an anxiety about death. The interior monologue is that of the "Success" hero in Advantages of Dark, Watson's second volume. Mood seems to have changed little from the tale of the Texas oilman to this poem in section IV of the latter work. Both men are rich and renowned, and both are aware of hollowness in their lives. If the mood has shifted, it has moved to a more anxiety-laden extreme in "Success"; for the oilman could satirically laugh at the devil and himself. The hero of "Success" takes a different approach to religion:

> Once on a tour of Rome
> I saw Him swim from Chapel's roof,
> Cracked, peeling; saw angels burst
> Through wood, stone until I almost,
> Almost....No; friends, wife would grin.

From his position as a mortal man, the hero craves reassurance of unities outside his own making. Soon he will swim "Up that last black, blank sealed / Stream." He is ready to look to the supernatural for aid; yet he cannot, for he fears social ostracism. He, too, must make the move to deliverance. But still he rationalizes to himself from the "placid pond of bed,"

> Smothered in our seasonless air,
> Anchored in this tepid pond,
> In Eden, innocent, ignorant,
> Sane,
> how can I complain?

Until he realizes that he can complain, and that he must act to free himself, the hero will remain as he is. Yet perhaps nothing short of confirmed knowledge of cosmic unity can serve to satisfy this man. So he

waits for death without impatience, wishing that before the end he might find meaningfulness, or at least adventure.

Such success as this man knows is hollowed by gnawing dissatisfaction at its core. The poet feels the possibility of a void at the kernel of being. The "Voices from the Palace" speak around that void, defining by human cruelty and remorse shades of its perimeter. Were there a loving God alive in the palace world, surely the cruelty could not have impinged so greatly on the domain of His love. No one has ever proved that there is meaningfulness in existence of self, or that there is a God beyond. What do not triumph in the trial of existence, are kindness, purpose, security, and love. There has never been a guarantee of these qualities to the individual. Yet Advantages of Dark presents certain situations in which there is comfort, in which there is momentary deliverance. The solution is incomplete, but there is hope. And the hope is the harvest of those "advantages of dark."

The hero of "Success" was alone, as were even the hopeful characters from the earlier volume. The man and his daughter from "Her Father Is Drunk in the Graveyard" were each to begin new but solitary paths of existence. And the old hero of "Grandfather at the Playground during the Sabbath Hour" was not understood even by his wife. The girl of "Her Father Is Drunk" hints at the solution posed by the poet in Advantages of Dark when she says that she will take a lover brave enough to embrace reality, to conquer life. Her joy in living would correspond to his.

Human intimacy, if but momentary, allows for security, kindness, purpose, and perhaps love. A facet of character becomes identifiable as it is reflected in another's being. Total understanding between the individuals can never be, but there can be a moment of touching in the

dark. This theme is perhaps the principal one of Watson's second collection; it is most beautifully presented in the first two poems, "Advantages of Dark" and "A Woman's Question."

Once objectivity enters a human relationship, analysis of the other individual checks the possibility of spiritual union with him. Two cannot share and feel as one when each is aware of his body and mind apart. "Advantages of Dark" is the application of these principles to the lives of two lovers, one of whom remembers

> Night assembled us
> Drew my limbs to yours
> Molded us to the bed
> Clamped bed to floor
> Floor to frozen ground
> Bedding the dead
> Holding the leafless oaks
> Night spread us with black
> Seeded with stars
> To warm our bed.

Together under the black spread of night the lovers had been one, feeling the extension of their union to include their physical surroundings: bed and floor. The floor also unites with the frozen ground, which knows intimately the bodies of the dead. From stars to night, to people, bed, floor, ground, to corpses and oak roots, the world has unity.

> Until scissors of light
> Shears air from field
> Oaks from windows
> Cuts you from me
> From the bed
> From the floor
> Dissects you to particulars
> Thumbs toes knees eyes hair
> Snips you from the unborn
> The living and the dead.

Once objectivity cuts the bond of lovers, all bonding extensions to their surroundings shrivel as well. He sees her as "particulars"; now, in the mercilessly objective light, she can no longer be coextensive with himself.

Brooding upon objectification of personality is one manifestation of the sensitive man's trembling before his tendency to analyze intellectually. As a sensitive man and as a lover, the persona of "Advantages of Dark" experiences dismay at his intellectual objectification of his beloved. In the dark his mind is no longer that of the twentieth-century intellectual. Instead, he feels the unity with all of life that characterizes the primitive mind. Trees, earth, a woman, bodies of the dead, are all equally a part of the night's union. To the primitive,

> . . . nature becomes one great society, the society of life. Man is not endowed with outstanding rank in this society . . . . Life possesses the same religious dignity in its humblest and in its highest forms. Men and animals, animals and plants are all on the same level.[4]

The poet's choice of words indicates the conviction from which his persona speaks. His morning light is as much a harbinger of a lovely day as would be the invasion of the Mongol Horde.

> The sun
> Through cold slabs of air
> Over a slice of field
> Between prongs of leafless oaks
> Through the double-glassed windows
> Through thick oil-heated air
> The sun snaps at you
> Asleep on the bed
> On the tan rug
> On the oak floor.
> Light thrusts
> At your body
> Chalks flesh in parts

Snips shoulders
Neck
Unstitches hair from skull
Shears head from pillow
Cuts out eyes
Divides your lips
Splits you from me.

As her features are distinguished, the fusion spell of darkness is broken. Split from each other, each is forced to view the other apart, objectively--in the most fundamental sense of that word. As her physical being is defined, she is less a part of him; and, therefore, "Light holds / More mystery than dark." There is no mystery to the dark bond of night. Only in the morning-after analysis of the miracle does each participant come to doubt his experience. And, until darkness once again descends upon the pair, each must live in doubt and distance from the other.

This poem is despairing in that the time of contentment is limited. Yet certainly the reality of such a time is affirmed as it has not been before by Watson. The meaning of the poem's title is self-evident. As the theme of "A Paper Horse" touches the central ideas of the poems in the book by that name, so the theme of "Advantages of Dark" touches the meanings of poems in the second book.

One question abstracted from the theme of "Advantages of Dark" involves the possibility of having meaningful intimacy, when the person with whom contact is made is not known sentimentally as well as physically. The poetic dialogue, "A Woman's Question," depicts the encounter of a man and a woman who are lovers only physically. The woman's question is a familiar one: "Will anyone ever come to understand me?" Her partner's answer may find voice only in his mind: whether or not he actually speaks the words aloud is unclear. First he speaks of "the character of trees," which he considers odd because they are dressed richly in hot summer and

stand naked in frozen snow. His personification of the trees includes the fact that pine and maple argue with the wind, "whose nature is perverse / To us," about modes of dress. Then he goes on to suggest that the union of his lover with himself, if it be emotional, is beautiful as a part of existence. They cannot control the perversity of wind or circumstance so as to direct their paths to meet again. But is there not beauty without understanding, just because they are together now?

"Joined so tightly that no wind seeps between us,
I look down at a stranger
As you look up at a stranger.
I have never understood one Fall leaf,
The wind, or why we caress,
Is it not enough for a stranger
That the Maple tree, that you and I exist?
That on this late Fall night the wind
Has stript the three of us
All in the same season?
That we flutter in darkness without reason?
That tomorrow the wind in intensity
And direction may or may not alter?
Is it not enough
That we simply are
And cannot feel the wind blowing?
Though we are unknown and unknowing
That we are for a moment touching?"

Thus the question is provided while the answer is not. Wind symbolizes perversity; no wind can separate them. They do not even feel its blowing. For that moment they have no destiny, no fear of the future; they may remain together, but that possibility is far less relevant than the fact of their present caress. Existence is validated as a good if moments such as this one occur. Here they have a unity with nature, as do the lovers in "Advantages of Dark"; the people and the trees are stript together. Human muscles flutter in cadence with the last autumn

leaves. All that is assertive in this paragraph is assayed critically, questioned, by the poet in the context of his poem. Is all of this now enough to make life worthwhile?

The answer must be no. For the man who has written of a queen who took many lovers, and whose husband eventually butchered her, cannot believe that there is sufficient gratification in physical intimacy to balance the ugliness of a life such as his queen's. If she felt amply compensated, there is no hint in "Voices" of such compensation. While "A Woman's Question" stands in testimony to the possible relief derived from sex, such poems as "A Second Look at Veronese's 'Mars and Venus United by Love'" and "Nude Film at a Drive-in" demonstrate that the act of love necessitates certain attitudes.

Watson briefly describes Veronese's painting and comments, "What a silly botch . . . . I think, Old Master, your painting lewd." And why does the poet think the painting "lewd"? Because the lovers are not aware of what they are doing. They know that they fondle, laugh, and gasp; but they experience no emotion, they recognize no beauty.

> Standing Venus does not watch
> The seated dandy fumble at her crotch,
> And he disdains to view her nude . . . .
> United? Nonsense. Each is alone.

The poet says, "The scene seems frivolous," and this pronouncement is the key to understanding his attitude toward sex. Lovers simply cannot take the act of love for granted.[5]

As long as sex is recognized as an act of union between individuals, the subject cannot be vile or lewd for Mr. Watson. He tells of young

man leering at a "nude Film at a Drive-in." He counsels those men that the actual experience of being with a woman would be almost boring to watch; yet the act is powerful and pure as lightning:

> The expected vile is innocent,
> Almost beautiful. The modest
> Beauty of bodies shorn of such
> Vehemence of clothes becomes
> Tedious to watch
> as to watch
> Encircling scrub pines burst luminous
> In shots of lightning, dry and mute.

Watson's glorification of physical love is well put. His most erotic poems are among his best. Yet his treatment of sex is argumentative, defensive. The defense is obvious and beautiful in "A Woman's Question"; the defense is obvious and didactic in "Nude Film." Today perhaps most people neither neurotic nor celibate share the poet's attitude: beauty in sexual union is one of the "givens" of life. Other such boons are available too: Advantages of Dark deals with some of them. The book is much more optimistic than is A Paper Horse. But the universe of pain sketched in the first book is not painted over in tender colors by the second work. And the questions of "A Woman's Question" resound continually. The redemptive aspects of existence must always be considered alongside the more damning ones.

Those redeeming aspects of existence touched upon in Watson's poetry all relate to his theme of the darkness as a secret place in which private indulgence of peace can be had despite the torment of the glaring world of light. As the rapture of sexual pleasure is not tied to emotional processes, other dark rapturous experiences are also free from mental in-

volvement. Darkness smears delineations into oneness. Two poems in section I further treat these "Advantages of Dark."

The first of these poems is "Going Nowhere Alone at Night." As in "A Paper Horse" and "Success," an insomniac is the principal character, but he is not lying in bed. Instead, he has chosen to drive his car, to watch his headlights reveal the yellow autumnal leaves. These leaves, the trees, the stars he mentions seem to be used much as they were in "A Woman's Question" or "Advantages of Dark." Again the poem is about love. He parallels his life to that of the "half-dressed" trees, for he is rooted in bed, "A black tree in rows, unmoving, / Of black trees." He is like the trees, yet they and the scene are not quite as beautiful as they once were. Although the yellow leaves are more beautiful this year, their luxury is incomplete.

> O the stars
> Warm, luminous as....It's wrong
> With half-dressed trees so lovely now
> As you and they were and all are.

The scene perhaps recalls another time, when some other person was an integral part of the night. Drifting in solitude like a leaf, the narrator is a fragment of an incomplete scene. Here darkness is still a secret place, albeit a more lonely one than it has been in the love poems. Darkness welcomes the drifter to merge with the shapes under the black canopy of night. Some of the advantages of dark are that it soothes and hides, as a bandage soothes and hides a healing wound.

Or darkness can be a time of jubilation. The season is winter now, and the man speaking is old. He remembers an encounter with a young

woman, "a movie queen half my age," who excited him as does first snow. The frozen indications of winter stimulate him physically, as though the winter marked a time of renewed virility. The snows cleanse and transform the landscape: naked, twisted branches are newly draped in beauty, and their age is hidden. The old man finds "First Snow" a cause to rejoice:

> Why do cold
> And snow and ice excite me so?
> Tonight in darkness I will roll
> Between stiff pronged pines on snow
> To celebrate . . . I don't know what.
> But I love to live where seasons
> Are erratic as dreams, and exalt
> Me, my flesh. First snow, a clean slate.

Here the "pronged" trees are not personified or animated; they are phallic symbols, representative of the nature of the old man's celebration. He is one of the men who has elevated sex in life. But in old age perhaps he comes to see the irony of joy in a moment of darkness. For soon he goes to black eternity. And if he does not realize the irony of the words he chooses for an epitaph, others will:

> In winter I was born and wed.
> At death for flowers let the boys
> Ice-ball bomb my box: a bobsled
> My hearse, my tomb a block of ice;
>
> And on that block carve out a girl:
> Below her cut the words, "Let's go,
> What are you waiting for?" Let's go.
> We melt together like the snow,

Watson treats death often as a release. In sexual and in mortal con-

summation there is a "melting together."

Many times, however, death is not a casual extinguishing but a tortured, forced parting, one of the most horrible of man's expectations. Watson must have smiled as he wrote "First Snow," and that smile would define one of two attitudes. Either he anticipates death calmly and smiles meekly; or he lashes out at the futility of life climaxed by such a blank termination and smiles sardonically like a skull. Knowing that the poet dreamt of burning bodies atop a golden roof in "A Paper Horse" suggests that his grin could not reflect meek acceptance.

But neither is the grin clearly sardonic, for there is ambiguity of theme and tone in Advantages of Dark which is less present in A Paper Horse. The atmosphere of the first book was sometimes comic but generally bleak. The poet was good-natured in his confrontation of dismal reality: the hope he held out was sparse, evidenced faintly in a girl, her father, and someone else's grandfather. No one else from the Paper Horse world was even remotely at peace. In Advantages of Dark the characters may be more mentally stable and emotionally adept, but the nature of their tranquility is momentary. The questions of universal justice go unanswered. Even the character of darkness becomes ambiguous. There are few advantages to the darkness hovering over the city as Night comes "In the Drugstore."

Five nights before Christmas two "girls," fast becoming too old for that classification, play with each other and a druggist in his store. Both are lonely and crave loudness or color, noise, action. Their philosophy of life is simple; the poet adequately states their goals in his italicized refrain: "Something to do, to do, to do, to do." They tease the druggist, pulling his tie and taunting his masculinity, shouting,

"Old lecher, old goat," as they dance before them. The girls are forced to leave the store at closing hour, after which

> Two girls kick at the streets,
> Frown in windows
> Until their feet hurt worse than their hearts.
> To do, to do, to do, do, do.

And as they separate to retire, each finds the comfort of sleep postponed by a consideration of her future:

> Each peers into a black sheet, her heart.
> The black sheet rises, and each trembling asks,
> "Is there a black panther loose in the dark?"
> No. The black sheet risen shows
> A widow sipping tea
> Watching boxes wrapped for grandchildren
> Under the Christmas tree.
> A red squirrel stares from the almond-laden sill.
> Each sighs in sleep, "Is that widow me?"

Perhaps this intimate glimpse into the dreams of the women is the high point of the poem. As widows they had found men, they may have found love; in any case, they have given birth and watched their children grow. And as old women they don veils of desolation, as in youth they took the habits of desperation. As it was in the beginning, it now is in the end; each world being tempered by loneliness without end, and colored by black.

No sooner are the lives of these ladies sketched than the poem's focal point switches from them. Human interests are put aside as Watson concerns himself with Nature. While the girls sleep,

> . . . Night stays up pacing the drugstore floor,
> Frowns at the book, the magazine rack.
> "I've read you all," says Night.

"For something to do
I'll dial WEather on the phone:
Night here, send me rush
Slush, sleet, then snow, and hard, hard blow."

The artificial internal rhyming of snow and blow is not concealed by the shock effect of naturalistic Night acting with indifference to humankind. Watson is often wise to avoid rhyme, although in this poem Night's fanciful character is boosted by his speech. The next section of the poem reads more smoothly, as Night's storm kills an elm which proves the agony of death by crashing through the drugstore window and smashing all within.

Night, alive by a miracle,
Packs the one unbroken toy,
A black panther, in his bag,
Jumps over the fountain, the elm,
Black hat pulled down tight
Against the spreading light,
Hums,
Something to do, to do, to do, do, do.

Thus the ironic tale is complete: man and nature struggle separately for something to do, each unaware of the other's struggle. Neither man nor nature is well pacified in the scope of the poem, for neither achieves prolonged satisfaction of the desire to do.

Other parallels are made between the girls and Night through a series of sounds and obscure images. The stated hue of the poem is black as it manifests itself in the panther, the hearts of the girls, and the body of Night. Yet the mood of the poem is far too vibrant to be uniformly dark. The resounding beat of the refrain creates, by synaesthesia, strobelight flashes on the mind's visual projection area. The black beast which is a toy as the druggist winds it becomes an object of psychological dread,

as the girls pause before sleep to ask if panthers run loose in the dark.[6] In the scene Night packs in his bag the panther, again a toy but identified with the Night; not only do the toy and Night escape the general ruin of the store, but also both are black. The black panther links the world of men to the world of nature, of Night. What the significance of the black beast is cannot be determined--other than that it is an object sometimes controlled, sometimes feared by human beings, while it seems easily and always under the control of Night. Naturalism, emphasizing the indifferent power of nature, is one big theme in this poem: Night is the embodiment of a disordered, anxious world.

The chaos of "In the Drugstore," teamed with the hollow achievement of "Success," reflect an attitude much in contrast to that of the love poems in Advantages of Dark. While the mood of the desperate poems is quite dissimilar to that of the milder poems, a loose unity of theme allows both desperate and mild statements to be consistent in the body of the poet's work, for variation in mood accompanies variation in the duration of time that a character is viewed. "In the Drugstore" presents the lives of the girls as they live today and as they will live years later when they are widows. The "Success" story likewise treats an extended period in the life of the poem's hero. When a given life is inspected, two of the defining characteristics thereof will always be sad irony and surrender to the deterministic strength of nature or social control. Sad irony manifests itself in the "Drugstore" parallel between the girls' boredom and the boredom of Night. In each case, ennui led to escapism. The forces of determinism that manipulate man's life include any part of his environment; thus the social life of the "Success" hero inhibited his achieving peace of mind. Over a lifetime every man will eventually

bow to circumstance; his attitude of surrender or the actual progress of the events involved make sadly ironic the premises from which he began.

Yet this view of life can be reconciled with the victories presented in the love poems. While the span of life cannot be a lovely dream, certain moments between birth and death are worthwhile. If there is no reason for being, and the universe is absurd, neither reason nor absurdity is relevant in an emotional or physical union of the moment. This union may be all that man has; perhaps it is also all that he needs.

However much brief satisfaction may appease, however much psychological or mystical significance union of body or soul may claim, there yet remains a dearth of hope for the individual in Watson's poems. A lone man's volition is crushed by the universe; he is unable to predict the advent of a paper horse from the storm of confusion that is his life.

The dramatic monologues of Watson's shorter poems usually treat only a few intense moments of the personae's lives. Such a stylistic format does not lend itself to wrestling with the possible solutions to the problems that the poet crystallizes in these brief episodes. Mr. Watson has attempted two longer poems, each of which comprise the fifth sections of his books. "Watson on the Beach" is the last work in A Paper Horse, as is "The City of Passaic" the concluding poem of Advantages of Dark. The longer poems are divided into sections so as to reveal progression in time and to delineate variation of theme within the single poems. These poems perhaps best demonstrate Mr. Watson's ability to wield ideas as he associates themes or motifs with certain concrete references, symbols, within the poems. For example, "Watson on the Beach" is unintelligible as a factual account; only by critical appraisal and interpretation of certain events and objects repeated in context can congruency and meaning

be discovered in the poem. These events and objects designate not only literal happenings or substance; they refer to conceptual matter as well. Such words are symbols, characterized by "being more in intention than they are in existence."[7] The interpretation of the symbol cannot rest upon adherence to any given theory of symbols; rather, the theory must arise naturally from the appropriateness of the interpretative attempt.[8]

"Watson on the Beach" purports to be the interior monologue of the poet himself. Within the body of the poem there are seven parts, each one treating an aspect of the central theme, mortality. The poem embraces an almost religious atmosphere, appropriate to its theme. Before the commencement of the first part, the poet clearly presents the setting, introduces the characters, and adopts the quizzical tone that continues throughout. He explains that

> Some customs stronger than church-going wheels us each summer
> From city to shore where we strip habits of the year,
> Declare bodies for sun, tides to wash.
> We arrive not knowing why we came, except for change;
> As last year, years before, an uncle less, a child more--
> the same.

The family's cyclic return to the shore is ritualistic, a custom repeated without question over the years. Ritual, religion, death have been concerns of Mr. Watson in many of his poems. From its outset "Watson on the Beach" prepares the reader to proceed with care.

Two paradoxes manifest themselves particularly in this poem. The nature of these paradoxes should be made clear before the poem itself is examined. Each paradox relates to the poet's earlier work and to the thematic content of his poetry as a whole. The hero of "Success" felt a flash of desire tug him toward the formal religion represented by the

figure of Christ painted on a church ceiling in Rome. Paintings and pilgrimages are the trappings of institutionalized religion; for public, sensuous appeal is a defining characteristic of social religion.[9] The Watson family's ritualistic return to the beach fits within the boundaries that define formalized religion.

The theme of "Watson on the Beach" is mortality, a subject that is no stranger to the majority of the poet's output. That "last black, blank sealed / Stream," which the "Success" hero so fears, is presented over and over again as oilman, old drunkard, judge, Tibetans, all confront death. The reality of life's cessation is forgotten in moments of dark union when all of nature is joined in unbroken continuity.

The paradoxes manifested in "Watson on the Beach" concern the facts of formal religion and death in their relation to myth. The primitive acceptance of life's unity by the persona of "Advantages of Dark" is mythical in attitude, for mythology

> . . . really cannot be traced, like ritual, to an origin in anything like a "religious feeling," either of dread, mystic veneration, or even festal excitement. Ritual begins in motor attitudes which, however personal, are at once externalized and so made public. Myth begins in fantasy, which may remain tacit for a long time; for the primary form of fantasy is the entirely subjective and private phenomenon of dream.[10]

The dreamers of the shorter poems were makers of myth. They created worlds of fantasy not from religious inspiration but from private musing. The lovers who felt their union to be a part of the continuity of nature participated in naive, mythopoeic acceptance of life's unity. The first paradox is that Watson's major poem dealing with man's significance in the face of death should be encompassed in the framework of ritual, a

post-mythological development in religious consciousness, while almost all the other poems are full of fantasy, myth-oriented, rather than inclined toward the formal. The assumption that Mr. Watson's principal concern is with the non-formalized aspects of religion seems valid in the light of the quantity of his work which tacitly accepts the mythical consciousness, the consciousness of the dreamer which is like the realm of myth in that

> . . . the world can assume a new face at any moment; for it is the emotion of the moment which determines this facial expression. In love and hate, in hope and fear, in joy and terror the features of reality are transformed. Any one of these emotions can give rise to a God-of-the-moment in a new . . . configuration.[11]

The motor attitudes of ritual, organized religion, are less familiar to the train of Mr. Watson's thought than is the imaginative freedom of myth.

The second paradox relates closely to the first. Assuming that Watson is at home in myth's realms of momentary emotions with natural continuity overall, his anxiety about death must be viewed with curiosity: the primitive mind is at peace with death. The mind of the man who knows all of nature as he knows his lover's embrace should not hesitate to embrace all life's processes, including death. In a system of mythology,

> . . . if anything is in need of proof, it is not the fact of immortality but the fact of death . . . . In a certain sense the whole of mythical thought may be interpreted as a constant and obstinate negation of the phenomenon of death. By virtue of this conviction of the unbroken unity and continuity of life, myth has to clear away this phenomenon.[12]

Perhaps the preceding clause explains the poet's continued emphasis on

mortality: he is at once a believer in unity of life and a man aware of the injustices of suffering and of death. He is caught thrashing between the poles of acceptance and denial. In his thrashing he hopes to grasp a rationale by which he can reconcile the warring convictions.

The struggle for reconciliation is embodied in "Watson on the Beach" not only in that the poet's thoughts on mortality are presented but also in that the poem itself is a struggle in language. The words and form of the poem are complex, mirroring the mental conflict of the poet, reaching as incomplete a resolution as does their author. Carl G. Jung believes symbols and metaphors are outgrowths of the poet's unconscious mind, that in poetry there is

> . . . a certain strangeness of form and shape, thoughts that can only be apprehended by intuition, a language pregnant with meanings, expressions that would have the value of genuine symbols, because they are the best possible expressions of something as yet unknown--bridges thrown out towards an invisible shore.[13]

The poem's themes are indeed thoughts best "apprehended by intuition," for intuition is the link between empirical reality and the conceptual sphere which is the home of metaphysical speculation. Symbols are the words of the language of intuition, for they too link the empirical with a much larger realm of concepts and emotions.

The nature of symbolic language makes paraphrase extremely difficult, perhaps a heresy. Without capsulizing each verse, a general description may clarify the action of the poem. Watson first squats on shells, facing the sea. Then he allows his son to bury him in sand and to ride atop his head. Partially underground, the poet observes light fog on the horizon and listens to the sounds of the surf. He sees teenagers pass with port-

able radios, and rushes from his sand cover to help a young girl unable to cope with the surf. But a youthful lifeguard reaches her first. The sequence of time is broken shortly after the girl's rescue; a series of isolated events follows. The poet looks toward his wife with admiration. Someone photographs Watson and his family. Watson swims and remembers a submarine shelling a burning ship. He rides breakers and watches people on the beach. Fog rolls in; the Watsons dress to leave the strand; fog rolls out. That night the town celebrates Independence Day--under blankets the families peer up at fireworks. At last home in bed, the poet offers a prayer before falling asleep.

Well, the Fourth of July was not very eventful that year. Mr. Watson did not write a very enthralling story, and his transition from one event to the next is sporadic, jerky. His thoughts follow in no logical order; but there are two types of language, one not dealing in logic or rational concepts. The language of the poetic imagination is emotional; its purpose is not to "express thoughts or ideas, but feelings and affections."[14] However, traceable progression of thought is lost in free-flowing poetic imagination. The impulse to unify by feeling is one of the salient features of the primitive mind.[15] And that mind makes no sharp distinction "between real and possible, between actual and ideal things."[16] The poet must make distinct the issues confused by the primitive while maintaining the same intensity of feeling. Early man's perplexity resulted from his inability to differentiate between "being and meaning," which were "constantly confused; a symbol is looked upon as if it were endowed with magical or physical powers."[17]

The hands of the poet must control the symbol, employ it with a sense of its limitation as well as its extension. The unchained mental response

evoked by a symbol is a threat to the intended theme of the poet, for thematic growth is not so much expansive as directed toward a point. The symbol's stem is an utterance, but its meanings spread like the leaves and sprouts of a wild vine. The poet prunes the vine and directs its growth. The meaning attributed to any symbol reverberates almost endlessly:

> Symbols only "mean" if they stand in a correlative point of function which, however, can again become the correlative point to another point, and so forth. The continuous change of the meaning of the object and point of correlation, which can almost be compared to an endless mathematical series, lies in the analogous character of the symbol.[18]

One means of confining the meaning of a symbol is to guard against use of words which have previously been broadly employed for various effects. Watson joins the majority of poets of this century in creating private symbols, distinguishing his work by personal references rather than those used traditionally or naturally.[19] In other epochs writers have made freer use of "natural" symbols, such as a path for man's life; or they have borrowed from "traditional" stock which accumulates in every culture, taking the form of lillies for death or ice for chastity.[20]

In his poetic treatment of mortality Watson mentions no paths, no lillies, no graves. However, his first few verses are a lucid statement of what hazily follows later. Part I of "Watson on the Beach" is a plain pronouncement of the poet's apprehensions about dying as well as the beginning of his description of the day's events:

> I squat on skeletons spat from the sea;
> Stare at water, water's dead.

Near mounds of jellyfish, my flesh
Bears all the puffy age I dread,
Yet an asteroid in my hand retains its points
And clams can stuff their flesh inside their bones,
Then lock their joints.
Tough luck that I am a man
So gone to flesh.

The product of his manhood, a young son, buries the poet and sits on his head. "All life squats on powdery skulls of the dead."

The second part of the poem traces Watson's thoughts as he closes his eyes. In its complexity of association the poem is like a requiem, combining many chords and progressions, all expressions of the central theme. One ironic progression is the fact that Watson's reflections on death begin as he is half-buried, a victim of his son's interment. The poet reinforces his central idea subtly throughout. For instance, the theme is reiterated as the poet looks toward the horizon and queries

. . . who can mark where beach or sea begins?
Death and life meet in this gray smear,
Shift, cross, for a moment, as lovers, are the same.

The requiem is Schoenbergesque: there is no refrain, just variations of a polytonal row. One phrase has not yet faded from the synaesthetic screen when another, the motif yet more differently arranged, breaks forth; no sooner does the poet mark the horizon and proclaim its likeness to death and life than his eyes close, blocking the reality of beach, son, and sand, and allowing for a new treatment of theme, a daydream behind closed eyes:

. . . a wrong turn
Off the highway, a dark dead end.

My motor fails, mind goes flat.
I wait for the giant wrecker to come,
Find and tow me home.

I wait listening: a shell,
I hold myself to my ear,
Yet I hear nothing
But motors of the sea,
Wheels quarreling
Before wheels of man.

The motor is his life; a shell is his life. The sea is also alive by motors, and both man and sea vibrate as wheels turn within. The universe of man and sea is alive with sound to which the poet listens through the shell, which he calls himself and which tradition calls the receptacle of the ocean's voice. The unity of nature is exemplified in the balance of tones gathered from the many motors creating music of the spheres. Watson's mind becomes intoxicated as he listens:

Sounds fill me until only sound exists--
Sound sun and stars once made,
And light recorded on our sea
Is now replayed from water's memory,
Record of our seed in sound,
Around, around,
World lost, world found.

Poetic insight is the transducer by which light and sound energies are mutually interchanged. The motor produces sound, which is transformable into light. Sound, light, and the mechanical workings of the motor teem with life's energy. All forms of energy are interrelated and indestructible. As long as life is recorded in its stages, and transformations from form to form occur, there is a discovery of new life as well as a loss of the old. The cyclic process seems ordered: "Around, around, / World lost, world found."

Yet sometimes sound and light cease abruptly. With the cessation, harmony ends and questioning begins:

> Do dead stars fallen from their tracks,
> Extinguished notes, heaped shells
> On dead ends of the universe
> Fill with water's sound, the past, their past within,
> Fill until they are nothing yet everything,
> Audible motion that will never still?

In nature as a whole when life terminates there is no obvious germination elsewhere. No obvious balance is maintained. Mankind is victim to the blight of extinction. But although human flesh is weak, man does have the means to assure that his life will not pass without record, for progeny guarantees continuation of human life, if belief is an inadequate assurance of immortality. Watson is acutely aware of the past and future potential of his family. Miniscule is the significance of one life, but less so if that life is a link in a perpetual chain. The human body is not tough like the echinoderm's spiny skeleton, nor does he possess the regenerative powers of that animal which render it potentially immortal. He is neither starfish nor star.

> . . . Watson,
> Holding a starfish in your hand,
> You are no star and never were.
> You are no one in particular.
> What son, indeed? What seed?
> Your name will never tell.
> You are everything and an empty shell.
> What son begat Watson begat Watson?
> A seed, a pod, a sound,
> And one by one they drowned.

Not only is man insignificant, he is also impotent to hear completely the

harmony of which he is a part. Perhaps there is hope in the fact that other ears are stronger:

> Dogs and sonar towers on the beach
> Hear sounds your ears will never reach.

The motor of life may revolve at a frequency too high to be heard by the human ear, but it may be revolving nonetheless.

While the poem's third part is a straightforward account of a girl's rescue, waxing theatrical only as Watson observes the firm flesh of youth, the fourth part is a highly hypothetical dream sequence. The dreamer is not Watson but the sea, which "rolls in white-sheeted sleep." The water becomes the poet's unconscious mind, into which he would reach for solutions to his doubts. Watson swims in "the sea's dream of itself."

> Deep in its mind
> I swim toward darkness,
> A sunken island
> That at night when I swim in sleep
> Seems at bottom of sleep,
> Yet awake I cannot recall
> Ever docking at that island
> We think submerged,
> That island which may, as memory,
> Be a mirror on the floor
> Where waver from above the sea
> What grains of light
> Wheel spinning through topless space
> And wheeling each grain is
> A broiling contention that is a star,
> Wild in self war as war on space.

Again the star, permanence, appears. Light above the sea spins through topless space and reflects from a sunken island sought by man in day, lying under every dream at night. The light reflected is from the

star, a mass of grains, "in broiling contention . . . Wild in self war." Perhaps this dark substratum of dream, the island goal of the swimmer, is a species communal repository of the truths Watson seeks, for he compares it to memory in nature. Every human being partakes of a primordial collective unconscious, in which rest unspoken replies to queries of the race as to its origins and significance.[21]

The content of these lines is difficult to assess. Yet there emerges a sense of what the poet would communicate through his confused account. His symbols "invite consideration" and allow the observer to act as interpreter.[22] Here island, star, and sleep are "words on paper; but the throughts aroused are not thoughts 'of' the words, but of other things which the words stand for."[23] The best guess as to what these words do "stand for" is derived in consideration of their context. The island is loosely equated with hidden truths; the swimming, with a search; the star, with a source of knowledge. But these associations of word and idea are still guesses. The process of symbol formulation is largely dependent upon the "personal interests and intentions of the poet."[24] When properly used, the symbol

> . . . means, refers, awakens insight, in and through the emotions which it engenders, and that so far as the emotion is not aroused the full insight is correspondingly not awakened.[25]

The trouble with the private symbolism of current literature is that "full insight" is never going to be awakened by obscurely personal references. Few contemporary poets will attract the critical talent and curiosity necessary to properly interpret their symbols. Yet the usage of words is such that their meaning is not lost to the reader.

> We may either use words for the sake of the references they promote, or we may use them for the sake of the attitudes and emotions which ensue. Many arrangements of words evoke attitudes without any reference being required en route. They operate like musical phrases. But usually references are involved as conditions for or stages in the ensuing development of attitudes. Yet it is still the attitudes not the references which are important.[26]

The obscurity of Watson's dream of the sea creates an attitude of reverie. His verse tone shifts to become appropriate to an episode of war. He tells of a sailor wheeling to stab his mate in order to procure the last seat on a lifeboat as their burning ship sinks, torpedoed by a submarine.

> Wind, water, fire accelerate
> What gas of space began,
> And man must imitate
> A glass that lightning makes of sand.

The "glass" made of sand by lightning is a mirror. Man's actions mirror nature's. From time immemorial, when "gas of space" began life, violence has been the watchword in a struggle for survival. The losers rest silently; Watson's dead sailor floats in the sunken ship, his "burning . . . / Green mirrors of stars, / Sodden flames that hum / What we know at heart, the heart." Perhaps "what we know at heart" is the treasure of the sunken island; the treasure now most closely approached in sleep will be reached in death. The dead eyes flame like stars, forever, silently keeping their secret. This part of the poem ends as Watson calls for the blessing of Black Angels, fish perhaps, that had passed the porthole from which the dead sailor peers. At last Watson emerges from the ocean's dream as he rises from the water

. . . awkward as a submarine,
Above my own, the ocean's dream.
Too deep for me this foreign element.

The fifth and sixth parts of "Watson on the Beach" are less deep. They show the poet at play and take the family from the beach at close of day. Riding breakers into the sand and swimming out beyond their white crests again, Watson feels himself

Swing through creation,
All past, the sun,
Wheel back and out
And back again
Until all motion,
Time,
I am its pendulum.

The verse of parts V and VI is imagistic, cleverly poetic rather than closely related to theme. Life is fun, even if it is not forever.

Part VII concludes the poem as the family lies under blankets to cheer the night's fireworks. A fire is lighted on a boat and put to sea as part of the celebration. Afterwards, the Watsons drive home,

Where we shall bed, boarded and bricked
From all elements but one,
That all I father, O father, and the sea fathers
Are: Fog flows past our screen, the glass,
Brings, through our window frame, a burning boat.

That element is mortality; the boat exists in memory, a twin of the sunken ship that held the sailor's body--burning like the vessel launched by Vikings to carry the body of their dead champion to his final rest.

"Watson on the Beach" might be termed a "philosophical poem." Incom-

plete in its resolution, inexact in its presentation of theory, the poem has still achieved Watson's goal; for when a poet approaches a philosophical idea as subject of his verse, he does not intend to debate the issues involved in that idea. "He accepts it and exhibits its emotional value and imaginative possibilities."[27]

All good poetry explores the "emotional value and imaginative possibilities" of its theme. The poet creates an emotional atmosphere in the poem that gives each work an individual vitality. The reader leaves the poem perhaps unable to recall verses verbatim, but always remembering the mood that expanded throughout each stanza and grew to characterize the poem as a whole. A symbol is more in intention than in existence.[28] The same is true of a poem. Language is comprised of words which are symbolic forms, laden with meanings that spread like ripples from a rock thrown into a pool. A poem is a symbolic form as well.[29] Because the poem assumes one character, a life of its own, it can be remembered as would be an emotive utterance or any other word. The strength of impact of a poem is directly proportional to the vividness of the "virtual" life created within its framework.

> To be imaginatively coherent, the "world" of a poem must be made out of events that are in the imaginative mode--the mode of naive experience, in which action and feeling, sensory value and moral value, causal connection and symbolic connection, are still undivorced. For the primary illusion of literature, the semblance of life, is abstracted from immediate, personal life . . . .[30]

The "mode of naive experience" that characterizes imagination and creates the semblance of "immediately personal" life is closely akin to the world of myth. Myth and imaginative poetry handle no theoretical explana-

tions abstracted from objective observation.[31] "The first inquiry into the literal truth of a myth marks the change from poetic to discursive thinking."[32] In like fashion, the world of the poem is no place for inquiry into literal truth. In the mythopoeic or poetic world view, the "distinction between the real and the imagined is not made."[33]

Watson combine myth and poetic imagination in "The City of Passaic," the long poem which concludes Advantages of Dark. This poem resembles "Voices from the Palace" in that each of its seven parts deals with a different person or event, and only when the parts are considered together does a unified account take form. The story is simple: the son of the King of Gods ravishes the wrong woman in his attempt to beget a son. The immigrant woman he had intended as his partner is an old widow who sews at a factory and steals coal from near a railway trestle so that her home may be warm. The rendezvous occurs one day when the widow, too tired to work, had sent her daughter Stella to the factory in her stead. Stella, a holy girl, tells of her day's work:

> I am a girl in a kerchief
> In Momma's old black coat.
> All day I've done her work
> At the factory by the tracks;
> I did not speak to the workmen
> Because Anna told me what men do.
> Next year I go to a convent,
> Or maybe a nurse in white.
> I will not be like Momma,
> And sew in a dirty factory . . . .

Stella's characterization of herself reveals a girl self-conscious of her virtue, a girl chaste and remote from the world. She compares herself to her sister, Anna, who is a blossoming cocotte, the perfect fruition of Passaic society. In contrast, Stella's society is that of the hermit;

her accustomed company knows no human frailty:

> Last fast day I took no food,
> Not even a slice of gum.
> Down on my knees, I told my beads,
> While Anna she smoked and drank a coke.
> In bed to me the voice of Mary said,
> "Stella,
> You ate no food, you drank no water,
> Stella, you are my blessed daughter."

Perhaps the girl preens her soul as her sister preens her body. Yet of the women introduced in this poem, she is the most appropriate choice to bear the "architect" of a new world. Ironically, however, her conception results from a mistake on the part of the son of the King of Gods. Stella's sexual partner is no gentle deity but a brutal realist who sees their union as a fulfilling and violent moment in time. Before the act, he thinks,

> Bend to me old seamstress in your kerchief
> By the railroad track
> In the whistling six o'clock dark.
> Lie on your back
> In your perpetual black dress,
> Lie in our inheritance, cinders
> On the track. Teach me your tongue,
> Scream it out
> Until the train's one eye comes.
> Bless my rape, bless our Paradise,
> Our only world, last world, Passaic.
> Remember old mother in your bleeding womb,
> Scream your story in my ear.

His mistaken violation of Stella means that the child will be half the product of her youth and piety. The rapist had thought of his intended victim as "Memory, / Old mad mother in your shawl . . . ." Memory's daughter is neither mad nor old. Her life is directed; somehow

the mistake seems hopeful. As the last poem in Watson's latter volume, "The City of Passaic" voices meek optimism. However, nowhere does the Watsonian Weltanshauung glimmer very brightly.

Mr. Watson's work is childlike in some ways. His observation of life is constantly wide-eyed and fresh. When he sees beauty he does not grasp at it; when he sees ugliness he does not grow bitter. Watson is curious rather than philosophical. Sometimes he seems a curiosity himself rather than a serious poet, for what other poet would dare publish a line like his, "While Anna she smoked and drank a coke"? There is a sparkling streak of humor running through a great part of his work. He embraces living--laughing, crying, or smiling like a ten-year-old. His subjects are varied though his themes are few; unending is his repertoire of inventive ways to restate a theme. Neither a master of language nor the maintainer of mental wells too deep to measure, Mr. Watson is an entertaining, enthusiastic man. He's so precious!

His work is not atypical in its similarity to myth or its use of symbol and metaphor. The language of a poet places him in the position of creator of myth, a role implicit in the nature of imaginative endeavor. The language he employs is emotive because a poem represents an emotional unit, a symbolic form. Metaphor speaks a sentimental tongue that no discursive ramblings can emulate; metaphoric thinking is mythic thinking, the product of a time when science had not reared language to intellectual sophistication. The form of a poem and its content are cemented by the association of each form and content to symbol, metaphor, image, and myth. Perhaps modern man needs myth to satisfy a thirst for sentiment, or to answer questions which are without the realm of scientific knowledge.[34] Poetry may quench the thirst: as a communicator, the poet is like a priest

who not only interprets myths but who creates them.

As a poet Robert Watson is both a giant and a dwarf. He stands tall as creator of verse which speaks his themes. The individual poems form themselves into mental units within the reader's consciousness; each work is a symbol of its theme. Together the themes delineate a world view and reflect some of the poet's personality. The composite of Watson's verse has a tone that reflects, perhaps, his own acceptance of life. The poems are myths, each of which demonstrates a principle of the poet's world view. As the creator of form from the chaos of random words and ideas Watson is a giant: he has made both poetry and myth.

Yet the man is dwarfed by the very nature of his endeavor. The idiom through which Robert Watson works, poetry, is independent in its life. A poem must survive separation from its creator. The poet-creator has made a world in which his personal part is finite. Like a deistic god he created: his creation worked without him; for he had provided the world with its own deities and symbols of reference. Image and metaphor, symbol and myth, are eternal in meaning while a man's stance on issues mental and spiritual will vary. So the god dies while his work cannot. Yet this work is the product of imaginative endeavor, metaphoric thinking, on the part of the poet. The process of creation is the bridge which spans poet and verse: the twain cannot part.

FOOTNOTES

1 Austin Warren and Rene Wellek, Theory of Literature, (New York, 1956), p. 186.

2 Philip Wheelwright, The Burning Fountain, (Bloomington, 1954), p. 79.

3 I. A. Richards, Principles of Literary Criticism, (New York, 1949), p. 273.

4 Ibid.

5 The resolution of the poem is superfluous in the context of this discussion, but Venus and Mars are exonerated. They never were meant to take sex seriously because the god of war knows he cannot make love.

6 As related in Tom Wolfe's contemporary collection of essays, The Pump House Gang, the term black panther is a common idiom among surfers used to refer to those older citizens who still frequent the beach. The term is associated with spent youth. In relation to "Night in the Drugstore" we may note that some of the "black panthers" are widows. Perhaps the dread of age known to the surfers is even more relevant to "Watson on the Beach."

7 Wheelwright, op. cit., p. 19.

8 Walter Hinderer, "Theory, Conception, and Interpretation of the Symbol," in Perspectives in Literary Symbolism, ed. Joseph Stulka, (University Park, 1968), pp. 19-92.

9 Suzanne K. Langer, Philosophy in a New Key, (Cambridge, 1942), p. 171.

10 Ibid.

11 Ernst Cassirer, An Essay on Man, tr., C. S. Howe, (New Haven, 1944), pp. 94-95.

12 Ibid., p. 84.

13 Carl S. Jung, "On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetic Art," in The Problems of Aesthetics, ed., Murray Krieger and Eliseo Vivas, (Chicago, 1953), p. 172.

14 Ernst Cassirer, The Logic of the Humanities, tr., C. S. Howe, (New Haven, 1961), p. 25

15 Cassirer, An Essay on Man, p. 82.

16 Ibid., p. 57.

17 Ibid.

18 Hinderer, op. cit., p. 96.

19 Ibid., p. 97.

20 Warren and Wellek, op. cit., pp. 189-190.

21 Jung, op. cit., p. 176.

22 Wheelwright, op. cit., p. 23.

23 I. A. Richards, Principles of Literary Criticism, (New York, 1949), p. 127.

24 Hinderer, op. cit., p. 97.

25 Wheelwright, op. cit., p. 48.

26 Richards, op. cit., p. 267.

27 Suzanne K. Langer, Feeling and Form, (New York, 1953), p. 219.

28 Wheelwright, op. cit., p. 19.

29 Langer, Feeling and Form, p. 234.

30 Ibid., p. 217.

31 Cassirer, The Logic of the Humanities, p. 94

32 Langer, Philosophy in a New Key, p. 202.

33 M. F. Ashley Montague, "Cassirer on Mythical Thinking," in The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer, ed., Paul A. Schillp, (New York, 1958), p. 366.

34 Warren and Wellek, op. cit., p. 192

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