

usual and, indeed, too biologic to suit the supreme excellence of divine things. This fact is explained by the author himself in his poem, "Annul Me in My Manhood," wherein he writes:

And in that wrenched inversion caught
 Draws off the needer from his never-ending need, diverts
 The seeker from the Sought.

Mood and figure thus at times reflect the state of soul described. Where disorder prevails some disturbance of harmony may well be expected. The state of soul herein described is not that of the poet but that of the protagonist portrayed in the poetic simile.

Beyond the image there would also be the question of the theme for future works seemingly promised in the final poem. The resolutions touching upon dedicated Christian striving for spiritual perfection, for the service of others in so far as they participate the image of God. One would expect perhaps the employment of more sublime metaphor to convey the historic presence of the God of Revelation in the world of human events. How translate divine charity, supernatural humility, and all the panoply of Christ-like activities to the modern fall-out conscious audience in these quasi-apocalyptic days? Future out-pourings will prove whether the quest for finer wine at the banquet of celestial song will be fulfilled.

—ALFRED CAMILLUS MURPHY, O.P.

LOVE'S UPLIFTED STROKE

My two colleagues have discerningly discussed the psychology and theology of Brother Antoninus. Man was examined; God was contemplated. Now it seems that a connecting link, however weak, must be forged between Antoninus the psychologist and Antoninus the theologian, for he is not content to make a scientific study of *homo sapiens*, nor does he pretend to speculate about the attributes of God.

All I mean to say is that the poems of Antoninus are the outpourings of his essential understanding and existential expression of the living relationship between God and man. This understanding and expression are not abstract and impersonal; they are concrete and very personal.

Antoninus is a poet. As a poet, he is not fascinated by "a hypostatized

aesthetic object," for his poems are representations of himself. His poems are flags of victory, monumental witnesses of his battle, veils which bear the imprint of the Savior's face. Reproductions that they are of his inner experiences, the poems are nevertheless integral, but only to the extent that the mysterious soul-workings of the poet are truly registered.

Man, in the working-out of his salvation, is confronted by his dogged self, the devil's attacks, and God's mysterious beauty. Therefore this salvific working-out embodies a triple encounter. These encounters can only be expressed by Antoninus in the on-rush of words, for that is his expressive way of satisfying himself and telling the world what self-discovery, exorcism, and sanctification mean. The poems are the mirror of himself, the signs of his relief from the exorcised demon, the witness of his faithfulness in engagement; they are the manifestation of every man in his struggle to meet God, to fight Satan, and to be himself.

Poetry must, in its very expressive quality (all other things being equal) first of all be a reflective image of its maker, and secondly, be so formed and shaped that it renders its meaning to other men. These two features correspond to T. S. Eliot's conception of the first two voices of poetry. Let me, then, indicate these two voices in Antoninus.

First, the poems must be looked on as they are the creatures, products, and expressions of this man called Antoninus, who must manifest himself in a certain way if his honesty and artistic integrity are to be maintained. Antoninus himself determines the structure of his poems, not solely by a free-will-act to produce *this* type of poem, but even more by an uncanny creative compulsion to say what has to be said.

Second, the poems are to be examined in their communicability to others and in the reaction they evoke from others.

First of all, let us look at the structure.

Order and Direction

Groping with the extremes of producing a work either for the sake of pure expression (so that the poem is really formless) or for the sake of absolute correctness (so that the poem is too-formed or rigid), Antoninus works for a coalescence of the two ". . . in which all relevant elements are synthesized into an indefinable whole." This indefinable totality cannot be perfect, for he cannot be. Yet the wholeness, despite any imperfection of part, is beautiful because there is *order and direction*.

The order and direction, although different in each poem, is the manifestation of movement toward God-discovery, struggle, and self-realization.

In some poems, the motion is circular: the experience with life, self-discovery through grace, need for forgiveness, the return to innocence. For example, in "In Savage Wastes," the poet is tormented with guilt, making his penitential retreat in the desert until he is proved. Then he will go back to his people; he will look for the sinners so that he can show pity. He will return to his mother, to his father for a blessing, ". . . and again be made as a child."

That this poem has direction is plain, for it expresses the idea of return to innocence. The motion is circular, for in the Dream-Prologue to the poem, the old hermit who decides to leave his desert-solitude meets a young monk entering it. The old man sees himself in the young novice; he identifies himself with him and goes back into the world. The wilderness-retreat is like that of Job's. The poet has been "touched by God" and looks to others for pity—"at least you my friends." But there is no one there: no sound, no sight—except the bare encounter with himself and God. Unlike Job, he does not plead his innocence, but opens his address to God with these words:

I too, O God, as you very well know,
Am guilty.

This poem parallels and personalizes another poem, "Jacob and the Angel." Jacob the usurper must flee from Rebecca's fondness, from Isaac's frown, from Esau's anger. These three flights correspond to three angelic apparitions: the angels on the ladder, the angels at the Camps of God, and the angel of the wrestling-bout. With each angelic encounter Jacob is able to rid himself of a gnawing and false dependency; the final match brings him to self-awareness and courage. He is wounded, yet he is stronger. Renewed, he can meet his brother in "the siege of grace."

In "In Savage Wastes," Antoninus is Jacob, who can go back after his wrestlings and complete the circuit to be born again. The beauty of order, the fulfillment of motion in man's life is thus captured by Antoninus.

Nature

Very conscious of order and perfection, Antoninus uses imagery and language as a craftsman. Rich cadences fall which capture nature in her pulsation and strength. As Francis attracted the forest birds to himself, so Antoninus is attracted to the winged creatures. It is the "small birds of a

feather" who attend the Crucifixion, who are sent to watch until the end "after friend and foe had all alike gone over the hill." It is the "winged-spermed" birds who, with great precision, consume the carcass-remains of Paul's horse, the last link with the Apostle's former life.

In his canticle to Mary Magdalene, Antoninus, writing of Mary's love for Christ, heightens the description with a picture of the violent but clean thrust of the lance into Christ's side and with the figure of the love-flight of two eagles over Juda, forming "four wings, one cross."

In "A Canticle to the Waterbirds," he asks the birds of ". . . harsh and salt-encrusted beaks unmade for song [to] say a praise up to the Lord." Antoninus dubs these birds with a dignity which is not man's:

You keep seclusion where no man may go, giving Him praise;
 Nor may a woman come to lift like your cleaving flight her
 clear contralto song
 To honor the spindrift gifts of His soft abundance.
 You sanctify His hermitage rocks where no holy priest may
 kneel to adore, nor holy nun assist;
 And where [h]is [sic] true communion-keepers are not enabled
 to enter.

Writers have for ages been stirred to capture the symbolic message of these mysterious fliers: the tragic heroine of *Pagliacci* is momentarily enthralled by the freedom of a flight of birds; the darkling thrush breaks the somber mood of Thomas Hardy, for the song of that bird had more "blessed hope" than he could ever summon up; the windhover's gliding-flight lifts Gerard Manley Hopkin's heart in ecstatic thoughts of Christ. Antoninus invokes these creatures to humble man, thinking his supremacy as absolute, to teach man much assured of his control of all things, and to say in their own necessary way what man cannot express in his freedom.

Violence

As if remembering Robinson Jeffer's line, "Violence has been the sire of all the world's values," Antoninus captures nature's violent upheaval to portray the upheaval and unrest in man's soul.

Although the concept of Christ as the Bread of Life in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist is one of serenity and peace, Antoninus vividly portrays this reception of Christ in violently vibrant verse.

. . . I lay as one barren,
 As the barren doe lies on in the laurel . . .
 As the eagle eats so I ate, as the hawk takes flesh from his talon,
 As the mountain lion clings and kills, I clung and was killed.

Christ makes His appearance in scenes of violence: the visage of a "great elk, caught midway between two scissoring logs" and of "the river, spent at last, beating driftwood up and down" give Christ a thundering entrance. Christ's birth in the soul is not a facile operation, but one of birth-pangs, ocean-onrush, and body-gashes.

To sum up this point, let me say that Antoninus, like John Bunyan, is concerned with man the pilgrim reaching toward God. This progress involves awakening, experience, loss of innocence, gain of wisdom, encounter with grace, recovery of innocence, and return by way of retreat and wrestling to light. All this is conveyed in violent imagery. The image is expressed in words with hard celtic consonants, and Antoninus has an anglo-saxon hand at building up words, e.g., *father-freed*, *hell-stench*, *heel-seized*, which strike harder than they would if they read: "freed of father," "stench of hell," and "seized by the heel."

The Individual

The poems of Antoninus either comment on the life of Christ and the saints, or relate his own life. Thus he does not capture life on a photographic plate or imprison it within a frame, but he makes life pulsate with all his passionate and reasonable powers towards its fulfillment in God.

The course of life is predominantly described in terms of the drama of the individual soul, the personal mystic enterprise:

I cried to the Lord
 That the Lord might show me the thing I am.

It is the individual encounter with God which fills most of the poetic thoughts. For some reason, the Mystical Body, the Church, the Communion of all members with Christ their Head surprisingly is not sung about. In the "Waterbirds" it is the gulls and kingfishers which "sanctify His hermitage rocks," places "where [h]is true communion-keepers are not enabled to enter." And it is true enough that God works His wonders with each singular man, and if Antoninus believes that every man *is* an island, he, at least in two poems, shows the concern of one sea-joined island for another. In "In Savage Wastes," the solitary retreatant will go back again

to the city of man and ". . . will seek God henceforth in the shameful human face." In the "Hospice of the Word," the poet cries,

O my brothers! . . . At the grimed sink
We fill the basin of our mutual use,
Where our forty faces, rinsed daily,
Leaves each its common trace.

All this gives one some indication of Antoninus' first voice. Let him speak for himself: ". . . The struggle with language is the struggle to make myself comprehensible to myself, to orient my inner and outer being."

But what of the readers and listeners? What must they expect from their self-comprehension and satisfaction of the poet? Certainly, they want to comprehend and to be satisfied as well. Since this expectation of the audience must be appreciated by the poet, he must labor to make his message penetrable; he must use his second voice to be heard by others. Let us, then, consider the message-impression.

All that has already been stated can very well be restated (and for that matter all that follows can be reinstated to fit that which has preceded), for the poet, although with different inflections and tonalities, says the same thing in his two voices. But for the sake of precision and conciseness, let me talk about the 'second voice' by way of the most predominant Antoninian motif—love.

How does a writer express love? A philosopher may describe it as "velle alicui bonum"; a dramatist may set up a balcony scene surrounded with "silver-sweet sounds"; a poet may find the right word with "a many-splendored thing." The poet Antoninus might ascribe to all these formulations, but with his own special powers he sings about God's and Man's love in terms which have very definite effects upon the listener.

There's no doubt about it—Antoninus wants to proclaim the wonderful ways of God's love. He cannot be content with merely saying, "God's love is wonderful." He must use words of wonder and images of fascination to tell it. He has chosen the most venerable and hallowed vehicle of sexual love to convey this mystery of God's love.

This should need no apology; yet for those of the unconsciously "either-or" inclination and the "not-nice" frame of mind, one is required, especially in the face of Antoninus' writings. His imagery in fact is vivid and violent. I think the reason can be found in what it images, the diffi-

culty and utter strain of loving God wholly—mind, soul, heart, and strength.

Quoting a mystical adage, "The soul is feminine to God," the speaker in "Annul in Me my Manhood" asks God to transform totally his "bold possessive" masculinity into a docile and maiden-like quiescence so that the mystical union of God and man can be achieved. The man knows that his "possessive instinct shoulders God aside." When he says, "The use of sex is union, / Union alone," he sees the need for God's annulling in him all that prevents union with God. As long as man is the impulsive pursuer, he is diverted and will remain forever needfully searching; man will achieve the fulfillment of his love only when the lover is God.

The deep mystical-love union of Christ and Mary Magdalene is richly and meaningfully unveiled through conjugal love images, both in the symbolic image of the lance-thrust into Christ's side and the beautiful picture of the love-flight of eagles "on wakening wings." Mary goes forth from Golgotha bearing "the stamp of a consummate chasteness." There is no more vivid way of telling the world of the joy and ecstasy of the "grappling of the soul in its God" than through a heightened exposition of the natural forces of passion.

Antoninus sings to the Christ in the Holy Eucharist:

. . . On my tongue you were meek.
 In my heart you were might. And thy word was the running
 of rain
 That rinses October. . . .
 Thy word in my heart was the start of the buck that is
 sourced in the doe.

Again, a most intimate and loving gift of God is described in terms of nature's generative act. The doe bears the seal of the buck and she will guard in her womb his sign; she waits, hidden, until she will give birth. The poet too bears in his soul the seal of Christ and the poet will treasure this secret and wait, hidden, until his time comes.

"The Song the Body Dreamed in the Spirit's Mad Behest" opens with, "Call Him the Lover and call me the Bride." The soul's utter incomprehension of its possession of God through grace drives the imagination to evoke ". . . the deepest resources of her sensuality, in order to achieve in shamelessness the wholeness of being an age of shame has rendered incomplete." Antoninus' imagination goes far in that achievement. The

plaintive and pastoral verses of *The Song of Songs* swell into fierce and forceful lines in this poem.

Some people have great difficulty in understanding why God should choose to express His special love for human beings in *The Song of Songs* by making use of poems of love between man and woman. The occult contempt for the flesh present in these people leads them to think less of God's love for every man. This same difficulty will very well arise in some upon reading "The Song the Body Dreamed," but the stumbling block becomes a menace only if they cannot see further than the symbol.*

The portrayal of the siege of the soul by God leads Antoninus in his "A Frost Lay White on California" to invert God's activity as the Lover to His passivity as the Beloved. God says, "I am your woman. . . ." This love-reality of God is so efficacious that its most poignant and delightful qualities are best captured by the feminine image. Christ, it will be recalled, calls himself "the Son of Man" but he also describes himself as a hen, "gathering her chickens under her wings." Jahweh is both "a giant [who] shall go out to battle . . . a warrior that stirs up his own rage. . . ." and is also like "a woman in labor . . ." (Isaias 42:13-14).

Antoninus has unburdened himself, and to use T. S. Eliot's concept, he has exorcised the demon within himself. The poet has not just thrown off before an audience some psychic material of his, but has transformed his inner conflicts in commanding, tough, and vibrating language. He uses terminology which at times runs counter to the traditional, and impresses an erotic imagery on the audience's imagination to drive home the grandeur of the personal contact God has with man. From out of the depths, into savage wastes, he has assimilated his days of serenity along straight paths and his nights of threat along crooked lines. The craft of the poet shows through when he can command the language to express the almost inexpressible. The song of the poet breaks through when he cannot make, in his powerlessness, the mysteries of life known in any other way.

—ALBERT DOSHNER, O.P.

* For a development of this theme read *The Third Revolution* by Dr. Karl Stern, and *The Paradise Tree* by Gerald Vann, O.P.

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See also the biographical notes on Brother Antoninus in the November, 1962 issue of *Ramparts* by Harry Stiehl.