

## **MYTH MYSTICISM AND MORALITY IN RUSSELL HOBAN'S LATER FICTION**

**MYTH, MYSTICISM AND MORALITY IN RUSSELL HOBAN'S LATER FICTION**

**By**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis considers the movement away from anthropocentrism towards mythocentrism in Russell Hoban's later fiction. An analysis of the nature and results of the juxtapositions of myth, science, collective history and personal crisis in the following novels exemplifies this, his essentially revisionist, philosophy: Riddley Walker(1980), Pilgermann(1983) and The Medusa Frequency(1987). In turn, these novels bring Celtic/Christian, Judeo-Islamic and Greco-Roman myth to bear upon various rational scientific societies and characters. In all cases transcendent moments edify the principal characters, whilst alienating them from their societies; in some instances social harmony is restored.

This multicultural comparison reveals in Hoban's method a growing concern for (collective and individual) moral and spiritual refinement. As the characters become less anthropocentric and more myth-centred, their transformations towards sexual maturity parallel similar changes in their attitude to myth. They move from destructive behaviour to creative. The observed spiritual growth, from fear and resignation, through faith and liberation, to baptised imagination, provides the structure for the analysis and interpretation of the three novels.

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## Introduction

The diversity evident in Russell Hoban's cultural and spiritual life could well be the key to his open-mindedness. Born in 1925, into a Jewish family in Pennsylvania, he married a fellow student in 1944 and remained in the United States, raising a family of four children, until 1969. That year he crossed the Atlantic, and he has resided in London, England, ever since. His marriage did not survive the move, and he remarried in 1975 "a German woman much his junior and by her fathered three more children"(Allison 199). Though his own upbringing was agnostic, Hoban now thinks that he is "a very religious person"; unattached to any one tradition, he is essentially a "freelance mystic"(Myers 12).

His literary career is equally diverse. His first children's books, published in 1959 and 1960, "were technical and explanatory as opposed to the imaginative and domestic books which were soon to come"(Allison 195). Following the break up of his first marriage, his interest in myth, psychology and fantasy grew, and he progressed to writing adult novels, the first being The Lion of Boaz-Jachin and Jachin-Boaz, published in 1973. In time, along with deepening philosophical, religious and moral emphases, a mythical awareness came to dominate his novels. In an interview with Edward Myers, in 1984,

Hoban noted the development of this mythic sense: "I accepted it as my way of going at it, and I'm doing it more and more as I go along"(9). Though Joan Bowers sees Hoban's work as a "unified aesthetic whole," "his adult fantasies . . . a kind of 'gloss' reflecting upon and illuminating his children's books"(80), I prefer to view his work developmentally, as does Hoban himself. "A book," he says, "takes me to the end of one stage of perception and the next book pulls me into another"(Brooks 81).

Hoban's highly original mythical sensibility suggests a mixture of Anglo-American, German and Jewish theoretical influences. Complementary to his Atlantic-hopping fellow-countryman T. S. Eliot, whose theory of tradition he applauds, Hoban extends the boundaries of literary creation to include not only the work of "the Magdalenian draughtsmen"(Eliot 16) but also the biological origins of cellular life and the molecular energy of inanimate matter, thereby providing contemporary readers with a renewed sense of the power in the spoken and written word. The rigidities of the theory that Eliot propounded in response to the excesses of German Romanticism have, in time, led to what Geoffrey Hartman refers to, in Criticism in the Wilderness, as "the forgetfulness of the sacred"(45). Hoban's work jogs that memory.

His later novels, which I will be considering, namely, Riddley Walker(1982), Pilgermann(1984), and The Medusa Frequency(1987), are in one sense revisionist works. They recall, for example, Harold Bloom's kabbalistic



view of the past as an "unquiet grave" that continually demands interpretation; this is a view in which, according to Hartman, serial critical "misreadings" preserve a textual link with the Divine (Hartman 52-55). In another sense, all three novels reveal an essentially American reception of the poetic genius that in its freedom of expression, again as Hartman describes it, "insofar as it has to choose . . . prefers itself primal and reprobate rather than Christian and Humanist"(95). Like other literary Americans, Hoban, in his open-mindedness, it appears, has been drawn to the "judicious" English tradition that is ambivalent, but that can also open "a breach . . . in almost every received value"(Hartman 200). Nonetheless, a true American, he strives "to have his say despite or within authoritative pressures coming from the great writers of the past, institutions asking [him] to conform to a community model, politics that limit subtly or by force what can be said and written"(Hartman 246).

Though Hoban's work is romantic, his transcendent vision is tempered with humility, becoming neither solipsistic (concerned only with his own perception) nor nihilistic. A deconstructionist film-maker in The Medusa Frequency commits suicide, whilst the hero accepts, and works romantically within, his human limitations. In Pilgermann, Hoban grapples with the whole notion of potentiality versus actuality, the hero's transcendent death giving way to the final image of the circles of law that limit mortal existence. In the same way that he applauds yet redefines Eliot's theory of tradition, Hoban appears to

take-off from Northrop Frye's stated position on romance in Anatomy of Criticism: "The whole area of romance [tends] to displace myth in a human direction and yet in contrast to "realism" to conventionalize [its] content in an idealised direction"(136).

Hoban provides a fresh paradigm for the application of Frye's position, because, as his religious sensibility deepens, his perception of myth becomes less anthropocentric and more creation-centred. This creation-centred romantic return connects him to the evolutionary power in all matter, both animate and inanimate, while it subordinates his life to being a channel for its communication. Whilst he says, "my writing has more to do with the history of my perception and the history of my being than it does with any story with which that history is integrated"(Brooks 72), he also says, "more and more my point of view gets less anthropocentric"(Myers 11). He says:

There's a combination of humility and arrogance: humility in the sense that I'm not a creator--I can't originate anything, I'm a perceiver--and arrogance in that I have faith in my own perceptions, that if I leave myself completely open it will put itself together in a way that will matter. (Haffenden 133)

Hoban's romanticism thus expands his imaginative horizons, reduces his status within them, yet enhances his role as a writer.

In short, Hoban's openness embraces the philosophical oppositions that arise in the face of myth and that are as "explosive in art as in politics"(Hartman 41). Paul Gray, reviewing Hoban's Turtle Diary, says: "A

romantic would emphasize the heroic; a realist would squint at the mundane. Hoban tries something harder: to see both, and the hairline truth that lies somewhere in between"(72). It is Hoban's willingness to be completely open to the influences of British tradition, American freedom, Jewish foundationalism and German Romanticism, combined with the "freelance" nature of his deepening mysticism (as opposed to the doctrinaire stance of Eliot, for example) that gives his work its originality. It is the synthesis, in his fiction, of expansiveness and moral responsibility that gives it bite. It comes as a breath of fresh air in the present scholastic reductionist atmosphere that tends to limit moral horizons with closed systems that generally take the joy out of life. My thesis will defend the moral integrity and viability of this, his increasingly mystical, awareness.

Several critics impose anthropocentric interpretations on Hoban's work. For example, Nancy Dew Taylor, in her article ". . . 'You bes go ballsy': Riddley Walker's Prescription for the Future," exhorts her readers (in the title using words spoken by the novel's Mr. Punch) to be courageously motivated in attempting to change the world. Mankind's future is, she says, "in the hands of each of us"(38). To the contrary, if there is a message in Riddley Walker, it is more paralysing than motivating, because a God-fearing sense of awe at the potential in all creation and individual human nature alike resigns the

enlightened reader, like Riddley, to his necessarily limited position in the universe.

Leonard Mustazza also takes an anthropocentric critical position when he focusses on the "subtle shift toward modernity of outlook" in Riddley Walker, namely, "the movement [away] from traditional society's reliance upon myth as unifying intellectual force"(18). Seeing the "innocent acceptance of the source and 'truth' of myths" as archaic, he argues that "we can easily extrapolate, based upon our own knowledge of humankind's anthropological progress, that the sacred myth of origin will soon lose its prestigious centrality in Riddley's world, despite his attempts to keep it alive"(25). Though he has to justify this critical stance in the face of the author's claims regarding intent that are "surprising"(26), Mustazza seems unable to accept that Hoban's *progressively mythocentric, decreasingly anthropocentric view* makes his theory untenable. Mustazza argues that it is the gradual revelation that the central myth may not be fixed and inviolable that "in large measure marks the transition from myth-centred primitive culture to modern culture"(22). To this I reply that Hoban's work shows that culture can remain myth-centred, even when the myth is fluid and open to interpretation, as it is in Riddley Walker and the two following novels. Mustazza says that Riddley's deductions regarding the government's use of religion "disturb him profoundly and . . . lead him to doubt the facts of the central myth itself"(23). I believe that this sceptical

interpretation is open to argument, as Riddley, by the end of the story, finds himself a latter-day "Eusa", with "Drop John" on his back, the myth not only revised and alive but also being lived in him (Riddley Walker 214). In the light of such representations, I propose to pay particular attention to Hoban's attitude to myth and the nature of its appropriation.

Mircea Eliade says that modern Western scholars have accepted myth "as it was understood in the archaic societies, where . . . 'myth' means a 'true story' and beyond that, a story that is a most precious possession because it is sacred, exemplary, significant"(1). Eliade continues: "When myth is 'living' in a society . . . it supplies models for human behaviour and, by that very fact, gives meaning and value to life"(2). He says that myths describe "the various and sometimes dramatic breakthroughs of the sacred (or 'supernatural') into the world"(2). He links myth strongly to time:

"Living" a myth . . . implies a genuinely "religious" experience, since it differs from the ordinary experience of everyday life . . . due to the fact that . . . one enters a transfigured, auroral world, impregnated with the supernatural's presence. . . . One is no longer living in chronological time, but in the primordial time . . . when the event first took place. . . . Myths reveal that the world, man and life have a supernatural origin and history. (19)

Joseph Campbell brings mythology more into the secular present with his definition: "A mythology is an organization of symbolic narratives and images that are metaphorical of the possibilities of human experience and

fulfillment in a given society at a given time. . . . Myths are metaphors"(135). In his view, this in no way devalues the viability of the ancient myths: "You've got to live on myths of the olden days! The elementary ideas are constant, they remain, they remain, they remain"(208).

I will be considering Hoban's juxtapositions of myth with the protagonists' personal stories in Riddley Walker, Pilgermann, and The Medusa Frequency. In each case there is a sense of the presence of the past. On the one hand there is the transcendent awareness of primordial time that Eliade describes, and on the other, a more realistic sense of elementary ideas remaining, such as Campbell defines, which is a further example of Hoban's openness to opposing ideas.

In an interview with Edward Myers, Hoban acknowledges Erwin Schrödinger's influence on his work (11). Schrödinger's "view of the world" links Eliade's "primordial time" with his own scientific perception: "Eternally and always there is only now, one and the same now; the present is the only thing that has no end"(22). Schrödinger goes on to connect this insight with morality: "It is the vision of this truth . . . which underlies all morally valuable activity. It brings a man of nobility not only to risk his life for an end which he recognises or believes to be good but--in rare cases-- to lay it down in full serenity, even when there is no prospect of saving his own person"(22). The novels I am to consider will deal with this particular aspect of morality. Each

protagonist will be brought to the point of self-renunciation in his transforming, transcendent relationship with a living myth. Schrödinger calls this particular virtue self-conquest: "[I]f we consider the practical behaviour which we value as morally elevated, positively significant or wise, . . . we find . . . [it] always has one thing common to it: a certain opposition to primitive desire"(52). He continues: "The insight which we have now achieved into the development of organisms allows us to understand very well . . . that our whole life . . . has to be and is a constant struggle against our primitive self [sic]"(53). However, Hoban does not rest entirely with Schrödinger, for, in the novels I am to consider, he allows the "primal and reprobate"(Hartman 95) aspect of human nature to inform his moral vision. His open-mindedness presents a possibility for moral transformation that allows each of his fictional protagonists to be responsible yet fallibly human.

I have chosen to work on Hoban's three latest novels because I see a progression in his work. His earlier preoccupation with psychological wholeness (for example, in The Lion of Boaz-Jachin and Jachin-Boaz) has expanded to include a growing concern with moral and spiritual refinement. It is with the relationship between his deepening mystical perception and growing moral awareness that I am concerned. My readings of Riddley Walker, Pilgermann and The Medusa Frequency will consider, in each, the nature and results of the juxtapositions of myth, science, collective history and, particularly,

personal crisis. In turn, these novels bring Celtic/Christian, Judeo-Islamic and Greco-Roman myth to bear upon various rational scientific societies and characters. In all cases, transcendent moments edify the principal characters whilst alienating them from their societies; in some instances social harmony is restored. The effort that Hoban considers to be part of "the task laid upon [him] by life . . . to be equally present" (Blishen 69) provides a strong sense of the presence of the past. But I would argue that, contrary to the doctrinal rigidities of T.S.Eliot's conservative Anglo-Catholicism and Schrödinger's evolutionary moral refinement, Hoban's openness to the whole of life including its essential Dionysian aspect provides a truly human and therefore more sustainable morality. It gives hope for just community in an age easily swept into dualistic separation or nihilistic denial.

The theme of moral maturation will ultimately focus on equality and justice in sexual relationship in The Medusa Frequency. This approaches a theme that has caused some concern among feminist critics in the classroom, regarding a chauvinistic attitude to women in Hoban's fiction. Certainly, in his first adult novel The Lion of Boaz-Jachin and Jachin-Boaz, it could be argued that Hoban portrays women in a derogatory light, since they are instrumental and secondary to the main plot that concerns the masculine odyssey of a father and his son. My emphasis on the process of moral growth in his three latest novels will exemplify what I believe to be an integrated human inner



transformation, as opposed to the dualistic solutions offered by current feminist scholarship.

A second focus will concern the nature of literary interpretation in The Medusa Frequency. Here I consider that Hoban's fictional response to myth also provides the fresh critical literature that Geoffrey Hartman seeks that "contains and limits the feeling of hollowness at the heart of language"(231). It returns to an intuitive understanding and a "renewed allegoresis" of "a non-demythologised text" (246) to combat the literalism of the scientific method and it thereby revitalises New Critical revisionism within a fresh paradigm.

The underlying spiritual development is a result of the protagonists' changing attitudes to myth. Primitive pagan intuition that accepts the explanatory presence of myth originally gives life meaning in Riddley Walker and opens the door to transcendence-- the entry into primordial time-- that transforms the imagination and leads to new life. The opening of that door is spiritual birth and from then Hoban's protagonists are on a journey to faith. This is a journey that Søren Kierkegaard believes takes a lifetime: "In those old days . . . it was assumed that dexterity in faith is not acquired in a few days or weeks"(23). He (Kierkegaard) will never forget that in a hundred and thirty years Abraham "didst not get farther than to faith"(37). Since Hoban's writing is, in his own opinion, a history of his perception, his latest novels reflect his own most recent steps along that way.

## Chapter One

### Spiritual Birth

Riddley Walker tells the story of an adolescent growing up in a barren, post-nuclear-war world, ignorant of the potential that exists within the phenomena of his life. Equally ignorant of the power in myth and sex, he accepts both for what they are, namely expressions of the inexplicable aspects of his existence. He is morally as unregenerate as the world in which he lives, existentially reacting, as he does, to events as they occur. However, his overriding curiosity leads him to question everything, and in that is both his strength and his weakness, for, in time, he learns that curiosity is, itself, a powerful potential. Were it not for that curiosity, though, he would never attempt to make the connections that lead him to moral and spiritual life; he would not have the experiences that lead him from an anthropocentric need to know to a myth-centred sense of wonder.

The novel's linear plot, with a pervasive "sense of an ending"(Kermode 1-31)limits the narratorial view to the present. "[You] never will get to see the goal of anything you're all ways, in the middle of it living it or moving thru it," says Riddley (181). The debased language in which the novel is written reflects the linearity, for being tied to the present, it cannot escape the

burden of the past. As Natalie Maynor and Richard Patteson observe, the language is "as much a record of the past as it is of the present"(24). In a world bereft of meaning, there remains a power in old stories calling for interpretation, and the results are often bizarre. Under these conditions, Riddley asks his questions, attempting to connect his partial vision of a glorious yet terrifying whole with the barren trivia of his life. In time, he learns to accept this questioning, partial vision as the only way he can live with integrity.

In Riddley's world, myth provides the link, through imagination, between the mystery of infinite reality and limited human experience. Legends, fables, rhymes, puppet-plays, dreams, songs, essays and rituals channel the mythic power in everything through the words of the moment, dynamically presenting the past to the present, the unknown to the known. Riddley learns that an anonymous story "couldn't come out of nowhere . . . so it must've come out of somewhere"(90). Myth empowers whoever appropriates it, for either good or evil. Ronald Granofsky refers to the possibility of "the powerful energies potential in man" being directed for either "creative or destructive purposes . . . the idea of potentiality itself becom[ing] a key one for Hoban"(172). The wonder and the horror of the power of myth lies in its incarnational aspect, in its participation in the extremes of good and evil in the human condition. Riddley's story exemplifies the possibility of moral maturation within that experience.

Jennifer Uglow's dismissal of the novel, on the ground that Hoban "project[s] into the future a pessimistic contempt for the masses which is hardly balanced by the promise of mystic intuition for an artistic elite"(1221), does not take into account Riddley's hard-won and concrete moral education; its mystic source, far from detracting from its humanity, enriches it. In the course of the novel, Riddley's changing attitudes to the power he discerns at the heart of things that is revealed through myth reflect the changes taking place in his own moral nature. Though the story is deterministic, Riddley's self-direction lies in his finally choosing to be a depersonalised instrument of the power in myth, neither moved by self-will, nor by social pressure. It is only moment by moment that his transcendent insights reveal the depth and extent of the power that he finally calls the spirit of God, and it is myth that unites those disparate insights through his imagination. Four key events in the plot that juxtapose his personal story with that power exemplify his gradual transformation. But, first, I will consider how Riddley's perceptions progressively alienate him from his society.

From the beginning of his story, Riddley is inclined to stand apart. Night after night he sits alone on the "hy walk," "looking at . . . the nite fires in the roof and the crowd all sat there with the rainy dark all roun them"(51). His inherited assumption of the role of "connexion man," on his father's death at the beginning of the novel, precipitates him into a crisis (that of an adolescent thrust into manhood), which separates him further from his society. At this

stage, Riddley is detached from the power controlling him. It is Lorna Elswint, the "tel woman," who identifies the force she sees moving him: "'Its some kynd of thing it aint us but yet its in us. Its looking out thru our eye hoals'"(6). This mysterious presence arouses Riddley's abiding curiosity and reflection. "[E]ver since then", he says, "it seams like . . . I ben all ways thinking on that thing . . . [o]ur woal life is a idear we dint think of nor we dort know what it is"(7).

At his father's funeral, Lorna's "tel" interprets Riddley's acceptance by the wild dogs of the Bernt Arse pack as his initiation into "1st knowing and the old ways from back befor the clevverness"(24). "After that tel . . . every 1 begun to look at me diffrent," says Riddley(25). Riddley's movement towards 1st knowing is counter to the direction in which the ruling power of his society is going, namely, towards "clevverness" (recovery of the lost technology). The ritual recognition of Riddley as connexion man further alienates him, as he cannot avoid a confrontation with Goodparley, the "Pry Mincer," who attempts to persuade Riddley to toe the party line when doing his obligatory connexions. Riddley says: "I dint realy want to get mixt in with it. I jus kep shut"(39). Nonetheless, he has to fulfil his function as connexion man for the community and interpret the Eusa puppet show, that Goodparley and Ernie Orfing (the "Wes Mincer", later to become leader of the opposition) perform that night.

The traditional, government-controlled Eusa show retells the Eusa story (that substitutes for Holy Writ in this post-religious society). The Eusa

story is, in turn, a re-telling of the legend of St. Eustace, (revised and handed down, in its turn, through a twentieth-century description of a fifteenth-century wallpainting in Canterbury Cathedral). Already translated to accommodate the imagination and understanding of the post-nuclear illiterate society, the Eusa story continues to undergo apocryphal revisions according to who is using it and to what ends it is being put. The travelling Eusa show takes the latest revisions to the people as government propaganda.

It falls to Riddley to do his first "reveal" the night after this, their latest, performance. After a conventional start, reminding the crowd that the backcloth of "smoak and flames" represents their communal history, Riddley goes into a trance and reveals the enormity of the Eusa puppet's influence over them all. It is a primitive vision, the head getting bigger and bigger in his imagination: "the finger hoal so big it wer over all of us as big as the roof . . . it wer coming up inside me as wel"(58). All he can say to the crowd is, "EUSAS HEAD IS DREAMING US"(58). This incident introduces the theme of the Dionysian power in myth that Hoban is to work with throughout the three novels, and that is crucial to his moral vision. Asked why Dionysus, St. Eustace, Punch and Judy, and Orpheus came to be combined in his thinking about Riddley Walker, Hoban quotes Walter F. Otto's Dionysus, Myth and Cult:

The elemental depths gape open and out of them a monstrous creature raises its head before which all the limits that the normal day has set must disappear. There man stands on the threshold of madness . . . He has been thrust out of everything secure . . . and has been flung into the primeval cosmic turmoil. (Haffenden 140)

Riddley's "trants reveal" is such an experience and, at this point, it shows the enormous power behind Goodparley's corruption of the mythical Eusa story in the interests of political progress. Next morning, the danger of Riddley's position for having spoken out comes home to him: "I fealt like my luck gone from me. I fealt like I rathert not come a wake that day"(60).

When Riddley hears some children singing a mocking rhyme about him, he says: "Wel you know 1ce [once] the kids start singing at you thats a cern kynd of track youre on nor there aint too much you can do about it . . . youve jus got to clinch your teef and get on with it!"(60). Throughout the novel, children exhibit a special yet unconscious relationship with myth, and barely out of childhood himself, Riddley is moving from that detached innocence that accepts a story for being "jus what ever it is"(90) to a deeper encounter with the power behind the words.

The first key event is Riddley's discovery of a Punch glove puppet, buried in the mud at the Widders Dump digging. Juxtaposing the history of his community with his personal crisis, the event brings Riddley in contact with

some children who had been watching a Punch and Judy show at the time of the nuclear explosion, two thousand years before: "We begun to fynd bodys and parts of bodys from time way back. . . . [T]hey wer littl kids. . . . It takes you strange digging up a littl dead kid like that. From so far back and dead for so long and all the time they ever had been jus that littl"(68). He also finds "a show figger" with "the show mans han stil in it," cut off at the wrist(69). "It wer crookit" and it "had a hump on its back"(69). Fascirated by the figure that is like no other he has ever seen and aware of the latent power in puppets, he feels compelled to resist the order to hand it over, preferring to hurl Belnot Phist, the overseer, head first into the hole and to scramble up and out himself. On the other side of the fence, the black leader dog from the Bernt Arse pack awaits him. Now outlawed, Riddley is aware of a latent power moving him: "It wer my feet done it by ther selfs I never give it no thot at a l"(70). He yields all control to it in the absence of any more tangible support or comfort. At this point, he is passive, dependent; he wants to be pulled by the cog.

In fact, the power is drawing Riddley through an intermediary, Lissener, who helps him grow up morally. Lissener, the current Ardship of Cambry (Archbishop of Canterbury) and leader of the deformed, inbred Eusa folk (direct descendents of those who made the nuclear bomb, the 1 Big 1), demystifies for Riddley the Eusa stories and rhymes, tempering the myth with realism. For example, Riddley learns that though the rhyme Fools Circel 9wys



may be "jus a game," "it aint much fun for the Ardship what gets his head took off at the end of it"(76). He learns the true history of the deformed Eusa folk, "bernt out with all the clevverness"(77). He learns of Eusa's martyrdom by the Ram (the government) for not co-operating with their efforts to make another 1 Big 1, preferring, rather, to remain an object lesson to his generation and posterity. It is with Lissener that Riddley returns to his childhood haunts, "putting his groan up foot where [his] chyld foot run"(93), and it is there, at Fork Stoan, that he sees with adult eyes the site of an old nuclear power plant, and he relates the literal "shyning of them broakin machines" to the mythological "shyning of the Littl Man" of the Eusa story(96).

Lissener encourages Riddley to make his own connexions, to move from moral dependence to self-direction: "Be your oan black dog and your oan Ardship"(95). However, as Riddley begins to think for himself, moral ambiguities arise. His initial ecstasy at the shyning of the machines turns to agony: "O what we ben! And what we come to"(96). The bitterness and frustration of his barren existence leads him to cry: "How cud any 1 not want to get that shyning Power back from time back way back?"(97). Lissener leads him one step closer to the dangerous power before they part when together they take possession of a bag of "yellerboy stoans" (sulphur) from the pocket of a dead mariner from "other side"(100) and Riddley feels the "Power working

[him] all ready"(101). As the pair go their separate ways, Riddley reflects on his acquired moral responsibility:

When I gon over the fents at Widders Dump . . . I dint have no 1  
on my back only my self. [Now] . . . I know there aint no such  
thing . . . you all ways have every 1 and every thing on your back  
. . . and mor and mor I wer afeart it wer coming to something I  
weren't going to be hevvy a nuff for. (106)

Riddley's fears are quickly realised when he finds himself literally a captive audience, listening to Goodparley's prattling, which educates him both for better and worse. On the one hand, Riddley hears Goodparley's bizarre interpretation of The Legend of St. Eustace, which underlies the seductive theories for the recovery of the formula for the making of the 1 Big 1, the "figure of the crucified Saviour" apparently representing "the number of the salt de vydit in 2 parts in the cruciboal"(124). On the other hand, he also discovers from Goodparley not only the name of the puppet he found, who is "the oldes figger there is," but also all about the Punch and Pooty show, which has "no connexion nor no reveal" since it is "jus only a fun show"(135). Forced to watch Goodparley perform the show, Riddley senses a familiarity in its content: "it . . . [seamt] like I knowit mor about [it] nor I knowit I knowit"(135). Goodparley tells him that "its on us all to be every thing." "There aint nothing only us to be Punch and Eusa boath . . . to be Drop John and all"(140), thus bearing out Campbell's assertion that elementary mythical ideas remain.

Having learnt of everyman's culpability in theory, Riddley goes on to discover for himself the pain of that knowledge in practice, for, unwittingly, he becomes an accessory to Goodparley's murder of Elnot Phist, and he is torn apart by the knowledge: "I ben the 1 as made that happen and now I were coming in 2 with it"(144). As David Dowling writes, "knowledge brings both glory and damnation"(186). Riddley's sense of responsibility gives way to horror of the potentiality for evil in everything. The discovery of the Punch puppet puts Riddley "on the road to where ever [he] wer going"(113), experiencing feelings he has never had before. It leads him through dependency to self-direction, through a sense of moral responsibility to horror of the potentiality for evil in himself and all things. The changes in Riddley testify to the Eusa myth now living itself out in his life.

The second key event occurs when Riddley comes to Cambry(Canterbury) and mystically encounters the power he has been perceiving at the heart of everything. This sequence again brings collective history and personal crisis together.

At "Cambry Outers," he feels the residual radiation of the Power Ring around the site of the 1 Big 1 that exploded two thousand years earlier, and he yells: "IT STIL IS"(150). The more he senses the vast potential of that power moving him the more he wants "to be the happener for [it]"(152). The desire

aroused by the shining machines at Fork Stoan, reinforced by Goodparley's seductive ethic returns: "I wanted that Hy Power back agen and wooshing roun the Power Ring . . . I wantit that spirit of God moving Inland frontwards agen"(153). In the intensity of his emotion, Riddley responds to the immanent power sexually, first as a boy, desiring "the Big Old Father" to "spread" him and "take" him(153), and then, as he approaches "Zero Groun," as a man, becoming "all juicy . . . like all of [him] wer cock and all the worl a cunt and open to [him]"(154). The moment lost, he knows that he has seen "that same 1 everything and all of us come out of"(154). Following the dogs, he enters what had been the crypt of Canterbury Cathedral. There, the silent power of myth, history and molecular motion combines with the humming of the residual radiation.

Riddley tries to describe the experience: "That place . . . wer a wood of stoan it wer stoan trees growing unner the groun[,] . . . the hart of the wood in the hart of the stoan in the woom of her what has her woom in Cambry"(156). The power of myth flows through the words uniting Riddley's barren, post-nuclear anthropocentric existence with the vibrant power of being and belief that yet remains, though hidden. Humbled, on his knees, he says:

The 1 Big 1 the Master Chaynjis it wer all roun me . . . it come to me . . . what it wer as made them peopl time back . . . bettern us. It wer knowing how to put ther selfs with the Power of the wood be come stoan . . . the idear in the hart of every thing. (156)

He continues: "If you cud . . . put yourself right with one stoan . . . youwd be moving with the girt dants of the every thing the 1 Big 1 the Master Chaynjis"(157). He senses the disorientation of his own generation, disconnected, as it is, from creation-centred living, and he would regain the metaphysical sensibility of his ancestors. He makes the connection between mysticism and morality.

Riddley becomes increasingly reflective, and sensing what Eliade calls "primordial time", he feels the presence of the past: "In the 1/2 lite . . . it lookit like [the crypt] wer stanning in its oan time not the same time I wer in"(157). Then he senses the molecular motion inherent in inanimate matter-- "stoan". He receives a vision of stone men trying to talk, only "theres . . . grean vines and leaves growing out of ther mouf . . . out of the nose hoals and the eyes then breaking the stoan mans face a part"(159) and the image, he realises, is everyman. Transformed by its symbolic import, Riddley now wants "no power at all, no more "myndy thinking", nothing to do with the "yellerboy stoan"(161). He calls his imaginary face Greanvine and he feels something growing in him, "like a green sea surging", saying: "LOSE IT . . . LET GO . . . THE ONLYES POWER IS NO POWER"(162). This is an awareness, for Riddley, akin to that described by Hoban in his essay "Thoughts on Being and Writing":

In all of us . . . there remains some awareness, rudimentary and inchoate, far down, dim in green light through the ancient reeds, and tasting of the primal salt, in which there is no "I", no person, no identity, but only the passage, moment by moment, of time through being undisturbed by birth or death. (Blishen 66)

There follows a vision of harmony in sounds and colour which becomes "a moving," and Riddley thinks he can move with it, but it is the dogs who run the idea of Greanvine "in and out of them stoan trees"(162). Idea becomes reality, as the black dog unearths the buried, carved wooden face of Greanvine, wrapped in a Eusa show cloth and Riddley knows it is very old: "It wer his look he wer looking at me from time back way way back"(163). Again, he senses the presence of the past.

When he descends from his transfiguring experience, the change in Riddley can be seen first in his unconditional acceptance of his lot, though his view is limited and unique and detached: "like [he] wer behynt the back clof in a show"(168). He nonetheless questions the power moving him: "If I wer a figger in a show what hand wer moving me then?"(168). Secondly, he has gained hope -- "Hoap of a Tree". On his way out of the Cambry outpost he first sees the slogan scrawled on a wall. His curiosity roused, the image remains a riddle until his next meeting with Orfing, who explains: "[T]heres hoap of a tree if its cut down yet itwl sprout agen"(171). An idea, originally from the Bible (Job 14.7), the concept of hope of new life in the face of its denial is promised in the

cycle of nature. Though used by the opposition party for political gain, the hope is sown afresh for Riddley. Finally, he feels compassion for his old enemy, Goodparley, now blinded by the enraged Eusa folk and in need of support. Riddley carries his "bundel" and leads him to Granser the charcoal burner (Goodparley's long-lost foster father), known to have healing abilities.

Riddley's transcendent experience at Cambry transforms him from boy to man; but it also transforms his horror to holy awe, his lust for fulfilment to acceptance of his lot, his bitterness to embryonic hope and his natural repugnance for Goodparley to compassion. Increasingly, though unknowingly, going through his own "chaynjis", living his version of the Eusa myth, Riddley still retains his curiosity, specifically regarding the nature of the force controlling his life.

The third key event brings together the various myths surrounding the mixing of gunpowder. This juxtaposition of myth and present reality reveals to Riddley the nature of his consuming curiosity and redirects and prepares him for his final role.

When Riddley took the "yellerboy stoans" from the dead sailor, he unwittingly precipitated the event at which he now becomes a bystander. Goodparley and Granser share their partial knowledge of the myths surrounding the making of the 1 Big 1 and 1 Littl 1. The mystique combines images from

the Eusa story, the legend of St. Eustace, the Bible, folk-tales and chemistry (and "fizzics"). Granser and the charcoal burners have two of the three ingredients to make the 1 Littl 1, namely, "Saul & Pæter"(saltpetre) and "chardcoal" -- the missing third being "yellerboy stoan"(184). Once Riddley produces the sulphur, Granser proceeds. Forced by Goodparley to watch, Riddley sees how it is done: "It wer like the 1st time I seen a woman open for me I wer thinking: This is what its all about then"(188).

He escapes the gunpowder explosion, but the experience that kills both Goodparley and Granser shows him the true nature of evil in his own and all human nature. He makes the connexion between his curiosity, his sexual potential, and the potential in the gunpowder. Granofsky relates sexual potential and violence in the novel:

The potential in the young man to mature, the future father within the son, corresponds to the atomic potential in all matter and to the potential violence in many social situations. The source of all energy and power can be traced back to this dormant potentiality. (173)

But also, the same curiosity that first led Riddley to see a woman open for him leads to the mixing of the 1 Littl 1. The curiosity that consumes Riddley is equivalent to that consuming everyone. Seeking an oracle from Granser's head, Riddley hears: "What if its you whats making all this happen?"(189). In a nihilistic dialogue with himself, Riddley denies anyone any point in thinking anything, since all are always culpable.



Riddley proceeds fully convinced of his unavoidable complicity in the evil of humanity. Walking over the barrens, the landscape mirrors his inner state: "Sour groun and dead . . . only the dry dus blowing in the summer and the grey mud in the winter"(190). But then the hope sown in Riddley's spirit at Cambry emerges: "Even the wind blowing the dus is something moving. . . . Seeds blow in the wind and what is earf but a deaclness with life growing out of it?"(190). He continues: "Rottin leaves and dead branches and naminal shit . . . all makes live earf on the dead groun"(190-91). The inheritor of all that is rotten and barren, aware of his own rottenness, nonetheless commits himself unconditionally to life: "I thot: What ever it is its my groun. Here I stan"(191). At that moment Riddley finds love, for the black leader dog nuzzles him and he says: "Thats when I cryd for the dead"(191). The black dog came into his life, symbolically, at his father's death, and the exchange of affection releases both Riddley's personal grief and his universal compassion.

Returning to the Cambry Power Ring, he now feels a power in himself circling with the residual power and he says: "Its the not sturgling for Power thats where the Power is. Its in jus letting your self be where it is. . . . Its tuning in to the worl its leaving yourself behynt and letting yourself be"(191). In a spirit of self-abandonment, he yells: "SPIRIT OF GOD ROAD WITH ME"(191), and at this, the moment of spiritual birth, there is no transcendent accompaniment, only a realistic sense that someone is around. Riddley

discovers Ernie Orfing in hiding. As his name implies, he offers an earnest alternative to Goodparly's ideas of moving "the outside of things frontways": "[I]ts the inside has got to do the moving"(198). The two survivors, outlawed and "living on burrow time"(197), try to find a separate peace, a new contract with society in the idea of the Walker and Orfing Show. Riddley commits himself to the role of the artist, sitting down and commencing to write the journal he has been narrating.

The making of the 1 Littl 1, explosively juxtaposing past and present, blows apart Riddley's innocent curiosity, his anthropocentric need for knowledge, opening his eyes to his inner corruption. Overcoming nihilism, hope leads him to commit himself to the myth-centred artistic life both as a writer and a showman.

The final event I will consider brings Riddley's story and the power of myth together in the first performance of the Walker & Orfing show. As he prepares for the road, Riddley assesses his attitude to the power he now knows to be inherent in the myth:

Ready to cry ready to dy ready for any thing is how I come to it  
now. In fear and tremmering only not running a way. In emptiness  
and ready to be fult. Not to lern no body nothing. I cant even lern  
my oan self all I can do is try not to get in front of whats coming.  
(199)

Riddley says that a show is "all ways trying to fynd out what is jus now . . . going thru its chaynjis"(199). He sees the power of 1st knowing and all he has learnt of since in those puppets. Those heads have things to say, "[W]hich they wont all ways be things youwd think of saying o no them wood heads the hart of the wood is in them and the hart of the wud [potential] and all"(198). Just as Punch is at once a spokesman for himself and everyone, so is the showman. Riddley predicts that sooner or later he will hear his puppets recount, "1 way or a nother", all the varied events of his life (201).

The response to the first Walker & Orfing show exemplifies public resistance to change. Before Riddley and Orfing can start, they have to debate with Rightway Flinter, who is understandably suspicious of fresh "trubba", knowing Riddley's part in the making of the 1 Littl 1. His moral reasoning, based largely on his community's need for survival, holds Riddley accountable and demands retribution. Riddley appears to be following in the steps Eusa had taken, when, culpable after the 1 Big 1, he did the rounds of the desolated towns, only to be rejected. Punch saves the day, appearing over Riddley's shoulder, beating him with his stick and then, dramatically, turning in silence, waving his stick at the watching crowd. As Punch bounces the universal shame back from Riddley to them, Rightway calls: "'You myswel come in and do your show. Whats on you is on you'"(207).

The show proceeds with Easier, a reactionary heckler, threatened by the anarchic Mr.Punch, calling: "'That figgers crookit'"(209). At the denouement, Easier yells,""You littl crookit baret I tol you not to try nothing here!"(213), and he knocks over the fit, precipitating a brawl with Rightway-- which Rightway wins. Testifying to the power of Punch to provoke, Hoban says:

Punch is that force that has no morality, no law; he wants immediate gratification for whatever urge he has at the moment. Our task, our burden, our human inheritance, is to try somehow to put together our need for a system of morality and our recognition of the amoral, unlawful urges in us. (Haffenden 143)

The puritanical Easier wants the morality without the recognition of the urges, the "easier" way, and therefore his system is incomplete. Ironically, Punch originally allays suspicion only to provoke it, but according to Leach this is in accord with his traditional Dionysian nature: "Dionysus is a saboteur of peace and quiet . . . the Dionysian rites, like the Punch and Judy show, celebrated [life]. . . not simply an acceptance of life, but an active vital living of it"(177).

Rightway joins Riddley and Orfing and the dogs (along with his brother and their combined families). If Riddley has accepted himself for who he is, he has also started a movement. It is counter-culture and shows every sign of growing, since there could well be characters, like Rightway Flinter, capable of moral reasoning, of seeing that "theres noren 1 kynd of crookit":

"Theres crookit on the out side and theres crookit on the in side"(209). There may be people who join them at every show. As they head out through the gate, a kid up on the "hy walk" reflects Riddley's own childhood back to him, endorsing him as a living myth, part of the folklore:

Riddley Walkers ben to show  
Riddley Walkers on the go  
Dont go Riddley Walkers track  
Drop Johns ryding on his back (214)

Riddley says he "wunt have no other track," reinforcing in this final image the linear plot to the end. He knows that his view is limited and his acceptance of that limitation is not a complete resclution, and we know he is living on "burrow time," with "Drop John" on his back. Hoban says that "Riddley has found what he's good for and the resources to carry on being himself"(Haffenden 126). Benjamin De Mott says that the novel's "striking accomplishment is that, in the act of damning the rnadness of the power obsessed, it brilliantly revivifies the consciousness of the resources in our midst that comprise our real hope at the brink"(25).

Living up to his name, Riddley will always question moral duplicity. Dowling sees the Punch and Judy show, "primarily as a riddle"(187). As a Punch showman, Riddley represents his own position in society, and, in turn, he is Hoban's expression of himself as a novelist. That expression is expansive in that it is open to the whole of human nature, not denying the existence of the

base, natural urges; but it is also responsible in that it sees the depravity deep within the human psyche and exposes the self-deceptions and social pressures that conceal it. Riddley has now, through his spiritual birth, through his transformed relationship to the power he calls the "spirit of God", become a myth himself. He has been through his Master Chaynjis, like Eusa, and is now a shaman (as Hoban would say) "functioning for his tribe"(Haffenden 144). However, in the acknowledgements for Pilgermann, his next novel, Hoban says: "Riddley Walker left me in a place where there was further action pending". The story, then, is by no means done, and possibly it will continue as long as Hoban continues to write.

## Chapter Two

### From Resignation to Faith

Riddley's changing relationship with what he calls "the Spirit of God"(RW 191), can be seen, by the end of his story, to have reached the discovery of faith, as in "fear and trembling" he approaches the role of puppeteer in the "Walker & Orfing" show (RW 199). Søren Kierkegaard, in Fear and Trembling, referring to a "tried oldster" who has "kept the faith," says, "his heart was still young enough not to have forgotten that fear and trembling which chastened his youth"(23). However, the indeterminacy at the end of Riddley Walker to some extent undercuts the credibility of this, his spiritual birth, and of Hoban's claim that by the end of the novel "Riddley has found what he's good for and the resources to carry on being himself"(Haffenden 126). Riddley passively accepts his outlawed state, "living on burrow time"(RW 197), and resigns himself to a burdensome emotional life, impeded by the weight of his own and his society's guilt and shame, an object of ridicule, with "Drop John" riding on his back(RW 214). His commitment to a way of life that could be more a treadmill around the "Fool's Circle" than a courageous encounter with reality, is less than a complete resolution, pointing, rather, to

what Kierkegaard refers to as the first movement of faith, "a caricature," namely that of "infinite resignation"(47-8).

Russell Hoban says, in relation to Riddley Walker, that Pilgermann was "further action, was further thinking along religious lines"(Myers 10). My consideration of this novel will show that the movement in Hoban's fiction away from anthropocentrism and towards mythocentrism continues, with an accompanying spiritual and moral growth. Pilgermann moves from resignation to faith and from moral passivity to action. Again, the power of myth effects the transformation, through educative dialogues with intermediaries and through the revelation of transcendent experience. Hoban's openness to both the moral and depraved aspects of human nature provides expansive insight into the possibility of individual and communal redemption. His analysis of the inter-relationship between potentiality and actuality reveals that they are part of a universal pattern in which humanity participates. His myth-centred embrace of the socially opposed Jewish, Islamic and Christian cultures, identifies the particular aspects of universal truth within each of them.

My consideration of this novel will start where Riddley Walker left off, for at the outset of his story the first- person narrator embodies all the imperfections apparent at the end of Riddley Walker. Pilgermann is outlawed, impotent and living on borrowed time, an object of ridicule, weighed down by guilt and shame (both his own and his community's). He feels the power of



myth compelling him to be its instrument and sets out on a track that could as well be a treadmill as a courageous encounter with reality. Jack Branscomb sees the similarity between the two novels in the context of their common time settings: "The movement from the eleventh century to the twentieth and from the forty-fifth century back through the twentieth to the eleventh links the novels and reinforces the sense of cyclical recurrence which is both a form of bondage and a path of release in Hoban's works"(37). But I would argue that the movement from bondage to release in Pilgermann, far from being a caricature, is the real thing and, as Hoban himself says, "[it]pretty well wound up [the] cycle of [religious] thought," begun in Riddley Walker (Myers 10).

It is in the narratorial point of view that the novels differ most noticeably (a difference that underlines the movement from anthropocentrism to mythocentrism). Pilgermann exists outside time, being "waves and particles"(11), and, contrary to Riddley, sees the whole: where Riddley asks questions, Pilgermann gives answers, expounds, philosophises; where Riddley has a sense of wonder and feelings never felt before, Pilgermann is worldly-wise, surprised by nothing. Pilgermann knows the power of myth intimately, existing as he has, transcendently, since his death in 1098 at the fall of Antioch. His religious sensibility is overt, with the benefit of 'thousands of years' experience. He attempts to separate his transcendent existence by recalling the linear details of his mortal life (as an eleventh-century German Jew, whose

name he never remembers) in order to see them in the context of the cosmic whole. There is no separation, for Pilgermann, between fact and fiction, myth and reality, history and religion. As the tile pattern he is to create continues to infinity, so all the phenomena of his mortal existence transcend material boundaries from his vantage point of "total Now" (Pilgermann 47). Thus, he confers upon mythological, religious and historical characters equal credibility, there being no separation between them in his narrating consciousness. The power within myth, religion and history is all one to him, and that power is God. He is required to transmit forever his own testimony to the nature "of the heart of the mystery, the moving stillness in which again and again explodes . . . the beginning of all things"(97). He has a mandate, a covenant with the Lord: "Everything is required of me for ever"(12). Thus, the transcendent Pilgermann, telling his tale, fulfils Hoban's claim for the artist as a Shaman functioning for his tribe (Haffenden 144), in this case returning to the past from the far side.

It cannot be denied, that Pilgermann is on a journey (his name being German for "pilgrim") and that it is educational. "[H]elp me, Memory!" he says, ". . . most of my education is lost to me"(102). It is the effect of that educative journey on Pilgermann that I will trace, from his victimised departure to his liberated arrival. As with Riddley, there is a process of moral change, moving him from a passive, controlled, victimised, cowardly, guilty know-it-all, to an active, self-directed, liberated, courageous hero of his own story, complete with

a sense of wonder. His story also answers Hoban's call for a system of morality that includes a recognition of the amoral, unlawful urges that are an essential part of humanity (Haffenden 143), part of it being the recognition of the rhythmic relationship between potentiality and actuality in his own life experience. By the end, he demonstrates (like Punch) "not simply an acceptance of life, but an active vital living of it"(Leach 177), not, however, as a puppet, a surrogate, but in himself.

The novel is often surrealistic in tone, in the confusion of images presented. Pilgermann says: "I can't tell this as a story, because it isn't a story"(38). So, I intend to look at those particular actions that are pertinent to my theme, as Pilgermann expounds them. His educative journey falls into four distinct phases which I will consider in turn: first, his victimised departure; second, the way through the dark wood and over the sea; third, his creation of the tile pattern in Antioch; and finally, the denouement.

At the outset of his mortal story, Pilgermann is plying his trades in the Jewish quarter of a German town in 1096. No doubt his life would have been uneventful had he not indulged his consuming desire to penetrate what for him was the heart of the mystery of existence, namely the beautiful Sophia, wife of the town tax-collector. The act through which he is received in communion into her presence, no longer regarded as an object but possessed

as a subject, changes his life forever: "The Shechinah was present in our holy sinning"(41)(the Shechinah being "the Divine manifestation through which God's presence is felt by man"[Shulman 300]). When Sophia whispers "Thou Jew! My Jew!" Pilgermann moves from "the centre of time," "the waiting," into "the motion of the everything, the action of the universe, . . . the living heart of the mystery"(16). But, minutes after his heroic, adulterous ecstasy, Pilgermann finds himself in agony, a castrated victim of the racist superstitions and fears of his Christian persecutors. Completing a cycle of absurdity, the tax collector, himself leading the persecution, saves his life. Alienated, castrated, Pilgermann sees overhead "a drift of storks . . . circling like those intersecting circles of tiny writing sometimes done by copyists with texts of the Holy Scriptures"(19). The Byzantine connection is prophetic as, later, Islamic pattern is to further his education regarding his relationship to "the action of the universe . . . the living heart of the mystery"(16).

Like Riddley, the alienation of his victimised position forces Pilgermann to self-examination: "God was to me as a parent to whom I had given little obedience and from whom I expected no inheritance"(19). In his distress, the lukewarm believer prays for deliverance, verbosely calling on the name of his religion, past, present and future. After a final triune supplication, the transcendent Christ appears, speaking from within Pilgermann's own head: "'I'm the one you'll talk to from now on'"(20). The educative dialogue prepares

the initiate for the way ahead: First, Christ encourages self-direction rather than dependency on a father-God. Pilgermann asks, "Have I got to be my own father now?" "Be what you like," says Christ, "but remember that after me it's the straight action and no more dressing up"(21). Second, he replaces Pilgermann's anthropocentric arrogance with humility. When Pilgermann opportunistically seeks a first-hand explanation for the perpetual Christian persecution of the Jews, he is met with an unbearable demonstration of divine power in the look Jesus turns upon him: "I explode in all directions to infinity, I contract to a point, I explode again from the point, I come back together and return shuddering and full of terror"(22). Begging forgiveness, Pilgermann admits the mortal limitations of his understanding of matters of eternal consequence and the precocity of his questioning. Third, Jesus demystifies Pilgermann's religiosity. Raging at Jesus, the Jew, for the anti-Jewish atrocities he has initiated, and horrified that he is the only one to talk to from now on, Pilgermann turns with a wordy, "forgotten" traditional prayer for deliverance to the Lord (he has not bothered with until now). "You're shaking an empty tree," said Jesus. "You're letting down your bucket in a dry well"(24). Then, he explains that restoration of manhood is not really what Pilgermann wants, that when he sought Sophia, the heart of the mystery, he was seeking, in effect, Christ, and now he has found him. Fourth, Jesus points out that up to now Pilgermann has had a free ride and that there is a price to be paid of "whatever

is most dear" by those who go his road of detachment: "There can be no holding by those who . . . will be here with me and gone with me"(25). Finally, Jesus teaches him that those who are tuned to him "shall go . . . have action": "I am a movement and a rest but at the same time I am all movement and no rest and you will have no rest but in the constant motion of me"(26-7).

After Christ leaves, Pilgermann reflects: "the pattern has found me and I must move . . . I poor eunuch of my Lord . . . subject always to Christ, the redeemer, the ransom, the sacrifice, victim, torturer, murderer, bringer of death"(26). Making, as Kierkegaard would say "the movement of infinite resignation"(62), Pilgermann is now at the point in life at which Hoban left Riddley Walker. Riddley felt the possibility of new life on the barrens; Pilgermann, despairing at the sterility of his enslavement to Jesus in whose name "they kill the seed that gave [him] life," received hope when Jesus replied: "From me came the seed that gave me life"(27). Kierkegaard stresses that the journey to faith takes a lifetime: "in a hundred and thirty years [Abraham] didst not get further than to faith"(37). Just so, Pilgermann knows his journey is now his life, an end in itself; he is a conscious instrument, a "poor bare tuned fork" being lived by the myth, the pattern, the motion, "humming with the foreverness of the Word that is always Now"(26).

Alone again, he considers the absurdity of explaining or preventing, through hindsight, his present situation; but he does question the morality of his

past actions. He had lacked vigilance on behalf of his fellow Jews and himself. Rather than arm himself to defend them and their religion, the only weapon he had taken in hand was the one with which he entered "the strange Jerusalem of the tax-collector's wife"(30). There is a paradox here, for, feeling no contrition for the sexual sin ("It would be an insult to [God's] creation not to climb ladders for that woman"), he nonetheless knows he did wrong when he "came between [the tax-collector] and his prayer"(31). Contrite, Pilgermann admits: "I've done wrong and reparation must be made. Because I violated that man's privacy . . . there's something required of me . . . What should I do, where should I go?"(31-32). A living myth, this time his Bath Kol, the traditional Hebrew inner voice, speaks to him: "Jerusalem! Thou pilgrim Jew!"(32). With her addressing him, as did Sophia, as subject, Pilgermann "could already feel the road under his feet"(32). Finding the tax-collector ahead of him, ready himself to leave on a penitential pilgrimage, full of remorse and publicly confessing his responsibility for the slaughter of the Jews, Pilgermann (though the injured party) admits that, in the final analysis, when "God asked for right [he] gave him wrong and the guilt is back on [him] again"(36). So, in an absurd alliance, with the tax-collector in effect leading the way, Pilgermann sets out. Later, he says "my pilgrimage . . . is a private matter between Jesus and me and the Tax-collector"(51).

There are echoes of the "1st knowing" in Riddley Walker in

Pilgermann's description of the way:

I give myself to the old, old, night that waits within me, the  
old, old night in the old, old wood. In this night the  
charcoal-burners crouch listening by their hearths while  
the trees pray, the wind speaks, the leaves rustle like  
souls departing with the upward flying sparks. (44)

The journey through the wood is surrealistic, the atmosphere, images and characters reminding the knowledgeable narrator of the art of Hieronymus Bosch, and time is transcended, "the crystalline vibrations of the purple-blue . . . being of the spectrum of total Now, that moment without beginning or end in which all other moments are contained"(47). This recalls both Eliade's "primordial time"(19) and Schrödinger's eternal "now"(22).

In the interview with Edward Myers, Hoban says that, along with Schrödinger, he feels "as if there is only one single universal consciousness and we are all receptors of it" and "as if the time is always Now"(Myers 11). Bearing this in mind, the bizarre characters that Pilgermann meets in his passage through the dark wood are, indeed, (as Hoban states in a later interview with David Brooks) not representations of something else, symbols, but rather "an aspect of things"(Brooks 77). They are what they are. Thus, the headless maggoty corpse of the tax-collector; Udo the relic-gatherer; his widow, the murderous second Sophia; the honey-divining bear being hung by the man who worshipped him; Bruder Pförtner and his company of death, raping the



child pilgrims in their innocent faith; the peasant Konrad with Bodwild, the Jew-hunting sow, are all part of the "aspect of things" and no doubt part of the single consciousness of which "we are all receptors." As such, they all have to be dealt with and accepted by Pilgermann as part of his own consciousness as he proceeds along his pilgrim way.

Of particular interest is the tax-collector, whose journey appears so bound-up with that of Pilgermann. Kierkegaard provides some illumination here, for, in Fear and Trembling, he describes the delusive outward appearance of the "knight of faith," speculating over his first meeting with such a person: "The moment I set eyes on him, I instantly push him from me . . . and say . . . 'Good Lord, is this the man? . . . Why, he looks like a tax-collector!'"(49). Hoban says: "I haven't read much Kierkegaard, but in Anxiety and Dread he talks about the dread of the possible. . . . We're not afraid of what we can't do, we're afraid of what we can do"(Haffenden 136). While making the connection between Hoban and Kierkegaard, this statement pertains to the horror, akin to the art of Bosch, of the violence and corruption exposed in the dark wood. The tax-collector, then, links faith to this dark aspect of humanity.

Talking to David Brooks, Hoban refers to "the deep health of the black": "I think that part of our current malaise is in a rejection of this vital black. . . . Black is the ultimate deep [and] . . . humans were meant to come to grips with these things and perceive them and have their action out of

them"(74-5). Pilgermann the narrator, from his universal vantage point, can see that the nightmare within which he is moving is a punishment: "such evil as I have done has tuned me to the gehinnom frequency, where I vibrate to the memories of all who have done evil; I share their being as well as their memories and . . . I remember as a doer remembers"(68). Gehinnom is the Jewish equivalent for hell, he explains, the opposite to Gan Eden (where the righteous go)(68). When he learns from the tax-collector that his transcendent fling with Sophia, far from being unique and personal, was nothing more than another in a long line of such trysts, he feels the agony of eternal loss: "The cup . . . would not pass from me.. . . And still I drink it now newly bitter after all the centuries. But the pain is the life,. . . [e]ven after death the pain is the life"(87). Here Pilgermann moves beyond resignation, acceptance of pain, to the recognition of its life-giving, restorative nature: "This great pain . . . swims its monstrous bulk in deeps far down, down, down below that agony of loss in which I grind my teeth remembering . . . "(87-8).

Though the final character Pilgermann meets on the road is ill-defined, he nonetheless feels "drawn to it as a father to a son," since it is "immediately recognizable . . . as an early state of [his] death(88). His experiences have led him not only to recognize and acknowledge his mortality but also to feel drawn to its naturalness, its wholesomeness. Thus, embracing the limits of mortal existence, Pilgermann composes a kina, a lament for the

beauty and wisdom doomed to be destroyed, for perfections only to be known in passing, for the inability to undo past violations or prevent those in the future: "Wisdom . . . shall never be within our grasp, shall only be a light upon our eyes and passing"(90). Pilgermann, the narrator, says:

Looking at. . . faraway events from this great distance I see them as if . . . dancing in a ring, unseparated by time: Crusades, plagues, massacres of Jews, dancing madness, peasant revolts -- a dance of life and a dance of death. A dance of life that spins itself into death. . . . Death is the natural expression of life. (99)

Though unable to achieve transcendence while mortal, Pilgermann sees that he was then part of the dance even in his agony of loss.

The transcendent journey through the dark wood, then, forces Pilgermann to confront previously latent aspects of being, that, though violent and macabre, nonetheless constitute a mysterious and essential part of humanity. He considers it his punishment to bear this knowledge, acknowledging in his own emotional pain that pain is life. Finally, confronting his mortality, he suffers the same frustration Riddley knew in the accompanying sense of limitation. He knows he will never experience the actualization of perfect wisdom, but, unlike Riddley, Pilgermann, the transcendent narrator, can see beyond to the role death plays in the dance, where virtuality and actuality inter-relate like music in "the enormity of Now"(100).

Leaving behind his bizarre fellow travellers, Pilgermann embarks "utterly alone"(103) on the Balena, only to be transferred by pirates to the

Ninevah. Being lived by the myth of Jonah, he is a resigned, yet rebellious, instrument of the Lord. In the Tripoli slave market, Pilgermann is sold to the Arab Bembel Rudzuk, and he leaves a free man with his new owner-turned-friend, sailing to Antioch on his dhow (aptly named the Sophia). Bembel Rudzuk explains that he needs Pilgermann because, being Jewish, he has a prime claim to the truth of Abraham that "personifies the elemental complementarity that moves the universe"(108). Having lost the affirmation of identity gained through Sophia's love, the lonely Pilgermann listens as his new friend describes his personal alchemy: "It is a continual offering to the Unity at the heart of the multiplicity [that] . . . makes no distinction between what is called something and what is called nothing [knowing] . . . such words to be without meaning"(109). For the first time truly needed for his Jewishness and liberated from the need to be called "thou" or "my", Pilgermann feels "such a Nowness in the light of the day that Christ leap[s] into [his] mind like the visual echo of his unheard voice"(109).

The third section of Pilgermann is static, in that though much is thought and discussed, the only events that take place are Pilgermann's creation of a tile pattern and its installation on a piece of land inside the city of Antioch. However, this is probably the most significant section of the novel, as it is the most concerned with what is hidden, with potentiality becoming

actuality, stillness becoming motion. When Pilgermann met Christ he reflected that "there is a point where pattern becomes motion, the pattern has found me and I must move"(26), and his preoccupation with the pattern reflects Hoban's own movement towards myth-centred imagination. In Pilgermann's journey through the dark wood and over the sea he has learnt a little of the nature of that constant motion within which he is now destined to "have no rest"(27). "No belief is necessary. . . It manifests itself," Pilgermann had said to Christ(27), and now, in his friendship with Bembel Rudzuk, the revelation continues.

"[Y]ou are here to do what will be done by you here," says Bembel Rudzuk(112), but Pilgermann, still obsessed by his castration, claims that he is unqualified for effective action, being a eunuch and "cut off from [his] generations"(112). Bembel Rudzuk argues that spiritual continuity is worth more than physical: "Better than sons and daughters is to be with the stillness that is always becoming motion . . . there is a continuity that is not cut off"(113). In an increasingly unfamiliar abstract environment Pilgermann recalls: "In the dark wood . . . I knew where I was. . . . I had a whereness to be in. Now I don't know where I am, I don't have where to be"(113). So Bembel Rudzuk introduces him to his first Islamic tile pattern, providing in the image philosophical ground for Pilgermann to stand upon and a task for him to perform: "This pattern is contiguous with infinity . . . once the mode of

repetition is established. . . .[T]he potentiality and the actuality are one thing"(113-4). Wondering if the purpose of the enterprise is to reveal "Thing-in-itself," Pilgermann is told that "'Thing-in-itself is not to be seen nor is it to be sought directly'"(117-8). An example of Hoban's possible interest in, and containment of, German Idealism, this thought also reflects Joseph Campbell's description of the mythological image that is "always pointing toward transcendence" and giving one the sense of riding on a mystery (41). Campbell warns that "if a metaphor closes in on itself and says 'I'm it, the reference is to me or this event,' then it has closed the transcendence; it's no longer mythological. It's distortion. It's pathological"(40).

As Pilgermann marks out the foundation of his own pattern of intersecting circles, he can feel (as did Riddley at "Zero Groun") "the power of the centre there, feel the radii going out from it and coming in to it"(120). On completing the pattern, he is surprised by the variety of actions that appear: "However one looked . . . there could be no doubt that the stillness had become motion"(123). When he names the pattern "Hidden Lion" there leaps up in him "a wild surge of terror and joy as virtuality, correctly named, leapt into actuality"(123). Referring to the lion in his earlier novel, The Lion of Boaz-Jachin and Jachin- Boaz, Hoban says:"As I worked . . . the lion became . . . whatever was needed as a vital force"(Haffenden 129). Significantly, the pattern's alternate name is "Willing Virgin". The opposing images, aspects of

Pilgermann's disintegrated sexual potential, unite in the complex variety of the whole.

Though his pattern contains the elements of the vital principle, the life-force, Pilgermann still feels unproductive: "[S]till there are things to be done . . . still there is action required of me"(124). However, once complete, Hidden Lion is where the action is. People gravitate towards it drawn by the latent power. It becomes "not only the liveliest of bazaars but also a good-luck place almost sacred to those who had experienced its power"(157). Meanwhile, Bembel Rudzuk gives Pilgermann swordplay and riding lessons to prepare him for the time of the actuality to come, namely the fall of Antioch.

If there is a moment that moves Pilgermann from within, reorientating him towards actuality, it could be when he first reflects upon the approach of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Self-pitying in his separation from his congregation through his eunuchhood, he acknowledges the mythological power within his religious tradition:

It was no use to tell myself that God was no longer He and that accounts were no longer being kept--centuries of moral reckoning leapt up in me. It was in me; I was in it: it was like a giant wave, an impulse racing across vast expanses of time, living its motion through successive particles of mortality. (160)

The juxtaposition of Judaic religious tradition and Pilgermann's personal crisis changes him from a self-pitying, apologetic onlooker to an eager, responsible contributor. He acknowledges that it was his choice to stand apart from the

Jewish congregation in Antioch: "I didn't want to be part of anybody else's traffic with God"(161). But, he knows he needs something from his traditional roots, maybe "the urgent maleness" of the ram's horn trumpeting that was "so much a call to action": "it was so utterly not the murmur of praying, swaying, weaponless victims"(161). Increasingly, Pilgermann's castration has become an expression of his moral impotence; he has been collecting experience, potential, virtuality throughout his journey but he has been unable to act upon it. The transcendent narrator Pilgermann comments on the summons of the Yom Kippur ram's horn "from the dreadful mountain of the Law": "This Law . . . so imperious is simply the law of the allness of the everything of which each of us is a particle. Quick! Now! Rise up from your sleep, from your unbeing! Be! Do! respond!"(161). "Be! Do! What?" wonders Pilgermann(161). An evening conversation outside the synagogue leads him to conclude that "Jerusalem was . . . to be found wherever [he] joined the motion of the hidden lion"(163), and he recalls one of the child-pilgrims on the road saying to him: "'Jerusalem will be wherever we are when we come to the end'"(163). Abandonment to the myth will place him within space-time singularity.

Once he chooses to lose himself in the action of Hidden Lion, for better or worse, things start to happen for him personally there. The tax-collector returns, gesturing continually, "possibly reckoning up something"(165). He convinces Pilgermann: "It was I that he was talking about . . . my account



that he was reckoning up"(165). Increasingly, the tax-collector, the spiritual aspect of things, sentenced to be accountable for the moral depravities of its rotting bodily form, takes his part in the drama of Pilgermann's life. Though ostensibly revolting, he is both a guide and an agent for redemption and a progressively important aspect of his existence.

The movement from virtuality to actuality has begun for Pilgermann, his inner stillness becoming motion. Though the final section of the novel moves conventionally with "a coherent sequence of picture cards," it is in the action within and behind the historical fall of Antioch, that Pilgermann plays his part to the death. He now knows that everything that transpires on Hidden Lion is taken up into the pattern, becoming contiguous with infinity. Thus the blood that falls on the tiles from the slaughter of a hundred Christians, (their lives taken in reprisal for a similar number of Turks killed the previous day), becomes "now part of the pattern"(175). Yaghi-Siyan, the perpetrator, chose the site in order that "the beheading of these . . . traitors . . . may go on for ever and ever until time will have an end"(172). As already observed in Riddley Walker, potential is itself amoral, and only in its actualising does it serve either good or evil. Moral choice lies in the nature of the appropriation of power. Bembel Rudzuk believes that "the Last Day is every day": "the Garden and the Fire are in each of us everyday . . . and we are in one or the other or somewhere between . . . depending on our actions"(179). With the immanence of the

terrible power in Hidden Lion before them in the bloodstains on the tiles, Bembel Rudzuk regrets the greed with which they pursued the Unseen who, he speculates, has answered: "I have shown you the surge of Me that is like a river of power, and still you crave more; very well then, I will show you more"(180).

Though the damage is done, the life on Hidden Lion continues as a boy prostrates himself on the blood-stained tiles and thereafter, daily, a pot of money is filled for distribution among the Christian orphans. The impulse exemplifies the "straight action" described by Christ(21), in his earlier conversation with Pilgermann. After the horror, everyday life returns to Hidden Lion with the stallholders. On the larger stage, responding to the virtuality of war, Pilgermann and Bembel Rudzuk tend the wounded with straight actions, "stuff[ing] entrails back into the places where they belong . . . sew[ing] up flesh that has been violently parted"(188). Pilgermann senses a universal rhythm accounting for both his personal, and mankind's mortal, castration and he imagines God calling him to abandon himself, and saying: "Let's see if you'll grow yourself some new balls and jump into the mystery with me"(201).

Passover arrives, and he enters imaginatively into its universal significance, consciously living the myth. Virtuality moves towards actuality, in his imagination, in the figure of Bohemond, the Frankish warrior knight "in his aspect of the death angel named Questing . . . questing on the death-track of

the mystery that is Christ"(208). Obsessed with the one whose name is "by now . . . like the roar of a lion"(210), Pilgermann sees Bohemond as Elijah, entering the Seder when the door is opened (anticipating his actual entry into Antioch several weeks later): "Elijah as enemy, enemy as messenger of God . . . the enemy as teacher. Sophia was the beginning of my Holy Wisdom and Bohemond would be the end of it"(211). Just as Easyer's literalism rejected the deeper moral engagement of the anarchic "Punch & Pooty Show" in Riddley Walker, so the traditional Jews in Antioch react with "stony glares" as Pilgermann challenges their "brute faith" in the restoration of "the glory of Israel": "'Wait, you'll see glory when Bohemond comes over the wall'"(213). On this Eve of Passover Pilgermann says,"Bohemond is Elijah and for me the taking of Antioch will be the Messiah and Jerusalem both"(214).

Passover comes and goes without event, but in a prophetic dream Pilgermann sees Sophia perish in the sack of Jerusalem, while the infant son of their union barely survives. Too late, he wants to act, to save the two people he loves most from disaster,for his young death appears mouthing the word "tonight"(218). Bruder Pförtner explains to the rebellious Pilgermann the irreversibility of death: "'Tonight is the fall of Antioch and I need all the Jews and Muslims I can lay my hands on'"(219). With time closing in on him, Pilgermann knows that, if given the chance, he would be assertive, and though

the faithful Bembel Rudzuk joins him in attempting to leave Antioch on his mission of mercy, Pilgermann knows that his good intention comes too late.

Imprisoned in a sense by necessity, Pilgermann's final surrealistic moments express his moral condition, translating into actuality the accumulation of experience, sensation and thought that make up the pattern of his existence. Locked in a cell with Bembel Rudzuk and the tax-collector, he endures the constant stench "of actuality"(233) as the latter repeatedly relieves himself into a bucket with "a noise that was like the bursting of the Unseen into the seen"(232). Agitated and shamed by the revelation of the private, internal corruption, he shouts "'if you're going to keep doing that at least you must accept responsibility for it!'"(232). Bembel Rudzuk, undisturbed in his detachment, urges him to stop "being ashamed" and at the right moment offers his shoulders for Pilgermann to stand upon, directing the unloading of the bucket through the window, just as Bohemond passes below. "There comes a wild cry of rage as startling and primitive as the roar of a lion"(234).

At that moment released from their cell, the companions head for Hidden Lion. Seeing Bohemond standing on the tiles, "foul and stinking with excrement,[from the bucket]," Pilgermann watches him make a gigantic sign of the cross, as he kills Bembel Rudzuk:

I see the great Frankish sword that has been going up and down  
 like a post-hole digger suddenly leap like a live thing as  
 Bohemond shifts his grip and now a track of brightness  
 horizontally cleaves the darkness . . . cleaves with its savage arc  
 the body of Bembel Rudzuk. (236)

As the life on Hidden Lion continues, Pilgermann finds himself face to face with the mystery that is Bohemond. This enemy, this messenger from God, through his symbolic action, bears the corruption and grants the absolution of sin that imaginatively liberates Pilgermann. Bohemond is not only his Elijah and Jerusalem but also the fulfilment of his earlier words: "I poor eunuch of my Lord . . . subject always to Christ the redeemer, the ransom, the sacrifice, victim, torturer, murderer, bringer of death"(26). Leaping into the mystery, Pilgermann "strikes with his sword," overcoming any trace of resignation with panache as he dies. He translates in his action, the material pattern of Hidden Lion into the eternal "night and dawn of brilliance . . . [where] the Virgin and the Lion [wheel] in the darkness and the light"(236). He is now part of the universal pattern that contains within it the opposing aspects of sexual potential, inter-relating, like music, in "the enormity of Now"(100). Bohemond, like Pilgermann, was merely a channel for the power in Hidden Lion where all that happens becomes contiguous with infinity. Pilgermann finally sees the storks returning, "circling in the overlapping patterns of the Law"(236) endorsing the continuing dynamic of the virtual and the actual, "the elemental complementarity

that moves the universe”(108). “Death,” says Hoban, “is simply the kinetic rejoining the potential”(Haffenden,134).

From the beginning, Pilgermann, contrary to Riddley Walker, sets out to deal with his equivalent of “Drop John” in his penitential pilgrimage to Jerusalem. During the course of his story, his dependant sexuality is converted to self-assured humanity. The only way that Riddley can live with the power of myth that possesses him is through a puppet, a surrogate. Pilgermann, on the other hand, on several occasions claims that he is being lived by the myth, by the motion, and he ultimately abandons himself to it, completely. Riddley never regains his innocence, but Pilgermann, in the picaresque ending to his story, has a sense of wonder at the Dionysian splendour of Bohemond, which leads into ecstasy as his horizons expand into transcendence. As with Riddley, Pilgermann becomes the hero of his own story, the shaman. “The true knight of faith is a witness, never a teacher, and therein lies his deep humanity,” says Kierkegaard(90). However, there is a problem for those who would apply his art to life, because Pilgermann is dead! I would argue that The Medusa Frequency, Hoban’s next novel, brings the visionary insights of Pilgermann down to earth, actualising them in the London suburbs of the 1980s, to be precise.

### Chapter Three

#### The Baptised Imagination <sup>1</sup>

Although Hoban once said that he supposed Pilgermann "pretty well wound up" the cycle of thought that started with Riddley Walker (Myers 10), there is ample evidence that this statement in no way prevents consideration of his next novel The Medusa Frequency as part of a continuum. Accordingly, I am treating The Medusa Frequency as a progression of Hoban's myth-centred, moral and religious thought.

Riddley Walker, as I have shown, moved away from the anthropocentric orientation of his society to a mythocentric awareness, through his transcendent encounters with the power of creation, revealed through myth. But, as I have described, the process of moral and spiritual maturation was incomplete. Pilgermann's penitential pilgrimage took him through transforming, transcendent experiences. As with Riddley, they were precipitated through his encounters with "the motion of the everything, the action of the universe . . . the living heart of the mystery"(Pilg,16). The pattern revealed itself through the medieval Christian allegorical myths, the Islamic pictorial myth of the tile

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<sup>1</sup> C.S.Lewis said that George MacDonald's Phantastes was to convert even to baptise his imagination (Lewis 11).

pattern, and the Judaic myth of his religious congregation. Unlike Riddley's, however, his changes led him from resignation to faith. The detachment of his final leap of faith enabled him to shed the guilt that had been impeding him. His liberating transformation into death left him to recall his tale with a transcendent awareness.

Like Pilgermann, Herman Orff in The Medusa Frequency moves from anthropocentric to mythocentric life and from resignation to faith. His encounters with the mythological "ancient of the deeps," the Kraken, lead him into transforming transcendent experiences(MF 10). It is the classical figures of Persephone, Orpheus and Eurydice, Hermes, Aristaeus and Medusa, along with the Kraken, that provide the imaginative channels for the mythical power. Set in modern Britain, The Medusa Frequency brings the visionary themes introduced in Riddley Walker and developed in Pilgermann down to earth. The narrator, Herman Orff, a mediocre novelist with potential, suffering from writer's block, is the instrument through whom Hoban's previous insights are applied to the experience of the contemporary literary artist. Hoban's earlier novel Kleinzeit (1974) also juxtaposes the Orpheus myth with the plight of a failing modern writer. Hoban says that in Kleinzeit he "made friends with death" (Myers 8) and Pilgermann was to be an elaboration of the themes broached there. I would suggest that through the absurdist humour of The Medusa Frequency he makes friends with life.



As in the previous novels, a moral development takes place in the protagonist as his story unfolds. In Riddley Walker, curiosity to probe every riddle of existence led Riddley to participate in the making of the "1 Littl 1." As the mystery of the potentiality of gunpowder was revealed in actuality, Riddley made the connection between this and his sexual nature. All along, when he had felt the power potential he had felt "juicy"(RW 154). As his story proceeded, he learned to approach that power "in fear and tremmering"(RW 199). Resigned to the fact that he would be forever culpable in his handling of power, he never allowed its force to be released within himself, but rather settled for the role of puppeteer for the unrestrained Mr.Punch; he allowed the puppet to demonstrate the debauched possibilities of human excess (and, in this sense, Punch was his saviour). In Pilgermann, it was Sophia who housed the heart of the mystery of existence that Pilgermann desired to penetrate. His educative journey that transformed his relationship to the "Unseen" changed also his attitude to Sophia (Pilg 180). Originally, he had seen her as the visionary key to his salvation, but, as his perception changed, he saw her as human, vulnerable, and in need of his protection. But his good intention to nurture her came too late; the potential for good in his sexuality was never converted to actuality. Only in his dying was he redeemed by the Dionysian figure of Bohemond. Like Punch, Bohemond embodied rabid masculinity. Pilgermann, in his final quixotic act of self-abandoned opposition to him,

participated with him in an imaginative drama that transcended the limits of mortality.

The theme of moral refinement continues in The Medusa Frequency, and the focus on sexual maturation suggests an alternative to possible claims of feminist scholars that Hoban's writing runs counter to their cause. Herman Orff, like his novelistic predecessors, has a consuming need to unite with the heart of the mystery of life, which, for him, is the feminine principle, contained within a composite female, namely, Luise (his ex-partner), Persephone and Eurydice. As Pilgermann had lost Sophia, so has Herman lost his Luise/Persephone/Eurydice, but, unlike Pilgermann. Herman has the opportunity for maturation, redemption and liberation within his life experience. It is the Dionysian figure of Medusa (a traditional embodiment of the destructive power of femininity) that is to be his saviour.

As with the previous novels, I intend to look at the story of the protagonist, paying particular attention to the nature and results of the juxtaposition of classical myth and his personal situation. Herman Orff starts out an impotent, guilt-ridden artist, resigned to earning his living by the reductive manipulation of classical literature, lamenting the loss of sexual love in his life (whilst indulging his lecherous imagination). By the end of the novel, he has become a liberated original artist, who works with integrity, while celebrating the innocent, imaginative delights of equitable sexual

communication. His story, to some extent, parallels that of Riddley Walker and Pilgermann, for educative dialogues and transcendent experiences again lead to his transformation. My analysis will trace his journey from resignation to faith. I will consider, first, Herman's initial plight and his meeting with the Kraken, second, the E.E.G. experiment at "Hermes Soundways" and its results, third, the nature and results of his various meetings with the head of Orpheus, and finally, the ethical effects of his experiences on his love-life and his writing.

Herman Orff is a middle-aged novelist who has not written anything of note for eight years. His unfulfilled domestic life parallels his writing career. Divorced and lonely, he had met Luise von Himmelbett eleven years previously and had told her: "'You're everything I've ever wanted in a woman'"(18). During the two years that she had lived with him he had written his first novel Slope of Hell, "a downhill sort of thing"(12), and the year following her desertion he had written "World of Shadows (Reedham & Weap, 1978)"(12). Since then, he has supported himself advertising such products as "Orpheus Men's Toiletries [and] Hermes Foot Powder"(12), moving on to writing comics for Sol Mazzaroth of Classic Comics. But he still seeks his next volume, sitting at his computer nightly, "like a telegrapher at a lost outpost," listening to his short-wave radio (9). Still lamenting the loss of Luise, he fears the potentiality, the terror at the heart of heterosexual relationship, while yet yearning for its

fulfillment. It is the same potentiality that fires his literary imagination. When he first met Luise, he imagined "waking up and finding her there every morning, [and] . . . page after page coming out of the typewriter"(18). Just as he now exploits classical myths to earn money, so then he had exploited Luise. He had reduced her to an instrument for his creativity. When Luise left, she wrote: "I trusted you with the idea of me and you lost it"(16). After nine years without her, Herman says, "I could feel that there was life in my head, there were all sorts of things going on in it, but nothing that could be made to act like a story for two or three hundred pages"(13). In short, Herman has writer's block.

Mention must be made here of a visual motif that recurs in both Pilgermann and The Medusa Frequency, namely, Vermeer's painting Head of a Young Girl. In Pilgermann, the narrator digresses to describe the expression on the face of the girl as "the heart of the mystery, the moving stillness in which again and again explodes . . . the beginning of all things"(Pilg 97), using language that suggests his earlier impressions of both Sophia and Jesus Christ(Pilg 26-7). That which had been a digression in Pilgermann becomes an obsession in The Medusa Frequency. Herman Orfl has three reproductions of the picture around him as he works. For him, the Vermeer girl represents the essential communication he has lost and longs to retrieve. "The look on her face always made me think of Luise von Himmelbett," he says(16).

Against this sense of on-going crisis, Hoban juxtaposes the mythical existence of the Kraken. (Considering Herman's regular utilisation of classical themes, it is not surprising that they should dominate his imagination.) When the mysterious words NNVSNU TSRUNGH appear on his computer screen, in his openness to the unknown and preoccupation with the source of creation, he suspects it may be the Kraken speaking. The screen replies: "IF YOU THINK OF ME I MAY BE REAL. LET ME NOT BE REAL"(8). "The reality of the Kraken isn't up to me, I'm not the final authority on such things," thinks Herman(8). He knows the power of myth is beyond his control. Through thought association, he digresses to the primal image of a fisher girl(Eurydice) in the embrace of a giant squid(the Kraken). The idea of sexual potential obsesses Herman. The very source of life, at the same time the source of his pain, awaits him at his computer screen. Communication with the Kraken is crucial to his survival as a man and as an artist. Myth and creation are now one for him. If it seems incongruous that a source of terror can be the source of life, the observations on potentiality in Riddley Walker should be remembered, namely that the source of both destructive and creative energy is one and the same. "[T]he powerful energies potential in man [can] be directed for creative or destructive purposes"(Granofsky 172). I would argue that in Herman's experience, the latter is converted to the former. Herman asks the Kraken to tell him about its source. "IN THE BEGINNING OF ALL THINGS

WAS MY BEGINNING, IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE TERROR. . . . THE TERROR WAS ITSELF AND THE TERROR WAS OF ITSELF. THERE WAS NOTHING ELSE," replies the Kraken, in cadences reminiscent of the first chapter of the gospel of St. John. In his essay "Pan Lives," Hoban says: "Keep in mind what St. John says: 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God'. I think that idea is in us independently of Christianity. I think it's simply in us and inexplicable"(173). It is obvious that Hoban identifies with Herman Orff, for while he was writing The Medusa Frequency he said: "'I know that [my work] is out of my hands, I'm hooked to something of everlasting vitality. Writing is receiving, is relay"(Brooks 76). "Something is going on between me and the Kraken and I have to pay attention to it"(Brooks 84). The Kraken promises Herman: "I WILL SHOW MYSELF TO YOU IN SEVERAL WAYS AND WITH SEVERAL FACES"(11). In other words, myth reveals itself to open, receptive minds.

Like both Riddley and Pilgermann, as soon as Herman commits himself to the power of myth over his life, things start to happen. Responding to a punning flyer from "Hermes Soundways" offering help for blocked writers, Herman takes his first leap into the unknown, even though "it mightn't be a place [he wants] to get to"(19). Events reveal his divided moral state, as he travels to "Hermes Soundways". The first pretty girl he sees elicits his pent-up

sexual enthusiasm: "O God! . . . to explore the valley of her pudenda! To climb with her the mountains of Orgasma"(20). Not only that, but his hyper-active imagination adds her to his classical composite woman: "Her face had a sudden woodland look, as if she might just that moment have heard the baying of hounds"(20). On one hand he tells himself not to be ridiculous, while on the other he thinks: "I'd never been foolish enough. What is it but foolishness that brings the giant squid and Eurydice together?"(20). This recalls Hoban's call for a moral system that includes a recognition of mankind's "amoral, unlawful urges"(Haffenden 14). In a novel full of crazy coincidences the woodland girl turns out to be Melanie Falsepercy, Istvan Follock's assistant at "Hermes Soundways", who is to become an intermediary in Herman's education.

Herman's description of the "Hermes Soundways" office recalls Hoban's obsession with the green depths that are an ever-present source of human existence: "[I]n the music of its half-light, it swam in sound like a long-drowned city in a sea of dreams"(21). Herman thinks: "Here sleeps the Kraken"(21). The treatment, "an E.E.G. technique with a few refinements," juxtaposes classical myth with Herman's personal crisis (19). Asked for a key phrase to trigger the search process, Herman finds himself saying, "the olive tree"(25). Whereupon he recalls his last traumatic summer with Luise, on the island of Paxos. They had wandered through olive groves, and the hollow darkness of one particular tree was for them the entry to the underworld, "a Persephone

door"(26). Following her discovery of an incriminating letter in Herman's writing folder, Luise pointed out that, though the darkness is good and nourishing, it can also be a bad place "in which people tell lies and are deceitful"(26). A pivotal moment in their deteriorating relationship, and a key to Herman's locked imagination, the persephone-olive tree connection is programmed into the Hermes' computer. The button is pushed, and Herman enters his own darkness.

Discussing his preoccupation with darkness, Hoban says: "There's a darkness in each of us, a Caliban of things, and it has to be acknowledged. . . . It matters because that's where the action is and you've got to move with it"(Brooks 78). Herman is longing to break out of the mental prison he is in, and once more move with the action. The surrealistic dream sequence that follows turns out to be both therapeutic and prophetic. First, Herman intuits a mere possibility: "[A]ll around me, as if the dark were silvered like a mirror, I saw a face . . . not mine . . . almost recognizable, with a speaking mouth saying words almost intelligible"(27). (In the classical tradition, Perseus had seen Medusa mirrored in his shield.) Following the intimation, the primordial images of water and darkness combine with the existing members of his composite female as he falls "down into the blackness at the bottom of the sea"(27). Rising to the surface, united to the Kraken, he finds that the acknowledgement of his own depths has expanded his imaginative horizons.



His heightened perception enables him to redefine his own plight, personifying it in the floating enormous rotting head of Orpheus, whose cry of "Eurydice" is "like the rending of mountains"(28). The giant, decaying artist's head, is an aspect of Herman's being, and he clings to it, for he needs the identity in order to stay afloat. He then sees his composite woman (Eurydice, the Vermeer girl, Melanie Falsepercy and Luise) rising like Venus from the dawn water and becoming an enormous face, surrounding him and evolving. But, just as he was unable to identify the mirrored face in the darkness, so now the resolution of the vision, the longed-for retrieving of the essential communication, eludes him. He relapses back into his pain and, like Orpheus lamenting Eurydice, repeats "Luise, Luise, Luise"(28). At this point, Herman runs out of "Hermes Soundways". Contact with the Kraken made, introduced to his mythical alter ego -- the lamenting, shamed, decaying artist Orpheus -- and, intuiting the promise of transformation, Herman is now living on a mythocentric wave-length, receiving an unfamiliar frequency. Only experience of life in this frequency will lead him through his grief and pain to the brighter prospect beyond.

Herman's heightened perception is evident as he makes his way home: "I could feel the running of the tide as I went up the escalators, through the corridor and up the stairs to the District and Circle Line platforms. . . . The unseen olive tree and the sea flickered their sunlight in the November dark"(29). Herman, in his turn, is experiencing Eliade's "primordial time"(19) and

Schrödinger's eternal "now". In his essay "Pan Lives", Hoban uses the olive tree to convey his sense of the abiding presence of the mythological past:

Very, very old, some of those olive trees. . . . holding themselves open like magical garments, showing the ancient hollow darkness in them. . . . They look as if they might have nymphs, dryads, gods or demons inside them. Pan isn't dead, don't think that for a moment . . . Pan lives, he makes his music on the hills and in the groves he stamps his cloven hooves and dances. (180)

Herman's transcendent perception remains the next morning:

A sort of singing filled my head; it seemed an aspect of the particles of light and colour that made in my eyes the picture of the time just before dawn. I thought of the dew on the grass where the olive tree stood. There seemed to be a question in the air. (30)

This passage further exemplifies Hoban's philosophy in "Pan Lives": "There is a continual telling and asking going on, a continuous conversation that is trying to happen between everything around us and us. . . . The universe is continually communicating itself to us in a cosmic eucharist of waves and particles"(174,182). Myth-centred imagination is, perforce, creation-centred. To the question hanging in the air Herman answers,"I will"(30). Thus he consents to being possessed by the myth of Orpheus and to its application and translation in his own life experience: "The singing in my head became the slowly spreading circles of an intolerable clangour . . . 'Eurydice!' whispered a voice from the mud, from the stones. 'Eurydice!'"(30). Like Pilgermann, the pattern has found Herman and he must move with it.

Whether the head of Orpheus materialises as a cabbage, a football, or as its rotting barnacled original, Herman listens when it speaks and responds. At their first meeting, he says: "Its voice was more elemental, more profound than human voices are; it was . . . as if the creature were for the first time putting thoughts into words"(31). (Punch had an inhuman voice; Bohemond roared like a lion.) In his heightened awareness, Herman can hear where others cannot. Calling for openness to unfamiliar communication from the world around us, Hoban says:

For the sake of the Word that is God, hear it say itself, hear the murmurous silence of the daily Word made flesh. . . . All of it needs to be taken in not as event but as language, as the allness of everything saying itself to us because we are what it talks to.  
(Pan Lives 174)

Herman's dialogues with the head of Orpheus are morally educative, leading him through his identification with the re-told myth to fresh perception of his position in the universal scheme of things and thence to self-knowledge and a sense of responsibility.

It is obvious that they have common ground for discussion when the head describes itself as "the endlessly voyaging sorrow that is always in you" and "the one to whom Hermes brought Eurydice and perpetual guilt"(33). However, its proclamation that "fidelity is what's wanted" directs the dialogue towards moral ground that the unfaithful Herman would prefer not to enter; nonetheless, he listens:

Fidelity is a matter of perception; nobody is unfaithful to the sea or to mountains or to death: once recognised they fill the heart. . . . [T]he soul is compelled by recognitions. Anyone who loves, anyone who perceives the other person fully can only be faithful. (33-4)

Suffering a twinge of chest pain, Herman replies: "If you're going to take a high moral tone you'd better find someone else to talk to . . . I'm not up to it"(34).

Like both Riddley and Pilgermann, Herman's resignation to his inadequacy stems from unresolved guilt. Orpheus' definition of fidelity is to direct Herman's gradual movement to maturity, both as a writer and as a man. The movement is to develop his ability to perceive fully. With his reply, "Once begun, the story must be finished; I take it on me"(15), Herman commits himself to the hearing out of the Orpheus myth and to the reliving of it in his own experience.

As the head begins its story, it again identifies with Herman: "[W]hat I had been was gone and what I was to be had not yet come"(39). It then introduces a sense of universality in the image of the world-child, "whose innocence binds the world together, whose innocence betrayed will unfasten the world"(40). Orpheus became the world-child when he first heard Eurydice weeping by the river (40). Herman makes his own connection, realising that the trauma of his experience with Luise affects all humanity. He is no longer an island unto himself: "I remember how it was, I remember her weeping"(40).

This first conversation has aroused Herman's moral sensitivities. He is now aware that his own failure to perceive has universal significance. It is with an unfamiliar sense of responsibility that he feels dismayed to find Sol Mazzaroth planning to involve him in a new glossy magazine called Classique. Sol offers more than six times the money Herman is currently earning for a sophisticated sensationalising of the Orpheus legend with particular emphasis on "amorous passion . . . unnatural gratifications . . . underworld action . . . [and] possibilities" that present Orpheus, not as "some little wimp" but "a really hunky guy"(50). Sol's proposed revisioning of the Orpheus myth that plays on masculine curiosity, the desire to probe the mystery of life, of sex, endorses machismo, the traditional male stereotype (that has landed Herman in so much trouble). The exploitation of the power of myth and of sex for personal gain, the designed partial perception, the unfaithfulness to the myth arouse Herman's nascent conscience. He senses "that something that until now had taken no notice of [him] had slowly lifted up its head and was watching [him]"(52). His wish "from the bottom of [his] heart that Sol Mazzaroth had never mentioned Orpheus to [him]" is the first indication of moral life stirring within his paralysed imagination(52).

Herman seeks further dialogue with the head, for he needs to finish the story, in order to understand his moral intuitions. He needs the human myth of Orpheus, the incarnate expression of the Word retold through human

experience. He needs to work out his own salvation through his application of that story to his own life. He learns that further contact with the head and continuation of the story involves further pain for both himself and Orpheus. When Orpheus says, "It hurts to remember," Herman replies, "Yes, but without remembering we have nothing"(62). Turning this imaginative insight from his second encounter with the head into reality, Herman experiences an escalation of his relationship with Melanie Falsepercy. He breaks his long fast and enjoys her in a night of passion. Images in his fragmented imagination unite as he sees her asleep beside him and "Luise rising in the shining dawn in the wild and rainy night"(68). Melanie is to be an intermediary, an agent in his redemption. She says, "I think we're all in this together, you and I and the head of Orpheus"(74).

Possibly renewal of sexual intimacy liberates the emotions clamped since Luise's traumatic departure, for at his next meeting with the head Herman is able to discuss that tender issue. The dialogue is again educative and again it concerns fidelity. When Orpheus points out that the potential for destruction exists at the heart of every essential relationship, he provokes Herman to tell him about Luise. Now that he is beginning to confront the pain of his lost relationship, Herman is beginning to gain self-knowledge. He acknowledges that neither he nor Luise had fully perceived the idea of each other.

The next day, Melanie calls to say that she needs to be alone, and with refreshing realism Herman thinks, "Well . . . there you have it: you need her more than she needs you"(76). But at dusk, his dependent yearnings return. He seeks but doesn't find the Vermeer girl's habitual returning gaze, so he tunes his short-wave radio to Radio Tirana's German transmission and hears "just such a voice as the Vermeer girl might have spoken with"(79). In his imagination, the language recedes and only the voice of the Vermeer girl remains, "beckoning wordlessly": "Come and find me"(79). At this point, he has the opportunity denied Pilgermann to renew his relationship with his lost woman. He is staking the survival of his imaginative life on the outcome of his trip to the Hague, to find Vermeer's Head of a Young Girl, and this is as significant a leap of faith for Herman as was his initial outing to "Hermes Soundways".

Significantly, he finds a nothingness on arrival, for the picture is not on display. Nonetheless, trusting the Vermeer girl, he proceeds, open to all eventualities. First, a bizarre meeting with Gösta Kraken, the deconstructionist film-maker, with whom Luise had lived for two years after leaving Herman, leads Herman to further self-knowledge. Kraken flaunts his incomplete perception of Luise as "flickering". He boasts that women respond to his "flickering" and he considers that his behaviour with Luise was "impeccable"(88). Beneath his enlightened artistic veneer lies a crude nature.

Herman questions his faithfulness, but Kraken regards faithfulness as an affront to his flickering. Herman replies: "'I'm rotten but you're a real creep . . . I know I'm rotten [but] you don't know that you are'"(88). Admitting, then, that his own unfaithfulness was "rotten", and open to further revelation, Herman proceeds to the viewing of the painting by Franz Post that is to be his nemesis, Gezicht op het Eiland Tamaraca. When Herman imaginatively enters the painting, the vision left undefined when he fled "Hermes Soundways" completes itself. Luise's body rises from the landscape's sea, "becoming, . . . a face loosely grinning, with hissing snakes writhing round it in the shining dawn"(90). Her mystery revealed, Medusa, Herman's new composite woman, says, "You have found me . . . I trust you with the idea of me . . . look and know me"(90). The pain of his experience with Luise, had, in fact, turned Herman's imagination to stone. Now that he claims and names that pain, reversing the traditional myth, Herman's frigid emotions crack and he comes out of himself "quite clean"(90). In Pilgermann, Bohemond embodied the composite aspects of Pilgermann's religious expectations, being not only his Elijah and Jerusalem but also his Christ (Pilg 235). Pilgermann entered into an intuitive relationship with Bohemond that transformed him from mortality to immortality. Likewise, Herman will be liberated by his intuitive relationship with Medusa that will baptise his imagination.



Before he leaves Holland, Herman begins to translate the vision to experience. His meeting with the now-married Luise, when he realises that "she has gone out of [his] life for ever," parallels the emptiness he had found where the Vermeer painting should have been(92). On his return home, it is his current account that challenges him to translate his visionary leap of faith into the act of self-abandonment that will liberate him from the morally compromising work awaiting him: "If you had balls I'd have been dead long ago. Go on, kill me, let's see you do it"(93). But Herman procrastinates: "Maybe we can work something out . . . [a]fter all, they're even doing Shakespeare in comics nowadays"(93).

As he starts to type THE STORY OF ORPHEUS for Sol Mazzaroth, the head arrives in a "blind rage"(95). The rotting artistic ideal and the very disturbed writer agree that Herman should listen and respond to the whole truth of the legend before exploiting it for profit. However, with financial disaster impending, Herman doubts the wisdom of seeking guidance from what is, realistically, a hallucination, and the ensuing dialogue educates him on the nature of doubt and belief. Doubt in the power of myth, in effect, reflects Herman's self-doubt. (It has been self-doubt that has led him to seek sex for reassurance.) Recalling the idea of the world-child, that gives his personal experience universal significance, he questions how it maintains its belief in the cohesive potential of natural phenomena. "How," he asks, "does the world-

child hold the world together and keep it real?"(98). This is a religious issue for Herman, because it concerns the sacrificial leap of faith involved in moving from an anthropocentric to mythocentric response to life. Orpheus replies: "This idea arises of itself from that energy of belief that keeps the mountains from exploding and the seas from going up in steam"(98). In other words, both the power to believe and the power that keeps matter the way it is come from the same source. As long as the visible phenomena of existence remain, the authenticity of belief remains (Genesis 9.22).

When Orpheus reveals that he too had a wandering eye and thereby lost Eurydice, Herman asks if the apparent universality of destructive unfaithfulness can be compatible with the cohesive ideal of the world-child. Orpheus answers, "The world-child perceives the lover as the whole world"(100). "I told you . . . that your morality might be too much for me," says Herman, and Orpheus replies: "My perceptions have always been beyond my capabilities . . . [but] it's an idea that won't let go of me"(100). Knowing he agrees, his flagging idealism affirmed, Herman can now act. It becomes increasingly apparent that Herman's attitude to myth parallels his attitude to sexual relationship: his exploitation of myth parallels exploitation of sex; his passive dependent wallowing in myth parallels a similar approach to sex; his self-assured belief in the viability of myth parallels a similar belief in sexual relationship. He turns down Sol Mazzaroth's offer, thereby killing his

current account, and accepts the fact that his relationship with Melanie is on the decline.

Forces appear to be working against Herman, for, as soon as he resolves to do "NO MORE OTHER PEOPLE'S ORPHEUS," he receives an offer to work with Gösta Kraken on the film series "The Tale Retold"(104). The grapefruit he orders at the informative luncheon precipitates his final meeting with the head and the completion of its story. Orpheus demystifies the myth when he says that he lost Eurydice when he stopped perceiving her: "[S]he simply left me and moved in with Aristaeus"(118). It was not so much his infidelities as the story that finally did it, as Eurydice had said: "'[N]ow the story has found us . . . I must leave you . . . and you will find me in your song'"(119). The reality of the power of myth is part of the human condition. There are myths waiting to be lived, consciously or unconsciously, everywhere and always. The head had told Herman that every man is looking for Medusa (96). Now he says: "You must do the best you can with what you've got . . . Eurydice is lost to you but Medusa trusts you with the idea of her. . . . Behind Medusa lies Eurydice unlost"(120-1). Herman subsequently eats the grapefruit, internalising the completed story. It now remains for him to translate its portent into his present experience.

Because the idea of Medusa is too abstract for him, he calls up the Kraken for clarification and this is its reply:

THE FACE OF MEDUSA. . . CANNOT BE IGNORED . . .  
 INTRUDED UPON . . . POSSESSED: YOU HAVE NEVER  
 GIVEN YOURSELF TO THIS ONE WHO WILL NOT GIVE  
 HERSELF TO YOU, YOU HAVE WANTED ONLY THE  
 SWEETNESS OF EURYDICE TO LOVE AND TO BETRAY. THIS  
 IS THE FACE OF WHAT CANNOT BE BETRAYED. LOVE CAN  
 BE LOST AND BEAUTY, BUT NOT THIS FACE OF DARKNESS  
 MADE BRIGHT. THIS IS THE ONE TO WHOM YOU CAN BE  
 FAITHFUL. (122)

This statement echoes the tone of Jesus' words to Pilgermann: "'I'm the one you'll talk to from now on . . . after me it's the straight action and no more dressing up'"(Pilg 20-21). For Herman this means no more dependent, romantic yearning. Instead, he is to enjoy, on its own terms, unselfishly, the creative idea, "the energy that will not be still" (Pilg :26), as it is revealed to him through female sexuality and the power of the Word.

Under the immediate strain of not wanting to do the film, yet resisting denying himself the promised eight thousand pounds, Herman ends up in hospital with angina. Unable to escape the imperatives of his insights he sees Medusa in the nurturing, authoritative night sister, while Melanie, his redemptive intermediary, visits and challenges him to "stop mucking about and get on with it"(127). On his return home, Herman, for support, plays a favorite video of a Greek man, in debt on account of his daughter's wedding, dancing, "his face . . . urgent with the marriage of his daughter as his dance carries him around his

circle"(130). Yielding to the same creation-centred pattern, Herman makes the phone call to cancel his part in the film project and then sits, receptive, at his computer screen. In the Brooks interview Hoban said: "When I get down to my desk . . . I feel that rush of panic and well being when I get hooked up with what's coming in and it goes beyond personal well-being or anxiety, I know that I'm doing what I'm meant to be doing"(76).

The Kraken, the Word of creation, is waiting for him and starts the story of Nnvsnu the Tsrung. The previously indecipherable words now provide a whole new imaginative world of response for Herman. Nnsvnu the Tsrung, the beleaguered hero, is forced to remain in the "blughole" of the "ultimate deep" in order to save the universe from draining away due to the actions of the "Deeply Bad Ones"(131). Actually "a neuron of the cosmic mind to which this universe has occurred," he is not unlike the narrator of Pilgermann(132). Certainly the tone of the whole enterprise resembles that of the exhilarating finale of Pilgermann. There are serious undertones in Bill Novad's acceptance of the story for the backs of cereal boxes. (The ultimate weapon of opponents of reader-response theory is the suggestion that scholarly activity could be reduced to a study of such material.) His call for "the reaffirmation of traditional values" echoes Herman's renewed sense of cosmic harmony: "I could see myself reading it at breakfast, could feel the peace and natural order of it"(139). Though to be paid a pittance, Herman is fulfilled and productive,

writing with integrity and originality. In contrast, the hypocritical Gösta Kraken dies of a heart attack, proving, as Herman says on the novel's first page, that "art is a tough business"(7). Gösta Kraken exploited the metaphorical power of myth, plumbing its depths for personal gain. Herman has moved from that position, through the terror of full perception, to a de-personalised faith; he is now committed to respond to the Word which is the "language . . . of everything"(Pan Lives 174). Hoban himself says: "I'm at the service of the material that enters me . . . [it] requires of me that I make it manifest as clearly and as beautifully as I can"(Haffenden 132). Herman reflects this mythocentric point of view when he says:

I realised that [Nnvsnu the Tsrung] himself was ignorant of [the] mothercode; he span his mind because the pressure of the ultimate deep forced him to do so, and through the centrifuge of his consciousness flung out, unknown to him, the numinosities and nexialities that were the frail but constant web of the universe.  
(136)

Nnsvnu the Tsrung, "ceaselessly . . . transmitting the mothercode"(136) to save the universe, fulfils fictionally Herman's preoccupation with the world-child, whose continuing belief in the idea of the world holds it together. In "Pan Lives", Hoban links this idea to language itself: "Everything is language . . . the world we live in . . . all of it . . . is talking to us . . . and we must find a language base from which to respond"(177). For Hoban, writing is a life-saving enterprise.

Herman's bouyant submission to his dark muse enables him to face Melanie's departure with equanimity. She parodies Eurydice's words, "I have a feeling that now you'll be able to write again better than before"(138), and generously adds: "at least you don't have to feel guilty about me, I did it to you before you did it to me"(138). Herman has now, with her help, redemptively retraced the previously catastrophic path.

Just as Nnsvnu the Tsrung has an intuitive partner, Nabilca (alias Wendy Nelson), "his thing of darkness, his sender and receiver of messages to and from the deep"(136), so Herman is now in intuitive partnership with the sweet voices on his radio and with the Vermeer girl. His changed perception of women parallels his changed relationship to the Word; he has moved from using women as instruments of his creativity to enjoying them as partners, co-players in a cosmic drama.

In the last glimpse we have of Herman, he is sitting at his desk listening to his short-wave radio. The girl from Tirana is reading lines from Rainer Maria Rilke's poem "Orpheus, Eurydike, Hermes" that celebrate Orpheus' lament-world after his loss of Eurydice. Herman's baptised imagination hears the deeper language behind the words, "that sweet and promising voice of Eurydice unfound and unlost"(143). Believing in his restored innocence, he looks at the Vermeer girl turned Medusa, "flickering and friendly, trusting him with the idea of her"(143). Herman is open, once more, to the potentiality of sexual

communication, and there is a chance that he may translate his vision into a relationship that fully perceives the idea of the other, to whom he "can never be unfaithful"(134).

Herman's moral growth from lamenting, unfaithful lover to celebrating, self-assured, committed partner refutes possible feminist criticism of Hoban as a patriarchal writer. Matthew Fox says: "Sentimentalism-- feelings for family, state, or one's beloved cut off from justice-- is part of a pathological mysticism"(Cosmic Christ 45). Herman moves from sentimentalism to an awareness of the true meaning of Eurydice. "'Wide Justice-- That's what the Greek name Eurydike means,'" says Orpheus (95). In fact, the movement from Riddley Walker's resignation through Pilgermann's thwarted need to nurture to Herman's sense of partnership is arguably a reflection of Hoban's own experience. Defending Gretel's acquiescence in The Lion of Boaz-Jachin and Jachin-Boaz, Hoban refers to his own marriage to a much younger woman:

[I]n the start of a relationship . . . the woman wants someone who is older and more experienced and can look after her. Inevitably [she] . . . gains confidence and recognizes herself as someone to be reckoned with, and the man must perforce recognize her as someone to be reckoned with. Parity is established. (Haffenden 130)

It is not unrealistic to anticipate progress in this regard in his future novels. The indeterminacy at the end of The Medusa Frequency reinforces this sense of process. Herman leaves us with a question in the air regarding any actual



relationship pending and Nnvsnu the Tsrung is "not likely" to ever see or touch Nabilca "his thing of darkness"(136). Therein lies a mystery that, like Medusa, warns "that understanding stops before it and goes no further"(121).

The Medusa Frequency addresses the plight of the contemporary literary artist, offering hope for creative community where incomplete perception and doubt assail the very language base upon which lasting concord is built. The specific focus of the novel can be extended to the wider canvas of human affairs through its confirmation of myth-centred literary experience that responds to "the energy that will not be still"(Pilg 26) through the written word.

## Conclusion

My thesis has traced the development of Hoban's moral and spiritual perceptions through his last three novels. I have shown that as his characters have become increasingly myth-centred and less anthropocentric they have matured morally. Hoban's creation-centred, moral vision that respects the physical and spiritual unity of human nature, and that perceives phenomena in their universal perspective, rather than distorted to suit humankind, is nonetheless practical.

To conclude, I first want to consider the credibility of Hoban's attitude to sexual relationships in the light of recent feminist criticism. Joan Coldwell, in her paper "The Beauty of the Medusa: Twentieth Century," effectively scans the revisionist field in the interest of feminist scholarship, and she says: "[M]any contemporary women writers present either themselves or their characters as Medusae. . . . This vision . . . represents a departure from the . . . earlier fascination with the figure [shown] to be exclusively male"(422). For Coldwell, masculine "fascination with the figure of Medusa" endorses rather than confronts traditional gender stereotypes, as her reference to a poem by John Montague avers. On the other hand, the fascination of female writers with the same figure demonstrates "the process of revisionist myth-making, whereby

women attempt to correct the gender stereotypes embodied in the old stories"(422). My thesis has shown that Hoban, a male, can do this also.

Coldwell recognises that the correction of gender stereotypes requires the inner transformation of both male and female for true equality and justice, and she describes such transformations, albeit from an anthropocentric position. Referring to the work of Sylvia Plath, she says: "It is looking straight at the tragic Medusa . . . that allows the petrification in art to occur, with the bracing of the will to overcome suffering"(431). In The Medusa Frequency, Herman Orff's subconscious petrification, to the contrary, melts, when he looks at the smiling, not tragic, Medusa. Far from bracing his will to overcome the suffering, he rather submits control of his will to the myth's transforming power. Coldwell also describes a character in a story by Eudora Welty who looks at the horror of Medusa, "transforming it into immutable beauty"(435). In The Medusa Frequency, it is the myth that transforms the character, not vice versa.

Coldwell's analysis of Iris Murdoch's A Severed Head focusses on the transformation of a male character whose experiences with a Medusa figure substitute illusion for the "recognition of [the] reality" of the woman in his life(429). However, her comment that "[u]nder the impact of feminism . . . [t]he beauty of the Medusa is now seen as an image, not of decadent eroticism, but of spiritual power"(423) reveals the dualism in her analysis. Her separation of

decadent eroticism and spiritual power, humanity from its well-spring, is reductive.

Far from endorsing destructive gender stereotypes, Hoban, in his revisioning of the Medusa myth, allows for the transformation of the male attitude through a synthesis of eroticism and spiritual power. His humble, myth-centred approach to the mystery of the power in sex retains a sense of wonder and innocence. In allowing men and women their full humanity, he allows them the ground on which to stand together. Hoban offers a moral response, albeit masculine, that I believe is sustainable because it embraces both the physical and spiritual aspects of human nature.

Second, Hoban's conscious response to myth is creative rather than destructive. The epigraph to Riddley Walker, from the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas, describes two ways of approaching the lion, that, for Hoban, is the universal life-force (The Lion of Boaz-Jachin 130): "Jesus has said: Blessed is the lion that the man will devour, and the lion will become man. And loathsome is the man that the lion will devour, and the lion will become man"(Hennecke 511). One way sees the fearful potential of the lion for what it really is, while the other way does not. With the understanding that the lion is mythological, and since studying a myth is a way of devouring it, Joseph Campbell's insight is relevant here:

We are probably being related to by a myth and we are being lived by it unconsciously because we are too stupid to study the myth. And there's a very big difference between living something consciously and being lived by it. (205)

In the three novels I have discussed, there is a development in each protagonist's mythical consciousness: from Riddley's initial ignorance to his sense of fear and resignation; from Pilgermann's initial resignation and passivity to his self- abandonment at his death; from Herman Orff's initial fear and resignation to his surrender to, and trust in, the mythical life he knows lives within him. (His eating of the grapefruit-half, the brain of Orpheus, is a parody of Holy Communion, in this regard.) As Campbell says, "the individual may realize that . . . she lives the divine life within her. Herself as a vehicle; not as the final term but as a vehicle of consciousness and life"(40). According to Hoban, the conscious myth-centred life is more creative than its anthropocentric counterpart, because the latter will be lived by a myth regardless, and (according to The Gospel of Thomas) the cooperation of man and lion is a blessing, whilst the lion alone is a curse.

Third, Hoban's creation-centred celebration of the primitive aspect of human nature, his religious respect for the primitive force that exists in humanity, links his thought to that of D. H. Lawrence, (and thereby indirectly to F. R. Leavis' sense of tradition). Edmund White, in his review of Hoban's Turtle Diary, makes a negative comparison:

[N]ostalgia for the mud was gripping . . . when D. H. Lawrence first explored it; through his best pages shines a[n] . . . inability to understand fully his own intuition. . . . But in Hoban's book primitivism has petrified into a received idea, automatically virtuous--and therefore insipid.(6)

In Hoban's later work (as has been noted specifically in Riddley Walker) both creation and destruction arise from that primitive potential. The possible virtue of that potential depends on the nature of its appropriation. Hoban's primitivism is not "automatically virtuous" and certainly not "insipid."

I would argue that in the novels I have discussed an anthropocentric approach to primitive power is destructive, whereas a creation-centred (that is, myth-centred) approach is not. The making of gunpowder in Riddley Walker, Yaghi-Sayan's slaughter of the Christians on the tile pattern in Pilgermann, and Gösta Kraken's exploitive plumbing of the depths of metaphor in The Medusa Frequency all lead to death. On the other hand, the Riddley and Orfing Show in Riddley Walker, the quixotic fight with Bohemond in Pilgermann, and the writing of The Seeker from Nexo Vollma in partnership with the smiling Vermeer Girl in The Medusa Frequency all lead to life. The former are anthropocentric actions while the latter are myth-centred.

It is the element of mystery that differentiates the anthropocentric view from that which is myth or creation-centred. Anthropocentrism is, in fact, the eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. Hoban's work has an overriding sense of mystery, and Paul Gray saw this even in the earlier Turtle Diary:

"Hoban . . . argues gently but profoundly that human lives are really composed of details as mysterious in their power as the force that tugs the turtles; the most dramatic adventure can unfold as a series of petty and incomprehensible inconveniences"(72). The sense of mystery is a religious instinct, and F. R. Leavis' praise of Lawrence could well be applied to Hoban: "[It is his stated compulsion to write] from the depth of his religious experience that makes him . . . so significant in relation to past and future, so . . . truly creative as a technical inventor, a master of language"(25). Herman Orff, in his trust and surrender to the primal truth of the Kraken, is demonstrating a similar religious sensibility. Just as Nnsvnu the Tsrung (an expression of Herman Orff's literary intelligence) does not know the mothercode but spins his thoughts under "the pressure of the ultimate deep," thereby holding the universe together (MF 136), so the myth-centred individual will respond to the primitive rhythm without knowledge of the actual purpose or result of her actions; she is content to be a part of the mystery. Joseph Campbell morally affirms the religious sensibility: "The act of joyful participation in the sorrows of the world . . . [is] a . . . non-egoistic, non-judgemental point of view. And so go into the play and play a part. And at the same time know that this is a shadow reflex"(226). I maintain that this is a realistic and humble estimate of human capability, and, in the final analysis, more "truly creative"(Leavis 25).

Fourth, Hoban's moral vision is in harmony with creation and perceives phenomena in their universal perspective. His "freelance mysticism", his openness, to some extent connects him with the creation-centred spirituality of theologian Matthew Fox. Hoban's understanding of the creative power in everything conforms to Fox's own term "panentheism":

Panentheism means 'all things in God and God in all things'. . . .  
[It] melts the dualism of inside and outside--like fish in water and the water in the fish, creation is in God and God is in creation.  
(Coming of Cosmic Christ 57)

Among the aspects of creation-centred mysticism that Fox describes are the following themes found in Hoban's later novels: "experience," "compassion," "connection-making," "radical-amazement," "self-criticism," "childlike playfulness" and "feminism"(47-61). Hoban's developing ethic conforms to Fox's description of feminists:

people who . . . will practice values of interdependence and communion rather than dualism; of celebration and delight rather than competition; of compassion rather than legalism; of nurturance rather than judgement. (56)

Riddley, Pilgermann and Herman are all led through experience to an awareness of this creation-centred way of life. Fox suggests that the task of a future ecumenical council might be "to declare an ancient and forgotten doctrine: the Cosmic Christ, 'the pattern that connects' all the atoms and galaxies of the universe, a pattern of divine love and justice that all creatures



and all humans bear within them"(7). "Our response to the sacred-everything," he says, "is reverence"(8).

However, whilst Hoban's thought to some extent reflects that of Fox, the freelance nature of his mysticism allows him, also, to retain the traditional fall/redemption religious paradigm. The themes of sin, guilt and redemption run through all three novels and are essential to the working out of his moral thought. This I see as his strength. For Fox himself becomes dualistic in his calls for the rejection of patriarchal theistic schemes. Hoban's expansive vision both contains and limits religious tradition. In "Pan Lives", he says: "There are no dead gods. . . . they're all with us still: every god that was ever named and worshipped, not one of them is dead. No god is ever supplanted, no god ever becomes obsolete"(181). In this statement lies the strength of Hoban's openness; in this statement is his refusal to be tied to any one idea, however new and enthralling, that would reject the wisdom of the past. This openness to both new and old theologies could explain Hoban's fascination with myth.

Robert Leach says of Punch:

Punch . . . seems to toy with and disdain the very idea of life and death, . . . suggesting . . . a wider frame of reference . . . perhaps. . . cosmic. . . . Such a celebration is firmly pagan. It bears upon the mysteries of the individual's life and of all life, without recourse to theologies. (175)

There are some critics who would question the practicality of Hoban's freelance mysticism. For example, Marion Glastonbury, in her review of Riddley Walker, says:

Unfortunately, when a metaphysician casts his net over the whole of human consciousness, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, and returns in triumph to share what he has caught, he appears to everyone but himself to be empty handed. . . . so, in this creation . . . the message, of survival through renunciation . . . , cannot escape bathos. (22)

Although she admits that "the secret is incommunicable; the revelation void," she seems unable to accept the import of mystery in the novel. Here I would return to Kierkegaard, who in Fear and Trembling affirms the inability of those with spiritual vision, like Riddley, to sell themselves: "Those . . . who carry the jewel of faith are likely to be delusive, because their outward appearance bears a striking resemblance to . . . Philistinism!"(49). In fact, Kierkegaard's statement that "humanly speaking [the knight of faith] is crazy and cannot make himself intelligible to anyone"(86), could well apply to Herman Orff's zany behaviour in The Medusa Frequency. But Kierkegaard also says that faith is ultimately practical, because "after having made the movements of infinity it makes those of finiteness"(48).

In the novels I have considered, there is a movement from vision to practicality, from potentiality to actuality. Riddley makes the movements of infinity but settles for "infinite resignation"(Kierkegaard 47-8), only converting the

vision to practicality through the gestures of a puppet. Pilgermann makes the movements of infinity, overcomes resignation and sees the movement of finiteness he wishes to make (namely the rescue of Sophia and his son from disaster), but death prevents his doing so. But Herman Orff makes the movements of infinity, overcomes resignation, and goes on to make the movements of finiteness. He is just a babe, taking his first steps in truly authentic action. His writing may appear trite and his romantic life may be largely intuitive and mysterious, but nonetheless he is carrying Kierkegaard's "jewel of faith" (49) and should not be dismissed by anthropocentric, success-orientated value judgements.

Hoban's deepening mysticism, then, is traditional, yet not archaic, since it engages readily with the most modern theology and it is essentially practical. Leavis says:

Major novelists \*not only change the possibilities of the art for practitioners and readers, but . . . they are significant in terms of the human awareness they promote; awareness of the possibilities of life. . . . It is the way towards understanding what tradition is.  
(2)

In this respect, Hoban approaches Leavis' criteria for writing in the English tradition.

I will now move on to consider further the theoretical implications of Hoban's fiction. His novels not only revise ancient myths but they also critique the whole enterprise of literary interpretation. Geoffrey Hartman, in Criticism in

the Wilderness encourages critics to be both creative and judicious with a deepening dependence on Wordsworthian inwardness(220). David Lake, in his paper "Language and Mysticism in Riddley Walker", sees this inwardness in Riddley: "[E]ssentially [Riddley] has always been at home with the One, in all its/her manifestations . . . Wordsworth and any number of other nature mystics might have put it differently, but they would not have expressed it better"(167-8). But Hoban judiciously says: "I don't think of myself as the creator but as the medium through which certain things come. . . . I never use the 'creative' in connection with writing"(Haffenden 132).

In fact, Hoban can be seen to conform to Hartman's description of the new revisionists: "close readers . . . struggling with language purification [as did the New Critics} they try to strike a balance between solipsism and materialism"(248). Language experimentation permeates Riddley Walker and The Medusa Frequency. As Maynor and Patteson observe, in Riddley Walker language is a protagonist "in its intrinsic relationship with theme and setting"(21). In "Pan Lives", Hoban says the following:

What is this language that I'm insisting on? The sky grows dark . . . boys play football . . . and I call that language. . . . [F]or the sake of the Word that is God, . . .[h]ear the earth say itself, . . . ponderous with evening, turning to the night while little Words of flesh kick a football. . . . All of it needs to be taken in not as event but as language, as the allness of everything saying itself to us because we are what it talks to. (174-5)

Thus Herman Orff writes his story from unintelligible letters that appear accidentally on his computer screen. For Hoban, in his openness, everything that is now is linguistically significant, and the present contains the past. His attempt to recover a non-verbal (intuitive), pre-verbal (creation-centred) language base quickens the power of the Word (thereby justifying the capitalization).

Hoban's call for a new language base reflects not only his openness to all life but also his decreasing anthropocentrism and in this respect he approaches the thought of T. S. Eliot. In his essay "Thoughts on Being and Writing", Hoban sees T. S. Eliot's "extinction of personality" as a "necessary symbiosis with the past"(Blishen 71), and he responds with his own credo:

Life, living itself [through the ancient past] flows on through me with its illimitable power. I have no choice but to be a channel for it, to be used for birth and death and procreation and mallet blows, . . . that is the task laid upon me by life-- to be equally present. (69)

It is his increasing mythocentrism that underlies this depersonalisation.

Referring to the ameliorating effect of Greek tragedy he says "everything that we associate with life, even in our posterity, will be gone. It doesn't matter, because it's part of the action of . . . the universal mind, of the fluctuations of the universe"(Brooks 75).

There is an evangelical zeal in Hoban's call for the writer to respond to "what's coming in": "Simply, we need it in the development of being, and

humankind is still evolving"(Brooks 76). This evolutionary thought is what I would call Hoban's romantic return, but it is modulated by his very openness. Where Schrödinger, in 1964, for example, anticipated the "[biological] transformation of man into an animal sociale" (58), Hoban says, twenty years later, after reading Scientific American:

I don't think that we're necessarily the last word in evolution . . . I think this [present universe] is just a little bit of action going on in this corner of the universe. Everything is not necessarily going to come out all right--it may just be an experiment that is a dead end. But to me, the whole thing is worth it for the action. (Myers 11-12)

It is his openness, his flexibility, I maintain, that is his strength, since it provides an informed yet balanced view in an anarchic world.

In the novels I have considered, response is everything. The changing response to the power of sex corresponds to an equivalent response to the power of myth. Riddley feels "juicy" in the presence of the power (RW 154). Pilgermann's obsession with both Sophia and Bohemond is at once sexual and mythical. Herman Orff's transformed sexual imagination parallels his transformed attitude to his literary activity. To reiterate: the nature of the response to potentiality, whether sexual or mythical, determines the nature of its actualisation. Response is everything. Hoban's myth-centred revival of a responsive approach to literature once more empowers the Word. More than that, it affirms in the current reductionist, separatist academic arena that men,

not only women, are capable of moral revisioning. of correcting gender stereotypes. Patriarchal imagination is as capable of transformation (for good or evil) as is its matriarchal counterpart. Male and female, in partnership, can seek a fresh language base from which to send and receive messages "to and from the deep" (MF 136).

When placed within the post-modern context of an absurd world, it is significant that all three novels concern lost souls. Riddley, through his spiritual birth, finds partial salvation; Pilgermann's soul is saved into immortality at his death; while Herman Orff's conversion opens up a whole new imaginative world for him, within the mundane. In all cases Dionysian figures redeem the heroes; in all cases the full potential of creation is acknowledged. In Pilgermann and The Medusa Frequency, that potential is neither suppressed nor evaded in the process of redemption. There is a sense of partnership in a cosmic drama being worked out between the hero and the power in everything. This scheme is not divisive, but rather, it integrates the individual (and his/her community) with the universal pattern.

The multicultural bases (namely Celtic-Christian, Judeo-Islamic and Greco-Roman) with which Hoban works in the three novels reflect, again, his non-sectarian openness. Kierkegaard says: "The knight of faith knows it is glorious to belong to the universal"(86). But also, he says: "The true knight of faith is always in absolute isolation, the false knight is sectarian"(89). "Though

sectarians unite," he says, "they never know what the individual learns"(89).

Hoban's awareness of the universal pattern, his lone openness, then, in Kierkegaard's terms, preserves his existential faith. Nonetheless, his fiction suggests the necessity of human interaction. In each novel it is the communion of mythical and human thought and events, through intermediaries from both realms, that brings about the principal character's enlightenment and moral transformation.

Finally, Hoban's openness keeps his art alive. He says that he thinks the process in his work is as important as the product (Brooks 77). As I have said, I believe that the diversity in his cultural and spiritual life could be the key to that openness. Since Western civilisation is now itself culturally and spiritually diverse, Hoban's openness gives hope that a similar communal awareness can convert an arrogant, anthropocentric generation from destructiveness to reverent creation-centred life.



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