

is as potent a force for change as the Whig interpretation of history used to be? One of the ironies of the current situation is that the passionate students of sociology with their bold affirmations and moralistic language will soon be solemnly reduced by expert analysis to a set of statistics, detailing their class, sex, age, etc., etc. And yet one asks oneself—will these rows of figures tell us what the student revolution is all about?

IN WHAT WAY are universities to be reshaped now that their social function has gained at the expense of their academic one? Are they to be secular temples or technocentric think-tanks? To judge properly the nature of their new role in society is as difficult as to solve the problems that their progeny will be called upon to face, the problems caused by nuclear stockpiling, by urbanisation and pollution, by the growth of cybernetics with its awesome implications, by starvation and neurosis, by the

ever more various conflicts of social, racial and religious groups which are not susceptible of simplistic analysis and treatment. The student revolt is irrelevant to such matters of major concern—it is a symptom, not a critique. The questions raised are much deeper than a mere “What’s it all about?”, and the challenge is more subtle than “It’s a bloody awful world.” The affirmation called for is more profound than the words of Tom Lehrer’s folk singer, “I’m in favour of peace, love and justice, unlike the rest of you squares...” It is better to question, comment and affirm than to remain silent and blind; given three years with the luxury of unfettered time, one ought to display some reaction to the society around. But if there are young and old who see in the mere fact of the student revolt new hope for us all, it is because the young are arrogant and the old feel guilty. Students, after all, have long protested against the world. It is the duty of the graduates to change it.

White Lady or She-Devil?

Reflections on Academic Fetishism — By JAMES WELLARD

IN 1917, a German prospector named Reinhardt Maack spent the night in a cave in the Brandberg Mountains of South West Africa. Maack was at the time hard-pressed. He was short of food and water and so was in no condition to study the Bushman paintings on the rock face of the cave where he was sheltering. However, one of the pictures was so impressive that he did feel impelled to make a rough sketch in the last page of his notebook, a sketch which he showed to his white colleagues on his return to civilisation. What he had seen and sketched was the portrait of a figure later known as *The White Lady of the Brandberg*—the most famous painting in the whole gallery of Bushman rock art.

Maack’s discovery proved to be sensational on two counts. First, the portrait was aesthetically of supreme interest; and secondly, it started a controversy which led to the suspicion that the experts, though in the dark themselves, were trying to blind the rest of us with science. In

fact, looking at this particular Bushman painting and other specimens of cave art, one began to wonder if many of the arguments advanced by the anthropologists were not in the nature of those pious frauds usually associated with the medieval theologians. Does not the myth created around *The White Lady of the Brandberg* remind us of the legends that have sprung up around the lives of the saints and apostles—legends that the church historians have often elevated into “historical fact”? And are we laymen entitled to question these “historical facts,” even, for instance, the residence, martyrdom, and burial of Saint Peter in Rome—let alone the provenance of this mysterious female in the Brandberg cave? Or are we brow-beaten into silence by the weight of academic disapproval?

WHO, OR WHAT, then, is *The White Lady of the Brandberg*? She is depicted as the central character in a loosely composed frieze of men and animals—she striding purposefully forward,

carrying what looks like a flower in her right hand, a bow and arrows in her left. The species of flower cannot be identified, and some observers say that it is half an ostrich egg in some kind of cup. She wears a dark-red head-dress, or wig, a short-sleeved brown jerkin ornamented with beads, a red belt, pink tights, close-fitting trunks, leggings, and white moccasins edged with red. The best portrait of her can be seen in the frontispiece of the first volume of the Abbé Breuil's *The Rock Paintings of Southern Africa* (1966).

Dressed like that, she certainly cannot be a Bushwoman; so who is she, and what is she doing?

The experts were naturally puzzled, because the bulk of cave paintings, whether African or European, had already been classified into neat scientific categories. Thus, paintings and engravings of animals were lumped together under such general headings as "ritual magic," the theory being that animals were drawn by primitive artists as part of a religious ceremony intended to confer supernatural powers on the hunters. The fact that there are tens of thousands of these animal pictures all over the caves and shelters of Europe and Africa was ignored; and the prosaic explanation that they were executed for the amusement of the artists and the information of the spectators was dismissed, though the practice of scratching *graffiti* on a nice smooth rock face has always been, and still is, a pastime of cave-dwellers, nomads, caravaners, goat-herds, and the like the world over. "Ritual magic," however, sounds more impressive in scientific journals. It is an evocative expression and enables the expert to write some academic purple prose like this:

The man who kills an animal for his own subsistence is most likely to feel a sense of awe when beholding its striking beauty; how much more must this animal have meant to him when he thought of it as a divine being! Nevertheless, the decisive factor is still the part played by each animal in the great drama of cosmic change. . . . There can be no doubt that these pictures also played a part in the propaedeutics of religious beliefs.¹

One wonders what a Stone Age hunter, stalking his supper with nothing but a throwing-stick, would have replied to this.

"Ritual magic," then, was the orthodox explanation of why primitive man drew portraits of animals. A stronger term was needed for his representations of human beings in their more intimate activities. How else to explain, or

¹ "The Rock Art of South Africa," by Erik Holm, in *The Rock Art of the Stone Age* (1961).

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explain away, the depictions of the sexual act? The term invented was "fertility rites." Alas! The first European travellers to see these down-to-earth pictures, whether on the rocks of Africa, or on the walls of Pompeii, or in the Etruscan tombs—not being familiar with the expression "fertility rites" and not knowing that they were looking at profoundly spiritual works of art—turned hurriedly away, shocked by their remote ancestors' depravity. A French doctor, for instance, reporting in 1847 the existence of cave drawings in the Atlas Mountains, asserts that "these lascivious pictures will never issue from our sketch-book." It so happens that the Frenchman had got it wrong. Indignation prevented him from properly examining what turns out to be a medley of men and animals. But the twentieth-century experts, scornful of this Victorian prudery, soon put our minds at rest. This sort of thing—copulation in one form or another—was merely a "fertility rite." Even the unrestricted prostitution permitted in the Carthaginian temples of Astarte was explained by this term; and, for all one knows, the drawings over the cells in the Pompeii brothel are interpreted by some up-to-the-minute social historian in the same light. "Fertility rites," like "ritual magic," is an impressive phrase.

It only remained to find a suitably clinical label for the prehistoric "pin-up girls," those plump females, sometimes sculpted in clay (the Willendorf "Venus" is the archetype), sometimes depicted in the act of intercourse, and sometimes drawn in the coitus position, though primitive artists had the same technical problems here that all artists had, up to the early Renaissance, in foreshortening supine figures. All such depictions of wanton or submissive females were made academically respectable under the term "maternity cult."

"**R**ITUAL MAGIC," "fertility rites," "maternity cult"—*The White Lady of the Brandberg* did not, unfortunately, fit into any of these pigeon-holes. It followed that one had to be specially created for such an important picture, and the obvious person to do this was the world authority on cave art, the Abbé Henri Breuil of the *Institut*. And so, in due course, the Abbé and his assistant Miss Mary Boyle were invited to South Africa to solve the mystery of the woman in the short-sleeved jerkin and the pink tights.

The conclusions arrived at by the Abbé, based largely on Miss Boyle's prolonged research, was that the *White Lady*, since she was dressed in what appeared to be the costume of a Cretan bull-dancer, must have represented "the Isis-Diana in the Lesser Mystery of Egypt." Once

this theory had been advanced, laymen—and, for that matter, the South African ethnologists—were obliged to keep their opinions to themselves, especially as a mass of evidence was produced to support the "historical fact." Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* was quoted as showing that "the whole world worships Isis under many changing shapes, with varied sites, and by many diverse names." Again, the style of the *White Lady's* coiffure was shown to be comparable with an Egyptian sculpture of the 5th century. Moreover, other figures in the frieze were identified with Egyptian gods and priests; and there was much learned talk about Sebek the Crocodile Man, Set the god of evil, Horus, Thoth, and the Papyrus of Nesi-Ta-Neb-Ashru. Miss Boyle concluded:

Several features of the painting reproduce so precisely the details mentioned as forming part of the ceremonial in the religious procession of the Second Mystery of Egypt, the resurrection myth of Isis, Osiris, and Horus, that it may reasonably be regarded as a sacred painting. . . . If this is the case, the artist must have known that in painting such a picture outside the sacred precincts, he risked the death penalty imposed on all initiates who revealed a Mystery.

The Abbé Breuil set his seal of approval on this curious hodge-podge of Egyptology and classical mythology by adding:

The fact that the *White Lady* is the best armed of all and the only one with an arrow at the ready tends to support other reasons for thinking she may be the Diana-Isis known in Crete and Egypt.

However, there were not lacking a few murmurs of dissent. Certain South African students of Bushman art were unhappy with what they felt was a "European" interpretation of the painting, and some of them went so far as to suggest that the *White Lady* was nothing other than the caricature of a woman missionary, dating not from B.C. 1500, as the Breuil-Boyle theory suggested, but from around 1850 A.D. This gives a chronological difference of 3,300 years, so one or the other of the experts must be wrong. The layman, however, is permitted to take his pick: the Isis-Diana of the Second Mystery of Egypt—or a European missionary of the last century. What it is not proper for him to do is to draw his own conclusions, write an article, and submit it to a learned journal. The experts would be down on him like a ton of bricks.

SOME TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO, Edward Gibbon, an outsider as far as the schools were concerned, challenged the right of the

academicians to regard their particular field of learning as a monopoly of the "in-group" to which they belonged. Examining the British universities and their faculties, he wrote:

The spirit of the monopolists is narrow, lazy, and oppressive; their work is more costly and less productive than that of independent artists; and the new improvements so eagerly grasped by the competition of freedom are admitted with slow and sullen reluctance in those proud corporations, above the fear of a rival and below the confession of an error.

Typical Gibbon, one could say; and his adversaries did say so. "We can discover but slender traces of profound and exquisite erudition, of solid criticism and accurate investigation," declared Dr. Edwards before the University of Cambridge, commenting on *The Decline and Fall*. "But we are too frequently disgusted by vague and inconclusive reasoning; by unseasonable banter and senseless witticisms; by embittered bigotry and enthusiastic jargon; by futile cavils and illiberal invectives...."

But the greatest of British historians cannot be dismissed that easily. On the contrary, his criticism of the monopolists is even more valid today than it was in the eighteenth century. The non-academical who doesn't think so should try airing his views at a meeting of historians, archaeologists, psychologists, or educationalists.

How jubilant Gibbon would have been over Michael Ventris' triumph in deciphering Linear B, for Ventris was precisely what Gibbon meant by an "artist." Yet Ventris himself was obviously aware of, and not a little intimidated by, the monopolists who accepted as "historical fact" the Minoan language postulated by Evans of Knossos. Indeed, we hear that those classicists who questioned the orthodoxy were punished by being excluded from digging in Greece, which is comparable to prohibiting a professional writer from publishing his work. Hence Ventris wasted a great deal of time in trying to find an Etruscan base for "Minoan"; and even when he was actually on the brink of a break through, he described his *Work Note 20*, "Are the Knossos and Pylos Tablets written in Greek?" as "a frivolous digression." In fact, it is clear from reading his *Work Notes* and correspondence that he did his best to refute his own irrefutable findings, in order to placate the savants. Significantly, after referring to what he calls "the Greek chimera," he concludes: "if pursued, I suspect that this line of decipherment would sooner or later come to an impasse, or dissipate itself in absurdities." The "line," however, was pursued, because Ventris had no career as a professor to jeopardise and no reputation as a scholar to lose.

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COLLINS

THERE ARE, ADMITTEDLY, few inspired amateurs like Michael Ventris; but more to the point, there are increasingly fewer disciplines in which they can expect to be given a hearing by the specialists. There remains one subject, however, which continues to attract the outsider, whence the professionals' rather bad-tempered definition of it as "the favourite playground of cranks." This is Etruscology, the study of which seems to produce nothing but academic brawling. The climax of this mock-war came in 1875 when Wilhelm Corssen published his *Über die Sprache der Etrusker* in which he "proved" that Etruscan belonged to the Indo-European family of languages and in 1876 when the equally eminent philologist Wilhelm Deecke "proved" that it did not.

By the mid-twentieth century, the professionals had given up their internecine warfare and retreated into a sort of philological Never-Never land whose boundaries were marked by warning signs few adventurers dared disregard. For Etruscan was now spoken of as belonging to the "pre-Indo-European linguistic group," or to a "proto-Indo-European stratum," or even a "peri-Indo-European structure." This last definition was calculated to silence the Etruscomaniacs once and for all, for it was rightly assumed that nobody outside the schools could have the faintest idea of what the expression meant—for the very good reason that it means nothing at all.

M. Raymond Bloch states the case for the career Etruscologists categorically in his *Les Étrusques* (1954):

The naïve pretensions of amateurs dazzled by the seeming success of their own essays in translation have done little more than to attract unmerited scorn from a few intelligent people.

Such arrogance comes ill from the successor of Corssen who translated Etruscan from bogus Latin, from Bugge who discovered the key in Armenian (false), Konow in Dravidian (false), and so on and so forth. Why, then, should the amateurs be blamed for doing the same thing and accused of misleading the public, particularly since it was an amateur who wrote the best book on the subject, namely George Dennis whose *Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria*, published in 1848, has never been superseded?

THERE IS a corollary to all this: it is the growing predominance of Gibbon's "spirit of monopoly" in almost every department of life and learning. One sees it notably exemplified in the arts where the monopolists have reached such heights of arrogance that the average outsider scarce dare express a personal opinion at

all. The shamans of painting, music, theatre, film, ballet, and so forth *tell* him what is good in either a supercilious or scolding manner which brooks no opposition. Thus the amateur is somehow made to feel an ignoramus until the extraordinary state of affairs is reached where educated people stand gaping at grotesque daubings which they are told are works of art, or at mounds of scrap iron said to be sculpture. Pictures produced by a donkey waving his tail over a canvas and discarded machinery dumped in an exhibition by leg-pulling students receive solemn attention and respectful praise from a brain-washed public. Concert audiences listen to a symphony composed by a computer linked to a roomful of typewriters, or even to a composition which has no sound at all. If some bold huckster of the arts presented a concert played by chimpanzees strapped to musical instruments, one may be sure that some critics would find suitable clichés to make us believe that new vistas in aesthetic experience had been opened to us. "Ritual magic" has really come into its own.

Could not one go on to say that this "spirit of monopoly" in the fields of learning and art has also become characteristic of almost all modern life, certainly of the relationship between the governors and the governed? What, for instance, of the draconian decisions handed down by governments and their departments, decisions which the average citizen (that is, the amateur) no longer bothers to challenge? For what is the use of protest when real democracy, government by consent and not monopoly, ended with the New England town meetings in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries?

Yet one would think that on the municipal level there would still be some semblance of participation by the private individual. There is scarcely any. We even have no say in what kind of street lamps should disfigure our streets, let alone what kind of schools we want for our children. The decisions are made for us by the specialists—electricians in the former case, educationalists in the latter. So, in the end, we accept, without protest, our hideous cities, our comprehensive schools, our mindless painting, our computerised music, our anti-literature, and, of course, the Isis-Diana myth of the Second Egyptian Mystery.

I am reminded of the rock art specialist who, hopefully expecting endorsement of the orthodox theory about "fertility rites," asked an Australian aborigine what the painting of a squatting figure symbolised. The aborigine laughed contemptuously and said, "That is a she-devil lying down for a man."

The contemptuous laughter of the savage is a fitting comment on the pretentiousness of a great deal of twentieth-century culture.

BOOKS & WRITERS

On Sincerity

From Wordsworth to Ginsberg — By DONALD DAVIE

KENNETH REXROTH declares, introducing *Selected Poems of D. H. Lawrence*:

Hardy could say to himself: "Today I am going to be a Wiltshire yeoman, sitting on a fallen rock at Stonehenge, writing a poem to my girl on a piece of wrapping paper with the gnawed stub of a pencil," and he could make it very convincing. But Lawrence really was the educated son of a coal miner, sitting under a tree that had once been part of Sherwood Forest, in a village that was rapidly becoming part of a world-wide disembowelled hell, writing hard, painful poems, to girls who carefully had been taught the art of unlove. It was all real. Love really was a mystery at the navel of the earth, like Stonehenge. The miner really was in contact with a monstrous, seething mystery, the black sun in the earth.

And again:

Hardy was a major poet. Lawrence was a minor prophet. Like Blake and Yeats, his is the greater tradition. If Hardy ever had a girl in the hay, tipsy on cider, on the night of Boxing Day, he kept quiet about it. He may have thought that it had something to do with "the stream of his life in the darkness deathward set", but he never let on, except indirectly.

This is outrageous, of course. In part, at least, it is meant to be; it is outrageously unfair to Thomas Hardy. But then, fairness is what we never find from anyone who at any time speaks up for what Rexroth is speaking for here. Are prophets fair-minded? Can we expect Jeremiah or Amos or Isaiah to be *judicious*? D. H. Lawrence was monstrously unfair; so were 19th-century prophets like Carlyle and Ruskin; so was William Blake unfair to Reynolds and to Wordsworth. And some of them, some of the time—perhaps all of them, most of the time—know that they are being unfair, as I think Kenneth Rexroth knows it. Fair-mindedness, Lawrence seems to say, is not his business; if judiciousness is necessary to society, it is the business of someone in society other than the prophet or the poet.

"The prophet *or* the poet."... For, although I've gone along with Rexroth for the moment in accepting this distinction, I am not really convinced by it. For what *is* the distinction which Rexroth has drawn, between Hardy and Lawrence? As he presents it to us, it has nothing to do with prophecy, though he seems to think it has. The distinction is quite simply that when "I" appears in a poem by Lawrence, the person meant is directly and immediately D. H. Lawrence, the person as historically recorded, born in such and such a place on such and such a date; whereas when "I" appears in a poem by Hardy, the person meant need not be the historically recorded Thomas Hardy, any more than when King Lear in Shakespeare's play says "I," the person meant is William Shakespeare.

When Rexroth introduces the notion of a tradition of *prophecy*, above all when he puts in that tradition the most histrionic of modern poets (W. B. Yeats), he is shifting his ground abruptly and very confusingly. What he is saying to start with is simply and bluntly that Lawrence is always sincere, whereas Hardy often isn't; and Lawrence is sincere by virtue of the fact that the "I" in his poems is always directly and immediately himself. In other words, the poetry we are asked to see as greater than Hardy's kind of poetry, though it is called "prophetic" poetry, is more accurately described as *confessional* poetry. Confessional poetry, of its nature and necessarily, is superior to dramatic or histrionic poetry; a poem in which the "I" stands immediately and unequivocally for the author is essentially and necessarily superior to a poem in which the "I" stands not for the author but for a *persona* of the author's—this is what Rexroth asks us to believe.

THIS is, as he well knows, to fly in the face of what seemed, until a few years ago, the solidly achieved consensus of opinion about poetry and the criticism of poetry. That consensus of