

turn out to be doctrinaire reductions of literary values which are in fact many-sided, and to conclude that "our" cultural predicament is a predicament largely defined by feminist conferences at the Modern Language Association whose current wars of essentialists and social constructionists register at several points of her book.

Kaplan's fuller, more complex female modernism rings false to the literary ethos of Mansfield's best work in the story which shares with Ford and Joyce, Eliot and Virginia Woolf (Woolf the novelist in distinction from her feminist theory, and if we can't draw the distinction then Woolf wasn't a novelist, nor was George Eliot) not only the era's experimental climate but its "last romantics" assumption that art is transcendence and the self irreducible. Kaplan is aware of such axioms about modernism: mainly set down by men so far, thus not relevant to our cultural predicament. Rather than appeal her female doctrine to Mansfield's best work, Kaplan pays protracted, respectful attention to the clunky sensationalism of *In a German Pension* (1911), which later Mansfield disowned, where childbirth agonies and male brutalities bear out feminist contentions that every hetero act since Adam and Eve is figurative or literal rape.

Kaplan's insistence (sentimental, ahistoric) that the House of Fiction has a ladies' room, a men's room but no common room where the sexes exchange notes, blinds her to the drama of motivation in Mansfield's final years. "Unpublished writings, letters, drafts, sketches, diaries are often as illuminating... as final products, because questions of professionalism and the material considerations of publishing and surviving affect what later becomes known as 'text': thus Kaplan explains her vulgar conflation of schoolgirl jottings with adult work. "Such refusal to abide by traditional definitions of what constitutes the object of critical

attention is a function of the feminist effort to subvert the patriarchal authority inherent in the canonization of 'texts.'" Mansfield would have given much for additional time to write canonical "texts" worthy of the Chekhov she admired (why shouldn't she admire him?) even if they didn't subvert patriarchal authority.

## *A Fairy Tale Reconsidered*

LARRY WILLIAMS

### *The Sleeping Beauty and Other*

*Essays*, by Ralph Harper, Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley Press, 1985 [1955]. xii + 49 + 144 pp. \$7.95.

IN FULFILLMENT OF an evil prophecy a beautiful young princess pricks her finger on a spindle and falls into a century-long sleep. A thick, impenetrable hedge of thorns springs up about the castle, enclosing it to the very top. Word of the princess, now known as "Briar-rose," travels throughout the kingdom, and many young men, heedless of the prophecy, come to assault the hedge of thorns. But all are caught fast, and die miserably. Finally, at the end of the hundred years, a foreign prince hears of the legend and comes to the kingdom. Ignoring the warning of an old man, who has seen many others die in the thorns, the prince parts the hedge and awakens the princess. Prince and princess are married and live "contented to the end of their days."

In his essay "The Sleeping Beauty," Ralph Harper, priest, professor, and philosopher, draws on all three of his vocations to explicate this simple yet enduring tale. Using Jungian archetypes and the techniques of biblical exegesis, Harper arrives at a bold, contemporary interpretation that lends renewed meaning to the tale without robbing it of its

essential mystery. Harper's salient observations, necessarily abridged and simplified here, equate the sleeping princess with God, or Presence, the youths who refuse to wait with Nietzsche, the old man who waits too long with Heidegger, and the true prince who arrives in "the fullness of time" with Dostoevsky. Harper sees the mass of contemporary humanity following Nietzsche or his "latest descendant," Sartre: assaulting the thorn hedge even as they deny the Presence within, and perishing in the clutches of the Ego. A few others follow Heidegger, the "shepherd of Being," awaiting Presence without longing or hope, and forfeit their chance to enter the castle. But no one has yet followed Dostoevsky, because no one has cultivated the quietude necessary to hear the call, much less to heed it. And so the princess sleeps on.

Harper defines our contemporary spiritual dilemma as "the slavery to a conception of spirit which does not admit presence." Presence, an idea Harper adapts from the early twentieth-century writings of Gabriel Marcel, is "concrete eternity," the knowledge of self and others gained through prayer, meditation, attentiveness, and, above all, wakeful silence, activities which have lost credibility in the post-modern era. Harper sees presence of being supplanted by presence of mind, a clever but superficial substitute. Of this "limitation presence," he says: "Only where a community is small or where one narrows one's outlook so that the environment seems small, can presence of mind flourish without looking comic." Elsewhere, Harper sharpens the contrast between presence and presence of mind by examining the range of human activities occurring under the mutually exclusive domains of silence and noise.

The atmosphere of presence, of giving, of wholeness, is silence. We know that seri-

ous things have to be done in silence, because we do not have words to measure the immeasurable. In silence we love, pray, listen, compose, paint, write, think, suffer . . . Whatever is within our control, like fighting or playing, travelling and talking, trading and manufacturing, we do noisily, because we do not have to be respectful before some source of power greater than our meddling.

Harper quotes Max Picard, who says, "Nothing has changed the nature of man so much as the loss of silence." He goes on to show the farthest-reaching effect of this loss, which is the objectification of human relations.

. . . What Dostoyevsky saw, which Nietzsche was unable to see, was that if you deny presence or a God who is Presence you are psychologically incapable of interest in or commerce with the presence of other human beings or nature. . . . Dostoyevsky, believing in a real Transcendent who is near man, always said that only the man who believes in God will be able to love individual men, although he may love humanity.

Through our denial of the presence in others, says Harper, we forfeit transcendence, resign ourselves to "shoddy temporary models" of success and self-assurance, and fall prey to the cosmic insecurity of those who, like Nietzsche, have slain the God within themselves. We will either join Sartre in crying "Let me alone and I am human," or we will join the self-seeking marketplace world of those who work not because they love work but because they crave the recognition that will dispel their own dreadful sense of anonymity. For these individuals, says Harper,

There is an exile of the nerves as well as of the body. . . . It is becoming harder and harder to go about one's business, ignoring the press and unease in the world and in those one lives with. Even in the country it is harder to sit unmindful of tasks, obstacles, threats. The birds sing, the fog

rolls in and out as usual, pictures are painted, gardens are grown, but unease remains in one's bones like malaria . . . the habit of disquietude, or some other cause, prevents one from relaxing. "We are the last to have known such things," said Rilke, thinking, superficially at least, of the aristocratic amenities of Europe, but probably also of the slower pace, the assurance of merit being recognized, of effort growing undisturbed in congenial climate.

Harper sees the pressures of anonymity, non-recognition, and homelessness compounded in our century by three entirely new phenomena: the emergence of totalitarian states, the increasing indifference of the bourgeoisie to spirituality and individualism, and the increasing complexity and acceleration of modern life. As technology breeds ever more pervasive sources of noise and distraction, as governments and the middle class itself conspire to squelch nonconformity, the true prince who will reawaken Presence seems an ever more improbable figure. Yet Harper has discerned his outlines. The true prince, Harper tells us, will receive his appointment not necessarily because he has earned it, but because he has been more attentive than others, and, above all, because he has trusted in the call.

The only kind of deserving may be that which trusts in the call rather than in the person called. If this is so, no wonder we miss the deserving when we look for it in self-assurance and success. We look for it in strongmen who are there only for themselves. Our strength is not in our deserving, but in our capacity to listen.

Harper's representation of our present-day spiritual plight as the living out of an ancient fairy tale will strike his more literal-minded readers as an allegorical simplification. Others will reject Harper's tentative optimism, expressed in the *Sleeping Beauty's* longed-for

reawakening, as a clerical vice. "The *Sleeping Beauty*" itself reawakens at a time when many intellectuals flaunt their disdain of fairy tales as proof of a courageous and ennobling realism. The fairy tale, conceived to embody and transmit wonder, now finds itself violated in the name of pseudo-Freudian inquiry. Yet the yearning for mystery, beauty, and hope persists, especially in those who have vanquished them. What cynics discover if they discover anything, is that they have merely traded one set of fairy tales for another. Hence the most successful purveyor of fairy tales in our time is the advertising industry.

Certainly Harper is no cynic, but his lifelong self-doubt and his unflagging rejection of easy answers have moved his spirit inexorably toward skepticism, where he encounters his own scholarly affinity for such *fin-de-siècle* luminaries as Marcel, Kafka, and Proust. His recognition of the vacuities of modern life places him squarely in the intellectual right, but unlike the more orthodox followers of the movement, he avoids sweeping condemnations. Choosing to express the commonality of our predicament, Harper sees even in Nietzsche not an executioner, but a victim. Like Augustine, Harper is a restless spirit seeking repose, a doubting spirit seeking faith, a disquiet spirit seeking silence. He characterizes himself more by the questions he asks than by the answers he obtains, and he seems comfortable with the thought that there might not be any. He says: "How often it seems when a solution falls apart in my hands, I have simply gone for a walk."

Walking is one of many themes Harper explores in five more recent personal essays included in the present volume of *The Sleeping Beauty*. His essay "Walking to Maráthi," an interior monologue set against the backdrop of a tiny Aegean island, evokes the lyricism of the young Camus. Like "Nuptials in Tipasa," "Walk-

ing to Maráthi" is a paean to the hot, dry, ancient places of the Mediterranean, sung without desire, expectation, or conclusions, simply for the joy of singing. Arriving at Maráthi with his son, Harper says simply, "I was not disappointed. It was no more, no less than I had anticipated." After lingering in Maráthi, Harper and his son then set out for Aghia Sophia, but are unable to get there simply because they run out of time. Says Harper: "From this I learned that holy wisdom is always out of reach, that one runs out of time no matter what the goal, and above all it is good to have a companion."

Like "Walking to Maráthi," "The View From Bujumbura," an essay nominally about Harper's two-week sojourn in the tiny African nation of Burundi, avoids the kind of summing-up we have come to expect from the formal travel essay. Where other Western writers might attempt to penetrate, to understand, to "make some sense" of a foreign culture through a catalog of its idiosyncracies, Harper seems more interested in understanding how the new atmosphere has affected his ongoing dialogue with himself. He is the antithesis of the American tourist, diffident to a fault, fearful of upsetting Burundi's delicate ethnological balance. He avoids looking directly at the women, speaks only to the old men, spends most of his time in solitary walking. "Identity is to be released, not found," he states. "I have never been so detached."

In passing, Harper mentions the tensions of Burundi, the recent massacre of one tribe by another, the government's uneasy tolerance of foreign visitors. Yet at no time does he descend into the political superficialities of the foreign press dispatch. Nor does he arrogate a specious expertise. Readers of "The View From Bujumbura" will learn less about Africa than about Harper himself, though they will learn a great deal about Africa, too.

Harper's travel essays, which reveal by eloquent indirection his own hard-

earned respect for Presence, will frustrate armchair tourists by their failure to coalesce. Like fiction, they represent self-enclosed experiences, approaches to the mystery of life itself. As Henry James said of Hawthorne's sketches, "To read them is to savor them."

"The Weight of Our Time" presents Harper at his most concrete and polemical. Readers will find much to applaud in Harper's assessment of the factors behind our present spiritual predicament. Chief among these, he says, is our loss of God-orientation. Augustine knew, as we do not, that "If you follow your restlessness or love to the end, you will find God." The difference today, says Harper, is that "we do not seem to get to that end—or any end for that matter—and no longer care." As a result, we are condemned to live out the Nietzschean prophecy "You will never pray again, never adore again, never again rest in endless trust. . . ."

The absence of endless trust has resulted in a curious permutation of values. Harper has them neatly paired. In place of faith we have self-confidence, in place of God, identity, in place of sin, failure, in place of praise, nostalgia, in place of disquietude, insecurity. "Freedom of choice is not what moves the soul of middle-class America," says Harper, "Rather, we are preoccupied with insecurity. We do not want to be free, but to be safe."

While in their daily manifestations these new values may differ only slightly from those they have replaced, at bottom a quantitative shift has occurred. Where once we sought grace and healing in the Spirit and in the Word, we now seek power and self-importance in the Flesh and in the Image. Our craving for money and success now vastly exceeds any blessings either of these agencies has been able to confer. As Harper puts it: "Human beings did not always overrate money and success to the point of being totally defined by them. . . ." Clearly these paragons represent poor

surrogates for the ever more elusive sense that we are loved, that we are worthy, that we have some part in what Gandhi called "the universal dance."

"Only the poet or the contemplative philosopher can still hear the sound of the retreating God," says Harper. "The question is: is he retreating further or is he coming our way again? What part we play now depends on the answer we give to this question." Like many of the questions Harper asks himself, he leaves this

one unanswered. But we may safely assume from the tenor of his writings that Harper has heard God's scarcely perceptible returning. Like the surveyor in Kafka's novel, *The Castle*, Harper stands even now at the castle gates. And though he does not say so directly, I think he would agree that, while a Sleeping Beauty who will awaken to an entire kingdom no longer exists, she is still there for those who know how to find her.