



### Monthly Musings for April 2018

#### **At the End of the Day from Trisha English**

Lao Tzu is reported to have said: “You can’t step into the same river twice.” By that he meant that once a moment has gone, it cannot be recaptured. I should have remembered that quote when I decided to return to Varanasi, on the Ganges, in January and February of this year.

I spent a couple of days in Delhi, to acclimatize myself, and then headed North. It is about six or seven years since I was last at Rajghat in Varanasi, and when the invitation came from the Krishnamurti Foundation to attend an International Conference on the “The Art of Living”, I decided to throw caution to the wind and see what, if anything, was happening in that part of the world. All available accommodation was quickly taken up, and about 70 people attended. I did not expect to get my old room back. It is in fact a small cottage, right on the banks of the Ganga, with a 180 degree view. Luck was with me but my first impression was not good. In the intervening years the curtains had rotted, the place needed a good scrub, it was freezing cold and only a tiny two bar radiator held back the cold. The shower didn’t work and a pipe burst just before I left the place. Temperatures varied, but mostly hovered between 6 and 10 degree celsius. Yes, it was freezing most of the time.

There was only a husband and wife team to service the whole compound. I don’t know how most of the people got on who were billeted in the school opposite. But certainly the compound was short staffed! Even so, the husband and wife team, provided a beautifully prepared breakfast and dinner in the evening. Lunch consisted of a buffet served in the school by the school staff. The children were still on holidays.

The actual conference was held in the building where Krishnamurti used to reside. There is a large room for meetings, video showings, and a well stocked library run by the conference organizers. Krishnamurti’s bedroom has been transformed into a silent, meditation room.

Most of the dialogues were held in small groups. These were rotated as the conference proceeded and were concluded with a plenary session. The small group discussions were excellent and informative. The large groups were generally moderated by the conference

leaders and Professor P. Krishna, who some people may remember from Mary Lutyens last volume of her biography of K. Professor Krishna was chosen by Krishnamurti to carry on his work at Rajghat. He retired some years ago but in recent times has been recalled by the Indian Foundation to take up the task again. He turned 80 on the 13<sup>th</sup> January, and is still travelling the world at the invitation of the Foundation and the Theosophical Society. At the time of my discussions with him, he was planning to return to Krotana in Ojai, to oversee the translation of some new Krishnamurti material covering the years immediately after 1933. This material was recently discovered and has not been published before.

Professor Krishna told me that it is difficult to keep the Study Centre going because of diminishing donations and subsidies from the schools. This is going to be an ongoing problem. Unlike Brockwood in the UK and Ojai, in the USA the Indian Foundation is not wealthy and not endowed it seems, with contributions from affluent donors in the West. I am wondering what can be done about this. Chennai and Rishi Valley could also do with some help. Tim Boyd, who is the current International President of the Theosophical Society is also facing the same problems. He is systematically undertaking the huge task of getting the Theosophical compound at Adyar into some kind of order. It suffered severely during the last years of Radha Burnier's tenure.

During my last visit, I commented on the lack of chanting from nearby temples and mosques. Apparently it had been outlawed for awhile. This time I am happy to report that various temple inhabitants chanted for most of the night and in the morning the Islamic community took over. One afternoon, a group of us hired a boat to take us the entire length of the river. It was freezing and the afternoon sun was pale and threw long grey shadows over the water. The buildings had hardly changed at all and I think it is fair to say that this 'eternal' river seemed somehow indicative of the human search for meaning.

The Indians were still cremating their dead. The children were still ragged, poor, and undernourished. The banks of the most sacred river in India were still caked in filth and human waste. At our journey's end, I saw two dogs embedded in the mud. They were just recognizable and would soon decay completely. We passed them as we hauled ourselves up from the river through inches of filth to the compound area. I can't remember things being quite so bleak, but I recognized the feeling of melancholy which invaded my bones. I took one last, lingering look and said goodbye. I will not be returning.

*Trisha English*

## **Barry Hora on the self**

In reply to our recent exchanges on the 'What is the self' question Barry writes:

Sometimes (not very often) when LISTENING the self sinks—out for lunch. The last time it happened was when listening to a Zen talk on the SELF by Alan Watts.

## Why Black? From Don Ross

It is imperative for certain things to be black: the New Zealand rugby team, solar panels and black holes and there are things which really need to be black like concert pianos, dinner jackets and Coco Chanel's little black dress but there are those which are black but shouldn't be: cars, bike rider's apparel and the roofs of houses in western Sydney.

The attraction of black for clothing is apparent especially for those who wish to appear a little smaller and for the convenience of conforming while still looking chic and not having to worry about unfortunate colour clashes. Often being clothed in black, having a black label, owning a black car and even slavishly electing for a black roof in a hot climate has become associated with prestige and all of the associated accumulation of expensive stuff necessary to proclaim high status to fellow status envious.

In our posh suburbs it is unusual to see a Merc, Rangie, Audi, Porsche or any of the other over powered and overpriced absurd vehicles in any other colour other than highly polished black. You are more likely to see, from the cliffs of Vaal, the white whale on its migration of thousands of kilometres than a white Range Rover travelling one kilometre, taking a kid to school on the adjoining streets. The more impecunious status envious declaim their aspirations by driving just as well washed black Mazdas, Hyundis and Jeeps and I have even seen a confused environmentalist in a black Prius.

Cars shouldn't be black because just as green and black military vehicles are intentionally difficult to see in the jungle, black cars are beautifully camouflaged on roads especially in times of low light. They are also, like solar panels, perfect absorbers of photons making them unnecessarily hot in our relentlessly warming climate. I guess their only benefit other than vacuous status striving relates to the employment of an army of car washers who ironically are usually black themselves.

Now if black cars are hard to see in low light, the very chic all black cyclists are impossible to see in such conditions and even easily missed in bright sunlight. Although rightly concerned for their safety, the black status delusion invariably overrides good sense. Remember that indomitable fellow who was leading the bike race from Perth to Sydney wearing black at dawn near Canberra who was killed by a car? If he had been in fluro green like my postman it is likely the motorist would have seen him.

The difference in ceiling space temperature of houses in sunny weather between a black or white roof is 15 degrees which is fine in winter but is an unbearable burden in summer necessitating power guzzling air conditioning for the very survival of their unfortunate inmates. What is the reason for this almost universal folly in the sprawling houses of outer suburbia? It can only be an apparent belief by the dills who build these terribly thermally inappropriate brick veneer follies that black elevates the status and therefore the self-esteem of their owners

This urge to acclaim and insist that black is the colour of high status seems to be a relatively recent craving perhaps associated with the increasing number of super rich but not especially wise beneficiaries of unregulated corporate affluence. Thus, the increasingly expensive accumulation of useless stuff automatically elevates the status of the accumulator simply by their choosing black or getting stuff in black packaging or having a black label. Fifty years

ago, for example, a black vehicle was a hearse, Black Maria or a model T Ford while priests, waiters, undertakers and slate roofs could only be guaranteed to be black.

I have observed another phenomenon which I call the black paradox. As one travels from affluent to less affluent suburbs, the prevalence of black cars diminishes in direct proportion to the increase of solar panels. So, stuff that shouldn't be black, so loved by status seekers, is replaced by stuff which has to be black by those who are trying to invest their modest resources in that which is beneficial to themselves as well the future of the planet which of course ironically includes those who waste their significant wealth on accumulating useless stuff.

*Don Ross*

### **Notes on Wonder from Alan Mann**

*Whoever is devoid of the capacity to wonder, whoever remains unmoved, whoever cannot contemplate or know the deep shudder of the soul in enchantment, might just as well be dead for he has already had closed his eyes upon life. Albert Einstein*

At a recent meeting I talked about Zen in an attempt to explain my interest in matters of the spirit and in philosophy generally. I remember saying I was working on another self-published book, letters to my grandchildren. Some days later I received an email from one of our group telling me he'd found another book involving letters to grandchildren. It was *The Sunrise of Wonder* by Michael Mayne. The title is taken from an insight G. K. Chesterton describes in his autobiography:

*At the back of our brains, so to speak, there is a forgotten blaze or burst of astonishment at our own existence. The object of the artistic and spiritual life is to dig for this sunrise of wonder.*

I wondered how I'm to handle this theme in words, as wonder is far more concerned with experience than explanation. I have already received polite indications that in offering other people's expressions of wonder I am not really saying what wonder means to me, to which I reply that I have selected the words that I would like to have formulated myself, words that most closely match my own feeling of 'wonder' and describe as far as it is possible to say what wonder is. Hence the poetic examples which follow.

As to activating my sense of wonder it is often the scientists who have the knack with their revelations of the mysteries of life, the universe and everything. To illustrate this aspect of wonder I selected video animations by Drew Berry and others. I am currently besotted by animations which provide a visual expression of the extraordinary complexity, organisation and order of the miniscule biological factories that keep me ticking.

[https://www.ted.com/talks/drew\\_berry\\_animations\\_of\\_unseeable\\_biology#t-520574](https://www.ted.com/talks/drew_berry_animations_of_unseeable_biology#t-520574)

<https://www.dnalc.org/resources/3d/central-dogma.html> 3 minutes

[https://www.ted.com/talks/david\\_bolinsky\\_animates\\_a\\_cell](https://www.ted.com/talks/david_bolinsky_animates_a_cell) Another 9 minute TED talk

(In this last example David Bolinsky says something I found hard to wrap my mind round. He is speaking of the difficulty of understanding principles if you are not trained in the subject concerned and in the case of mathematics he says you see an anthropic ideal and that life had to evolve from the numbers that describe the universe).

I wish I had the mathematics to grasp that. I sometimes think that my love of explanation is a barrier to the experiencing of wonder and that this need for explanation, plus habit, is what makes that wonder so elusive. As far as explanation is concerned it is the poets I turn to.

I spent the best part of 50 years trying to get to the bottom of that sense of something missing, of something at the heart of things that my everyday mind ignores. Here are some of the best expressions of how it strikes me.

### **Wordsworth:**

*...And I have felt  
A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;  
A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still  
A lover of the meadows and the woods,  
And mountains; and of all that we behold  
From this green earth; of all the mighty world  
Of eye, and ear,--both what they half create,  
And what perceive; well pleased to recognise  
In nature and the language of the sense,  
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,  
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul  
Of all my moral being.*

This oft-quoted extract from *Lines written above Tintern Abbey* is one of the best expressions I have come across that captures the individual sensing of the undivided. Traherne asks "are you not drawn to some great thing?"

### **Rilke:**

On meditation designed to hold the present moment in eternal waiting:

*And we: onlookers, always, everywhere,  
always looking into, never out of, everything.  
It fills us. We arrange it. It collapses.  
We arrange it again, and collapse ourselves.*

*Who has turned us round like this, so that,  
whatever we do, we always have the aspect  
of one who leaves? Just as they  
will turn, stop, linger, for one last time,  
on the last hill, that shows them all their valley - ,  
so we live, and are always taking leave.*

*End of 8th elegy*

Rilke very clearly understood the open perspective, the uninterrupted view, including what I'm looking out of as well as simply what I'm looking at. Other examples of this insight in his work are *The Poet's death* and *What Birds Plunge Through Is Not The Intimate Space* and *The Poet's Death*.

## **Traherne**

My interest in Zen led me to read a book by R. H. Blyth entitled *Zen in English literature and the Oriental Classics*. This book, after my digging into a range of Eastern traditions in both their ancient and modern manifestations, led me back to my own tradition through the work of Thomas Traherne (1634-1675). He is the most ecstatic of my guides and the Buddhist scholar David Loy, in a chapter entitled '*How does an Awakened Person Perceive the World*' chose Traherne as the best example he can find of such a person.

There are so many examples of Traherne in full flight that it is hard to pick the best example. One of the most widely quoted is :

*From Cent 3/3—The corn was orient and immortal wheat, which never should be reaped, nor was ever sown. I thought it had stood from everlasting to everlasting. The dust and stones of the street were as precious as gold: the gates were at first the end of the world. The green trees when I saw them first through one of the gates transported and ravished me, their sweetness and unusual beauty made my heart to leap, and almost mad with ecstasy, they were such strange and wonderful things: The Men! O what venerable and reverend creatures did the aged seem! Immortal Cherubims! And young men glittering and sparkling Angels, and maids strange seraphic pieces of life and beauty! Boys and girls tumbling in the street, and playing, were moving jewels. . . . Eternity was manifest in the Light of the Day. . . something infinite behind everything appeared which talked with my expectation and moved my desire. . . .etc.*

## **Chesterton**

Michael Mayne says in his book: For, as Chesterton knew, 'we have forgotten who and what we are, and (art) makes us remember what we have forgotten'. To illustrate this point he relates the story of **Wallace Stevens**, on seeing a Picasso painting, and then writing poem which includes these lines on the man with the blue guitar:

*They said, "You have a blue guitar,  
You do not play things as they are."  
The man replied, "Things as they are*

*Are changed upon the blue guitar."  
And they said then, "But play, you must,  
A tune beyond us, yet ourselves,  
A tune upon the blue guitar  
Of things exactly as they are."*

I read this as underling the difference between what I think things are and how they really are.

John Wren-Lewis was fond of Chesterton, and to my surprise I find that Zizek is another Chesterton fan. John was always quoting these two verses from the *Ballad of the White Horse*.

*"I tell you naught for your comfort,  
Yea, naught for your desire,  
Save that the sky grows darker yet  
And the sea rises higher."*

*"Night shall be thrice night over you,  
And heaven an iron cope.  
Do you have joy without a cause,  
Yea, faith without a hope?"*

An example of his opinion that wonder is not dependent on favourable conditions. He related how, after waking in hospital after his near death experience, he was filled with gratitude and wonder, notwithstanding the basic and rather unsavoury conditions.

## **Heidegger**

Heidegger is an unlikely member of my team of guides but after struggling with his philosophical problems he seems to have taken a more literary course and wrote a very interesting piece called *Conversation on a Country Path* and some poetry. What I find particularly interesting in his insistence on what he referred to as 'waiting on' as opposed to 'waiting for'.

## **Dickinson**

Finally, Emily Dickinson who I think is one of the most helpful of the poet's. Poem 1129

*Tell all the Truth but tell it slant --  
Success in Circuit lies  
Too bright for our infirm Delight  
The Truth's superb surprise*

*As Lightning to the Children eased  
With explanation kind*

*The Truth must dazzle gradually  
Or every man be blind --*

This has led me to ask the question, to what extent meditation is relevant to wonder, and what sort of meditation might be relevant? A future project.

*Alan Mann*

**Greville Street Meetings— For your diaries.**

Sunday 6 May and Sunday 3 June. We have a couple of interesting subjects and speakers lined up. More details in due course. If would like me to add you to the meeting circulation list please let me know.

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