What to do with an old mind: HEAR THE BUTTERFLIES!

ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS 3013
309 L.Ellz.Dr., Craigville, MA 02636
Phone/Fax 508.775.8008 8.25.00
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The crazies will be leaving for home this afternoon, the 38th Annual Craigville Writers' Conference being over. One old guy last evening used a bongo to aid in his bemused & bewitching poems on what's best in nature--one said the beak is God's greatest invention, another argued that feathers are better than scales or skin. Our writers' conference is no place for practical, down-to-earth people who have "it" all pretty much figured out, "thank you very much" (the insulting phrase with which the first Harry Potter book's first sentence ends: now there's a *real* crazy, that J.K.Rowling).

1 As **poets** play with sounds, **philosophers** play with ideas--or, transposing, sounds are poets' ideas, & ideas are philosophers' sounds. (Today's edition of SCIENCE has a Woods Hole scientist's argument that oral-aural mimesis [in this case, dolphins' imitating sounds from other dolphins & from our mouths] is the probable origin of language [&, therefore--I may be adding--, of ideas, which are non-things we "see," the meaning of the Greek root of "idea"].)

So now you know why the general American public (not the Russian public!) thinks poets & philosophers are equally crazy, though in different ways.

2 Yesterday on a television panel I touched on what happens when a person, or a culture, loses poetic-philosophical sensitivity. The story of language as a two-storey phenomenon is reversed: words collapse back into things ("the reification of the metaphor," I said). A trained chimp or dolphin will fetch a ball when you say "ball" but will only stare into space if you say "the whole ball of wax," a humorous metaphorical phrase meaning "everything" under consideration--humorous because wax is a thing shockingly irrelevant to the subject until it's thought of in the form of a ball, which itself is relevant only as a metaphor for "all"; so, by delightful indirection, wax is piggybacking on all. ("The whole enchillada" is a Mexican-flavored parallel.)

On language's first floor, sounds are signs when they, as it were, point to things ("as it were" points to the fact that you are about to encounter a metaphor). On the second floor, the things themselves have become signs of non-things, ideas invisible (even though, you remember, "idea" means, etymologically, something "seen"). When the second storey collapses, ideas are treated as things along with the actual things around them at ground level: the metaphors have become what they started as, viz. things (technical term for this: the reification [re-making] of the metaphor [back into a thing]). To save us from this error of forgetfulness, the semanticist uses skills both of the poet & the philosopher.

3 The fundamentalist mentality is literalist (another way of stating the error in §2), the secularist mentality is metaphorist (e.g., miracles, even including Jesus' resurrection, are "only" metaphors, not realities). This Thinksheet is not the place to lay out the relative pathologies of these two crippled mindsets--linguistic, theological, & other; but I will display two egregious instances, one for each sickness:

(1) Tim LaHay's book-series titled LEFT BEHIND illustrates the fundamentalist **identifying** of picture & reality. Jewish & Christian apocalyptic uses picture-language for visions ("seeings": "vision" has the same Greek root as "idea") of future "last things" (which is what the Greek-transliterated word "eschatology" means). The only biblical support for "left behind" is in the Mt. & L. forms of what scholars call the Little Apocalypse. Jesus had foreseen the Temple's destruction (Mt.24.1-3; M.13.1-4; L.21.5-7), & in all three passages the disciples asked "When?"--the question the Little Apocalypse, immediately following in all three of these gospels, answers not with a calendar date (which Jesus says [Ac.1.7] "is not for you to know"; "only the Father" knows [Mt.24.36]) but with pictures.

The final picture in the Little Ap. is a warning to be **faithful** at all times: the boss arrives unexpectedly & punishes those who are caught not doing their job. The picture just before that is a warning to be **watchful**, "ready" lest the last day come upon you like a burglar entering your house. And the picture just before that is a warning to be **knowledgeable** about the judgment, lest you get "left." This picture is three pictures riding on one judgment-picture: the *separation* of Noah & his family to save them, them alone, from the flood. Here are the three pictures of separation in time (the sheep/goats separation [Mt.25.32] is in space): (1) one of two men working

"in the field" is "taken" (rewarded), the other "left" (punished). That's Mt.: L.'s parallel has the two men "in one bed," which is picture (2). Picture (3) is in both Mt. & L.: Two women are (Mt.) "grinding at the mill," (L.) "grinding together," & the same taken/left formula applies to them. "Left" has the metaphoric force of "left out": DON'T GET LEFT OUT is a signifcant theme in Jesus' body of parables (e.g., the socalled "foolish virgins" who, by lack of foresight, got shut out of the wedding).

Tim LaHaye's LEFT BEHIND series in hugely popular books & films reifies Jesus' basic metaphor of time. The apocalyptic pictures are not about space & time but about the consequences of our decisions: they are existential, not material. The ark separated Noah & his family from the doomed, but the ancient storyteller wasn't teaching how important space is; & in the "rapture" (the up-"seizing" of the saved) story, Jesus isn't interested in either space or time (for his disinterest in time, see again Mt.24.36 & Ac.1.7). From his aggressive nonsense, LaHaye is only making piles of cents.

(2) While the literalist identifies picture (e.g., Jesus' "rapture" story) with the reality (a supposed future event), the metaphorist **separates** reality (as supposed) off from reality-pictures, which are degraded as "mere" metaphors. Yesterday a biologist told me he can't use the phrase "intelligent design" because "It implies a Designer!" (To which I replied, "Exactly.") Materialists are so determined to keep "science" & religion separate that they insist, with Darwin, that the appearance of life must have been, must be, "spontaneous" (i.e., "by itself," without God); & bio-differentiation must be "natural" (i.e., God not managing the "selection" [which is "only" a metaphor if nobody is doing the selecting]). Up with evolution, down with evolutionism (materialism). Too bad the U.S. Supreme Court has thus far failed to distinguish the two. Evolution is factual, evolutionism is a materialist philosophy incorporating, as antimetaphors, "spontaneous" & "natural." But science itself is now weakening that language-game, which was in effect eroded by Josiah Royce in a number of books: this morning I happened to be re-reading his THE WORLD AND THE INDIVIDUAL (my copy was pub. by MacMillan in [!] 1900): "the Absolute is no absorber and transmuter, but an explicit possessor and knower" (587). Think how much freedom from language-games & -tricks we might achieve if we were to become ourselves better poets & philosophers: "Life involves passions, faiths, doubts, and courage. The critical inquiry into what these things mean and imply is philosophy" (lecture 1 of his [1892] THE SPIRIT OF MODERN PHILOSOPHY).

The "nothing but" fallacy is one form of overclaiming, but I don't think I'm guilty of it when I say that all <u>thinking is pictorial</u>. Almost a century ago we discovered that light can be pictured (by its observed behaviors) as either particles or waves, & photologists aren't embarrassed that the pictures are irreconcilable--so not to worry about "contradictions" in religion pictures. Pictures go straight to our feelings & then may get processed by our neocortex (in which case we call them "ideas"). Susanne K. Langer intricately laid out the process in her two-volume MIND: AN ESSAY IN HUMAN FEELING (Johns Hopkins: I, 1967; II, 1972)--but here I must resist the temptation to quote from them.

4 But whence this Thinksheet's title? It's from a poem written in our home yesterday by the 15-year-old daughter of a pastor-niece of mine: "The Song of the Butterfly." Four days ago, with the other members of her section of the youth division of the Writers' Conference, she was sent out around Craigville to note down whatever sounds she heard (writing being the silent manipulation of sounds). She saw butterflies (& wrote a brief piece on conversation between ears & eyes), but they didn't qualify for her note-taking--or did they? Her poem works in sounds she heard, but the stanzas end with these lines: "Is what I hear the song of the butterfly?" "I strive to hear the song of the butterfly." "I know I hear the song of the butterfly." "I feel blessed with the song of the butterfly." In a brief interpretive essay on the poem's "hidden meaning," Kristen Schweitzer-Haug relates the stanzas to our life-stages, each increasing one's appreciable awareness (a Wieman definition of God). In stanza #1, childhood, parents are the "whispering trees" she heard on her walk. Stanza #2: the crickets she heard were her present peer-pressuring friends. Stanza #3: she looks forward to an adulthood in which she can "feel relief because finally you discover your true calling. You finally hear the song of the butterfly." The final stanza: "Now I can walk home and I'll feel satisfied / I was able to see [note shift from hearing] all of God's beauty...." Comment: "You have found your true purpose in life."

The Song Of The Butterfly

I walk down the well-beaten path in the woods
Wind dancing among the trees whispers to me
I stop and I listen, my heart beats so loud
What is that sweet voice I hear?
Is what I hear the song of the butterfly?

I continue to trod down the well-beaten path
And walk until I reach a wide open field.
My body is warmed by the sun beating down
Crickets are talking, buzzing
I strive to hear the song of the butterfly

I follow my path until I reach the stream
And the cool water washes my burning feet
The bubbles dance by me, caught in the current.
I look up and I smile
I know I hear the song of the butterfly

Now I can walk home and I'll feel satisfied
I was able to see all of God's beauty
But the thing that I will always treasure most
From this walk is what I heard
I feel blessed with the song of the butterfly

Kristen Schweitzer-Haug
Williamsville, N.Y.

This poem actually has a hidden meaning. The first stanza represents childhood. Your parents, which are represented by the whispering trees, try to guide you. You are starting to discover your purpose in life, which is the song of the butterfly.

The second stanza represents your teen-age years. Crickets represent friends, which are drowning out your ideas and goals in life. It is hard to overcome this pressure.

The stream in the third stanza represents adulthood. You feel relief because finally you discover your true calling. You finally hear the song of the butterfly.

The final stanza shows that you can then continue on with your life and feel satisfied because you have found your true purpose in life.