



**LIVING AND ACTING**

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*A consideration of the universal  
simile of life being like a play*

The truth which the artist seeks and which he expresses through his art is part of the universal truth, just as the truth sought and expressed by the philosopher and the scientist and the theologian is part of the universal truth.

- Elfrida Vipont Foulds (1955)  
in 'Christian Faith and Practice', 466.

Totus mundus agit histrionem  
(All the world plays the player)

- Motto said to have been displayed at  
the new Globe Theatre, London, 1599.

Unless matters of culture are more clearly shown to be vitally related to religion, an increasing element in life will stand outside of the religious sphere, and life become either more and more disintegrated or wholly secularized.

- Caroline C. Graveson (1937)  
in 'Christian Faith and Practice', 463.

A good theatre company is a metaphor of a possible society.

- Peter Hall (1974)

Because it is difficult for people to perceive their own problems, they can get some sense of them through seeing themselves as seen by others.

- Idries Shah: *Reflections*, 1968.

## Truth and its Shadow

That we all might be merely players in a cosmic drama, whose 'reality' as apprehended through our consciousness of the world we live in is no more than a game and an illusion, is a universal idea found in most religions. Our own Isaac Pennington, writing in 1653, five years before he joined the Quakers, expressed the idea in matchless style:

All Truth is a shadow except the last, except the utmost; yet every Truth is true in its kind. It is substance in its own place, though it be but a shadow in another place (for it is but a reflection from an intenser substance), and the shadow is a true shadow, as the substance is a true substance.

This is, indeed, the thesis I wish to pursue in this paper, using the theatrical simile as the most apt illustration, dealing as it does with the truth expressed through the human situation.

Despite the medieval origins of our theatre in the Christian Mysteries and Moralities, the Churches (and Quakers in particular) have despised, until fairly recently, the tawdry make-believe of plays and players. The genius of Shakespeare and one or two others, whether dramatists or performers, was not sufficient to excuse what was seen as an immoral pastime. Nor was this solely because the content of plays was often puerile and the playhouses were places of ill-repute: the real offence was in *the confusion of truth*. The point about the traditional fare of theatres - and by extension, perhaps, all fiction - is that what is made to appear true is not true; it is a deceit, a conjuring trick, an illusion, and as such, from a strict religious viewpoint, it is morally reprehensible to waste time by having anything to do with it.

The confusion of truth, especially between actors and 'real people', has been much increased by certain trends in television. The premiss for a documentary series like *The Marriage* (BBC TV) is that 'we are people - and therefore more real than actors.' After considering how another BBC-TV programme, *Crimewatch*, walks

a tightrope between fighting real crime and exploiting it as rather morbid entertainment, Rodney Tyler comments that

The questions of the boundaries between real life and fantasy remain; perhaps no more forcibly than in the mind of the actor Steve Hodson. So convincingly did he play a building society robber and so closely did he resemble him, that despite a warning by the police some people telephoned to name him as the crook. Fortunately, he had an alibi.<sup>1</sup>

A similar point is made by writer Peter Ackroyd, wearing his television critic's hat, when he bemoans the worst programmes of 1985 as having abused the power of television with "fly-on-the-wall" techniques of filming, so that the viewer becomes the privileged spectator of someone else's suffering." He continues: "The defence for these programmes asserts that they fulfill a kind of social service, by bringing to the attention of the public problems which might otherwise remain unrecorded, but the element of voyeurism - the contemporary equivalent of 'freak shows' at the fairground - is so strong that it seems to dominate all other considerations. . . . . The 'reality' which appears on the screen is not, in any case, real at all when one recalls the amount of manipulation which goes on behind the camera."<sup>2</sup>

Unlike the Quakers in the past, the immorality objected to here is not that of actors behaving like real people, but real people being forced - however willingly - to behave like actors. The coinage that exchanges experience of reality is being debased. A terrible example of how this syndrome can go wrong where sick minds are involved was shown by a recent case in which a girl was actually hanged as part of a home-made movie. With his characteristic belief in the truth of paradox, Oscar Wilde rightly observed that Life imitates Art: and that was before television. Now, it is patently true that there is a two-way traffic between the scenarios drawn from life and the life-scenarios drawn from watching films and television. In our emotional relationships, if not exactly in similar environments, we mostly live in a gigantic soap opera. Sometimes the

only difference seems to be that in real time (clock time) life spreads out over great tracts of daily routine and specific (but largely insignificant) detail which soap opera can - indeed, must - ignore. The late Andy Warhol, once the grand old man of Pop Art, expressed the feeling: "I always suspected that I was watching TV instead of living life . . . The movies make emotion look so strong and real, whereas when things really do happen to you, it's like watching television - you don't feel anything."<sup>3</sup>

However, 'for balance' it must be said that recent research into the part television actually plays in people's lives notes that they 'know the difference between TV and life' (and that includes children).<sup>4</sup> This is obviously true; but so is the fact that we mostly incline to imitate what we are impressed by, or admire. Incidentally, the very idea of keeping 'balanced viewpoints' on television itself is a dangerous phenomenon (mainly forced on the media by political and religious sectarian interests) because it tends to *neutralise* any conviction at all, whilst ostensibly giving it the freedom to express itself. Programmes like 'Question Time' (excellent though that has been as entertainment) are an anodyne for public unrest on matters of contemporary concern. This is television taking the place of religion as Marx saw it: 'the opium of the masses.'

The theme of illusion and reality on television and film is sometimes pursued by its more philosophical artists. How Pirandello would have loved Woody Allen's brilliant fantasy *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985) in which a stereotyped character from a black and white Hollywood movie of the thirties steps down out of the screen, 'escaping into real life' as he says, and into the technicolour world of the Depression. There he meets terrible (and very comic) difficulties stemming from the sheer inept innocence of his scriptwriter (whom he equates with God), and with only phoney 'stage money' in his wallet (economics are reality). On top of this, the screen character has to face the actor who plays (played) him, anxious to be rid of this doppelgänger who threatens, not only his future career as an actor, but the whole film industry with its marketing of a 'safe' dream world.

The adoring fan, a poor café waitress, abused by her husband, sacked from her job, trying to force reality into her relationship with the screen character, and trying to grab some actual reality for herself from the actor, is finally betrayed on all counts. She is left a sad, lonely girl sitting alone in the cinema, pushing popcorn into her mouth as she gazes adoringly at Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers performing one of their dream-like routines. At one moment, when the black and white characters are left stranded together on the screen in reel two, awaiting the return of their errant colleague so that they can get on with the plot, one of them gazes directly out at the technicolour audience and says: 'What if *they* are the illusions and not us?'

This kind of game with different levels of reality may remind some readers of J.W. Dunne's 'Serial Time', only this is Serial Reality; one is contained in another, and so on, like Chinese boxes, to an unknown number. In the contemporary theatre, it was inevitable that a dramatist would eventually have an ostensible member of the audience shout at the actors in the middle of a scene "Identify yourselves!" and for them to do so, in actual truth, giving a potted biography of their lives up to that moment: Edward Albee did this in *Counting the Ways* (1976). For Universalists, this may illuminate their belief, perhaps, that Truth speaks to us in many guises 'according to our condition', and that no single religion or philosophy can claim therefore a sole prerogative to it.

### A Single Image of the Truth

"Realism is not a matter of showing real things," said Bertolt Brecht, "but of showing how things really are."<sup>5</sup> Moreover, when he concluded late in his career that he was concerned with a 'Dialectical Theatre' rather than an 'Epic Theatre',<sup>6</sup> he was recognising the basic factor which life and acting have in common - the techniques of dialectic. Argument by debate rules all our lives, whether in private or in public. We are 'talked into' this, or we 'talk ourselves' out of that. Dialectic

rules: we are governed by the internal dialogue between our different selves, and we are persuaded or not by the external dialogues of our social existence. The American sociologist, Erving Goffman, makes the point succinctly: "Underlying all social interaction there seems to be a fundamental dialectic . . . a character staged in a theatre is not in some ways real, nor does it have the same kind of real consequences as does the thoroughly contrived character performed by a confidence man; but the *successful* staging of either of these types of false figures involves the use of *real* techniques - the same techniques by which everyday persons sustain their social situations."<sup>7</sup>

This double dichotomy of 'actor and characters played' and 'person and life-roles played' is like two follow-spots merging to illuminate a single couple. It is our thesis that we are looking here at a single image of the truth. Moreover, it is a universalist image because it embraces the diverse expressions of truth as of one nature.

In an article called *Why the Theatre?*, the late Michael Macowan, noting this century's restless questioning of illusion and reality in drama and life, found that there might be a unifying factor. Not surprisingly, perhaps, it turns out to be religion, or 'experience of the mystery.'

At the very heart of the theatre is paradox. The audience's experience of being drawn into the illusion of the play, and in that way finding a deeper reality, is a paradox. So also is the actor's relation to the character he plays: he is both himself, and another person. Moreover he is always aware of the pattern of the whole play . . . But for the character each event is happening for the first time.<sup>8</sup>

Macowan goes on to point out that to reproduce this 'as if for the first time' existence of the character, the actor 'must have full attention in the moment.' This is difficult at the best of times for the ordinary person, but for the actor with his dual attention on both the character and the practical circumstances surrounding a performance, one might think that this giving of



'full attention' is even more difficult. Yet the fact is that 'for the trained and gifted actor it may be easier than doing the same thing in his own life.'<sup>9</sup> One might define acting as life lived deliberately instead of by accident.' This change in man's being - the concept of deliberately controlling one's attention (one's thoughts and one's consciousness) - 'has always been the aim of all true religion.'

In ancient Egypt, the actor-priest represented the god and, in a sense, was merged with his identity. In some quarters, even today, actors are led to have a religious sense of vocation in their work. The teaching of Constantin Stanislavski and his followers is a well-known example; and more recently, the Polish theatre guru, Jerzy Grotowski. In a frontspiece to his book *Building a Character*, Stanislavski declares with monastic passion: "An actor must work all his life, cultivate his mind, train his talents systematically, develop his character; he may never despair and never relinquish his main purpose - to love his art with all his strength and love it unselfishly."<sup>10</sup> In the nineteen thirties, he talked of his system as 'a whole way of life',<sup>11</sup> and that phrase was echoed by James Roose Evans, when setting up an experimental company called Stage Two in 1969. He said his company would "look for a theatre that will be as much a way of life as a way of work, for work that will involve the whole of the actor's being."<sup>12</sup>

That same year, 1969, Grotowski's company paid a very limited visit to London. In an early statement he had said:

In the theatre which I direct I have been given an unusual role: I'm not simply the director producing plays, more a 'leader', a 'guide', or even, as some of my friends have suggested, a 'spiritual instructor' . . . It becomes no longer a question of training an actor, but of emerging from yourself and going out to meet someone else. The actor's work can lead to a 'rebirth'. The actor is born again, not only as a professional, but as a human person.<sup>13</sup>

This observation, of course, is central to our theme; we are dealing with acting and life as encompassing a

single truth; but Grotowski made a cardinal error in his assumption that 'everything which is art is artificial.'<sup>14</sup> In trying to follow this assumption to its extreme expression he let out the baby of theatre with the bathwater of his theory about reality in performance. This is because the theatre is a trade of artifice and illusion, however strongly it may focus on the experience of reality in its story-telling. But it should be contended, I think, that art, by virtue of its condensation of experience, is *more* real than life; it is more intensely true than life itself which is 'diluted' in time and space. Grotowski would have found this difficult to accept; and in rejecting artifice he crossed the borderline between illusion and reality to the side of reality alone, thus shutting himself off from the means of creating a theatrical effect. Only a religious cult was left to him.

In recent years, he has been investigating ritual performative techniques, trying to rediscover 'art as a way of knowledge where ritual and artistic expression were seamless.'<sup>15</sup> Among those he has invited to work with him at the School of Fine Arts, University of California, Irvine, are 'Sufi dancers, Buddhist incantation teachers, Haitians specializing in sun rhythms, and a dervish.' Universalists will await further reports with particular interest.

### **The Bringing Together of Art and Life**

The participation of non-theatrical groups of people in rites and ceremonials of their own making has been widely documented in social history, and it continues to make its appearance today, especially with young people. Witness the demonstrations which are often as much for their own sake as for the ostensible Cause on the placard; witness the Pop Festivals which are as popular for the 'get-together' as for the music; witness group archaeological projects, safari trips, adventure courses and the increased interest in 'dramatic' sports like sky-diving, wind-surfing, gliding and climbing, where individual execution is often enjoyed within the group context. The word 'drama' stems from the Greek

word for 'doing something', and television programme planners have not been slow to recognise that there is 'natural entertainment' in these activities. They contain the element of 'contest', essential to drama, and they are all part of what Desmond Morris calls the 'stimulus struggle' in our times: that is, the effort we are obliged to put into life to help make up for the unutterable boredom of having our 'recent' jungle stimuli of getting food and shelter too easily and quickly answered in modern urban environments. The supermarket as a life-support system has much to answer for, with credit-card 'ease of purchase' coming a close second.

Any future worth talking about in life, yet alone in art, depends on the answers we give today to a number of vital questions; and foremost among them are the time-honoured questions at the root of all philosophy and religion. Who are we? Why are we here? What must we do? (It is not coincidence that an artistically committed actor and director, Bruce Myers, said in a recent interview: "Who you are, and what is the right way to behave - these are the great questions of theatre.")<sup>16</sup> In the age of nuclear weapons, wrong answers to these questions, whether intentional or unintentional, will surely bring us to the end of the road - or at least, of a road we can recognise as such. This late in the day, even the 'correct' answers, whatever they may be, may bring us to a similar cul-de-sac. If the human race is to avoid a dead end and continue its evolutionary journey (unlike the dinosaurs) it will have to leave behind, or radically restructure, nearly all its accumulated caravan of goods, services, institutions, and perhaps most important of all, ideas; all the things, in fact, which have led us into the crazy dilemmas of our times. A courageous jump has to be made somewhere, 'a leap in the dark.' We need to adapt, like the chameleon, to the extraordinary conditions of the 'information explosion' of the micro-chip age; and, at the same time, to trust to that knowledge we can carry *outside* a computer, or even a book, and to the lay wisdom of past experience. To get us out of the cul-de-sac, we have to leap over the wall of our conditioning and

ignorance and bigotry directly to the ground of truth on the other side, as it were, on which our actions will have a chance of creating future hope and progress.

Art, as ever slightly ahead of life, has for some time found itself in its own cul-de-sac. Artists in this century have been forced to re-think what they are doing in their art even more urgently than the man-in-the-street has been obliged by the contents of his newspaper to look at what he is doing with his life. The artist who is more than a reproductive craftsman, whether writer, musician, abstract artist or photographer, cannot avoid taking a personal attitude to the sickness of the age; whereas for the 'average man' such problems as population control, starvation, ecology, pollution, world money market economy, and the bomb, are just sufficiently around the corner to be ignored until their personal effect is unavoidably direct.

The only answer to this ostrich-like attitude to life's many problems would appear to be improved education. It is necessary now for all men to become 'artists', not in any media, but artists with the material of their own lives. It is as if we need to become actors creating a character. With greater awareness of what we might and should be, we can 'rehearse' that truth in the busy 'sleepwalking' or 'theatrical' world of everyday life.

### Transcending a Decadent Cul-de-sac

Many Western artists in their cultural cul-de-sac move in every decreasing circles, producing remote abstractions in Form and Technique. There seems to be no space left for Content in its old sense of an interpreted theme recognisable to a lay audience. The object d'art itself is its own meaning; the technical use of materials is for its own sake; the *experience* of the artefact is all. We live in an age of 'experience-mongering', as if we had to convince ourselves of the reality of being alive. Commercial advertising plays richly on the suspicion that we may be 'missing out' on something which the other person has. The TV and

Colour Supplement advertisements are more 'dramatic' in their presentation of a fantasy world - and often more artistically produced - than the programmes and articles around them. Values are turned upside-down, inside-out; illusion and reality are so cheek-by-jowl, a mere column-margin or programme-break apart, that a constantly active critical faculty is required to register the fact. "Events," Peter Ustinov once observed, "are becoming so absurd in themselves. The 'theatre of the absurd' I thought was just a fad but as it turned out it accurately reflects the world we live in."<sup>17</sup> The ultra-sophistications of modern art, and of plays by absurdist dramatists like Ionesco and Beckett, are symptomatic of our social sicknesses. The theatre of the absurd was - is - a reaction to the loss of faith in language, and even in reasoned debate. The attitude is dangerous, a sick pessimism. ". . . It's a game. Language is a game. It's all on top. Something to hide under. It's got no connection with reality." Thus speaks the character of Helen in James Saunders' play *The Borage Pigeon Affair*; but nevertheless, if you throw language out, you throw out all hope of making sense of life. Wittgenstein solves the dilemma, especially for the modern dramatist, when he notes that "Nothing is lost if one does not seek to say the unsayable. Instead, that which cannot be spoken is - unspeakably - contained in that which is said!"<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps the Soviets are right about the decadence of Western formalist art; although 'socialist realism' is certainly no answer to it, not with such a naive, blindfold attitude to the questioning spirit and creative 'outsider'. The trouble with any art which only allows the understanding of the lay majority to direct its scope and content is that it becomes reduced to the function of an ideological tool instead of being a key to revelation. On the other hand, if it becomes so specialised and remote as to be uncommunicable to anything more than a small coterie of aficionados, what is the point? With no disrespect, it would be as well to write this in Esperanto. Or is it the point that all art is initially personal and esoteric, limited to the artist's own circle and to his local environment and

cultural background; whilst the hope may or may not be harboured that one day in the future all the world will understand?

The artist's effort to break this deadlock, to shout his personal artistic freedom in the face of official rebuke, too often results in shock for shock's sake, and a decadent sensationalism. There seem to be no boundaries to what can be said in a theatre today; and it may not be long before what is done - no doubt in the name of artistic truth and reality - has no restriction. Why not chop off the head of a *real* canary in *Miss Julie*; why not draw real blood, and ultimately really kill the villain, using a condemned criminal for the actor? It has been done before in ancient Rome, and we may see it again before this shallow civilisation, too, completes its due cycle and fall. If this sounds like a plea for the return of censorship, it is; but censorship by the artists themselves, not by any pious officialdom.

A trenchant little item was reported in *The Observer* some years ago which involves a cynical comment on illusion and reality, and a lifting of two fingers at life 'as a sport and a play.'

On the Victoria Line during the week many passengers were visibly distressed at seeing a young man dressed in blue jeans and a cotton sweater who had a couple of four-inch gashes at either side of his throat sewn with livid stitches. He looked about 17 and at the end of his tether. Sympathizers made way for him as he got up to get off at Oxford Circus. In the doorway he passed around an amused look and pulled the gashes and stitches off, which were painted on flesh-coloured adhesive tape.

One wonders at the young man's motives in creating this 'happening'. Was it just for 'kicks', like the party jokes of 'jumping spiders' and rubber 'lizards'; or should we credit him with performing this theatrical gesture in order to make the passengers seriously question their reactions to everyday truth? Whatever his motives, one thing is certain: he meant to *play with real feelings*, and got some pleasure himself in doing so. It is a cautionary tale; and in the larger scheme of things,

beyond the Victoria Line, we might ask ourselves how often we are blinded by illusion, how unwittingly played upon, how impossibly ignorant of actuality. Well may we cry with Büchner's Danton: "We are puppets strung to unknown powers - nothing, nothing ourselves! We are the swords that spirits fight with - we never see the hands that brandish us . . ." <sup>19</sup>

Are all artists like the young man in blue jeans; are they irresponsible, thwarted children, sublimating in their 'art', their 'playing', the otherwise mature urge to do things in life for real, and take responsibility for their actions? Some psychiatrists have said so. But leaving aside the psychological reasons for the young man's 'play', the incident does show that because the theatrical medium necessarily incurs the human actor for its expressive purposes, it is more in touch with its public than most other artistic media. Because of this, if life is to find one way of transcending its present cul-de-sac via the arts, then of all the arts, theatre is the most likely to aid and abet the process. Moreover, in so doing, it may find the way out of its own particular cul-de-sac: the accusation that it is an irrelevant and elitist pastime. Theatre straightway gives the clue to transcendence by its very essence - illusion. May not the apparently real cul-de-sac be itself an illusion? May it not be that our true reality is elsewhere; that we are 'trapped' only by the rigidity of our own concepts about 'real' life? We have come full circle from our starting point.

### **Towards All Life as a School of Being**

How, then, are we to test for alternatives in this 'real', unreal life? The answer could be, as already suggested, that we should 'rehearse' them, to find out how they work, or rather, how they may become an effective performed experience. Much more urgently than better Schools of Knowledge, we need *Schools of Being*. There is already too much knowledge available, not on its own account, but for the human brain. We get confused by the facts, as the joke goes: facts

are for computers. There is too much daily information fed to us by the media on top of other sources, leaving not enough space in our attention for conscious being. The imbalance needs correcting. Indeed, in countless small instances mostly working quietly beneath the everyday fabric of society, it is being corrected. Nature invariably evolves her own cures for extreme circumstances. The last ten years or so have seen an explosion of 'Schools', small pockets of spiritual activity, employing all kinds of exercises designed to alter and improve the individual's sense of being, and enrich a conscious appreciation of life. This is clearly indicated by the number of participants in the increasingly popular Festivals of Mind, Body and Spirit. In fact, so much is now being published in the field that 'Mind, Body and Spirit' is now the label for a whole section in major bookshops, with conventional 'Religion', 'Psychology' and 'Philosophy' retaining their own shelves. But apart from the commercial aspects, especially with Health Foods and Additives, a holistic approach to mental as well as physical health is the 'Alternative' or 'Complementary' order of the day. We have begun to recognise the vital need for balance, not only in diet and exercise, but between the sides of our brain-functioning.<sup>20</sup>

Lack of balance, almost by definition, implies dis-ease; and in the psychological context it provides all of us, in varying degrees, with those experiences of mental tension which so often break out in what we call 'neurotic' expression. It has been said that what dominates the air today "is the feeling that things are out of control, and it is the result of massive and rapid-fire changes that shake up the life-routines and everyday assumptions by which millions of people order their behaviour. It is a symptom of what I call future shock." Thus writes Alvin Toffler whose best-seller, *Future Shock*, was published in 1970. We are, he says, in collision with tomorrow now; and the shock we feel is very akin to that felt by a traveller suddenly plunged into an alien land. "Future shock is culture shock in one's own society."<sup>21</sup> Consider, then, deliberately administered culture shock - the fear of unknown references - as a



kind of homeopathic inoculation against the social neurosis or disease of an unbalanced life. Some avant-garde writers and dramatists have almost instinctively used this 'fear' as their *leitmotif*. It might be called the Kafka, or the Pinter, syndrome - the nameless threat - but it is inevitably a vicarious experience in the theatre, or even reading alone, because of the actor-audience (writer-reader) relationship. A School of Being tries to achieve the experience by more direct encounter. It involves people in contact with people - not their opposite, the actors - and the ideal it pursues means turning back from the cul-de-sac toward the original starting place, toward those life-supporting sources upon which all our lives most deeply depend.

The idea of 'Life as a School of Being' has occurred to others; and not surprisingly to a Quaker - to that adventurous spirit, the late Damaris Parker-Rhodes. She wrote how she consciously needed

to grasp the fact that there is an underlying unity to all life. Life is perpetually signalling to me, **because I am the microcosm of the macrocosm.** . . . All life from the highest to the lowest is a school of being gradually arising from non-being, and it is possible to signal blessing ahead into the substance of material things and for this to have actual effect on the material plant.<sup>22</sup>

What else is the power of prayer?

A School of Being, then, takes its members back to the basics of living. One has to say 'members' rather than 'students and teachers' because such a School is essentially a group experience in which all teach and learn from each other, working with a common ideal; and to *experience* the ideal together is the object, not just to teach it to the uninitiated. In the religious context, there have always been such Schools - they are called, of course, monasteries or convents. But in these more secular times, they are often termed communes. They frequently represent a life-style which is against the tide of contemporary life (with its ideals based in property, personal gain, over-consumption and media-set standards). Because they do not confirm the average

man's 'normality', but are more inclined to undermine its shallow expedience, they are likely to be labelled 'cranks'. Even monks are seen as 'outsiders' whose presence can be an uncomfortable criticism of our more worldly choices in life; and of course, like nudists and other adherents to 'alternative living', they are the butt of popular humour. Yet although laughter may draw the teeth of self-criticism, it will only give a temporary respite to those for whom the question 'what am I doing with my life?' is ever insistent.

Ultimately, as in so many things, education is the key. In terms of syllabus priority it seems to me that education in general is not sufficiently answering its responsibility to instruct about the basics of living as they *actually are* in the workings of body, mind and spirit. It is not saying unequivocally enough what is required of all 'students of life' - children, adolescents, adults, each one of us - to survive, grow and realise our potential to its highest mark. The Eightfold Path of Buddhism gives a succinct example of how a syllabus might be organized: right attitude, right motive, right conduct, right speech, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right meditation. But, of course, the Buddhist expression is not the only one, nor indeed the advisable one in this country, for such a scheme. Yet it points the way. Perhaps not even Christian terminology is advisable, for so long as there is given the 'freedom to explore' the elusive nature of Truth (as the Church of England Synod recently gave to its 'heretical' yet patently sincere brother, the Bishop of Durham), then it does not matter which Teacher we happen to follow. We are all, in the final analysis, Seekers after Truth; and Truth, as John Linton reminds us, 'is wider than Christianity.'<sup>23</sup> Wherever we are born, to whatever culture, at whatever living standard, it is ourselves that we have to know and control in the School of Being - in the 'drama' of our lives. The seeking is all.

To summarise our theme: not only is life like a play, but consciously 'acting out' a predetermined role can become like life. The School of Being is in the business of turning mere ideas of the spiritual life

into a reality, lived day by day. In plays, ideas are given vicarious being; and in this manner, the Drama at its best reveals the most intimate observation of the human situation, helping to clarify meaning and purpose in our lives, cleansing our muddy emotions, conferring a sense of values and comradeship, and bringing with it a heightened consciousness and spiritual healing. Likewise, the scenario that it is required of us to play, in order to clarify and achieve those same elements of 'meaning' and 'value' and heightened awareness, can be given actual being in our lives.

What I like to call the 'Revelatory Theatre' is the obverse side of the School of Being that is our life: it is the true shadow of the true substance. 'Quaker literature from its very beginnings has reflected the theme of the universality of revelation.'<sup>24</sup> In revelation, the truth of fact and of symbol merge, confirming Isaac Pennington's observation that 'every Truth is true in its kind.' It tells us in each precious moment of this transient life that whatever the evils and deceits and miseries which surround us, all will be well. In the words attributed to a mystical Jesus speaking to Mother Julian in her thirteenth 'showing' or 'revelation' - "It is true that sin is the cause of all this pain; but it is all going to be all right; it is all going to be all right; everything is going to be all right."<sup>25</sup>

## Notes and References

- 1 Rodney Tyler, 'The police drama that's real life' in *The Times*, November 12th, 1985.
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- 3 Andy Warhol, interviewed about the splintered images of himself in an exhibition at the Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London, July, 1986.
- 4 Jane Root. *Open the Box*, Comedia Channel 4 Book, 1986, p.17.
- 5 Bertolt Brecht, quoted by Lindsay Anderson in *The Times*, April 21st, 1973.
- 6 *Brecht on Theatre*. The development of an aesthetic. Edited and translated by John Willett, Methuen, 1964, pp.281-2.
- 7 Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1969, pp.220 and 225. Also Pelican Books, 1972.
- 8 In the British Theatre Association's *Quarterly Drama* for Summer, 1969.
- 9 In the context of this observation the following is of interest: After concentrating on a role all day, every day, for 17 weeks in a TV serial, actor Peter Bowles was asked if it was a relief to be himself again. 'Yes,' he agreed wryly, 'though the trouble with actors being themselves is that quite often they don't know who that is.' - the Observer Colour Supplement, 'A room of my own,' 26th January, 1986.
- 10 Constantin Stanislavski. *Building a Character*, Max Reinhardt, 1950. Also Methuen University Paperbacks, 1968.
- 11 Stanislavski. *Op.cit.*, p.290.

- 12 Reported in *The Stage*, 1st May, 1969. But the experiment failed from lack of financial support.
- 13 In the Royal Shakespeare Company's magazine *Flourish*, Autumn 1966.
- 14 Eugenio Barba, quoted in John Russell Brown's *Effective Theatre*, Heinemann, 1969.
- 15 Grotowski in the Los Angeles Times, 1983, quoted by Richard Fowler in 'The Four Theatres of Jerzy Grotowski: an Introductory Assessment' in *New Theatre Quarterly*, No.2, May, 1985.
- 16 Bruce Myers, interviewed by Melanie Phillips in *The Guardian*, 16th July, 1986.
- 17 Peter Ustinov in *Plays and Players*, January, 1973.
- 18 Quoted by Martin Esslin on the title page of *The Peopled Wound*, Methuen, 1970. Re-issued in 1973 as *The Plays of Harold Pinter*.
- 19 Georg Büchner. *Danton's Death*. English version by James Maxwell. Methuen, 1968, p.50.
- 20 cf. Robert E. Ornstein's *The Psychology of Consciousness*, Freeman, San Francisco, 1972, for details of research into the bifunctional brain of man. Basically, in relation to our approach to knowledge, the left-hand side governs our rational, analytical, sequential thought; and the right-hand side, our intuitional, relational and holistic mentation. Interviewed in *The Guardian*, 5th November, 1986 Ornstein comments on his own research into the bifunctional brain: "That was a first cut into trying to look at different systems - it's quite inadequate now. We have to think that there are scores of important systems instead of just two." His later research is pursued in *Multimind* to be published in early 1987.
- 21 Alvin Toffler. *Future Shock*, Pan Books, 1971, p.13.
- 22 Damaris Parker-Rhodes. *The Way Out is The Way In*, QHS, 1985, pp.93-4.

- 23 John Linton. *Quakerism as Forerunner*, QUG Pamphlet No.1.
- 24 Ralph Hetherington. From the introduction to *Readings for Universalists*, QUG Pamphlet No.6.
- 25 Julian of Norwich. *Revelations of the Divine Love*, translated by Clifton Wolters. Penguin Classics, 1966, pp.103-4. There have been eight Penguin reprints of this fourteenth century mystical treatise up to 1985, which must say something about contemporary needs.

## **THE QUAKER UNIVERSALIST GROUP**

The Quaker Universalist Group believes that spiritual awareness is accessible to men and women of any religion or none, and that no one Faith can claim to be a final revelation or to have a monopoly of truth. The group is open to both Quakers and non-Quakers.