

The Hero as Artist in John Hawkes's *Second Skin*

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John Hawkes is one of those writers concerned with the function of the artist as maker and inventor of perceived and desired worlds. As has been noted, often to excess by his critics, Hawkes delves into the world of dreams, nightmares, and violence in order to expose what he feels is an important aspect of human actuality. The exposure is not gratuitous. As Hawkes says in an interview, "I don't advocate crippling; I'm an opponent of torture. I deplore nightmare; I deplore terror. I happen to believe that it is only by travelling those dark tunnels, perhaps not literally but physically, that we can learn in any sense what it means to be compassionate."¹ Whether it be the post-World War II desolation of a destroyed German town, the projected wasteland of the American West, the violent, orgiastic scene of a horserace in England, or the deathly, dark realm of an island in the Atlantic, Hawkes's landscapes serve to show in relief the working out, in an allegorical manner, of desire, violence, and the minimal possibilities of love. Hawkes has said that his writing contains "a quality of coldness, detachment, and ruthless determination to face up to the enormities of ugliness and potential failure within ourselves . . . and to bring to this experience a savage or saving comic spirit and the saving beauties of language."² The power of language, with its "saving beauties," to encompass a world of violence and horror, thereby surpassing it and, in turn, defining a new world of the imagination, is the subject of Hawkes's fourth novel, *Second Skin*.

The potential for violence and beauty is a polarity reflected in the basic structure of *Second Skin*. This polarity is suggested by the presence of two islands in the novel: a dark, Atalantic island ruled over by the sorceress, Miranda, ironically named the "gentle island," and a "wandering island" of the hero's, Skipper's, imagination. The former island is one of death and violence, replete with dark designs and shady characters; the latter is a paradisiacal realm of fertility and communal love. Hawkes's depiction of the two islands has a basis in his personal history, as he informs us in a recent discussion of *Second Skin*. He and his family vacationed on a island off the New England coast, and Hawkes's description of this island parallels that of the "gentle island" in *Second Skin*: "On a cold, bright, early summer morning we sailed with our then three young children in an old white fishing boat . . . our little five-year-old girl seasick down below in her mother's arms . . . already a victim—poor thing—of the island I myself was so terribly drawn to. This was what my imagination had suddenly and at last perceived: the sun, the black shiny sea, the cluster of bleached houses, the bright boats, an enormous abandoned white house on another promontory, and overhead the marvelous white scavenging gulls."³ The huge white house would become Miranda's house in *Second Skin*, where Skipper stays with his daughter, Cassandra; the island itself would become the scene of Skipper's humiliation and Cassandra's suicide. The "wandering island" of the novel has its origins in Hawkes's memory of a summer spent on an island in the Caribbean, which he describes as including a "perfect beach . . . where we did flourish (on the beach, in the clear sea, surrounded by tropical wildflowers and hummingbirds and an underwater coral reef of the earth's navel)."⁴ These landscapes, experienced and perceived by the novelist and filtered through his memory, provide the emotional climates for the drama that takes place in *Second Skin*, the settings where the choice between life and death is made by the hero.

Second Skin is written entirely in the first person, the narrator and hero being a middle-aged, fat, balding ex-sailor who tells his story from the vantage point of his created paradise, the "wandering island." The narration does not proceed chronologically, but moves backwards and forwards through time, with intermittent glimpses of Skipper's life on his "wandering island," when he says that he moves "to step from behind the scenes of my naked history."⁵ In that history, Skipper tells the tragic stories of death and violence that have ruined his life and made him "both scapegoat and victim," a "bearer of grace, though not to his family."⁶ From Skipper we learn that his father, wife, and daughter have all committed suicide while he has ineffectually stood by, unable to help them. Skipper himself has been near death, having been beaten and sexually assaulted during a mutiny by a youth, Tremlow, who becomes his personal nemesis and devil. Skipper is of a passive, loving nature, but for all his love and concern, he is a failure—his family lies dead around him. Thus he retreats away from violence and death to a sunny island which exists "unlocated in space and quite out of time" (p. 46), where he is an artificial inseminator of cows, the happy ruler of a small community, and possibly the father of a native woman's child. Hawkes has said that "*Second Skin* reveals for the first time in my work a kind of sexual affirmation,"⁷ and Skipper himself writes that "until now, the cemetery has been my battleground" (p. 47)—thus affirming his comic triumph over death as of a life-giver on a fertile island. The novel is clearly a type of ironic pastoral romance, though no mere plot summary can convey the terror and humor of Skipper's journey through death to life. By investigating recurring motifs and symbols of the novel and by observing Skipper as the narrator and architect of his "naked history," it will become apparent that Hawkes has written a work in which imagination and memory, the power of art, have victory over the desire for death and the cruelty of life.

Hawkes has made many significant statements about his style, all of them important in understanding his fictional technique since he is such a highly-stylized writer, using style to make present his "lunar landscapes." He has said in an interview that "related or corresponding event, recurring image and recurring action, these constitute the meaningful density of my writing."⁸ In *Second Skin* the recurring images of wind, birds, and skin are structuring devices which portray Skipper's immersion into the world of violence and his transformation of that world into the pastoral, "wandering island."

Skipper's prologue to his naked history, entitled "Naming Names," introduces much of the central imagery of the novel. Defining the subject of his history, Skipper says: "In all likelihood it may prove to the wind—its changing nature, its rough and whispering characteristic, the various spices of the world which it brings together suddenly in hot or freezing gusts to alter the flavor of our innermost recollection of pleasure or pain—simply the wind to which my heart and also my skin have always been especially sensitive" (p. 3). Skipper's notion of the wind, according to Lucy Frost, is "a metaphor for powers controlling the external world in which any self may exist. Since it cannot be seen, held, or controlled, wind is an impersonal assailant of the victim, man."⁹ Thus, throughout most of the narrative, the wind serves as a demonic element, whipping and lashing at Skipper's sensitive skin. As Skipper and Cassandra leave the bus going east after a blowout, as they walk through the desert landscape at night, the wind is described as a "hot wind" which "warmed the skin but chilled the flesh, left the body cold" (p. 35). A few minutes later, Cassandra is assaulted by three soldiers while Skipper stands passively by, unable or unwilling to help. Here and throughout Skipper's history, the wind coming up signals an approaching calamity. Later, describing the climate of the dark, "gentle island," Skipper writes:

. . . from my bedroom window I watched a single hungry bird hang itself on the wet rising wind and, battered and crescent-shaped and angry, submit itself endlessly to the first raw gloom of day in hopes of spying from on high some flash of food in the dirty undulating trough of a wave. And every morning I stood blowing on my fingers and watching the torn and ragged bird until it flapped away on the ragged wings of its discouragement, blowing, shivering, smiling to think that here even the birds were mere prowlers in the mist and wind, mere vagrants in the empty back lots of that low sky. (p. 51)

The "single hungry bird" symbolizes Skipper's isolation and victimization on the island, as he constantly, when going out-of-doors, is worried about the wind and protecting himself from it. The demonic nature of the wind is made clearer when Skipper remembers the mutiny on board his former ship, the *S.S. Starfish*, and depicts the leader of the uprising, Tremlow, as "a man of the wind, a tall bony man of this sudden topside wind" (p. 137). Tremlow, the devil of the novel, is appropriately identified with the wind, which carries the "seeds of death," and against which Skipper ineffectually tries to protect his tortured skin.

The wind is transformed into a beneficent element when Skipper describes the "wandering island." In that protected space, Skipper can go about naked, even when the wind blows: "But the wind, this bundle of invisible snakes, roars across our wandering island . . . These snakes that fly in the wind are as large around as tree trunks; but pliant, as everlastingly pliant, as the serpents that crowd my dreams. So the wind nests itself and bundles itself across this island, buffets the body with wedges of invisible but still sensual configurations. It drives, drives, and even when it drops down, fades, dies, it continues its gentle rubbing against the skin" (p. 46). Previously, Skipper has experienced the sharp edges of things, or has felt the painful pressure of the harsh wind. But here, on his constructed paradise, though the wind has "wedges" and though it "drives," it is a soothing, sensual element that wraps itself around, encloses, and protects Skipper's sensitive body. The snakes in the wind serve to emphasize the fertile, sexual, life-giving nature of Skipper (be it physical or artificial) and the island. As on Prospero's island, Skipper's imaginative space is full of strange music and invisible forms which he, through the magical transforming power of language, has made over from those harsh, demonic elements and memories of his earlier life.

Hawkes's use of bird imagery in the novel provides another example of Skipper's transforming imagination. For Hawkes, birds have always been symbols of victimized innocence, as in *The Lime Twig*, where Margaret Banks is often referred to as a bird, a victim of her husband's dreams of power.¹⁹ In his prologue, Skipper says that he is the "lover of the hummingbird that darts to the flower beyond the rotted sill where my feet are propped" (p. 1), and his "wandering island" is full of bright flowers and responsive birds. But on the "gentle island" the birds are victims of the cold or seen as vehicles of destruction—demonic reflections of the hummingbird. In the recounting of his experiences on the dark island, Skipper tells of the time when he is comically, pathetically attacked with snowballs by Miranda's henchmen, Captain Red, Jomo, and Bub. Skipper has gone to a high school dance with Miranda, Cassandra, and the men, tagging along protectively with the group in order to watch over his daughter. He has been lured outside the gymnasium by a phony message that he is to meet Miranda in the cemetery, significantly the "lover's lane" of the "gentle island," since there love is associated with death, not life. Instead of seeing Miranda he is attacked by snowballs: "But I stopped. Listened.

Because the air seemed to be filled with low-flying invisible birds. Large or small I could not tell, but fast, fast and out of their senses, slamming past me from every direction on terrified steel wings and silent except for the unaccountable sharp noise of the flight itself" (p. 86). The snowballs, seen by Skipper as birds, are terrible, mechanical, destructive objects—the birds or rockets of war and violence. Later, as Skipper walks home, having been left behind by Miranda and her friends, he sees the road before him, "littered with the bodies of dead birds. I could see their little black glistening feet sticking up like hairs through the crusty tops of the snow balls" (p. 92). The birds in this scene are portents of death and victimization, of Cassandra's eventual suicide as she becomes entrapped in Miranda's spell and succumbs to the sexual desires of Captain Red and Jomo. Skipper effectively transforms these dead birds into the lively hummingbirds of the "wandering island" as he fills in, for the reader, the created portrait of the "wandering island."

Perhaps the central image in the novel is that of "skin," an intensely evocative and rich symbol. One "skin" is that of the novel itself: the protective layer of language which covers over the flesh of Skipper's tragic, naked history. Tony Tanner explicates the image in another sense as "the vulnerable surface of our 'schizophrenic flesh,' the clothes we cover it with, the points which penetrate it. The idea of second skin can refer to all the clothes we don according to convention, as it can suggest the recovery of our original nakedness, and thus innocence. It can imply the sloughing off of an old skin and the rebirth into a new one. This fits in, of course, with the desire to slip off old imposed identities which is so prevalent in contemporary American fiction."¹¹ In this sense, Skipper rejects the skin of the old life of death and violence as he is reborn into the new life of his self-created imaginative space on the "wandering island." Also, there is Skipper's physical skin, buffeted by the wind and brutally tattooed at Cassandra's request with the name of her dead, homosexual husband, Fernandez. The mark of the tattoo is painful to Skipper long after the memory of the physical pain is attenuated by time, since it serves as an emblem of the curse of death (Fernandez is brutally murdered) that Skipper carries with him always. Only on the "wandering island," his skin turning brown under the sun, does the vivid green of Skipper's tattoo begin to fade. There are the "skins" of Skipper's clothing, especially his navel uniform, which both protects him and identifies him as a "skipper"—the cloth of pride and memory. Yet, in the novel, this "skin" is often assaulted, either innocently or malevolently. Pixie, Skipper's granddaughter, smears chocolate over his uniform on the bus trip. Miranda maliciously spills ketchup on it and hangs it on a dressmaker's dummy in Skipper's room in an effort to humiliate him. The uniform is spotted with Fernandez's blood when Skipper discovers his body in a cheap hotel. Once again, this demonic symbol is transformed when Skipper moves to the sacred space of his "wandering island," where there is no need for protective outer clothing, and where Skipper, the passive ruler, needs no outward marks of identification. He frees himself from the bondage of clothing, thus liberating himself from the "staining" and tattooing, the marks of violence and humiliation that beset him in his previous existence.

The most significant use of "skin" imagery appears when Skipper, Red, Bub, Jomo, and Cassandra, at Miranda's direction, take a voyage around the "gentle island" on the *Peter Poor*. During this voyage Cassandra has sexual relations with Captain Red while Skipper lies, knocked unconscious, in the cabin. Skipper feels that this violation of Cassandra is the main factor in her decision to commit suicide by jumping from the island's lighthouse. It is possible that Red has made her pregnant; it is more apparent that Cassandra's promiscuity and betrayal of her father cause her guilt and subsequent death. The voyage is

taken on a cold, wet day, so that everyone must put on oilskins to protect themselves. Skipper calls these garments his "second skin," and it is obvious that he regards them as necessary physical protection against the wind and a figurative one against ensuing danger and evil. As he reels under a blow delivered to him by Bub after the start of the voyage, Skipper sees Cassandra and Red together, the latter having "thrown open the stiff crumpling mass of yellow skins and . . . smiling and taking his hands away" (p. 185). Subsequently, Cassandra pulls off her skins, a symbolic act which Skipper sees, before he passes out, as her rejection of his protection and a submission to Red's sexuality and Miranda's dark designs. When the voyage is over, Skipper stands on the dock and looks at the boat, seeing the oilskins "piled high amidship on the *Peter Poor*. Our wretched skins. And above the pile with the black strap looped over his steel hook and the rest of it hanging down, Jomo was standing there and holding out his arm and smiling" (p. 188). The "black strap" is part of Miranda's brassiere, which serves as her flag of victory, seeming to turn up whenever anything unfortunate happens to Skipper. Jomo's hook is a sinister, mechanical object which is constantly angling the fish, Cassandra, in order to catch her, as Jomo finally does, in a destructive act of desire. The skins themselves as protection against evil are useless since Cassandra has already been "caught" of her own free will in the boat. The shedding of skins on the "gentle island" is a signal that there has been a submission to evil designs. On the "wandering island" the need for such protection (ironically, no protection at all) against evil and death is unnecessary since, on this isle of regeneration, sex and death are accepted as the inevitable processes involved in the ongoing pastoral cycle that produces new life.

The recurring imagery of the novel, the transformation of demonic objects and symbols into their sanctified, beneficent counterparts, depends on the perceptions and artistic power of the narrator and hero, Skipper. He is, no doubt, an "unreliable" narrator, a clownish, ineffectual figure whom we look down upon and who is cast out by society. He may be, as Anthony Santore suggests, a self-deceiving character who constructs the "wandering island" in order to "shield himself from all the unpleasant parts of his life . . . so that . . . he can shield himself from the pain he has caused."¹² But a more accurate and less one-dimensional assessment of Skipper's "unreliability" than Santore offers is needed: Skipper's delusions, exaggerations, and attempts to escape into a world of pure imagination may indeed be the by-products of guilt, but they are also the things that define the function of what Hawkes sees, in Skipper, as the contemporary artist.

Early in the novel, awaiting the painful act of being tattooed, Skipper fearfully reflects upon himself:

My high stiff collar was unhooked, the cap was tilted to the back of my head, and sitting there on that wobbling stool I was a mass of pinched declivities, pockets of fat, strange white unexpected mounds, deep creases, ugly stains, secret little tunnels burrowing into all the quivering fortification of the joints, and sweating, wrinkling, was either the wounded officer or the unhappy picture of some elderly third mate, sitting stock still in an Eastern den—along except for the banana leaves, the evil hands—yet lunging, plunging into the center of his vicious fantasy. A few of us, a few good men with soft reproachful eyes, a few honor-bright men of imagination, a few poor devils, are destined to live out our fantasies of friends, children and possessive lovers. (p. 18)

It is Skipper's self-knowledge that he is a victim which motivates this testament of victimization, and in this regard Skipper is acutely aware of himself. He does not spare himself in speaking of his pathetic appearance and the ineffectuality which underlies such phrases as "wounded officer" or "elderly third mate." Yet through the tone of his narrative is conveyed something that Skipper does not realize about himself: he takes himself too seriously, takes Cassandra too seriously, and over-dramatizes the whole business of living in the world of his experiences. He is a man of too much imagination, who stretches to epic proportions his sad, trite struggles with life. A snowball fight becomes a major battle with the forces of evil; a bus ride becomes an epic journey through the abyss; a tattooing becomes a tortured experience of crucifixion. Skipper, to himself, is not merely fat—he is a mass of contorted, sweating, ugly flesh, a Rabelaisian giant stumbling through a too-small world. His imagination serves, as does the imagery of the novel, a double function: for as his paranoia, anxiety, over-protection, and absurdity serve as contributing factors to the jealousy that drives Cassandra away from him and to death, so too it permits him to construct a new, paradisiacal world through which he can save himself. Thus Skipper is simultaneously aware of what he is—victim, clown, jealous father—and unreliable in that he exaggerates what he is. His propensity for victimization increases proportionally to his self-awareness as victim. He is obviously cognizant of Cassandra's promiscuity—at one point he calls her a "teen-age bomb;" yet, elsewhere, he refers to her as a "matron," a "child," and a "queen." His naive optimism often conflicts with such realizations as this one, when he reflects on Cassandra's inherently suicidal nature: he says that he "could fail and . . . the teen-age bomb could kill the queen or the queen the teen-age bomb" (p. 34). It is only when Skipper constructs his artificial paradise that the pathetic victim becomes a comic king, and that the capacity for exaggeration which has earlier served as a vehicle for pain, delusion, and destruction, becomes the force that makes the building of his new world possible.

Skipper then, sensitive, imaginative, and hyperbolic by nature, is Hawkes's portrait of the hero as artist. Like the artist, Skipper's memory and imagination screen out, deny, affirm, expand, and define various experiences, transforming them and forcing them to conform to the aesthetic unity of the "wandering island." In shame and confusion Skipper often distorts his vision of himself and his impotency in order to affect meaningful, assertive actions upon the lives of those he loves, thereby attempting to overcome inexplicable evil and death. But, in fact, he discovers that his attempts at action, especially his overprotectiveness towards Cassandra, often make things worse. Therefore when he creates the "wandering island," it is significant that passivity, not assertiveness, is conceived of as the means by which to deal with evil. One incident that occurs on the island is illustrative of this. Skipper walks down to the swamp of his island one day and discovers that Catalina Kate, his pregnant native mistress, is lying facedown in the mud with a giant iguana firmly attached to her back. Skipper tries to pull off the reptile, but only succeeds in hurting Kate as the animal digs its claws in more deeply. He decides to wait and eventually the iguana climbs off Kate's back of its own will. Skipper learns, through this incident, that he must wait for evil to pass over, that it cannot be defeated, so it must be endured. It is fitting that, at the end of the novel, Skipper and his small community perform a ritual mass on All Saint's Day in the island cemetery, celebrating death as a necessary part of the life cycle and of rebirth. The world he has created is a turning away from another world in which he is a failure, and a transformation of that world into an acceptable, though timeless, spaceless, "unworldly" alternative.

Ultimately, the reader of *Second Skin* must ask, what kind of world does Skipper's "wandering island" represent? Is it merely an escape, an opting out from the "real" world which Skipper cannot cope with? The answers to such questions can never be definitive, but it must be remembered that the entire novel is a mediation through language and memory of Skipper's experience: it is all an imaginative structure, an imagined world or worlds. In creating the "wandering island" Skipper is by no means a cowardly or even untraditional hero in terms of the history of American fiction; indeed, he is firmly entrenched in a solid tradition. In *A World Elsewhere*, Richard Poirier says that "classic American writers try through style temporarily to free the hero (and the reader) from systems, to free them from the pressures of time, biology, economics, and from the social forces which are ultimately the undoing of American heroes and often their creators."³ On his island Skipper and we too are freed from the overriding social pressures of the novel—war, violence, and death. The island exists out of time, as an alternative to Skipper's failure in the "real" world. Poirier goes on to say that "The idea that through language it is possible to create environments radically different from those supported by economic, political, and social systems is one of the sustaining myths of literature. It is a myth in one sense because it is historically invalid: the enormous contrivances of style called forth by this effort are themselves an admission that the environment thus created has an existence only in style. Not God, not religion, not reality, history, or nature, but style is its only authority."⁴ As we have seen, Skipper's art is an example of those "enormous contrivances of style"; it is only through what some might call the abnormality of his imagination that he can create the "wandering island," what Poirier would term "a world elsewhere." Indeed, if we may extend the meaning of "skin" a little further, the "second skin" of the novel is the skin of style itself, the diaphanous skein of language that Skipper has woven from the transformed elements of a demonic universe. The "wandering island" is, as Poirier suggests of the created environments of other American novels, a historically invalid contrivance, a place where style and the stylist (Skipper) are the ultimate authority, preserved through the efforts of the human imagination.

Suitably enough, Hawkes portrays his artist-hero creating "a world elsewhere," with all its benefits and, as Poirier suggests, its inevitable drawbacks, because Hawkes himself admits that he is, above all, not a storyteller or a moralist, but a stylist. In a well-known statement Hawkes says that, "I began to write fiction on the assumption that the true enemies of the novel were plot, character, setting and theme, and having once abandoned these familiar ways of thinking about fiction, totality of vision and structure was really all that remained."⁵ "Totality of vision" and "structure," if not to be conveyed through plot, character, setting, or theme, can only be conveyed through style itself: the interweaving of perceptions, dreams, and visions, the recurrence of imagery that relate the "pattern" and transformative powers of the hero's imagination. Skipper's ability to bring the chaos and violence of Miranda's dark, "gentle island" into conformity with the beneficent pastoral order of his own island is, in fact, the subject of the novel.

However, the drawbacks that Poirier sees in worlds similar to that which Skipper creates should not be underestimated, nor should the benefits of such worlds be accepted without qualification. And Hawkes, in what is perhaps the finest achievement of *Second Skin*, qualifies explicitly by making Skipper, at best, a laughable ruler of the "wandering island." In his created realm, Skipper goes about inseminating cows which, of course, have no need of such human assistance; he may or may not be the father of Kate's child, but he blithely acts as if he is; he even has with him a faithful servant, Sonny, an ironic

version of Crusoe's Friday. Skipper's world is a travesty of Prospero's island, Sidney's Arcadia, Marvell's Garden, and all the other traditional pastoral realms of literature. Though Skipper has transformed chaos into order, he has not transformed himself: to the reader he is still a clown; still, even, a victim, if a happy one, of his own imagination. If Hawkes refuses to state any "moral" explicitly in his work there certainly is an implicit one in *Second Skin*: the imaginative creations of the modern artist, taken from the rubble of reality, are fragile structures which partake of the failures that are integral to the real world, while simultaneously attempting to transcend it.

Hawkes makes it evident that, if we are to laugh at Skipper presiding over his "wandering island," we also are meant to take aspects of his existence there seriously. Like other post-World War II writers such as Mailer, Vonnegut, Heller, and Pynchon, Hawkes sees war as a cataclysmic backdrop, a horrendous event that continues to curse our existence. In *The Cannibal*, the vicious symbol of the motorcycle and its rider, the bleak landscape, and above all the ultimate act of human desecration, cannibalism, demonstrate the effects of violence upon the human psyche. In *The Lime Twig*, Hencher's desire for power, symbolized in his entrapment with a downed bomber, the scenes of a bombed-out Dreary Station and nightly air raids are analogues to Michael Banks's quest for power and resultant self-destruction in the form of a racehorse. Thus in *Second Skin* the passive, powerless hero is the survivor; action, assertiveness, will to power all lead to death. Like Heller's Yossarian or Vonnegut's Billy Pilgrim, Skipper travels to and creates a new land which is a turning away from the violence of war and mass murder, events that can never be assimilated by human rationality or understanding. Only through "the saving beauties of language," that is, through style, can war, violence and death be transcended and comprehended.

Ultimately, Hawkes shares with other writers who create "worlds elsewhere" the liabilities of relying solely on style as an artistic alternative to "reality" as well as the capabilities and insights which the exploration of such worlds entails. As Poirier indicates in *A World Elsewhere*, the novelist who creates another world through style is somewhat in danger of losing control over those creations if the style becomes too intricate or personal, and he cites Whitman and Twain as writers whose created other worlds lack authenticity. A fair assessment of Hawkes and *Second Skin* must take into account his tendency, in his structuring of perceptions and images, to make the flow of Skipper's impressions at times too highly evocative, at other times too private for the reader to grasp fully or relate together. But, like his hero, Hawkes's power as an artist is coexistent with his weaknesses. If the bevy of intricate descriptions and the variety of recurring imagery in the novel occasionally become too confusing to the reader because they come too quickly or occur at large, inconsistent intervals, it is only through perception, description, and imagery that the ugliness of Miranda's world and the comic beauty of Skipper's island are realized. Hawkes's novel, in essence, provides us with an "ethics of style" and demonstrates its failures as well as its successes. *Second Skin* is about the artistic function of man which Susanne K. Langer defines as symbol-maker, conveying a constructed human response to the world.¹⁶ Whatever that world is, we know now that the meanings we confer upon it, the "second skins" we weave out of it remain ours in our humanity and doubt. Skipper's ability to make out of an old world of "reality" a new world of fertility and love reflects Hawkes's hope for the artistic act, as well as his despair at the fragility of that act in the face of delusion and violence. Hawkes thus expands as well as delineates our humanity, our capacity for destructiveness as well as our ability to create new worlds, if only through the sometimes weak, often misused instrument of human language.

NOTES

¹Robert Scholes, "A Conversation on *The Blood Oranges* between John Hawkes and Robert Scholes," *Novel*, 5 (1972), p. 205.

²John Enck, "John Hawkes: An Interview," *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, 6 (1965), 14-15.

³John Hawkes, "Notes on Writing a Novel," *Triquarterly*, 30 (1974), 120.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁵John Hawkes, *Second Skin* (New York: New Directions, 1964), p. 48. Subsequent references to the novel will be from this edition and noted in the text of the paper.

⁶T. A. Hanzo, "The Two Faces of Matt Donelson," *Sewanee Review*, 73 (1965), 111.

⁷Hawkes, "Notes on Writing a Novel," p. 111.

⁸Enck, p. 149.

⁹Lucy Frost, "Awakening Paradise," in *Studies in Second Skin*, ed. John Graham (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1971), p. 58.

¹⁰For an extensive discussion of the bird imagery in *The Lime Twig* see Robert Scholes, *The Fabulators* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

¹¹Tony Tanner, *City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 218-19.

¹²Anthony C. Santore, "Narrative Unreliability and the Structure of *Second Skin*," in *Studies in Second Skin*, p. 87.

¹³Richard Poirier, *A World Elsewhere: The Place of Style in American Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 5.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

¹⁵Enck, p. 149.

¹⁶For an extended discussion of the artistic function as Langer defines it see Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study of Symbolism in Reason, Rite, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 24.