

It is obvious from all of Breitbach's works that he writes with great care and often rewrites his prose in order to improve it. He also has the tendency to publish chapters of his works before they appear in book form. In 1976, for example, he released the first act of an unpublished play, "Der Araber von Schiltigheim" ("The Arab of Schiltigheim"), and of his forthcoming novel, "Frau Berta" ("Mrs. Berta"), he has already released two chapters. At present he is working on another play with the tentative title "Ein makelloser Held" ("A flawless Hero").

The year 1978 was a very productive one for Breitbach. It was also the year when he was honored with the rather beautiful edition of *Wechselrede* ("Dialog") which was issued for his 75th birthday. It contains comments and tributes of writers and politicians who have known Breitbach. This and the fact that his plays have recently been performed on stage and television, as well as the filming of his short stories and his novel *Bericht über Bruno* show that there is a growing awareness and appreciation of his work today. His reputation as a literary figure has greatly increased within the last few years. It can, therefore, be said with some confidence that his literary work will have some impact on contemporary German literature.

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From Rogue to Redeemer: R. K. Narayan's *The Guide*

R. K. Narayan has been described in *The Times Literary Supplement* as "a writer having few equals among modern novelists."¹ His novel *The Guide* is a fine example of his talent at its mature best, yet though it has received some incidental comment in a few general accounts of Narayan's work (such as the insightful accounts given by William Walsh,² S. C. Harrex,³ and also Keith Garembian⁴), it has received little detailed critical attention in Western literary journals.

In this novel, Narayan presents in his characteristically muted manner, the story of a radical spiritual conversion. It dramatizes one of Narayan's recurring themes—self-abnegation as the means to spiritual peace. Through his eventful career, Raju's primary motive has always remained his own self-gratification and it is not till the very end that he is moved to do something "in which he was not

¹"Well Met In Malgudi," *Times Literary Supplement*, 9 May 1958, p. 254.

²See William Walsh, "Sweet Mangoes and Malt Vinegar: the Novels of R. K. Narayan," in *A Human Idiom: Literature and Humanity* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964), pp. 128-48.

³S. C. Harrex, "R. K. Narayan and the Temple of Indian Fiction," *Meanjin*, 31, No. 4 (1972), 97-107.

⁴Keith Garembian, "Strategy and Theme in the Art of R. K. Narayan," *Ariel Review of English Literature*, 5, No. 4 (1974), 70-81.

personally interested.”⁵ This is the core of his spiritual conversion and the novel’s success depends on the degree to which this progress is rendered credible.

Unlike other Narayan protagonists, Raju is not consciously a spiritual seeker, rather, he is a thoroughly worldly, amoral man. He pursues the woman Rosie, quite undeterred by the fact that she is a married woman, as throughout his masquerade as a holy man he suffers no pangs of conscience. Unlike Graham Greene’s “whisky priest” (in *The Power and the Glory*) who, conscience-ridden, is governed by a death wish, Narayan’s bogus swami wholeheartedly enjoys his “perks” of office and clings tenaciously to life. His martyrdom therefore has an intriguingly unpremeditated quality and yet its effect depends finally on the fact that it is deeply grounded in the logic of character and event.

He is a most complex figure, seeming to have no settled personality but constantly assuming a new one according to his circumstances. His one constant characteristic appears to be a quality of charlatanry. His behaviour constantly suggests an actor’s performance and the parallel is often explicitly emphasized, as in the opening encounter with Velan when “He felt like an actor who was always expected to utter the right sentence” (p. 14). He decides “he must play the role that Velan had given him” (p. 20). He provides the villagers “with a specific program” (p. 47) and later selects the inner hall of the temple as “a better background” (p. 130). He grows a beard and long hair as being appropriate to the role. In fact, all the varied roles of his past have been appropriately costumed. In his earliest performance (for his father) he “recited all kinds of sacred verse in a loud ringing tone” (p. 11), with his forehead smeared with ash. As a tourist guide he wears a khaki bush coat and hat which he exchanges for a silk shirt and lace dhoti when he becomes the romantic lover. Even as a lover, his actions suggest an elaborate performance as when he describes how he declared his love but “sandwiched it conveniently” between expressions of appreciation of her art, and is delighted that “It worked” (p. 74). As Rosie’s agent, he tells Velan, “I dressed myself soberly for the part in a sort of rough-spun silk shirt and an upper cloth and a hand-spun and hand-woven dhoti” (p. 157). He is impressed with his own performance: “I never knew I could speak so well on cultural matters” (p. 158).

Besides this charlatanry, two other elements have also remained constant. Each role is assumed as a direct result of Raju’s inability to disappoint other people’s expectations. For example, he becomes a tourist guide as a result of people constantly asking him for direction; he becomes Rosie’s lover almost because of her husband’s neglect, and then her business agent when he realizes the seriousness of her ambitions. Later, in prison, he supplies his fellow-inmates’ need of a mentor, as he also supplies the Superintendent’s very different needs. His final metamorphosis into the Swami is then supremely understandable as the outcome of this innate compulsion to fulfill the role expected of him. Velan expects guidance of the “holy man” he meets near the shrine and Raju cannot disappoint him. So he is also led to serve the whole village, settling their quarrels, “he even came to the stage of prescribing medicine” (p. 48). Finally then, when a martyr is needed, it is Raju who must fill that need. A radical change of attitude however must also come about for this final act to acquire a redemptive quality, otherwise Raju is no more than an unlucky rascal caught in the toils of his own rascality. Throughout, while ostensibly serving the needs of theirs, he has always remained the self-interested rascal; in this final act alone he transcends the claims of self.

⁵R. K. Narayan, *The Guide* (Mysore: Indian Thought Publications, 1970), p. 213. Subsequent references are to this edition and will appear in the text.

It is this self-interest which has remained the other constant element through all his varied roles. His response to the observed need of others has never been altruistic. Rather, he deliberately exploits the situation to his own profit. As guide, he enjoys "seeing a lot of places and getting paid for it" (p. 52); as Rosie's lover, and as her agent, his gratifications are many. Later, in prison, he enjoys a favorite's privileges, and he accepts the role of Swamireasoning: "Food was coming to him unasked now. If he went away somewhere else nobody was going to take the trouble to bring him food in return for just waiting for it" (p. 30). Only at the last, when he foregoes all considerations of self, making indeed the ultimate sacrifice of life itself in the service of others that he becomes transformed from social parasite to saviour.

Despite the varied roles he has played, Raju remains recognizably the same person throughout. In fact he is faced with the dilemma of an unwilling martyrdom because, true to his nature, he is unable to refuse the demands made upon him. The change that does come about is in the area of his consistent self-concern. Whether Raju's death does in fact bring the desired rain is irrelevant. What is important is his belief that his sacrifice will benefit the community. So the bogus sadhu becomes a true saint.

This spiritual conversion is a compound of many elements. It is typical of Narayan's unsentimental realism that compulsion also has a role in events: Raju would have run away, but realizes "they might drag him back and punish him" (p. 97). Next he devises methods whereby he might soften his ordeal, but is pushed however unwillingly to a total commitment. If compulsion were the only element in the situation however Raju would remain merely an unlucky rogue.

There is however a positive element in his acceptance. He is held back not only by fear, but also "by the thought of their gratitude" (p. 97). Observing the exhausted Velan asleep, he is "touched by the sight" and reflects "Why not give the poor devil a chance . . ." (p. 213). If, as E. M. Forster suggested, that "the test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising us in a convincing way,"⁶ Raju emerges as a completely rounded portraiture. This capacity for sympathy is no incomprehensible development; it is the quality which has throughout enabled him to gauge the emotional needs of others. He might turn this to his own advantage, but he also seems to be moved by a genuine kindness. So he cannot disappoint the simple Velan at their first encounter, or as guide he tells lies simply to please people.

Raju's acceptance appears also to be moved by a feeling for nature. He feels his sacrifice would be worthwhile if it would "help the trees to bloom and the grass grow" (p. 213). One recalls that he and Rosie had found 'a common idiom' in their enthusiasm for the natural beauty of Memphi hills, moving Marco to remark ". . . so you are a poet too" (p. 68). In prison he is happy gardening, enjoying the "blue sky and sunshine" and also "the smell of freshly turned earth" (p. 203). His cultivation of his vegetables is lovingly described: "I watched them grow and develop . . . I plucked them, wiped them to a clean polish . . . arranged them artistically" (p. 203). In boyhood he had detested working "while the birds were out flying and chirping in the cool air" (p. 12).

Most important, an extremely subtle change is shown establishing itself in Raju's mental outlook. His narration of past events bears the marked clarity of the chastened vision. So he honestly acknowledges that Rosie became famous

⁶E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (Victoria: Penguin, 1972), p. 85.

“because she had the genius in her, but that he had been ‘puffed up’ with his own importance” (p. 162). Again he admits, “I can see now that it was a very wrong line of thought to adopt” (p. 195). Clearly, Raju the narrator has progressed in understanding beyond Raju the actor in those past events. Moreover as Swami, his life begins to lose its purely selfish bias almost in spite of himself. In ministering to the villagers, “his life had lost its personal limitations” (p. 47); he is obliged “to be up early and rush through all his personal routine” (p. 48); only when left alone, is he able to “sigh a deep sigh of relief . . . and be himself” (p. 48).

Subtler, more mysterious forces also have a part in Raju's transformation. Here Narayan exploits the suggestiveness of images and symbols which while being deeply rooted in traditional Indian life, also possess a more universal resonance. There is the village, a symbol of the pristine innocence of an unspoiled way of life; the river, synonymous with purification and regeneration; the temple associated with supernatural and redemptive influences; all have a role in Raju's conversion. He is latterly subjected almost exclusively to these spiritually regenerating forces. Raju is touched by the simple generosity of the peasants, and the thought of them helps prevent his running away. He had hoped that the revelation of his past would relieve him of the expected sacrifice and is flabbergasted at the strength of the faith which survives even this discovery. The guilelessness of the villager makes him an incalculable quantity to the wily Raju, who feels “This man will finish me” (p. 209). At the shrine, mysterious influences appear to affect Raju's fate. Velan naturally takes him for a religious recluse, and from this all subsequent events flow. Raju is himself impressed by the spiritual insights he begins to express and once he “felt he was growing wings. Shortly he felt he might float in the air and perch himself on the tower of the ancient temple” (p. 20). The purificatory significance of Raju's daily ritual in the river is readily apparent.

Narayan shows a fine artistic tact in the handling of the final scenes. The gradual distancing of Raju's consciousness is dramatically appropriate as increasing weakness dissolves his hold on consciousness. The changed Raju becomes invested finally with a quality of exaltation and mystery. His progress from rake and social parasite to saviour of the community is rendered wholly credible.

Even as a rogue, Raju always retains the sympathy of the reader. This follows from his creator's own attitude of humorous tolerance, the humane understanding of individual frailty and foible which pervades all of Narayan's work. A moral lesson might be gently hinted but outright condemnation is never part of his intention. It might even seem that Raju's misdemeanors grow directly out of the vicissitudes of circumstance. He is a victim of the coming of modern ways of life to Malgudi. First, he picks up bad language from the railway workers, then as his father's business commitments increase, he drops out of school. His varied encounters at his station outpost lead him to become a tourist guide. As Malgudi develops, opportunities for living on one's wits also proliferate. That Raju's “rake's progress” is partly the result of the advent of modern progress to Malgudi is underlined in that his salvation is worked out through a renewed contact with the traditional way of life still preserved in the village of Mangal.

The reader's sympathy with Raju is also ensured through the fact that most events are recorded through his consciousness. The authentic tones of Raju himself are skilfully preserved through the consistent use of his individual idioms as when he tells how he had “to spend a couple of days in the lock-up”

(p. 194), or how Rosie “liked to loaf in the market” (p. 78), as also through a pervasive sense of his personal revaluation of past events. The many touches of psychologically realistic detail bring him vividly to life—moments like his dismay when surprised by Rosie in his torn banian, or his irritation at Marco’s marching ahead of him (the official guide) to the caves. It might be remarked also that the figure of Raju admirably combines the particularity of the individual character with the wider representativeness of a national, and beyond this of a universal, human type. Always remaining a unique individual, in his khaki coat and dhoti as tourist guide, or as Swami with long hair and beard, he is a figure intimately related to the Indian landscape. He is also, as with many Narayan heroes, immediately recognizable as a universal type, the confidence trickster par excellence—the man with the inborn ability to attract trust and even affection and the compulsion to exploit it to his selfish advantage. Raju’s progress from rogue to redeemer is wholly engrossing, surprising, and yet finally wholly credible. It represents one of Narayan’s most successful achievements as a novelist.

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