The Verbal and the Visual in Richard Taylor's *Tender Only to One*

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Taylor's short novel is like a stone picked up at random by the shore of a lake. Its surface, smooth and polished, lends itself to endless observation, and each examination reveals concealed treasures for the mind's eye. I propose to interpret this novel by framing five questions, and the answers to these should provide five different explorations of the relationships between painting and writing. To begin with, does the form of *Tender Only to One* lend itself to a comparison with some characteristics of painting? Second, in those sections of the novel establishing a link with the visual arts by reference to well-known painters, is the writing to be construed as biographical or fictional? The next question is deceptively simple: why did Taylor choose these particular painters and not others? The penultimate question is: what do these painters and the novel's own characters share? Finally, is there any kind of reference to particular pictures in the novel, and what is their function?

I

In terms of genre, the narrative combines aspects of the short story, epistolary novel, *Bildungsroman*, interview, and utopia.[1] The means of narration themselves are far from monolithic since a constant shift occurs from the omniscient narrator to the more personalized and expressive "I." Like any other, this coin has two sides. One constitutes a threat to unity through dispersal; the other promises a dynamic synthesis of fragments. The novel's spatio-temporal structure entirely rests on the tension between totality and dislocation, which underscores the relationship between painting and writing.

The novel is organized around two types of sections recognizable by their divergent spatio-temporal references. The first type, which will be called painter sections, is often charac-

[1] The first section on Van Gogh, as well as the second and the third section on Gaugin, uses letters. The last section of the novel is a short *Bildungsroman*, and the section on Emil Nolde reads like an interview.

terized by both temporal and spatial precisions conveyed by the title of the section. In addition, the title can also refer to a specific painter. For instance, the first section of the novel is entitled "Saint-Remy, 1890," while the next section of the same type reads "Gaugin: Tahiti, 1901." Ten sections of the novel are devoted to six well-known painters: Van Gogh, Gaugin, Degas, Monet, Nolde, and Bonnard.[2] What these artists have in common is that they were born in the nineteenth century. Their lifetimes span the latter part of that century and the beginning of the next one. Therefore, the painter sections are temporally and spatially circumscribed.

By contrast, the second type of section, which could be called contemporary sections, is characterized by temporal and spatial vagueness, yet the reader is able to distinguish these other sections from the former ones because they are sprinkled with words or groups of words indicating both a contemporary period and a Canadian setting. Examples of spatial and temporal indicators can be extracted from a short study of the first three contemporary sections—"Bachelors," "Isabel," and "A Winter."[3]

Of these three titles, only one refers to time—more precisely, to a season. Yet phrases such as "Shirley Temple movies" (9) or "TV reruns of W.C. Fields and the Three Stooges" (11) indicate that "Bachelors" is located within a certain culture, at a certain point in time. "A Winter" is crammed with indications such as "a chilly October," "in the morning," "many years ago," or with clock-times such as "11:45." But these references are deceitful since they are not anchored to any precise date.

The same ambiguity prevails with the spatial indicators. It becomes evident that both "Bachelors" and "Isabel" are set against a rural backdrop, whereas a cityscape characterizes "A Winter." It could be argued that the frozen canal where citizens skate refers to Ottawa, but there is no way of telling where "Bachelors" or "Isabel" takes place exactly. The only possible assertion is that "Isabel," for instance, is concerned with Canadian nature with its chipmunks, silky milkweed, mosquitoes, blackflies, and groundhogs. It should be added that, in spite of these unidentified settings, the spatial descriptions remain extremely vivid.

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[2] Given a limited amount of space, I shall focus on Gaugin and Van Gogh as representative of the painter sections.

[3] References are to *Tender Only to One* (Ottawa: Oberon, 1984).

It turns out, therefore, that the two types of section do not display the same temporal accuracy. This blatant asymmetry is certainly not to be ascribed to some sort of flaw in the novel. Rather, its function seems to be twofold: on the one hand, a temporal gap exists between the two types of section; on the other, this vagueness could suggest that a certain link exists between these two types of section, which is not temporal. It can be further observed that the fragmentary structure of the novel displays a conspicuous dislocation of the narration. Thus temporal gaps, vagueness, and fragmentation, each of them combined with the other, produce a contiguous structure where sections are juxtaposed to one another. In other words, the novel rests on a metonymic structure where contiguity, instead of sequence, rules. This metonymic structure is essential, for it enables the novel to throw a bridge between writing and painting. By using devices and techniques which will be explored below, Taylor succeeds in having his text share some of the spatial characteristics of painting.

This deliberate emphasis on space, however, does not mean that time is totally discarded from the novel. In his search for interartistic equivalences, the writer is burdened with a heavy handicap which is the irretrievable temporality of word succession, whether in poetry or prose. On the other hand, it is often argued that painting is a solely static art where space prevails. Gestalt theorists such as Rudolf Arnheim, have challenged this view by showing that time, far from being absent, plays a major role in the visual arts. In the case of painting, the temporal dimension is involved in the perceptual act without which the work of art could simply not be grasped. Arnheim writes:

> sequential perception. . . characterizes experience in all aesthetic media, the spatial as well as the temporal ones. What distinguishes the media in this respect is that in music, literature, film, etc., the sequence is inherent in the presentation and is therefore imposed as a constraint upon the consumer. In the timeless arts of painting, sculpture, or architecture, the sequence pertains to the process of apprehension only: it is subjective, arbitrary, and outside the structure and character of the work.[4]

Both in the spatial and temporal arts, the process of sequential perception results in a synoptic apprehension of the dynamic gestalt of the work of art. As far as Taylor's novel is concerned,

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[4] From "Unity and Diversity of the Arts," *New Essays on the Psychology of Art* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1986) 70.

it can be argued that the attempt to escape from the sequential constraint is based on the combination of contiguity and simultaneity. Its ideal gestalt results from the simultaneous apprehension of fragmentary sections. From a narrative viewpoint, simultaneity is one of the means of getting nearer to a symbolic spatial form because it tends to decrease the sense of chronological or linear time. Ellipsis, typography, and paratax are Taylor's additional means of damming the flow of words and creating a spatial form.

Ellipsis governs not only the general fragmentary structure of the novel, but also the inner structure of most sections. For instance, four different sections are devoted to Gaugin, and each of them refers to the three discrete dates 1901, 1902 (twice), and 1903. The point is that the shift from one date to another is without transition. This elliptical characteristic is reinforced by the fact that contemporary sections are inserted between these four sections referring to one and the same painter.

Ellipsis prevails, too, in the internal organization. In most of the sections, the recurrent past and present tenses are juxtaposed to each other through the elliptical shift from one paragraph to another. In "The Princess," for instance, this temporal dislocation is conveyed by the four disconnected main parts of the narrative. The first part deals with the general description of the setting and situation in the present; the second is concerned with frequency, that is, what usually happens in winter; the fourth focuses on a single evening. The third part is a brief historical parenthesis relating Cook's fatal expedition in the South Seas. This parenthesis is literally wedged into the narrative flow and does not present any causal or sequential link with the rest of the section.

Typography functions as a doubly efficient tool, for it both takes part in the narrative technique and makes points visually. The most conspicuous typographical feature of the novel lies in its recurrent blanks, which concretely convey temporal discontinuity. For instance, the elliptical nature of "Broken Harmony" is signalled by no less than four such blanks.

Paratax is many writers' cherished means of obstructing narrative continuity. "The Other Heaven" entirely rests on this flattening syntax. In "Marquesas Island, 1902," one reads: "Imagine if I could open this tropical night to a Breton village in snow" (32). This sentence can be regarded as the axis of imagination flanked on each side with paratactic sentences such as "Yellow fires like sequins in the dark" and "Cold against my naked belly, clutching my balls with its icy grips" (32). Through

paratax, the depth of memory is flattened out so that Brittany and Oceania, cold and warmth, are simultaneous and juxtaposed, as when one beholds paintings, preferably Gaugin's with their flat, interlocked areas of colour.

"Cannibals" and "Bonnard and Marthe" are among the few sections which contradict the distinction between painter section and contemporary section. "Bonnard and Marthe" can be considered as the pearl of the novel, and its function is crucial for the interartistic relation between painting and writing. It combines Bonnard's and Marthe's viewpoints and the French setting of the *Méditerranée* with an old man's viewpoint and the Canadian setting of Québec. Thus the narrative rests on constant shifts of viewpoints, spatial divergences, and temporal discrepancies.

The function of this section is to abolish this dislocation in order to achieve an aesthetic unity which merges characters, viewpoints, settings, and the theme of desire. In other words, this section encapsulates the implied structure of the novel, which French criticism refers to as *mise en abyme.* Here is the crucial revelatory passage:

> Like the afterimage from a flashbulb, Marthe gleamed against the wall, or rather it was not Marthe, but [the old man's] wife. She lay elongated in Marthe's bathtub. (67)

The gaps between painting and writing, between Bonnard and Taylor's character, are momentarily bridged, for simultaneity has become the seal of this interartistic harmony.

I

The answer to the second question is located in the grey area between fiction and fact. In order to indicate the demarcation between biography and fiction in the painter sections, one has to establish the biographical references of these sections.

It is a fact that Van Gogh stayed in the Saint-Remy asylum from May 2, 1889, to May 16, 1890. Suffering from hallucinations and convulsions, he entered the asylum on his own initiative. Just before this period, the painter had lived in Arles where he had rented the right wing of a detached house, which is referred to as the yellow house in Taylor's novel. Van Gogh writes: "It is painted yellow outside, white washed inside, on the sunny

side. I have rented it for 15 francs a month."[1] The painter's means of living were provided by his brother Theo, who regularly sent 50 francs to Vincent three times a month. Van Gogh remained a bachelor the whole of his life, but he learned in January 1889 that Theo was to marry Johanna Bonger. This biographical information is actually woven into the narrative of the first section on Van Gogh.

The second section explicitly refers to the painter's stay in Auvers-sur-Oise from May 20, 1890, to July 29 of the same year. There Vincent was under the care of Doctor Gachet who was a non-conformist of Flemish origin and who counted many acquaintances among artists. The circumstances of, and the reasons for, Van Gogh's suicide are rather vague. On July 27, 1890, he shot himself with a revolver in a farmyard and died two days later. This first biographical example gives evidence that Taylor's painter sections are carefully elaborated. On the other hand, it is the reader's role to take heed of the biographical clues disseminated in the other sections.

The four sections on Gauguin are based on his second stay in Oceania, where he exiled himself in 1895 until the year of his death, 1903. Gauguin's "tinned tripe and asparagus" (12-13) and "scaly legs" (14) actually refer to the painter's heavy reliance on French tinned food, as well as to his suffering from eczema on his feet and halfway up his legs.[2] The first of the four sections alludes to the traumatic relationship between Gauguin and Van Gogh. In December 1888, two months after his arrival at the yellow house, Gauguin finished a portrait of Van Gogh painting sunflowers. On seeing it, Van Gogh is said to have exclaimed: "It's me all right, but me gone mad."[3] In Taylor's section, one reads that Van Gogh hurled an easel at Gauguin. Van Gogh actually hurled a glass at Gauguin's face in a café. As everybody knows, Gauguin packed and left after learning that Van Gogh had clipped the lobe of his ear.

In September 1901, Gauguin moved from Tahiti to Hiva Oa in the Marquesas islands in search of unstained primitivism. This period corresponds to the three remaining sections in Taylor's novel. Two of them are letters addressed to Daniel, who turns out to have been one of Gauguin's closest friends and correspondents. Daniel de Monfreid was a painter who, among other

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[1] Quoted in Pierre Cabanne, *Van Gogh* (New York: Abrams, 1970) 126.

[2] Reported by Bengt Danielsson, *Gauguin in the South Seas* (New York: Doubleday, 1965) 261-62.

[3] Quoted in Cabanne 155.

things, recovered the illustrated manuscript of *Noa Noa,* which he gave to the Louvre.

The House of Pleasure is a translation of *La maison du jouir,* which was the name of the house Gauguin had built at Atuona. It is also a fact that its walls were decorated with Japanese prints, with photographs of paintings by Manet, Puvis de Chavannes, Degas, and Rembrandt, and with pornographic pictures Gauguin had bought in Port Said. In a letter to a lieutenant of the local *gendarmerie,* the painter relates how women, who were curious about his pictures and harmonium, visited frequently.[4]

The last Gauguin section carries ominous overtones because it points at the year of the painter's death. The last months of his stay on the islands made him more and more pessimistic. The *Mercure de France* was one of the rare links with French intelligentsia. To Gauguin's desire to go back to France, Monfreid indeed replied: "you have passed into the history of art."[5] Gauguin's pessimism was increased by the loss of his daughter Aline, who died of pneumonia in 1897. To crown it all, he had to struggle against the vapidity of the French colonial administration. The facts are that Gauguin asked for an inquiry about a *gendarme* who had been bribed by American whalers to let them trade illegally with the people of the islands. Another *gendarme* then decided to sue the painter for slander. As a result, Gauguin was sentenced to three months in prison and to a fine of 500 francs.

It is assumed that Paul Gauguin died of an overdose of morphine in 1903. On the morning of his death, during a conversation with the clergyman Vernier, "he turned abruptly to the discussion of art and literature, especially Flaubert's novel *Salammbo."*[6] He died a few hours later.

Despite their factual evidence, the painter sections do not read like sheer biographical reports. If this were the case, these sections would turn out to be based on a mimetic approach to what is now accepted as historical reality. Taylor's approach is actually that of a Janus. While it establishes the realistic background of the painter's lives, it simultaneously denies any reading of the sections in terms of verisimilitude. This rejection of mimesis is achieved through five interrelated factors.

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[4] See Paul Gauguin, *The Writings of a Savage,* ed. D. Guerin (New York: Viking, 1978) 293.

[5] Gauguin, *Writings* xxxi-xxxii.

[6] Quoted in Danielsson 292.

To begin with, the painters are detached from their historical backcloth to enter the world of fiction as protagonists who express themselves through the narrative voice "I." The only case of a painter section narrated by the omniscient narrator is "The House of Pleasure, 1902." But, at this point in the novel, Gauguin has already acquired a fictional status developed in two previous sections. It also becomes clear that the events of the painters' lives are transformed into the elements of very schematic plots within each section. It can even be shown that factual events, in turn, foster fictional happenings. For instance, I have not found any biographical references to Gauguin's parodic burial of a rat at Tahiti. What happens, then, is that fiction progressively encroaches on factual territory. Finally, one must not forget that these partly biographical sections are the components of a structure which implicitly discards mimetically chronological links since it relies on ellipsis and contiguity.

The consequences for the interartistic relationship within the novel are invaluable. With only one throw, Taylor succeeds in hitting his target twice. First of all, by manipulating the painters' biographies, he incorporates the world of art into that of fiction. But by grafting these two worlds, he implicitly reiterates the modernist rejection of mimesis which both painting and writing share. Yet, in this respect, Taylor's trump is still to come, as our answer to the next question will now show.

III

The reason for the choice of these particular painters lies in the fact that five of them were affiliated with writing. This affiliation is actually twofold: either the painter produced written works, or he was acquainted with a literary circle and provided illustrations for fiction and poetry. Monet is the only painter who apparently neither wrote nor illustrated any work. In other words, Taylor explores what German scholars call *Doppelbegabung* or artistic double gift. What happens in the novel is that the interplay between writing and painting is reinforced by the intertextual bond between the painter's literary production and the narrative. The two sets of sections which mainly develop these other artistic ties are those focusing on Gauguin and Van Gogh. The remaining painter sections are endowed with the same goal, though to a lesser degree.

Gauguin has an impressive literary production to his credit. In 1892 and 1893, he created two illustrated works, *Cahier pour Aline* and *Noa Noa.* He was also an essayist, as is testified by *The Catholic Church and Modern Times,* published in 1897.

In 1899 and 1900, he was editor of two newspapers, *Le sourire* and *Les guêpes,* the latter ironically published on behalf of the Catholic church against Protestantism. In 1902 he wrote a treatise on art entitled *Racontar de rapin (Dauber's Gossip).* Two months before his death, Gauguin was still busy with the writing of an autobiography, *Avant et après,* about which he wrote:

> This is no literary work deliberately cast in a chosen mould. It is something else: the civilized man and the barbarian face to face. The style has to be in keeping, laid bare, showing the whole man, often shocking. That comes easily enough. I am not a writer.[11]

To Gauguin, writing was synonymous with literary conventions which prevented the full expression of one's most primitive nature. So it is only to that extent that he was not a writer.

The fact that four sections of the novel are devoted to this painter points out that his position and function are central. Of all the painters referred to, he is probably the most articulate about the problem of the relationship between art and reality. Gauguin is the painter of anti-mimetic suggestive abstraction. While Monet refused to acknowledge that he did not always work from nature, Gauguin proclaimed that he worked from memory first and foremost. In a letter to Monfreid, he wrote the following:

> I have always said, or if not said, at least thought, that a painter's literary poetry is special, and not the illustration or the translation, through shapes, of something written. In other words, what you should try for in painting is suggestion rather than description, just as in music.[12]

Gauguin's interartistic analogy sheds an extraordinary light on Taylor's own intertextual practice which does not reproduce an original text, but rather suggests an elusive and desirable bond between painters and writers. In Gauguin's quotation, it should be noticed that the terms "illustration," "translation," and "description" are specifically endowed with a mimetic connotation. In Taylor's novel, the intertextual strategy consists in distorting a quotation which is originally located in a text written by a painter. The function of this systematic distortion is twofold: it prevents the painter sections from being read mimetically,

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[11] Gauguin, *Writings* 227.

[12] Gauguin, *Writings* 211.

and, by the same token, it indicates the process of fabulation characterizing fiction.

The mutual illumination between Gauguin's and Taylor's works is exemplified by the following intertextual passage: "What concerns me is the letting go of whatever shapes me as a man. The possibility that I might be giving up without knowing it" (13). This febrile search for identity underlines Gauguin's own words: "For two months I have been filled with one mortal fear: that I am not the Gauguin I used to be."[13] The world of fantasy shared both by writing and painting is also suggested by the reference to Odilon Redon's "one-eyed monsters" in the first Gauguin section. In *Avant et après,* one reads the following tongue-in-cheek warning: "Do not get the notion of reading Edgar Poe except in some very reassuring place. . . . And, especially, do not try to go to sleep within sight of an Odilon Redon."[14] Finally, *Avant et après* is also alluded to as the autobiography "that should scald a few delicate sensibilities when it is published" (75). The latter intertextual sentence can once more be compared to Gauguin's statement that his autobiography "includes things that are very harsh for some people, especially for my wife's behaviour and for the Danes."[15]

This ceaseless criss-crossing of intertextual references turns out, therefore, to be the canvas where writing and painting interact. On the one hand, the painter does not stand without his scribbling shadow; on the other, the painter also comments on the interrelations between the arts. What the reader is confronted with is another instance of an encapsulated narrative whereby Taylor, as a writer, explores the relations between writing and painting by referring to painters such as Gauguin who, in turn, writes, as well as examines the relations between painting and writing. The recurrence of this device is not a coincidence since its effect is to spatialize the narrative flux.

The same approach can be observed in the two sections on Van Gogh. The Dutch painter's epistolary writing is not of an ordinary nature but reads like a multi-generic work combining confessions, theoretical statements on art, illustrations, and visual poetry.[16] It is important to notice that Van Gogh did not view

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[13] Gauguin, *Writings* 212.

[14] Gauguin, *Writings* 244.

[15] Gauguin, *Writings* 227. This excerpt is from a letter to Monfreid, February 1903. Gauguin's wife was Danish. She went back to live in Denmark when he decided to devote his life to painting.

[16] Here is an example of Van Gogh's writing: "One night I went for a walk by the sea. . . . The deep blue sky was flecked with clouds of a blue deeper than the fundamental blue

his paintings as mimetic representations. Laying down the principle of what was to become expressionism, he wrote: "instead of trying to reproduce exactly what I have before my eyes, I use colour more arbitrarily, in order to express myself more forcibly."[17] When he shifts to literary expression, Van Gogh demonstrates an acute perception of the literary power of suggestion as opposed to mimetic reproduction. Commenting on the work of a minor writer, Henri Conscience, he remarks to Theo:

> Conscience described a brand-new little house with a roof of red tiles full in the sunshine, a garden with dock and onions, potatoes with their dull green. . . the heather all yellow. Don't be afraid, it was not a Cazin, it was a Claude Monet.[18]

Mention should also be made that Van Gogh was an assiduous reader who referred in his letters to writers such as Voltaire, Shakespeare, Dickens, Maupassant, Zola, and Lamartine.

I

As in the other sections of the novel, the intertextual strategy establishes the relationship between Van Gogh the painter and Van Gogh as Taylor's character. In the first section, he is described sitting by the window and gazing "out at the sky waiting for the sun to rise" (6). In one of his letters written at Saint-Remy, the painter writes: "Through the iron-barred window I see a square field of wheat in an enclosure, a perspective like Van Goyen, above which I see the morning sun rising in all its glory."[19] Having moved to Auvers in Northern France, Vincent expresses his loneliness to his brother: "if my disease returns, you forgive me. I still love art and life very much, but as for ever having a wife of my own, I have no great faith in that."[20] If we now shift back to Taylor's section, the intertextual origin of the following sentence is revealed: "I want to lie in bed with a woman who sleeps calmly, with a smile on her lips" (6). Incidentally, the spatio-temporal framework of the section does not

of intense cobalt, and others of a clearer blue, like the blue whiteness of the Milky Way. In the blue depth the stars were sparkling, greenish, yellow, white, pink, more brilliant, more sparkling gemlike than at home—even in Paris: opals you might call them, emeralds, lapis lazuli, rubies, sapphires." (Cabanne 131)

17 Quoted in Herschel Browning Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1968) 6.

18 Van Gogh, *The Complete Letters*, 3 vols. (Greenwich: New York Graphic Society, 1959) 3:196.

19 Van Gogh, *Letters* 173.

20 Van Gogh, *Letters* 293.

correspond to that of the letter, which is another case of intertextuality's claiming its rights over fiction.

Enough evidence has now been provided to show that *Tender Only to One* aims at suggesting the anti-mimetic characteristic common to painting and writing. In addition, the interartistic bond is tightened by the reference to artists who had a gift for writing. Performing a last pirouette, Taylor reverses the perspective so far adopted, when he devotes a section to Robert Louis Stevenson. This selection does not rest on coincidence any more than did the previous choice of painters. Not only did Stevenson exile himself to Samoa, but he was also possessed of the gift for visual expression which materialized in watercolours, for instance. Through this move the reader has come full circle, from the painter to the writer, from the writer to the painter.

The answer to my fourth question brings out a thematic import which, ultimately, bears on the interartistic relation in the novel. Both types of sections are dominated by a pessimistic vision of human relationships which are chiefly characterized by alienation, primitive or archetypal behaviour, and unhappiness. What most characters and the painters share is the position of outcast.

For instance, both old Bobby and Van Gogh live on the margin of society. To others "old Bobby must have looked like a scab or dead blister. . . short, unshaven and sometimes muttering" (24). Furthermore, Van Gogh almost epitomizes the artist's alienation from society, as he is deprived of wife and friend, and as he has to bear the brunt of his viewers' negative criticism which purports that his "paintings are painted with an exaggerated vengeance, a feigned desperation as if they might never get finished" (7). Most tragically, the painter is alienated from himself, and his split ego takes over in the second Van Gogh section. Both Gauguin and Percy as the Wandering Jews are searching for a better world. This is the reason why one exiles himself in Oceania, and the other, one suspects, in British Columbia. It is certainly no coincidence that the "heavenly odour" (58) of the lavender bushes at the beach can be associated with Gauguin's *Noa Noa* which means "very fragrant."

Alienation is also experienced through the lack of communication which again characterizes different sections in the novel. Gauguin exclaims: "Painting and writing cannot expel the horror of uncertainty I feel on this island, so I resort to talking to myself" (13). In fact, whether referring to contemporary characters or painters, the narrative voice "I" has the equal function of signalling a profound isolation. As the title "Solitary

Confinement" points out, the characters remain prisoners of high-rise apartments, wheel-chairs, or beds. The Degas section, in particular, is a typically Beckettian reminder. Whole sections such as "The Other Heaven" read with almost no word exchanged between the protagonists. If words are exchanged, they are cast in the mould of reification, which is the case of Monet's "Très bien" (41) or Alvin's stories which "Bobby had heard too many times before" (26).

As Nolde explains in the interview, he and Gauguin were fascinated by the then exalted primitive cultures of exotic origin. Through the contemporary sections, one discovers that both desire and destruction tap the same primitive source. The result is the curious patchwork displaying Percy's pictures of "piles of broken bodies with the shadowy outline of keepers" (54), the slaughter of an American soldier in Vietnam, the disquieting splitting of a pig, the clubbing of Cooke, the cruel death of a moose, and the tiger of desire in "Interlude."

It remains the fact, however, that happiness and love are given a chance to redeem this rather gloomy situation. But only moments of relief are provided—such as Mrs. Stewart's nocturnal epiphany at the end of "Broken Harmony" or Paul's quasi-maternal comfort in Loretta's lap. These moments are precious yet ephemeral, for the house where Mrs. Stewart lives is to be sold, while the slipping razor across Paul's face opens old wounds again. Moreover, what is the borderline between pleasure and pain in Gauguin's erotic relation with the young girl or, for that matter, in the old man's longing for his absent wife at the end of "Bonnard and Marthe"? Do not Gauguin and old Bobby share the same voyeuristic fascination for photographs of young girls? One can see that the moments of harmony are not bereft of jarring notes.

Grace's aquarium, Percy's Monet-like artificial garden, Percy's Third Beach where he is lucky enough to meet a German man, Kealakekua Bay where the ants are cannibals—all these convey the protagonists' attempt to create the microcosm of their dreams to enjoy finally peace and plenitude. Yet this land is to be found nowhere; hence its name is utopia. This is what Paul discovers at the end of the last section: "[he] stood for a moment blinking in the falling snow, then hurled the sphere into the air and watched it fall short of the island and slap on the water" (106). For both Gauguin and his homonym Paul, happiness does not belong to this world. At this point, we stand at the brink of nihilism.

Where is the *locus* of harmony in the novel which can redeem its vision from a nihilistic finality? I suggest that a clue to the answer is embedded in the passage where Gauguin remarks: "Perhaps one day my life will epitomize the artist and many will try to follow my example both physically and metaphorically, because one must find out one way or another" (79). Undoubtedly, Taylor has been on Gauguin's tracks throughout the novel by establishing a metaphorical relationship between painting and writing. The *locus* of harmony is utopia, the place which escapes the rules of time and space governing *this* world. But this is precisely one of the definitions of painting which, free from alteration, projects a fictional microcosm issued from the painter's vision. The final step then is to unveil Taylor's references to particular pictures, which will constitute the answer to my last question.

V

The reason why the oblique references to works of art in the novel may remain unheeded is that they are conveyed by a narrative style which does not assert but suggests, or which is not tragedy but often verges on irony. The references are inserted and blend with the deceptive description of settings, characters, and events. But for the receptive reader, they trigger a wealth of visual stimuli parallel to the text.

Confined in Saint-Remy, Van Gogh expresses his sense of isolation with the following words: "I could not paint this room. The chair says nothing to me, the bed remains a bed" (6). These words are far from being contingent, for they belong to the frame of reference specific to Van Gogh's memories, but also fit within the pictorial context of the painter's numerous representations of cypresses. One can think of *Wheatfield and Cypresses* (1899), *Cypresses* (1889-90), or even of the light-throbbing *Starry Night* (1889).

The second section on Van Gogh is a vivid dramatization of the painter's self-destructive anxiety. Taylor resorts to an expressive style based on the juxtaposition of paratactic fragments such as "Out into the light. The road. Trees walking, fields weeping. Dry throat. Birds scream. Sky tilts, crashing around me" (51). It is difficult not to relate this ekphrastic passage to one of Van Gogh's last paintings, *Crows in the Wheatfields* (July 1890). Again, the reference to Doctor Gachet has its pictorial counterpart in Van Gogh's portrait of the same man who leans with his right elbow on a table where two French novels lie.

In Gauguin's case, it can be argued that the statement "What concerns me is the letting go of whatever shapes me as a man" alludes to the painter's spiritual quest, which he expresses in his important painting *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Do We Go?* (1897). In addition, Gauguin also painted a still life with a group of sunflowers and a chair, entitled *Sunflowers on a Chair* (1901), which, in the novel, he dedicates to Van Gogh. In "The House of Pleasure, 1902," Gauguin nostalgically recalls "the young girls bathing in streams years ago when he first came to the islands, floating with their breasts, the wet black hair and the mocking laughter" (57). These memories seem to derive from such idyllic pictures as *Fatata Te Miti* (1892) and *The Day of God* (1894). In the same section, the thirteen-year-old girl is reassured by the unfinished painting of "a pair of thick Tahitian women and a panting dog" (57), which, in fact, are recurrent symbols in Gauguin's iconography. Paintings such as *La perte du pucelage* (1891), *Pastorales tahitiennes* (1892), and *Adam and Eve* (1902) resort to the dog or the fox as an erotic symbol.

This pictorial network of references is essential, for it reveals the last feature of the contemporary sections. It turns out that these sections also share the visual aspect of the painter sections. Apparently, mention is not made of specific Canadian paintings, but the suggestive pictorial quality of the narrative supplies the basis for what should be called *tableaux vivants*. In the Bonnard section, for example, one reads: "By the river [the old man and his wife] relaxed on wooden lawn chairs eating dainty sandwiches under an umbrella" (65). While reading "Bachelors" one cannot help visualizing the hanging carcass with its sustained iconography from Rembrandt to Soutine and Francis Bacon. Sketchy portraits are provided contrasting Percy's frailty and the German's huge bulk. In addition, the narrative is studded with visual similes such as that of Mrs. Stewart "tucked into bed like a long white mouse" (47).

The common visual aspect of both types of section is finally underscored in the last section of the novel, which presents itself like a synthesis of the painter sections. One thus discovers Degas' chiaroscuro in the "sihouette of a woman in the window of a white house" (98). The flowerbeds of Loretta's garden also share some affinity with Monet's Giverny. The assembly of grotesquely disguised people could join the distorted carnival masks of Nolde's paintings. Bonnard is alluded to when Loretta and Paul are described standing "naked in the bright glare of the [bathroom] mirror" (105). And it is perhaps at this point that the reason for the temporal and spatial vagueness of the contemporary sections becomes apparent. Such vagueness by-

passes the picturesque for the sake of universality to which the painters' erewhons aspire.

If one now looks back at the total picture, one obtains a kind of tryptich. At the center, the text stands with paintings on the right and *tableaux vivants* on the left. Furthermore, this structure reveals a Kantian conception of art by creating a playful combination of knowledge and imagination on which the reader draws, as he/she undertakes the interpretation of *Tender Only to One*.

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