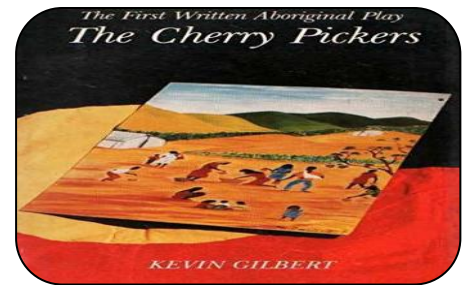




THE CHERRY PICKERS: AN EVOLUTIONARY HYPOTHESIS (A STUDY OF DECONSTRUCTION)

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ABSTRACT

Karvin Gilbert's *The Cherry Pickers* is generally read and appreciated, for it happens to be historically the first written aboriginal play. But it deserves more than mere historical importance. It is not only a document of the racial experience of Australian aborigines, but also an attempt to combine into it a consistent system of universal truths such as the one that life is an evolutionary progression from simple, incoherent and therefore homogenous to more complex, coherent and definite familiarised and social structures. Gilbert seems to weave around this evolutionary hypothesis different strands of the play. For instance, this hypothesis supposes that stronger races and nations must subjugate uncivilized societies, such as the Australian aborigines who, being simple and homogenous, must be subjugated by stronger races and nations, so that more complex and therefore heterogeneous societies are formed. Nevertheless, this supposition is based on absence of sentimentality for the aborigines. On the contrary, Gilbert appears to be influenced by the critical philosophy, that knowledge would be impossible if it were not for the mind's capacity to discover likeness and difference, as well as for its demands for logical consistency. None of these functions is the result of individual experience; it is, to be sure, racial.

KEYWORDS: hypothesis, evolutionary, deconstruction

INTRODUCTION:

In this paper, Even as good a tribal society that of the Australian aborigines, difference surfaces, through in a muted form, regarding whether stealing is to be endorsed or not. In the still small voice of conscience, stealing is not an agreeable feeling in a more adjusted society, but it is hushed by an overwhelming primitive denial that stealing is bad under conditions. Chucksda dares to go against the stream when he obliquely accuses Tommolo saying: "He should have carried a spear. He did not"¹ He further says: "He should have walked on until he reached the homestead and told them he had no tucker."² The accusation provokes Toodle's angry defence. "But if he is hungry an gotta eat then its alright. It just gotta be!"³

Similarly, difference arises in response to the process of evolution between Tommolo and Zeena in Act (iii) Scene (i). Zeena thinks in terms of the survival principle. She says that they have managed to survive and they will get through hard times, of course through mutual understanding. Against evolution, she knows, is posed dissolution; the later is precipitated through differentiation without integration. Differentiation is a passage from a state of incoherent homogeneity to a state of definite coherent heterogeneity. Gilbert obviously alludes to Herbert Spencer's law of evolution here and elsewhere in *The Cherry Pickers*, as in his other plays. As against Zeena, Tommolo has a strong derive towards dissolution in terms of Spencer's law. However, Spencer is proved partially wrong. In the post-colonial era, we have, through a hindsight, come to see how the native people in Asia and Africa have freed themselves, one by one from imperial domination. They have like Tommolo asserted their right to belong to their land, though the Australian aborigines have willy-nilly to opt for integration. This is not

to say that Australia has achieved a complete integration of the aboriginals. Complete integration and diversification would be reached in a wholly stable and blacks especially orderly social organization in which all individuals-will be free to express themselves; they are able to live their own lives without any interference, without shame and discrimination.

Gilbert believes that the individuals, as races, have a right to self-preservation, to a liberty and to happiness. In the span of evolution century or a half is wink of time. That is why Zeena pleads: "Time itself will change their minds Tommolo. Time and understanding. They will come to understand us and we will learn to understand them. People together in own aim right." Tommolo is furious about the right, only of his own people and evokes God to punish the white for perpetrating cruelties on the natives. Gilbert appears deeply hurt in this regard, but perhaps finds Tommolo virulence off the mark. Tommolo's invocation of God betrays his primitive mind, steeped as it is, in dreams and visions. From this mind prayer and placation naturally spring and are quickly given symbolic value in rituals. Gilbert views religion, as also origin of species, not through a priori theories and static concepts instead, empirical observation of nature guides him to reject what racial instinct conceives to be the birth of race in metaphysical theories. For him, as for Charles Darwin, life generally is a biological process. Gilbert is a keen critic, as Spencer was, of the failure of religion. For example, he points out at the outset of *The Cherry Pickers* how vainly the aborigines regard their origin as a handiwork of Great Artificer. I AM appears on the stage in Scene (ii) Act (i) to create mankind. But instead of making Adam and Eve and showing any indulgence towards them this Great Artificer feels that over-intelligence is a disaster. So he would not use the same mould. He, therefore, would not use clay and sand. He would rather work for six days as the Biblical God did and rest on Sunday. Since it is his second coming, his craftsmanship is a lot improved. He would therefore concentrate on SPIRIT rather than on body.

The setting of the origin of aborigines is expectedly ethereal; large parallel mirrors reflect the infinity, because it is "Creation Time". Gilbert seems here to ape the Biblical narrative of creation. He finds theistic origin ridden with contradiction. The play, being post-modernist in spirit, enacts a critique of origin or archie. But if the dramatist is critical of the divine origin of species, he is equally critical of the theory of self-existent world. This is shown the way he leaves the matter of the origin undecided, because it is simply unknowable, for all Darwin's attempt to trace the origin of humankind in apehood. What Gilbert means to show is that whatever we perceive has a beginning in space and time. To say then that universe has no creator does not add to our knowledge.

Gilbert enacts theistic origin of mankind just because it is the most popular hypothesis. In theism the world is regarded as the creation of a personal God. Yet the dramatist finds no empirical evidence for this view. It does not answer: what was at the beginning of the universe? Following Kant, we have come to see that the thing-in-itself is unknown? We can never explain the origin of the material universe. Any position that we take-whether the universe is theistic or atheistic or pantheistic, we get involved in contradictions. I AM represents a theistic creator, but he ingrains his creation with the Spirit, so that it is moved by nothing else but what it calls the Law or alternatively spirit of land or Love. In this regard, if we suppose that suns and planets existing are created by God, we also suppose that certain pre-existent elements were thus put into their present arrangement. That means that the universe is self-existent; what is potential becomes actualized. The Law ingrained in the creation in the Law of Evolution, which is pervasive, i.e., we discover through it, the universal law of all things. Gilbert applies this law to all aspects of life spiritual or physical, scientific or religions. Gilbert includes in it the law of Land and love. The whites have captured the land belonging to the black natives. The Law operates even in this domination through war. But war is followed by peace or what I am calls the law of Love. The world has passed from militancy to pacifism. The earliest societies were comparatively simple and peaceful. At the next stage, tribes entered into warfare requiring strong central Organization and despotic rule, with the subjection of the weak by the strong, of the unorganized by the organized. More recently, as per the law, peaceful age has been approaching. But as August Comte puts it, to stage passes out, yielding place to new. In fact, all stages coexist; though there is always a dominance of the stage to come. The blacks in Australian, at least a majority of them, still live as second-rate citizens,

though of late, and that too grudgingly, they have been given the right to vote. It is only to be hoped that they will gain their sense of dignity and pre-eminence as indigenous people.

The lacuna in the laws is that it is more speculative than realistic. Zeena too hopes that better sense will prevail on both sides. I am also fashions the rock into a tiger striped dog. He is conscious that his generation should be neither too fierce nor too tame. Gilbert also tries to reconcile egoism and altruism. While he condemns too much egoism of the whites, he does not wish the blacks, to give up their right of self- preservation. Nor does he seems to ask the imperialist for to devote themselves to the blacks. It may be right to say that doles and social security may be detrimental to the development of individuals, as of races, from the evolutionary point of view, but the systematic elimination of the aborigines is equally indefensible. The play opens with the complaint against the "White Founders" lie that the aboriginals do not exist and if they do exist they are vermins spreading diseases, as soon to be eliminated as possible. The dictum "survival of the fittest" literally imply that only those forms of life will survive which are able to cope with conditions of living. This again may be condoned from the teleological point of view, but is, of course, no longer defensible. The aboriginals face extinction, dissolution and destruction. It is obvious that the social dissolution of the native which follows the aggression by imperial forces, and which, as history shows, is apt to occur when one stage i.e. homogeneous stage ends without succession by the other. As a result decay begins to take its toll.

Most males and females in the play are old or very old, decrepit and derelict. And while the old decay, the young flee further deep into the interior, bereft of the trapping of the civilized world. The conquered society lies in the state of dispersion; its dissolution is literally a cessation of those corporate movements which had been its forte, so much that its hero, Tommolo has taken to thieving, the vocation of Robinhood, out of sheer feelings and impulse for the predicament of fellow-blacks. Moral consciousness implies the control of impulses and feeling by higher and more remote ideas and feelings. But impulsive as the people at Bubba's camp are, they cannot think beyond the present. The material conditions at the camp also show the decay that has set in. The backdrop of the camp is of a Cherry Orchard on which these Cherry Pickers of the camp somehow survive. They live in a very old tent. They drink with mugs made from jam tins with wire handles. Seats are old, dilapidated packing cases and old rusted four-gallon petrol drums. In all, the living condition of these campers is deplorable. They live as savages do in an otherwise civilized world. This is a society destroyed from without.

Gilbert shows how the two processes the process of evolution and that of dissolution subsist simultaneously. This is, of course, not unimaginable while one society faces dissolution, other sideral societies will be undergoing evolution. Viewed from this hypothesis, the reader cannot but be optimistic. But whether this process of evolution-dissolution would forever continue is difficult to say. One can at best be agnostic. A hypothesis is after all based on the observable phenomena with a dim foresight that someday egoism will yield to altruism and that with more perfect social conditions food for everybody, and steady industrial employment, as against Cherry Picking, "there will be relatively few occasions in which a person will need the assistance of others. There will be no longer any clash of the whites and blacks.

So, Gilbert is in large measure hopeful. He looks forward to an era of universal peace among races and nations. This is, of course, not to deny the present misery of the aboriginal. The process of evolution is indeed cruel in order to be kind in the long run. Gilbert situates the play at the beginning of creation. Zeena, indeed, says that their hopeless predicament is "Perhaps we're beginning, Tommolo, this may be the start of real beginning and not just death as you claim", she consoles her husband. Tommolo, however, wants to take the initiative from the temporal process, saying "We'll find our beginning then, We'll make our beginning. We'll find our own God. Come on Zeena. Come on! If there nothing better left to live for- if we can't find it - let's have the guts to die for something them!" Tommolo's desperation is genuine, but perhaps shortsighted. Evolution is a passage. Hence, there is no absolute at either end of the process, neither at the beginning, nor at the end. Moreover, any resistance to evolution is one of finite phenomenon only, and always has a beginning and an end both in space and time. Therefore, time and space are wholly incomprehensible. The immediate knowledge, which we seem to have of them, proves when examined, to be total ignorance.

It is this ignorance that baffles Tammolo, Zeena tells Tommolo "we can't go back in time and change things."⁷ This irritates, Tommol. He says: "We can't go back in time but we can bring time back to us."⁸ This he means can be done by tribal dance and music and dances, Zeena get apprehensive. She replies: "Those were the cave-age days, the Stone Age.⁹ This, according to her, is anachronism! The truths from the beginning of time- the truth of two hundred years ago can't be given rebirth and become the truth applicable to today."¹⁰

Gilbert then rightly calls attention to the relativity of knowledge. Tommolo does not argue back, for he has come to know now that there is no point arguing, since he has come to know that there is no absolute knowledge. *Zeena* reminds Tommolo a poem Bidjarnj wrote, the one about true truth and each man's right being another's wrong.

If knowledge is relative, it follows that we can know only the finite and the limited. That is the reason why we cannot foresee the end. Nevertheless, and this is what Gilbert urges the aborigines to look forward to the extent possible. *Zeena* pleads with Tommolo: "... It means that we should leap to our full height. We must fall, but we must be prepared to fall and leap again. We must hold to a truth only until such time as we can think it out and then supersede it by a higher truth." Tommolo's way of looking at *Zeena's* place is different. He says that the tribal dance is not for going back, but for going forward. He says: "It means that we're trapped- and we've got to leap." As Richard Nile has put it: "Aboriginal dreaming across the continent hold that death means going into the country attaching yourself spiritually to place, which is quite different rationalization for that of oft-noted European dread of sleeping perchance to dream."¹² He adds: Aboriginal dreaming are clearly journeys from which travelers can do return. But it requires a leap of faith, a shift in perception or, as Judith Wright would say, a new axis, to begin to wander beneath southern skies."¹³

Tommolo's return to the ways of the aboriginal ancestors is paradoxically in step forward, as he says, for he feels that through this backward move, they will regain a sense of identity and dignity which he and the aborigines have lost in aping the whites. In the evolutionary process homogeneity must be followed by heterogeneity. The ingenious the people have as much a right to become differentiated. In the early stages of annexation the only differentiation between them and their white conquerors was colour. All else belonging to the native's languages and culture, for example, was disregarded. But with the passage of time, the ingenious people tried to assert their difference, their identity, though at this stage it was uncertain about the direction of their difference. Perhaps the first step that evolution takes is the step backward to the roots. Races and also individualism, Gilbert believes, must develop difference. He is, therefore, emphatically opposed to any kind of hegemony in the name of homogeneity, any kind of imperialism or even socialism. Gilbert appears to be a firm upholder of individual intuitive.

The dramatist probably hopes that the further development in the direction of diversification and of industry will force the whites and blacks to live a life of peaceful co-existence, as following division of labor, individuals depend upon one another. In such a state, the aboriginals will be able to express themselves and live their own lives, without any interference from the whites. The sole business of the state would be to keep peace, by preventing, through the exercise of its police power, its communities from coming into internal conflict, and by protecting them from attacks from without. This is where the ruling whites failed. They, to begin with, thought that the aboriginals did not exist, as Bungaree, mimicking the Governor in the Prologue to *The Cherry Pickers* says, and then declared that their land was terra nullius, denying the rightful sovereignty, killed thousands of natives and to cap it all cloaked war and genocide under the euphuisms 'punitive party' and 'disposal' and such other terms. Instead, the whites did their best to render them decapitated for life of industry through excessive drinking, reduced their numbers by killing them and also by making their womankind infertile by "Cattin the winmens' gears out of their guts when they go to hospital to have a baby or operation."¹⁴ says Bubba. But by following the evolutionary law, the remaining women like Subina gone old, nonetheless, feel "we gotta breed our own kind again or else we'll all breed out, an with no place am' wanted by no one. All gorn an only misery left."¹⁵ For the women like Ettie there is nothing greater in her life than to be the instrument of the evolutionary impulse. She suffers, as do others of her kind, the stigma of breeding. The logic that the whites supply for the misery of the native black is; "Why do

women breed so many children-don't you know that is why so many children die? But Ettie's logic for breeding children is biological."¹⁶ As part of the concept of the "survival of the fittest, a phrase which Darwin took over from Spencer, mean, of course, nature's tendency to produce more off-springs than can survive. Ettie uses this concept, saying: "They don't die because we have 'em, they die 'cause you whites won't let us hear enough many wages to keep 'em alive."¹⁷ That is why it is, she adds, her job to have children: "It's the way only to see that some get through. That go on lirm past the starving an' the kid sick." She further of the survival of the Nature, by saying "one strong one just got to get through. Its my job."¹⁹ Nature, according of Darwin produces more offspring than can survive, and those who Lurvive are able to do so in consequence of some superior fitness to live in the environment in which they are produced. By the word "fittest" Darwin obviously meant superior health, strength and mental capacity to survive against all odds. There appears to be something of the metaphysical and weirdly feminist in what Ettie says: "Me life as a women-no matter when man do to us! Me, I'm black, I can't afford to stand back. I can't afford to be pretty up, to put perfume on it an make it smell like the bloody tulip or rose or lemon tree flower just to have fun with it like you white wimmen do. To us blacks - life is serious. Sex is for a purpose- not just 'pleasure' like you cock up for!²⁰

Like Darwin and Spencer, Gilbert undermines the rationalistic concept of mind. Mind follows the lead given by emotions. As Ettie seems to say there is no sharp distinction between instinct and intelligence, or as Jacques Derrida would put it, between the sensible and the intelligence. Instinct, of course, comes first, for it cannot, for that matter, claim primacy. Similarly, mind too is not an abstract faculty. Notwithstanding this undecidability about the superiority of mind our 1 body and vice versa, Gilbert depicts a bitter struggle for superiority of races claiming pre-eminence on the basis of either mind or body. The white women deride the 'breeders' i.e., black women. The two economies claim an edge over each other. This, however, does not lead, as suggested earlier, to pessimism. Gilbert deconstructs polarities, making the two sides see reason. He is hopeful that co-existence would ultimately prevail in Australian civilization.

There is, however, no logical necessity for wishing a reign of peace and harmony between the blacks and the whites. If there is any necessity, it is a psychological one, that adjustment to life involves more pleasure. At the time of the enactment of the play, Ettie may feel determined to procreate in excess of the actual survival rate and thus declaim pleasure. But she and other women say this only when they feel determined. As Gilbert suggests, there is no metaphysical first to hold us to precreation at the cost of pleasure. There cannot be any hierarchy between nature and culture. Pleasure can be delayed, but cannot be denied.

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