



Journey to a Wake

Henri Bortoft. Philosopher. 1938-2012

A train, the time to focus on this crucial stage
Travel through life could have reached: abrupt.
Pistons hiss. Wheels turn, onward, where the world
Crosses the tracks, since minds have strode the globe:
From the iron age of steam; taking this rail
Guiding spirits who need to cross the land.
Work. Family. Wars. Calls to answer. Get aboard.
The past when they all came and went, fills up these gaps;
Floods back now on this stretch to reach
Last rites for a friend now ended; decades on
From our times shared. When thought, music, written works:
Looked such great parts of our time: fit to beat,
Or equal huge eras of classic worth: we feel
Must be valued, and added on to, in the sense
Living minds can open ways dead books still hold.
He followed this course deeply. The man who has passed on.

Patrick Henry

MEMOIR IN TRIBUTE**PATRICK HENRY**

Henri and I had passed the Eleven-Plus Exam in 1949, and found ourselves in the same classroom at Scarborough Boys High School. A third boy on our row asked Henri (then called Peter) what he aimed to become, and the answer came, "a nuclear physicist." I had no idea what that meant, but was impressed by the decisive, ambitious and accurate style of this fellow pupil. The other boy Michael, later a Naval radio officer, whom I met again forty years after, and now passed away, never asked me that question. Anyone could tell I had no idea where I was, or headed for.

Then Henri went to an upper stream for those good at science and languages, not my departments at the time. Cycling, boxing and funny stories were the only areas I made much mark in. Rugby and cricket, I avoided much as Henri did. Myself never a team player in any sense. Henri only ever teamed up with philosophers through his lifetime.

A body I admired, though never quite making their side either.

A few years on, aged sixteen, we both frequented All Saints Church Youth Club, a lively spot in that 1950s, pre-Disco, pre-TV-viewing era, when the term "teenage generation" thankfully did not yet exist. Square dancing, debating sessions, cycling tours and camping trips were offered by the club. Henri and I both developed interest in Modern Jazz. Very new, fresh, and expert at that time. Some could be detected in visiting dance bands, such as John Dankworth and Ted Heath. We came to know a local bricklayer, Ken Read, who spent most of his wages on jazz LPs. These had only begun recently and he possessed nearly every one existing: about fifty, I suppose. We, still schoolboys, plus others, went to his council estate house one night a week, to hear these gems. Soon after, Henri and I grew to like classical music, historic or contemporary. Henri's father, Ron, was a knowledgeable musician, who had played violin, guitar and organ. When I bought a disc of Stravinsky's Rite of Spring (still my favourite piece and I still spin that actual vinyl, bought in 1957) Ron Bortoft had me take it round to re-record in his bathroom, the most silent part of the house, on his tape recorder, a mysterious ultra-modern machine to my naïve outlooks. Ron was a baker and ran the famous Waffle Shop on Scarborough seafront, where I worked in later years for him, and then his son Mike, who carried on the business until quite recently.

At their home, I once met the legendary grandfather, Harry Bortoft. A stern, master-baker figure, still haunting stories of our seaside town.

Henri graduated in Physics from Hull University, and took a temporary teaching post in Surrey, around 1960, when I was working in London. Weekends, he came and slept on my floor in his sleeping-bag. This was virtually a Fulham doss-house for Irish labourers. My father and grandfather being such persons, I felt almost at home. Henri found it an exotic, weird experience, the kind of which he relished all of his life. Saturday nights we spent in Soho pubs and/or cinema going. London showed many films by Fellini, Ingmar Bergman and Kurosawa at the time - intriguing delights for our appetites. I still chase after re-shown classics of that era, when now the Bond, Star Wars, Potter-type garbage predominates. The intellectual cultural revolution we egotistically believed we took part in half a century ago, seems to have petered out.

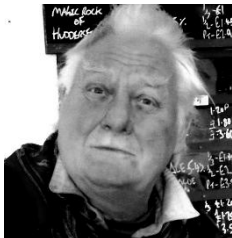
Henri and I supported the CND Peace Campaigns and demonstrations. Now he was a postgraduate at Birkbeck College, London University, studying Physics and Philosophy with David Bohm. There he met Jacqueline Klein, biology graduate from Rhodesia, and they moved to a house in Putney, when he and I had shared a flat in Islington. Now I sometimes slept on their floor, reciprocating the old arrangement at the Fulham doss-house. The Henri-Jacki ménage a lot nicer, and would ever be so. They moved to Kingston, near London, and became part of the J. G. Bennett circle.

I went to their wedding at the church there and also the christening of their daughter Laura, to whom I became Godfather. Marlon Brando was off away filming at the time. Bennett, I heard lecture at a place near Victoria Street, and understood nearly nothing. Henri took in a great deal which advanced his pursuit of knowledge. He and his family I saw quite a lot of over the years in London, Hertfordshire, Kent, Norfolk and Scarborough. I hope still to do so, except there is a huge absence, now we have all seen Henri pass on. But we have not lost him. His presence will be ever enormous. Apart from my own parents (remarkable, but a different story) Henri has been the most inspired, perceptive, determined, likeable, generous person I ever met. His spirit is somewhere, close to us, in an age that needs such strength more than ever before.

RESPECTS AT ST. PETER'S, MATLASKE

A dialogue goes on underneath
This misty day where last respects are held
At a house; an inn; and at a Saxon church,
Dating from when belief, mystery, and mundane times reigned.
Our talk or silent thoughts, set out links between
Outer and inner worlds; and the sacred and profane,
Matters needed to weigh the worth of present life;
Grasped firm in the hand as a hank of wool:
Once the trade value for all on wide Norfolk land:
Raising a fleece to wear against the hollow chill,
Still stealing across this bleak day we take leave of one
Gone to an inner world, hard to fathom or to plan.
A paradox between the holy and the logic mind.
Our church songs raise this sense in their vibrancy of words.

Patrick Henry



Patrick Henry was born in Scarborough in 1938. He has lived in London, in the 1950s-60s. Cornwall and Yorkshire, in the 1960s, Paris and rural France as translator, interpreter, scriptwriter, antique dealer, grape-picker in the 1970s. He was an adult student at Harlech College, Wales UEA, Norwich. Trinity College, Connecticut in the 1980s. BA in American Studies. Scarborough postman, 1990s. Poetry and paintings tours of New York, Paris, Ireland, Australia in the 2000s. His art and writings are published in New York at <http://nycbigcitylit.com/>

