

Toad archetype traced to Homer

Scholar unearths deep-rooted phobia in Freud

By IAN BALFOUR

The Toad Archetype in Western Literature
P. Ublish Orperish. 372 pp.
Toronto: Dada and Sons, Inc., A Division of Quatu House

The neglect of the toad archetype in Western intellectual history and in literary criticism in particular is, of course, notorious. Though virtually every important thinker/author in our tradition has

dealt with toads in one way or another, the lack of scholarship in this area is, to say the least, a blemish on our critical visage.

Dr. Orperish's new study of the toad archetype is, in a very real sense, a pioneer work. All future scholars will use Orperish's magnum opus (following his celebrated The Diphtong and Cathartic Affect in Shakespearean Tragedy) as a point of departure.

Dr. Orperish's monumental erudition, far surpassing the overviews of Auerbach and Frye, is staggering. The opening chapters trace the use of toad symbolism from the pre-Homeric epics, through the Greeks and Latins up until the modern era, which as Orperish maintains "is where the good stuff really begins".

His chapter on Shakespeare is exemplary, with one exception. Dr. Orperish correctly points to the toad as the unifying element in Richard III as well as unearthing revealing parallels in other plays of the canon. He neglects, however, Othello's immortal line: "I had rather be a toad..." (III.iii).

The toad here, clearly, becomes the symbol of the ideal state of man. If Othello were indeed a toad, he would surely not have had all those

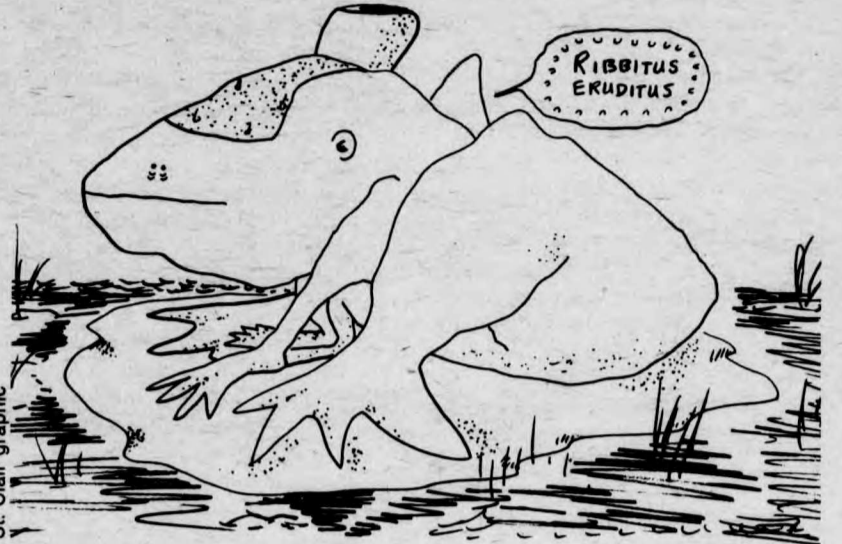
problems with Iago and Desdemona.

Equally penetrating analysis is to be found in a chapter on Milton, who in justifying the ways of men to God, describing Satan (the most interesting character in Paradise Lost) as "squat like a toad". Orperish reveals that a prominent Cavalier leader of the day was named Toad Smith (who reappears in Joyce's Ulysses) and so the symbol clearly works on many levels.

Orperish now turns to the Germans. We learn that when Schiller called Goethe a naive toad, the latter misinterpreted it as a compliment, which accounts for the problematic toad symbolism in Faust. Orperish then draws our attention to the toad leitmotiv symbolizing the irreconcilability of polar opposites in Wagner's Tristan und Isolde. (Nietzsche was ecstatic about the use of the toad at first but later denounced it as "subversive and silly".)

In Kafka's oeuvre, Orperish maintains the toad is a symbol of all that is bureaucratic, ineffable or guilty.

As for Freud, Orperish contends that the complete omission of toad references in the collected works is proof of pathological phobia of toads. This obviously caused tension between him and the young Jung.



When Jung began his toad research, the split with Freud was all but inevitable.

It was only natural for Mallarmé and the Symbolists to seize upon the powerful symbolic potential intrinsic to the toad. Crapeuisme (literally ((Toadism))) became the intellectual rallying point for a generation whose influence on Joyce, T.S. Eliot and Bliss Carman is profound.

Few critics, from Aristotle right on down the line, have displayed

such keen insight, such vast erudition, such inspired mixing of metaphors. If Orperish lives to complete his work in progress, we can look forward to what promises to be the definitive comparative study of Dante and Joyce and Kilmer.

Dancers' concert

Students and faculty members of the York Dance department will hold their annual end-of-the-year concert on April 10, 11, and 12 in Burton, nightly at 8 p.m.

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