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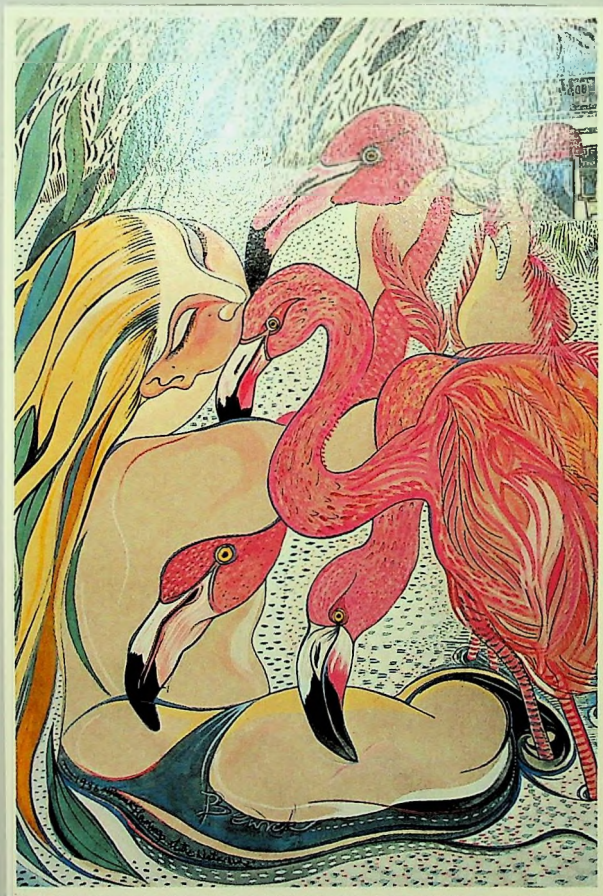


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PAULINE BEWICK

A Cultural Phenomenon



Presented to the Department of Visual Communication
National College of Art and Design
by Rachel Arbuckle

Tutor: Frances Ruane

Bachelor of Design 1990

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank the following for their help and co-operation in writing this paper: Pauline Bewick, Brian Fallon, Sean McCrum, Dr. Patrick Melia, Dr. Margaret Piggott, Patrick Pye, Dr. Frances Ruane, Dr. Hilary Tovey, Dr. Edward Wolff. Special thanks to the Melia Bewick family for an enjoyable 10 days.

INTRODUCTION

Pauline Bewick is the object of considerable controversy in the world of art critics. She has cultivated a virtually patented style which has become most fashionable among art admirers of all kinds. Yet although her work is widely enjoyed, her reputation as an artist is comparatively lightweight. Her work is frequently described as superficial and shallow on an analytic level. Her draughtsmanship is considered poor and she is accused of having contrived a style merely for stylishness sake.

There has been only one full-scale publication on Pauline Bewick, that is James White's *Pauline Bewick Painting a Life* (13). In this book White deals chiefly with a chronology of Bewick's life, illustrated with her paintings. He offers little, if any, critical appraisal of Bewick as an artist, but rather gives a detailed celebration of Bewick both as artist and person. It struck me that the controversy of the critical responses to Bewick's work is an intriguing subject which has not previously been explored. It subsequently aroused my curiosity as to how one artist could be viewed with such a diversity of opinions.

As a result of my research, I found that the critics seem to have some difficulty in judging Pauline Bewick. She does not seem to comply with any of the main existing categories in art. She cannot be accepted as a painter or "fine artist", so the term "illustrator" is applied. This too, however, has its problems. An illustrator is a graphic artist who deals primarily with works reproduced in books and magazines, while Bewick produces mostly full-size paintings. The problem of the categorising of Pauline Bewick is one of the issues I shall demonstrate in the following chapters.

The aim of this paper is not to alter existing opinions, nor to argue in defence of Pauline Bewick. It is an attempt to reach a deeper understanding of the artist through the discussion of her merits and demerits as seen by the art critics, and to study how these relate to her own views on the subject.

A completely rational state of mind causes one to distrust the prevailing fashions before which our professional intellects are wont to bow. Does this scepticism have a valid foundation, or is it merely an innate reaction to sensationalism? Has Bewick earned her now secure place, not only in the world of Graphic Art, but also in the history of Irish painting? Or has she, as has been suggested, created a sensation of what must have been an extremely difficult childhood, and unconventional upbringing, to sell herself as an artist? These are some of the questions to which I shall attempt to provoke answers based on a greater knowledge of the subject.

In order to place both the criticisms and the artist in perspective, I have included a brief biographical background which is primarily a catalogue of her achievements.

In the first chapter I shall look at various critical responses to the artist's work. In researching this paper I have read a large number of reviews dating from the 1950s to the 1980s and rarely find two critics who are in full accordance with one another. This at least must be considered when deciding how much weight to place on the critics' opinions.

Secondly, I shall attempt to create a true picture of the artist. I shall relate, as far as possible, her own opinions on the topics previously discussed by the art critics.

These first two chapters I hope to approach from an objective viewpoint offering only a brief conclusion at the end of each. In this way I wish to allow the reader to form his or her unbiassed opinion on the subject.

Lastly I shall make a comparison between the views of the critics and those of Pauline Bewick. This, the third chapter, will provide me with an opportunity to express my own views on the subject and to suggest an approach to criticising the artist.



Fig. 1. Pauline Bewick's House, Glenbeigh Co. Kerry. (Photograph)



Fig. 2. Pauline Bewick's Garden, Glenbeigh Co. Kerry. (Photograph)

BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

Pauline Bewick, born in 1935 in Northumbria, England, is thought to be of the same family as the great naturalist and wood engraver Thomas Bewick. This paternal link, however, is uncertain.

Brought up by an eccentric mother, as a young girl she lived in several abodes. These ranged from a caravan in Kilmainham to a cottage in Kerry, from a barge on the Kennett and Avon canal to a fashionable terraced house in Rathmines. She attended a total of five schools, two of which were English "progressive" schools which promoted creativity and freedom of thought. These provided an ideal atmosphere for the young artist to develop her talents, but left her somewhat behind in the field of academic studies. This and a mild case of dyslexia have resulted in an artist who claims to have been influenced by no one in her early years.

Her formal training in art began when she enrolled in the National College of Art and Design, Dublin, at the age of fifteen. On leaving the college in 1952 she began to design theatre sets for Dublin's Pike Theatre while also acting in review there.

Since 1952 Pauline Bewick has continually had her work shown in major exhibitions in Ireland and abroad. Her first one-woman show took place at the Clog Gallery, Dublin, in 1957. In 1959 she went to London where her works were chosen for the exhibition of Artists of Fame and Promise, Leicester Galleries. She also exhibited in mixed shows in the Piccadilly Gallery, the Portal Gallery, the New Art Centre and the Zwemmer Gallery, all in London. She had one-woman shows in the Parkway Gallery, London, in 1959 and 1960 and she also wrote and illustrated a series of children's stories shown on BBC television.

In 1963 Pauline Bewick returned to Dublin where she held a series of one-woman shows in the Dawson Gallery while also exhibiting in many prominent mixed exhibitions.

During her London and Dublin periods her works are mostly of interiors: bedrooms, cafes, restaurants, women relaxing, dressed or nude, and also more social scenes, often satirical. Since the early '70s her subjects have changed to the countryside of Kerry, where she took up residence with her husband and two daughters (fig 1&2) and of

Tuscany, where she purchased an 18th century farmhouse as a holiday home. She continues to paint women clothed and unclothed; children and animals in country settings.

Her exhibitions at the Dawson Gallery, Dublin, continued until the death of gallery owner Leo Smith, and she is now with his successor at the Taylor Galleries.

Bewick was elected a member of the Royal Hibernian Academy in 1985 and is currently a member of Aosdana. In 1985 David Shaw Smith made a 50 minute film profile of Pauline Bewick, and Dr. James White wrote a book on her life and works which was published by Wolfhound Press. In 1986/87, coinciding with her 50th birthday, a series of retrospective exhibitions took place showing the artist's work from the age of 2 to 50. She exhibited 1500 works in Dublin, (Guinness Hop Store June, '86), Cork, (Crawford Municipal Gallery, Oct '86), Belfast, (Ulster Museum, Jan/Feb '87) and Limerick, (City Gallery March/April '87).

Pauline Bewick is currently spending a year on the South Sea Islands fulfilling a lifelong ambition to study primitive culture and society.

CHAPTER 1

What the Critics Say

With the large number of existing reviews of, or references to, the work of Pauline Bewick, it would be impossible to quote from all of them in this chapter. I shall therefore deal only with a selection of the critical responses, but one which should give an unbiased reflection of the whole. I have divided the topics discussed in the reviews into six fairly broad categories. Of each category I shall give a brief overview, summarising the responses in that particular area. In this way, I hope to demonstrate the diversity of opinions held on the work of Pauline Bewick. To aid the comprehension of the critical comments, it is necessary to illustrate the text with the artist's work. As there are few references made by the critics to Bewick's paintings by name, I have inserted works which, for me, clarify the points made.

PROLIFIC OUTPUT.

One of the undeniable qualities of Pauline Bewick is her enormous creative energy. This leads to a tremendous output of work which is frequently referred to by the art critics. It is, however, viewed in various different ways. In this section I shall illustrate the diversity of opinions by quoting only some of these many critical references, those which I consider to be of most relevance.

Aidan Dunne (30) describes her "tireless enthusiasm" as the quality that saves her pictures. Arts Review (54) states that Bewick's work "...conveys a sense of basking in nature through her prolific response to the individual elements in plants and wildlife..." (fig. 3). Dr. James White (36) writes of the "exotic exuberance", one of her most famous qualities, which reflects her joy of living. Much akin to her exuberance is her ability to produce such enormous quantities of work, a quality which is summed up by



Fig. 3. *Asleep with Mallard and Eggs* 1983 watercolour and acrylic on handmade paper. (*Inside Tribune*, May 1984)



Fig. 4. *Breakfast at Bewley's* 1985 watercolour and acrylic on handmade paper. (*Social & Personal Magazine*, 1986)

Marie Crowe (25) : "The Pauline Bewick industry rolls on....and talk about productivity."

In spite of Crowe's admiration of Bewick's productivity, the critics frequently view it negatively. This is most obvious in the reviews concerning Bewick's retrospective exhibition at the Guinness Hop Store in 1986. At this venue the artist exhibited 1500 pieces dating over a period of 50 years. Sean McCrum (50) when writing on her retrospective exhibition describes the large amount of paintings on display as "the relentless hammering of hundreds of nails where half a dozen would have done". This, he wrote, devalued any valid points that Bewick was trying to make about particular stages in her career.

Aidan Dunne (30) likens her to a "tourist with a camera, bent on getting everything on film, snapping enthusiastically as she goes", which for him leads to work of a "sprawling indiscriminate air" (fig. 4). When reviewing Bewick's retrospective exhibition he concluded: "She has advanced in leaps and bounds from the early days, that much is clear, but she might be better off as an artist, to have produced less more carefully". Dorothy Walker (66) is of the opinion that the sheer quantity of pictures at Bewick's retrospective is offensive; not, however, because the quantity diminished the quality, as Dunne has suggested, but simply because "were it Botticelli himself one might balk at such a quantity".

Molly McAnailly Burke, however, admires Pauline Bewick for her prolific turnover of work. She puts her into the category of "Pop" - advertising, pop-music and David Hockney. She defines this as a culture which recognises the artist as a worker, who "if clever and prolific, can create products accessible to a broad range of people.

The aesthetics may moan, but the popular artist, such as Pauline Bewick, generally do not develop drink problems, drive off cliffs, sever their ears or commit suicide before the age of 40. Rather they live to a robust and happy old age, secure in the knowledge that their life was well-lived. (48)

The general opinion appears to be Bewick's exuberant prolific output results in a capacity of work which is too great for one exhibition to hold, and also possibly for one artist to produce successfully. Many critics imply that there is no merit in such productivity. Yet by others she is admired for the quantity of work produced, for her sheer dedication to art as a creative activity and her recognition of art as a means of earning a living.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Pauline Bewick is extremely marketable as a person and this is undoubtedly one of the reasons for her success with the public. She willingly talks to reporters and has appeared on television and radio for interviews, chat shows and such celebrity game-shows as Ronan Collins's *Play the Game*. She is open, honest, warm and friendly, lively and attractive, and is willing to talk freely in public about herself and her views. This is in such contrast to the traditional view of an artist as the dark, moody, brooding recluse that the public are charmed. Brendan Glacken opens his review of David Shaw Smith's film documentary on Bewick with an amusing, yet somewhat justifiable, view of artists:

Not quite the full shilling, most artists. Very peculiar. Rooms to let (indicates head). *Not-all-there*.

Then along comes Pauline Bewick. Shockingly sane. Sinfully successful. Infuriatingly charming. And, worst of all, married with two kids and living in Kerry. Surely the only place for any self-respecting artist to live is in sin? It is very disappointing when artists fail to live down to one's expectations.(40)

Also on the subject of Shaw Smith's film, Brian Fallon states that "...the public is always more interested in personalities than in art..." (70). Aidan Dunne (31) writes that "...good art makes bad television..." and continues by describing Bewick as "an almost ideal subject for a television profile..." He writes that Shaw Smith's camera "gives us...a woman, much like anybody else, so we are not affronted by seeing anything strikingly different from ourselves".

The accessibility of her work also adds to her attraction for the public. Her bright, flowing watercolours are easy to relate to in their subject matter and instantly appealing in form and colour. Aidan Dunne (31) describes her "stylised, faux-naïf" work as "instantly accessible" (fig. 5).

James Thompson (63) also describes her work as "easily accessible" but uses this in a negative sense, combined with "ultimately commercial" and as "defining a celebration of middle-class materialism and 'liberation'".

Aidan Dunne expands on his notion of accessibility when reviewing Pauline Bewick's retrospective exhibition. He writes that what Bewick presents to the spectator "amounts



Fig. 5. *Negro and Negress with Lillies in London* 1986 watercolour on handmade paper. (Postcard)



Fig. 6. *Woman and Two Bantam Cocks* 1985 Tapestry. (Postcard)

to a present of culture-without-pain" which leaves "her public" feeling pleased, relieved and flattered:

Pleased because the pictures are immediately, slickly attractive. Relieved because they look at her work and say: so this is art, why, it doesn't hurt a bit, it positively soothes....Flattered because they know they can appreciate it, and it's art, isn't it? (29)

The importance which Bewick places on interacting with the public, or making herself more accessible to the public, is often interpreted as a form of self-promotion. Her retrospective exhibition at the Guinness Hop Store was thus viewed. Bewick was accused of holding the exhibition in order to promote her sales abroad. Sean McCrum (71) is of the opinion that she makes use of her unconventional upbringing to sell herself as an artist. Deirdre Walsh (40), however, contradicts the implications that Bewick is craving for fame, writing: "Pauline Bewick prefers not to be the centre of attention and is much happier to be left alone to get on with her painting"

To summarise this section, most people would agree that Bewick is a good business woman. She appears to approach her art as a career, the success of which is aided by good public relations. Her work is easy to comprehend which earns Bewick a diverse audience, yet seems to mar to some extent, her popularity with the professional critics of art.

TECHNIQUE

Under the heading of Pauline Bewick's technical expertise lie a variety of qualities mentioned in the critiques of her work. Her quality of line and use of colour are frequently referred to, as is the composition of her paintings. More controversial, however, are the references to Bewick's depiction of the human form. Firstly in this section I shall give a brief indication of the opinions found in the many references to line and colour. I shall then deal with the criticisms of Bewick's composition, and finally consider the views on her portrayal of human form in more detail.

In 1957, although still very much the eve of the artist's career, Bewick's quality of line was deemed "un-mistakeable" (44) and likened to the almost sacred one of Aubrey Beardsley. Throughout her career this quality of her work has been considered one of her outstanding features and is mentioned in almost all reviews of her work. Frequently described as a linear artist, Brian Fallon (38) and Fred Urquhart (64) to mention but two, recognise Bewick as a "very talented draughtswoman", and Geraldine Neeson (55) praises her "unhesitating line" (fig. 6).

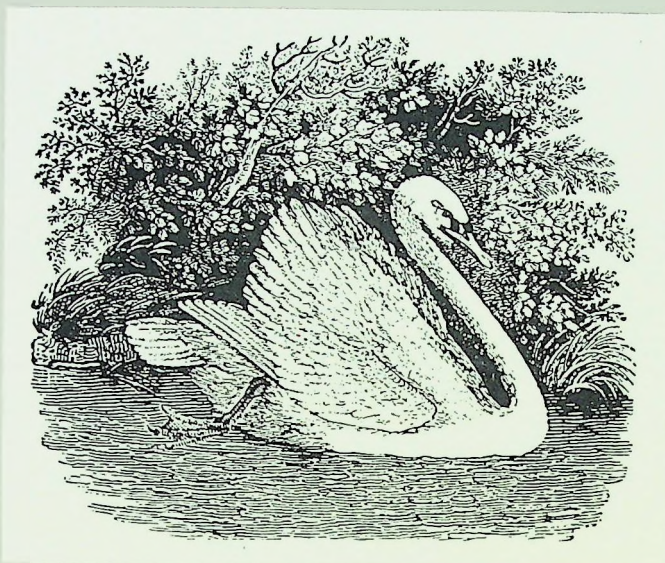


Fig. 7. *The Mute Swan* 1804
Thomas Bewick
wood engraving.
(A history of
British Wood
Engraving by
Albert Garrett)



Fig. 8. *Tuscan Dream* 1986
Tuscan pigments
on unbleached
linen. (Postcard)

Dorothy Walker (66) states that Bewick at her best can draw with a "superbly spontaneous line". However Walker is not a perpetual admirer of Bewick's work, also stating that at her worst she "can trivialise and prettify the most profound subjects". James White (37) credits Bewick with the combination of a "lyrical flow of line with a brilliant handling of light." Brian Fallon (38) also writes of her handling of light and is of the opinion that she has progressed in this area in recent years.

P. J. Byrne (22a) claims that Pauline Bewick has inherited some of the linear talent of her distinguished ancestor Thomas Bewick (fig. 7), whereas James Thompson, who considers Pauline Bewick more interesting as a cultural phenomenon than as an artist, is of the opinion that her work "has absolutely nothing to do with the wood-engraver". He describes Thomas Bewick as:

...an exemplary instance of a "low" artist who created works of such richness and depth that they surpass the more laboured and pretentious productions of "high" art contemporaries, while Pauline Bewick provides the opposite example of a person touted as a "high" artist whose superficial work possesses only minor decorative merits of content and execution. (63)

The subject of colour in Bewick's paintings is one discussed almost as frequently as her linear talent. Brian Fallon (38) mentions in 1984 that her colour sense has "grown considerably in recent years". Some have described her colours as "vivid and brilliant", some "earthy" (47); "high-keyed" (30); or "gentle swashes" (61), or simply "pleasing colours". Aidan Dunne (69), however, describes her paintings as employing "colouring-book colour schemes", contradicting many favourable opinions.

Sean McCrum does not find fault with Bewick's colour sense but finds that her use of colour leaves something to be desired:

She tends to use colour as a method of filling in the gaps between the lines. She works mostly in watercolours, but here, the medium merely acts as a flat wash. (50)

McCrumb explains this opinion with reference to three of Bewick's works: *Tuscan Dream*, (fig. 8) *Fox Drinking*, *Eel Swimming* (fig.9), and *Jug of Wild Flowers* (fig.10). He maintains that her approach to outlines and colour is limited and does not relate to her subjects:

"It doesn't greatly matter it's a fox, a human figure or flowers in a flowerpot. It could be one or the other." (71)



Fig. 9. *Fox Drinking, Eel Swimming* 1987 watercolour, acrylic and feathers on handmade paper. (Postcard)



Fig. 10. *Jug of Wild Flowers*
1979
watercolour on handmade paper.
(Postcard)

Introspect is an annual review of the arts which contains criticisms written, curiously, by a committee of critics. Patrick Pye (editor) writes explaining this as "for obvious reasons in a small country like Ireland". (74) The *Introspect* committee (43) agrees with McCrum's comments considering Bewick's colour to be: "...quite separate from the form. An identification as exchangeable as the numbers on a dice."

When reviewing Bewick's retrospective exhibition, however, Sean McCrum writes that she "can use the colour and texture of paint to express herself without having to over-clarify her psychological condition." To illustrate this he refers to three of Bewick's works, all oil paintings and "real" subject matter instead of imagined. In these, he writes:

...the paint is able to deal directly with it [the subject]. There are no stories to follow, instead Bewick confronted what was actually there. (50)

Brian Fallon (38) agrees, stating that he likes her best "when she draws with her eye on the target and does not get caught up in the sinuous net of a self-conscious style" (fig. 11). He also states, when writing on Bewick's exhibition at the Taylor Gallery in 1980 (39), that at times he "...yearned for the solidarity of oil paints." He then asks the question: "Can watercolours on this scale make up by their brilliance and luminosity for the lack of real *matiere*?"

Aidan Dunne (29) mentions "a multitude of sins" which he spotted in Bewick's work at her retrospective exhibition. These he names as "weak drawing, haphazard composition, grinding heavy-handedness..." which accompanied the previously mentioned "colouring book colouring schemes". The *Introspect* review (43) agrees with Dunne's references to composition, writing that Bewick's work lacks spatial sense. Sean McCrum (71) says "she cannot compose" and, with reference to *Tuscan Dream* (fig.8), that the "shapes are just ineptly thrown together." But, in contrast, when reviewed anonymously in *Kerry's Eye* (46), her strength is said to lie "in the way she exaggerates perspective or proportion in order to create an inner dimension."

With regard to Bewick's portrayal of the human figure, a criticism which is often made concerning Bewick's work is that she lacks a knowledge of form. Aidan Dunne describes her drawing as weak (29), and James Thompson writes that:

...Ms. Bewick is a superficial and frequently feeble draughtswoman of the nude. Not only hands and feet, the bane of the amateur, but also other anatomical junctions are often handled with ineptness or inexpressive distortion (63).

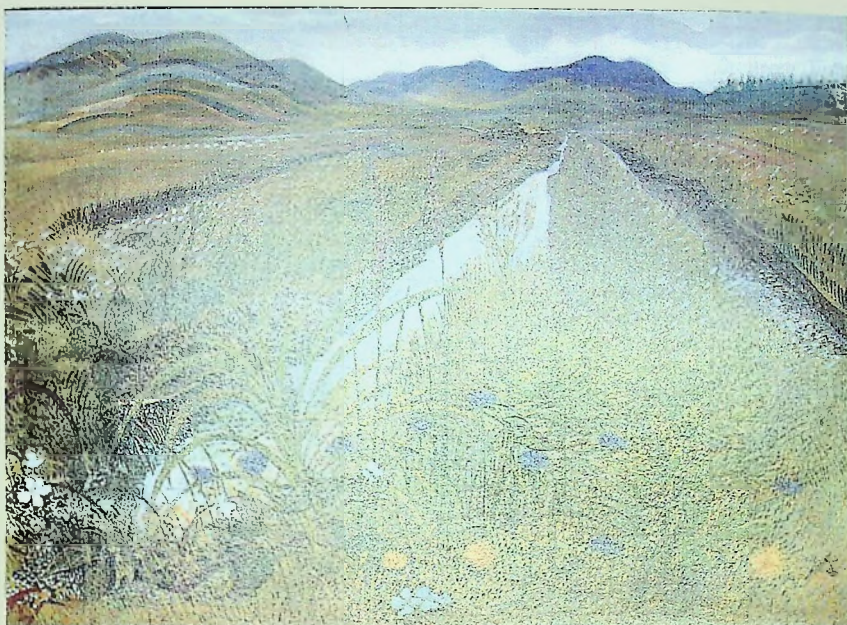


Fig. 11. *Kerry Bog and Wild Flowers* 1985 watercolours and acrylic on handmade paper. (*Social & Personal Magazine*, 1987)



Fig. 12. *Eating Artichokes in Paris* 1956 inks. (13, p.54)

Sean McCrum states that her drawing lacks any knowledge of anatomical structure:

...unlike Picasso, or and other abstract artists, who could draw exquisitely from life and abstracted keeping the feel and structure of the hands and feet and so on.....she simply cannot draw and that's it. (71)

Aidan Dunne (32) also relates Pauline Bewick to Picasso, stating that often her work is derivative of that great painter, but that the sheer strength of his skill is lacking and "in place of spontaneity we have recklessness." Sean McCrum, on the other hand says that she is definitely not reckless:

If she were reckless, she would at least be taking a chance, but I don't think she is. She has worked out a style and a content and she just continues to hack them out. (71)

This is obviously an area of Pauline Bewick's work on which the art critics cannot agree. They frequently contradict each other even when arriving at the same conclusion. One example of this can be seen in Dunne and McCrum in their references to recklessness. Dunne dislikes Bewick's work for it's recklessness while McCrum dislikes it for its lack of recklessness. Some consider her linear quality to be of a high standard whereas others consider her draughtsmanship mediocre and even poor. Two of the mainstream critics have expressed the ineptness of compositional structure while a third critic, although perhaps not so widely acclaimed (this article in Kerry's Eye was not signed) considers that Bewick's "exaggeration" of certain elements in her pictures to communicate an inner depth. Overall, I think it can be said that the majority of critics consider Bewick's work to be technically lacking in some way, though they cannot agree where this lack lies - whether it is linear, in composition, an uninspired use of colour, or simply in her watercolour medium.

DECORATIVE CONTENT

The work of Pauline Bewick is frequently termed as decorative, and this seems to be coupled with an accusation of superficiality. The opinion that she has contrived a style for the sake of stylishness (38) is one often aired by art critics. She has also been accused of having found a style early in her career which is commercially viable (31). This, they say leads to ignorance of the need to experiment or progress in any way. First expressed in 1957, Bewick's reputation as a somewhat lightweight artist remains among many art critics today.

In 1957, Arland Usher (65) wrote that although she has a great gift of fantasy and sense of fun, her figures tend to be "the stock figures of the cubist-classical design rather than anything intuited or felt" (fig.12). This, he says, leads to the danger of getting "stuck" in a mere decorative modishness. John Hutchinson (42) is of the opinion that this remains true to the present day and that her myriad details and rhythmic arabesques detain the eye on the surface creating "literally superficial" works.

James Thompson, who seems to find even the decorative flourish of her signature offensive, writes that:

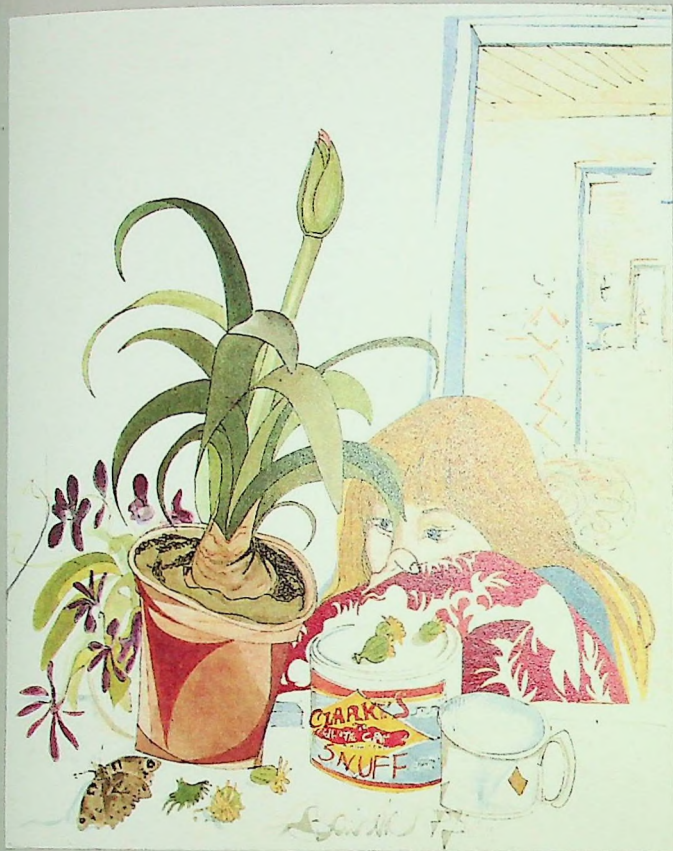
...if art of sustained effort and achieved weight and meaning is to have any significance, then her work must be recognised for the slight and modish production it is. (63)

Hilary Pyle (33) claims that "...The urge to decorate and add enigma through festive complication is inborn..." yet Aidan Dunne's opinion (29) is that Bewick has "carefully nurtured" a sound decorative instinct "allowing her to produce neatly formulated, bright, jolly pictures."

Brian Fallon describes her work of the 1970s as "too facile" (37) and in 1986 he comments that he "likes her very recent work less with its tendency to mannerism and a certain glibness" (36). Bruce Arnold (16) describes Bewick's work as "at times quite superficial" while James Thompson (63) claims that she is "hardly a painter at all, but rather a gifted decorator." Aidan Dunne might agree with this as he describes Bewick's work as tending towards "decorative whirls and curlicues." He does consider her adept, however, at making a virtue of her technical limitations by sweeping pictorial difficulties

...if not under the carpet, certainly behind a swish of brightly patterned drapery, a sweep of stylised vegetation, or a flurry of wild arabesques. (29)

Introspect magazine (43) states that Bewick's "eye is too knowing" and so "her distortions of nature end up being stylisations, and their lack of nervous quality insulates them from transmitting emotion." Brian Fallon also implies that her work is decorative, but he contradicts the lack of nervous quality which for *Introspect* leads to decorativeness. He describes her "virtually patented style" as "nervous, mannered, full of sinuous curves and sweeping decorative shapes" (38) yet he comes to the same conclusion as the *Introspect* committee.



(left)

Fig. 13. *Two Buds* 1977
watercolour on
handmade paper.
(13, p.90)

(below)

Fig. 14. *Lovers in Feathers* 1982
watercolour,
acrylic and
feathers on
handmade paper.
(13, p.116)



In this section it is generally agreed that Pauline Bewick's work conveys a strong decorative instinct. This appears to be viewed, however, as a quality which is closely related to superficiality, and therefore as proof of her mediocrity. There is a discrepancy between critics as to whether Bewick has cultivated her decorative style in order to sell, or whether it is an innate tendency of the artist. But in either case the result, as far as the majority of the critics is concerned, is rather lightweight art.

FEMININITY AND SENSUALITY

Pauline Bewick's work, being that of a woman, presents feminine concerns. These I have, for the ease of analysis, placed under the headings of Femininity and Sensuality. I shall firstly deal with femininity, summarising the main points made by the critics on this subject. Secondly I shall illustrate the reaction of the critical press to the unmistakeable sensuality of Bewick's work.

"Feminine" is an adjective frequently used by critics in relation to Bewick's work. This in turn is combined with many others: Anthony Denslow (27) describes her work as "feminine and lyrical and demands attention" and Aidan Dunne (29) sees it as "steeped in a sensual female experience of the garden of earthy delights". Mary Anderson (14) describes her as "one of the few woman artists using the experience of being female as an integral part of her work". Deirdre McSharry (54) writes of a painting by Bewick which is in her possession, that it gives her courage to start the day with its "joyously female view of a private moment in a woman's life...she celebrates the splendour of being a woman." Aidan Dunne, however, in a second review sees Bewick's feminine expressions as leading to "domestic and idyllic themes" which encourage a "casual mode of approach" (32) (fig.13).

Bewick is also often referred to as an earthmother by the critics. Aidan Dunne refers to her as "an earthmother, sexually aggressive and sensually aware." John Hutchinson (42) refers to this in an attempt to explain the artist's lack of popularity with the "mandarins of the art world." He suggests that her "lush earthmotherliness" is simply not in vogue at present.

Bewick's earthy femininity is presented to us hand in hand with sensuality, a virtually undeniable quality in her work. Although numerous references have been made by critics to this sensuality, it is interpreted in a variety of ways. Debbie Lawson (47) describes an exhibition of Bewick's work in Hampstead as "an infinitely beautiful



Fig. 15. *Woman Looking at Herself*. 1987 watercolour and acrylic on handmade paper.
(Photographed with kind permission of Pauline Bewick)

collection of watercolours and tapestries, each with a unique richness and sensuality..." Anthony Denslow (27) describes her work as at once "innocent, optimistic and sensual", while Sean McCann (49) describes her work as "some of the most erotic paintings to come from an Irish based artist for years." Kate Robinson (59) when referring to Bewick's painting *Lovers in Feathers* (fig.14) writes that "in her most explicitly sexual work a secret nervousness is revealed". A. Butler (22) writes that Pauline Bewick's work is "almost Freudian in it's seemingly unconscious symbols" while Hilary Pyle (58) describes it as simply "naughty drawings" (fig.15).

"Sex with a capital upside down" is how J. H. describes Pauline Bewick's work:

The artist reverses everything. She tumbles our personal images about until we wonder, can we spell our own name, or confess our own sex?

More blatant is the sexual reversal. Bewick begins with classical images - Venus rising naked from the waves, rampant swans, raging bulls, men bewitched as pigs.

Bewick reverses. As a bird watches calmly and toes rest lightly in the branches, the woman takes the bull.

The switch is a brutal blow to traditional male pride. Yet it is a blow delivered with such precision and subtle humour that it becomes an embrace." (45)

Clare Boylan recorded an interesting incident concerning the attitudes to sensuality in Bewick's work with reference to the painting *Lovers in Feathers* (fig.14):

A Pauline Bewick which I had chosen to illustrate a proposed question on Irish views on art erotica was declared unsuitable for public viewing. The women in R.T.E. thought the picture of amorous nudes, reclining amid real feathers, was lovely. The men decided that as the male subject was in an "aroused condition" it couldn't go out on the screen. (20)

"...I suspect that Pauline Bewick's work appeals mainly to women." writes John Hutchinson (42), and surmises on why this should be. He himself has "...always been immune to the undoubted charm of Pauline Bewick's paintings..." and suggests that it may have something to do with the matriarchal world in which she grew up, and the fact that Bewick was sheltered from, or perhaps even deprived of, masculine influences in her childhood.

In overview of the critical responses in this area, once the diversity of interpretations has been established, the dominant message appears to be that Bewick's work appeals primarily to women. This is certainly true in relation to femininity. Anderson and

McSharry, both women, express admiration for Bewick's integration of her sex into her work, while Aidan Dunne sees this to have a negative effect. It was also suggested that this type of work is not in fashion at the moment.

The appreciation of her sensuality, however seem to be more equally distributed among the sexes. It also appears that either Bewick's sensuality varies greatly from one work to the next, or that the critics indulge themselves in a personal interpretation of the work. If the latter is the case, it should be noted that it was not stipulated in review that a personal opinion was being expressed.

THE ARTIST AS AN ILLUSTRATOR.

This brings me to the final point from the critiques that I would like to consider, that is, Pauline Bewick as an illustrator. Firstly I shall quote but two of the many reviews of Bewick's work as an illustrator of books. I shall then relate these to several criticisms of her paintings and introduce the critics' views on the differentiation between a painting and an illustration.

Dorothy Walker praises Bewick's illustration:

If I were a publisher I would get her to illustrate a dozen children's books....looking at her drawings one always wants to sit down there and then and invent some fabulous fairy story....tough, extraordinary, magical.... (67)

Fred Urquhart praises Pauline Bewick's illustrations for Ulick O'Connor's book *Irish Tales and Sagas* describing them as full of imagination, "as magic and magnificent as the legends themselves....an utter joy" (64).

In general it is agreed that Bewick's illustration is of high quality, imaginative and pleasing to the eye. The Arts Council sponsored the publication of the children's book "The *Matchless Mice*, illustrated by Pauline Bewick, as a way of introducing quality illustrations to young people and the overall critical view is quite favourable.

With regard to Bewick's paintings, Brian Fallon (38) writes that in her work there is "the ghost of the high-powered illustrator hovering near." With Bewick's graphic art winning such high acclaim, one might presume that to integrate some of her illustrative skill with her painting would be to her advantage. This, however, when we look at criticisms of her painting does not appear to be the case.

As early in the artist's career as 1957, Arland Usher writes that "Miss Bewick only needs something personal to express (whether love or hate) to be a fine artist" (65). Sean McCrum writes that due to the limited repertoire of emotions expressed on paper, "her pictures keep centring on messages which are easily readable" (50). He suggests that she should work to someone else's ideas to overcome her limitations saying that:

Bewick's work constantly hankers for something to illustrate. (71)

Introspect in 1976 describes Bewick as a "serious painter". the committee in review consider it unfortunate that with such manifest seriousness there is something lacking in the conviction of her work. This, it explains, is because Bewick's work is that of a "voyeur and not yet a recreator." It writes that we only have to wait for Bewick to digest the lessons about the distinction between painting and illustrating to see a fine painter emerge:

While it is perfectly acceptable for the imagery of the latter to have the quality of mental conceptions, the imagery of painting has to be more physically constituted to engage the nervous system of the spectator at a fuller than human level. (43)

Patrick Pye (editor) later expressed his personal opinion on the subject of the difference between illustrating and painting:

The distinction between the descriptive (and illustrative) and the painterly lies in the 'outwardness' of the former and the recreative 'inwardness' of the latter." (74)

He also suggested why the "Modern Movement in the most general sense" has rejected the seriousness of illustration as a result of the need to redefine painting. This redefinition which the various modern movements attempted to supply took place as the camera evolved and took on the "descriptive and recording function that painting had, WITH ITS OTHER FUNCTIONS, served traditionally." (74)

Sean McCrum considers Bewick's work to be illustrations rather than paintings in that her images are too literal, but adds that: "Her concepts become the dominant factor rather than being "chewed over" in someone's mind." He continues by relating this to the medium that is being used:

The notion makes the transition from something which is unperceivable by someone else, to something which is perceivable to someone else in a particular medium. It is the medium, be it paint or whatever, that is important. You reach a point where you are not dealing with the paint acting as a vehicle for the idea, or the idea acting as a vehicle for the paint; the paint and the idea become meshed. They go through a process

and come out as something perceivable by someone else, but each in terms of whatever method is used. I do not think Pauline Bewick does this. (71)

I asked Brian Fallon to outline the difference between an illustrator and a painter, and whether being called an illustrator was a negative reflection on Bewick's work. He replied:

There are illustrators and illustrators - Lautrec, for instance. Bewick is essentially a book illustrator, who would look best between book-covers. There is plenty of good art - Boucher, Guys, Warhol, et cetera - which is shallow but it doesn't matter. (70)

To sum up this section, it appears that the term "illustrator" is applied in a derogatory sense with relation to the full-scale works of Pauline Bewick. Yet her book illustrations are, overall, reviewed quite favourably. There is no doubt that this question of illustrator or painter is an extremely complex one, and there appear to be many opinions on the subject. It has become clear that a painting which is illustrative in the way that Bewick's are said to be, cannot be regarded as a "serious" painting or "fine art". On combining and summarising the critics' views on what is required of a work in order to be classed as a serious painting, the result is this:

1. The picture must express a personal idea, theme or emotion.
2. the imagery must not be literal or descriptive and must evoke a strong emotional response in the spectator.
3. The message must be conveyed through the integration of the theme and the appropriate medium.

If we are to consider Fallon's response as the valid reaction of a mainstream art critic, it is possible to add a fourth requirement to this list:

4. The name of the creator must not be Pauline Bewick,
or perhaps it should read:
The work must not look good in books.

REPRISE

On completion of this chapter I hope to have presented to the reader a clear and honest overview of the opinions held on the work of Pauline Bewick. It has emerged that the majority of our professional intellects consider Bewick's work to be considerably lacking in conviction. This causes them to reject her as a serious painter or a fine artist.

Yet even with this established, the critics find it difficult to agree on why this is so. Each obviously holds strong views on the subject, but the very quality which for one critic leads to an artist of mediocre talent, may be contradicted by the next. The fact that this critic too considers Bewick's work to be lacking does cause one to distrust, or at least to question, their word.

At the risk of straining for a paradox, the critics do not merely arrive at the same destination via different routes. They occasionally embark across the infinite plain of the world of art criticism in opposite directions, and still manage to arrive at their common destination.



Fig. 16. Pauline Bewick's Studio, Exterior.



Fig. 17. Pauline Bewick's Studio, Interior.

CHAPTER 2

What The Artist Says

"Forget the critics" is how Pauline Bewick would advise young artists today. In an interview with Mary Rose Doorly she said:

You really can't allow yourself to be held back by the critics. When it comes down to it, an awful lot of work which is trendy or unusual in any way, is picked out on by the critics and turned into a new fashion. But this doesn't last. What often happens is that the critics mould art into fashions. (28).

For Pauline Bewick to disregard the word of the critics in this manner can be considered a normal reaction having read the unfavourable responses to her work. In this chapter I shall explore the artist's own views on the topics discussed by the critics. I hope to give the reader a clear image of the way the artist works, and to aid him or her to judge objectively the criticisms of her work. The bulk of the information in this chapter is taken from a personal interview with the artist at her home in Co. Kerry. I was a guest in her house for ten days, in which time the artist spoke to me on the subject of this paper. In spending time with her, and speaking to her in familiar surroundings, I hope to have evoked a response unreserved by unfamiliarity. I mention this at this point because I think it is important to consider that a person, without any intention to mislead, can respond very differently to different interview situations. I have also included quotations from other source material, such as exhibition catalogues and newspaper articles which bear relevance to the topic of discussion. For reasons of clarification I shall retain the six headings from the previous chapter. I shall not, however, provide an overview until the end of the chapter, thus creating a more veritable impression of the artist.

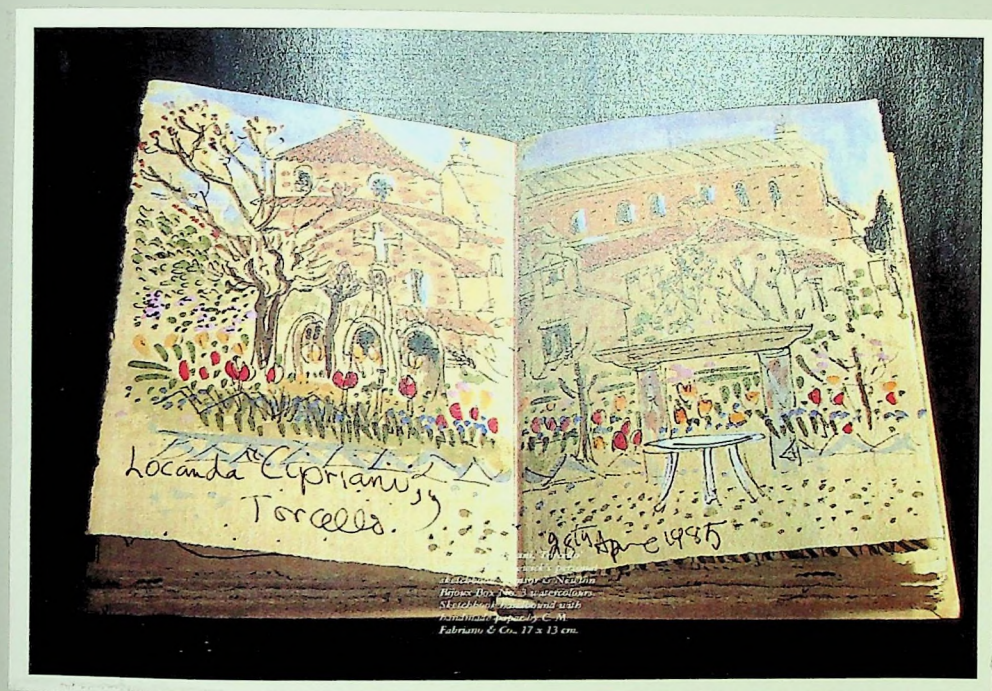


Fig. 18. *Tuscan Capriani, Torcello* 1985 watercolour on handmade paper. (*Social & Personal Magazine*, 1985)

PROLIFIC OUTPUT.

Since a very young child Pauline Bewick has used art as a method of purging her own thoughts and worries, drawing or painting everything from topics of conversations held between her mother and philosopher friends, to her school teachers. This she still does today by carrying everywhere a beautifully bound book of hand-made paper and some watercolour paints (fig.18), unselfconsciously painting and sketching in restaurants, theatres, even in cars and airplanes. The bookshelves in her tasteful cottage in the Kerry hills contain books, maps and menus from her student days which are filled with what her psychiatrist husband describes as "doodles." Today she still creates doodles and rough cartoon sketches which have great bite and incisiveness, but more of her ceaseless energy is channelled into creating full-scale works. Of these she can produce "three or four cracking paintings" in an inspired week (48).

Pauline Bewick's paintings reflect in a direct, unsophisticated way her pleasure in the sun, the beauty of nature, the people and objects that surround her, the simple joys of living. Her children and animals walk into the paintings and are set down in them, along with the doorways, windows, trees and hills.

"My paintings reveal three distinct moods. First there is the realistic, literal interpretation. (fig.19). Then there is background realism plus the emotions of the human being conceived (fig.20). Finally there is the purely imaginative or illustrative, such as the humorous painting of women eating mouthfuls of oysters." (fig.21) (17)

Many paintings are begun, not with a preconception, but with a chance object, which is outstanding only because it has happened to catch the artist's fleeting attention.

Anything from a new pair of earrings to an anecdote from a friend can inspire a new work. A new thought creates a new painting and this causes an enormous output of creative energy. She describes this need to draw, saying: "If I were alone in this world on a desert island I would be scratching out on the sand what happened to me." (8) She is stimulated to paint by anything that is "mind-boggling", be it a human being, a flower, having a baby, or the beauty of a mountain: "If it fills my mind and if it is brilliant or terrible I must paint it." (8)

Bewick cannot account for the popularity of her work with the public in general. She does find that there is a genuine interest, and from people of all ages and diverse backgrounds. It pleases the artist that her paintings should be purchased because they



Fig. 19. *Lillies, Woman and Sun* 1979 watercolour. (*Cosmopolitan Magazine*, 1980)



Fig. 20. *Woman and Frog, Dooks* 1985 watercolour and acrylic on handmade paper.
(Postcard)



Fig. 21.
Spaghetti Eaters
1985
watercolour and
acrylic on
handmade paper.
(Postcard)

give pleasure rather than as an investment. In the same direct manner, Bewick admits her unpopularity with the art critics.

The critical press don't like me. I've gotten a lot of bad reviews, I've been called an egotist, and too commercial. It doesn't really affect me but it upsets my husband, and the publishers of my books. But in a way I see begrudgery as a compliment. If anyone feels they can be so rude to me, they must see me as a strong person, and that's particularly complimentary for a woman. (48)

Criticisms of her paintings..."apart from the odd thing that is true"...do not shatter Pauline Bewick, nor indeed does praise have any effect whatsoever on her work. It is only if someone shows a dislike to her as a human being that hurts. Bewick emphasises that she does not attempt to contradict the critics by maintaining that her work is good. She admits that maybe it is "no good" and states only that it is good for her, therapeutic and purging. For this reason she would never give up painting, but she says:

...if it all falls through in the end I don't care because I've got an awful lot of other things I like doing in life, like gardening for instance...I'm not dependent on the public view of me at all. (68)

Bewick works neither for the critics nor for the public. Her huge turnover of work is not in order to impress, but to satisfy her own needs. She says that in one way she does like to create an impression in that once she has "churned it out" she says: "right, you're going to get it, everything." But the actual "churning out" is not done for anybody but herself: "...completely for my own satisfaction."

Nevertheless, Pauline Bewick does have black periods when she doubts her capabilities as an artist, telling herself:

You are hopeless, you are not at all what you thought you were. Your watercolours are facile, light, slight, stupid - you should be in oil paintings - much more serious, much deeper - you haven't gone deep enough. (8)

It may be this small flaw in Bewick's self-confidence which causes one of the biggest drives in her painting career. As a child her mother kept and cherished every one of Bewick's drawings, always full of praise and highly appreciative. But on attending Art College, deprived of her mother's constant encouragement, Bewick sought other people's praise, which made her a hard worker: "...now other people look at my work, not just my mother." (8)

Bewick expresses this only too human need for appreciation in relation to her retrospective exhibition at the Guinness Hop Store. She defied advice of many people

not to hold an exhibition containing so many pictures as it would decrease her value. She wanted to show the people of Ireland just how much work she does turn out and how stimulated she is "about everything in life", even if this meant the killing of her reputation as an artist:

Basically I didn't care about the value of my work. What I cared about was showing off, as if to my mother, how clever I am and how prolific I am." (68)

Bewick suggests that there is a general opinion in the art world that an artist who produces so many paintings must not be producing art of a high standard. This, she says, in a perverse way was actually one of the most driving forces behind showing all 1500 paintings (which is only half of what she has produced in her lifetime):

I'm not going to pretend I'm not churning them out, I'm going to show just how much I do churn them out. It's like one churns out thoughts; thinks or eats every day. To me it's as natural as all that....It's like another part of my brain... just a useful way of thinking as far as I'm concerned." (68)

PUBLIC RELATIONS.

Pauline Bewick's eagerness to share her intense pleasure in her visual world has led to her being considered as a self-publicist. She admits that most artists are reclusive, and finds her own public engagements extremely rewarding. The first reason is that she enjoys observing "things about human nature" (26). One of her observations is that people, of whatever age, are drawn to the paintings that represent their own age group. So that six year olds will be most interested in her work from that age, while 20 year olds are most interested in her work from that time.

The second reason that Bewick finds her contact with the public rewarded is because accessibility is a very important part of her work. Liberto Stantoro, speaking at the 14th congress of AICA, in Trinity College, Dublin in 1980, commented that art has never been as "'elite', distant and aloof as nowadays." (11, p. 26, para. 1). In Bewick's opinion art should not be "snooty". It should be where people can see it. She also believes that if art is of importance to the "learned professor or top gallery man", it may be of even greater importance to the slum girl or boy who perhaps will see something more in life through her pictures. For this reason she believes that the elitist air about art galleries is misplaced.



Fig. 22. *Reading a Julie O'Callaghan Poem* 1985 watercolour and acrylic on handmade paper. (Comopolitan Magazine, 1986)

Bewick is constantly concerned with the welfare of the world. She has a horror of destruction, be it that of man, animal or plant. She also has a fear of bad news and the sadness that inevitably accompanies it. She attributes the window, a constant feature in her paintings of interiors, (fig. 22) to a form of escapism:

It shows, I think, my worry that I'm not really connected to the outside world and am escaping and burying my head in the sand (33).

When the artist was in her early 30s, her mother who had always been her example, turned against her artistic talents accusing her of "fiddling while Rome burns":

She told me that what I was doing was a waste of time and that I should be out in the world doing something about the problems. I thought to myself: 'the only thing I can do is paint.' (36)

Bewick is constantly telling herself it worthwhile to paint. She counteracts the feelings that she should be doing something more for the world by making herself accessible to more than simply the wealthy or elite. This she does through illustrations for magazines, books, films, television and radio appearances, and paintings reproduced on thirty pence postcards. Bewick does admit, however, that these are not simply a means of making her work more accessible. They also act in public relations as "little ambassadors". Many postcards which have been sent abroad have resulted in major exhibitions for the artist.

"Even David Hockney's work is on carrier bags," says Pauline Bewick. "If you believe in your work it should decorate everywhere." (48) The so-called devaluation of works through reproduction does not preoccupy her as she is fundamentally unsure about the real value of art to the human race:

I have a question mark as to whether art really is a valuable thing. I wonder is it? Certainly to me it is, as a purging thing, therapeutic. (68)

An incident which occurred at Bewick's retrospective at the Guinness Hop Store, however, managed to make her feel that she isn't fiddling while Rome burns. It concerns a group of girls from the slums of Dublin's inner city, whose attitudes changed in a positive reaction to her work:

When I had my exhibition in the Guinness Hop Store, we were going in for the opening everybody dressed up to the nines, and at the door were some local kids from the area, very poor, and they were mocking everybody going in. I hadn't by the way seen this. It was when I came out, the same three girls were hanging around and Poppy said 'Mummy, those three girls have been there all the time'. (About 14 or



Fig. 23. *Woman and Wren* 1982 watercolour on handmade paper. (13, p.136)

15 year olds). They said 'you wouldn't ask us in there would ya?' and I played right into their laps which I always seem to do and said 'No we're too snobby!' and then I said 'I'm just going over to my car, do you like my car?', teasing them. So they began to get the joke and they then said 'But you wouldn't ever have us in there, would you,' and I said 'actually seriously I would, would you come in one day?' and they said 'we might'.

So I'd just finished a lecture one day and I was exhausted. And there came up these three tough girls, chewing gum, with a few more with them. A gang of them. And they were chewing gum with a very bored look on their faces. And I thought 'there's my girl.' And she comes up and says 'we came.' And I said 'Oh good. I'll give you a lecture. I've just given one and I'm exhausted, but come on, I'll give you a lecture.' So I took them around and they chewed gum and looked at my pictures very much out of the corners of their eyes. And it began with the sex ones. They began to smile. And then as they began to really identify with and listen to things, they began to laugh. And in the end we were all laughing together. We then went on to the animal ones and this and the other ones. I was enjoying it and they were enjoying the tour. A few days later, in comes their social worker who looks after delinquent kids in the area, and he said to me 'Your lecture made a big impression on these girls.' And I said 'Oh good, why?' He said 'well, to begin with they had a game which was to tie cats to a clothesline, by their tails, or any old way and peg stones at them to death. And these girls after this lecture said 'Ah no, we won't do that.' And he asked them why and they said that they had such a laugh at the cats and things at my exhibition and they enjoyed the whole thing so much. This stopped, maybe only for a week, or a day or so but it effected them. It somehow got to the core of those girls. Now that I find that I'm not fiddling while Rome burns. (68)

It is a case like this where Pauline Bewick is convinced of the value of her art, not for its technical or artistic merits, but for the fact that it causes positive reactions, and maybe describes a further dimension to life which had not before been considered.

TECHNIQUE

Bewick claims that when she paints, her mind slips into what is almost a subconscious state. James White records an incident during the filming of David Shaw Smith's documentary film. (13, p.146, par.2) Bewick was painting *Woman and Wren* (fig.23) as Shaw Smith and his crew were filming the artist at work. Suddenly, however, Bewick "broke down and sobbed bitterly when she found it impossible to paint on." She later intimated that it was the presence of so many people that had cruelly jolted her back from the subconscious world she works in, and from whence the ideas flow. It is for this reason also that she confesses to a certain uneasiness about painting portraits, the presence of a sitter prevents her from losing herself in the realisation of the picture.



Fig. 24. *Woman and Swans* 1984 Tapestry. (13, p.143)

Bewick is a great believer in Jung's collective unconscious or "primordial racial memories", and she attributes many of her images to an emotion, feeling or yearning which is common to all mankind. Myths are thought to spring from this subconscious mind, and due to the collective element, similar images tend to emerge in many diverse cultures. One example of this is the imagery concerned in both the German myth *Lieda and the Swan* and the Irish legend *The Children of Lir*. Due to the artist's lack of formal education, she had not been in contact with these stories until quite recently, yet for many years the woman and the swan have been a recognisable Bewick image (fig.24). She justifies this by saying:

I think that women have a romantic thing about swans, just like they have a fear, some of them, of snakes or spiders. I think its collective that women have this romantic vision of floating along, this graceful swan. (68)

Bewick has also decided, from observing the public's reactions, that: "women, at least in Dublin and Cork, are very, very interested in frogs". It is interesting that frogs also exist in fairy tales, myths and legends from different cultures. "There is definitely something kinky about frogs" concludes the artist. (28)

With regard to Aidan Dunne's comment (32), that her work lacks spontaneity and that in its stead we have recklessness, Pauline Bewick commented:

I think I'm the most spontaneous amongst my friends! In every way. It can be a great thing and rather a stupid thing...The result may be slight and trivial to Aidan Dunne, but it certainly helped me along the way. (68)

However she was also quite satisfied with being considered "reckless", describing it as "a good word actually." She attributes her unselfconsciousness to being totally reckless, adding:

If I lacked recklessness I would be conscious of what I was up to, and the whole purging of it, the whole joy would be lost...I add a little bit of intellectual thought, naturally, and not every picture is reckless. But the best are reckless in my opinion. (68)

Bewick tends to start a painting, as I have previously mentioned, with a chance object which for some reason has caught her attention. She will immediately draw this, for example a pair of earrings, and from this will evolve a face. She lets her imagination roam free and take the pen or brush where it will.



Fig. 25. *Man, Fox and Goose* 1985 watercolour and acrylic on handmade paper.
(Postcard)

Woman and Wren (fig.23), which was painted during David Shaw Smith's television documentary, was stimulated by a dead wren which Shaw Smith had found outside the artist's house in Kerry. The progression of this painting was followed on film - firstly the precise delineation of the wren which Bewick was holding in her hand. From this grew the form of the woman, and lastly the patterns of the foliage.

Bewick works in this manner even when painting a "still life" composition (fig.10):

It is not arranged on the table as it comes out in the picture.. I will do a flower right up close to my nose, and then draw the pot around it, and then draw something beside it that's not beside it. (68)

The difficulties in creating a compositionally successful picture in this manner could be one reason for the references among critics to her lack of spatial sense and haphazard compositions. Bewick does however "intellectualise" at this point if she finds something lacking. She describes *Man, Fox and Goose* (fig.25) as "a struggle":

It took me ages to be satisfied with this painting. The moment I made the horizon an escape it became a good painting. Before that I had the mountains going across all the way, and somehow it locked it all in. But when I had that...a sort of a feeling of eternity...I felt happy with the painting (68)

DECORATIVE CONTENT

Pauline Bewick's psychiatrist husband, Dr. Patrick Melia considers her work to have great depth. He maintains that her work is certainly not superficial or shallow, and he suggests that the reason it is thought to be so, is the fact that Bewick's work is popular and decorative to look at. Another factor which contributes greatly in his view, is that she is a "compulsive artist." (72)

Bewick admits that there is a danger for her, of creating a style, finding it commercially viable, and imitating it. She denies, however, that this would be purely because the style sells well. She thinks that it is a problem common to many artists "that one learns how to draw a foot or a hand, and leans very heavily on that." (68) It is possible to neglect the need to look at a subject, thus creating a slightly inaccurate "style". Bewick consciously combats this by painting still-lives such as a vase of flowers because:

I really have to look at the way the petals go, or the way the leaves shade. I could paint this garden (fig.2) from my imagination and it would be stylised. But if I sat out there, then I would see how very deep green it is between the acid greens. My memory will never tell me that.



Fig. 26. *African Woman's First Period* 1987 watercolour and acrylic on handmade paper. (Photographed with kind permission of Pauline Bewick)

If Pauline Bewick is stimulated by something, she must paint it. Likewise, in order to paint something she must be stimulated by it. For this reason she cannot see how any artist could retain a particular style, or subject, simply for the reasons of "cashing in on it". An example illustrating this took place when Bewick was with Mr. Leo Smith at the Dawson Gallery:

I remember Leo Smith again. I was young and afraid of him. He frightened a lot of people. He said to me 'Miss Bewick,' (he never called me Pauline), 'I could sell your cats. Why have you stopped painting cats?' And I said 'I'm not in the mood any more.' And he said 'if you were a professional, Miss Bewick you would paint cats.' And I said 'Well, they wouldn't come out right because I've gone off them at the moment. When I start again, if I start again, I'll give you my cats.' Now I wasn't rich and perhaps I should have considered it almost like a commission, but it wasn't a commission - a commission is different. So I didn't do cats. But a few years later, or a few months later maybe, I'm not sure, the cats had kittens. Then I'm onto cats again because I'm riveted by the kittens and the whole thing of cats and kittens. And he got his cats that way. But I wasn't going to churn them out. (68)

The stubbornness that prevents her from painting a subject or utilising a style purely to satisfy public or critic, also prevents Bewick's life becoming perverted by the fame that she has earned through her art. A television appearance the following night is totally forgotten: "...once a thing is over, it's yesterday, it's years ago, it's finished with. It is the absolute moment that is of interest to me." In the same manner, the opinions of others of her work are disregarded and forgotten:

I think that if you base your life on what other people think of you, it's sad. I think that this is actually quite a human failing...It's not knowing yourself. I think it is very important to know yourself...Instead of thinking 'she's having a great time with the boys, why aren't I?' You should be able to say 'she's having a great time with the boys but I'm having a fabulous time splashing my feet in the water.'

With reference to Brian Fallon's comment, that he prefers Bewick's observational to her imaginative work, the artist feels that she can sympathise with his criticism. She does, however, paint many scenes to satisfy herself which it is not possible to observe. One example of this is the painting *African Woman's First Period* (fig.26), a work which was executed while Bewick was passing through the menopause. Having never visited Africa, the scene is purely imaginative. She admits that "the style is perhaps not well observed: her toes are in the pattern that I've done toes practically since I first started to draw." But this, for Bewick, is overridden by the fact that there are more new images in this painting than there are old, the moon, the snake and even the colours used.



(left)

Fig. 27. *Young Apple Tree* 1987
watercolour and
acrylic on
handmade paper.
(Postcard)

(below)

Fig. 28. *Reading Under a Grapevine*. 1984
watercolour and
acrylic on
handmade paper.
(Postcard)



Frequently in her more recent work, Bewick tends to use small coloured dots to, as she puts it, "fill in the spaces". *Young Apple Tree* (fig.27) displays this technique. She is very fond of using pattern in her work and expresses a love for the lively, painterly feel the dots lend to a painting. She explains that it has only evolved since her eye-sight began to deteriorate. Bewick invariably paints without her glasses, not liking to have any barriers between herself and the paper, and finds a bonus in the more painterly result. *Young Apple Tree* (fig.27) is very different from *Jug of Wild Flowers* (fig.10) which is extremely delicate. The latter was painted when the artist's eyesight was "sharp as a whistle" and picked up every little detail.

Reading under a Grapevine (fig.28) is a pure celebration of the pleasure of reading in the evening heat of Tuscany. This picture boasts a multitude of intricate, decorative patterns reminiscent of Japanese art. "I absolutely love doing all these patterns, of the immature grapes and the patterns on her dress, et cetera..." says the artist.

FEMININITY AND SENSUALITY

Pauline Bewick recalls both the artist Brian Bourke and gallery owner Leo Smith saying that "a woman will never get any further than the bed; that all they're interested in is sex and a man." (68) Appalled at their chauvinism, she remembers asking Mr. Smith "what if that particular woman uses the bed as her subject?" She admits that this is what she did at the time, drawing out of herself the excitement of overnight parties and the men on whom she had crushes (fig.29).

Later when she married and bore children, her subjects were pregnant women with strange forms in their wombs, expressing her apprehension of the unknown world which she was about to enter, and the question of whether she was to continue creating on paper, canvas or in sculpture at the same time as creating within her own body.

When the children were born she focussed on them as her subjects. Bewick describes the subject of her work as: "whatever the going thing is at the moment." She uses it, not in a calculated way, but as a way of thinking out her love, her children, worries, depressions or elations.

For this reason Pauline Bewick's work is essentially female in its subjects, depicting her concerns as a woman. A world of nudes, children, cats, lovers, seascapes, interiors: "a mixture of fantasy and intimism that keeps one foot on the ground" (22).



Fig. 29. *After Late Night Parites* 1950/51 poster colours. (8, p.4)

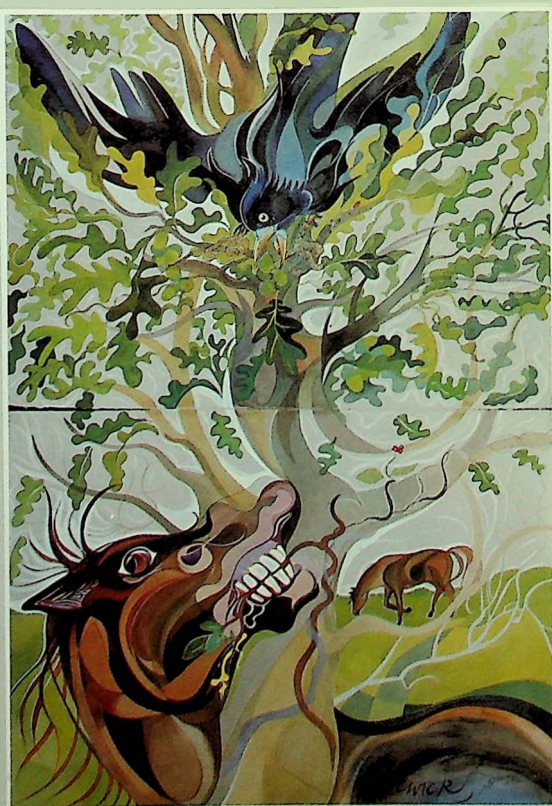


Fig. 30. *Rook, Oak and Horse* 1985
watercolour and acrylic,
snakeskin and feathers on
handmade paper. (13, p.142)

Bewick attributes the fact that she paints women rather than men, to knowing what it feels like to be a woman. She paints them lying naked in the countryside because she feels that women are elemental creatures and it is natural for them to be in contact with air and earth.

There is an awareness of violence in Pauline Bewick's work which belies the prettiness and that most people assume is her main feature. She insists that there is no romanticism in her paintings:

I am very practical, down to earth...I have no illusions at all. People think my paintings are romantic. They're not at all, they're more sensual, and each has a cruel moment in it. (34)

The cruelty, which frequently accompanies sensuality in Pauline Bewick's paintings, is also primarily a female concern. The artist has a fear of world over-population (fig.34) which she deems as the underlying cause of many world problems:

Over-population draws men towards war. It is in a man's nature. But if there were wanted children, there would be no crime, no brutality, no ugliness. Man makes war instinctively to depopulate. (68)

A celebration of the beauty of life is paralleled with wonderment at the ugly destruction of war or sadness at the cruelty of nature. *Man, Fox and Goose* (fig.25) is an example of this. The beauty of the goose, the fox, the scenery, the berries on the thorn bush and the man, is celebrated in Bewick's stylish flowing line. "But the fox has separated the goose from life, the man is worried about it, the very sharp thorns - a tremendous conflict between cruelty and beauty." (68)

I am saying 'Look, look what the fox does. I love the fox. I love the goose. I know the fox has to eat the goose.' I am saying 'My God what are you doing?' But yet I have no answer for it. (8)

The diptych *Rook, Oak and Horse* (fig.30) is another example of Bewick's concern with the cruelty of nature. The painting was stimulated by comedian, Woody Allen's expression "the world is a restaurant". It depicts again the rich beauty of nature, the thriving oak tree, the horse and its mate, and the rook. But the tree will eventually be killed by the parasitic ivy plant, the rook eats its fruit and the horse eats its lush foliage. Bewick says she realises that for every living creature, to eat is necessary for survival, yet the destruction of nature's beauty is a constant cause of sorrow to her.

"Thank Goodness!" was Pauline Bewick's reaction to Aidan Dunne's reference to her "casual mode of approach." She considers a casual approach to her work essential.



Fig. 31. *Poppy*. Georgia O'Keeffe 1927 oil on canvas.
(*The Art and Life of Georgia O'Keeffe* by Jan Garden Castro)

When painting outdoors, she generally considers her personal comfort to be of more importance than her subject matter:

Sometimes I want to get a nice cosy nook in the sun, and it might not be quite such a good view of the geese, the flowers, or whatever I'm painting. But the nook for me, and my comforts are more important. (68)

Bewick also carries this casual mode of approach through into her physical handling of her work. Perhaps it is related to her unsureness as to the value of art - her own therapeutic amusement in the action of painting is of greater value to her than the finished product.

If I'm framing I tend to tear them around...I mean, I bring them out in the wind and they flap, and I throw them in the back of the car..." Bewick explains this by saying that in the back of her mind, she does realise that she is dealing with something potentially valuable. But at the same time she says: "...if you go on like that you don't do anything. (68)

With regard to sensuality, Pauline Bewick is probably most widely renowned for her unusual but sensitive and effective portrayals of woman in all her stages of maturity, from childhood through to puberty to adulthood. But the sensuous nature of her work extends far beyond the portrayal of the human form, and stems from a genuine excitement by everything around her. A naturally sensuous person, Bewick was taught by her mother at a very early age to live harmoniously with nature and to appreciate its beauty. One of her early memories is the tremendous sense of freedom and oneness with nature she experienced while "dancing naked with a thin veil to a wound up gramophone" on the huge lawn of St. Catherine's School in Almondsbury while she was a pupil there. (13, p.24, par.5)

She describes the Poppy flower, the fading of the colours, the deep red at the base of the petals and rich darkness of the centre as "sensuality personified" She says she can relate very well to the work of American artist Georgia O'Keeffe and her sensual, or sexual, interpretations of flowers (fig.31).

If one accepts Jung's theory, perhaps the fact that she works in the subconscious might be a reasonable explanation for Pauline Bewick's popularity, in spite of her faults as an artist which are readily pointed out to us by the critical press. In the same manner the sensuality of her work is easily accessible, not only to the art connoisseur, but also to the average sensitive human being.



Fig. 32. *Holiday
Man and Wife in
St. Moritz.*

1985

watercolour on
handmade paper.
(Photographed
with permission
of Pauline
Bewick)



This diptych was
painted when the
artist was
particularly
concerned with
growing old.

Bewick is often amazed by the diverse characters of the people who buy her paintings. She takes it for granted that the "normal, sensual women" would like her work, but she does come across the "odd neurotic woman who likes my work...that I cannot understand. How can they tune into it, it makes me wonder?" (68) She also claims that many men have expressed a liking for her work, contradicting John Hutchinson's assumption that her admirers are primarily female. She relates an incident illustrating this:

I once was in my own exhibition many years ago and this big architect comes in with his girlfriend, and he said: 'Jesus Christ Pauline, you paint for men', all excited. And she said: 'Isn't that funny,' she said - a gorgeous looking girl - she said 'I thought my God she paints for women.' And both of them felt very strongly that I painted for them only, which I thought was a very great compliment in itself. But I don't paint for anybody else but myself...If it is pornographic, it is because I must be feeling pornographic. If it is genuinely sensual, it is because I'm feeling sensual. If it is fat, it's because I'm feeling fat and heavy. (68) (fig.32)

THE ARTIST AS AN ILLUSTRATOR

That Pauline Bewick is, or rather, should be an illustrator rather than a painter is generally implied by the critics. It has become a virtually accepted fact, so much so that even the artist herself would not dispute it. She admits that having her works of art classified as "illustrations" used to upset her. Now, she has overcome this problem, recognising herself as fundamentally an illustrator of her own life. Likewise she believes that every picture that anyone paints is an illustration, for all works of art are illustrative of the artist's mood at the time of creation.

For any person familiar with Bewick's work, this is undeniably true, as she constantly paints her thoughts, emotions and surroundings. However, if unfamiliar with her work one could be forgiven for thinking that the majority of Bewick's work is done with a relevant text in mind. Some obvious examples are those paintings which have been related to legends and myths.

Another example is the painting *Woman and Frogspawn* (fig.33) which was chosen to illustrate an article in *Cosmopolitan* magazine concerning the removal of various female reproductive organs, including the ovaries. Whereas this "illustration" seemed to relate perfectly to the subject, it was in fact painted for purely personal reasons and as a full-scale painting in its own right.



Fig. 33. *Woman and Frogspawn* 1980 watercolour and acrylic on handmade paper.
(*Cosmopolitan Magazine*, 1980)

Bewick related the troubled thoughts behind this painting pointing out two contributing factors. Firstly a very vivacious lady-friend of the artist had spent a morning relating various tales of an amorous extramarital adventure, after which Pauline Bewick accompanied her two young children collecting frogspawn in jamjars. It was the reserve that Bewick harboured as to the moral decency of her friend's sexual activities, combined with an unwilling slight repulsion at the feel of the frogspawn, that caused her to paint this picture. (Pauline Bewick, when she is painting, never consciously makes connexions such as this between the events that influence her in everyday life and the idealistic world of her paintings. She does enjoy, however, when asked where the idea came from, attempting to analyse the completed image.)

Likewise *Social and Personal Magazine* (Dublin) reproduced works by Pauline Bewick in a series called *Paintings to Read About* (fig.34). Each painting was accompanied a short story or poem written by the artist. It is naturally possible for these paintings to be termed as illustrations (were it not for the title of the series) as they illustrate the text. However it must be understood that in each case it was the painting that was conceived first and the text is a story to illustrate how the painting evolved. This is the reverse of how an illustration is created.

When illustrating Ulick O'Connor's book *Irish Tales and Sagas* (fig.35), for which her work won wide acclaim, Bewick insists that she was not illustrating his stories, but her own.

I wasn't illustrating anybody else's story, I was illustrating my own story, my own myth. That I do all my life. When I am given a commission I tend to try and slot into my own feeling of myth, reinterpret it into my own myth for it to have any meaning. I don't believe that you can illustrate something you don't feel very deeply.

Pauline Bewick, when questioned on the difference between an illustration and a painting refers to the conception and execution of the work. While illustrating she is aware of what she is drawing, and conscious of her use of line, colour, and tone. The subconscious mind is arrested, it appears, while in painting the reverse occurs. The mind is allowed to explore the subconscious unprohibited by the physical act of creating. In breaking the barrier of illustrative lines, the picture becomes a painting.

Bewick suggests that the reason people consider her work to be illustrative is that think it needs a story to accompany it. But this in her view is true of the work of many artists:



**PAULINE
BEWICK with a
controversial
offering.**

*'Couple Before Breakfast' by Pauline
Bewick. Mixed media, 75x110cm.*

Slipping along through a life and a life ...
It's chance that begets us to this one or that,
It's like picking a ticket out of a hat,
It's like closing your eyes and stabbing a pin
that brings us into the world that we're in.

So now that we're in it and have brains in our heads,
Let's not get too carried away in our beds,
Let's use some proved method to keep down the masses,
To stop man from building all over the passes,
To stop man from digging and rooting down pipes
and stringing long wiring through skies and down dikes.

Let's call to a halt when we've bred one or two
then after that make it for pleasure we'll screw.

PAULINE BEWICK is an artist of repute. She is equally a talented and natural writer.
Her 'paintings to read about' are original and sensual. She lives in Kerry.

Fig. 34. *Married Couple before Breakfast* 1985 watercolour. (Social & Personal, 1985)

I think one would like to know why he [the abstract artist] has done one long red line on a black background. When it is explained that it is the rush hour in New York, it adds another dimension.

The old cliché "every painting tells a story" is synonymous with the thin line existing between painting and illustration. While expressing oneself on canvas in a painting, it is occasionally necessary to provide an explanation, and through this narrative the painting becomes an illustration.

REPRISE

The general message conveyed in this look at Pauline Bewick as an artist is that she is a normal, uncomplicated human being. She comes across as being as direct and unsophisticated (in the best sense of the word) as her paintings, a somewhat welcome refreshment after the complications of the critical press. But if we take a closer look at what the artist says, several ambivalences begin to appear:

Bewick says that she does not heed the critics' word, yet during her black periods she accuses herself of being "facile" and "slight", echoing exactly some of the criticisms made of her work. She insists that she is not dependant on the public's view of her work, yet she does "show off" in order to win approval. Likewise she is a compulsive painter, but she has to keep telling herself that it is worthwhile to paint. She also says that the real value of her art is its therapeutic purging process, yet she considers the postcards of her work to be valuable in promoting herself as an artist.

All these points serve to clarify the fact that Pauline Bewick is not so facile as the critics deem her art to be. They depict a woman who, like all of us, fundamentally seeks praise for her achievements. She has created a self-preserving indifference, however, which as I have demonstrated, must be quite necessary for an artist in her position.

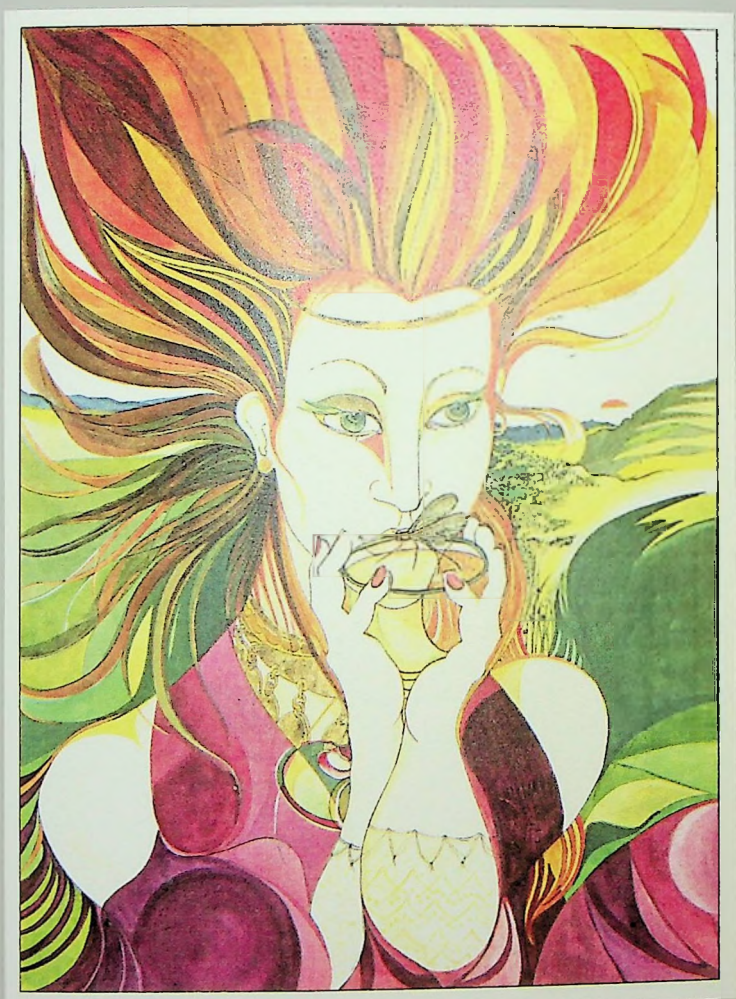


Fig. 35. *Myth Woman* 1980 watercolours on handmade paper. (7, p.11)

CHAPTER 3

A Comparison of Views

At this point in the paper, I think that it is apt to consider the role of the critic in society, in an attempt to reach a deeper understanding of the nature of criticism. Having suggested some considerations in this area, I shall use these as headings to reconsider the critics' responses in Chapter 1. I shall assess these views alongside those of Pauline Bewick, while introducing my own opinion.

THE ROLE OF THE CRITIC

As works of the imagination feature largely in our lives, if not in art, in cinema, theatre, music, television or novels, criticism has the possibility of being a most important activity with an important social role to play. This, however, may not be satisfactorily fulfilled. It is certainly Pauline Bewick's opinion that most critics write for each other, and that they do not merely criticise art but mould it into fashions. It should be considered that even scholarship does not ensure total objectivity, for even scholars have their idiosyncrasies of approach which may influence how they see the work. The high esteem in which for example Picasso is now held by critics of art results in considerable demands being placed upon artists in order to live up to the expectations of fashionable art.

Acknowledging my very limited experience and expertise in criticism I shall only suggest some considerations that would help me to understand the nature of art and criticism. These I have compiled from a variety of sources in order to list a number of points that would be widely accepted as true. I have placed them under the following three headings: to clarify, to explicate, and to judge.

1. To clarify: A critic should become familiar with the work he is judging and pass on an understanding of the work by bringing out its inner meaning. A critic should combine his or her scholarly expertise or factual knowledge with a deeper more personal knowledge of what the artist is saying, to decipher and translate the meaning of the painting into a clearer language and so place it at the public's disposal.
2. To explicate: To consider the work as an object - the result of creative activity - of the world of culture. The critic should generate a greater interest in the public by presenting to them the conditions or influences on the work.
3. To judge: A work of art has, as with any other product or consumer item, a value. The critic must judge with an open mind, not merely feeding the public with his or her personal opinion which may inhibit the response of the individual viewer. It is necessary for the critic to overcome any idiosyncrasies of approach and maintain an openness of mind in judging a work of art. Indeed the critic may be of the opinion that the works judge themselves and his or her function is that of an impartial and prudent witness.

CLARIFICATION

My general conclusion on writing the previous chapters is that the critics' understanding of Pauline Bewick's work is limited. In order to clarify an artist's work to the public, one must have a deep understanding of the motives and messages conveyed. This happens rarely in Bewick's case.

The critics do, however, attempt to clarify her technique. This is seen in the detailed discussion of whether she is a painter or an illustrator. I shall deal primarily with this issue in the following section, discussing relevant subjects such as the accessibility of Bewick's work.

In the second chapter I have established that Bewick's work is frequently used to illustrate text for which it was not intended. I have also established that her illustrative work is generally more favourably received than her paintings. This, it has been suggested, is due to the paucity of themes which Bewick deals with in her work, that her work becomes enriched when illustrating another person's concept. Bewick maintains, however, that when illustrating a text, she must translate it into a form which

she personally can relate to, her own myth. It is only in this way that Bewick can illustrate, for she believes that it is impossible to illustrate anything that is not felt very deeply. What this implies is that the illustrations which are reviewed so favourably are the result of Bewick's imagination as much as her paintings. I personally cannot perceive much difference in execution, style or content between Bewick's illustrations for Ulick O'Connor's *Irish Tales and Sagas* (fig.35) and her paintings. Whether this suggests that Bewick's paintings are illustrations, or that her illustrations are paintings, I am not sure.

Having read Pauline Bewick's views on the subject, let us revert to the points taken from the critics' views on what qualifies a work of art as a painting. The first is that the artist must express a personal theme or emotion. Both Arnold Usher and Sean McCrum believe that Bewick lacks this quality. Yet, on reading the inspiration for her paintings, it is clear that this is precisely what she is doing through her work. She confessed to a friend the method she employs when inspiration is absent:

When I'm stuck and can't think of what to paint or draw, I sit and analyse the strongest feeling in me...This way one has a subject each time to paint or draw and it's very therapeutic. (13, p.121 para.3)

The artist constantly describes her personal concerns on paper, be they thoughts, emotions or purely her fascinations with beautiful things.

The second is a more controversial matter. The imagery must not be literal or descriptive, and must evoke a strong response in the surveyor. In general, Bewick has been criticised for her lack of literal knowledge, as in her depiction of the human form. Therefore if we are to take the critics' word at face value, Bewick complies also with this second rule.

If we are to look deeper than the surface, however, the literal aspect of Bewick's work lies in its easy comprehension. It is true that her imagery is easy to comprehend once the reason for painting the picture is known. It has been demonstrated, however, with particular regard to the sensuality of her work, that it is possible to evoke a wide range of responses from the critics. The diversity of emotions which the artist exorcises in a painting can account for the broad variation of criticisms of her work. "Sensual", "innocent", "optimistic" and "erotic" have all been used to describe Bewick's work, and relate likewise to the artist's character. she is an artist who honestly pours her personality onto paper. That these emotions have been received and communicated by the critics would imply that Bewick's work possess another quality of "fine art".

The main criticism in this area seems to lie in Bewick's decorative content. I wonder why it is that a decorative work is not considered valid as a serious painting? Virtually all the critics regard Bewick's need to decorate her work in an unfavourable light. Possibly it is considered, (maybe rightly so), that Bewick uses her decorative skills to cover up any technical pictorial difficulties. Perhaps it is because, as John Hutchinson suggests, this decorativeness prevents one from reading beneath the surface of the work. The second criticism is more serious, if it implies that the emotional force with which the picture was created cannot be communicated because of the decoration.

Thirdly, for a work to make the transition from an illustration to a painting the use of the medium must be taken into consideration. McCrum's argument that Bewick does not transmit a notion through her use of the medium is a valid one. Her watercolours tend to be applied flatly, her ink line is gracefully sinuous, and this does not change with the mood of the painting. Perhaps if her technical mood did change or intensify, the "engagement of the nervous system" of the viewers of which the *Introspect* committee write might also be achieved.

Bewick, however, does differentiate between illustrating and painting in her use of the medium. She states that during illustration the process of using a medium is a conscious one, while subconscious in painting. This may be so, but the emotions behind the painting seem unable to penetrate the artist's well-formed style, even at a subconscious level.

Sean McCrum would agree with this stating that the way in which she puts line and colour down onto paper indicates an extremely shallow subconscious state, if any at all. In his opinion such a decorative self-conscious style could not be the product of a true uninhibited description of an emotion. This might be true. It may also be simply a result of the artist's recognised uniformity of style and technique. The imagery perhaps does spring from the subconscious, but it is the transition between art as a therapy and art as a communication which requires greater depth. Pauline Bewick maintains that her painting is as natural as eating or thinking, but these processes are not laid out for public consumption and therefore they require less skill in the area of creativity. In general, I think it can be agreed that Bewick does not comply with this third rule.

We have learnt from the critics that Pauline Bewick is not suitable to be called a "serious" painter. We can also say that from Bewick's accounts of her own views as an artist, that she is not an illustrator, in the critics' sense of the word. A combination of

Bewick's exuberance and her wish to make her work accessible to a wider range of people than most artists, has earned her Molly McAnailly Burke's title of "pop" artist. She considers this to be someone who makes a living out of art, through being "clever and prolific". In my view being a "pop" artist does not decrease the seriousness of an artistic career

It is these characteristics which earn Bewick the title of "pop" artist, and a low reputation among art critics: her prolific output, her accessibility. Dunne has even expressed an implied criticism of "her public", a public who possibly are new to the area of art appreciation.

It seems to me to be an outdated idea that a "Pop" artist can not be taken seriously. This opinion has been updated in other artistic fields, and the change is already late to be emerging in art. Take for example music - "Pop" music. This particular style of music has established a class of its own with separate standards and judgements of seriousness. Similarly pantomime and theatre are not judged using the same criteria. Perhaps it is time we had serious critics of "pop" art to update the criteria by which to judge the work of "pop" artists such as David Hockney, Jim Fitzpatrick and Pauline Bewick.

The "pop" artist's idea of accessibility is clearly considered quite differently by artist and critics. Pauline Bewick, in endeavouring to reach as wide an audience as possible, views accessibility as a necessary and very positive quality in her work. The critics on the whole react negatively to this considering the accessibility of Bewick's work to cheapen it to the realms of commercial art.

The issue of the pretentious elitism of the art galleries is illustrated by Aidan Dunne in what I would consider to be an appalling show of snobbery in a possible attempt at the clarification of Bewick's work. In describing it as "culture without pain" which leaves "her public" feeling pleased, relieved and flattered, he is not so much criticising the artist's work as the intellect or the appreciative capacity of "her public". The very distinction between Bewick's public and the general public implies to me that he feels that one must be lacking in cultural understanding to appreciate her work.

Perhaps Dunne would prefer that the art galleries were reserved for the elite or the academics and their corresponding artists. This, Bewick is against in principle, and not to realise this is a failing in his role as a critic. He not only fails to clarify, he clearly does not have the knowledge to explicate her works to the public. Instead he passes an

unfounded judgement not only on the works, but also on the public themselves. If this is the function of an art critic, possibly my assumption that a critic is potentially valuable to society, was misguided.

In attempting to clarify Bewick's work, it is possible that the critics attempt to read too much into it. Although she is certainly not facile or shallow as a person, my understanding of her work is that her primary concern is not with communicating a complicated message to a receiver. The one message she wishes to transmit is her simple joy of living, and any subsidiary emotion expressed in a painting is purely for the purging of the artist herself. Bewick does not intend that the public should be able to read her psychological state at the time of the conception of the painting, her sole wish is that her paintings should "cheer people up" (33). Perhaps in this way she will have contributed something good to this world.

In judging Bewick by the standards of "serious" painting, this is one of the areas in which she is considered lacking. But we do not, to my knowledge, have any defined standards of "pop" art. As I understand it, depth of emotion is not one of the necessary requirements.

EXPLICATION

The critics have established that Bewick can not be classed as a "serious" painter. However, classifying her work as not serious, they also fail to consider it as a result of its correct culture, in other words to explicate it. In this section I shall discuss the interpretations of Bewick's motives behind her art, and the critics' understanding of whence it flows.

With regard to Bewick's retrospective exhibition in the Guinness Hop Store, and having read her reasons for exhibiting such a quantity of pictures, the criticisms on the subject are reasonable. They do not, however, seem to take into account Bewick's motives for holding the exhibition. Possibly Bewick could have made the necessary points with fewer paintings. Maybe then she would have been better received. But Bewick's reasons for holding the exhibition were not to illustrate her life or to be well received by the critics. The motive behind exhibiting 1500 works was as the artist puts it "to show off" how prolific she is. McCrum's criticism is of the selection of the paintings which was undertaken by the artist herself. His opinion is that she did not sufficiently realise the difference between the public's needs and her own, a fair

comment for an intermediary between the artist and the public. But Bewick, although extremely communicative with her public, emphasises that she is not dependent on its view of her work, nor that of the critical press, she took the risk of negative responses in order to satisfy herself.

Here is one of the ambivalences of which I spoke at the conclusion of the second chapter. If she is not dependent on the public's view, why then exhibit at all? Bewick herself expressed slight confusion on this point saying that she employed a public relations officer to ensure the exhibition's success and to notify the public and the press, inviting them to attend. Yet, she says that in a strange way, she did not care.(68)

Aidan Dunne also in his criticism of Bewick's retrospective exhibition at the Guinness Hop Store fails to recognise Bewick's motives for such a quantity of paintings. He does attempt an explanation for the quality in Bewick's work which he dislikes. He suggests that her work would be improved by less quantity and more quality. As we have read, in the previous chapter, Bewick is a compulsive painter - each new thought provokes a new painting. But I am unsure whether, if Bewick halved the number of paintings which she " churns out" her work would lose the "sprawling, indiscriminate air" which Dunne so much dislikes. He seems to be referring principally to her style, and this is one of the early established, unchanging qualities in Bewick's work. Perhaps to satisfy Dunne she would be obliged to alter not only the number of works produced but also the style in which they are executed.

Pauline Bewick has admitted that she is very fond of decoration. The putting onto paper or the intricate patterns, the colourful dots, the decorative curvacious lines and the delicate colours results in great satisfaction for the artist.

I do not consider myself to be in a position to judge whether Bewick's work is shallow. Certainly it is decorative and literally superficial in that the eye can be detained on the surface of the picture for this reason. The artist, on the other hand, seems to involve her whole being in her work. For this reason she contributes considerably more depth to her work than is generally understood. This once again underlines the necessity for the art critics to know and understand the work which they endeavour to judge before the public.

JUDGEMENT

It follows naturally that as the critics have not adequately fulfilled clarification and explication, unfair judgements are frequently passed.

Dr. Margaret Piggott, Professor of Women's Studies at Oakland University, is also a collector of Bewick's work and has reviewed her work both in periodicals and on radio in the United States of America. She states that there are two main contributing factors to Pauline Bewick's lack of acceptance in the world of serious art. The first of these she names as Bewick's watercolour medium, and the second, her sex. In her opinion:

It is very difficult for a woman to be respected today. It is a terribly anti-feminist area to be in. It has become acceptable for a woman to be a crafts-person, women all over the world have had to fight for this for years....Bewick has to battle with being a woman. Unfortunately, most art critics are men. She has to battle what most men think makes art great. (73)

Pauline Bewick's reception of Dunne's reference to her "casual mode of approach" (32) indicates that a light-hearted approach to her work is important for her. Dunne obviously views it as a quality which results in work on a somewhat superficial level.

As I interpret his criticism, Dunne makes a connexion between superficiality and femininity. It is this that I cannot comprehend. Could it be that in 1980 when Dunne wrote this review, that he had not yet passed out of the age of the Victorians? Perhaps he had not yet realised that women today are considered to be of an equal intellectual and emotional capacity as men, and a feminine artistic response to be equally as valid as a masculine one. Domestic subjects may seem casual to Aidan Dunne, yet they are subjects to which today all women and most men can relate, and clearly are of great significance to Pauline Bewick.

It is in this area of judgement that the majority of the critics responses lie. Our professional intellects seem to frequently take upon themselves a role not fitting of the station of critic, that as as a maker of unfounded judgements. Personally, although I readily acknowledge the need for art critics in their particular role, I cannot conceive the relevance in such comments as James Thompson's when he writes:

If art of sustained effort and achieved weight and meaning is to have any significance, then her work must be recognised for the slight and modish production it is. (63)

In writing this, Thompson at once expresses a personal opinion and hinders an unbiased response from the reader. He also forms a contradiction. If the work of Pauline Bewick be as slight and trivial as Thompson maintains, why is it that he feels he must protect the reputation of the "serious" art world? If Bewick's work does pose such a threat, either it is not so slight as Thompson implies or we should reconsider the validity of the standards representing this "serious" world of art.

Again in this case Bewick is being judged by the role requirements of another class of art. It is the art critics who have placed Bewick in another category, deeming her not worthy of being a serious painter. Why then do they persist in judging her as a serious painter?

Many critics have implied that the quantity of Bewick's work decreases its value. Dorothy Walker, on the subject of Bewick's prolific output however seems to shun quantity on principle. I would understand that she chooses Botticelli as an example of a widely celebrated high artist, and yet even 1500 of his works, often considered to be the ultimate achievement in painting, would be unacceptable. This criticism, therefore, can have no bearing on Pauline Bewick as an artist. Like that of James Thompson, if a critic is to play a constructive role in society, I cannot see that a remark such as this is of benefit to either artist or public.

In suggesting that less paintings would create a more favourable impression of Pauline Bewick, it is interesting to note that the critics suggest a well-known marketing technique; to decrease the quantity and increase the price of a product generally wins it higher esteem and creates greater demand. This provides a contradiction to the accusations that Bewick does not vary from her commercially viable style, and that she has boosted her artistic career through the publicising of her childhood. What the critics are doing is suggesting better marketing on one hand, and on the other criticising her for being a successful marketer.

With regard to the judgements that Bewick's work lacks any great knowledge of anatomical structure, I would agree. But the artist never paints the human figure from life. Where this is concerned the emphasis is on the imaginative concept Perhaps a greater clarification and explication of Bewick's work would result in a judgement more appropriate to her technique.

As mentioned in chapter two, Bewick's paintings depict three definite moods. The second that she mentions is the "background realism plus the emotions of the human

being conceived". It is this category to which Bewick's depictions of the human form belong. She is not interested in creating an anatomically exact figure. She is more interested in portraying her emotions through the figure. The criticisms on this subject, therefore, do not perturb the artist.

At the risk of only scraping the surface of a subject far beyond my capabilities, I would like to express my own understanding on making a judgement such as this.

According to the research of Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, the comparison between nature and art exists far back in the history of art. The ability to render to perfection natural objects was termed Layman's View. This maintained that the expertise of the artist lay in his ability to faithfully copy nature to create a life-like subject. To illustrate the emphasis placed on excellence by the Layman's View, I shall quote an anecdote from "The Elder Pliny's Chapters on the History of Art" as related by Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz.

Zeuxis painted grapes; some sparrows flew by and pecked at the grapes. Parrhasios then asked Zeuxis to accompany him to the studio where he would demonstrate that he could do something like it. In the studio Zeuxis asked Parrhasios to pull back the curtain covering the picture. But the curtain was painted. Zeuxis acknowledged Parrhasios's superiority: 'I took in the sparrows, but you took me in.' (6, p.62, para.2)

There are many anecdotes of this kind throughout the history of art, drawing a comparison between art and nature, and thus grading the work in it's excellence of faithful forgery of nature. These standards are still found today in the admiring comments of "It looks as if it were alive", or "almost life-like".

It appears that these standards in art, although perhaps somewhat out dated in this era of abstraction, are still applied. In order to be considered an excellent draughtsperson in the critics' eyes, one must have the ability to faithfully copy the beauty of nature. Only then can an artist create his or her own form of art.

This, however, contradicts Patrick Pye's references to the redefined standards in painting. He states that since the invention of the camera, painting is no longer a literal description or record of nature. Likewise, the theory of the excellence of an artist being decided by his or her "life-like" reproductions can be contested by the non-realistic drawings of animals in the Paleolithic age. It is generally conceded that these have not been bettered. Why then do the critics of art persist in making comparisons between the

works of art and the works of nature? It seems to me that their standards in art would benefit from being up-dated to comply with the era in art that they are criticising.

John Hutchinson's suggestion (42) that Bewick's work is currently not in vogue causes some scepticism as to the objectivity of the critics' word as art criticism, implying as it does that what is fashionable is an important consideration in the world of "fine art". Who is it that has the authority to say which artists are in vogue at any particular era in art history? Great artists, in my opinion are always in vogue. For the critics to take it upon themselves to decide who or what the present "trend" includes, results not only in a superficial view of art, but also in fashionable art. One of the fundamental requirements of a critic is the ability to judge a work, the result of a creative activity, with an open mind. If this is not happening, Pauline Bewick is justified in advising young artists to disregard the critical press. (28)

If the reason for the frequent criticisms of Pauline Bewick's work is that her work is not fashionable, there seems to be a contradiction in the matter of her style. In creating a recognisable style which is commercially viable, Bewick is in effect following her own fashion. This question of Bewick's "virtually patented style" is one of the areas which causes most critical response. If the critics are simply disapproving of an artist because he or she follows a different fashion to the one to their liking, it reduces the whole issue to the ludicrous level of "Mods" and "Rockers".

The final judgements made by the critics which I wish to consider are those which accuse Bewick of selling herself as an artist, both through her instantly appealing personality, and her unconventional upbringing. I would consider it to be true that it would be very difficult to dislike Bewick as a person, and it may follow that if one knows her neither is it possible to dislike her work. If we take as examples Clare Boylan, David Shaw Smith and James White, all three of whom have worked very closely with the artist, none of them find fault with her work. In fact, concerning his film documentary, David Shaw Smith was at pains to point out that it was not meant as a critical appraisal of Bewick's work. Yet he did allow two well-known female writers to express uncritical appraisal of her work (40). I do not think that this is a negative reflection on Bewick's painting, but rather a positive reflection on her as a person.

With regard to her selling herself as an artist through creating a sensation out of her unusual childhood, it is my opinion that the public has a great deal to do with this. According to Ernst Kris and Otto Kurtz (6, p.13, para.1) the universal interest in

everything reported about the childhood and youth of not only artists but all exceptional persons, has deep roots in the human mind. This interest, they say, can be accounted for in two ways. Firstly, the belief that childhood events can have a decisive influence on the future development of the person. The second interprets the earliest available information about heroes' lives as premonitory signs. In other words, it sees the experiences and the actions of the child as an indication of his future achievements.

Both of these theories appear to stem from society's urge to find some access to the exceptional or gifted figure. It is the second of these I shall refer to in relation to Pauline Bewick. The artist confirms the interest of the public saying that she is often asked to talk about herself, her childhood background, her work and her views.(68)

It strikes me that one cannot criticise Bewick for having had an unusual and exciting childhood, for this is fundamentally what is happening. The life history of most, if not all, artists is known and is considered an important part of any major work on them (possibly for the reasons discussed above). Not all, however, have lead such an unusual life as Pauline Bewick, therefore not all are so greatly publicised or widely discussed.

It also must be considered that Pauline Bewick's childhood story did not become publicly prominent until her career as an artist was established. During the '50s and '60s none of the press reviews mentioned her childhood, excepting one which wrote about her mother's house in Rathmines, in which lived a small colony of art students. If Bewick were using her background as a selling point, surely it was a great mistake on her part to withhold the information for twenty years! It wasn't until Bewick became prominent as an artist that the story of her childhood emerged. This may certainly have been as a result of the public seeking access to the artist.

REPRISE

It is quite clear at this stage in the discussion of the role of the critic that it is not often satisfactorily fulfilled in the case of Pauline Bewick. There appears to be a general lack of understanding of both the artist and her work, which leads to a tendency to make unfounded judgements. If a critic is to be of benefit to society, it is not as a sensationalist or "trend-setter". The art critic should be in the position to place art at the public's disposal through using his or her superior knowledge of the subject. Personal

opinions must be stifled in an attempt to provoke responses from the public which have been influenced in no way.

CONCLUSION

Pauline Bewick is indeed a curious phenomenon in the world of art. The critics maintain that she is not a "fine artist" or painter. She is not a commercial or graphic artist as she does not work on a commission basis. Neither is she an illustrator because her paintings are designed to be hung. She is a compulsive artist who has become extremely popular through both her personality and her work.

The critics have attempted to make Bewick fit into one of these categories in their criticisms. Having decided that she cannot be classed as a painter, many of them have essayed the category of illustrator. Bewick, however, refuses to remain within these confines, thus causing some degree of confusion. Some critics have expressed a wish for her work to remain within the covers of a book. Another considers it necessary to protect the reputation of "art of sustained effort" in the presence of Bewick's "facile" efforts.

My suggestion is that Bewick's work belongs to the 'popular' cultural world of the 20th century, and should be judged as such. It is time that "popular" art be recognised as a valid and serious category in the art world. Personal biases and standards of previous eras in art should now make way for a new category in art which possess its own merits.

The role of an art critic in society should also be restated. The clarification and explication of an artists work should be undertaken with an open frame of mind. the critic should bear in mind that he or she is a public service, merely a interpreter who uses scholarly expertise to make art more accessible to the public. It is then the role of the public to form a personal opinion of the work. It is all too frequently that arts reviews nowadays become a battle of cultural fashion and bitchiness.

It is interesting that of the three art critics with whom I corresponded in writing this paper, Patrick Pye is also a practicing artist. While the other two freely expressed personal grievances about Bewick's work, Pye merely outlined his interpretation of "painting" and "illustrating". He concluded his letter:

I wish you luck with Ms. Bewick, but don't ask me to say ought further about her work. All painters are magicians totally loyal to their own brands of magic and the connoisseur must pick his way between these contradictions of taste as best he may. (74)

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