

acceptance of mahogany for fresh acts' (p. 141). It is shown rather by the recurrence of a group of central images that betray the obsessions eating deeper and deeper into her personality. At the end, she has no country, no family, not even a name. Her life, in sad irony, has fulfilled Gertie Stepper's aspirations for her own old age:

'When I am old all I shall want is a cup of tea, and die.'

It made Theodora laugh. As if it could ever happen this way. (p. 42)

But it does. We last see Theodora thanking the doctor who has come to take her to a mental home:

she held her head on one side as she had seen ladies do on receiving and thanking for a cup of tea.

Then they all laughed.

## *Before the Monsoon*

The parched brown plains of Hindustan  
drowse beneath the brass bowl of the sky.

Through clouds of dust the unrelenting sun  
opaquely glows above the huddled village

vaguely curled around its shrunken pool  
and almost empty tanks. In the furnace

of early afternoon nobody comes  
or goes down the narrow unswept lanes.

From exhausted fields the few gaunt cattle  
seek the engulfing shade of a ruined wall.

Everywhere there is silence, silence  
and the dull timeless ache of apathy.

RAYMOND TONG