

Jane Southon

**...IF YOU ASK THEM,
VERY MANY PEOPLE TURN OUT TO HAVE HAD
WHAT YOU MIGHT CALL MYSTICAL EXPERIENCES.**

This is mine. I feel defensive about it, so the writing is staccato.

Five of us were travelling about sixty miles by car. I was the front passenger. Perhaps we were all in an altered state of consciousness, high on a week-long trip on open living. Our eye muscles had relaxed. We were not making shrewd competitive evaluations of each other. The talk bricks made constructions instead of being used as missiles. There was a lot of laughing.

Miles and miles. Some wrong turnings. Laughter. Quiet. The car radio and Beethoven. I had leant my head back on the top of the seat. Then suddenly I found myself in the midst of an experience more overpowering and memorable than any other twenty seconds of my life.

The sensation of going forwards fused in some way with the music. As if detached from the car, I felt myself hurtling, feet first, timelessly, joyfully, down along through the tunnel of the trees that were arched above the road. I felt holy. Strange words from me. I felt consumed with holiness. A kind of ecstasy spread from my hands and feet, up through my body, to a climax round my mouth. I had never before been aware of the spread of minute muscles all round my mouth, as they relaxed and opened into a huge and grateful orgasmic acceptance.

Then, as if awaking, I said, 'I have known my death'. After I had heard myself say the words, I began to feel their meaning. Thoughts came up. How could I know that I had known my death? But I remembered the dropped jaw and gaping mouth of corpses. Death of a man who, sitting in a bus, had turned to the person next to him and said peacefully, 'I am dying', and then died.

Later, too, I rummaged the likelihoods of my birth memories blending with feeding memories blending with sexuality to make my vision or whatever it was. I found my reflections plausible and quite unhelpful.

What transcends analysis for me is the strength I have from that little death, that illusion of death: the possibility of a death not wracked with remorse at wasted life; a death clear of thoughts and memories and such irrelevant furniture; death as an overpowering joyful experience, a culminating ecstatic giving in love.