

Notes for Podcast 10 & Strangeness and Charm, 1999 Part Two, 67 Skies

It was felt that '& Strangeness and Charm' should be discussed over two podcasts, as we wished to play '67 skies' in its entirety because it is such an unusual and iconic track. With words by Mike, and music by Chris and Pete it started off as three songs which now merge seamlessly into each other. The full title of the track is '67 Skies & Time to Change (Out-Tense). Cut the Colours Just like Spitalgate Hill.' The spoken words at the beginning included family and friends.

More information: <https://holyground.co.uk/strangeness.html>

In 2023 Pete spent some time discussing & Strangeness and Charm, particularly 67 Skies with his friend Richard Godden. Richard is a professor of English and he shared his insights in a series of email notes:

Dear Pete,

Thank you for both the tape and the transcribed lyrics: reversal of sound seems an apt accompaniment to the sustained temporal reversal that drives "67 Skies", but first... it is a great song, and has been a thoughtful pleasure to listen, read and relisten to it. What follows, for what it's worth, amounts largely to a transcription and elaboration of my notes, and of the comments we exchanged while I was in Wakefield.

The lyrics make a claim for what could be described as temporal distention ("years wrap over from the future....looking forward to the past"), that is for a time in which memory, present perception and anticipation 'distend' one another, producing an experience of temporal density. But the prevalent elegiac tone of the song contradicts that experience: the tolling of the bell, the fading of the "distant hills" and the onset of darkness, wind and rain. So muffled, "tomorrow" and "change" get short shrift: for example, the repeat of the "67 skies" that pour through the window, and "fill the eyes" (a great image) results in a verse whose reiteration introduces primarily the notion that the "darkness IN the corners" seeps "FROM" those corners," presumably to blur the eye with a grief that dedicates both the "real" and its "realization" to a much mourned past. The backward glance, so soaked in rain all but literally 'weeps.' Given what you told me about the singer/writer of the lyrics, I would somewhat clunkily move from the song as an elegy, a form that 'mourns,' to the song as an expression of 'melancholia.' The distinction (borrowed from Freud) runs as follows: mourning 'fills its mouth with words' about a lost person, thing, or idea, in order to get on with living. Melancholia 'swallows' (cannot express) and so gets on with dying. The melancholic has committed so much of his/her life to the loved idea (thing, person) that to give up that precious item would be like dying. The 'swallow,' in effect, creates a crypt (or cryptic vault) within the melancholic, a space, barely available to the consciousness of its carrier, within which the lost precious refuses to be lost. Clunk. None of this may apply, but the multiple voices at the song's start do share and design versions of a space in which they wish "to stay...forever." In doing so, they all but constitute an echo-chamber (voiced, but building a set of landscapes conspicuously empty of human sources) into which persons may vanish (the encrypted crypt or the darkness come 'from' the corners of a room). In its structure, the song's lyric 'circles back,' "There were then...There will be again"...tacitly reversing the claim for "one step backward...two steps forward" ... all the steps are "backward." What lies back there is essentially, though beautifully, mystified (the rosary, angels, earlier agricultural production...childhood as bolt-hole and locked door?). So, sound reversal 'sounds' entirely true to the considerable force of "67 Skies": even the title encrypts...why '67'?

Sorry, I got carried away: the jottings of a tired and retired academic who is avoiding painting the back of a shed. Stay sane, Richard