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Ideas and Aesthetics: An Analysis of the Concept and Presentation of Evil in Certain Great Novels of the Nineteenth Century

Kenneth Lash

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT AND
PRESENTATION OF EVIL IN
CERTAIN GREAT NOVELS OF THE
NINETEENTH CENTURY

KENNETH LASH

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IDEAS AND AESTHETICS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT
AND PRESENTATION OF EVIL IN CERTAIN GREAT NOVELS
OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of English
University of New Mexico

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Kenneth Lash

1948

This thesis, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Graduate Committee of the University of New Mexico in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Francis P. Stokes
DEAN

May 31 - 1948
DATE

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PREFACE

I should like to acknowledge my debt, and give my thanks, to Dr. Hubert G. Alexander of the Department of Philosophy and to Drs. George T. Arms and Cecil V. Wicker of the Department of English Literature at the University of New Mexico. Conversation with Dr. Alexander led directly to this thesis; continued help and encouragement from Dr. Arms and Wicker made possible its completion. All three have given freely of their time and knowledge. I should like also to thank Miss Nancy Trammell, a librarian at the university, for her help with manuscript.

Kenneth Lash
June 17, 1948



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CHAPTER I

QUESTIONS OF HYPOTHESIS, PROCEDURE, AND DEFINITION

1

As the title of this paper indicates, I assume the existence of an important relationship between the idea and the aesthetic expression of it. I believe that this relationship takes shape as an influence -- the influence of content upon form. Certainly this is not a new hypothesis, but I have not yet seen a careful examination of it in connection with the novel. Nor is there, so far as I know, any general agreement upon the extent of this influence.

I have chosen to examine content in the light of its concept of evil. This is not a completely arbitrary choice. During a recent period of intensive and varied reading, I was struck by the fact that, almost without

¹ The novels included for specific examination date from 1831 to 1902. I feel it permissible to include The Wings of the Dove and Heart of Darkness (both 1902) because they sum up a nineteenth-century development as well as initiate a twentieth.

exception, the contents of the major works shared one uniform characteristic: a preoccupation with the problem of evil. I found this especially true of the novel, a form of literature which, in its greater manifestations, might in one sense be termed a vision of evil. It was a perception of this pattern which led me to believe that a strong connection must exist between our literature and our attitudes toward evil. These attitudes comprised, at least for the novel, the matter of content. It seemed certain that they must somehow have ramifications into form.

It occurred to me that an investigation of this relationship would be double-edged, for it would to some extent cut into the old problem of the degree of connection between ethics and aesthetics. The study seemed a bit formidable, but it interested me. I was further intrigued by the thought that it might yield some further insight into the relationship that exists between all writers of "high seriousness" regardless of geographical or chronological boundaries. The project seemed valid, and the possible rewards well worth the effort; I decided to attempt it. There remained to be decided the question of procedure.

I determined to restrict myself to the novel. It was here that the concentration upon evil had impressed me most strongly, and a little post facto reasoning persuaded me that it was a logical choice. Only poetry could, so far as recent production is concerned, compete with it in richness and variety. I rejected poetry for two reasons: 1) almost since its inception, the novel has been the mass literature of our age, and as such it is a stronger reflector of trends -- both ethic and aesthetic; 2) since I was in any case to be dealing with abstractions (concepts of evil), the explicit qualities of prose would provide a firmer base upon which to meet my reader.

With this much decided upon, there remained the problem of scope of investigation. It was obvious that I could not trace attitudes toward evil and relationships of content and form in any given novel without the use of generous detail. The subject demanded depth of examination. But a certain breadth was required too if my conclusions were to rise above the level of phenomenal significance. I settled upon one of three possible centuries -- the nineteenth.

My choice of this century was the result of several separate beliefs and a preference: first, I preferred to get as close as possible to contemporary literature, without getting so close that my view would be obscured by history-in-the-making rather than abetted by history made; second, I believe this to be literature's richest century since the sixteenth; third, this century represents for me a kind of culmination of the trend toward literary preoccupation with evil.

The decision to make the investigation international in scope was implied in the very purpose. One wished to run no risk of mistaking national tendencies or situations for broader aesthetic truths.

With the field of investigation thus determined, there remained only the question of choice, that is, the assembling of a specific list of nineteenth century novels for detailed study. Since I could not reasonably cover a great list, and since I was primarily concerned with artists of the highest stature (those most universal in scope, most penetrating in depth), quality was patently the yardstick to be applied. I would restrict myself to "great" novels (no more than one by any single author, so as to get more breadth). The decision was to rest primarily upon my own conviction that each of the works

selected was (in varying degrees, of course) a major work, either as concerned its own merits, its importance as an influence, or both. On these personal grounds I excluded Dickens (who has, after all, nothing more perceptive to say about evil than does my sweet old grandmother, though, like her, he is always talking about it), and I included Flaubert (whose Madame Bovary is to me outrageous as art, but its literary importance cannot be denied). I did, however, rigidly limit my choice by determining that I should include no novel which was not generally considered by major critics to be a work of uncommon and enduring stature. Thus, though one may perhaps rightfully quarrel with my omissions, I do not think that an inferior book will be found on the list. (It was because I felt this necessity that I was unable to include a German novel, for I know of none in the nineteenth century that could hold its own on this list.)

Next in the line of procedure was the job itself -- the reading and analysis of the books, the checking against other opinion, the working out of the conclusions. The organization of the paper itself would depend completely upon the nature of the findings, since my approach was to be less that of attempting to justify a preconceived hypothesis than that of delving into a body of material

to see what might be found.

It was in the light of these findings that the particular groupings which I have employed finally evolved. It seemed to me that, despite the expected overlapping, the novels fell naturally into three major groups, according to whether the evil manifested itself mainly in personal, societal, or cosmic contexts. Hence I have used this principle for my larger organizational plan, though I attempt at every point to notice cross-references, to keep the classifications as flexible as possible.

One thing further needs fully to be understood: it is the author's concept and presentation of evil only in the novel under consideration, which interests me here. I am unconcerned by what he says before or after (and equally unconcerned by any "intentional heresy" I may commit in regard to his views). It is the particular novel itself, as an integrated statement, which I am investigating -- not the author. Hence, if I say "Tolstoy feels thus and so about evil," there is no sense going to My Confession to affirm or refute it; I shall be speaking only of his statements in War and Peace.

And there is another limitation to be reckoned with. Each of us has his own particular concept of evil as well as a general knowledge of other concepts. He will, whether

consciously or unconsciously, tend to emphasize his own, even if this emphasis takes the form only of extra sensitivity in certain areas. I have tried in this paper to reproduce as faithfully as possible the individual attitude toward evil of each novelist. But my use of the word has certain personal connotations which depend upon my own concept of evil. Thus a definition becomes necessary.

3

There are roughly two kinds of definition: 1) Dr. Johnson's kind, wherein a word or term is given certain definite and restricted meanings so that, upon the ordinary levels of usage, it may pass as common coin and purchase everywhere the same amount of meaning; 2) the kind more often used by philosophers and poets, wherein a term's overtones and extensions of meaning are suggested, and one is asked to accept as hypothesis this particular definition in order that he may follow the argument to reach the insight. It is this second kind of definition which I employ here. I define simply what I mean by this term within the context of this paper, and thus set up the necessary preliminary basis of understanding between us.

My own view of evil is, though not strikingly original, certainly a highly specialized composite. (I suspect this to be true of most people today.) Without some knowledge of its derivation and development, the theory would be apt to sound meaningless. There is, then, an amount of discussion in order.

It should be understood at once that my use of the word evil contains no intentional reference whatsoever to literal belief in the Devil. Not only is diabolism completely alien to my own viewpoint, but, aside from certain symbolic inferences in Moby Dick, none of the novels under consideration allows any room at all for such a concept.

There are other grounds, too, upon which I depart from the orthodox theologian. If there be such a thing as original sin, I accept the inheritance as I do two arms and a nose, and go on from there, confident that there is plenty of sin which I will originate myself (else I should, literally, die "innocent as a babe"). Nor have I any patience with predestination (or direct intervention of any kind), for if evil is predestined by an all-wise, all-good God, then it ceases to be evil and becomes instead simply a bitter-tasting prescription.

I am concerned specifically with a rational and

secular explanation of evil, which has reference, however, to a scale of values essentially Christian in nature. An explanation such as this implies only the acceptance of the spirit of Christianity, and, if rationally conceived, holds good for all who accept this spirit, regardless of the nature of first cause.

Evil, like good, is a concept which, on certain basic levels, we all understand, but which we find difficult to define. Each of us is inclined to emphasize those aspects of evil which have most affected him. The result is, in many cases, a partial definition, if not a partial knowledge. But the object of any definition is to include as many components of the term's meaning as possible, to make a broad and inclusive synthesis.

If we push back far enough into the meaning of evil, if we attempt to make room for all the manifold definitions that have been given, we find ourselves stating simply that evil is whatever harms man. This implies, of course, an anthropocentric concept of the universe, a concept which we can well accept as representative of most of man's thinking. It is clear, certainly, that "evil" is a term applied by man to those forces in the world which hurt him. It does not, so far as we know, exist as a principle outside the realm of

human values (one does not usually conceive of a nail's calling "evil" the hammer that hits it). If we accept this as a starting point, two questions arise: first, what are the sources of this harm? and second, of what does the harm consist?

There would seem to be three major sources of evil: 1) cosmic (the earthquake that kills me), 2) societal (the war that kills or maims me), 3) personal (the self that injures or perverts me).

Cosmic evil would necessarily include the other two, for Nature includes human nature. The distinction is one of convenience, so that we may look for a moment at the evil which stems from the non-human segment of the universe (space, time, matter, plant, animal). Here all is natural process, in itself neither good nor evil, but its manifestations and activities are assigned certain values by man in accordance with the way they affect him. The coming of night, which is beautiful to the tired workman, is mercilessly inexorable to his brother, astray in a foundering boat. Sunlight is "good"; earthquakes are "bad" -- but both are normal functions of the cosmos! (We shall see that Hardy and Melville cannot integrate this truth in the way that Conrad can and does.) There is, then, a conflict between man's values and the processes of nature

which, without exception, are indifferent to man. This indifference, and the hurt to which it gives rise, is the source of so-called cosmic evil.

Societal evil, which includes personal evil to the extent that persons are members of a society, is a more complex thing. The harm is not so apparent, not so obviously a black matter as is a rampaging flood. It is often a subtle and devious concept masquerading under the guise of good, e.g., the social ideal of rugged individualism. The societal ethic conflicts often with the individual ethic, e.g., my society tells me I must condemn and kill, but I do not believe in doing either. Furthermore, societal ethics tend to become "frozen" into laws or mores, but ethical choice is not compatible with laws, inasmuch as every situation in which we are called upon to choose differs to some extent from every other situation, and so requires its own particular solution. Since in Chapter II, Section 2, there is an extended discussion of societal ethics, this summary will suffice for the moment.

Personal evil is that harm which I do to myself (through ignorance or self-deception), or which is done to me by another individual acting as an individual, rather than as an agent of society, e.g., the difference

between the man who shoots me in my home and the man who shoots me on the battlefield. The concept here is too obvious to call for explanation. But there remains, in relation to all three sources, a definition of the harm that evil causes man.

It is patent that this harm is not always physical. Indeed, physical harm per se is neither good nor evil, e.g., an injury may possibly make me bitter, but it may also, by acquainting me with suffering, broaden and deepen my ability to empathize. If it makes me a better person, the injury cannot be called evil. The final pronouncement in regard to the good or evil of physical harm rests upon its predominant spiritual effect. It is here, in the realm of its effect upon the spirit, that all action and attitude must finally be judged in terms of good or evil. Thus a twofold problem arises: 1) what scale of spiritual values does one use? 2) how does one interpret action and attitude in relation to this scale?

Any concept of evil is, of course, relative to a corresponding concept of good. To speak of one is to speak obversely of the other. Hence, what harms man, what is evil, is that which prevents him from attaining the good. This "good" is -- as seen by poets, philosophers, and theologians alike -- the fulfillment by man of his higher capacities as a human being endowed with intelligence and

soul. His whole scale of values, e.g., mercy, magnanimity, etc., is based upon this sense of his own humanity, his capacity for nobility of thought and action. Thus, as St. Augustine pointed out, man does evil (i.e., harm to himself and others) when he turns from the pursuit of these higher values toward a pursuit of the lower, when he stops moving toward the ideal man and moves instead toward the animal. Here is the main source of evil.

But I think there is a distinction to be made between the man whose "turning away" is conscious and voluntary, and the one who turns without knowing it or because of a pressure he cannot withstand. In both cases evil will result, but in the first case the man himself may be called evil; in the second, it is the pressure or the ignorance which is the evil! Thus St. Augustine's definition requires expansion:

Evil is the turning away by man from his pursuit of higher values, and the force which tends to make him do so.

If this definition holds true, if evil is composed primarily of a series of forces working upon man, and if the larger part of these forces is initiated or sustained by him, then it must also be true that evil is a dynamic factor, since these forces will to some degree necessarily

vary in each particular situation and in every age. Evil may equal x in the sense that it is always a manifestation of the destructive side of Nature (mainly human nature), but x often shows up in the equation masquerading as y, z, a, etc. For instance: to the church fathers of Spain the Inquisition was a "good," and for contemporary variants upon the theme we have the "desirables" of Aryan or white supremacy; respectability, starting as a good, overreaches its logical limits and gives rise immediately to empty sham and rank hypocrisy, both of which remain hidden behind the original virtue; strict family loyalty, a necessary ideal for the early Anglo-Saxon world, becomes a mutual exclusiveness in our own. Thus evil masquerades as good, apparent good turns out to be evil, and the only law to live by is the discovery in every situation of x (genuine evil) and the turning away from it toward y (genuine good)

The perception of evil is at every moment a condition for the pursuit of good.

But what are the conditions of this perception and, of particular import to this paper, what is the function of the artist relative to this perception? The answers to these questions lie for me in the close interrelationship between aesthetics and ethics, an interrelationship which

I take to rest primarily upon their shared basis as forms of intuitive expression.

CHAPTER II

ART AND ETHICS AS INTUITION: AN INTERRELATIONSHIP

1 - Art as Intuition

Art is one of the giant modes of insight. To understand how this comes about is to understand why it is so. And to grasp fully the thing itself is to understand more clearly its extensions. The beginning question is, then -- what is art?

For Benedetto Croce, art is the expression of an intuition. With this I agree, though I find it necessary at several points to depart from his account of the nature of intuition.

He states that knowledge has two forms: it is either logical knowledge, obtained through the intellect, dealing with the relations between things, and productive of concepts; or it is intuitive knowledge, obtained through the imagination dealing with the individual thing itself, and productive of images.¹

This is, perhaps, a useful dichotomy, but it has noticeable leaks. It is quite possible, for instance, to intuit relationships and concepts. And conversely, to

¹ Benedetto Croce, Aesthetic as Science of Expression and General Linguistic, trans. by Douglas Ainslie (London: Macmillan, 1922), p. 1.

restrict logical knowledge solely to the realm of concept is to overlook the fact that such knowledge is often a prerequisite to intuiting, e.g., I am not apt to be able to intuit a tree if I have no prior knowledge of trees.

It is because of this latter factor that one cannot fully accept Croce's statement that intuition is dependent upon nothing outside itself. To some extent, each intuition depends upon the existence within the intuitor of a context of observation related, however indirectly, to the thing being intuited. Furthermore, each successful intuition has a relationship with future intuitions insofar as it becomes a part of our knowledge context, and in the manner in which it produces repercussions, or extensions, of meaning for us.

I would agree with Croce, however, that each intuition is, within itself, a perfectly unified, self-contained whole, characterized by the quality of expressibility precisely because it represents a particular fully and completely grasped, i.e., form applied to matter. It is the intuition -- cerebralized, extended, and formulated -- which constitutes the basis for concepts.

It is for this reason that the traditional master-slave relationship of intellect and intuition is not to be tolerated. The only independent function of the intellect

is the extending and formulating of that knowledge which is given by the intuition. In and by itself, intellect is insufficient for anything but the making of analyses. And though analysis may upon occasion lead to conceptual synthesis, intuiting is characterized by the fact that it is always a synthesizing process. It has to do not only with the particular as such, but with every level of intensive and extensive significance contained within the particular. This can, I think, be best illustrated by a concrete description of the workings of intuition.²

One always intuits a particular thing or relationship. This individuality of the thing intuited holds true even if it be composed of a myriad of separate parts, i.e., I may intuit France. (But in so doing I do not also intuit Germany simply because they are both countries. Any similarities I find after intuiting both, belong to the realm of formulated concept.) I use everything I know, sense, or feel about France in arriving at my intuition, from the most minute factors of food preferences to the most weighty observations of national cultural trends. All my varied observations

² Unless there is a specific reference, Croce cannot be held responsible for what follows.

may suddenly blend together for me in a consistent and cohesive synthesis, giving me a feeling of having arrived at a total knowledge of France. This is the moment of intuition. It is not quite magic. I do not mean that after such an experience I could automatically answer one-hundred factual questions concerning the country. But, if my intuition were a true one, I could do something more important and significant: I could accurately guess the direction taken by that country in any posited situation which was not atypical, without knowing the facts, because I know the country -- its feeling, spirit, and quality of movement. Through an observation of its particulars, I have arrived at a synthesis representative of its essence. This last sentence gives a clue to the method by which intuitions are arrived at.

Suppose that, as a child, you had a favorite tree in your yard. Perhaps you helped plant it, watered and tended it. When it grew, you climbed all over it, observed every branch and knot, every scar in the bark. Then suddenly and inexplicably one day you looked at the tree and "knew" it. It came to life for you; you felt it. You could, if the opportunity arose, have spoken of its life and characteristics in detailed and humanistic terms.

You knew, all at once, the tree in its totality rather than a catalogue of facts about it. This is, I believe, the source of the so-called "mystical" knowledge both of children and adults. It is nothing more nor less than intuiting, and illustrates Bergson's thesis of intuiting as the insertion of ourselves into the thing intuited.³ One can also perceive here the close connection with the theory of aesthetic empathy.

Intuition, then, though it springs to life full grown, does not spring from a vacuum. There is a necessary groundwork of close, thorough, and persistent observation at its base. This much is subject to our will. But the "magic moment" -- the instant when all these separate observations merge into the full-blown intuition -- is not. (Nor has it, so far as I know, been adequately explained by the psychologists. I am attempting here a description rather than an explanation of its workings.)

An incongruous but effective comparison of the moment of intuiting is that of the successful pull on the handle of a slot machine. A number of divergent fruits

³ Henri Bergson, An Introduction to Metaphysics, trans. by T. E. Hulme (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1912).

(equivalent to our observations) spin before our eyes on three separate wheels at blinding speed, completely indistinguishable. Almost before we are aware of its starting, it has stopped. Three pictures appear which we note immediately as the right combination. We have won.

But the difference is this: we cannot consciously pull the handle of the machine. Our subconscious does it -- often when we are not even thinking (consciously) of the game. We know the long history of bathtub theorems and impulsive inventions. These are the work of intuition. But I emphasize again, it does not come to the unthinking, the insensitive. Observation need not be conscious, but it must exist as ore for intuition's refinement. It is the necessary number of separate exposures needed before the vaster view can be pieced together.

One gathers, so far, that intuition has two definite and unfailing characteristics: 1) it is a synthesizing function, 2) it possesses immediacy of impact. Does it follow, then, that all intuitions have the same essential character? In regard to the above characteristics, yes. But on other grounds there is a definite distinction to be made.

I have said that, as I see it, one may intuit

concepts and relationships as well as particulars. These two forms of intuiting, as process, do not differ. Both result in an instantaneous totalizing of given factors by means of an intuitive leap. But here the similarity ends, because the "given factors" are disparate.

In the one case, these factors are abstractions -- in the sense that all concepts and relationships are necessarily abstractions, involving as they do an emphasis upon similarity at the expense of particularity. It must follow then that the intuitive process applied to such material can result only in a synthesizing of abstractions -- that is to say, a further abstraction. To distinguish this type from concrete intuition, with which I am mainly concerned in this paper, I will use the term "abstractive intuition." This type of intuiting makes possible both the mathematical prodigy and the master of metaphor. It is the common property of both science and art. But it must claim for its own the full limitation of purely abstractive thinking i.e., the partial quality of its knowledge. It may understand a certain relationship between entities without understanding fully the entities themselves. It is for this reason that the physical scientists, whose use of intuition for positing hypotheses is limited in most

cases to abstractive intuition (since they are concerned primarily with relationships), can offer us less a total knowledge than a "fingerprinting," a behavior pattern, a descriptive classification. So-called "concrete concepts" are not truly concrete at all, inasmuch as the concreteness which any object has for us depends upon the totality of our knowledge about it. Trees are concrete objects, and there is a certain concept of trees, but the only trees that are really concrete for us are those we know individually. The scientist tells us how, under certain conditions, an atom acts, but he does not know exactly what it is.

But "to know exactly what is is," to express its essential particularity, is the aim of the artist; hence abstractive intuition will not suffice for him. Art concerns itself primarily with the concrete, the particular, rather than the abstract, the generic. Its mode of intuiting, therefore, has to do with the particular. It works upon the "thing" itself, attempting to "get it" in all its totality. It is manifest that certain essences or universals will shine forth from the successful presentation of such a totality (nothing is completely unique any more than it is completely same),

but this abstract quality is only a part of the intuition embodied in the work of art, not the end in itself, as is true of scientific creation. It might be said, then, that concrete intuition contains as a part of itself the matter for abstractive intuition; thus, since the reverse is not true, abstractive intuition becomes to this extent secondary, in the sense that it is part of a larger whole.

I do not find that any further differentiations need to be made between intuitions. It is more or less customary to use the subdivisions of perceptual (sensory), intellectual (rational), and mystic intuition. This may on occasion be convenient, but I feel it to be misleading, for it applies actually either to the dominant means through which the intuition is arrived at, or to the subject matter of the particular intuition. It does not, to my way of thinking, properly apply to the essential nature of intuition as such.

For example, my intuitions of taste will come primarily from sensory observation. I might therefore describe it as primarily perceptual intuition. My intuition of a theorem will be based upon an observation of concepts, hence it is arrived at primarily through intellect. Etc., etc. But: I maintain that both these intuitions will contain within themselves all the factors -- sensory, intellectual, and mystic -- present within

the particular thing being intuited. To believe that a mathematical theorem cannot contain an element of the sensual, or that a taste cannot have a mystic potential, is to live in an oversimplified world.

There are, after all, three levels upon which the human being functions: sense, mind, and spirit. Such being the case, then the world in which he lives must exist, for man, on these same three levels: actuality for him is material, intellectual, or spiritual -- or a combination of the three. And, I believe, every thought and every object has in varying degrees an existence on all these levels, contains within itself some measure of these three components of actuality. Therefore the true and full intuition of any particular will embrace all these components. This totality of content is precisely the quality that best characterises an intuition. It will include the essence of a thing as well as its individualities and potentialities. It will, unless it be abstractive intuition, yield in every case full concrete knowledge. Therefore I prefer to avoid any further subdividing of intuition into 'kinds.' Intuiting itself is basically indivisible as a process. It is a unity.

There are, however, differences of degree, extensive differences, between intuitions.

For instance: as a child, I can intuit a fairy tale. I can smell the cooking in the giant's kitchen, hear the cluck as the golden eggs are laid, feel the hot breath upon me as I scramble with Jack down the beanstalk. This is undoubtedly why a child can hear the same story over and over again without tiring of it. For him it is not simply a narrative of events, but an emotional, intellectual, and spiritual experience. He receives from it definite impressions of danger and safety, wealth and poverty, courage and cowardice, goodness and badness. Through continual hearing he gets, in fact, everything that is in it. He intuits it.

When (and if) he grows up, he may well duplicate this experience with, say, King Lear or Moby Dick (which are, in their own ways, "fairy tales" -- stories of men and events above and beyond life's normalities). The intuiting of both Jack and the Beanstalk and King Lear has the same intensive quality -- the quality of completeness, of total absorption of the thing intuited. The difference is one of degree, of extensiveness. King Lear is an infinitely broader and more complicated intuition, hence a "greater" one. It requires an infinitely wider and more profound fund of observations, and results in a correspondingly deeper and more inclusive synthesis.

It is not possible to "get" it until one has reached a point of mature observation of, and reflection upon, the nature of man in this life.

It is perhaps superfluous to state that the amorphous factors of "time" and "experience" do not necessarily lead a man to the point at which he can intuit Shakespeare or Melville. Neither a miscellany of knowledge nor even a perfectly organized body of specialized knowledge having little to do with human values -- such as that held by many businessmen, artisans, and scientists -- will yield by itself the raw material required for an intuition of great art. It is no substitute for a searching observation of man, his world, and his values, upon which all art is based. Without this kind of activity, one is unable to grasp the larger intuitions of art and philosophy. He substitutes for childhood fairy tales the detective story, the pseudo-historical novel, the best-seller. He may be a man of intelligence, but he remains without wisdom, for there is no wisdom that is not compounded of far-reaching intuitions about humanity. And conversely, I propose that there is no great art which does not contain precisely this type of high-level intuition, of wisdom. It is, in fact, the expressing of such intuition, the objectification in accordance with

aesthetic discipline, which constitutes the matter of art. (I speak in this paper only of true art.)

If this be correct, and if I have truthfully described the nature of intuition, then one must conclude that art belongs to the world of knowledge, not merely to that of feeling or sensation.

We have seen that art, as knowledge, differs radically from science. It concerns itself primarily with the particular, rather than the generic. It offers the totality of a thing, rather than abstracted parts or functions. It offers wisdom rather than intellectual knowledge. And it does so, can do so, because it is an expression of full intuition.

I can illustrate this to some extent by harking back to my subdivision of actuality into the three levels of sensational, intellectual, and spiritual. Man functions on the planes of sense, mind, and spirit. Now these levels of human functioning are, at any given moment, largely separable, without being completely so. (Let us agree that when, for the sake of the argument, I separate them, I am actually pointing to a strong conscious emphasis rather than to a total separation.) Religion, for instance, is spiritual actuality; one functions in regard to it on the level of spirit, with the senses

appealed to secondarily, and in greater or lesser degrees of intensity and validity, through ritual; while mind, superseded by spirit, either makes its peace and is convinced, or else remains hostile and asserts its separate claims. Science is primarily intellectual activity, with the sense and spirit functions as possible, but adventitious, concomitants. Idealistic philosophy, though its field of investigation includes all three levels, is apt to be often neglectful of, or disparaging about, sensory appeal and sense values, and to sacrifice intuition at the altar of concept or system. It is only in art, I believe, that all three levels of human functioning are simultaneously invoked and appealed to, given their just and due attention, called into action together in the manner natural to human activity at its highest point of concentrated perceptiveness, i.e., the moment of intuiting.

The great work of art has form (which includes factors of structure, design, balance, color, tone, etc.) for the senses; intuitive knowledge for the mind; aura (spiritual significance and appeal through truth-beauty) for the spirit. I believe that the work of art, as a truly expressed intuition, will necessarily contain these elements in proper balance.

One notices, for instance, that some books appeal primarily to ratiocinators, some to mystics, some to sensualists, and a few to all serious readers. Only these few are great art, though all of them may be "successful" art. Contrast, for instance, a work such as War and Peace with one of our modern sociological novels in the manner of, say, James T. Farrell. Insofar as the latter work fails to contain spiritual insight or appeal, then to that extent it fails of being the full expression of an intuition, and hence is not a true work of art. One feels of such a novel, as one does of many of the products of the naturalistic school, a preconceived emphasis or "purpose" which is foreign to the nature of art. Ask a great artist how he planned or created a certain work: if he gives you a systematic answer the chances are that he is merely trying to be rid of you. Often he will say, "I saw it that way. I felt it that way." The act of creation is so often described as a feeling simply because it is not the separate function, easily traceable, of mind, sense, or spirit, but rather a fusion of all three in a moment of undifferentiated unity, in which the creator acts, on all levels, as a purely sentient being.

It is for this reason that the great artist's is the broadest possible act of integration. His work, because

it appeals simultaneously to all three levels of human functioning, is closest to the living, pulsating organism. Where science is the crystal, colorless light of mind, and philosophy is that plus the white light of spirit, art is both plus the vivid red of living and sensation.

For example, the work of the philosopher reaches its most effective form (its height of efficacy) when it is incorporated into a work of art, e.g., Plato's Dialogues. Why? Because it is boiled down again to the near-intuitive level, in which concentrated form it has greater impact and is more readily communicated; and because, in the form of art, it is made "alive," truly dynamic. And only the dynamic application of an idea is capable of producing a direct effect of any magnitude. Life swirls around and past static concepts. It is as if life, in itself the very definition of dynamism, is susceptible to a change of direction only through the application of principles equally dynamic. And if it is true that the Art which would perceptively portray life must incorporate within itself this dynamic component, then it must also be true that the Ethic which would wisely sway life must contain an equivalent factor.

2 - Ethics as Intuition

Throughout the course of history, philosophers

have maintained again and again that there exists between aesthetics and ethics an interrelationship both close and inevitable. But, as is the way with theory, it has often been carried to an extreme, with the result that we find art in many periods of history looked upon simply as a vehicle for moral propaganda (e.g., modern Russia), a kind of aestheticized parable, the beauty of which depends solely upon the force and decorum of its "message." The reaction has been natural and violent. Artists, wishing and needing to be free from such restrictions, have often enough swung to the opposite extreme of denying any connection between art and ethics, e.g., the "art for art's sake" school, an attempt which, should it succeed, would make of art an isolated phenomenon, with references to nothing but itself.

The art-as-propaganda theory is obviously untenable, for two reasons: first to judge the success of a work of art by its subject-matter alone is an egregious error, for it implies indifference of choice on the part of the artist; but, as Croce notes, intuition is not subject to will; therefore art must be a matter of spontaneous inspiration. Second, any practical aim assigned to art beyond sheer expression is a superimposition. Once the artist has, to the best of his ability, expressed the

intuition, his responsibility ends. Any use to which his expression may be put is not, strictly speaking, the concern of the artist as artist.

Yet the traditional connection between aesthetics and ethics persists, and has been held by so many fine and diverse minds in so many varied historical periods that it cannot, I think, be explained away. What, in the light of our theory, can be the basis for it? Can ethical significance be found integral to art, inherent in its very nature? I think so. Let us look, for a moment, at certain aspects of ethics.

We must, first of all, distinguish between two types of ethical behavior: 1) personal-universal; 2) societal.

Personal-universal ethics are those which stem from, and reside in, the individual himself, both as a particular person and as a human being. They attain universality when the belief is so deep-seated as to be less a matter of the individual than of homo sapiens. For instance, the human being would seem to have intrinsic in himself certain basic ethical urges or ideals, e.g., mercy, magnanimity, courage, etc.⁴ This ethical core

⁴ I think that the disclaimers of ethnologists and others in regard to the existence of a universal ethic are simply the exceptions that prove the rule. I believe these exceptions to be found mainly where societies have become so 'closed' and highly organized that societal ethics have become too strong for the expression of personal ethics.

has its foundation in Spirit, and is therefore, as potentiality, independent of group, which is why I align it with the "personal." It is, of course, qualified within the individual, in extent all the way from the near-obliteration of the gangster (who has, however, a code) to the exaltation of the mystic. Personal qualities, beliefs, and situations will partly determine the activating force of this innate ethical core.

But there is a second, and equally important, qualifying factor -- societal ethics. These are the codes, mores, and standards of the society in which man lives, which may, to a greater or lesser degree, repress those beliefs or tendencies of his own which are not in accord. Beyond the simple tribal structure, societal ethic becomes an amalgam of national and local mores, along with special "group alliances" possessing an ethical dogma of their own, e.g., religious sects, fraternal orders, secret societies, etc. Insofar as man is governed by these influences, he acts as a member of a group rather than an individually responsible person. He transfers his responsibility to the group and receives in return group sanction.

It can be proved, I think, that each new society

attempts as far as possible to incorporate within itself, as a basic appeal, this universal ethical urge. Let us assume that it more or less succeeds, as one might say that early Christianity succeeded. A fairly close accord between the societal and universal ethic is attained, resulting in a greater spiritual comfort and vitality, diminishing the conflict between personal and societal ethics. But societies are not static; they grow, change, become more complex. New problems and situations arise; an ethical compromise is made "for the sake of our group." Now the societal ethic has deviated from the universal. A new confrontation arises, a new compromise is made; the pattern recurs inevitably. What develops eventually is a societal ethic quite distinct both from its original form and from the universal ethical core, e.g., my instinct is to succour the dying stranger unless he be manifestly an enemy; my society forbids me to do it because there is not enough food available to allow the sharing of it with strangers.

Societies become, one might say, the sum total of the preservation instincts of their individual members. This tendency extends beyond material requisites to embrace ideologies, religions, economic systems, etc.

To the extent to which societies are "closed" (in the Bergsonian sense), they take on ethical characteristics peculiar to themselves. Insofar as these characteristics are at odds with the personal-universal ethic of the individuals within the society, a self-contained conflict is created.

On the level of the purely personal, the conflicts are more in number but less in weight. Society is, at any time, a composite of an infinite variety of individuals, each of whom has, beyond the universal level, slight to great variations of personal reaction to the particular social ethic he instigates or inherits. But the very fact that these reaction-variations are personal and multifarious, keeps the conflict singular and isolated; therefore, as concerns the immediate welfare of society, these are relatively unimportant. It is only when the isolated rebels gain in number and in awareness of each other's existence that the "danger" arises of their banding together by means of finding a common grievance against their society. And by what means is this common grievance justified? By nothing more nor less than a universal ethical (spiritual-ethical) urge! What less than this can supersede social ties, traditions, and fears? Why does every major revolution, whether it be

directed against monarchic or economic despotism, have about it a spiritual force, if not for this very reason? There is always an ethical appeal. A purely destructive urge will not turn the trick, for, in itself, this urge is not a property of man's spirit; hence fascism, for instance, must excuse destructive means by using the appeal of a constructive end.

If my explanation of this process be accurate, it reinforces my argument on two counts: 1) it is a manifestation of the existence of a universal ethical core in the spirit of man; 2) it reaffirms my previous statement as to the necessity of a successful societal ethic to conform as closely as possible to the universal ethic.

One derives from this latter fact what one has known all along: social ethic is, in the nature of things, secondary. One would realize this simply by its transience and variation, quite aside from a knowledge of its fortuitous and adventitious qualities. Therefore, if this be the case, one cannot rely upon society to furnish him with true ethical instruments. He cannot fully accept its codes or its judgments if he wishes to live in accord with his deepest ethical sense or to judge the true ethical significance of the actions of others.

I can conceive of an intelligent and sensitive man to whom a society is the greater good and who will, therefore, freely sacrifice a small part of his personal ethical integrity to preserve this society (though to the extent to which he must make this sacrifice he shows his society to be defective). But I cannot conceive this same man sacrificing his knowledge of the act, of its real significance; for in so doing he would not be making a choice -- and hence his act would have no ethical significance.

One understands, of course, that true ethical behavior necessarily involves choice. If, under compulsion or sheer robotism, I act in the most ethical manner conceivable, it yet cannot be said that I am an ethical person, for I have no choice in the matter. My behavior may be described as ethical, but not myself. (The dog that walks like a man is not a man.) My behavior has no ethical relevance in regard to my personality until I am free to make a choice between the higher and the lower action or pursuit.

This freedom of choice depends upon the coexistence of two factors at the moment of choosing: 1) the amount of freedom, both physical and mental (free will), necessary to allow my making of the choice and my acting upon it

once it is made; 2) sufficient knowledge or awareness of the true nature of the situation to make the question of a choice clear and the answer significant in relation to a preconceived value scale. It is this latter factor which concerns me here, for its corollary must be that a basic requisite for ethical behavior is a thorough knowledge of the situation in which one is involved!

But the chooser himself is a part of the situation in which he is involved. We have found his ethical core to be qualified by personal tendencies and, often, covered over by societal strictures. It is not until this debris is cleared away, not until he understands his own nature as an ethical being -- as well as all the salient elements in any situation in which he is called upon to choose -- that he can discard the convenient cliché for the significant ethical judgment.

And so it is understanding per se, both of self and circumstance, that is the primary requirement of ethical decision. By this very fact understanding becomes our first ethical obligation.

And, in turn, the basic mode of understanding is intuition! This is especially true in relation to ethical understanding, for concepts are inadmissible on the behavior level; since ethical choice is ineluctably involved in

of life, each confrontation is in some respect new, requires its own particular solution or "answer," and is, therefore, truly solvable solely by an intuition of the given situation.

Now if all this be true, then ethics -- like art -- must inevitably be the expression of intuition! And, like art, the intuitions of ethics have to do with the very stuff of life -- not with concepts, as is true of the science of ethics. The connection between ethics and behavior is here, and it is close. But how close? In what way do the intuitions of aesthetics meet those of ethics, and how much do they have in common? In what way do the intuitions of ethics meet those of ethics, and how much do they have in common?

3 - The Interrelationship

We know that ethics have to do with behavior. We know that this means not only behavior toward man, but toward everything in the world. We know further that it involves not only physical behavior -- the thing done -- but mental behavior -- the idea, impulse, or motive behind the thing done, which dictates or prescribes it. Modern psychology has managed to convince many people of the close and indivisible bond between mental and physical behavior. A small band of poets and philosophers have posited the unity of the mind.

We acknowledge, then, two types or levels of ethical

functioning: 1) the physical -- better termed mechanical since it is simply the translating into action of the psychical. I use this term rather than "mechanical" because fully as many of our actions are motivated by the physical that astounding catch-all of fears, instincts, impulses and mystic urges -- as are prescribed by a true reason (I use "true" here to distinguish between the instinct grasped and conceptualized as rationale, and mere rationalization -- which is a psychical self-justification in clothing.)

It is manifest that the first level of essential functioning -- the physical or mechanical -- is not the essential one, and is less relevant to holy functioning. One should note, however, that official functioning on the mechanical level can proceed equally from either of two directions (rationalization). For instance, if I am troubled or psychically frigid, it is quite easy for me to rationalize my neuroses by assuming the attitude that my life is an unholy business and that I leave it alone because, when considered, I am a pretty holy person. I am a deacon of my own sanctity, oblivious of my emotionalism. I may do the right thing, but for the wrong reason. Take me a deacon if you will; I am still a liar. And it should be added here that the number of lies an unorthodox person tells other people is exceeded only by the number he tells

the dynamism of life, each confrontation is in some respect new, requires its own particular solution or "choice," and is, therefore, truly solvable solely by an intuition of the given situation.

Now if all this be true, then ethics -- like art -- must inevitably be the expression of intuition! And, like art again, the intuitions of ethics have to do with the very stuff of life -- not with concepts, as is true of the science of ethics. The connection between ethics and aesthetics is here, and it is close. But how close? Precisely where do the intuitions of aesthetics meet those of ethics, and how much do they have in common?

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functioning: 1) the physical -- better termed the mechanical, since it is simply the translating into action of 2) the psychical. I use this term rather than "mental" because fully as many of our actions are dictated by the psyche -- that astounding catch-all of fears, instincts, impulses, and mystic urges -- as are prescribed by a true rationale. (I use "true" here to distinguish between the insight grasped and conceptualized as rationale, and mere rationalization -- which is a psychical wolf in mentality's clothing.)

It is manifest that the first level of ethical functioning -- the physical or mechanical -- is not the essential one, and is less relevant to this discussion. One should note, however, that ethical functioning on the mechanical level can proceed equally from truth or falsehood (rationalization). For instance, if I am impotent or psychically frigid, it is quite easy for me to rationalize my neuroses by assuming the attitude that sex is a rather unholy business and that I leave it alone because, everything considered, I am a pretty holy person. I am convinced of my own sanctity, oblivious of my sanctimoniousness. I may do the right thing, but for the wrong reason. Make me a deacon if you will; I am still a liar. And it might be added here that the number of lies an unethical person tells other people is exceeded only by the number he tells

himself, whether consciously or unconsciously.

With this in mind, it is easy to see that Shakespeare, though he gives the speech to Polonius, speaks in the great ethical tradition when he says:

This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

That which is essential and significant in ethics is not external. List of rules, books of etiquette, compilations of laws are not in themselves the basis of ethical behavior, but are rather collections of majority opinions within individual societies. For example, a Chinese and I may act divergently in a given situation, yet each of us may be acting ethically in regard to the mores of his own society. It is equally possible that neither of us is acting ethically in the real sense of the word, i.e., in accord with a true intuition of the situation and the relation between it and ourselves. Once these two factors are known, action becomes less a matter of choice than of necessity, *psychical necessity*.

I do not mean that man always bows to this necessity. The crowded couches of psychiatrists would prove the lie. But on the whole, that man who understands both himself and the situations in which he is involved, develops an overall pattern of behavior on the second, or *psychical*,

level. The main determinant is his own nature. This is not a deterministic philosophy, for I believe that man may be free to be himself and even to go against himself. But if his actions do not follow from convictions, and if these convictions be not based upon intuitions concerning himself, his fellow man, and his world, he leaves the plain of truth for the forest of falsehood. Whether this be conscious or unconscious has no bearing upon the final classification of his action. If it be based upon no convictions, his action, whether "good" or "bad," is simply tychistic, and he himself is just another blob of protoplasm waiting to be prodded.

Therefore ethical behavior depends not only upon knowledge, but primarily upon self-knowledge!

Now this "self", whether Pleistocene or Pilgrim Father, Byzantine, Baptist, or Buddhist, is the one common denominator in a maze of ethical formulas. A human being is a human being is a human being. He has, as I have said, certain inner loyalties called "values" which, though modified by his society, seem to persist perenially in approximately the same form. These are among the few things which man may be reasonably sure that he knows about himself. It is for this reason that man perpetually attempts to translate the world and his

action in it in terms of these essences.

Courage and justice are two of his eternal values; therefore all his "good" gods are courageous and just (inscrutable as their justice may sometimes seem). Anthropomorphism is natural to man, for he cannot possibly, even if he would, understand his world in terms of anything but himself. He can know himself; he can hardly surmise outside of himself. In fact, it might well be said that what he does not know about himself he cannot really know about anyone or anything else. Hence, to repeat, he interprets his world in terms of human values, builds his societies in accord with these values, lives his life by them, sees everything in relation to them.

Ethics is the very embodiment of this knowledge of man about himself. It is an attempt to conceptualize his intuitions about his own values -- so-called "human values."

Now what is the primary concern of the artist? With what is he eternally and exclusively dealing if not with human values?

Does not his work contain within itself, whether explicitly or implicitly, a manifest valuing? If his objectified intuition be true and profound, can it help

but influence the value system of those who accept it? Can anyone see what we speak of as "truth," recognize it as such, and not subject his evaluations in this area to a "sea change"?

The artist presents to us his intuition of the truth concerning his particular subject. But since everything we see is subject to evaluation by us, and since all valuing, to be valid, must rest upon our keenest intuitions of truth, then is not the artist -- like the ethicist -- an important contributor to the establishment of a universal core of human values? Though the roads of aesthetics and ethics are in many ways disparate, they often meet.

For example: you cannot possibly paint a successful still life of flowers without giving me an insight into the way in which you, as a human being, see flowers and act towards them; without, in other words, giving me an accurate estimate of how you "value" flowers. It may be only one of many possible values in relation to the subject, but it is one nevertheless, and as such is capable of influencing my future behavior by means of modifying or supplanting my present value. It also influences my attitude toward you. As I look at your painting I receive with my aesthetic impression not only the visual beauty

of your art, but also the psychic beauty, which comes to me through your intuition of the subject plus your manifest valuing of it.

And conversely if I, in offhand, even awkward, conversation make a profound observation upon the proper attitude toward ugliness, though my words be not art, they may have an aesthetic quality about them because of the truth they reveal about humanity and humanity's values. The chances are that these words will conjure up in the artist's mind a painting, done or to be done. If my words represent an intuition concerning a behavior attitude toward ugliness, then all they need to become art is successful objectification. They are, just as spoken, aesthetic as well as ethic, for they contain the intuition about human values which is the common core of the aesthetic and ethic experiences.

The core exists. But one must, of course, beware of forcing too close an amalgamation upon the ethic and aesthetic experiences. They are not identical. The former has immediate and direct reference to action. But action is only one of three possible levels upon which one may act in regard to a problem. There is also, at the opposite extreme, the level of scientific detachment. And there is the level of aesthetic contemplation, which

is actually a synthesis of the other two. It possesses characteristics of both action and detachment; the observer is involved yet not involved in the tragedy he watches. He realizes it as a catastrophe which bears upon him, but in his role as spectator he is protected by the "psychic distance" between himself and the spectacle, and is thus enabled to remain essentially contemplative. Hence the aesthetic experience may have a detached self-containment, quite independent of action. In the case of art, it is a kind of constant radiation emanating from the work; it may be that after exposure one may translate this energy into action, but it is equally possible simply to absorb the rays.

I do not, moreover, mean to imply that art need have any connection with societal or bourgeois morality. For instance: if a work of art depict a scene of happy home life, is it "moral" because of its type of content? Is it still "moral" if it be sent to troops in the field far from home? Is it "moral" if it be produced in a society which finds it desirable to submerge family to community or state ties? All no, of course. It is moral only because it has "caught" and expressed the true and abiding beauty of a particular relationship, and in this sense it is moral no matter where or when it is created

or shown. This is the only tenable basis for morality in art. Nothing has been added or imposed; the work need merely be truly what it is -- the adequate expression of an intuition -- to be also an ethical instrument.

Such being the case, it is no wonder that any study of aesthetics, if sufficiently extended, comes face to face with ethics, and vice-versa. They are, by nature, inseparable. The Greek amalgamation of the good, the beautiful, and the true was a discovery of fact rather than an exercise in synthesis, just as Keats' aphorism was keen insight rather than poetic verbiage.

Art is truth, and truth is never immoral; on the contrary, it is the only possible basis for real morality.

As a primary source of intuitive knowledge art is a tremendous fount for ethical development, which is also an intuitive process; furthermore, since truth is the source of beauty, the moments of aesthetic and ethical perception are inherently interrelated. There is no ethical intuition that does not have beauty, nor is there an aesthetic experience which is not ethically contributive.

That room which holds great art is lighted up by truth. And wherever truth is sun, life shadows forth in beauty.

CHAPTER III

EVIL IN A PERSONAL CONTEXT: WUTHERING HEIGHTS,
THE SCARLET LETTER, CRIME AND PUNISHMENT,
THE WINGS OF THE DOVE

The general connection between art and ethics has been established. It has been argued that this connection manifests itself in literature mainly through a concentration upon evil. There remains the task of tracing specific instances and drawing general conclusions. But any larger insights which may result relative to the effect of content upon form must necessarily wait upon a detailed study of these two components in all the novels under consideration. I have divided these novels into the three major groupings in which, as I have stated, they seem naturally to fall so far as their concept and presentation of evil is concerned, i.e., an emphasis upon evil in its personal, societal, or cosmic contexts. I shall take them up in that order -- with a chapter for each division -- moving from the more concentrated to the more inclusive concepts. Within each of the three groupings, I have arranged the novels chronologically -- not for lack of a better plan, but because they seem to

show a definite evolutionary component which I think to be significant.

I have devoted, within each chapter, a separate section to each book. This was, I found, necessary if the aesthetic unity of each novel was to be preserved. This necessity also seemed to dictate that the concept of evil in each novel must be presented in a somewhat different way, i.e., its own way. It also presented the opportunity -- not to be ignored, because of content-form implications -- to attempt certain critical judgments upon each novel in turn while the evidence was directly before us. I rely upon common purpose, liberal cross-references, and a certain unity of approach, to hold the sections tightly together.

1 - Wuthering Heights (1847)¹

Here is, certainly, a strange book. And it derives from a mind equally strange -- a mind for the most part as isolated as its possessor, though an acquaintance with such figures as Shakespeare, and such nineteenth-century literary trends as romanticism (both English and German) shows through. But, as Rose Macaulay says in her introduction to this edition, Emily Brontë was in the main a person "living her retired, unsocial life

¹ Emily Brontë, Wuthering Heights (New York: Modern Library, n.d.), 390 pp.

with her family, her books, her ardent, brooding imagination, her dogs, and her beloved moors, desiring neither fame nor friendship, her genius burning its own fuel, independent of outer experiences to feed it."²

It is perhaps because of this independence of "outer experiences" that we find certain unrealities in her book, e.g., the speech of uneducated characters is often very polished, even "literary"; certain scenes are written in an overblown romantic style. Yet I find these particular flaws unimportant, if not irrelevant, for two reasons: 1) this is not a "realistic" novel, 2) the flaws are usually found in the less important scenes, and do not diminish the essential truth or reality of any of the characters. This kind of bungled or neglected detail has little to do with the greater realism -- that of true insight into character and situation -- which Emily Brontë has.

But the novel does have, for me, a serious defect -- one which it shares with most works that owe a debt to the Gothic -- : it does not know when to stop. The essential truths of this novel have all been communicated, the destinies of the central characters fulfilled, and

² Ibid., Introduction, p. vi.

consequently the true tension attendant upon the revelation of these twin factors relieved, at the moment of Catherine's death. One would allow some space for the intimation of Edgar Linton's death, and certainly a scene of Heathcliff's misery and ghostly visions. But for the rest, that part of the story following is in most respects simply a parallel of what has gone before. The attitude and cruelties of Heathcliff multiply rather than change, and he himself, having lost the raison d'être of his existence, loses also much of his interest and meaning for us. His redeeming grace is gone; one feels that he too should go, and quickly.

I do not mean to say that Heathcliff becomes unrealistic. Such a man can keep himself alive only by cultivating his most intense passions; when nothing remains on earth to claim his love, he will concentrate upon his hate and become just such a revenger as he is portrayed. But protracted revenge is not, in itself, interesting or aesthetically satisfying -- especially when it is a repetition of a previous sequence. The other characters in the latter part of the book add nothing to help this situation. Young Cathy's sufferings simply parallel those of Isabella Linton; young Linton, and Hareton Earnshaw in his transforming process, are

both flat compared to their predecessors; Nelly becomes merely more dull -- and yet the entire second half of the book (nearly two hundred pages in the Modern Library edition) is devoted to them.

This is, perhaps, part of the chaotic aspect of the book, which, it should be stated, has its defenders. E. M. Forster, for example, feels that "only in confusion could the figures of Heathcliff and Catherine externalize their passion till it streamed through the house and over the moors."³ I would agree that this "externalization" is desirable and important, and I have no objection to Emily Brontë's use of a chaotic element to achieve it. Melville employs chaos in somewhat the same way in Moby Dick. But Melville never repeats himself. He can speak of the same thing twenty times and say something new about it each time. Emily Brontë cannot. She sees and feels intensely, but usually upon the same plane and within the same restricted area. This is her limitation, and since it is one which leads to a lack of varied interest and response, it would seem logical to suppose that compactness would serve her best.

If, however, the second part of the novel presents a flaw, the first part contains what I consider to be

³ E. M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927), p. 210.

magnificent character portrayals set in a surely-presented atmosphere of real and valid terror. The early forms of Heathcliff's revenge and the consuming power of his love are both well-motivated and thoroughly convincing. Since his and Catherine's love is the informing motive of the entire work and since one must take into consideration the fact that revenge is a derivative of hate, we find here a novel devoted to the study of love and hate, with all the psychological intermixings of love-in-hate and hate-in-love included. And since these two most elemental passions are often considered prime sources of good and evil, we ought to have here a book closely concerned with our problem.

Wuthering Heights is concerned with evil in its most personal form. These people, isolated almost completely from the outside world, do not act as agents of any society or power beyond themselves. They act upon themselves and each other solely as individuals. What results is a spotlight concentration upon certain eternal and unvarying aspects of human nature, viz., the extreme reaches of love and hate, as well as all the shadings, of which the human heart is capable.

Love and hate appear in the story in three main degrees. Each degree is exemplified by one of the novel's

central characters: Edgar Linton (normally strong), Catherine Earnshaw (abnormally strong), and Heathcliff (consuming, almost preterhumanly strong).

Edgar's love for Catherine is deep and true, but not beyond either reason or example.

Catherine's love for Heathcliff (she admired Linton, but never truly loved him; such a love as was hers for Heathcliff admits of no twin) was passion of a strength and endurance beyond both reason and example, beyond the capacity of most, beyond any other claim which she might urge upon herself. Nurtured in childhood, and for long years her only one, this love grew and thrived, fed by a nature inherently generous, deep, and outward-flowing. Yet she crossed it; she tried, in her marriage to Edgar, to forget it -- a thing that Heathcliff would be completely incapable of doing...a thing which seals at its brimming height his cup of misery and hate.

For Heathcliff's love, black as some of its effects may be, is nonetheless a mighty power of devotion. His is a love unsurpassed in intensity by that of any other literary creation (it makes, for instance, Romeo's vows sound like the wind in the cornfield). It is a love incapable of being built and supported by any human being remotely "normal" in the sense of having a previous or

consequent love of any kind, or interests of any stature outside his love. Heathcliff has neither, and it is this factor which is at once the source of the beauty and soul-consuming fidelity of his love, and the complete abandonment and intensity of his hate for whatever thwarts this love. Having known nothing else of good in the world, all his love, loyalties, and ethical being are focused upon Catherine. The rest of the world -- with all its people -- is merely a tool to be used for the one end of furthering his love for her and keeping hers for him. He had, as Nelly surmises, a "monomania"⁴ for Catherine (compare later père Goriot, Ahab, Kurtz). She was everything in his life -- the direct motivator of all his good, and both the direct and indirect source of all his evil.

Here an interesting thought occurs: in the exact proportion of their power to love, these people have the power to hate, i.e., to do evil. Edgar can hate Heathcliff, but not with such insistence that it colors his every moment. He can live outside of it, even ignore it when other factors of life demand it of him. But it is yet strong enough to bring about an evil: not only does it

⁴ Ibid., Chap. XXXIII, p. 374.

reinforce his decision to abandon Isabella when she elopes with Heathcliff, but it leads him, with the help of jealousy, to make that fateful decision to forbid Catherine the privilege of Heathcliff's company -- a decision which leads to her death.

Catherine -- always the compromise between the two men -- has not the abiding hate of either, but she has many more separate moments of it. Her volatility leads her to hate both men upon occasion, to do so with less good reason and more frequency than either, and to give it vent at moments (such as those when she is dying) when even Heathcliff would have restrained. Thus, though her hate is never so intense as that of either man, it is so much greater in quantity of application than Linton's that she does greater harm with it than he. By means of her hate she wrecks the lives of both her lovers.

Heathcliff's hate is, of course, a veritable furnace, the flames of which seem unquenchable, seem to require ever-increasing amounts of fuel gathered from broken lives. His victims are everyone near him except Cathy -- from the unimportant and strangely annoying Mr. Lockwood, through Hindley and Hareton Earnshaw, Isabella and Edgar Linton, to the younger Cathy and Linton. We are run through a rushing, swirling gamut of hate.

No blood-drinking Senecan or Restoration villain ever hated with greater force and effect, and with less concern for the merest humanity. The thing one notices, however, is that, with the exception of Hindley Earnshaw, Heathcliff was neither directly nor intentionally wronged by the victims themselves, nor did he hate them for themselves. His hate stemmed directly from their connection, deliberate or fortuitous, with his love for Cathy. It is only for the relationship he construes between their existence and the thwarting of his love that Heathcliff hates them.

Hence we have the phenomenon of hate (and evil) proceeding directly from love. And the same holds true with Catherine's and Edgar's hates.

Does Emily Brontë feel, then, that love and hate, good and bad, are inextricably intermingled? I think she does. There are many evidences. Surely Edgar is illustrative, for his love is solely "good" in the portrayal, yet it leads to evil. Cathy's love is excessive from the start, and leads her to mischiefs even in childhood. She seems ever to delight in hurting her loved ones a bit so as to be able to show the power of her love to console and cure. This, perhaps, is a kind of summary of love. It serves here, as I have said, as compromise between Edgar's good love and Heathcliff's

unhealthy one.

For unhealthy it must be. It is so fiercely intense, so pin-pointed, so consuming of everything in him, that it not only has not a shred of feeling left for the world, but by its very savagery cannot help immolating both itself and its object. It is a kind of life-in-death or vice-versa -- a superhuman intensity of living on one level surrounded by a void. It is the grasping with every force of mind, body, and spirit at one of life's essences, where all others have long since been desperately and conclusively foregone. It is a discovery of warmth by one whom the world has chilled to the marrow, and who cannot therefore be comforted by simple warmth, but must fan it to the height of hell's before it can reach into his frozen feelings and bring them alive. As such, this love is in itself a torture, yet it is also his sole means of keeping a meaningful contact with life, and thus becomes at the same time an all-surpassing joy. Not that joy which spring love brings, wherein all the world is bright and cheery. Far from it. There are no illusions here. The full price is known, paid in advance, and yet to be paid again and again. It is as if Sisyphus, kept to the same task, were given a heaven in which to perform it.

This is Heathcliff, the central figure. One cannot

possibly deny the purity of his love which is, in itself, almost god-like. But it takes all the good that is in him to sustain it, and so every other part of him becomes devil. The good that is in him forever gives rise to evil.

It is in one's attitude toward Heathcliff that the final effect of the book must reside. The author has so conscientiously kept herself from comment that no pressure is exerted either way. She makes him monstrous, yes -- but she makes the Bible-addict Joseph monstrous too. Like Rose Macaulay, I get in spite of all a feeling of awed liking for Heathcliff. There can be no doubt that, skillful as she was in handling the reader's emotions, the author meant that I should.

This sympathy for such a chaotic figure is not out of line with certain basic attitudes clearly present in the novel. It is definite, for instance, that the author feels the existence in life of a large segment which cannot be either solved or controlled by logic. Catherine says (and I feel this to be an autobiographical item):

I've dreamt in my life dreams that have stayed with me ever after, and changed my ideas: they've gone through and through me, like wine through water, and altered the colour of my mind.⁵

⁵ Ibid., Chap. IX, p. 91.

There is, too, a strong feeling about "affinities" (cf. Browning, her contemporary) which are beyond one's power to change or combat. Catherine says, before her marriage to Edgar:

Whatever our souls are made of, his
 (Heathcliff's) and mine are the same;
 and Linton's is as different as a moon-⁶
 beam from lightning, or frost from fire.

Evidently, then, in breaking with -- in a sense defying -- this affinity, Catherine abandons a truth.

One notes further that the author does not take the innocent position that the Lintons of the world are "good" and the Catherines and Heathcliffs "bad": "the mild and generous are only more justly selfish than the domineering;"⁷ says Nelly at the ending of Edgar's and Catherine's happiness in marriage, thus giving Edgar his due share in the fault.

And in this connection it should be noted that Nelly, the staunch representative of middle class ethics -- who will lie and sneak around on occasions when she stiffly believes it her "duty," and who, like most ethically-starched bourgeoisie, inevitably thinks herself in the right though the contrary is proved to her time and again -- makes some of the book's most irretrievable

⁶ Ibid., p. 92.

⁷ Ibid., Chap. X, p. 106.

blunders. Her keeping Catherine's illness secret from Edgar contributes directly to Catherine's death. In fact, Nelly's "good-mindedness", backed by an alert but not profound intelligence, succeeds only in keeping a precarious balance between her grievous errors and helpful preventions. In this light one must construe the author's meaning to be that common ethical standards are not only incapable of preventing this kind of disruption and terror, but are badly over their heads in trying to deal or cope with it at all.

The strength of this evil seems to derive solely from the awful complexity of man and the forces that work upon him (compare Conrad). There is no genuine appeal to or from God here (recall the horrible Joseph); nor does Nature hurt anyone (it is more of a balm, though as difficult and temperamental as the characters set in it); and certainly society is no problem, for there is none here (Gimmerton, the nearest town, is neutrally portrayed). In short, this drama, aside from the reinforcement of a stern atmosphere, takes place as closely as possible in a vacuum. The world outside has little to do with it one way or another. Both its good and evil stem directly from people -- and only from those people closely concerned in the story (contrast Balzac, Hardy, Melville, etc.).

The evil is augmented to some extent by Chance, e.g., old Mr. Earnshaw's finding the orphaned Heathcliff in Liverpool and bringing him home; Heathcliff's over-hearing only the bad part of Cathy's reasons for being unable to marry him. It is probable, however, that this is more a literary device than a statement of belief. Much stronger is the element of Destiny. One can, I think, properly use this term to describe the force which sets up the affinity between Catherine and Heathcliff, and then works to bring them together. Certainly once this much is accomplished, everyone and everything is powerless to undo it, and their love works toward its own end with a kind of Aristotelian inevitability. Heathcliff and Catherine are almost immediately caught in an unviolable and inescapable pattern. Catherine says of him:

If all else perished, and he remained, I should still continue to be; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger.⁸

This is partially a tale of Destiny, containing in good measure the preternatural overtones common to this type of writing and thinking. But the destiny involved is more the necessary nature of man than of event. And this nature

⁸ Ibid., Chap. IX, p. 94.

is so ineffably complex that a black and white ethical approach to man and his actions is for Emily Brontë thoroughly implausible. It is for this reason that the fundamental ethical approach of the book is one of tension and ambiguity.

The good and evil it presents are not simple and direct; good is not equated with love, evil with hate. True, it is shown that love can nurture people, make them happy, even cure their physical ills, e.g., the younger Cathy and Linton; and that hate blights, hurts, finally kills. The complication arises from the fact that there is a component of hate in love. It can spring directly from it, both as a result of the intense jealousy and sensitivity which passionate love engenders, and from the necessity to defend that love from whatever threatens to harm it or interfere with it.

Is one to think, then, that the author is condemning passion, saying that emotional excess, whether of love or hate, is evil? I believe not. Though she is aware of the evil to which passion gives rise, she seems to see people as victims of it, to defend them, and to admire their

force. One notices that those who neither love nor hate are, by inference, incapable of producing either much evil (Joseph) or much good (Nelly). They merely bow to, and thereby abet, the stronger. They claim little of the author's interest, and none of her admiration. She is truly absorbed only by the passionate Catherine and Heathcliff; it is with them alone that she feels a full emotional and intellectual sympathy.

One can easily enough understand this sympathy for Catherine, who is after all a magnificent woman doomed by the flaw in her character which leads her continually to hurt those she loves. But what of the dark and vengeful Heathcliff? How admire him and still retain a defensible ethic? This I think is the book's central tension; this is the reason for my previous statement that one's final attitude toward the book must depend upon his reaction to Heathcliff. Most of us react the way that Emily Brontë meant that we should, i.e., we share her respect and emotional sympathy for Heathcliff. But, since she does not in any way explain her attitude, we are at a loss to explain our own. Why did she feel this attachment? The critic who makes use of the biographical approach answers this question by references to the sexually-split personality of Emily Brontë, maintaining that she

identified herself with both Catherine and Heathcliff. This sounds quite logical, but like all such critical approaches it is of no help to the reader who wishes to understand his own reaction to a book. How has the author brought us into her camp, made us share her respect for a man the majority of whose actions are patently evil?

I maintain that she has done it simply by presenting him with great force and consistency, by not attempting to excuse (and therefore diminish) him by imputing his actions to external forces, and by making palpable her own emotional sympathy for him -- a sympathy which she must have known could be shared to a greater or lesser degree by her readers. The close identification of a character with evil has never, of itself, alienated him from our sympathies. And as far as our interest is concerned, it has long been clear that we are most interested in "bad," or at least highly imperfect, characters than we are in "good" ones. The "good" characters of literature, the Griseldas and the Platons, are for the most part flat, dull, "unreal." What is the reason for this truth of aesthetics, and what is its ethical implication?

Dr. Hubert Alexander has suggested to me that the

perennial interest in the evil man cannot be explained simply by imputing it to man's romantic spirit, his desire to experience vicariously some of life's wilder forces. The true basis of the interest lies in the process of identification: we identify ourselves more easily with the imperfect, the character who is somehow overwhelmed by life. Conversely, the character who is unwaveringly good, who seems to have brought life under control, is so remote from us as to seem unreal. This is, I think, a valid explanation of our degree of interest in a Heathcliff. But why the admiration?

This admiration is based upon a personality component, and must therefore have an ethical, rather than an aesthetic, basis. What strikes one immediately as uniformly characteristic of the great evil characters is their force, their power to produce the effects they desire. Certainly power of action is not always good, but power of personality is somehow always admirable. The reason lies in the fact that this power accrues only to that man who has integrated his personality, and integrity is an ethical good! It implies lack of compromise, lack of hypocrisy. Is not this the reason for Milton's respect for Satan? The ethical and aesthetic appeal of a character whose great force and intensity results from a highly

integrated personality accounts for the continual reappearance in literature of the monomaniac. In the eleven novels under consideration, only two (The Wings of the Dove and Jude the Obscure) do without a major character who is a monomaniac or who has monomaniacal tendencies. Monomania resulting from tight integration of personality and concentration of power is in itself neither good nor evil; strictly speaking, the great religious prophets were all monomaniacal. The ethical label applies only to the effects.

In this light, Heathcliff is both good and evil, for the results of his monomania are both love and hate. Quite aside from the moral judgment, however, the basis for admiration -- both Emily's and our own -- remains, for Heathcliff is that rarest of humans -- the man of true force. And yet, at times, this very force alienates one. Why? Is there something bad about it too? Can integrity be other than good? The answer must be yes, since the adverse part of the reaction exists.

One need not go so far for the reason. The complete absence of compromise in a personality implies a certain hardness and a disturbing positiveness about his own beliefs. The resultant lack of the yielding qualities which man prizes so highly that he terms them "humane"

often alienates such a personality from us emotionally. And the corresponding lack of mental flexibility results in intellectual alienation. To see everything from one viewpoint, whether this viewpoint be predominantly good or bad, entails a sacrifice of observational scope and a consequent absence of intellectual balance. To act powerfully from such a concentrated intellectual and emotional stance is inevitably to sweep before one a host of people who are either indifferent or of another persuasion. It leads also to an ignoring of cries for help. Such a person, regardless of his greatness, or even of his nobility, will inevitably cause people to suffer. Is not this precisely the reason that Ishmael finds himself compelled at last to reject Ahab as a prototype, despite the fact that he never ceases to admire him? And is not this the reason that Catherine tries to reject Heathcliff? Like Ishmael with Ahab, Catherine rather than Heathcliff is the one with the broader point of view and the greater share of human flexibility, and she too sees the serious shortcomings of the tremendous man. But the bond that ties her to Heathcliff is not one of admiration but of love; hence she is inextricably caught. She cannot, like Ishmael, be a "loose fish"; her attempt at it results in the book's

catastrophe.

It is, I believe, this difference of character between Heathcliff and Catherine, with the implications as outlined, which forms the hard and realistic core of this novel, and which gives to it ethical as well as aesthetic tensions. The tension results from the realistic rather than moralistic approach. The author is not concerned with moral judgment; she does not see either Catherine or Heathcliff as "good" or "bad." She sees them rather as exemplars of two different ways of life, each of which is good and bad. Heathcliff's integrity keeps him from playing with love as Catherine too often does, but it also prevents him from acting toward anyone but her with even a minimum of humanity. Catherine's flexibility allows her to recognize the goodness of Edgar Linton, but it leads her to attempt to compromise the one thing in her life which is absolutely uncompromisable -- her love for Heathcliff.

To repeat, then, it is not good and evil which is to be found in Wuthering Heights; it is good-and-evil. It is people and human action in a universe which looks on without comment or compassion, which gives man no guidance. The result is physical and mental chaos. Man has power and is defenseless, has knowledge and is

without wisdom, has love and cannot escape hating, has depth of soul and suffers because of it. The process of living demands a resolution of the antitheses which are the very stuff of life, and which therefore cannot be resolved. Certainly Emily Brontë felt all this herself, but what is more important is that she put it into an art form and transmitted the feeling to us.

It is primarily a "feeling" that one gets from Wuthering Heights. There is no intellectual discussion. No "solution" is advanced -- or even intimated. Things are not much changed for better or worse at the end, except that the new generation on the moors seems to be a milder people and will perhaps avoid a repetition of the tragedy, having had already too large a share in it. But the world is in no way changed, nor are the people in it. The human characteristics that brought on the original tragedy remain only partially (and one suspects temporarily) quiescent in the descendants. And Heathcliff and Catherine still roam the moors as legendary ghosts.

This is, then, not a "message" book in the sense that, for example, Père Goriot, Jude the Obscure, and War and Peace are. The author never intercedes or speaks directly. Nor is it a finely polished study of personal evil. But

it has a direct relationship with a novel that is. For in her portrayal of evil loosed upon a doomed group, in her picture of their emotional reactions, Emily Brontë's novel has a distant but distinct relationship with Henry James' The Wings of the Dove. The differences of tone, setting, subtlety, and character could hardly be greater, but the tragic inevitability of the two stories, the closely selected and isolated groups -- atypical and almost beyond their worlds -- upon which both authors concentrate, and the completely absorbed and abstaining attitude and point of view of the authors, bring them closely together. We shall see that James superimposes a social necessity upon personal evil, which is absent here.

Heathcliff and Catherine are a world unto themselves. They are their own gods and their own avenging harpies, at one and the same time. The life they find is a thing of tangled beauty and viciousness. Love and hate, good and evil, merge indistinguishably into each other. One can only live as he must, as his character and predominant circumstance demand. Better life-in-death than death-in-life.

2 - The Scarlet Letter (1850)⁹

Hawthorne is original in his background; it is a background of sombre greys and browns, on which his brilliant figures stand out in sharp relief.¹⁰

Not exactly "original," one would think, having just come from a study of Wuthering Heights, the background of which, if tending more toward violet, is nonetheless at the same end of the prism as is this.

A further comparison of backgrounds brings out the note of authenticity common to both. If Emily Brontë¹¹ successfully evoked the isolation of the moors, Hawthorne, equally successfully, conjures up the isolation of another place and time -- the Boston of the early New England Puritans (circa 1650). He does it without the use of much external detail, concentrating instead upon significant moral detail, e.g., the forms of Puritan law, the ministry, the austerity of the people, the rigorous dignitaries, etc. The continual iteration of this detail works throughout toward a sombre, austere background. The result is what I would call an "atmosphere novel," or more precisely a "psychic atmosphere" novel -- even

⁹ Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter (New York: Modern Library, n.d.), 303 pp.

¹⁰ Ibid., Introd. by Wm. Lyon Phelps, p. x.

more so than is Wuthering Heights. Whatever physical description and attention exists, seems included only to reinforce this mental picture. Even the vivid figure of Pearl serves mainly as near-grotesque contrast, throwing the background into sharper relief.

This is not, however, so dark a book as Wuthering Heights. Though the same "eternal triangle" is relied upon for plot pattern, the parallel figures involved are less strong: Chillingworth, despite his relationship to Heathcliff, is not so wild nor inclusively vengeful; Hester is no Cathy; Dimmesdale is a weaker figure than Edgar Linton. Furthermore, these characters are softly draped in a veil of sympathy by their creator. Phelps remarks, making a comparison with another book on our list:

Flaubert (in Madame Bovary) has nothing but scorn for his characters, whereas Hawthorne treats all of his people with dignity...he was deeply moved by their fate.¹¹

It must be remembered, too, that we are dealing in this novel with an over-layer of allegory -- a kind of sin-in-the-Garden story. The characters will, therefore, have existence upon explicit symbolic levels.

Moreover, the evil in The Scarlet Letter takes place against the ever-present background of a powerful

¹¹ Ibid., p. xvi

social force -- the mores and beliefs of Puritan society. There is not the insulation from community living that is present in Wuthering Heights. Quite the reverse, for society here is in a sense the warp across which the woof of these lives is woven. But the emphasis remains upon personal evil, for the "sin" in question was not in any way forced upon them from without. It is upon their own consciousness of their sin, as Puritans, that the story concentrates; the punishment by society is secondary.

It is in a way surprising that, dealing with such a palpable reality as Puritan society (and resorting frequently to personal interpolations), Hawthorne was able to keep so well about his story that transparent veil of remoteness which is necessary for the predominantly psychic story. (It is a method perfected and powerfully utilized by Franz Kafka¹² in this century.) And in the light of Hawthorne's frequent intrusions into the story, it is equally surprising that he manages to preserve a strongly concentrated effect, a feat which he owes primarily to his sense of structure.

He attains this concentration in three ways:

1) by limiting himself to four important characters and

¹² cf. The Trial.

by keeping the story steadily focused upon them, 2) by having these characters act and be acted upon within the bounds of their own interrelationship, 3) by using every detail of atmosphere, observation, and description to reinforce the portraits of these characters. Thus the intensity is constant, and the portraits alive in the sense that Dorian Gray's portrait was alive (though not, with the possible exception of Pearl, alive as living, breathing people).

It is, in fact, the sharply etched descriptions, with their startling chiaroscuro, that lend palpable reality to what is essentially a story of the insubstantial,¹³ of the vicissitudes of soul. The air of insubstantiality with which Hawthorne invests the entire story is heightened, fortunately or unfortunately as one's taste may incline, by the device of "multiple choice,"¹⁴ whereby an incident is suggested on several levels of consciousness and probability -- one simply takes his choice of belief or disbelief. It is only Hawthorne's strong sense of the past as a continuum,¹⁵

¹³ Cf. short stories of Poe and Kafka's Metamorphoses.

¹⁴ See F. C. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), pp. 276-277.

¹⁵ See Henry James, "Hawthorne", The Shock of Recognition, ed. by Edmund Wilson (New York: Doubleday, 1947), pp. 427-556.

his sense of man's eternal sin-consciousness,¹⁶ which gives the book a concrete vitality and a contemporary significance.

This carefully articulated novel, revolving structurally around the three scaffold scenes, divides its moral burden between the four main characters, who might be separated into two groups: primary (Arthur Dimmesdale and Hester Prynne), and secondary (Roger Chillingworth and Pearl). The basis for this division is twofold: 1) the sin which motivates the story belongs to the first group which is, to this extent, responsible for the second; 2) the characters of the second group act upon the first, but not upon each other, whereas those of the first group act primarily upon themselves.

Dimmesdale receives the largest share of attention, which is natural enough since he is the major character and the ultimate meeting ground of all the warring forces. He is the only one acted upon by all four characters (since we should have to include his actions upon himself), as well as the representative of a tortured conscience living in a Puritan society. This embattled clergyman is, too, the only indecisive

¹⁶ Cf. The Trial.

character of the four (note the contrast with the thorough decisiveness of the others and of the society), and it is his very indecision which makes of him a battleground for all the psychic factors at work in the situation. He represents, symbolically, conscience-tortured-by-guilt, with a secondary burden of self-respect-lost-through-cowardice (his inability to give up to public respect).

One detests these labels, but must use them here because this is a somewhat hierarchical sin setup, and one might as well go along with Hawthorne's categories; and because these characters are presented in so concentrated and restricted a light as to become types rather than three-dimensional characters, portraits rather than living figures.

Even as a portrait, however, Dimmesdale has characteristics which make him the central image in the gallery. For one thing, sin exacts from him the highest price, not only because he is most sensitive to it, but because he cannot, like Chillingworth, accept evil nor can he, like Hester, reject it through confession. So he pays and pays. But, he manages to purchase something with it, for one feels that he, alone of the three sinning characters (himself, Hester, Chillingworth) is

finally "saved" outright (one feels, I think, more purgatory in store for Hester, and a rocky path for Chillingworth).

Just as his besetting sin is weakness, so retribution comes to him through this same weakness. He marshals all the forces of rationalization in a hopeless attempt to quiet his conscience and thus stave off the moment of truth. He resorts even to that final extremity of guilt -- masochism. He fails in this because, one hears Hawthorne say, the mind is powerless before the soul; man is powerless before his God. It is only when physical, rather than mental, flight is proposed to him that Dimmesdale finally realizes the hopelessness of all flight (cf. our generation in Hemingway's short story, "The Killers"), and gathers the courage to submit. It is a good picture of an intelligent and sensitive clergyman, passionate in mind and soul but bloodless in body, weak in will, convinced but afraid, caught by a combination of circumstance and his own character -- both in its strength and its deficiencies.

One wonders, though, why Hester should ever have coveted him as a lover. Did ever a woman have worse? Has any woman ever given so much for so long for so little?

Dimmesdale seems, by his lack of thought about Hester as a woman (she is always a sign of his sin), to regard her as a passing fair passing fancy. He never shows a sign of love for her as an individual (the forest scene comes close, but even there he is mainly self-preoccupied). And he tops off this cad-like behavior in the final scene on the gallows when, to poor, bewitched Hester's final question as to whether they may not spend their after-life together, he says in a horrified tone, but with a nice clerical finality, "Hush, Hester, hush!"¹⁷

As for Hester herself, she is, except for a few scenes (notably the one by the brook) almost as gray a character as her dress. One feels again and again the latent power and passion in her, but since Hawthorne has her show it, so to speak, in reverse -- through her iron self-control and stoic resignation -- we rarely see her living colors. (It has always bothered me somewhat that a character of Hester's latent explosive-ness, Puritan, or no, could manage seven years of bad luck so quietly.)

Her problem differs from Dimmesdale's in the obvious respect that, by admitting her sin (in which she had really no choice, hence one must shift the accent,

¹⁷ Hawthorne, op. cit., Chap. XXIII, p. 295.

as Hawthorne does, to her rigorous penance in the public gaze) she has sacrificed public for private respect, and so made of her earthly hell a more external thing. (One is tempted to feel, today, that by being more severe upon herself than were either the judges or townspeople, she distills in the alembic of her super-severity a perverse psychological joy, equivalent perhaps to Dimmesdale's scourging of himself.)

Critical opinion tends to posit Hester as the repentant sinner.¹⁸ It is a view which makes little sense to me. How is Hester to be considered "repentant" when, after long years of living alone with her sin and bearing the full burden of public stigma, she proposes to Dimmesdale, at her first real opportunity, that they do it all over again -- and on a larger scale! No, Hester remained primarily a woman, despite the prim masquerade. And I cannot believe that Hawthorne was not well aware of it, was not in fact consciously working toward a more subtle effect.

What he wanted, I suspect, was a sharp contrast between her and Dimmesdale, a contrast that would move on several levels, but that would find its crux in this matter of penance. Dimmesdale is characterized by

¹⁸ See Yvor Winters, Maule's Curse (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1938), p. 16.

Ivor Winters and others as the "half-repentant" sinner.¹⁹ But how half-repentant, since he goes off in a cloud of angels? His public confession was, evidently, a minor matter, necessary perhaps as the final piece in his jig-saw puzzle of penance, but obviously secondary to the inward penance he had already (and continuously) made. But Hester, who has done the long and public show of penitence, remains at heart as unreconstructed a rebel as ever. She is ready to repeat; she speaks longingly of a future time when society will not be so rough on women. In short, she accepts only what she must (remember again that her "confession" was the rather undeniable fact of Pearl). And Hester is not quite to be saved, not to join Dimmesdale in heaven's higher strata. What then can Hawthorne be doing but pointing to a difference between true repentance and the outward forms of repentance? True penance is made only by the soul. After all, Hester's private hell flames were hot and constant enough, but they were just a flicker of cardboard matches compared to the conflagration roaring always within Dimmesdale. The half-repentant sinner, then, is Hester. She has all the strength that Dimmesdale

¹⁹ Ibid.

lacks, but not the will to use it in the same way. In this regard she stands half way between the weak but good Dimmesdale and the strong but evil Chillingworth.

For all intents and purposes, Chillingworth is the fiend incarnate, though like the Fiend himself, a fallen angel. He says of himself, "A mortal man, with once a human heart, has become a fiend for his (Dimmesdale's) especial torment."²⁰ He bears, in certain passionate moments of his darkness, a resemblance to Heathcliff. His position, at the story's start, is not unlike that of Heathcliff when that dark one returns to the moors after Cathy's marriage to Edgar:

Here, on this wild outskirts of earth, I shall pitch my tent; for, elsewhere a wanderer, and isolated from human interests, I find here a woman, a man, a child amongst whom and myself there exist the closest ligaments. No matter whether of love or hate; no matter whether of right or wrong! Thou and thine, Hester Prynne, belong to me. My home is where thou art.²¹

But for the phrasing and name, Heathcliff might well be saying this to Catherine. Furthermore, the utter single-mindedness and ruthlessness of his revenge links him again with Heathcliff's monomania. But the diabolic nature of his evil, consisting as it does of a combination of medieval herb-witchery (a good Salem note) and modern

²⁰ Hawthorne, op. cit., Chap. XIV, p. 196.

²¹ Ibid., Chap. IV, p. 85.

psychology, is distinctly his own.

Chillingworth is the book's one unrepentant sinner. He is drawn without a backward step toward irremediable ruin. Since he becomes, at the moment of our meeting with him, unequivocally black, and remains so throughout, there is no inner growth in the character, for which defect Hawthorne compensates by using him sparingly, and giving an effect of growth by tracing the ever-increasing physical effects upon him of his evil. He is, besides being the one character irretrievably sunk in sin, a catalytic agent in the story -- a function which he shares with little Pearl.

Pearl is a problem child. She has, for a long time, bothered readers of the book, both layman and critic alike. The trouble centers around the question of her credibility. And since we are dealing in this novel with symbolic characters, the question of credibility becomes double-barreled: is Pearl credible as symbol? is she credible as child? I think yes to both.

First of all, what is her function, her "label"? Pure conscience. This is patent. She is not only a constant reminder to both Hester and Dimmesdale of their transgression, but accurately serves them as a barometer

of their sincerity of repentance and adherence to vows. When Hester discards momentarily the scarlet letter, it is the child who admonishes her, who will not recognize her as mother; when Dimmesdale will not acknowledge her openly as his child, she will not love him, Etc., etc.

She is, in her whim and caprice, not unlike Conscience, which goes and comes, which seems at one moment satisfied with the bone we throw it, only to return the next day demanding the whole animal -- all beyond our control, all a thing of us and yet beyond us. It comes, too, in all the vivid and witching colors of Pearl, irresistible in action and aspect. And in its goodness is her beauty (note that Chillingworth -- evil -- is as ugly as Pearl is beautiful).

Many critics, over-occupied with the volatile qualities of Pearl, the continuous changefulness (and the responsibility is Hawthorne's, for this emphasis is originally his), overlook the permanent and unchanging characteristics basic in her. She is constant in her very inconstancy. She is constant in her refusal to compromise, in her refusal to accept anything less than forthright behavior from anyone, in her refusal to be deceived by words or temporary emotions. Thus, as her basic characteristic, we find integrity, which is the

very stuff of conscience. In her way, she is more unyielding than the Puritans themselves.

As a living figure, her reality runs up against the same problem as that confronting the other characters -- the fact that they are all primarily symbols. Perhaps, since he was modelling his portraits to conform with abstractions, Hawthorne fell into the trap more deeply with Pearl than with the others for the very reason that she was a child, and children lend themselves most stubbornly to abstraction. At any rate, he seems to have realized this at least subconsciously, for again and again he returns to description and analysis of Pearl, trying it would seem by main force to put her across both as symbol and child. But he attempts the explanation in many ways, and so Pearl seems to us many things.

At one moment she recalls a sapient Wordsworthian child, carrying in plain view her intimations of immortality; in the next, she is a changeling, a strange and beautiful child who belongs to the Dark Prince and abides on this earth only long enough to await the Erl-King who will come to carry her back to native lands. In the meantime, however, Pearl succeeds in carrying off Hawthorne.

She seems to us so many things precisely because, for Hawthorne, she became them. Her wonderful child-ness completely bewitches her creator, and so her darker allegory is overlaid with brilliant tints of life. Pearl emerges, if something less a cogent symbol, something more a living child. To me, she is quite believable as a high-spirited, intelligent, abnormally sensitive child (how quickly children come to feel the lies and wrongs of their elders). But, whether this be granted or denied by the reader, he will, I imagine, agree that she is more credible as a living being than either of her parents.

All four of the characters function primarily as exemplars of the workings of moral and immoral forces. Hawthorne is completely preoccupied here with moral issues, so much so that the book constitutes on one level a parable. In this respect, in its concentration upon the crux of a situation involving definitely set-forth concepts of good and evil, it differs from the other novels under consideration. It differs also in its thoroughgoing religious and moral atmosphere, its general acceptance of the orthodox Christian principles of right and wrong.

Hawthorne's own attitude is best exemplified in the following apostrophe, spoken in his own voice:

And be the stern and sad truth spoken, that
the breach which guilt has once made into
the human soul is never, in this mortal state,
repaired.²²

And if "guilt" equals the result of the breaking of religious law (which he is at pains to point out was synonymous with civil law in those days), we have here the convictions of a latter-day Puritan. This view of good and evil, based firmly upon the Ten Commandments, is so familiar as to require no explanation. There is, however, the elaboration of Destiny, which has a strong place in the book.

Not only is it impossible for Dimmesdale and Hester to escape the consequences of their particular sin, but all evil, once strewn, makes an inescapable destiny for those involved in it. When Hester asks Chillingworth to forgive, he states the case:

"Peace, Hester, peace!" replied the old man, with gloomy sternness. "It is not granted me to pardon. I have no such power as thou tellest me of. My old faith, long forgotten, comes back to me and explains all that we do, and all we suffer. By thy first step awry, thou didst plant the germ of evil; but since that moment, it has all been a dark necessity."²³

²² Ibid., Chap. XVIII, p. 231.

²³ Ibid., Chap. XIV, p. 199.

His explanation is certainly within the limits prescribed by the Scholastics, viz., humans have free will until they choose evil. But Pearl's predestination (her character is determined by the sin of her parents) looks back to the sterner orthodoxy of original sin concepts. This is a sense of Destiny closer to the prophets of Hebrew pessimism.

And yet one notes that eventually Pearl is "saved" through good. First Dimmesdale's confession humanizes her, then Chillingworth (in his only inconsistent action) leaves her his wealth, with which, presumably, she later buys respectability. This is, then, especially when one includes Dimmesdale's salvation too, a rather free and easy Destiny, which does not hold a grudge. The atmosphere in this novel, stern as it may be in its outward forms, is in reality a sympathetic and forgiving one. Despite his blackness, it is difficult to hate, or believe to be eternally damned, even Chillingworth. Hawthorne infuses all the characters in a final glow of Christian forgiveness. His novel thus becomes not the saga of a search for truth, but a story of truth overcoming falsehood (contrast practically every other book on the list). It is not, then, as James says,

a "consistently gloomy" novel;²⁴ quite the reserve. It is neither sad nor pessimistic. Good conquers evil, balance comes back to Boston, and there are some new, if slightly battered, faces in heaven.

Personally, I regard this as an optimistic novel. Compare, for instance, Hawthorne's attitude toward man-in-the-mass with that of the later novelists:

When an uninstructed multitude attempts to see with its eyes, it is exceedingly apt to be deceived. When, however, it forms its judgments, as it usually does, on the intuitions of its great and warm heart, the conclusions thus attained are often so profound and so unerring, as to possess the character of truths supernaturally revealed.²⁵

It is to the credit of human nature, that, except where its selfishness is brought into play, it loves more readily than it hates.²⁶

The second opinion is quite sound, so long as one does not attempt to explain how seldom selfishness absents itself as a factor in human actions. The first, resulting no doubt from Hawthorne's lack of real understanding of mass humanity, is in itself enough to stamp the book as

²⁴ James, op. cit., p. 509.

²⁵ Hawthorne, op. cit., Chap. IX, p. 143.

²⁶ Ibid., Chap. XIII, p. 182.

almost benightedly optimistic. Even Chillingworth, in a strange way, is bathed finally in this kind light:

It is a serious subject of observation and inquiry, whether hatred and love be not the same thing at bottom. Each, in its utmost development, supposes a high degree of intimacy and heart-knowledge; each renders one individual dependent for the food of his affections and spiritual life upon another; each leaves the passionate lover, or the no less passionate hater, forlorn and desolated by the withdrawal of his subject. Philosophically considered, therefore, the two passions seem essentially the same, except that one happens to be seen in a celestial radiance, and the other in a dusky and lurid glow. In the spiritual world, the old physician and the minister -- mutual victims as they have been -- may, unawares, have found their earthly stock of hatred and antipathy transmuted into golden love.²⁷

This is perhaps the strangest passage in the book, but it is only one of the counterstatements which lift the novel, ethically speaking, above the primer level of "A is for Adultery." This one, though its equating of the principles common to both love and hate is both good philosophy and excellent psychology, has a confusion about it insofar as it goes beyond the likenesses of love and hate to the point of merging them indistinguishably. They may well be opposite sides of the same coin, but certainly a great deal depends upon the spin. One thinks

²⁷ Ibid., Chap. XXIV, p. 299.

instantly of Heathcliff, and realizes that he does not hate at the same exact moment that he loves. Compounded as he is of both love and hate, he yet alternates between them -- in quick succession, no doubt, but regardless of the instantaneousness of the change, it is yet a matter of separate stills rather than one blurred film. On the whole, though, the merit of Hawthorne's observation outweighs its defect. And there are other subtleties in the book which prove that Hawthorne, orthodox and direct on some levels, had others upon which he operated with a care for what James terms "the deeper psychology."²⁸

For instance, he portrays Dimmesdale as becoming a greater minister by the very agency of his guilt. He uses this, in fact, for his only really ironic touch, viz., Dimmesdale delivers his greatest sermon at the moment when he has reached the apex of his sin-consciousness. Yet Hawthorne never seems to decide whether this kind of good-through-evil is valid or not. We might know if we were shown clearly the reaction of the parishioners to his confession, but this is covered over by the occasionally tiresome and evasive device of multiple choice. The decision remains a matter of paying your money and taking your choice. At one moment Hawthorne

²⁸ James, op. cit., p. 476.

convinces us that no good can come of evil; at the next he is busy showing us Dimmesdale in the act of lifting the entire congregation on wings of words up to a cloud somewhere over Boston.

One feels also that his regard for the dignity and staunchness of the Puritans is not unmixed with a disapproval of their stark austerity. He is advocating a return to their honesty, but not to their severity.

And there is, as has been pointed out to me, yet another interesting effect of ambiguity in the novel, one which does not seem to result from any conscious intent -- or at least is not under the author's control: there is in Hawthorne's tone throughout the book not only a palpable sympathy, both positive and negative (absence of real condemnation), for the sinning characters, but there is also a repeated implicit suggestion that the actual adultery -- a mere carnal sin -- is hardly very important as sin. (The real sin is the hypocrisy.) This tone is, however, more than balanced off by the repeated condemning of the act. It is as though Hawthorne were first pointing out to us that the adultery was only a legalistic sin, but then went on to great lengths to show the importance of such a legalistic breach in a society where religious and civil law were

one and the same.²⁹ It is suggested that Hawthorne did not actually feel, in his deeper being, that the adultery of Dimmesdale and Hester was really a sin, but that he could not bring himself quite to admit it, and must have realized in any case that his contemporaries would not have accepted such a view.

However this may be, it is certain that this ambiguity, plus the others mentioned, give the book an effect of "swinging sympathy," a tension and counter-statement which is a fault insofar as it is not under control, but it is a virtue in that it keeps the novel from being "message-laden" (contrast War and Peace).

Certain it is that the psychological tensions make of this book -- the first major novel written by an American -- a work which, at least in part, looks forward to the future. Its opinions upon the essential nature of good and evil are, in the main, without profundity, and belong to the nineteenth century "school of certitudes"; but its dawning realizations of some of the complexities involved in a separation of good from evil, and its intricate depiction of the effect of evil upon man, make of it an outstanding work

²⁹ See F. I. Carpenter, "Scarlet A Minus," College English, V (Jan., 1944), 177 ff.

which looks forward to the psychological novel of Henry James. Its portrayal of the psychical effects upon Dimmesdale of all the forces -- natural and preternatural -- which surround him, makes it in part a beautifully handled, psychologically accurate picture of the soul in distress. Many of the separate observations are keen, viz., on Dimmesdale's return from the fateful meeting with Hester in the forest, when the decision to flee with her had been made, he finds that the town and everything in it looks completely different to him; and (an even better observation) he has an almost unconquerable urge to laugh, shout, swear, be impious, sock everyone; he has had a heady draught of freedom held to his nose, and is as beautifully "drunk" as if he had swallowed a jug.

But if Hawthorne succeeds here, he fails I think on the level of symbol. The allegory is flat and fairly unprofitable. The reason is, I suspect, quite aside from the questionable virtues of allegory as literary form, the limitations of Hawthorne's poetic imagination, which made him unable to vitalize and sustain his symbols.³⁰

³⁰ For an excellent analysis of allegory in general and Hawthorne's use of it in particular, see James, Ibid., pp. 474 ff.

A certain amount of poetic force he surely had. We see it in the authentic and powerful evocation of place and mood. But he did not have the profound, virile, world-embracing poetic force that enabled Melville to people an ocean with symbols and make every one of them fiercely alive and dynamic.

Hawthorne's vision is of a twilight world, where all who suffer are about to rest, where all that is evil will be blanketed by good, and where all that is disturbingly dynamic will melt back into eternal symbol. It is a land of simplification...and of sleep.

3 - Crime and Punishment (1866)³¹

Here is the sleepless land...a place of perpetual nightmare. Moving from Hawthorne's seventeenth-century New England to Dostoyevsky's nineteenth-century Russia transports one from a vague twilight vision to a harsh, jangling reality. All the veils are torn away; ambiguity and allegory are gone; the dignity of society is gone; Athena is in the market-place; and the protest of the loveless is not dreamy adultery, but murder with an axe.

This is no brave new world. The problems in it are those of old: how can man -- subject to every

³¹ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, trans. by Constance Garnett (New York: Modern Library, n. d.), 332 pp.

misdirecting influence from without and within because of his weakness and fallibility -- find himself and his God? It is a different text -- a different page of the world's book -- but the sermon is the same. We may expect, then, to find beneath the striking differences between Crime and Punishment and The Scarlet Letter substantial interrelationships.

One notices immediately that both are stories of conscience, of the effect of evil upon mind, body, and spirit. Both Raskolnikov and Dimmesdale have committed crimes. Both are members of isolated social groups (Raskolnikov's is isolated by economic factors) and, though both are subjected to strong moral pressures from these groups, each finds his salient punishment within himself. Each treads eventually the path of good-through-evil, and each arrives at his destination -- God.

Further comparisons suggest also the contrasts. Though both books are morally realistic, in the sense that they recognize the existence of good-and-evil as well as good and evil, The Scarlet Letter is, as novel form, essentially a romance, whereas Crime and Punishment is a realistic novel. There are great differences between the causes of the two crimes. Whereas

Dimmesdale's derives from a normal enough slip of the libido, Raskolnikov's is consciously planned, thought through, and decided upon as action for the very reason that it is crime. It results from a rational principle which dictates that a crime shall be committed. It is an attempt at a way of life which is beyond ordinary distinctions of good and evil. The punishment, when it comes, lies for Raskolnikov mainly in the fact that his principle has failed, or rather that he has proved inadequate in relation to it. Thus, though sore self-knowledge is the outcome of both Dimmesdale's and Raskolnikov's crimes, that of the latter has reference only to itself, not to any external factors of society or religious law. Furthermore, in Dimmesdale's case, the crime is committed before the story begins. We see only the punishment. But Raskolnikov's situation is presented in its entirety. We see the crime, the motives, the results. We see a man not falling from a proven way of life but groping toward one. The story is revealed almost entirely through the developing realizations of Raskolnikov's mind. As a result, although both books concentrate upon "the deeper psychology," this one is both a broader and more profound study of the psyche. And although both concentrate primarily upon evil in

a personal context, evil which derives from man's nature as an eternal individual, the probing light is more sharply focused upon individuality here. Raskolnikov is the center around which every character and episode in the book revolves. The others serve merely to augment him, either by a projection of his tonality or by serving as a contrasting shade. This novel is, in fact, a kind of crux of the nineteenth-century trend toward the study of the individual as individual (it harks back to Julien and Goriot, anticipates Freud and Nietzsche, and looks forward to Milly Theale and Leopold Bloom).

Because it is such a strongly concentrated novel, the main effect of which depends upon the action within the mind of one man, it is surprising to find oneself confronted with a long list of important characters. But such is the case. And since I shall have to refer to them off and on throughout this section, and since -- for me, at least -- Russian names are difficult to remember in quantity, a dramatis personae will perhaps be helpful (to simplify, I will list them only by that lesser part of their long names by which I shall refer to them):

"And how dared I, knowing myself, knowing how I should be, take up an axe and shed blood! I ought to have known beforehand ...Ah, but I did know!" he whispered in despair...

"No, those men are not made so. The real Master to whom all is permitted storms Toulon, makes a massacre in Paris, forgets an army in Egypt, wastes half a million men in the Moscow expedition and gets off with a jest at Vilna. And altars are set up to him after his death, and so all is permitted. No, such people it seems are not of flesh but of bronze!"

One sudden irrelevant idea almost made him laugh. Napoleon, the pyramids, Waterloo, and a wretched skinny old woman, a pawnbroker with a red trunk under her bed -- it's a nice hash for Porfiry Petrovitch to digest! How can they digest it! It's too inartistic. "A Napoleon creep under an old woman's bed! Ugh, how loathsome!"³²

Here is illustrated the triangular trap in which Raskolnikov is caught. The three sides of the trap are constructed of a) the reason for the crime, b) the crime itself, c) the results of the crime. Each side is equally vicious, for each has turned out to be a sharp, jagged, twisted, filthy thing rather than the smooth, straight, clean-steel creation that Raskolnikov had hoped for, and had made himself believe in. Let us look at the before and after of each of these three components.

³² Ibid., Part III, Sec. VI, pp. 268-269.

It is best to start with the crime itself, in order better to trace later the discrepancies between the action and its causes. There are two murders -- one planned, one unplanned -- both committed with an axe, both brutal and frenzied. The murders so completely unsettle the murderer that the consequent robbery -- the supposed motive of the crime -- is only partially accomplished (and the small gains never realized). So completely gone are the wits of the murderer, horrified at his crime, that only fortuitous circumstances save him from the consequences of his innumerable blunders.

What in particular strikes one about the crime as Dostoyevsky presents it? The brutality? The coincidences? No, the emphasis is carefully and heavily placed upon two factors: 1) the sheer horror of it, not for the victims but for the murderer himself; 2) the complete futility of it insofar as the accomplishment of its aims are concerned. One knows instantly that such a crime can yield only bitter irony and defeat for the criminal. This is underscored by the accidental and terrible necessity of killing the gentle Lizaveta as well as the old pawnbroker, Alyona Ivanovna.

At the very moment of the crime the possible moral excuse that he had killed only an evil hag is taken from Raskolnikov by the second murder (this, rather than any moralizing on the self-propagation of crime, is to my mind Dostoyevsky's purpose in involving Lizaveta). We know at once that there is to be no moral "out" from this crime, nor even a practical justification, for it has, as action, miserably betrayed its causes. What were these causes?

This is not to be answered by a simple label. The reasons for the crime are, as would be true in the case of so complex a nature as Raskolnikov's, compounded of a layer of overt motive which is buoyed up and reinforced by a sub-stratum of justification and extension of purpose which reaches all the way from social theory to mysticism.

The overt reason, which seems to provide the immediate necessity of the act, is poverty. It is that grinding poverty which denies a man his dignity and hinders him from rising to the level of accomplishment which will afford him a feeling of fulfillment (compare Jude). The result is subjugation, a frustrating of will. And it is in this light, rather than that of a wish for comfort or even a desire to help his family

and friends (for Raskolnikov, though generous, is always at base an egoist), that poverty is a contributing factor to his crime. I believe this to be true despite Raskolnikov's later denial of the influence of poverty upon him, a denial which is accepted by some excellent critics.³³ It appears to me that, since the crime is an expression of will, any major factor which has contributed to the compressing of that will to the exploding point must be considered as partial cause of the crime. Thus, when Raskolnikov determines that he will commit crime in order to gain enough money to take his first step upward, he admits to some extent the subjugating power of his poverty. I will admit that it is certainly a lesser motive. One knows, for instance, that the extreme form of his poverty is more a result of his psychic impotence at the moment than it is an imposition from without. And furthermore, his decision to solve it through robbery and murder is by no means dictated by the problem. This particular decision depends upon the underlayers, upon the warring factors in his psyche which seize upon crime as solution.

There is, first, Raskolnikov's own version of the old theory (to be revived by the contemporary Nietzsche)

³³ See Janko Lavrin, Dostoevsky (New York: Macmillan, 1947), pp. 75-81.

that mankind is divided into two unequal parts: the leaders and the led, the geniuses and the common men, the givers of commands and the receivers. Add to this Raskolnikov's conviction that he is in every case one of the former, and he becomes a diamond among zircons. It is important to the masses that he, rather than any of them, should survive, for he is potentially one of their leaders. But they do not recognize this and are allowing him to perish. It therefore becomes necessary for him, in order to exist, to impose his will upon the people. In a combination of Carlylean hero-worship and Nietzschean devotion to the principle of action, he chooses Napoleon as the yardstick by which to measure himself (compare Julien; contrast Prince Audrey).

It is precisely here that Raskolnikov subconsciously feels himself caught in the dilemma inherent in this "separate ethics for supermen" theory. He realizes that he can never be the callously self-convinced will-imposer that Napoleon was (just as he feels at bottom that he is not this type of person at all, and that the matter of degree is essentially irrelevant). He determines therefore to be moderate and cautious about it, in the sense that he will impose death, not like Napoleon upon thousands

indiscriminately, but upon one person who is by his reckoning a malignant force in the world. Thus he justifies the fact that her death will be of use to him by reasoning that it will be also to society's advantage. The sophistry is, of course, patent: he is applying a post-rational process to a decision already determined by the will.

The true compulsion to murder lay somewhere in the dark area of furious protest against social martyrdom, plus the need to emerge with a strong and positive action from the coma of weakness and ineptitude in which he had spent so long a time. It is for this reason that the murder is necessary; simple robbery is the weak, undignified action of the sneak-thief. This is to be an act of strength, an affirmation of will, a Napoleonic action on a small plane.

But in the very act of so restricting his plane, and in the name of un-Napoleonic rationalization -- choosing so weak and wretched an object for his action -- he immediately and ineluctably deprives his act of any air of heroism or affirmation it might have had. He makes of it not a firm, Napoleonic gesture of appropriation, but a bumbling and horrible episode of meaningless brutality which accomplishes not one of its aims. It is,

then, in the sickness of his causes that we find the death of his results.

Not only does the crime reveal to Raskolnikov how far he is from being a Napoleonic prototype, but it shows him ultimately that he is never destined to be the type of leader who achieves moral ends by amoral means. It is not, however, the lesson itself that is so terrible; it is the way in which it is brought home to him.

As he looks at the murder and the murderer, what does he see? A terrible crime which, however, was of help to some one? This crime has helped no one, for not only had he stolen very little money, but he had not been able to bring himself to use the little he had stolen. Has it, at least in a negative way, helped society? Hardly, for he had killed the gentle and charitable Lizaveta too. Has he proved his social theory? No; this was impossible, for it is a theory unfitted to him and unprovable by him. Has he proved his strength? Quite the reverse, for he has been found unequal to the task he set for himself, with the result that the murder itself was a brutal, fear-crazed thing, and its aftermath is a sickened, half-mad murderer. The whole thing has proved to be a senseless botch on every

side, and it has done nothing but show Raskolnikov that he is not the man he thought (and hoped) he was. This Hamlet-like realization is heightened by his vivid mental picture of the "inartistic" qualities of his crime, the vulgarity of it:³⁴

Raskolnikov's torment was not one of moral remorse. His loathing of himself and of his deed was above all aesthetic.³⁵

It is here, rather than in the conventional conscience-illness of a Dimmesdale -- where the conscience plagues one for the breaking of external law -- that we find the departure point of the punishment that fits the crime.

This punishment is largely mental, which is fitting because rational (or pseudo-rational) factors played the major part in his decision to commit this particular crime. It was a matter of his theory that power lay waiting in the world for those men of sufficient force and originality to pick it up. Porfiry Petrovitch states the matter perfectly: "Here we have bookish dreams, a heart unhinged by theories."³⁶

It is precisely for the reason that such a large component of ratiocination is involved in Raskolnikov's crime, that its ultimate failure and horror must be

³⁴ See quotation p. 102.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 80.

³⁶ Dostoyevsky, op. cit., Part VI, Sec. II, p. 441.

borne not only by the under-levels of conscience but also by the inescapably open, brightly-lighted area of his rationale. (It is also because of this fact that retribution comes so swiftly.) This is apparent to him immediately after the crime ("Surely it isn't beginning already! Surely it isn't my punishment coming upon me? It is!"³⁷), when three rationally calculable results appear plainly and oppressively: 1) the failure of his crime as crime, 2) the failure in accuracy of his own rational evaluation of himself, 3) the failure of his principle of life and the lack of a new one to fill its place.

We have seen that it was not the fact that he had committed a crime that bothered him so much. Rather he is haunted, from the moment the deed is done, by a clear vision of the essential vulgarity of it. It was such a small, mean act, so meanly carried out. Nothing about it bears any resemblance to the action of a man who possesses true strength of purpose. It is, in fact, a crime most fitting a common fool. Raskolnikov's stern pride and haughty self-possession lay mingled with the old woman's blood. And, more important, so does his

³⁷ Ibid., Part II, Sec. I, p. 91.

self-respect, his self-esteem, for the crime's aftermath proves to Raskolnikov that "he hath ever but slenderly known himself," or at least has rejected that which he knew and substituted a vision of that which he wished.

He, who thought he could with deliberation kill in cold blood and then outface both society and his own conscience, is reduced in no time to a despairing, cringing, half-dead man -- and this even before anyone suspects him. His own self -- that self which he had so badly misjudged -- is persecutor enough. It harries him constantly -- awake or asleep -- with visions of violent contrasts between the Raskolnikov he had projected before the crime, and the one who now exists; between the strong, resolute leader of men to whom all is permissible, and the weak, wavering creature haunted by his vulgarity of action, despairing over the deformity in his psyche which had led him to do a thing which his mind had warned him beforehand he could not do:

"I aimed at carrying it out as justly as possible, weighing, measuring and calculating. Of all the lice I picked out the most useless one and proposed to take from her only as much as I needed for the first step, no more nor less...And what shows that I am utterly a louse...is that I am

perhaps viler and more loathsome than the louse I killed, and I felt beforehand that I should tell myself so after killing her. Can anything be compared with the horror of that! The vulgarity! The abjectness."³⁸

He has, despite his evaluation of himself as a highly rational man, acted irrationally at the most critical moment of his life. The result is a cruel piece of stupidity which, before it does anything else to him, completely destroys his self-respect. But it also destroys the meaning of his life. This act was the result of his total development up to this point. It was to have been his solution to the problem of living, a solution expressive of those principles which he believed applied to his own life and gave to it its particular meaning. But these principles, for him at least, had no longer any validity. Nor was there anything to replace them, anything to grasp on to in this moment of despair. "(Raskolnikov) was thus thrown into a spiritual vacuum which he was unable to bear by his very nature."³⁹ All was emptiness. Retribution had come quickly, imposed upon him by himself. Only with

³⁸ Ibid., Part III, Sec. VI, pp. 269-270.

³⁹ Lavrin, op. cit., p. 80.

his garden thus deeply furrowed could he so well retain and nourish all the subsequent seeds of retribution that are blown so relentlessly his way.

The process moves in inexorable fashion. As his feeling of degradation progresses toward the critical point, he begins to hate himself. Hating himself, he cannot help but hate everything and everyone else. Thus he broadens the schism between society (including family and friends) and himself, a schism already made too wide and deep by the eternal curse brought upon himself by every criminal: the necessary inability ever again to converse freely and intimately with his fellows.

Then organized society, in the person of Porfiry Petrovitch, takes out after him. This ramifies. First his secret is suspected by the police, then by others; it becomes known to the police, then to others. Soon -- very soon -- Raskolnikov feels that he has nowhere to turn. Everything seems to give him away. Added to his already critical loss of self-respect is the knowledge that he is becoming, both in thought and action, nothing more than a hunted animal. This represents, of course, the final loss of human dignity, the final intolerable factor in a labyrinth of torture. Porfiry Petrovitch⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Here is a fine character: tired, disenchanted, an essentially kind man in a cruel job, sensitive, and with a keen, incisive mind of Italian Renaissance subtlety.

accurately states Raskolnikov's position when he says, "It's not merely that he has nowhere to run to, he is psychologically unable to escape me..."⁴¹

He finds himself suspicious of those he loves. He hurts them, hates them. And they in turn, suspecting nothing, freeze the blood in his veins by an innocent remark. Nor is there any momentary relief for him in that part of the lives of his family, friends, and acquaintances which he shares. Their destinies seem nearly as hopeless, their lives as meaningless and brutalized, as his own. The situation grows in complexity and intensity until Raskolnikov, severely ill, becomes nearly mad with that disease common to men of perception who are battered by life -- monomania ("He was in the condition that overtakes some monomaniacs entirely concentrated upon one thing."⁴² Cf. Heathcliff, Chillingworth, Ahab, Kurtz.) He is faced at last with the final penance of suicide or confession. It is at this point that -- subtly, still in the form of punishment -- the slow reclamation of Raskolnikov begins.

⁴¹ Dostoyevsky, op. cit., Part IV, Sec. V, p. 333.

⁴² Ibid., Part I, Sec. III, p. 29.

On this there is less need to comment. It is a direct process and occupies a minor part of the book, being in fact the subject of an epilogue which I consider extraneous. (At the moment of Raskolnikov's confession to the police, the story that is being told here is finished. The rest, as Dostoyevsky correctly surmises, "might be the subject of a new story.") Suffice to say, his reclamation is made possible through love and a new faith (compare Tolstoy; contrast Hardy). The four kinds of love are all included: love of friends (Razumihin), love of family, love of woman (Sonia), and, ultimately, love of God. (It might be noted that Sonia's love is the pivotal one; it saves the other three by saving Raskolnikov.⁴³)

This is primarily a book about evil and its results, and secondarily a story of an unsuccessful attempt to go beyond the usual distinctions of good and evil. Evil is shown in all its manifold forms and weights, perhaps so that the solution advanced may seem the best way to cope successfully with the whole portfolio of evil. There is avarice, lechery, drunkenness, brutality,

⁴³ Sonia acts, on one level, as an externalized conscience, somewhat like Pearl.

poverty, ignorance, treachery, rape, robbery, prostitution, blackmail, disease, and violent death (one accidental, one suicide, two actual murders, one murder related in the past, and another suggested). All these evils run through the story like so many themes in a fugue -- countering each other, repeating, varying, never disappearing. The evil that is done is reinforced by the evil that is dreamed and the evil that is told. And the helplessness of these people in the face of it is equally emphasized and reiterated.

The cornered Raskolnikov is no worse off than the trapped Marmeladovs; no poorer than his mother, no more oppressed than Lizaveta, no more disenchanted than Porfiry Petrovitch. His position finds other echoes in the poverty-stricken helplessness of Dounia and Sonia, and the personality-entrapment of Luzhin and of Svidrigailov (who has tried to live without reference to any concept of good and evil beyond that of personal satisfaction). The first pair shares with him the terrible pressure of externals, as well as a certain capacity for inner beauty and strength (which is, however, more developed in them); the second pair, free from material oppression, shares with him the more deadly

pressure of internals -- both rendered helpless, like him, by a psychic deformity, but unlike him, completely doomed, for they have pursued the line past the point of deviation. (This kind of repetitive parallelism suggests a hyper-complex Lear-Gloucester pattern.) With Sonia on the one side, and Svidrigailov on the other, we have a vivid projection of the two directions in which Raskolnikov can go. In either case, suffering lies in wait for him, as it does for everyone.

There is no feeling here that some are destined to suffer while others escape. It is no matter of chance or individual destiny. Oh yes, Raskolnikov several times mentions these factors in connection with his crime, but one is unconvinced; he is rationalizing (thus the accidents that enable him to "escape" are nothing, for he never truly does escape). As we have seen, even the accident of poverty is no determinant in itself, for in varying degrees Luzhin, Porfiry Petrovitch, and Svidrigailov are crushed despite, and even because of, their material comforts.

No, the evil here does not befall one by chance, and the only way in which Destiny is involved is that no one is destined to escape the effects of evil. And it

is for this very reason that the book is, to me, less depressing than, for instance, Jude the Obscure or The Red and the Black. It is perhaps more intensely painful than any of the other novels under consideration (Ahab at least has "greatness"); yet at the same time it is less pessimistic than any save The Scarlet Letter and War and Peace. And one of the reasons for this, paradoxical as it sounds, is the very universality of the evil Dostoyevsky portrays. This uniformity of suffering, independent of Chance, implies a universe which, though it be a difficult place to live in, has a pattern and a kind of negative justice.

But it is not a negative factor to which Dostoyevsky is pointing. What does he imply in this story? He is certainly not writing an anti-superman tract (contrast War and Peace). Nor a warning to would-be murderers. Nor simply a case study of a tortured conscience. These, and many other, ingredients may be found in the book, but there is, above and beyond the separate insights, a unifying major emphasis.

This emphasis centers upon his viewpoint of the structure of the individual as a fluid, self-contained unit holding within itself -- as potential -- heaven, hell, and all the intermediate gradations.

Dostoyevsky is careful to point out that this applies not to certain individuals, but to all. Everyone contains within him the seeds of his own salvation and damnation. And the choice of which set of seeds he nurtures is his own, regardless of external circumstance. Society can neither guarantee your good nor prevent your evil. This holds true even of the so-called "ideal society." Razumihin, very likely speaking for the author, has this to say of the attainment of universal good through the planned society:

"Everything with them is 'the influence of environment,' and nothing else. Their favourite phrase! From which it follows that, if society is normally organized, all crime will cease at once, since there will be nothing to protest against and all men will become righteous in one instant. Human nature is not taken into account, it is excluded, it's not supposed to exist! They don't recognize that humanity, developing by a historical living process, will become at last a normal society (compare Hardy), but they believe that a social system that has come out of some mathematical brain is going to organize all humanity at once and make it just and sinless in an instant, quicker than any living process!....they don't want a living soul! The living soul demands life, the soul won't obey the rules of mechanics, the soul is an object of suspicion, the soul is retrograde! But what they want though it smells of death and can be

made of india-rubber, at least is not alive, has no will, is servile and won't revolt! And it comes in the end to their reducing everything to the building of walls and the planning of rooms and passages in a phalanstery! The phalanstery is ready, indeed, but your human nature is not ready for the phalanstery -- it wants life, it hasn't completed its vital process, it's too soon for the graveyard. You can't skip over nature by logic. Logic presupposes three possibilities, but there are millions! Cut away a million, and reduce it all to the question of comfort! That's the easiest solution of the problem!....the whole secret of life in two pages of print!"⁴⁴

It is not to an expression of the social will that we may look for our solutions (cf. 1948). It is the individual -- with all his illogicalities and necessities -- who is, and must be, finally responsible for his own good and evil. What we have here is, of course, the Christian doctrine of free will and individual responsibility (which, if truly followed, will result in social good).

There is no heavy and irrevocable destiny hanging over us (contrast Jude the Obscure and Wuthering Heights); Chance does not decide, except insofar as it aids or hinders us in following our choice (contrast The Red

⁴⁴ Ibid., Part III, Sec. V, pp. 251-252.

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and the Black); environment, cruel as it may be, is not an invincible foe (contrast Père Goriot and Madame Bovary); nor is there abroad in the world a cosmic principle of evil beyond ourselves (contrast Moby Dick). Both good and evil are very real, and have very real effects both upon the people from whom they stem and the people upon whom they fall. But in every case good and evil are a matter of, by, and for, the individual. The cardinal sins are not those which are sinned against others (Raskolnikov is saved), but those which are sinned against one's self, against one's own nature. It is this poison which sickens Raskolnikov and kills Svidrigailov; it is this poison which has never been able to touch the soul of Sonia, the prostitute (though it has killed her body). One sees here justification for D. H. Lawrence's remark on Dostoyevsky:

The whole point of Dostoyevsky lies in the fact of his fixed will that the individual ego, the achieved I, the conscious entity, shall be infinite, God-like, and absolved from all relation, i.e., free.⁴⁵

But if there is an insistence upon the "individualness" of people, there is not the feeling of a world made up of isolated beings. Quite the opposite, for all

⁴⁵ The Letters of D. H. Lawrence, ed. by Aldous Huxley (New York: Viking Press, 1936), p. 330.

are tightly bound together by a community of suffering. Dostoyevsky throws over all alike a blanket of suffering which, though dark and oppressive, is at the same time soft, warm, communal. It is, in fact, the sharing of this blanket which gives people to understand and sympathize one with the other. Thus the rapist sympathizes with the victim, the policeman with the criminal, the criminal with the prostitute, the prostitute with the drunken father, and so on. It is a sense of inclusiveness, essentially Christian in nature. And in this way suffering, though usually occasioned by evil, becomes often a contributing factor toward good through its tendency to heighten understanding and sympathy. It is a perception by Dostoyevsky of that mixed quality of all human action which was later to affect J. M. Forster (Trilling says of Forster that "as he grows into life he is far more aware of good-and-evil than of good and evil."⁴⁶)

This feeling informs the whole book, so that there is not a character in it toward whom we do not feel a certain sympathy born of understanding (compare The Scarlet Letter). Thus the emotional, as well as

⁴⁶ Lionel Trilling, E. M. Forster (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1943), p. 164.

rational, impact of the book points one toward hope rather than despair. For let evil be as universal and inescapable as it will: if we are all to share in the suffering; to come to know ourselves and others through this suffering; to have a real chance at saving ourselves, rather than to be at the mercy of environment, chance, or predestination, then life becomes a positive thing with a positive meaning. The challenge, though no less stern, becomes worth accepting, for the triumph of good, within the individual, comes not only to be possible but to be within the individual's control.

Where is this "good" to be found? Given the expressed views, it must be that good, like evil, resides within the individual. It must also be that one must judge it within the life-context of the individual, just as the evil of Sonia's prostitution and Dounia's acceptance of Luzhin must be appraised within the boundaries of the dynamic necessities of their lives. (This is the basic reason why, regardless of his conviction that she was vile, Raskolnikov had no moral right to make the final judgment of old Alyona Ivanovna.) But how many people can fully know these necessities in the lives of others? Very few, certainly. Does it mean that in this respect almost

all moral judgment of one man by another is futile -- even vicious? Does it mean that in truth there is no objective ethical code beyond "Thou shalt not judge"?

Yes, it does. Recall the prophetic dream that Raskolnikov has in the Siberian hospital:

He dreamt that the whole world was condemned to a terrible new strange plague that had come to Europe from the depths of Asia. All were to be destroyed except a very few chosen. Some new sorts of microbes were endowed with intelligence and will. Men attacked by them became at once mad and furious. But never had men considered themselves so intellectual and so completely in possession of the truth as these sufferers, never had they considered their decisions, their scientific conclusions, their moral convictions so infallible. Whole villages, whole towns and peoples went mad from the infection. All were excited and did not understand one another. Each thought that he alone had the truth and was wretched looking at the others, beat himself on the breast, wept, and wrung his hands. They did not know how to judge and could not agree what to consider evil and what good; they did not know whom to blame, whom to justify. Men killed each other in a sort of senseless spite. They gathered together in armies against one another, but even on the march the armies would begin attacking each other, the ranks would be broken and the soldiers would fall on each other, stabbing and cutting, biting and devouring each other....Only a few men could be saved in the whole world. They were a pure chosen people, destined to found a new race and a new life, to renew and purify the earth, but no one had seen these men, no one had heard their words and voices. (Italics mine.)⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Dostoyevsky, op. cit., Epilogue, Sec. II, pp. 528-529.

This "dream" (a frightening prophecy in the light of contemporary history) marks a towering peak of nineteenth-century disillusionment in the validity of logic as a "control" for life -- a disillusionment which persists in our own century. One is reminded of Trilling's observation that "Yeats, in one of his autobiographies, says that the religious life consists in making all things equal, the intellectual life in saying, "Thou fool." ⁴⁸ The voices of these new leaders had not been heard because they had never spoken in judgment, never said "Thou fool." Absolute objective truth is something we are not likely to possess about ourselves, let alone about others. These judgments are valueless and harmful, says Iostoyevsky. The way we can best help others is to help ourselves, to develop our own highest potentialities.

In the course of this development, this seeking by the individual for self-knowledge, mistakes will inevitably be made, and often these mistakes will be productive of evil, e.g., Raskolnikov. They will harm ourselves; they will harm others. And yet it must be so, for we are not born like Athena. Evil is a natural by-product of human growth. (Note that even the "angelic" characters -- Sonia and Dounia -- while not evil in themselves, are at

⁴⁸ Trilling, op. cit., p. 163.

times a force for evil.) This is not an apologia by Dostoyevsky; evil remains not one whit less terrible, nor our responsibility for it one whit less binding. It is simply an attempt to understand evil as stemming from the same source as good, i.e., the development of the individual as a living being.

If, says Dostoyevsky, this development is deformed or prematurely cut off, we will have a person whose existence is productive of more evil than good, e.g., Luzhin, Svirigailov; if it reaches a fine point of integration, the opposite holds true, e.g., Razumihin. Most people are, like Raskolnikov, somewhere in the middle, apt to go either way. Is there, for such people, no signpost, no dependable guide whatsoever?

Dostoyevsky suggests that there may be one: faith. Just as it was theory that wrecked Raskolnikov, it was faith that brought him back to life. It was faith that saved Sonia -- faith in one's self, in man, in living, and in the godhead. It is not a rational process, but an emotional one; it is productive not of theory, but of feeling:

He thought of her. He remembered how continually he had tormented her and wounded her heart. He remembered her pale and thin little face. But these recollections scarcely troubled him now; he knew with

what infinite love he would now repay all her sufferings. And what were all, all the agonies of the past! Everything, even his crime, his sentence and imprisonment, seemed to him now in the first rush of feeling an external, strange fact with which he had no concern. But he could not think for long together of anything that evening, and he could not have analyzed anything consciously; he was simply feeling. Life had stepped into the place of theory, and something quite different would work itself out in his mind.⁴⁹

Faith is brought about by love and is, in turn, conducive to love. It is a central and permeating feeling which has in its power the ability to check the errant mind and to present an invulnerable core to the buffetings of circumstance. All that is truly good will grow out of faith. It is a deep and abiding emotion not, like rational theory, subject to constant change. It is, in fact, not so much a signpost toward good as it is the goal itself. Without a living faith, there can be no faith in living.

This, as I see it, is Dostoyevsky's vision in the novel. It is a vision of hope, and yet, in some ways, it is a private vision. (I shall have more to say about the "private" qualities of the religious solution in my section on War and Peace.) It says to all who suffer: find yourselves by yourselves. It has inherent in it

⁴⁹ Dostoyevsky, op. cit., Epilogue, Sec. II, p. 531.

the difficulties of all thoroughly individualistic solutions. Shall two people perish that one may survive? And added to this difficulty is the even greater problem which results from the fact that faith is not to be had simply by an act of will (as Dostoyevsky himself knew only too well).

In relation to this latter statement, however, one must credit Dostoyevsky for attempting to portray the gaining of a faith in realistic terms. For this is surely a realistic novel, despite the breaks in realism here and there. I refer to such things as the relentless piling on of misery throughout the story. Purposeful as it is, it cannot help at times striking the reader as a bit too much. The detailed recollection of Svidrigailov's terrible rape and the suicide of his child-victim, the unbearably oppressive picture of his last night -- these and other details seem to take one farther into the gloom than he need go for the matter at hand, and for this reason seem to smack of card-stacking. And there is, of course, the disheartening coincidence by which Svidrigailov overhears Raskolnikov's confession to Sonia. (It might also be mentioned that Sonia herself is oversimplified, emerging more as symbol than person.)

On the whole, however, these are real people, whose actions -- unusual as they may be -- spring logically and realistically from their positions. Leading real lives in real rooms, these people act for reasons consistent with their characters and surroundings, and work out their destructions and salvations among themselves. Not for an instant does Dostoyevsky depart from his particular brand of realism. He carefully avoids coming within sniffing distance of sentimentality even though the story, full of helplessness and misery as it is, presents a thousand possible pitfalls. He escapes them with the utmost skill, e.g., the telling of Sonia's first night of enforced prostitution, which Dostoyevsky makes the drunken Marmeladov relate in a tavern; thus the potential sentimentality is, so to speak, filtered out through Marmeladov; the reader, seeing the scene in a dirty mirror, gets nothing but the horror. Pathos, which in moderation is a valid artistic evocation, is used sparingly. He reserves it mostly for the old people (Marmeladov, Katerina Ivanovna, Pulcheria Alexandrovna) and the children. Irony, that most misused device, is given fresh effect by a kind of inversion. It is employed mainly by Raskolnikov against others and life at large, but

in almost every case the irony rebounds upon himself. The reader, like the audience at a play, is "in" on the secret and can foresee the boomerang quality of the ironic statements. It is, in a way, irony used to disprove the value of irony. Letters and dreams are used in a skillfully realistic fashion to reinforce and restate both the action and the psychological aura of the story.

Crime and Punishment is as tightly atmospheric a novel as The Scarlet Letter, and posits the same acceptance of good-and-evil, or good-through-evil. But it is far more deeply penetrating psychologically and metaphysically, and in a sense more convincing because of its realism. This psychological realism is used not for its own sake, but as a means to an end -- the end of presenting an insight which, though based firmly upon life's concrete realities, finds in them a deeper significance. And on this plane, Dostoyevsky's novel stands facing The Wings of the Dove.

4 - The Wings of the Dove (1902)⁵⁰

This novel, in its examination of people at the

⁵⁰ Henry James, The Wings of the Dove (New York: Modern Library, 1946), 758 pp.

opposite end of the social scale from those of Crime and Punishment, is no less unremitting in the psychological realism of its method. It is, if anything, more realistic, since it does not in any way rely upon coincidence, dramatic action, piling on of detail, or any other effect which is purely a derivative of plot content; nor at any moment is the reader "ahead" of the characters -- the revelations come to both simultaneously. There is no branching out into the mystic, no sense of prophecy. The point of focus, though shared primarily by three characters, is no less intense than that of Crime and Punishment because it is concentrated upon the situation or relationship which exists between these characters. Too, the characters here, no less than those of Dostoyevsky's novel, seem in a sense all to be cousins, related not by poverty and suffering but by a common sensitivity and awareness, and a uniformly high proportion of ratiocination to word or action. The "thinking" quality of these people is precisely what relates them so closely to the unredeemed Raskolnikov, especially as concerns the results upon them of their own evil:

Many of (James') characters illustrate the law of retribution, and they suffer penalties no statute can impose and no human spirit escape.⁵¹

⁵¹ Lyon M. Richardson, introd. to Henry James (New York: American Book Co., 1941), p. lxxxviii.

This is a statement which, in The Wings of the Dove, is borne out by Merton Densher and Kate Croy. It indicates the likelihood that we have here the same intensive emphasis upon the individual and his mental processes that we had in Crime and Punishment. But there is also a difference. Both aspects are brought out in this comment upon James by T. S. Eliot:

It is in the chemistry of these subtle substances, these curious precipitates and explosive gases which are suddenly formed by the contact of mind with mind,⁵² that James is unequalled. (*Italics mine*)

One understands from this that it is not, as is true of a Raskolnikov-Hamlet study, the self-induced turmoil of the individual mind which primarily absorbs James, but rather the fomentation that results in the mind when it is exposed to something outside itself -- and this "something," this catalytic agent, is almost invariably another mind. (This "other mind" can, of course, be symbolic of a force, and often is, e.g., Sir Luke Strett, the healing principle.) It stands to reason that if the action in this novel -- and it is no less action, dramatic action, because it is presented as "thought in motion" rather than physical act -- is to result primarily from a contact between minds, we shall have a different

⁵² T. S. Eliot, "Henry James," The Shock of Recognition, p. 856.

type of character and a different attitude toward social influences than we found in Crime and Punishment. We cannot have here the thorough egoist, who is sensible of externals (including people) only upon that level at which they palpably affect him. Hence we have a great difference between the central figures of the two novels, between the self-immersed Raskolnikov and outward-tending Milly Theale. There is to be none of Raskolnikov's unleashed expression of self, nor even his comparatively great freedom of will; there is instead a sensitivity to others and their needs which must to some extent restrain this will unless it take as outlet the expression of one's self as a social being. Here is the basic differential between the attitudes of the two novels.

This emphasis upon the individual as part of a social context made me hesitate before I included The Wings of the Dove among that group primarily concerned with the personal aspect of evil. More than any other book in this group it spans the personal-social classifications in the sense that it includes large elements of both. However, we shall see that not only is the "society" in this book an isolated and rather inbred segment (the aristocracy of manners

and perceptiveness), but that the problems posed by this society are solvable by the individual. The final responsibility rests with him. Whatever pressures toward evil his society may exert, he must, and can, withstand them at least so far as his own actions are concerned. Thus the dominant note is individual responsibility plus a certain amount of free will, a combination which typifies the concept of good and evil as a matter basically of the individual person.

It is difficult, for several reasons, to reproduce the "story" of this book. For one thing, it is, like all of James' work, a highly integrated unit, a cohesive work of art which does not lend itself to easy summary or sharp analytic break-down. For another, the action presented is all mental, and so much a matter progressive revelation that no separate insight (equivalent to a conclusive action in other books) can stand alone and still convey its true significance in terms of the novel itself -- it is always a momentary culmination of a series of previous insights, and is itself moving toward new ones. (This is, I think, an integral part of the magnificence of James' artistry.) This continuous flux is an essential part of the main characters themselves, and renders

inexpedient any attempt to restate them except upon symbolic levels. And in any case, it is the plot itself, rather than the separate characters, which gives us the final insight into the theme. To this extent I would agree with Yvor Winters' statement:

Since James conceived the art of the novel primarily in terms of plot (situation), and plot almost wholly in terms of ethical choice and of its consequences; since he raised the plotting of the novel to a level of seriousness which it had never before attained in English; since all intelligent criticism of James is resolved inevitably into a discussion of plot; this moral sense, this crisis in history, will prove, I believe, to be the source of the essential problem of James's art.⁵³

For these reasons, it is advisable that I switch method somewhat, and attempt to get at the theme mainly through plot rather than character. Here is a summary of the story's essential situation, plus a few descriptive remarks about the more important characters:

Kate Croy is attractive, cultivated, definitely "bred" -- in the way only Englishwomen are -- but with no money of her own, and with an immediate family background that will not bear too much looking into. She is, however, more or less "adopted" by a rich aunt, Maud Lowder. Maud is a widow whose social position is fairly high, but it is based primarily upon wealth

⁵³ Yvor Winters, "Henry James and the Relation of Morals to Manners," The American Review, IX, (Oct., 1937), 490.

(not overpowering) and her own efforts. There are no blue lineages about. It is for this reason that her "hopes" for Kate in regard to a proper marriage are important enough to her as to give them, so far as Kate is concerned, the quality of command. Maud is firm, vigorous, and observant. She watches. This makes it difficult for Kate, who loves Merton Densher, a man without money or position. The difficulty is not merely the provisional qualities of Maud's generosity, but the fact that Kate feels a sense of debt to Maud and, more important, is herself averse to a moneyless existence because of the vulgarity to which it has exposed her within the confines of her own family. Densher, a Fleet Street man, does not himself care about money. But he is highly sensitive, perceptive, and in love -- he understands Kate's position, and goes along with it as far as he can without surrendering his own dignity and maleness. They meet furtively, wait in indecision simply because in their position they can think of nothing else to do.

Meanwhile, on the Continent, Susie Stringham, a middle-aged Bostonian, is "doing" Europe, and enjoying every moment of her release at long last

from the narrow mental confines of Boston. She is accompanying Milly Theale, an American heiress. Milly is the "dove," the princess. One feels rather than sees her. What one feels is a delicate and unusual, but profound, beauty, almost raw sensitivity, complete integrity, thorough generosity, a certain lonely emptiness of heart, and an indefinable evanescence. Susie, thinking of a change of scene for Milly (note these plain, almost ugly, names), remembers Maud, whom she has not seen since they were girls in school together. She writes to her. The situation comes into being.

Milly captivates Maud and her circle completely. American she may be, but she is first and foremost a "princess," in spirit as well as wealth. Milly returns the fondness. She is especially drawn to Kate and Densher. All seems happy. But suddenly one is aware that Milly is dangerously ill. The disease is unnamed and is not outwardly apparent. Milly, neither now or at any other time shows it. She wants it to be either unknown or ignored. But she must see a doctor. She visits the gentle and perceptive Sir Luke Strett. He tells her that the best way for her to live is simply to do it. One understands then that Milly's

life has been tragically empty insofar as deep human contact is concerned. The princess has everything -- and nothing. One also understands that, since this is the only prescription, her life depends upon herself, her own attitudes and actions in the coming months. Not that it is in any case to be long, but it can be still a life, something which she has not had. And the prospect of her attaining to it seems good, for she is well on the way to being in love with Densher, whom she had previously met in New York.

But Densher, though he senses some of the true greatness of Milly, loves Kate, and is not a man who loves lightly. Everyone senses Milly's need. Kate, who is by this time very close to Milly, persuades Densher that he should, out of sheer humanity, see something of Milly. His friendship can mean much, and her time for friendship may be short. Densher accedes. Milly has in the meanwhile gone to Venice with Susie, needing to prove things to herself. Densher follows. At one time and another so do Kate, Maud, Sir Luke Strett, and Lord Mark, a member of Maud's circle -- polished, subtle, self-seeking, capable of genteel brutality of action. Densher is by this time aware that Milly loves him. And he is also aware of Kate's real motive in promoting the friendship between himself and Milly. It is based

upon the fact, so well-recognized by Kate, that Milly is not one whose generosity will end with her death. It is to be their (Kate's and Densher's) solution. She admits it fully to him, and proves her seriousness in regard to him by a visit to his rooms. Densher is caught. He dislikes his role, but wants Kate very badly. He accepts, and goes on with it.

Milly is completely taken in because she has so thoroughly trusted them. She has explicitly thrown herself upon their mercy. And Kate has given assurances that nothing exists between herself and Densher. Milly is disarmed. But Lord Mark, whom Milly has turned down, brutally reveals the situation to her. She does not believe, and calls Densher to her home. Without saying so, she wants a denial; Densher understands her mute request, but cannot at the crucial moment bring himself to lie outright to her. Nor would she in any case ask him bluntly. But she lets him know that, even if it be so, he is forgiven and still loved by her. This is their final visit together. Densher quits Venice. He can stand no more of this treachery, not even for Kate. Milly is too fine, too much better than all of them.

Not long after his return to England, Kate brings

him news of Milly's death. They both understand. She has "turned her face to the wall." The expected letter from her arrives on Christmas eve. Densher knows what is in it. He cannot open it. Kate will not. She throws it into the fire. Densher soon hears, as he knew he would, from Milly's lawyers. He cannot open this letter either (he cannot face this final act of nobility on Milly's part; his own behaviour is now too clear to him). He sends it to Kate. The final scene of the novel has Kate coming around the next day with the opened letter. Densher asks her not to tell him any of the details. She says simply that the bequest was, like Milly herself, "stupendous." But Densher cannot accept the bequest, cannot bring himself to use the fruits of the betrayal. He asks Kate to allow him to refuse the money. She says that she cannot do this and still marry him. He nevertheless cannot accept. She accuses him of having been in love with Milly:

"I never was in love with her," said Densher.

She took it, but after a little she met it. "I believe that now -- for the time she lived. I believe it at least for the time you were there. But your change came -- as it might well -- the day you last saw her: she died for you then that you might understand her.

From that hour you did." With which Kate slowly rose. "And I do now. She did it for us." Densher rose to face her, and she went on with her thought. "I used to call her, in my stupidity -- for want of anything better -- a dove. Well she stretched out her wings, and it was to that they reached. They cover us."⁵⁴

Densher can see but one solution. He gives Kate a choice -- she can either marry him without their accepting the money, or else she can refuse and he will make the money over to her. But Kate understands something else, something beyond the money. She wants an assurance from him on another matter:

"What is it then?"

"Your word of honour that you're not in love with her memory."

"Oh -- her memory!"

"Ah" -- she made a gesture -- "don't speak of it as if you couldn't be. I could, in your place; and you're one for whom it will do. Her memory's your love. You want no other."

He heard her out in stillness, watching her face, but not moving. Then he only said: "I'll marry you, mind you, in an hour."

"As we were?"

"As we were."

⁵⁴ James, op. cit., Book Tenth, Chap. XXXVIII, p. 438.

But she turned to the door, and her headshake was now the end. "We shall never be again as we were!"⁵⁵

One sees, even in this short summary, that here is a novel in which the central characters make a choice, and that this choice constitutes a judgment by the author insofar as he makes an explicit evaluation of it. The word "explicit" is, of course, a somewhat dangerous adjective in reference to this book. James never editorializes, never speaks out to conclude, never makes a judgment for you. But it does not follow that he makes none for himself. He does, despite the fact that he keeps it unspoken, keeps it rigidly contained within the confines of the plot or situation. Nor does one feel this judgment less emphatically because it is given out in a series of carefully muted grays rather than strong blacks and whites. The style is involuted and occasionally tenuous, but the touch is firm and the meaning certain. This meaning has to do with aspects of both personal and societal good and evil. Let us look first at the personal evil.

This is, as it must be, manifested in the separate personalities of certain characters. One finds them falling

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 439.

naturally into a kind of gradation, or progression: Kate's father, her sister, Lord Mark, Maud Lowder, and Kate Croy -- with Merton Densher as the pivotal principle. These are, of course, in decreasing order of vulgarity and direct, unalleviated nastiness (it is interesting to note that the same regressive order holds for other attributes, e.g., their ability to take action); but they are in increasing order of effect upon Milly Theale, who is the all of beauty and goodness. Here is a relevant paradox: it is not the openly brutalized who can do serious, meaningful damage to the truly good (in the sense that gratuitous murder, for instance, is meaningless), for nothing is expected of them and they are easily recognized; it is rather the cultivated insidious, having enough of the good in themselves to be familiar with its ways and appearances, who can gain entrance to the final sanctum and make of their defilement a heartbreaking reality.

Note further that the list runs progressively in order of sensitivity. Here again is our paradox, for one knows unequivocally that insofar as Kate is more sensitive than her slatternly sister, she is just that much more "fine" for James -- yet Kate (with and through Densher) is the chief betrayer of Milly! Does one need,

in this light, to discard sensitivity as a prime Jamesian virtue (and, conversely, the lack of it as a force for evil)? Not at all, for just as Milly is the most sensitive of the characters, so Densher, more directly susceptible to her influence and a more sensitive person than Kate, passes over at the last on to the side of integrity.

What then does our paradox come to if not to no paradox at all? The self-resolution of differences comes about as we seem to hear James say: the thoroughly vulgarized are, patently, the lowest of people, but of relatively little importance to us here, incapable as they are of touching -- or being touched by -- the beautiful. The sensitive -- those who know the action for the dry, dead shell of a hundred living thoughts -- are the ones who are most dangerous; yet it is among them, if at all, that we are to find recruits for the moral aristocracy.

Precisely what is it that Milly has that the others, less sensitive, do not have? James would probably call it "infallible good taste." But this covers almost everything of a higher moral order for him. Since he equates the good, the true, the beautiful, and the ideal, "good taste" would inevitably condone no

betrayal of these -- at any cost whatsoever. Milly pays the debt of constancy with her life. The converse of this strict loyalty to principle is not merely self-deceit or moral fluidity, but a conscious sacrifice of good taste by sensitive people, people who know. It is a sacrifice on the altar of self-ness, of high selfishness. It is the Augustinian turning away from the higher value to the lower. For James, this good taste is an intellectual and spiritual noblesse oblige. If one lacks it or, having it, fails to act in accord with it, then to this extent he is "vulgarized," he is capable of evil.

Moving away from strictly personal evil, there is a transitional middle ground between it and social evil -- the area of wrongdoing traceable to psychological pressures. Lyon Richardson states:

It is also clear that James assumed that evil springs from psychical disturbance; in some cases it is strongly psychopathic in origin.⁵⁶

Both James' insight and method are primarily psychological in nature. One sees this especially in regard to his

⁵⁶ Richardson, op. cit., p. xxli.

handling of Kate. Her treachery is to be so fully "revealed" and, in this subtler sense, "explained," that the entire first book (the novel is divided into ten major sections or "books") concerns itself with her heredity and environment as forces. And, insofar as they are forces bearing upon her ultimate betrayal of Milly, fashioning her "in the mould" so to speak, they are to this extent forces of and for evil. In varying degrees this approach is used for other of the characters, but it is of greatest import for Kate solo, and for the late-Densher relationship which, as Richardson points out,⁵⁷ has about it a quality of frustration so strong as to make action, any action, a psychological necessity. One sees, of course, that this kind of motivating evil is neither wholly personal nor impersonal, about which I shall have more to say later.

Quite impersonal, however, is the societal evil which James depicts as extant both within and without the individual social groups. One can hardly be more aware than is James of certain of the deeper implications of living within a society. Speaking of Milly and her "situation," he says in the Preface:

57 Ibid.

If her impulse to wrest from her shrinking hour still as much of the fruit of life as possible, if this longing can take effect only by the aid of others, their participation (appealed to, entangled, and coerced as they find themselves) becomes their drama too -- that of their promoting her illusion, under her importunity, for reasons, for interests and advantages, from motives and points of view of their own.⁵⁸

Not only Milly, but all these people are in a way, at least as members of a society, importuning and being importuned. The relationship of Maud and Lord Mark is founded upon such tenuous, yet basically ugly, social necessities as to make it nearly impossible for James to "get" it. Maud's ambitions for Kate (and the consequent demands) are derived not from any high or enduring values, but directly from social rules, social conveniences, e.g., the "proper" marriage. And inasmuch as this is a weight pressing upon Kate Croy, making her personal integrity a lesser thing, social evil is found to sift down upon the individual. This whole aura of deceit and treachery is one of "social price," what one pays of his person to remain, and have what he wants, within a social group. No one here needs Milly's money to feed himself. It is, therefore a kind of social decadence,

⁵⁸ James, op. cit., Preface, p. ix.

a breach in morality sufficiently wide to sink the ship of European aristocracy, that James portrays for us here.

Against this James sets an American, Milly. And in this fatal meeting he shows us another societal evil, this time one which is intrinsic to a world structure comprised of separate, relatively "closed" societies. By their very integration and individuality these societies, automatically and independent of their wishes, erect between themselves a barrier to mutual understanding, a kind of cultural tariff wall so high that only those with the greatest goodwill, and the largest funds of intellectual coin, can traffic successfully between them. With little in the way of real understanding, the one society preys upon the other in a near-elemental fight for survival. Only Milly (and to a certain degree, Densher), the prey itself, manages to breach the wall, and this only because she is so truly what she is -- the "princess" and the "dove" who will be no less, come what may. How clearly, then, does it come down to this: that for James, as it was for Hardy, societal evil is simply individual insensitivity multiplied by x , and sanctioned from without. It is a lack, on the group level, of the innate goodwill and loyalty to principle, the transcendental "good taste."

In this light, one cannot help but wonder what James must be implying as to the fullness of corruption at the bottom of the social scale if the top be like this. One feels vicariously his horror of a world kept circling by endless "unfelt," "undigested" acts. Regardless of such speculation, however, there is one matter treated concretely in the book which is central to all the rest, and which is the microcosmic question not alone of this novel but of our whole western civilization: the matter of free will.

There is, in The Wings of the Dove, little sense of cosmic evil, of evil so inherent in the very nature of the world as to be eternally irremediable and to constitute, by that very fact, a curb upon free will. (One contrasts, almost automatically, Hardy and Melville.) As for Fate, one finds several different attitudes toward it, leading again to a paradox.

For instance, in the Preface, James has this to say of Milly and her situation:

My young woman would herself be the opposition -- to the catastrophe announced by the associated Fates, powers conspiring to a sinister end and, with their command of means, finally achieving it, yet in such straits really to stifle the sacred spark that, obviously, a creature so animated, an adversary so subtle, couldn't but be felt worthy...⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. viii.

And:

I need scarce say, however, that in spite of these communities of doom I saw the main dramatic complication much more prepared for my vessel of sensibility than by her -- the work of other hands (though with her own imbrued too, after all, in the measure of their not being, in some direction, generous and extravagant, and thereby provoking).⁶⁰

Here we have Fate, all right, but "in straits," capable of being provoked -- something of a contradiction in terms if we are to think of Fate in its Greek definition.

One finds, further, that irony -- a natural concomitant of the fatalist or determinist view -- though potentially present in large amounts, is at no time "played for" by James as an effect. For instance: there is irony enough to be had in the tale of Kate's plan for gold, which works so beautifully right up to the moment when the results are at hand -- at which point all becomes, by a kind of reverse alchemy, lead. And again, there is irony too in Milly's situation, in her tremendous naïveté and goodwill juxtaposed against the highly-polished, intricate treachery of her "friends"; in the way, surely unforeseen by her, in which her beautiful plan both fails and succeeds; in the fact, too, that in losing her love she wins it, in dying she

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. xii.

lives. And yet, in all of this, one never feels James exploiting, underscoring, or even concerning himself with, the ironic effect. It is as if he feels irony to be an inferior value, and will admit into his book, when anything other than objective revelation is to be admitted, only the deeper sense of tragedy. And he attains this tragic aura, rather than the merely ironic, by attempting to give his characters a mammoth share of freedom, by hoisting free will over and above fatalism, determinism, and, to an extent, even above physical actuality.

One notices in this book, for example, that it is not the rich, per se, in whom James is interested -- only Milly and Mrs. Lowder, of the main characters, are rich -- but rather in those sensitive people sufficiently removed from the restrictive effects of sheer economic need so as to have some freedom of movement and of choice. James' supposition here is beyond cavil: only those life-decisions which can be made without the necessity of considering, on the survival level, material necessity, are in the fullest sense matters of free choice, and therefore subject to strict ethical judgment; hence, only within the framework of such a freedom does one's choice have true ethical

significance. For this reason, then, James attempts, so far as he can, to free his characters, to construct for them a partial world in which the will operates freely. By the extent of his success (and failure) in building this structure, one measures his own belief in its actuality.

He succeeds in creating a strange, vague world in which everything, even Death itself, is a matter of, for, and by Mind. Reality seems to have little or no objective existence, to draw its primary characteristics from the subjective context of one's thoughts about it. In the portrayal of Maud, for instance, this suggestion is carried almost to the "thinking makes it so" extreme: she is characterized as one who, having once formed an opinion, true or untrue, relative to a given situation in which she is concerned, acts thereafter in such a way, and so strongly, as to mould the situation into the shape of her preconceived opinion. This is, for James, going rather far -- almost to the point of a filigreed existentialism -- and it costs him another contradiction, or unresolved paradox; for he is too much the psychologist to be a thorough-going devotee of free will, and so when he builds

up Mind (amalgamated, to a degree, with Spirit) to be the all, he will not blink the fact that one's "all" includes a large amount of self-imprisonment. And so Mind, which starts out to be the parole, becomes also the jail.

After all, how much freedom do these people really have? Maud, Kate, and Densher are enslaved by their own plans; Milly is caught between them and death; Susan is Milly's psychic Siamese twin. Minds such as these are chains from which no Houdini escapes. Despite all the riches and refinement of Mind, its champagne insulation against vulgarity, it can assume, when too much lived in, the character of a delicate, self-contained Chinese torture-chamber. And this aspect, it appears to me, comes through strongly in the book. These people are finely integrated in such a special way as to be essentially inflexible, unadaptable; they are too much what they are to be really free. Theirs is a softly misted, gray world in which people live like so many thinking organisms confined by choice in a Petri jar, cushioned by the delicate fluid they themselves exude.

These people are, after all, really the top-level

progenitors of Eliot's Waste Land populace. The more sensitive of them (Milly, Densher) show a painful inability to cope directly with action. They have a terrible lack of natural vitality. To a great extent their talent is one of diminishing life's vividness to the subtle grays of death. One feels of them a kind of Schopenhauerian denial of the Will-to-Live, at least on its own terms. They seem like the aristocracy of a tiny, fading kingdom, unwilling to thrive and propagate in a world no longer cast in its image or to its liking, but determined to die, as they have lived, with a certain amount of grace. It is as if one must look for affirmation to the truck driver, for vitality to the sternly self-willed, e.g., Maud, Lord Mark, Kate until the denouement. It is as if the truly good people are at the same time the ones least capable of combating evil. They can merely refuse to add to it, and hope that the small evidence of their lives will have some weight in history.

There is no other faith. From this particular world of James', God and belief have disappeared. It is a place of shifted and shifting values, in which moral landslides have left only the gaunt bedrock

of individual responsibility. But here is the exact crux of the paradox, both for James and for all of us in the twentieth century: individual responsibility is a meaningless doctrine unless there be individual free will. (I cannot be blamed for failing to do that which I am not free to do.)

The corollary is manifest: with the growing loss of faith in dogma, both religious and secular, only the doctrine of individual responsibility remains as the ethical base of our entire western world; therefore, the rejection of the amount of free will necessary to support the structure will result in a centripetal crash, as the last ounce of attracting force disappears from moral gravity. Then robots, and the robotized conscience.

One feels this implied by James and senses his horror of it. One finds him at desperate lengths to track free will to its strongest hold. But one finds him also the twentieth century man -- scientific, realistic -- who is unable to exchange that which he sees for that which he would like to see. What he does see is free will restricted by the constant encroachment of psychological factors: historic, hereditary, environmental, personal. These factors

are, of course, the twentieth century substitute for the religious and rationalistic restrictions imposed upon free will by the previous nineteen centuries of Christianity. But, as I have said, the dilemma is greater now, the qualification more significant both because it has been extended in scope and because responsibility to any ethical external more significant than the state is being removed.

That James meant to portray free will so closely confined as he does, I doubt. (But for us here, his intention is secondary.) He exerts, as I have said, every effort to give his characters as much freedom as possible. And yet, aside from Densher, who among them has actual freedom of choice? Milly is the only other person who makes a morally significant decision, and hers, I repeat, seems to me less a choice than the logical extension of an integrated character. Only Densher, as the major figure least defined, is capable of unrestricted choice on a level which can be equated with the operation of free will. He makes it, makes it in the direction of "right," and in so doing shows ethical development. It is his decision, and his ability to make it, which -- along with the existence of people like Milly -- represents Henry

James' faith. It is also the book's moral.

One need not fear the bluntness of this word "moral" in applying it to The Wings of the Dove. For despite the fact that this is a book of airy essences and subtle shadings, far removed from the story with the appended aphorism, it is thoroughly and constantly moral. The book does not insist on your making a judgment, but it makes one; it does not set up an exaggerated black vs. white conflict, but rather juxtaposes good and evil with that air of fidelity to truth characteristic of the finest art. For James is an artist, to his very fingertips. But he is not an artist first and a moralist afterwards. He is both at once, for he has not made that separation of the aesthetic and ethical functions of art common to the western world and Christianity. One relates him rather to the Greeks, for whom the good was beautiful, for whom the two words were one, and for whom the greatest possible beauty was to be found in the best possible life. One cannot read this book without feeling that for James, too, life itself was an art.

But unfortunately his Greek spirit was forced to exist in a world essentially hostile to it. So Milly, his tragically beautiful heroine, herself an

artist at living, must die to retain her beauty of spirit and to make of what life she had a perpetuating force for good. This person, in this century, has little opportunity for an act of affirmation on a scale any broader (it could not in any case be deeper) than was Milly's in her relationship with Densher; the given sphere is The Lady of Shalott's rather than Joan of Arc's. And if, in such a time, in such a place, James pointed at "good taste," at the spiritual decency of individual responsibility, as man's foremost hope (compare Conrad), one can but credit him with insight and goodwill. And if, at the same time, he seems to have pointed at it not in the spirit of a broad and comforting optimism, but rather with the feeling that here is the last and final shelter under which we of the twentieth century can decently hide, one can say only that events of today seem destined to make of this non-propheying artist an amazingly accurate prophet.

5 - Summary

As one looks back at these four novels, certain relationships and contrasts come to mind, certain patterns seem to appear. (I should, perhaps, reiterate that the

novels were not specifically "picked" to produce patterns, nor do I offer these patterns as more than interesting possibilities.) One notes that both the earlier novels were romances, while both the later ones were works of psychological realism. The trend illustrated gives rise to a generality which we know to be true of the nineteenth-century novel as a whole, viz., the movement toward progressively greater realism. We seem to have come a long way in the little over two generations that separate Wuthering Heights from The Wings of the Dove. But does this latter novel seem so far removed from The Scarlet Letter? or the former from Crime and Punishment? I think not.

In both Emily Brontë's and Fyodor Dostoyevsky's books, we have passionate, tortured figures enmeshed in chaos and held by the chains of their own unrealized characters. They are both books of violence, books of explosive circumstance. In each the expression of a strong but frustrated will accounts for the dynamics of the central situation. These are stories of the "self" demanding its own expression, caring little for the effect of this demand upon others and society at large. The resultant conflict is so strong and violent,

and the central figures so frenzied and jagged, that a live power seems to reside in the books. One is almost surprised to see them rest quietly on his bookshelf.

The same is not true of The Scarlet Letter and The Wings of the Dove. These are quiet books, the tones of which, though no less deep, are those of the solemn and dignified New England judge (I agree -- almost positively -- with T. S. Eliot: "James is positively a continuator of the New England genius."⁶¹) There is a kind of acoustic veil which mutes the voices of their characters, making them seem to come from beyond some shrouded isle. Milly is even more a mist-shimmering vision than little Pearl, but equally palpable as symbol. Both Hawthorne and James are moralists in the best sense of the word, which is to say that they are moral realists, interested in the true nature of morality rather than the inherited codes. Both apply the "deeper psychology" to arrive at this reality. And in both cases this moral reality was not merely the solution, the appended message, but was rather the fabric of the entire structure. I agree with Matthiessen that James was more successful:

⁶¹ Eliot, op. cit., p. 859.

(Hawthorne) started with a dominant moral idea, for which his picture, like Spenser's was to be an illustration....James, in a sense, started where Hawthorne left off.⁶²

James, of course, has truly equated a moral sense with art.

All four of the novels are concerned with good-and-evil, or good-through-evil. There is no humor in them to speak of. Each sees evil as stemming primarily from the perennial nature of the human being as an individual. None thinks of evil as essentially a societal or cosmic effluvia. It is man's personal responsibility, for he is, within the circle of his own being, its prime source. He may be a man subjected to the terrifying forces of love and hate like Heathcliff; he may be simply humanly weak like Dimmesdale; or he may be tragically fallible like Raskolnikov and Densher -- each situation will produce its own kind of evil.

The equating of Raskolnikov and Densher brings us to an interesting point: in both cases it was basically a lack of knowledge -- an unperceived truth later to be discovered -- which led to tragedy. In both cases, evil stems from ignorance -- not moronic ignorance, of course,

⁶² Matthiessen, *op. cit.*, p. 301. For a detailed and perceptive comparison of Hawthorne and James, I especially recommend this book, pp. 292-305.

but a crucial lack of perception of one's own deeper nature, of one's true self. In The Wings of the Dove this required knowledge involves a broader and more intricate perception, for it concerns not only that abiding and largely consistent knowledge of one's self, but demands also a recognition of that ever-fluctuating quality which is the relationship of one's self -- at any given moment -- to other selves. (It should be noticed that this intricacy of analysis increases progressively among the four books.) It is at this point that personal behaviors and attitudes step over into the social realm, a process which James carefully traces for us. He is well aware that unlimited self-expression is tantamount to a declaration in favor of anarchy, and anarchy is something which even apes will not tolerate. So long as one lives in a society -- a group of selves all seeking their fullest expression -- there must be a point at which one will accept abnegation in some areas in return for higher fulfillment in others -- a fulfillment which can only be achieved within a social context (the only complete savage would be a man who had never lived with others). Since this is so, one has a debt to others. James is extraordinarily alive to the fact

that it is one's inevitable responsibility to recognize the existence of other "selves," to be, so far as possible, sufficiently perceptive of others to the point of recognizing their needs and desires for expression, and -- more important -- to help them if one can, even as far as surrendering one's own prior claims in a given situation. It is still self-expression, but it is transferred to the social level whereon one expresses himself as a "civilized" person, i.e., a social being. It is on this level that James finds the beauty (and the ugliness) of human behaviour. And it is upon this level that the contemporary individual, living in an ever-diminishing world, a world where even continents can no longer act as self-contained entities, finds his most critical moral problem. And he confronts it without faith or "laws" to go by.

James offers him as glimmering hope personal sensitivity to good and evil. And certainly the world is in dire straits if an international core of it does not exist. But the difficulty is both manifest and menacing: the truly sensitive people, at any point in the world's history, have always comprised a minute fraction of its population. True perceptiveness is not, beyond an elementary point, teachable; those who have it are indebted mainly to a genetic mystery and a

fortuitous suffering, and comprise a widely dispersed aristocracy. Certainly James knew this, as well as he knew that the almost unendurable complexity of modern life posed such labyrinthian questions in regard to the "situation" of any given person that even the best-willed sensitivity in the world cannot often unravel them. It is here that his "solution" meets a mighty obstacle, one which modern writers, in company with psychiatrists, still wrestle over. And the hopeless air which surrounds the struggle is too well known to us. The necessity of incessant observation of his world in order that he may wring even a temporary truth out of it, has robbed the contemporary intellectual of his power of action. This is the Dirge which has been played unceasingly in memory of the Individual by our twentieth-century writers. Confronted by evil, the individual of today has all he can do to recognize it. He may then, like a Jamesian character, combat it by keeping himself away from it. When he has done that, he is finished (unless he makes a game-life of observation per se). Hence "good," instead of being a vital affirmation, becomes a negative quality, i.e., a rejection. Little wonder that we go mad! And a significant point is that this particular line of

vision runs through James on a straight line to Hawthorne. Matthiessen traces it for us:

But what Coverdale (Blithedale Romance) had dreaded acutely, that he was becoming inhuman through his analytical detachment, became the increasingly inescapable situation for James' super-subtle observers. They grew obsessed with their author's own insatiable scrutiny of motive for motive's sake, until, in the case of the narrator of The Sacred Fount (1901), it was not possible for him to be sure whether his inquisitiveness was good or evil, or whether, indeed, he might not actually be insane. Only a shift in attitude was necessary, from James' inordinate excitement in the unfettered play of consciousness to Eliot's horrified perception of the pathic observer's inability to leave any effectual mark on the world, and the choric role has become that of Tiresias, that "infinitely gentle, infinitely suffering thing," who, both male and female, is doomed to foresuffer all that happens in The Waste Land.⁶³

And in truth, for that person who is himself vitally concerned with the personal approach to good and evil, a wide reading in the best novels on the subject of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, will, if he have even the most ordinary powers of association, make of him a wryly-blessed Tiresias.

63

Ibid., p. 298.

CHAPTER IV

EVIL IN A SOCIETAL CONTEXT: THE RED AND THE BLACK,
PERE GORIOT, KADAME BOVARY, WAR AND PEACE,
JUDE THE OBSCURE

1 - The Red and the Black (1831)¹

We have seen that, insofar as my classification of evil is concerned, The Wings of the Dove has a large transitional component, moving from the personal toward the social emphasis. In this respect it is conjoined with The Red and the Black, though here the movement is in the opposite direction -- from the social toward the personal. And there are further connections. The Red and the Black, though chronologically the earliest book under consideration, belongs in point of strict realism and psychological insight to the novel of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Matthew Josephson says:

Stendhal, using only the most frugal descriptions, locates or fixes characters within the pattern of their mental habits, observed by an analytical rather than a sensuous process. He peers beneath the surface; his life-

¹ Stendhal (Marie-Henri Boyle), The Red and the Black, trans. by C. K. Scott-Moncrief (New York: Liveright, 1943), 2 v. in 1.

long disposition to be a scientific observer has taught him what there is inside people that makes them different from one another. Hence even his exceptional or superior characters, like Julien, appear consistent, credible, alive; also many-sided, in contrast with Balzac's simpler "beasts of prey," with their single appetites for money or sex. For, even the subconscious reveries of Stendhal's characters are set forth in richest detail (compare James). It is on this side that he has made his appeal to the greatest of modern authors, such as Marcel Proust, Andre Gide, and the earlier James Joyce.²

Earlier in his article, Mr. Josephson had -- quite rightly, I think -- linked Stendhal with Dostoyevsky in the matter of intensity of realistic effect. The Red and the Black, so far as its scientific approach to the individual and the depth of its revelations about him are concerned, is not simply a precursor of the modern novel, but is itself a modern novel.

It is also "modern" in its approach toward the problem of society. In anticipating Balzac and Flaubert, it anticipates also Faulkner and Dos Passos. Society here is not, as in The Scarlet Letter, simply a background, nor is its influence and "law" a force for good which

² Matthew Josephson, "The Stendhal Revival," Atlantic Monthly, 178 (Sept., 1946), 123.

is rejected by the hero. Quite the reverse: the society of the French Restoration is depicted with stringent realism as a degraded structure, the evil of which sifts down inevitably upon the individual. It is society which gives Julien his false values and later kills him when he abandons them. Thus if we cannot quite call society the hero of this book, it is certainly the triumphant villain. It receives the emphasis. I could not, without stretching the term a good deal, agree with Henri Peyre that the novel is a "picture of manners";³ Josephson is closer to the truth when he describes it as primarily a novel of ideas.⁴ These ideas concern the problem of man's relationship to a society which tends to impose its own corruption on him.

The novel is so constructed as to give us a wide and thorough view of this corruption. There are two volumes, divided essentially by place of action -- volume one, the provinces, and volume two, Paris (with

³ Henri Peyre, Writers and Their Critics (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1944), p. 96.

⁴ Josephson, op. cit., p. 123.

the final scenes returning to the provinces as Julien goes back to the place of his birth to be judged and condemned). The volumes are held together structurally by concentration upon the hero. There is hardly a moment when Julien Sorel is not upon the stage, or at least hovering visibly in the wings. Let us look first at this portrait of the hero as a young man.

What strikes one immediately is that he is presented organically; he develops and grows. More arresting, however, is the fact that the author's attitude toward him keeps pace with this growth (an effect which I have never encountered in such strength elsewhere, one which contributes mightily to the "living" quality of the book). Throughout the first volume and well into the second Julien seems such a nincompoop, and is treated by Stendhal with such a cavalier air, presented so caustically, that even in his nebler and more poignant moments it is difficult for the reader to feel that his fate is of much significance. It seems simply a holiday excursion into irony. But gradually this changes. As he grows in knowledge and begins to apply his integrity to real values, one comes subtly, almost without warning, to care a good deal about what happens to him. It is this fact which,

in the final scenes, leads the reader to supply from his own sympathies the pathos that Stendhal invariably veers away from, e.g., omission of actual scene of execution. Julien's spiritual growth accompanies a natural growth in perceptiveness which allows him so much better and more deeply to analyze the people whom he meets and the circumstances in which he finds himself that these too begin to take on a full three-dimensional quality. As a result, the whole book (for the effect is retroactive) comes suddenly alive and meaningful in a way which lifts it far above the plane of sheer satire. (This gradualness of revelation reminds one of James and Tolstoy.) And Julien himself becomes a person of true warmth, one whom the author can finally like to the extent at least of characterizing him as a "fine plant." It is an apt metaphor, but Julien is a plant with a strange history of growth.

Born poor, the son of brutal father, Julien receives some training in Latin and Scripture from the kindly old abbé Chélan. He is hired as tutor, and brings to his first job a determination for success and advancement which verges on the fanatic. Though his amazing energy in this direction derives from

neuroses, his methods are those he has learned from the society in which he lives. His success is to be not that of a snivelling Alger, but of a Nietzschean conqueror -- one who in all cases takes what he needs. Young Julien makes his first step in this direction by seducing Mme. de Rênal, his employer's wife. But the significant thing about his action is that he forces himself to do it. He is so frightened that, at first, there is no question whatsoever of sexual motive. This is what is done by the man who succeeds; he is such a man; it is therefore his duty to do it. And so, with a portrait of Napoleon handy to remind him of his destiny and give him courage, he does it.

This is the first of a series of rapid steps upward which deposit him finally at the point of marrying the only daughter of one of France's most aristocratic and influential families. Each step is a result of chance plus Julien's main eye for it. He positively batters himself into a state of constant watchfulness and calculation. His courage and daring are unlimited, his self-control unflinching. He allows himself no surcease, no rest from the pursuit. But the significant thing about him is that he remains always a lost child,

haunted by fears of inferiority and failure. By comparison, Raskolnikov is a mature man. The slightest show of true kindness toward him brings tears to Julien's eyes. And despite his role of the unbending conqueror, he is never mean or even remotely vicious. Despite his effective career as raisonneur, he is at heart an incurable romantic. Clinging tightly to his vision of Napoleon (cf. Raskolnikov), he searches in vain for the heroic life. Mlle. de la Mole is not wrong in comparing him to her dashing and romantic ancestor. But what she does not perceive is that they are no longer living in an age of heroism. That went with Napoleon. Under the Bourbon Restoration heroic action has become outré; it has been displaced by "civilized" methods, i.e., intrigue and duplicity. It is precisely this which Julien comes to understand, and with the gaining of this understanding he loses his world -- or rather throws it away as a thing unworthy of being kept. It is this fact which Croce, who otherwise understands so well the opposition of forces here, misses completely:

(Stendhal) draws the characters of his fiction after two fundamental types, that of the cold, calculating, tenacious and dissembling priest,

who never allows himself to be diverted from his ends, and of the man of inflammable imagination, who becomes blind with anger and is carried away in the whirlwind of passion, and has recourse to sword and pistol, losing in an instant all he had won at the price of prolonged effort. He unites these types in... Julien Sorel...⁵

But Julien's "losing in an instant all he had won" is precisely the point that is being made and upheld, for he had come to see his all as nothing! The cold and calculating priest in him is not really Julien; it is the force of his time moulding him. And when he sees finally the full ugliness of his mould, he smashes it. In a "whirlwind of passion"? Of course. Julien is in his early twenties, and his is an emotional nature; he is not a Stoic philosopher. When he finds his world to be a thing which he cannot accept on its own terms, he defies it, and acts finally in accord with his own true nature, his own sense of "duty." Is his notion of duty highly romantic? Yes, but one refers again to Julien's age. In a sense, this work is an epic of adolescence. Not the pimply and perverse stage, but the point in man's life when he steps bravely for the first time into the maelstrom of adult life, carrying with him for support a few decadent and broken-down ideals which his family and society have bequeathed to him

⁵ Benedette Croce, European Literature in the Nineteenth Century, trans. by Douglas Ainslie (New York: Knopf, 1924), pp. 100-101.

after first glossing them up with four coats of phosphorescent paint. The paint takes a while to wear off. When it finally did in Julien's case, and all he had left was a splintered stick with "Duty" written on it, he did not simply throw it away, laugh his first cynical laugh, and presto! become a citizen of the world.

Instead he took a good long look at it, perceived that it still meant duty to his own ideals, grasped it tighter, and hit over the head the first person that tried to betray these ideals. But then something else happened, and Julien was enabled in the short space of time left him to become truly a man.

It is a mistake, I believe, to explain him finally in terms of his impulsive shooting of Mme. de Rênal. At his trial and in prison condemned to death Julien is, for Stendhal, the "fine plant" grown to maturity, the man who might have been foreseen in the boy. It is a mature Julien who perceives that it was his moral compromise, his living in accord with the morality of his times, that brought him to his prison cell. It is for this reason that he condemns himself ("These words only: I feel that I am justly condemned."⁶) Remember that he is given

⁶ Stendhal, *op. cit.*, II, 321, Chap. LXXI.

every chance to escape a sentence which, in his forthright speech to the jurors, he brings upon himself. Everything from jailbreak up to a sensational conversion is suggested to him as a means of escape likely to succeed. His final answer tells all: "And what shall I have left... if I despise myself?"⁷ There is no escape from self-condemnation (compare Raskolnikov), but it takes a man to realize it. And in Julien's case it is a twin-edged realization, for as Harry Levin says, "he condemns society, in the end, through self-condemnation."⁸ He has nothing of good to hope for from his society; a courageous acceptance of death is as much victory as one can expect. His general position is paralleled somewhat by that of E. M. Forster's hero in The Longest Journey:

Rickie Elliot traces his descent not to the exasperating father of all the Bildungsroman heroes, Wilhelm Meister, but to the one young man who was truly great. Rickie is related to Julien Sorel. The life that Forster provides for Rickie is not a school: it is the real thing, like the life Stendhal provides for Julien. We knew that life for these two young men is real and serious if only because it kills them both. For both

⁷ Ibid., II, 347, Chap. LXXXV.

⁸ Harry Levin, "Stendhal in Technicolor," New Republic, 115 (Nov. 4, 1946), 595-597.

authors have said: Experience be damned -- life either pays you or you die.⁹

Life does not pay Julien because there is too much evil in his society. Stendhal traces this evil systematically. His revelations mount in scope, power, and significance in direct ratio as the hero himself grows and perceives. Beginning with the cheap intrigues at Verrières, he moves all the way up to a table of ministerial conspirators. The little evils of the provinces -- both of church and state -- are traced to their huge, ever-flowing source in the highlands of Paris, the center from which the muddied ripples flow. But this mathematical progression is one of intensity only; the quantity is constant. Evil, in one form or another, is everywhere. The coarse brutality of Julien's father and brothers is paralleled by the pious hypocrisy of Mme. de Fervaques and the exquisite nastiness of the Parisian drawing rooms. The petty scheming and contriving of provincial officials is paralleled by the conspiracies of top-level aristocrats attempting to abolish parliamentary rights (the last fruits of the Revolution). The selfish and treacherous little provincial abbés are tracked to their origins through

⁹ Lionel Trilling, E. M. Forster (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1943), p. 79.

a picture of the profound spiritual emptiness, the meannesses, jealousies, mundane ambitions, and spy sects of the seminary; and in turn the character of the seminary is traced to its leaders -- the worldly bishops who sell their support to the conspirators (thus betraying the people) at the price of the return of expropriated lands (Rome is implicated in the bargain).

Individual characters move on the usual three levels: the dirty, mettled black (Valened); the in-betweens (Marquis de la Mole); and the reasonable facsimile of whiteness (Mme. de Rênal). None is as dark as Heathcliff or as light as Milly Theale. Nor does the evil necessarily issue outward from them in the same proportion as they themselves are evil. As is true of The Wings of the Dove and Jude the Obscure, the greater harm to the hero often results from the temporarily insensitive or wrongheaded action of a "good" character. Thus Julien, often unwittingly, does great harm to Mathilde and to her father, the Marquis, and he puts Mme. de Renal through several hells. But the crux of this evil-from-good is the unintentionally cruel letter of Mme. de Rênal's which precipitates the final explosion.

The plane of simple condemnation is mixed with a much subtler examination of the shifting area in which evil results from the workings of complex psychological drives and factors of chance. This is the area which Stendhal investigates in the two love affairs.

In examining them, one should remember that, right from the start, neither affair had, in itself, any chance of success. Whether or not Stendhal took this to be true of most affairs is another matter, but certainly such attachments cannot thrive when for one of the participants it is mainly a matter of career, as it was in each case with Julien. I have spoken about Julien's entering upon them from a sense of duty -- duty to his will-to-succeed. It is in his portrayal of this "using" of love that Stendhal investigates most profoundly both the nature and effects of the driving will. Josephson says:

For Stendhal, under the shadow of Napoleon and of the leaders of the French Revolution was obsessed by the concept of human will, as the philosophers who came after him, from Schopenhauer to Bergson, were to be obsessed by it.¹⁰

¹⁰ Josephson, op. cit., p. 123.

Julien, in his will to be loved (for reasons and needs of his own) is not in some respects different from Heathcliff in his will to love. Both are divided within themselves, and both, through the intensity of their efforts, give their lovers a goodly share of torture. Where an uncompromising will is involved, the element of plasticity -- which is required to prevent love from being an inflicted thing -- is missing. Abrasiveness results, with its consequent misery and harm. Hence in both instances love -- the source of good -- becomes so twisted as to produce evil. In Julien's case the evil is a more simple matter of rejection: he fights against falling in love while calculating every minute how to make the woman love him. This donning of the raisonneur's armor in answer to the command of the will makes him immediately proof from any of love's real rewards and makes him at the same time certain poison to any woman unfortunate enough to love him. This is best illustrated in his early affair with Mme. de Rênal.

This, as it turns out, is a real love which brings more hurt than joy to the lovers because they both hold something back from it. Neither is capable,

at the time of surrendering everything to his love, and nothing less than everything can sustain it.

Mme. de Rênal, whose love and sacrifices are greater than Julien's, cannot bring herself to give up home, children; and reputation for it. Julien, at this point extremely immature, cannot surrender his ambition to his love, cannot totally give himself because of his constant immolation in suspicions prompted by his ever-raw and bleeding ego, and in any case does not truly comprehend the extent and depth of the love -- either on her part or his. Consequently, it is a "mountain high, valley low" affair and ends with Julien nearly driving the poor woman out of her mind by a surprise night visit (after they had agreed to part, and had done so for months) on the evening he leaves for Paris. This is certainly a cruel act -- dictated by ego -- but not fully comprehensible as such by Julien.

When he does battle for love with Mathilde, the daughter of his benefactor, M. le Marquis de la Mole, it is Julien at his most iron-willed and astute point who finally gains the victory. But, like all such "victories," it is Pyrrhic. In the first place, it is a victory which he never really desired

emotionally. In the second, it fares badly as love by comparison with his first. Where this is intellectual -- a love born and nurtured in the mind -- the other had, at least on Mme. de R en al's part, emotional depths. Where this is alternately forced and fought against, the other was to a large extent natural. And these differences can be traced to the differences between the forthright Mme. de R en al and the devious Mathilde, for in both instances the women were aggressive and set the tenor of the affair (despite the fact that both eventually lose the initiative and control).

Mme. de R en al is simply and fully woman. But Mathilde is cerebralized woman, bored with and by the results of her cerebrations. She reminds one at times of Hedda Gabler and is precisely the type of young Parisian society woman whom Romain Rolland was to describe in Jean Christophe. She says of herself:

...what advantages has not fate bestowed on me! Birth, wealth, youth! Everything, alas, but happiness.¹¹

Sophisticated, worldly, she has all the accomplishments and allurements that her predecessor does not have. Yet,

¹¹ Stendhal, op. cit., II, 84, Chap. XXXVIII.

for all her dignity and refinement, she is hard where Mme. de R nal is soft; she is calculating where Mme. de R nal is artless and straightforward; she seeks escape in love, where Mme. de R nal simply accepts love when it comes to her. Mathilde is the intellectual of the two, yet she is as wildly romantic as a William Morris medieval heroine. Her love has not, like the other's, the power that flows from a woman's stable strength in love. Hers is wildly passionate at times, yet there is a self-consciousness intermingled with her passion that spoils and disperses it. Mme. de R nal's passion is quiet, in reserve, springing up when required, like a natural fresshet.

It is not surprising that, given these two characters, Mathilde causes Julien greater hurt (and naturally receives it back at last with interest) than does Mme. de R nal, despite the fact that the latter is a direct causal factor in his downfall. The wild love of Julien and Mathilde is too harsh, too frantic, too overladen with emotional fencing ever to evolve into the softness and warmth that must eventually surround any healthy love. Stendhal shows this plainly and makes what is for him the conclusive contrast between the two loves at the time of Julien's trial, imprison-

ment, and death. Mathilde is frantic with fear for him, yet resourceful in the midst of it all. Mme. de R nal is quiet, tender, deeply-loving, unable to think of anything but being with Julien and comforting him. And so when Mathilde, imitating an event in her family history, finally buries Julien's head in a wild grotto for which she imports Italian marbles "at great cost," Mme. de R nal goes quietly home to embrace her children before she dies.

The contrast between the two women and the two affairs is handled with great care and detail, and even greater insight, by Stendhal. Occupying as they do at least half the entire work, the affairs are almost a book within a book. What can be derived from them on the psychological level is not of paramount importance here, though it occurs to me that on the basis of Julien's career a good case might be made for fear neuroses as a fount of the will-for-worldly-success (recognition). His fears of what failure in each affair will do to his career is at every moment matched by his torture at the thought that anything less than total victory on his part may lead these women to think him inferior. This fear of inferiority extends to

Julien's other activities -- indeed, it pervades his whole existence up to the time in prison when he finally sees the deeper meaning of "inferior" and "superior." This final understanding of true standards throws light upon the societal good and evil represented by the two women.

One sees plainly that the false standards and superficiality of Paris have succeeded in undermining the character of its women (Mathilde, as Stendhal shows us, represents the best it can produce). The boorish pettiness of the provinces has not so great an effect, for there the family still exists as an institution. A feeling for her family keeps Mme. de Rênal whole despite her loveless marriage. In the country, with children, a touch is kept with reality. Woman does not become cerebralized, de-sexed, escapist. To this extent a vote is being cast for the simpler life (compare Tolstoy and Hardy). It is not, however, an unqualified vote. One sees that it is a provincial jury which, despite the pressure for acquittal from Paris, convicts Julien. High intrigue stumbles on the mere pebble of Valenod's petty jealousy. In their adverse effects upon Julien, the provinces and Paris are balanced off by Stendhal. The deciding factor comes at the end, when the new deep-seeing Julien wishes he

had remained with Mme. de Rênal in the country and been content with the simple pleasures and beauty which had brought him a joy never equalled by Paris.

One feels, however, that Julien would not have survived no matter where he went or did not go. There is too much evil about. Its atmosphere pervades every place, engulfs every person. In its unalleviated form it is presented as a direct, obvious, and uncomplicated force (as against its subtle and mixed nature in the affairs). Its causes are ambition in the knowing (Frillair), insensitivity in the dull (Nerbert); its results are vanity, greed, selfishness, hardness; its means are intrigue, duplicity, and finally brutality -- whether direct like that of Julien's father, or indirect like that of Frilair, Valenod, the nobles. This air of evil is heavy in the provinces, heady in Paris. From the same warp in the human character comes the same evil. It is greater or lesser in proportion to the extent of the warp plus the ingenuity of the individual times the power of his position. And in almost every case it is disguised by the rankest hypocrisy (which is, for Stendhal, the most impossible thing to bear).

By implication this personal evil comes down

finally to a smallness of soul. Sometimes this smallness is due simply to the lack of opportunity for expansion (the early Julien); other times it is inherent and unchangeable (Norbert). To this extent, then, evil on this level must always exist. But it is on the societal level that Stendhal finds the greater evil, for the false standards and opportunistic morals of the social entity bring out and encourage the worst in its individual members. Little more need be said of this, for it is patently the illustration given by Julien's life, of which I have already spoken. What needs stating is Stendhal's belief in the unreasonably large part which Chance must necessarily play in such a society -- a society totally lacking in concrete values by which to judge its members, and hence resorting in every case to expedience.

One notices that Julien's entire career is dominated by the most fantastic turns of fortune. They begin by his being hired by M. de Rênal, for preposterous (but believable) reasons, to tutor his children; they continue in the de la Mole attachment, and end in the savage burst of irony by which Mme. de Rênal brings on his death, and mighty, unfailing intriguers

like Frilair are unable to control a poor provincial jury which ninety-nine times out of one hundred would never think of revolting against the wishes of its superiors. This element of chance, devoid of all reason or meaning, is large throughout the book, almost as large as in Jude the Obscure. It is brought into stronger focus and given enlarged scope by repeated references to the accident that made Napoleon and the revolutionists great only to crash them down again; the accident of the rise and fall of families during the Revolution and Restoration; the accident of England's part in the catastrophe, of the unpredictable path since pursued by France, and of the unfortunate whim by which one is born in an age he is temperamentally unfitted for.

If life is to have about it such a tychistic air, if the best laid plans "gang agley" while the worst are to proceed without hitch, one's viewpoint of existence is certain to contain a large element of irony -- which Stendhal's surely does. What lends it conviction as a viewpoint is the consummate skill with which he handles it. I agree with Harry Levin that "there has never been a greater master"¹² of irony than

¹² Levin, op. cit., p. 597.

Stendhal. I have already mentioned several examples; one could list them page on page. Basically the entire story is ironic. While Julien is false and calculating, he thrives; when he is true to himself, he is condemned to death. Every seemingly fortunate accident turns out to be unfortunate. When the heart should be dictating actions, the head usurps, and vice-versa. Lies are accepted with a friendly smile; truth outrages everyone. Everything seems to work in reverse. This is illustrated best in the three fundamental areas of politics, religion, and natural law (we have already seen it operative in love).

Political power is like money: the more you have of it the better you are able to increase it. Parties are fakes -- mere labels for men seeking power. And those that have the power, those in whose hands the people's inheritance of liberty resides, are busily engaged in demolishing the last vestiges of democracy left from the Revolution.

Religion, as practised in this France, is odorous beyond belief. The prelates are all wordly self-seekers, the Jesuits are chameleon-conscienced politicians, Rome is a gigantic vise. Spite, jealousy, hypocrisy, money, and ambition run the Church, and bend their energies to destroy true men of religion like Chélan and Pirard. Only a few stern Jansenists

show any kind of integrity. But more important than the vices of its practitioners is the empty sham of Christianity itself as it is usually promulgated. The now perceptive Julien ponders it in his prison cell:

"Where is Truth? In religion... Yes," he added with a bitter smile of the most intense scorn, "in the mouths of the Maslons, the Frilairs, the Castanèdes... Perhaps in true Christianity, whose priests would be no more paid than were the Apostles? But Saint Paul was paid with the pleasure of commanding, of speaking, of hearing himself spoken of...

"But a true priest....would speak to us of God. But what God? Not the God of the Bible, a petty despot, cruel and filled with a thirst for vengeance... but the God of Voltaire, just, good, infinite..."¹³

In the realm of civil law the confusion and injustice reflect an equivalent state in the realm of natural law:

"They are right, the men in the drawing-rooms never rise in the morning with that poignant thought: 'How am I to dine today?' And they boast of their probity! And, when summoned to a jury, they proudly condemn the man who has stolen a silver fork because he felt faint with hunger!

(cf. Les Misérables)

"But when there is a Court, when it is a question of securing or losing a portfolio, my honest men of the drawing-rooms

¹³ Stendhal, op. cit., II, 340, Chap. LXXIV.

fall into crimes precisely similar to those which the want of food has inspired in this pair of gaelbirds...

"There is no such thing as natural law: the expression is merely a hoary piece of stupidity well worthy of the Advocate-General who hunted me down the other day, and whose ancestor was made rich by one of Louis XIV's confiscations. There is no law, save when there is a statute to prevent one from doing something, on pain of punishment. Before the statute, there is nothing natural save the strength of the lion, or the wants of the creature who suffers from hunger, or cold; in a word, necessity..."¹⁴

There is, amid all this darkness, a little light.

There are people trying to be decent (Marquis de la Mole, Mathilde, Abbé Chas.-Bernard, Marquis de Croisenois) and times trying to be happy, but never quite succeeding because of an ineradicable blemish which results in efforts either too lax or too strenuous, and always too unknowing. There are some truly good people (Pirard, Fouqué, Mme. de Rênal, Julien). Common to them all are emotional sensitivity and integrity. The accent is on the heart; there is little intellectuality to be found among them. Note, for instance, that the fine, rock-like Fouqué is the epitome of provincial mentality, yet he is a true and generous person because such is his nature. Note too how strong, highly-coloured, and volatile

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 338.

Julien's emotional nature is and how when it finally triumphs over the raisonneur in him he becomes admirable. Stendhal evidently holds that it is a sensitive and generous nature, not a highly developed intellect, which makes the human being good in himself. He does not touch upon the question of relative values between his concept of the "good" person and that other person whose day-to-day contacts with others is anything but ethical, yet who produces work which contributes to the welfare of an age, e.g., Balzac. These few people, given a nature inherently good, and steadfastly refusing in any crisis to compromise it, help each other, hurt each other (unintentionally), together fight rottenness -- and lose!

Evil conquers good, not only by weight of numbers -- a staggering enough advantage -- but by the lack of any plan or force in the world which works effectively toward the Good. One does not get here Hardy's or Melville's feeling of a positively hostile universe, but one does get some of their feeling about the great principle of Indifference which seems to pervade the world. The few good people are isolated, alone, helpless in a world which, presided over by Tyche, is best suited to the advantage of the conscienceless opportunist. Certainly this is a pessimistic novel. There

is no hope offered, not even the little belief in evolutionary meliorism which Hardy cradled so gently and precariously in his heart. It has, however, that aura of passionate belief in the beauty of goodness, that unswerving devotion to truth, which bespeak the silent hope.

As a picture of life, and as a book, certain cavils can be made in regard to The Red and the Black. Eliot makes one when he says that "A situation is for Stendhal something deliberately constructed, often an illustration."¹⁵ There is some evidence to support this, e.g., the scene of high governmental intrigue seems introduced mainly to give the author an opportunity for comment upon this stratum of society. There are some others like it which do not contribute, in proportion to their length, enough advancement in plot or character development to justify them completely as legitimate artistic technique. This "tailored to fit" approach holds also in regard to arbitrary lengthening or fore-shortening of episodes as well as the occasionally too

¹⁵ T. S. Eliot, "Henry James," The Shock of Recognition, ed. by Edmund Wilson (New York: Doubleday, 1947), p. 862.

convenient introduction or abandonment of character.

The total effect, however, is one of complete realism, for the episodes and characters are in every case made "real." Motives are psychologically credible -- brilliantly so -- and actions proceed from them with the logical illogicality so true to life, where between the decision and the action a myriad of extraneous forces exert their mutating influences. No easy symbolism is used to by-pass exactness of observation. On the contrary, nothing is allowed to stand sufficiently undissected as to allow it the dominant monochromatic tone, the essential unity, of symbol. The work is truly analytic in the best French manner. And the accuracy and depth of its analyses are attested negatively by the almost total inability of Stendhal's contemporaries to "stomach" it (with the notable exception of Balzac, who perceived immediately its greatness) and positively by the pronouncements of such later men as Nietzsche and Freud, both of whom regarded it as amazingly profound in its psychological penetration. It belongs with Crime and Punishment and The Wings of the Dove, not only so far as brilliance of analysis and presentation are concerned, but also in point of time-influence. It was not until the 1890's that the full stature of The Red and the Black was widely

recognized. Its cult has been growing in France and England ever since.

It is interesting to note in this regard, and in connection with the ethical influence of art, that Julien Sorel became an exemplar for the men of the French Résistance during the sorry days of "Mamma" Petain's government under the occupation. Julien's dissent from Restoration morality and suppression of liberty was equated (not altogether tenably) with the moral obligation of those living under the occupation. His energy and action became the groundwork for "le Beylisme." It is curious to see what a century will do to history and heartening to note what it often does for a great work.

2 - Père Goriot (1835)¹⁶

Given an equivalent of the rapacious and inescapable social force present in The Red and the Black, plus a greater inability on the part of individuals to withstand this force, the resultant viewpoint must be that of the pure environmentalist. Balzac states the

¹⁶ Honoré de Balzac, Père Goriot, trans. by E. K. Brown (New York: Modern Library, 1946), 289 pp.

credo he was to illustrate in the Comédie Humaine:

Society makes the man; he develops according to the social centers in which he is placed; there are as many different men as there are species in zoology.¹⁷

Julien Sorel has become less strong, less impetuous, less loyal to the ideals of his youth. He has become Eugène de Rastignac, the central figure of this misnamed novel. His defeat entails no execution. Society simply moulds him in its image once for all. There is to be no rebellion, no backsliding. The conflict between society and the individual has become a hopeless struggle for the latter. He has only two alternatives: capitulation or defeat in pitched battle:

In any case it is society, right or wrong, that defeats the individual regardless of the justice of his claims...¹⁸

This thesis is illustrated in Père Goriot, mainly by the fate of the three main characters -- Eugène de Rastignac, le père himself, and Vautrin.

Despite the title, it is Eugène's book. The major emphasis falls upon the gradual disintegration of his ideals as he comes in contact with Parisian society.

¹⁷ Quoted by E. K. Brown, Ibid., Introduction, p. viii.

¹⁸ Ray P. Bowen, The Dramatic Construction of Balzac's Novels (Eugene: Oregon University Press, 1940), p. 2.

He has none of the monolithic stature, the singularity, of Goriot or Vautrin. He is in effect "our representative"; he is naive humanity in the large being acted upon -- the metal thrust into catalysis. It is in his vicissitudes and reactions that Balzac expresses the central meaning of the work. Goriot and Vautrin circle around him as influences for good and evil respectively. It is to be noted that these two are so thoroughly what they are as to be not so much influenced by environment any longer, but rather to have become themselves environmental influences. They have long been victims of the materialistic ambition which for the first time lays strong hands upon Eugène when he comes up from the provinces to study law in Paris. But Eugène, unlike them, comes of an aristocratic -- though impoverished -- family. Hence money itself is not enough for him; it must be accompanied by social position. In short, his ambition for "success" is modeled exactly upon the standards held up to him by Parisian society. The crux comes when, after recognizing the corruptness of this society and the degradation to which it will subject him as partial payment for acceptance, Eugène makes his choice -- he accedes.

As it concerns Goriot, the story is a variant of the Lear theme -- the father who gives everything to his daughters and receives in return nothing. Goriot literally devotes every cent of his money, every ounce of his energy, and every moment of his attention to the welfare of his two selfish and heartless daughters. They are his whole life. He is repaid by being shut out of their fine houses and receiving nothing in return for his efforts but the demand for further efforts. The excess of his paternal love does not allow père Goriot to admit to himself the true nature of his daughters until he lies abandoned on his death bed:

At the long last, old Goriot realizes the selfish indifference of his daughters, and for a moment his love turns to hate. But his ruling passion has too long held sway over him. In the last minutes this love reasserts itself. He plays his role to the end.¹⁹

This role involves, for Eugène, an influence toward good inasmuch as the old man, quite without meaning to, appeals continuously to his youthful sympathies and generosity. To this extent he keeps alive Eugène's better nature, and thus functions toward him in a manner

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 42.

directly opposite to that of Vautrin.

M. Cheat-death, as he is known to the *Sûreté*, is a striking portrait in the gallery of arch-criminals. Brilliant, witty, daring, and not without certain generous loyalties, he has undoubtedly the admiration of his creator. Balzac seems to see him as a lower-class Machiavelli -- a man of penetrating insight who, in adopting a strong philosophy of his own, does away with all temperizing measures and all hypocrisy. In this role, as Bowen notes,²⁰ it is Vautrin's function to unmask the little shams of those who gather at Mme. Vauquer's table. Also, in comparison with their meanness, his courage and honesty assume large proportions. Nonetheless, in regard to Eugène, he is a strong force for evil. His schemes for making Eugène rich (not disinterested, but involving a real liking for him) include murder. He represents in effect the logical extreme of the morality of his society, stripped of all pretense and compromise. He sits at the other end of the teeter from the submissive Goriot, while in-between, balancing all, and luring Eugène irresistibly to its middle ground, is Society. It is represented

²⁰ Ibid., p. 107.

here by its two extremities -- the nobility and the peer. Aside from exceptions mentioned, nothing good can be said of either.

The nobility are pictured as vain, superficial, grasping, and ambitious. Their main preoccupation is pretense. Men and women are alike deceitful. All the passion exists outside the marriages, a situation which is "accepted" only in public; in private husband and wife hate each other for it and make of their homes little circles of hell. Hence all their supposed sophistication and "maturity" becomes transmuted into the worst kind of childish malice, jealousy, and spitefulness. (Though one may be appalled by Baron de Nucingen, one has a difficult time denying him the right as blithely as does Delphine of at least an occasional night with her, if only to allow him to retain his physical self-respect.) The lovers betray the women just as the women betray their husbands. The men detest each other; the women tear and claw one another. All is given for gain, and therefore all can be given for love only when the love is coercive to gain. It is difficult to imagine a more frantic attempt to escape from boredom and meaninglessness than that portrayed as existing in this society. So frenetic is it that their very lives are staked upon

the vacuous gamble, and boredom ceases only when the tragedy of a wrecked life supplants it.

Yet their opposite number -- the poor and hopeless who live in the stupefying tawdriness of Mme. Vauquer's boarding house -- is no better. In fact, these people are for the most part so degraded and beaten that they have accepted boredom as a comfort. They ask for no more than do animals -- feed, bed, a prowl in the park. An eventless existence has become a summum bonum. Their attempts at bettering their conditions are even worse than those of the nobility. Instead of gambling a life for a fortune, they indulge, like Michonneau, in petty treachery for pitiable sums. And instead of the fierce brutality of the nobles, which marks at least some remnant of animal vigor, these people meet life with that worst of all receptions -- indifference. This is the final death-in-life which so depressed Hardy, the principle which outraged Melville. These people want not a moment's talk of Goriot's death; it will spoil their meal. Do no sixty people die in Paris each day?

There is nothing to expect, then, at either end of the social scale. Nor are we given any intimation that the middle class is better, especially if we take as representative M. Gondureau, head of the Sûreté.

We must believe that Balzac is condemning society as a whole (he took French society to be the microcosm of all). The full weight of this condemnation comes to light when one realizes Balzac's position as environmentalist.

In this theory society is the main source of both good and evil. It is the preponderant, the final, influence upon man. If it be thoroughly bad, what can follow but that the people in it are equally vicious? What is the further outcome but that evil breeds evil, for if society alone determines the development of man, and if this society be evil, then man cannot help but become increasingly depraved. And as he becomes so, in his turn swelling the ranks of a degraded society, he multiplies the influence of it on the young arrivals, broadening its nets and deepening its pits.

We are, of course, given a few pure gleams. But what becomes of them? There is the Viscountess de Beauséant, a member of the old aristocracy that Balzac respects. She has nobility and integrity, but finds to her grief that these traits are gone from her circle. She retires with a deep finality from the field to take up voluntary exile in a convent. Goriot's concentrated altruism results in nothing but harm for his daughters,

poverty and death for himself. He dies in terrible pain, deceived most ludicrously and awfully at the very moment of his death. Bianchon, the young medical student and friend of Eugène, is retained in the ranks of the good by taking as his goal a quiet life of simple devotion. (This is contrasted strongly with Eugène's aims. As their lives and paths diverge, only Eugène's youthful goodness holds them together. One foresees a day when, because of the inevitable change in Eugène, it will be impossible for them to be anything but strangers.) Bianchon will return to the provinces and fight the good fight, but Balzac gives us little hope that he will make any impression on others. He certainly does not influence Eugène.

Eugène himself comes from the old aristocracy in which Balzac believed. The simple lives led by the impoverished de Rastignacs in the provinces is held up as good. There is an air of integrity, unselfishness, and devotion about it which is contrasted sharply with that of the new aristocracy and its city life. But what is to happen to its product, Eugène? Goriot's two daughters, Anastasie and Delphine, are in a sense a projection of Eugène into the future. Like him they once enjoyed a family life of purity and love. Flashes

of goodness and simplicity still remain, e.g., their final realization of the full import of their father's death and the true beauty of his life -- a kind of temporary redemption allowed them by Balzac. But on the whole they have been irreparably poisoned by the circle of society in which they have chosen to live. They have only too well learned their lessons of superficiality and heartlessness. And there is little reason to believe that Eugène, aiming at the same goals, is either much better or stronger than they were when they started out. Circumstances are similar in that both begin with a "want" inflated into an absolute need -- the need for wealth and social standing. Not only is Eugène going to stay on in Paris and inevitably gain what he wants through the defeat of his better nature, but this defeat is to be accomplished by the very agency of one of Goriot's daughters, as Balzac indicates so clearly in the almost viciously ironic sentence that ends the book:

And as a first act in challenge of Society, Eugène went to dine with the Baroness de Nucingen.²¹

With such a choice of available fates, Balzac's world is a bitter one. Since the Viscountess de Beauséant

²¹ Balzac, op. cit., p. 269.

commands his highest respect and admiration, then her renunciation of the world must be, in this novel, his final admonition, his signpost toward a noble haven. If this be so, then Balzac here is even more a pessimist than is Hardy in Jude the Obscure. They both see a gleam of hope in the steadfast people -- Hardy in his peasants, Balzac in his old aristocracy. But where Hardy hopes for evolutionary meliorism, Balzac despairs over the total defeat that is encompassing all that is best in his world. The multiplying arms of the social octopus are reaching out to pull us down. Even now they have stretched from Paris to the provinces and ~~is~~ forged the only son of a fine aristocratic family. Who is, then, to escape? He gives us no word. He reveals no hope.

Despite Balzac's so-called "biological eye," it is difficult to term completely realistic the picture that he gives us here. The portraits of Goriot, Vautrin, and Society itself are more than somewhat infused with romanticism. They are all giants, dealing with puny men. As Harry Levin notes:

To amplify the subject of the city... is to dwarf its inhabitants: (Balzac) made the metropolis his actual hero, or rather villain, by investing Louis-

Philippe's Paris with the sinister
glamor of Haroun-al-Raschid's Bagdad...²²

Croce repeats and extends the accusation:

Balzac does not do otherwise than give an extraordinary aspect to what is ordinary, middle-class and popular even in that series of novels which Brunetiere considers to be "objective" and "naturalistic." No portrait of character or surroundings but he exaggerates it to the extent of making it altogether marvelous and fantastic...²³

It is true, I think, that Balzac is carried away in this book by the characters of Vautrin and, more especially, Goriot (the title would seem to indicate this). Not that they are unbelievable as people. Vautrins have always existed, and Goriot is credible in the same way that Heathcliff is (they are both possessed by a monomania which has its foundations in an obsessive love). But Balzac is not being quite naturalistic in placing two such men together in a boarding-house, nor is his preoccupation with them truly "objective." Both a predilection and a convenience are manifest. Bowen sees the skeleton of purpose:

²² Harry Levin, James Joyce (Norfolk, Conn: New Directions, 1941), p. 70.

²³ Croce, op. cit., p. 273.

The drama presents youth, hardened middle age, and doting old age, each facing that society and each meeting with defeat.²⁴

well and good. Certainly both the older men have been defeated by society. Vautrin has been made a criminal, and Goriot's generosity to his daughters has been turned by social alchemy into the ruination of both them and himself. But the question remains -- why do these two men need to be such extreme characters? One can, to an extent, justify Balzac artistically by stating that the power of social force is enhanced by its triumphs over two such strong figures.

Furthermore, as representatives of extreme good and evil, their both liking Eugène throws deeper light on his character -- there is something in it for both of them. But then another inconsistency arises: why is Vautrin, if he be the representative of evil, portrayed as possessing such strong virtues; and how does Goriot, who made his money as a city profiteer, and who understands so little the falseness of his society that he has absolutely helped his daughters to be caught in its worst trap, become the representative of good? This difference between individual character and the effect

²⁴ Bowen, op. cit., p. 5.

of its actions gives the opportunity for brilliant realism (as we have seen in The Red and the Black), but Balzac does not take it. He leaves the inconsistencies as they are -- a mere blur. One can only conclude that he himself did not see through them, suffering as he did from a slight romantic astigmatism. The brilliance and energy of his characters leave little to be desired; his objectivity toward them, much. Precisely the reverse has been said about Flaubert.

3 - Madame Bovary (1856)²⁵

The psychological realism of Stendhal, passing through the theoretic environmentalism of Balzac, comes down finally to the scientific naturalism of Flaubert. The publication of Madame Bovary, which rocked and shocked France, ushered in the era of the novelist-as-social scientist, a role which, to a greater or lesser degree, he has played ever since. It is because the line from this novel to Studs Lonigan is so direct that Levin characterizes Flaubert as "the patriarch of modern fiction."²⁶ The aesthetic doctrine involved is

²⁵ Gustave Flaubert, Madame Bovary, trans. by E. A. Aveling (New York: Modern Library, n.d.), 400 pp.

²⁶ Levin, James Joyce, p. 5.

clear enough. Flaubert advises:

Try to cling to science, to pure science;
love facts for their own sake; study ideas
as the naturalists study gnats.²⁷

But loving facts "for their own sake" is quite different from loving that which the facts signify. For Flaubert the facts that he saw signified a bleak social desert of mediocrity and meaningless evil. But, as Louise Bogan pointed out,²⁸ he was not content simply to rest the blame upon society as an abstract concept; he traced the separate threads that made up the fabric, i.e., the essential nature of individuals and the consequent form that their social relationships will necessarily assume. It is a study of society through its individual components; hence we must expect the evil to be manifested primarily in the separate characters. These characters range from the colorless mediocrity of Charles Bovary to the black vileness of Lheureux (the successful). The fact that Flaubert is aiming at a picture of society as a whole rather than individual portraits is apparent not only by the inclusiveness of attention, but by the circumstance of his presenting

²⁷ K. E. Gilbert and H. Kuhn, A History of Esthetics (New York: Macmillan, 1939), p. 491.

²⁸ Louise Bogan, "Sentimental Education Today," Nation, 155 (Oct. 3, 1942), 301-303.

in most cases two or more cuttings from the same cloth.

For example, Charles, old Roualt, and Justin belong together. These are the simple ones. These are the ones who, meaning only good, have not the wit to translate the wish. But, Flaubert says, not only do they fail in their intent (and this often at crucial moments for themselves and others), but their consistent failures and dullness, plus their constitutional good-nature in the face of it all, makes them an irritating goad to the quick-witted and temperamental people of the world. It is no accident that such people are the world's pushballs. They invite it, seem almost to insist upon it. These are the animals, the creatures of instinct who love simply and eternally, but whose unchanging affections are often boring, and are accepted by others as one accepts the fondness of a faithful dog -- only when one is in the mood. Trustworthy, loyal, loving, insensitive, opaque: what they do of good with one side of their character, they more than undo with the other. All we can expect from them is that they will rarely do harm knowingly; but since they never know enough, they succeed in doing a great deal. To call them "good" is to be sentimental, or at least to imply only an absence on their part of intentional evil. They are agents of evil if not originators, seeming in their dazed and helpless ways to be mere tools of Chance, Accident's pawns. Hippolyte has membership in this group too. And one cannot help but

notice that Justin seems introduced only to serve as carbon copy of Charles, to underscore Flaubert's point that it is only in such dumb, adoring natures that the wildly self-centered Emma can inspire lasting love.

The next group, in ascending order of force for evil, is comprised of Emma Bovary's two lovers, Rodolphe and Léon. These are the egoists, the pleasure-seekers who in the very midst of their pleasures never forget to take good care of themselves. Depicted here as the greater and lesser respectively, the rake and the would-be-rake, the difference is merely one of degree, owing its origins to a contrast in experience, funds, and social standing. It is only fitting that Emma should meet her ruin at the hands of such men, for selfish and self-rapt as she is, they are more so. She can at least lose herself in the maze of her dream love, while they cannot; she can at least temporarily give everything, while they not only cannot do this, but cannot even accept from her a larger share of love than will fit comfortably, without confining, their tender egos. They pick cautiously from among her proffered sweets, like a child at a penny-candy counter. When finally confronted by her life-or-death crisis, neither one exerts a stranger's effort to save her. Cowards and sentimentalists, they have underneath the hardness of both. Their very hardness makes their pleasures empty. With no other values besides personal ease, they are prey to their own appetites, but

their terrible inability to get out of themselves makes the satisfaction of these appetites impossible. They are, as Hopkins would say, "self in self steeped and pashed." And in a different way, the same holds true of the next group, M. Homais and Abbé Bournisien.

These are Messrs. Science and Religion, or rather pseudo-science and pseudo-religion. One may be surprised to find the seemingly harmless Abbé so high up in the hierarchy of evil, but to the best of my knowledge I am following Flaubert. Here, as in the groups already examined, Flaubert uses the technique of concentrating strongly upon the representative character -- the epitome, so to speak -- and then tying up others with him. Again and again Homais and Bournisien are included in the same equation and made to come out equal. M. Homais is not merely the only one with whom the abbe is shown to be in the habit of conversing on specific subjects, but their arguments are pointed up both by being the only ones in the book and by being recorded in some detail. What is Flaubert's purpose? To show the mutual antagonism of their views? We get that the moment they are introduced, and Flaubert is too skilled a writer to repeat himself without cause. The schism between the pseudo-scientist and the pseudo-priest is obvious enough to all; what is not so obvious is the astounding likeness which lies underneath, the hidden connective tissue that runs between them like an underground cable.

In the first place, they are mentally and hierarchically of the lower orders in their respective fields, though each rules a roost at Youville. (Note that Homais' tyranny over the doctors is matched by the abbé's over the schoolboys.) In the second place, each is uninterested in any views but his own, and here we see the fine subtlety of purpose in Flaubert's recording of their arguments: they are always arguments -- never discussions -- and go on at a rising pitch until both parties are offended -- only to be repeated when next they meet. Why? Neither one is ever convinced of the smallest truth of his opponent's argument. The abbé surely is not attempting a conversion any more than is Homais. Their perpetual argument is based upon two factors: 1) Both belong to the sound-of-one's-own-voice school. The need neither agreement nor conversational sanity. The mere opportunity to talk of their single preoccupation is enough. They are both long out of the habit of listening. The abbé no more hears Emma or notices her need when she does to him than does Homais with Charles. Like Rodolphe and Leon, they are violently concentrated upon self, but each has made an identification with an external principle, i.e., science and religion. However, instead of giving themselves to the principle, they have taken the principle for themselves, thus claiming for their own the rewards and merits which

true scientists and religionists have brought to the fields, and adding a formidable increment to their egos. Clothing themselves in these two "holies," each has become literally unassailable. 2) They recognize underneath the surface antagonisms this common tie (and others) which binds them to each other more closely than to anyone else in the village. Both men of "intellect," power, and social standing, they are brought together again and again by their separate shares in the sickness and death in the town. They know that at such times they can divert themselves with argument, on occasion take a friendly bite and drink together at wakes, and even follow this with snoring in concert. They have donned different pods, but they are like-size peas. Flaubert finally comes out with it explicitly in a sudden sardonic flare. He says, at the end of the scene in which they fuss about the dead Emma in her room:

The chemist and the curé plunged anew into their occupations, not without sleeping from time to time, of which they accused each other reciprocally at each fresh awakening. Then Monsieur Bournisien sprinkled the room with holy water and Homais threw a little chlorine water on the floor.²⁹

Thus, by pointing up the only real difference between them, Flaubert underscores heavily their likeness.

²⁹ Flaubert, *op. cit.*, Part III, Chap. IX, p. 30.

Their shared evil consists in their petty self-absorption. Neither seems even to understand the deeper meaning of science and religion, and each reduces his field to a series of "tasks," which he then elevates consciously and/or subconsciously above human considerations and needs. This is not, especially in the case of the abbé, an intentional thing, but results from the familiar negative evil of lack of sensitivity which so bothered Hardy and James. Yet this lack is so pronounced in both men that one cannot help thinking of a past time when it was consciously developed. To be sure, the abbé is not guilty of Homais' cheap ambition or beast-like revenge upon the blind beggar, but as he says to Homais, clapping him on the shoulder after they have had a glass together, "We shall end by understanding one another."³⁰ They already do.

The central figure of the novel is, of course, Emma Bovary. All the characters and incidents revolve around her. If Raskolnikov was a "heart unstrung by theory," Emma is a head unstrung by dreams. A little provincial girl who has read too many romans, she is wildly romantic and immature as a pussycat. She is an exemplar of Byron's remark that "Love is of man's life a thing apart/ 'Tis woman's whole existence." Wanting only to be always madly in love, she finds herself in

³⁰ Ibid.

the position of being married to a placid, boring man and living in a dull, complacent village. Adultery is her only hope of realizing her impossible dreams -- impossible in their lack of resemblance to any plausible life on earth or to any life she could actually stand. For Emma is not even a good dreamer:

However, in the immensity of this future that she conjured up, nothing special stood forth; the days, all magnificent, resembled each other like waves.³¹

Euphoria for her is to be found only in the very heartlands of escapism. She pursues it in passionate love, concentrating her every energy and resource in the futile search. She succeeds only in falling prey to "the eternal monotony of passion, that has always the same forms and the same language."³² Her love never gets beyond passion. It is an attempt at storming the gates of heaven by force, and the force redoubles in fury at each repulse. Compare her, for instance, with Cathy (Wuthering Heights). Certainly Emma comes close to matching her in wildness and courage. But Emma is false where Cathy is true because she has as cause not the true love of two men which she is unable to integrate, but rather self-induced passions which she is unable to sustain because they are vaporized by the lack of reciprocity. Yet for them she rejects and betrays the

³¹ Ibid., Part II, Chap. XII, p. 204.

³² Ibid., p. 219.

man who loves her, and sacrifices her child, her honesty, self-respect, money, and finally life itself. Everything is used or swept aside in this furious pursuit of self-gratification, and the result is not only to bring her down on to the level of crooked and sensual bitchery, but to destroy, along with herself, Charles and her father, to ruin her child, and to contribute to the hurt of Justin and Hippolyte. She is in most respects as self-absorbed as the others, and she is certainly no less a creature of instinct than the husband she detests. But her only instinct is a love compounded of passion and luxuriousness. It is as if her proposterous mind has diverted and corrupted a natural tendency which in itself is good. For Emma is at least wholehearted and unashamed in her loves. But her sensual dreaminess undermines every reality (notice that even her feeling toward religion is completely sensual and vague). Thus, when it becomes apparent to her that what she seeks is not to be found, that what she dreams cannot be made real, and that in her search she has ruined herself and her family, she turns without hesitation or fear (and, it might be noticed, without repentance) to suicide. She dies without reproaching anyone or anything, with a feeling of tired disenchantment rather than bitterness.

Despite the fact that Flaubert shows her no sympathy, one cannot help feeling sorry for Emma. Her good returns her nothing; her evil comes back redoubled. Croce analyzes the difference between Flaubert's presentation of Emma and the reader's reaction:

But if conicality or mockery is excluded from this representation, it would be impossible to find here sympathy, tenderness, or pity; on the contrary, we are rather sensible of a certain ferocity in laying bare every fold in Emma's soul, in refusing to her a single flash of moral goodness and in degustating the torments that assail her, when she is hunted down and overcome by the deceptions in which she has become involved... Yet it is impossible to deny her a sort of greatness, as of one obsessed (again this concept, cf. Heathcliff, Chillingworth, Raskolnikov, Julien Goriot, Ahab, Kurtz) by a demoniac force, which at times becomes heroic. Emma is not base. With what ardour and resolution does she give all for all; how superior she feels herself to every law, which is not that of her dream, her longing, her passion; how, when she is hemmed in on every side, does she contrive to shake herself free of the chains, and then goes deliberately and without complaint to meet her death.³³

Furthermore, I think one feels her dilemma -- the search for self-identification in a world of strangers, and for the reality that is at least more dream than nightmare -- to be so much that of the modern world, that she becomes as much victim as inflictor.

She is, even for Flaubert, not so black as Lheureux. And yet in a way they might be grouped together. Each brings rich and shining stuffs -- the one emotional, the other material -- which beckon one out of resistance, and each later presents the one who has accepted with a

³³ Croce, op. cit., p. 303.

bill larger than he can pay. Lheureux, however, prosecutes the defaulters. He is cowardly, conniving, hypocritical. But the main difference is the traditional one between emotional and premeditated crime, which difference is simply a subdivision of the distinction between conscious and unconscious evil. Lheureux is the black spider, carefully and incessantly spinning an ever-larger web with which to trap more and more victims. He is, though small and petty, pure evil. His function in the story, aside from that of the traditional usurer, is to act as the devil's agent who, at the critical moment, swoops down to claim his own by applying a match to the dynamited atmosphere and blowing all those bearing his mark to hell. He is, of all the important characters, the neglected one. This is obvious simply by the monotone in which he is painted. Flaubert does not explain him; he just uses him. It is surprising that Flaubert would employ such a personification; it is not good naturalism, and Lheureux is not really needed. He serves, whether or not Flaubert meant it, to lighten the color of Emma's wrongs by contrast, underlining her as a harmful but simple girl rather than an evil woman.

One other of the story's characters deserves mention -- the puzzling blind beggar. His literary function is clear in the two meetings Emma has with him: the contrast between her reactions at the two times

serves to delineate a change in her. And again, there is the use of him at the story's end when he walks by Emma's window just as, in her dying moments, she has succumbed to one of her romantically roseate visions of God and heaven. His song recalls her sharply to ugly reality. This is, in truth, so artificial and obvious a "device" that I found myself rebelling against it, feeling the Flaubert could not have introduced him just for this, or simply to show Homais' brutality. Hence the puzzlement. The blind man is ugly as a leper, neutral in personality; he roams the countryside begging, while he sings a romantic lay. He seems to recur as a theme of low irony; his ugliness coupled with the whining of his troubador song forms an obvious symbol. Even more than Lheureux, he is a symbolic character -- something of an anachronism in a naturalistic novel (foreshadowing Joyce).

In this whole gallery, there is not one full-length portrait of a good human being. There is, however, a small sketch. Dr. Larivière appears but once and does nothing of importance, but he stands out as the only character of whom the author approves. He is depicted as the true man of science -- brilliant, accomplished, dignified; disdainful of conventions and hypocrisies, sardonic, unswervingly honest. He is accustomed, says Flaubert, to "practicing virtue without believing it."

So much for any hope that he might give us.

Standing off to look at the novel as a whole, one cannot but agree with Croce that "few books are so desolately pessimistic as Madame Bovary."³⁴ Society is a mess because the people who comprise it are so hopelessly inadequate, both as individuals and as social beings. Man's dreams are as worthless as his realities. And this that I have portrayed, says Flaubert, is not the vision of an artist, but the facts of actuality -- unadorned and unmitigated. But one wonders if this is so. There seems to be an element of card-stacking here, the aura of a thesis being pushed to far. Critics point to a reason. Oscar Cargill notes:

Flaubert hated every character in Madame Bovary, as he did the vast majority of his fellow men, for their mediocrity.³⁵

Croce gives an extended view:

Flaubert...having attained to the maturity of his spirit, resolved to depict...his own dissatisfaction, his own bitterness, his own sarcasm. This resulted in....Madame Bovary.³⁶

And finally a confession from Flaubert himself:

"People believe," writes Flaubert with reference to Madame Bovary, "I am taken with the real, whereas I detest it."³⁷

³⁴ Ibid., p. 305.

³⁵ Oscar Cargill, Intellectual America (New York: Macmillan, 1941), p. 66.

³⁶ Croce, op. cit., p. 300.

³⁷ Gilbert and Kuhn, op. cit., p. 492 (quoted from Flaubert's Correspondence, III, 85).

What results is, as always, a most unnatural naturalism. The scientist does not color his observational report on cancer tissue by expressions of his detestation of it. Flaubert is being no more objective in hating his characters than Balzac is in loving his, and neither is being as objective as Stendhal, who likes or dislikes his people in accordance with their natural vacillations between good and evil. Ever since Flaubert, it has somehow been assumed that to detest life, and to portray only its evil, is to be "objective," while to enjoy it, and speak of its good, is to be "subjective." Certainly this is a startling and revealing assumption, showing all too clearly the fundamental disillusionment that has come upon the western world. True objectivity, which implies a healthy awareness of life's evil and good, has been confused with a most subjective pessimism. As a result, the "naturalistic novel," beginning here with Flaubert, has thrown many writers so far off balance that even today men like James T. Farrell go about leaning heavily into ill-winds and believing that they are seeing the world from a vertical position. If it is the true naturalistic approach that is wanted, go to Tolstoy's war. But note that he is conscious of life's immutable and.

4 - War and Peace (1872)³⁸

Tolstoy is inclusive. He is, in fact, inclusive to an epic extent. It is this which not only makes War and Peace perhaps the most exhaustive social novel ever written, but which gives to it its balance. Unlike the three French novels, it does not concentrate all its forces upon a condemnatory examination of society. But it is not flattering either. Tolstoy keeps both eyes open, and thus includes both the good and the bad that he sees, in a ratio that is convincingly true to life. As Fadiman puts it:

The constant impression of naturalness one gets from reading Tolstoy comes partly from his lack of obsessions. He does not specialize in a particular emotion, as Balzac specializes in the emotions deriving from the desire for money.³⁹

In a sense this book represents a development (or more likely a culmination) of the realistic social novel to a point of objective inclusiveness which is the real naturalism. Except for the two characters who represent the extremes of falsehood and truth (Napoleon

³⁸ Leo Tolstoy, War and Peace, trans. by Constance Garnett (New York: Modern Library, n.d.), 1146 pp.

³⁹ Clifton Fadiman, "Current Reading," New Yorker, XVII (Jan. 31, 1942), 50.

and Platon Karataev), Tolstoy is more objective toward his characters than is Flaubert, because he does not hate them. He makes himself (and us) understand a family like the Kuragins or essentially unpleasant individuals such as Boris Drubetsky and Dolohov (a remote cousin of Heathcliff). On the other hand, he does not, like Balzac, idealize his characters. He is not afraid to show the mediocrity of Nikolay Rostov or the decline of Natasha's brilliant individuality. Nor is it a matter of the Russian hero versus the French villain. No such simplifications exist in the novel, for its view is not restricted to one society or one age. Rather, as Janko Lavrin points out, the vision is essentially universal and eternal:

War and Peace presents a whole period of Russian life sub specie aeterni. And it is precisely this "unhistorical" substream of timelessness that turns its characters into our own contemporaries as well, into contemporaries of any epoch. Moreover, the younger characters grow before our eyes, and one generation replaces the other as naturally as spring replaces winter. ⁴⁰

The balance of this novel is not, however, the result of steering a middle course. It is more a matter of tension between opposites, of repeated antitheses

⁴⁰ Janko Lavrin, An Introduction to the Russian Novel (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1947), p. 129.

-- some resolved and some not. For example: I have already stated that Tolstoy's objectivism deserts him at a crucial point -- when he is portraying the two characters who stand at the extreme ends of his value scale. Then there is the fact that his book, which is in large part an anti-war tract, presents at the same time a historical view in which control of such matters is seen as residing outside man's powers. And this historical view is itself expounded with such Jekyll-Hyde irregularity that some people see it finally as an adaptation of the Schopenhauerian cyclical concept of history,⁴¹ while others find the emphasis to be overwhelmingly upon the providential view. And again, the novel presents the paradox of anti-societal revelations capped finally by the strongest pro-social sentiments. There is also the incongruity of the searching intellectual analysis, by which Tolstoy has arrived at truths which could help improve civilization, giving way finally to a predilection for primitivism. There are other contrarities of statement and emphasis which, along with those mentioned, have made this novel

⁴¹ Eminent among those of this persuasion is the late Philosopher-Professor Urban of Yale.

many things to many people. For some it is an epic of the gentry class or a great family chronicle; for others it is an epic of war or of history. E. M. Forster sees it as a story of Space rather than Time.⁴²

Professor Urban lectured upon it as primarily a novel about the will-to-power. In almost every instance the term "epic" is used, which denotes its strength (scope) and perhaps implies its weakness (diffuseness). The special form of this book's weakness derives from its final and most incompatible paradox: it attempts to unite within itself both art and propaganda. This, more than anything else, accounts for the antipodal elements which remain unresolved. As an artist, Tolstoy saw and presented the amalgamation of opposites which go to make up the unity of human character and action; as a moralist, however, he had definite two-dimensional views which, often enough, clashed with his artistic vision. There was not -- nor could there be -- a completely successful integration of his dual nature.

One bit of proof lies in the fact that, huge and complex as War and Peace is, little or no analysis

⁴² E. M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927), p. 64.

of story or character is needed to arrive at the book's moral views. They are all explicitly stated -- at length. Their basis lies in Tolstoy's concept of history:

We are forced to fall back upon fatalism in history to explain irrational events (that is those of which we cannot comprehend the reason). The more we try to explain those events in history rationally, the more irrational and incomprehensible they seem to us. Every man lives for himself, making use of his free-will for attainment of his own objects, and feels in his whole being that he can do or not do any action. But as soon as he does anything, that act, committed at a certain moment in time, becomes irrevocable and is the property of history, in which it has a significance, predestined and not subject to free choice.

There are two aspects to the life of every man: the personal life, which is free in proportion as its interests are abstract, and the elemental life of the swarm, in which a man must inevitably follow the laws laid down for him.

Consciously a man lives on his own account in freedom of will, but he serves as an unconscious instrument in bringing about the historical ends of humanity...The higher a man's place in the social scale, the more connections he has with others, and the more power he has over them, the more conspicuous is the inevitability and predestination of every act he commits. 'The hearts of kings are in the hand of God.' The king is the slave of history.

History -- that is the unconscious life of humanity in the swarm, in the community -- makes every minute of the life of kings its own, as an instrument for attaining its ends.⁴³

⁴³ Tolstoy, op. cit., Part IX, Sec. 1, p. 570.

So much for free will. All history is predestined, and is not in any way subject to the influence of Chance or personal genius (cf. Carlyle):

The words chance and genius mean nothing actually existing, and so cannot be defined. These words merely denote a certain stage in the comprehension of phenomena. I do not know how some phenomenon is brought about; I believe that I cannot know; consequently I do not want to know and talk of chance. I see a force producing an effect out of proportion with the average effect of human powers; I do not understand how this is brought about, and I talk about genius.⁴⁴

There is no sense bothering one's head about historical causes:

Causes of historical events -- there are not and cannot be, save the one cause of all causes.⁴⁵

God is the cause of all. But he does not work unpredictably like the fatalistic Hebrews' Jehovah. This is more akin to Greek determinism, wherein certain historical laws are deducible through an analysis of man's life. On the whole, however, one does best to forego attempts at analysis, and simply to fulfill unconsciously the part

⁴⁴ Ibid., Epilogue, Part 1, Sec. 11, p. 1065.

⁴⁵ Ibid., Part XIII, Sec. 1, p. 928.

assigned him in history, i.e., in man's life-in-the-mass:

In historical events we see more plainly than ever the law that forbids us to taste of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. It is only unself-conscious activity that bears fruit, and the man who plays a part in an historical drama never understands its significance. If he strives to comprehend it, he is stricken with barrenness.⁴⁶

If this be the case, then the "good" man must be precisely this innocent, unself-conscious fellow. He must be one who, in working naturally for himself, will necessarily work effectively for all because he is primarily a member of the society of man rather than an individual. He will be an exemplar of the one great force in life -- the principle of man-in-the-swarm, with all its mystic potential. He will be, in fact, the Russian peasant. He is, in this fiction, Platon Karataev.

This peasant-Plato, this philosopher-saint, is the book's super-hero. He is the simple man, who accepts all and thanks God for it (cf. Gandide). Jolly, kindly, hardy -- he is something of a cliché expert, e.g., "I say it's not by our wit, but as God thinks fit." He is a lover of horses and dogs -- an elderly man without a gray hair or a missing tooth.

⁴⁶ Ibid., Part XII, Sec. IV, pp. 885-886.

But his salient trait, for Tolstoy, is his thoroughly communalized nature. He is the apogee of mass-man:

Every word and every action of his was the expression of a force uncomprehended by him, which was his life. But his life, as he looked at it, had no meaning as a separate life. It had meaning only as a part of a whole, of which he was at all times conscious. His words and actions flowed from him as smoothly, as inevitably, and as spontaneously, as the perfume rises from the flower. He could not understand any value or significance in an act or word taken separately.⁴⁷

Platon is the abstract hero in the same way that Napoleon is the abstract villain. The three more fleshly heroes of the novel -- Pierre, Prince Andrey, Nikolay -- arrive at an approximation of Platon's state of grace after cumulative misfortunes and searchings. Each finally rejects self-assertion, the will-to-power (notice that Andrey wanted a "Toulon" just as Raskolnikov did), and finds simple beauty in love. Each gives up self-seeking: Andrey abandons the search for glory, Nikolay for unbridled pleasures and irresponsible ease, and Pierre for the private satisfactions of freemasonry, romantic love, and politics. They discover the fatuousness of egoism, and each returns at last to his role of a man

⁴⁷ Ibid., Part XlIII, Sec. XlIII, p. 915.

among men. Thus the central burden of the novel's moral rests upon anti-individualism; the instinctive group life triumphs completely at the end. Lavrin feels that Tolstoy goes too far:

When proclaiming the peasant Karatayev as a greater man than that "puppet of circumstances" -- Napoleon, Tolstoy only affirms, once more, his anti-individualistic trend; his worship of the static "group soul" and of the undifferentiated precivilized masses. At the end of the novel, the vegetative principle of existence actually triumphs: in the married life of Pierre and Natasha, both of whom are so much submerged in the cares for their increasing family...that they hardly have time for anything else. The individual is sacrificed to the race, to the species.⁴⁸

But is not this, after all, an expression of the Christian social doctrine? Tolstoy binds it up tightly to orthodox Christian dogma in toto by promulgating the single measure for all individual ethics:

For us, with the rule of right and wrong given us by Christ, there is nothing for which we have no standard. And there is no greatness where there is not simplicity, goodness, and truth.⁴⁹

It has been necessary fully to examine Tolstoy's concept of the good because, strictly speaking, there

⁴⁸ Lavrin, op. cit., p. 129.

⁴⁹ Tolstoy, op. cit., Part XLV, Sec. XVlll, p. 1008.

is no positive evil in the book! In this sense it differs from all the other novels under consideration. There are only actions which may be termed good or bad according to whether they help or harm the society of man and whether they conform or do not conform to Christ's teachings. There are no truly evil characters in the novel. Even the villain Napoleon is portrayed negatively: he lacks insight and goodness, but is in no way responsible for his own career. He, more than any other character, is the slave of circumstance, the one who serves as dummy to the people's ventriloquism. All is Necessity.

A belief of this sort, to be consistent, must necessarily abandon the conventional view of the existence of evil individuals. One has only to understand the reasons (necessities) for an action to see that, though it may seem evil to us, it is natural or necessary for its doer. Thus the scheming greediness of Prince Vassily, the betrayal of Sonia by Nikolay, the snares of Ellen, the selfish hedonism of Anatole Kuragin, the sporadic cruelties of Dolchov, the occasionally bestial attitude of the soldiers (both Russian and French) toward their enemies and prisoners, the executions,

hypocrisies, intrigues -- all are eventually explained, i.e., understood, and emerge not as premeditated evil but as the natural by-products of mass life. And, like all by-products, they are not the same as their source (the individual), though they be derived from it. They result from the operation of outside forces upon the source, causing a change in its molecular structure. One has only to study these laws of change, to recognize the effect of given forces upon given objects, in order to realize that free will is subject to greater or lesser compression by Necessity, that it is in all cases limited, and that consequently a man's acts are never completely his own responsibility. Since this is so, it follows that a man can never be totally blamed (or praised) for his own actions. Thus through understanding we arrive at that point to which spirit alone can guide us -- compassion.

By the same reasoning we are led to a de-emphasis of externals, a realization that no happiness is to be found in comforts, no reward in glory, no achievement in ambition -- especially the ambition to serve the political State, the form and movement of which is quite beyond one's influence. And conversely, no

deprivations can in themselves kill a man's soul or destroy his happiness (cf. Pierre in captivity with Raskolnikov); everything can be rewarding if one's spirit is, so to speak, "in tune." The true service, whether to society or individuals, can result only from love (e.g., Kutuzov and Platon). It is the internal condition of man which is of sole importance. If it be right, he is protected from all but the superficial effects of circumstance, and he is assured that all he does will be somehow right and good (compare Crime and Punishment). He need only be in a state of love -- love of people and of God, of life and of the after-life, for since God is both love and eternity, life is love and death is an awakening (e.g., Andrey's death-scene).

There is, then, no individual evil. But, one asks, what about societal evil? What about the terrible war? Here again Tolstoy's particular mode of understanding removes the conventional aura of evil. He first admits the horror of it:

On the 12th of June the forces of Western Europe crossed the frontier, and the war began, that is, an event took place opposed to human reason and all human nature. Millions of men perpetrated against one another so great a mass of crime -- fraud,

swindling, robbery, forgery, issue of counterfeit money, plunder, incendiarism, and murder -- that the annals of all the criminal courts of the world could not muster such a sum of wickedness in whole centuries, though the men who committed those deeds did not at that time look on them as crimes.⁵⁰

Nor, in a sense, were they crimes, however terrible they may have been as action (cf. ^{the} Nuremberg Trials). Tolstoy sees the war as happening because it had to happen. After cataloguing the so-called "reasons" for the war, he concludes:

And so all those causes -- myriads of causes -- coincided to bring about what happened. And consequently nothing was exclusively the cause of war, and the war was bound to happen, simply because it was bound to happen. Millions of men, repudiating their common sense and their human feelings, were bound to move from west to east, and to slaughter their fellows, just as some centuries before hordes of men had moved from east to west to slaughter their fellows.⁵¹

The war was somehow predestined by an infinite chain of causality which we are powerless either to avert or understand. This theory of predestined catastrophe, while it does not remove the cruelty and horror of the thing itself, does nonetheless make implausible a concept of catastrophe as evil, for the responsibility lies ultimately with the all-wise, all-

⁵⁰ Ibid., Part IX, Sec. 1, p. 568.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 569.

good God who is by derivation its cause. It assumes, therefore, the nature of a trial rather than a positive evil. Its very inevitability makes it at most an event beyond man's control which he terms evil because it hurts him, but which, if he regard it as simply a part of man's history of earthly purgatory, works somehow toward his ultimate good. (There is no Satanism in the book.)

This kind of thinking, pursued to its logical conclusion, leads eventually to total elimination of the concept of evil in its traditional sense -- in the sense that evil is a positive force against which man must fight to attain his salvation, and against which he has a chance of victory. If God is to be both First Cause and Omnipotence, then presumably all happens as He sees fit and necessary; hence one cannot call any event evil. And this applies regardless of the particular ratio of free will admitted into the system, for it is patent that to the extent to which God is Cause, free will cannot be crucially significant. Life becomes simply an endless chain of event, some links of which hurt man and others help him. There is as final earthly reality only the individual soul, which

either attains to a state of love or does not. Beyond this there is only the infinite and the eternal, in comparison with which man's life and actions are insignificant and virtually meaningless (N. B. Andrey's death scenes). God may judge and he may not. Tolstoy gives no indication either way. One infers, however, from the way in which the story is handled, from the complete lack of sin-consciousness manifested by the author (contrast Hawthorne), and from the strong emphasis upon love and understanding, that Tolstoy feels (more strongly than did Hawthorne) that in the end will come forgiveness for all.

Certainly it is this aura, rather than the book's concept of space as Forster conceives,⁵² which removes all possible depressive effects from the novel's most ugly or melancholy moments. More than Crime and Punishment this is an optimistic book. Not in the sense that it foresees great improvement in the world of here and now, or that it predicts a beatific reign of reason:

Once admit that human life can be guided by reason, and all possibility of life is annihilated.⁵³ (Compare Razumihin's speech, pp. 119-120 this paper.)

⁵² Forster, op. cit., p. 63.

⁵³ Tolstoy, op. cit., Epilogue, Part 1, Sec. 1, p. 1064.

Furthermore, he often makes his statements in the dry, certain tone of a mathematical theorist, which contrasts most invidiously with the plastic and warm human being who shines forth in the artist. And what most unnerves and finally depresses the reader is the fact that not one of his explicit statements is needed! -- they are all implicit in the story. The moralist could well have trusted the artist. Because he did not, War and Peace consists of an unforgettably artistic narrative embedded in an inartistic novel.

The split personality of the work has made it, as I noted at the beginning of the discussion, something of a jack-of-all-books. Read for many years as sheer epic, it underwent a sensational revival during the recent war (cf. The Red and the Black), when its picture of the western invasion of Russia seemed to be less story than history and less history than prognostication. Even the newspaper columnists mentioned it. And, as I understand, the Russian high command extracted word by word from the book the invasion episode, and putting it together in a brochure, issued it to their soldiers at the time of the German invasion. Many have held that Tolstoy's version of successful Russian tactics during

the Napoleonic invasion, i.e., retreat, attrition, scorched-earth policy, etc., exerted a powerful influence upon Russian strategy during this war. Malcolm Cowley upholds the idea and extends it into a theory which is not without interest and a certain plausibility:

Tolstoy's ideas have taken hold of the Russian mind to a greater extent, perhaps, than the Russians realize. I sometimes think that Russian communism is in many respects more Tolstoyan than Marxian; certainly it is so in its mystical feeling about the masses, of which there is no more than a trace in Marx, and in its theories about art, which Marx would have ridiculed.⁵⁵

While it is surely possible that the Russians are influenced by Tolstoy, the reverse is more than possible. War and Peace is infused with the peculiarly Russian sense of spiritual manifest destiny -- a sense which, incidentally, antedates communism by many years, just as the moralistic tendency of Russian literature antedates Tolstoy. But to my knowledge no other writer -- Russian or otherwise -- has ever tucked his spiritual propaganda into so great and convincing a novel. It is no wonder that this book already has

⁵⁵ Malcolm Cowley, "This War and Peace," New Republic, 106 (May 11, 1942), 642.

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a strange history. It may possibly have yet a stranger one. But it will always be difficult to assay that part of its total effect which owns to its art alone.

5 - Jude the Obscure (1895)⁵⁶

If War and Peace represents an apex of faith and belief in the nature and goodness of First Cause, Jude the Obscure (along with Moby Dick) may be said to represent a nadir. For Hardy the profound consolation of Tolstoy's view is unattainable because the beliefs on which it rests are not compatible with his own. Like Melville and Conrad, Hardy asked his universal questions in the role of secular man. He was faced with the same problem -- the inability to borrow from religious conclusions, which are essentially private insofar as they are applicable only for those who possess belief, e.g., the Buddhistic concept of the universe is in this way private to a Christian.

Bordering as it does upon the uncommunicable, the religious spirit says simply "Attain unto me." But it does not say how one is to do this. Doctrine

⁵⁶ Thomas Hardy, Jude the Obscure (New York: Modern Library, n.d.), 503 pp.

does not tell one; dogma cannot help; custom is empty. These have meaning only after the spirit is attained. Therefore, those who cannot believe cannot accept for themselves the conclusions of the believers. No matter how much one may wish to do so, no matter how convinced he may be of the wonderful efficacy of these conclusions, they remain tools which do not fit his particular grasp. They slip out and away. All he can do is adapt from them those principles and patterns which will fit into his different mode of thought. It is by this method that he sometimes attains to a parallel way of life which, though based upon secular thought-patterns, is nonetheless called religious because we have no other word to express the way of life founded on dedication and love. But the parallel lines diverge, as they must, at the point of the concept of evil.

The secularist can accept neither Satanism nor merciful predestination. For him evil remains, in its larger sense, a thing in and of his life -- his only life. Part of this evil he recognizes as claiming its origin in Nature, and being therefore irremovable. He may or may not make his peace with it. If he does,

he still must face the other part of evil -- that which he sees stemming from man upon man. Even this segment of evil is inescapable, but it would seem at least to be controllable. To the extent to which it is controlled, life becomes correspondingly good or bad to him. If this evil is kept within what might be described as his psychic limits, life is worthwhile. But when this body of man-made evil extends beyond those limits, he must, even if he foresees a future generation which may attain a better balance, have a dark view of contemporary life. This is partially true of Hardy, and I think it is in this light that one best understands the social viewpoint expressed in Jude the Obscure.

This story of a poverty-stricken young man whose quest for learning and love is balked by a combination of society, chance, and fate has in it several elements reminiscent of War and Peace. There is, first of all, the author's air of philosopher-novelist. Second, there is an insistence upon the major part played in our lives by the principle of cosmic necessity, here termed Unconscious Will. Consequent upon this belief, there are no villainous characters. Third, there is, despite the difference in fundamental beliefs, an aura of

Christian ethical values. As Shafer says:

(Jude the Obscure) is, indeed, a modern homily upon a venerable theme, showing how the letter of the law killeth, whereas the spirit giveth life.⁵⁷

And last, there is the strong emphasis upon the role of society in man's life. But in Hardy's universe society is as unacceptable as causality is unpleasant. It is against, rather than within, a strong social framework that Hardy has cast this novel.

One should remember that, like Stendhal in The Red and the Black, Hardy deals with a specific society. Coming on the scene at the tag end of the great and thriving Victorian era, Hardy's inherited tradition was mainly comprised of the unidentical twin-certainties of mechanism and religionism, overdressed beyond recognition in the smooth silks of utilitarianism and the puffed flounces of Victorian complacency. It was precisely this complacency which was bound most to shock Hardy, who viewed man-made evil as the result always of some form of insensitivity. It may be impersonal and unconscious:

In place of it (an aged church) a tall new building of German-Gothic design, unfamiliar to English eyes, had been erected on a new

⁵⁷ Robert Shafer, Christianity and Naturalism (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1926), p. 239.

piece of ground by a certain obliterater of historic records who had run down from London and back in a day.⁵⁸

It may be conscious, but negative:

The rector had gone away for the day, being a man who disliked the sight of changes. He did not mean to return till the evening, when the new school-teacher would have arrived and settled in, and everything would be smooth again.⁵⁹

Or it may be the conscious acceptance of a way of thought or action which is positive in its transference and reinforcement of evil. This is exemplified, in successive shadings, by the college deans in their utter refusal to aid Jude; by Vilbert, the quack physician; by landlords who refuse rooms to the child-laden family; by the vulgar cunning of Arabella's snares; and by a whole set of narrow, creed-loving people. These last, comprising society in the abstract, illustrate the truth that for Hardy, as for James, social evil is simply the product of individual insensitivity times the number of people making up the society -- with the final result sanctioned by group mores.

⁵⁸ Hardy, op. cit., Part 1, Sec. 1, p. 7.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 4.

Both James and Hardy were very much aware of the dynamic complexity of individual life and of the necessary clash produced when this complexity is juxtaposed with static social standards. But where James gave his characters as much freedom as possible, thus concentrating upon the characters themselves, Hardy gave them little or none, shifting his emphasis to the external forces working upon the characters. One sees this in the web of poverty in which Jude is inextricably enmeshed. This poverty is bigger than Jude himself; it is presented as an irresistible force (contrast Crime and Punishment), one of the greatest evils permitted and perpetrated by society. The whole story is presented against this bleak background. It is not the poverty that starves one physically, for this applies only to a fringe and thus sacrifices quantity of application, but rather that broad, perennial poverty which outfaces a whole class in its struggle for human dignity. Jude says: "...it was my poverty and not my will that consented to be beaten."⁶⁰

The existence of such poverty is, of course, a

⁶⁰

Ibid., Part VI, Sec. 1, p. 339.

manifestation of group insensitivity. It can exist only in a society where selfishness is comme il faut. Sue Bridehead comments on another aspect of the general air of narrow selfness which pervades her society:

What does it matter, when you come to think of it, whether a child is yours by blood or not? All the little ones of our time are collectively the children of us adults of the time, and entitled to our general care. That excessive regard of parents for their own children, and their dislike of other people's is, like class-feeling, patriotism, save-your-own-soul-ism, and other virtues, a mean exclusiveness at bottom.⁶¹

This "exclusiveness" is exactly what Jude and Sue meet at every turn, whether it is a matter of Jude's being excluded from the university by snobbish dons, from rooms by grasping landlords, or, with Sue, from social acceptance by sanctimonious gossips. And here again poverty enters in, for it is their lack of money which puts them at the mercy of society, which precludes recourse from its arbitrary and automatic codes.

What Jude and Sue find to be preeminently, almost eerily, characteristic of their society is its inexhaustible fund of barriers and its spontaneous compulsion to erect one where none stood before -- and where none belongs in the true nature of things. We see this operating

⁶¹ Ibid., Part V, Sec. 111, p. 334.

from the saloon to the college, from the seduction-trap to the empty marriage vow so piously protected, from group bigotry to national creedism. The book's central example is society's reaction to Richard Phillotson's surrendering his wife (Sue) to Jude. Hardy deliberately sets this up as the most understanding and unselfish act in the story, and then makes his bitterly ironic comment by showing Phillotson -- as a direct result of his act -- forced out of society's graces into a life of meanness and poverty because he had departed from social standards. It is this concept of rigid standards -- one set of rules blindly applied to a myriad of people and contexts -- that forms the broad base for a thousand social evils. Sue expresses one aspect of it:

Domestic laws should be made according to temperaments, which should be classified. If people are at all peculiar in character they have to suffer from the very rules that produce comfort in others!⁶²

One sees from all of this that a large segment of contemporary social comment exists in the novel. I would agree with Shafer that -- at least on one level -- Jude the Obscure reflects Hardy's "plea for charity,

⁶² Ibid., Part IV, Sec. 111, p. 270.

for a larger tolerance, for a repudiation of narrow traditional applications of moral principles which sacrifice truth and reality for appearances."⁶³ Does Hardy have any hope that his plea will be heard? To a degree, yes. In regard to social evil, his final position evolves as evolutionary meliorism. This is not a blind faith that "things will work out," but rather a deep conviction that things will never "work out" completely, but may at least, if man will strive toward light, become more bearable through the lessening of "man's inhumanity to man." He seems to foresee an awakening of social consciousness, an alleviation of social evil through reason. Society may one day advance to the point of recognizing and accepting both sensitive and instinctive human beings, and make a proper place for them. Jude feels that the time is not far off, though too far to help him:

As for Sue and me, when we were at our best, long ago -- when our minds were clear, and our love of truth fearless -- the time was not ripe for us! Our ideas were fifty years too soon to be any good to us.⁶⁴

⁶³ Shafer, op. cit., p. 238.

⁶⁴ Hardy, op. cit., Part VI, Sec. X, p. 492.

Well then, one may ask, why all the talk about the gloom of this book? Why is it generally described as one of the darkest novels ever written? The answer lies in the fact that here again is a book with a split personality. Society furnishes only a part of the evil -- this may be ameliorated; but the other part, larger and more ominous, derives from the cosmos, from natural law itself -- this evil is eternal and irremediable. Both kinds of evil are treated at length in the novel, and the contrasting attitudes of the author toward them sets up a tension which Harvey Webster states as follows:

Paradoxically, Jude the Obscure...is at once the most outspoken expression of Hardy's "pessimism" and his most significant attempt to make the future a time in which man's life will be more endurable. It is pessimistic in its emphasis upon the relentless way in which destiny prevents happiness; melioristic in its contradictory emphasis upon the social causes which contribute, but may not always contribute, to man's failure to find a satisfactory life.⁶⁵

Anxious to acquit Hardy of the charge of unrelieved pessimism, Mr. Webster tends to emphasize the melioristic aspects of the book, and while he succeeds to a degree,

⁶⁵ Harvey Curtis Webster, On A Darkling Plain (Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 1947), p. 183.

I think that Jude must remain for most of us a dark novel. And Hardy cannot have meant otherwise.

There is evidence that Jude, of all his novels (it was his last), represents Hardy's most carefully worked out and vertically developed statement of his belief, and that the statement is made in this book more directly and with less euphemism than in any of his others. Critics have commented on this: Edwin Arlington Robinson somewhere calls Jude the "most true" of Hardy's novels; Arthur Symons terms it Hardy's "most thoughtful" book;⁶⁶ Louis Cazamian says that Hardy in this novel "draws closer to complete realism, free from all violence, but destitute as well of all secret leaning to indulgence, than does any of his contemporaries."⁶⁷ What Hardy will not indulge is any blinking of the existence of what he conceives to be outsize cosmic evil. He presents his theory in the novel, and presents it hard.

The nut of the argument lies in the fact that man is not, contrary to Victorian belief, the center of a universe specifically made for him by an all-wise,

⁶⁶ Arthur Symons, "Thomas Hardy," Encyclopedia Britannica (11th ed., 1911), XIII, 947.

⁶⁷ E. Legouis and L. Cazamian, A History of English Literature (New York: Macmillan, 1935), pp. 1280-1281.

all-good Creator. Quite the reverse: he is of little importance in the universal scheme of things. A study of man's life will yield up no cosmic secrets except, perhaps, that there is a process known as natural evolution. And for Hardy, as for Melville before him, the terrible indifference to man of the workings of natural law was more than a theory; it was a brute, irrefutable fact confirmable by the thousand observations of a single day. Nature has its law, the logic of which bears no reference to human values. But, as law, it is inexorable in its workings, and if man attempts to stand in its way, then man is crushed (Jude and Sue). We are ruled over by an unconscious, universal, Schopenhauerian Will which man's puny counter-Will or intelligence is powerless either to combat or comprehend. It is Necessity, in the strictest sense of the term. But it is not, like Tolstoy's, a kindly Necessity; it is merely a blind force. One's view of such a universe can only be fatalistic. One understands that the life principle will fulfill itself in accord with its own incomprehensible pattern. The incomprehensibility makes even determinism implausible. And the fact that this pattern has no reference whatsoever to human

values is patent: is not the law of nature mutual butchery? Is not the advantage of one organism gained at the expense of the other? Does not insensate strength prevail over delicate beauty? Everlastingly yes, says Hardy, for this is Nature's law, this is the life principle. Its prime manifestation in human life is the sex drive. Study this and you have your universal analogy. Hence sex forms the groundwork of this novel.

One tends to forget that Jude the Obscure is a love story. Perhaps because there is so little of love's joy in it. Or perhaps because, like The Red and the Black, it is more properly a love study. Jude is caught in the sex snare before society gets at him. His youthful marriage to Arabella Donn, into which he was mercilessly beguiled, sets a permanent blight on his life before it has fairly begun. And his later connection with Sue Bridehead, who is as afraid of sex as Arabella is afraid of doing without it, is equally hopeless in its maladjustments. Sex is not selective. It is simply part of the blind force which hurls people about, driving them into either psychically or practically incompatible relationships. Jude, of course falls into the trap in both its extreme forms -- love sensual (Arabella) and love spiritual (Sue). Hardy's final comment would

seem to reside in the fact that both loves, in their effects upon Jude, are equally destructive. Thus instinct assumes its characteristically victorious stand over reason.

This illustration of the workings of the sex principle is important to the book just as is the illustration of the workings of the social principle. Both are forces for evil -- one remediable, one not. But neither is the true villain of this novel. That role is reserved for Fate, and as far as I can see it is the book's largest role. It has not only the most incisive and revelatory lines, but it so dominates every other element that it succeeds almost in cancelling them out.

Fate works in this novel directly. It is very noticeable that the element of chance, or coincidence, which looms so large in much of Hardy's work, is held to a minimum in Jude. This must have been conscious, for the powerful effect upon our lives of the adventitious in its manifold unforeseeable outcroppings is for Hardy a bottomless well of tragic irony, an omnipresent confirmation of that blind principle which

gnaws at the roots of our lives like a beaver at a willow tree. Yet I count only eight coincidences in this novel (no one of which is as important as the letter incidents in Tess and The Return of the Native), which is not many for a work of this size. They have a cumulative weight, but the significant thing is that they are kept well within the bounds of probability. They take the form, for the most part, of accidental meetings between people who never stray far (at least for long) from the small radius of Wessex countryside which contains their homes and their destinies. It is as if, in Jude, Hardy was especially cautious about coincidence in order to obviate misinterpretation or easy "explaining away." It was the hand of Fate he was drawing, and he kept his strokes clear.

An unrelenting spell of doom runs like an underground river throughout the book. One is never allowed to forget that Jude is "the predestinate." (So strong is this effect, that one is hardly surprised at Jude's reception by society; it seems as if society is merely playing its own predestined part toward him.) Notice that Jude and Sue are almost beaten from the start by their common heritage -- a family history of tragic

marriages. Sue says of the relationship between her and Jude:

There is something external to us which says, 'You sha'n't!' First it say, 'You sha'n't learn!'....Now it says, 'You sha'n't love!'⁶⁹

Phillotson, perceiving the harsh outcome of his generous act toward Sue, decides that the hostile universe twists all man's acts into its own image:

Cruelty is the law pervading all nature and society; we can't get out of it if we would.⁷⁰

The bitter lessons of history and story give Sue an insight into Jude's inescapable fate:

You are Joseph, the dreamer of dreams, dear Jude. And a tragic Don Quixote. And sometimes you are St. Stephen, who, while they were stoning him, could see heaven opened. Oh, my poor friend and comrade, you'll suffer yet!⁷¹

Part of their tragedy is inherent in the characters themselves (personal fate), part in their major circumstance (society), and part in natural law (universal fate) -- the black backdrop against which all individuals and all

⁶⁹ Hardy, op. cit., Part VI, Sec. 11, pp. 412-413.

⁷⁰ Ibid., Part V, Sec. VIII, p. 389.

⁷¹ Ibid., Part IV, Sec. 1, pp. 247-248.

societies move and play their parts. Hardy states it:

They would sit silent, more bodeful of the direct antagonism of things than of their insensate and stolid obstructiveness. Vague and quaint imaginings had haunted Sue, in the days when her intellect scintillated like a star, that the world resembled a stanza or melody composed in a dream; it was wonderfully excellent to the half-aroused intelligence, but hopelessly absurd at the full waking; that the First Cause worked automatically like a somnambulist, and not reflectively like a sage; that at the framing of the terrestrial conditions there seemed never to have been contemplated such a development of emotional perceptiveness among the creatures subject to those conditions as that reached by thinking and educated humanity.⁷²

This concept of an irremediable flaw in the cosmic plan underlies the book; it forms the cold, damp floor of the entire structure of the tragedy. More than simply a struggle of individuals against society and ill-fortune, the novel presents a deeper, more fundamental conflict, i.e., that between man and the eternal forces of natural law. There is about the book an aura of necessary futility and defeat. There is a sense of aged and ageless battle which gives to the characters an air of inherited weariness. The doctor describes little Father Time's suicide as a case in point for "the beginning of the

⁷² Ibid., Part VI, Sec. 111, p. 418.

coming universal wish not to live."⁷³ M. Cazamian comments upon this aspect of the novel:

Jude the Obscure is the most powerful of the books in which the fatigue of modern vitality has expressed, exemplified and justified itself in principle.⁷⁴

One sees quite clearly, I think, the tension that exists in the book between Hardy's hope and despair, his meliorism and his fatalism. It is perhaps, so far as the story is concerned, more a split than a tension. Webster emphasizes the hopefulness of the social commentary;⁷⁵ Forster emphasizes the tragic qualities of the fatalism.⁷⁶ For me, Forster is closer to the central emphasis. How else can one think, in the face of a comment such as this by Sue:

We said -- do you remember? -- that we would make a virtue of joy. I said it was Nature's intention, Nature's law and raison d'etre, that we should be joyful in what instincts she afforded us -- instincts which civilization had taken upon itself to thwart. What dreadful things I said! And now Fate has

⁷³ Ibid., Sec. 11, p. 411.

⁷⁴ Legouis and Cazamian, op. cit., p. 1288.

⁷⁵ Webster, op. cit., pp. 183-190.

⁷⁶ Forster, op. cit., pp. 140-141.

given us this stab in the back for being such fools as to take Nature at her word!⁷⁷

Society becomes, in this light, simply the tool of an omnipotent, offstage Fate. And so do the characters themselves! They never truly have a chance, and the final evidence of their lives evolves as a testament to the power of Fate rather than of man. The result is an artistic flaw. I agree with Forster:

(Hardy's) characters are involved in various snares, they are finally bound hand and foot, there is ceaseless emphasis on fate, and yet, for all the sacrifices made to it, we never see the action as a living thing....The fate above us, not the fate working through us -- 78

Much as one may sympathize with Jude and Sue, he feels after a while that they are being pushed around too easily, that they are being "puppetized." As is true to a degree of Madame Bovary also, the characters are sacrificed to the point that is being made -- in the one case, social evil; in the other, cosmic evil. And the point is made through plot rather than character. One seems to see Hardy's skeletal diagram for this book: three main characters, each

⁷⁷ Hardy, op. cit., Part VI, Sec. 11, p. 414.

⁷⁸ Forster, op. cit., pp. 140-141.

illustrating a principle: Arabella Donn -- the instinctive, the sensual, the necessarily treacherous, close to Nature, remains the same throughout because this force never changes; Sue Bridehead -- woman at her sparkling best, the sex principle of the sensitive, her charm will ensnare Jude, but she is woman and has woman's weakness, she will crack, develop downward, drag Jude with her; Jude Fawley -- the impoverished, the gentle, the sensitive, the yearning, Innocent Man with a Curse, he will develop upward in character, become involved with antipathetic society and more importantly with both woman principles, suffer from the involvement because he has something of each woman in him, but triumph over both because he is more than either, only to die when he has become truly worthy so as to give his death tragic quality, die because he is "the predestinate Man" who must die tragically and alone in a hostile universe. Plot. The point made.

This turnabout of what is recognized as sound novelistic technique lands the book in trouble, for the fate of the characters does not seem peculiar to themselves. It evolves finally as a generality -- an

abstract statement illustrated by story. To some extent this is, as we know, permissible. The whole body of Greek tragedy bears proof that this approach can be preeminently successful. But Aristotle was, on the whole, right in his analysis of the necessary approach to such narrative. Not that the protagonist must be a king, but he must surely be one of nature's "nobles" -- in strength as well as personality. Jude has strength of character, but not strength of action. He has no power, with the result that his battle with Fate is far too uneven, and thus his consequent defeat loses in significance and tragic force. He is not -- like Oedipus, Lear, or Ahab -- representative in some way of man's "topmost greatness," therefore his fall cannot produce in us our "topmost grief." One might generalize that if a writer is to pit his characters against omnipotent external forces such as social or cosmic evil, he must, if he is to claim decisiveness and finality for his outcome, choose his protagonist (man's representative) from among those humans who in some way epitomize man's strength. One understands that a flyweight cannot successfully fight a heavyweight. This fact

certainly has a significance of its own in relation to natural law and is legitimate matter for story. But the author cannot, when he shows the little man being counted out at last, turn to his audience and say, "Here is your final answer; this is the best we humans can do."

Hardy is essentially a poet. He deals with the big, eternal forces of life, and he deals with them in such a way as to lend symbolic stature to his landscape. But he peoples it with midgets. Poignant, often beautiful, midgets -- yes, and significant because they are sensitive of the gigantesque qualities of their landscape, which is the main fact of their lives. But they are more pathetic than tragic, or perhaps tragic as a group rather than as individuals. It seems to me that Gray's Elegy, to which Jude bears startling resemblances,⁷⁹ handles with greater balance the subject of life's obscure people, and sees more properly the limitations of their tragedy.

⁷⁹ Gray's Elegy contains a description of the Jude-like man:

Hard by yon wood, now smiling as in scorn,
Muttering his wayward fancies he would rove,
Now drooping, woeful wan, like one forlorn,
Or crazed with care, or crossed in hopeless love.

The cosmic evil which looms so large in this novel -- and which tends to break it aesthetically -- makes the book transitional so far as my classifications of evil are concerned. The large layer of social comment deposits it more properly among the societal novels, for -- and here is another hypothesis -- the true novel of cosmic evil must be that and nothing else. If, after all, a large body of cosmic evil exists, then personal and societal evils either derive from it or pale into insignificance beside it. Logical thinking would seem to dictate that man must first make peace with his universe before he can be at peace with himself and his society. He must understand, and to some extent accept, the eternal hostilities before he can properly understand or accept the temporal. Here again is the lesson of the Greeks and of Lear. But apparently Hardy could not follow it completely, could not at this time make any major adjustment to his universe, and so shifted his attention to the less secret, more solvable evils of society. He states:

Whatever may be the inherent good or evil of life, it is certain that men make it much worse than it need be. When we have got rid of a thousand remediable ills,

it will be time enough to determine whether the ill that is irremediable outweighs the good.⁸⁰

This is, for Hardy, either overstatement or the expression of a wish. He was not of sufficiently escapist temperament to have put off his own decision as to "whether the ill that is irremediable outweighs the good." Nor was he apt to balk at going right to the heart of the problem. His quotation from Antoninus, prefaced to Part Five of Jude, could serve as motto for the entire work:

Thy aerial part, and all the fiery parts which are mingled in thee, though by nature they have an upward tendency, still in obedience to the disposition of the universe they are overpowered here in the compound mass the body.⁸¹

It also might well have appeared on the title pages of Moby Dick and Heart of Darkness.

⁸⁰ Quoted by Webster, op. cit., p. 189.

⁸¹ Hardy, op. cit., Part V, Sec. 1, p. 311.

CHAPTER V

EVIL IN A COSMIC CONTEXT: NOBY DICK, HEART OF DARKNESS

As prolegomenon to this chapter, a short discussion of the concept of cosmic evil and of the necessary conflict between man and his universe might be helpful.

One may accept -- like Hardy, Melville, and Conrad -- the hypothesis that evil is "wrought in" with the world, that it is an inseparable principle of life -- a kind of heavy gaseous mass everywhere to be found and at no single point successfully to be fought into dissipation. The tree came with the garden. The odor of evil has pervaded the world since the beginning. Man's moral history has been not so much the story of evil men corrupting the universal good as it has been the epic of good men rising now and then like sporadic peaks above the cloud of evil. Man was thrown into unequal battle from the start. The cosmos always wins.

The Greek man-gods are interesting in this light. Neither morally better nor worse than man, they are, because of superhuman powers, simply a greater force in either

direction. Yet they too are subject to the world-principle, in this case called Fate or Destiny. And this principle seems always to be somewhat on the harsh side, leaning toward that evil (for man) which is consequent upon severe rigorousness of pre-ordained rules or "justice" concepts, in the service of which Ate is too often prime mover, and Tyche first constable. In our own thought, predestination has hired Satan. There has always been a tradition of Ahriman, a belief that there is a cosmic -- or at least preterhuman -- source of evil.

And in truth it does seem an oversimplification to assume that evil proceeds only from man. One may, to be sure, take refuge in that philosophical bomb-shelter which would have nothing exist except as it is seen and perceived by man. But even this has leaks. Nature's floods, earthquakes, and assorted horrors, the terrible battle for survival of plants and animals, the whim and bitter caprice by which nature, like an ulcer, feeds upon herself -- all this man perceives without instigating. All this man shares as a part of Nature, the laws of which have seemingly nothing to do with conscience, morality, ethics -- with goodness as man comprehends it. Here is the initial -- and I think, basic -- conflict: nature's laws are, in many respects,

separate and distinct from man's inmost concept of good. They deny both his manner and his myth.

Whatever he may do, however, they remain laws -- for the most part fixed and immutable. And man, as a part of nature (rather than just a product of it), cannot escape the impact of these natural laws. He suffers doubly under them -- in action and perception. Worse yet, since his animal side is first in him, his basic metal is perennially and often irresistibly, attracted by those depths of Nature which are contrary to his humanity (see Heart of Darkness). He feels the magnetic pull of nature-as-indifferent-creator, and is himself sometimes caught in her strange laws, laws which govern by a cosmic utilitarianism of the greatest good for the greatest number of things which are most essential and suited to the survival of the physical cosmogony. In a court of such law, man is but one witness -- important, but not necessarily indispensable. And the trial he attends is not his own, but that of a whole world, of an infinity of animates and inanimates. The law in this court, as I have said, is not for him alone. Seated to the left of him on the plaintiff's bench is an atom, to the right a whale. All are subject to one law. So far as the judge (whether god or chemist) is concerned,

the law is good because the world continues to exist and even thrive under it: the planets remain in orbit; the sun is still hot; space seems to be functioning well. Hence, if the whale or man complains, it is unfortunate but little can be done. The law works, and therefore cannot be altered. It is the principle upon which all legality works: instances of injustice are allowed because nothing is perfect and this system is, on the whole, the best available. Thus man remains plaintiff at a bar too cosmic for him.

But the Law grinds on. The Law of Survival is established and pitiless -- so he kills. The Law of Lust is Statute A of the Law of Survival -- so he lusts. The Law of Attrition is a sub-statute of the Act of Replenishment -- so he dies. Indiscriminately, and regardless of worth, age, sex, race, or desire -- he dies. It is not just a matter of individuals -- the Byzantine empire is an individual to a Cosmos. No principles of human value are at work in all of this. Nature is scientific, not merciful; efficient, not just (unless, America-like, one takes efficiency to be a cup of justice' scales).

Yet man, though a part of this, a part of Nature,

partly transcends it. He is what the wind is not -- conscious; what the rock can never be -- sensitive; what the ocean never was -- hopeful. And he has what Bergson calls "aspiration."¹ Recognizing all of this in himself, he seeks to sustain it, to keep it as a buoy which will float him atop his primeval fluids (he can never get out of them). He dares to hope, and translates his hopes into ideals, and sometimes succeeds in translating his ideals into action. At such time he wars on those laws of nature which are contrary to these ideals. He wars on them both in the universe and in himself (Ahab). He imposes mercy on efficiency, justice on whim, courage and altruism on the survival instinct. In short, he opposes his ideals to Nature's laws in those areas in which they clash.

Thus man arrives, through a certain goodness of his own, at the peculiar one-leg-out-of-trap position which so eternally characterizes him. The part that is out transcends his physical world. But the other leg is even more eternally fixed in the trap, for that which he aspires to transcend is a world in which he

¹ Henri Bergson, The Two Sources of Morality and Religion, trans. by R. A. Audra and C. Brereton (New York: Henry Holt, 1935), Chapter III.

is ineluctably involved -- a world of which he is born to be a part, and the laws of which in some measure he cannot escape because they were made in part to keep him extant.

The eternal grasp of that trap on his leg -- keeping him earthbound, keeping him in a sense divided against himself -- is the source of what man calls "cosmic evil."

1-- Moby Dick (1852)²

Melville would not for an instant have agreed with Hardy that the time to weigh life's final good and evil is after man-made social evil has been ameliorated. It might have drawn a laugh from him. He might have said something to the effect that the time to worry about flies lapping your blood is after you have closed your wound. And the "wound" for Melville resulted always from the sharp edge of universal truth impinging on the individual consciousness. If War and Peace is an epic of social man and his unconscious activity, Moby Dick is an epic of individual man and his conscious functioning; if War and Peace preaches acceptance and the warm hand of God, Moby Dick speaks of defiance and of a God whose hand wields thunderbolts as well as shafts of

² Herman Melville, Moby Dick (New York: Modern Library, 1930), 822 pp.

sunlight -- and wields them both with indifference. The vast space of Russia gives way to the vaster space of the Pacific, and both are absorbed like notes into that which is the very definition of Space and Time -- the infinitude of Mind, the eternity of Consciousness. There is no peace here, and the invasion is that of mind upon itself, the never ending contest of consciousness and understanding.

The whole book is a contest. E. M. Forster is right: "Moby Dick is full of meanings: its meaning is a different problem....Nothing can be stated about Moby Dick except that it is a contest."³ He is right, too, in implying that the book is bigger than any of its meanings -- bigger than all of them put together. No Tolstoyan Sunday-morning syllogisms break up Moby Dick. It dares to let chaos stand as unity. The unifying element is the governing consciousness of the individual; the chaotic element is, as stated, the cosmic contest. This contest turns up everywhere in the book. It dominates every person, place, and thing. Basically, there are the antipodals of land and sea, mind and feeling, space and time, light and darkness, self and non-self, worship and antagonism, human and preterhuman, positive and negative, good and evil -- all summed up, all apotheosized, in Ahab. Ahab

³ E. M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927), p. 203.

-- captain of everything but his own soul (Lawrence badly misunderstands this⁴), cloven like the split truths he has foundered on, partly sheer magnificence of man and partly awesome darkness of monomaniac. The book's good and evil centers in him; he is our indicative symbol. Indicative rather than definitive -- definitions are the abandonment of contest. But he is only one of the three major symbols. It might be best to speak first of the whale and the sea, for their symbolic content can be more easily understood separately than can Ahab's.

Moby Dick is omnipresent in the book -- first as feeling, then as force, and finally as the all of both realized in concrete reality. He is a principle of omnipotence, omnipresence, and whiteness. Whiteness is at once the greatest absence and the greatest presence. It avoids all the specific commitments of color and all the palpable realities of shading, and thus becomes for us that nothingness which is at once everything because it feels like eternity -- the disappeared distinctions of infinite time and space. It is, therefore, the Mystery. It is also the Indifference of the eternal to the temporal. Whiteness is an absence; Indifference is an absence. Moby Dick, in his whiteness, shares in, and

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D. H. Lawrence, "Herman Melville's Moby Dick," The Shock of Recognition, ed. by Edmund Wilson (New York, Doubleday and Co., 1947), pp. 1048 ff.

is an agent of, this cosmic principle of indifference, and is himself a part of the mystery of creation. He is no cosmic handyman like the Biblical whale -- Moby Dick does not give back what he swallows. He is the Thing itself: indifferently he sports and plays or staves in the sides of ships; mysteriously he is everywhere, seems to sense and know. Melville probably means also to say that cosmic indifference -- like this whale -- may hurt you if you happen to get in its way, but that the cosmic mystery -- again like the whale -- will not harm you unless you hunt it down. But if you so much as get hold of its tale, beware! Even partially grasped (which is all that is possible) it can be your destruction. Thus, as Sedgwick pointed out in what I can only call his beautiful book of Melville,⁵ there is a Moby Dick swimming in the substream of every consciousness. Part of the creation mystery is ourselves.

The sea is where Moby Dick lives, i.e., the answers to the mystery of creation resides in fathomless truth. But one can sail upon this sea, one may live closer to this truth than do life's landmen. Land is the place

⁵ William Ellery Sedgwick, The Tragedy of Mind (Cambridge, Harvard Univ. Press, 1945), pp. 96 ff. I feel that I have so much made sections of this book my own that it is now almost impossible for me to separate Mr. Sedgwick's insights from my adaptations of them. I should like simply to credit him with a large share of my understanding of Moby Dick.

of easy certitudes, of comforts, safeties, classifications -- of, in short, all the little fires and tiny walls which man has made to give him ease without truth and security without self-possession. To cast off from it is to invite danger (truth has often been dangerous, as many of man's myths testify). Melville speaks the warning:

For as this appalling ocean surrounds the verdant land, so in the soul of man there lies one insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy, but encompassed by all the horrors of the half-known life. God keep thee! Push not off from that isle, thou canst never return.⁶

But for some, insularity will not do, however joyful. They must needs know the whole of life to live it whole. These put out to sea, and the sea yields them up some of its secrets. The secrets can be beautiful or horrifying -- or both. One may meet whales a-loving -- or Moby Dick. And one may meet Moby Dick in any of his varied moods. The sea contains all of this, all that is chaotic, huge, overwhelming, profound, eternal, in some sense fatal -- and in every sense key to the unknowable. Sedgwick's deduction seems undeniable: the sea is also "the truth of human consciousness."⁷ The consciousness

⁶ Melville, *op. cit.*, Chap. LVII, p. 399.

⁷ Sedgwick, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

contains all of truth, and all its unplumbed depths of beauty and of horror.

Captain Ahab sails the sea searching for Moby Dick. Man plunges down into his consciousness to solve the eternal mystery. But he does not ordinarily try to root it out, to tear it out. Ahab does. He goes after truth with a harpoon. Truth has hurt him, and before he can integrate it, restore his balance, and emerge the greater for it, he becomes crazed. Thus his search is a hunt. His search for the nature of truth -- in itself the greatest of all human activity -- becomes a hunt for the truth-weapon. Destruction lies inevitably at the end. If this truth be what he thinks, mad Ahab in possession of it will not hesitate to play Samson with the structure of the universe itself. Even in defeat he pulls down the larger part of a world with him (his ship of many nations). And yet I maintain that Ahab is portrayed essentially as a Promethean hero, that he is man's champion, that his defeat lies in his monomania, and his triumph in his death. It is necessary to look at him more closely.

Captain Ahab is a ruler, kingly in fact and in spirit. But he has been "dethroned" from that part of himself and of life which can give joy and peace, cut

off inexorably from his happiness, both past and potential.

He says of himself:

Gifted with the high perception, I lack the
low enjoying power; damned most subtly and
malignantly! damned in the midst of Paradise!⁸

He is damned in part through his frailty and in part through his greatness. The inscrutable, indifferent malice of the white whale plunged him down into the tight, sweaty cabin of monomania. He has emerged from it in the full paraphernalia of a most acute and deep-seeing madness that finds its causal factor but a link in the chain of evil that rings the world around. He is driven mad by awareness, by what Geist calls "the tragic vision."⁹ He has, out of the inner necessities of his nature, looked straight upon the sun of truth, and caught a kind of blindness.

It must not be forgotten that this spiritual greatness is the underlying cause of Ahab's madness. Taken in and by itself, the overt cause -- Moby Dick's reaping of his leg -- is not enough. Ahab knows whales are sharp-toothed. Not this event itself is primary, but rather the significance which he sees in the event,

⁸ Melville, op. cit., Chap. XXXVII, p. 242.

⁹ Stanley Geist, Herman Melville, The Tragic Vision and the Heroic Ideal (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1939).

its relationship to and bearing upon the whole stream of circumstance and event which runs counter to man's deepest belief in the mercy and goodness of this world and its gods. It is this insight into the essentially chaotic and unyielding quality of life which madness heightens in Ahab; it is refusal to blink the vision that, in turn, reinforces his madness. For as Geist notes,¹⁰ it is a vision essentially self-destructive, a realization which so shakes the vessel of man that it cannot help but crack.

Yet the soul, though divided against itself, continues to swell and grow until it is the whole man. Ahab becomes naked soul, huge soul. He grasps in his hand the lightning rod, and shouts Promethean defiance. He will yield up everything -- life itself -- before he will surrender his last essence of god-like pride and sovereignty. Starved and battered by an unprincipled universe, he turns his back upon irresponsible man and puts his questions to the gods themselves. The very Pequod is "An Anacharsis Clootz deputation from all the ends of the earth, accompanying old Ahab...to lay the world's grievances before that bar from which not very

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 56.

many of them ever come back."¹¹ Their questions are of justice, final and cosmic, and for answer they receive that most peremptory indefiniteness -- death.

For forty years Ahab has been on the sea, thinking, seeing, feeling the stuff of which his madness is to be made. A great intellect from the start, even in his madness "not one jot of his great natural intellect had perished." And his will, always strong, has become preterhuman. Madness has turned his clay to bronze:

Did you fixedly gaze, too, upon that ribbed and dented brow; there also, you would see still stranger footprints -- the footprints of his one unsleeping, ever-pacing thought.¹²

The thought is Moby Dick -- a beast with a history of gratuitous malice! a "dumb" thing possessed of a cunning and contriving malignity! Who put it into this monster to chew off legs it cannot eat? Ahab pounds at the door of the Creator for his answer. He comes as man's champion, for he will -- in himself -- uphold man's stature in the teeth of anything and everything; he will somehow hunt down and outrage the outrageous, be it agent, principal, or god. He says to Starbuck:

¹¹ Melville, op. cit., Chap. XXVII, p. 174.

¹² Ibid., Chap. XXXVI, p. 230.

All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event -- in the living act, the undoubted deed -- there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the moldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to us. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him. Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me. For could the sun do that, then could I do the other... Who's over me? Truth hath no confines.¹³

For such a man, madness can be an ally. Ahab, though he suffers from its horrors, finds in it an unsparable advantage. He says to Pip, the little negro cabin-boy who has been driven out of his mind by fear, and with whom he feels a sympathetic kinship:

There is that in thee, poor lad, which I feel too curing to my malady...and for this hunt, my malady becomes my most desired health.¹⁴

This kind of self-conscious madness is obsession rather than insanity. He is fully cognizant of his monomania without being able to shake it off. In every other

¹³ Ibid., p. 236.

¹⁴ Ibid., Chap. CXXIX, p. 763.

respect he is in full possession of his powers, and as he realizes, the efficacy of these powers is, in the direction given, enhanced by his madness. It is a "controlled" madness, which serves to clamp Ahab's purpose in a vise that a balanced will could not turn. He analyzes it perfectly:

They think me mad -- Starbuck does; but I'm demoniac, I am madness maddened! That wild madness that is only calm to comprehend itself!¹⁵

And so his power and determination are beyond those of a sane man, are in fact a match for the very gods themselves (contrast Jude). He says, in a speech which for sheer power is possibly unexcelled in our language:

I now prophesy that I will dismember my dismemberer. Now, then, be the prophet and the fulfiller one. That's more than ye, ye great gods, ever were. I laugh and hoot at ye, ye cricket players, ye pugilists...Swerve me? Ye cannot swerve me, else ye swerve yourselves! man has got ye there. Swerve me? The path of my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run.¹⁶

But madness has exacted its price from Ahab's soul. Enhancing his will, leaving his mental powers untouched, his monomania has knocked him off balance

¹⁵ Ibid., Chap. XXXVII, p. 242.

¹⁶ Loc. cit.

by deteriorating his sympathies. It has put him, emotionally, just outside the human. He can still see in: he can sympathize with the captain of the Rachel seeking a son lost at sea; he can even feel again -- momentarily -- warm human loyalties, as he does with Pip, and once or twice with Starbuck. But he cannot give himself up to them, nor -- worse yet -- can he surrender to his humanity one iota of his "fixed purpose." If all his earthly world (the crew of the Pequod) will dedicate itself to his purpose, then will he be at peace with that part of it. He will give doubloons and rum. But let any forego this purpose, or think to move him from it, then will he turn upon them the forked lightning of his harpoon. To this extent Ahab has become inhuman and evil. There is a barrier between himself and human sympathies. This is the extremity to which Bulkington and Ishmael (and Melville himself, presumably) -- though sharing the strength of his feeling about cosmic injustice -- will not go. They remain this side of evil. They stay with what Olson terms "right reason."¹⁷

All of the crew can be roughly classified in degrees of good and evil by their relationship and

¹⁷ Charles Olson, Call me Ishmael (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1947), pp. 52 ff.

attitude to Ahab (and through Ahab to Moby Dick). The crew is more than motley -- it is a microcosm. Every corner of the world is represented. They may be approximately divided between the light and the dark races, with the obvious implications. The white sailors are generally more easy-going, more humanly weak; the darker ones are more intense, more powerful, closer in spirit to Ahab. The latter do not have Flash's gratuitous cruelty nor Stubb's humor, but they have an unbending quality about them which is at once awe-inspiring and fearful. The split is epitomized in the characters of Starbuck, the first mate, and the Parsee Fedallah, smuggled aboard by Ahab as his private harpooner.

Starbuck represents all the land virtues -- religion, honesty, practical courage. He has a wife and family, a happy home. He is the voice of "sweet reason" -- goodness itself. And perhaps this is why he emerges as the only muffed portrait in the book. He is too much principle, and not enough man. And, one guesses, he was a principle which Melville could not bring himself to like, with the result that he seems often a Sunday-school man who makes a hell of life's sterner realities. Unnerved by the sudden appearance at sea of Fedallah, he falls back upon a combination of New England theological vacancy and Yankee

"common sense":

A sad business, Mr. Stubb!...but never mind, Mr. Stubb, all for the best. Let all your crew pull strong, come what will... Sperm, sperm's the play! This at least is duty; duty and profit hand in hand!¹⁸

But Fedallah -- evil itself, Ahab's darker shadow -- is brought to life with a most subtle and astounding concreteness of color and vapor. He is:

tall and swart, with one white tooth evilly protruding from its steel-like lips. A rumpled Chinese jacket of black cotton funereally invested him, with wide black trowsers of the same dark stuff. But strangely crowning this ebonness was a glistening white plaited turban, the living hair braided and coiled round and round upon his head.¹⁹

Less specifically, but even more concretely: [?]

He was such a creature as civilized, domestic people in the temperate zone only see in their dreams, and that but dimly; but the like of whom now and then glide among the unchanging Asiatic communities, especially the Oriental isles to the east of the continent -- those insulated, immemorial, unalterable countries, which even in these modern days preserve much of the ghostly aboriginalness of earth's primal generations, when the memory of the first man was a distinct recollection, and all men his descendants, unknowing whence he came, eyed each other as real phantoms, and asked of the sun and the

¹⁸ Melville, op. cit., Chap. XLVIII, p. 318.

¹⁹ Ibid., Chap. XLVIII, pp. 314-315.

moon why they were created and to what end.²⁰

Fedallah is still asking the same questions of the same forces. The fact that he is Evil does not make him any less implicated in the answers to these questions than is Ishmael. He merely puts his questions in a different way, and spends his every ounce of physical and occult powers to get the answers. He is involved in cosmic plan just as Milton's Satan is, and -- like him -- he strikes a sympathetic chord in the subconsciousness of the man who conceived him. Fedallah, as well as Starbuck, exists in all of us. But why? Why was he put there? How is he in accord with universal plan, with final truth?

The real answer to good and evil lies in the answer to these questions, not in the direct manifestations of it in man. And since Melville cannot answer these questions, he does not, for himself, make any decision about the true nature of good and evil. It is a secret still locked in the cosmic casket. He decides only that there is a better and a worse way of seeking the answer, a better and worse attitude toward the cosmos. We can discount the ways of Starbuck and Fedallah -- they are extremes. The vortex lies in Ahab -- Ahab before madness (Bulkington, Ishmael), and Ahab after. Monomania

²⁰ Ibid., Chap. L, p. 335.

is the wrong way. This need not sound silly -- there are millions of monomaniacs in the world. There always were and always will be, whether they take the form of Saxon avenger, Inquisitor, dictator, or the less candid disguise of Rotarian or scholar-with-a-theory. We have seen many of the characters in these novels afflicted in different ways by the disease: Heathcliff, Chillingworth, Raskolnikov, Julien, Goriot, Emma. And there will be Kurtz. The list is endless, both in fact and fiction. For Melville it represents the human being strayed from human paths. What makes Ahab great is that he strayed for the noblest reasons.

If there is a "lesson" -- and one hates to use that word in connection with this least moralistic of books, though it is a moral one -- I suppose it to reside in Ishmael. The wanderer, the outcast man venturing into the depths of the world's consciousness seeking the Voice and the Word, he hears nothing. The only one left alive after the Pequod's destruction by Moby Dick, he is but more the world's "orphan." Still, as I have said, he will not seek his life's remedy in the desperate dedication of a maddened Ahab. He will remain a "loose-fish," and keep his individual measure of free will and free choice, small though it may be in this "joint-stock" world. One must solve man's problems in the guise of man.

Even Ahab himself realizes this at the end. Afloat in the chaos wreaked by the white whale, he turns to see his ship sinking without him:

Am I cut off from the last fond pride of meanest shipwrecked captains? Oh, lonely death on lonely life! Oh, now I feel my topmost greatness lies in my topmost grief.²¹

He realizes now to the full how completely he has cut himself off from the world of men, and this realization, in causing him his greatest grief, gives to him his final mark of greatness. Well might the soaring sky-hawk plunge down with Ahab's flag.

Moby Dick is a difficult story to write about. The written word is so final and direct, while this narrative is so dynamic and ambient. Dealing as it does with the bottomless caverns of human consciousness, there is always -- no matter how far one goes in any given trial -- what Ahab calls "the little lower layer." It is somewhat easier, however, to speak of its techniques. They are admirable. Working with chaotic subject-matter, Melville includes it all and makes a chaotic book. He keeps all the dream-like fluidity, all the unpredictable mixings of short and long wave, multi-colored facets of the consciousness. And what is really great is that he

²¹ Ibid., Chap. CXXXV, p. 820.

manages to present the order of chaos rather than to impose order upon it. (Tolstoy is the only other novelist I know who can do this.) He does it by means of his own governing consciousness, which serves to unify every impression into a true whole, regardless of the discordance of impressions. Sedgwick sees it:

There is this fluidity in Moby Dick. Yet it does not fall into what we call the stream of consciousness. For the consciousness in Moby Dick is in a state of exertion. It is trying to define or comprehend itself. Accordingly it does not relax and disintegrate on a stream of impressions.²²

It is the consciousness itself, as a unity rather than a Joycean receptacle for life's kaleidoscopic impressions, with which Melville deals. His accent is on the sameness, the oneness of consciousness and the world. There is little sense recommending it as artistic technique, for it is essentially a matter of vision. Nothing less than an intuition of the universe is required to understand the essentially metaphoric quality of the world -- world concrete and world abstract. Dante had it. So did Shakespeare. Melville belongs with them. Forster says that Melville "reaches straight back into the universal, to a blackness and sadness so transcending our own that they are undistinguishable from glory."²³

²² Sedgwick, op. cit., p. 135.

²³ Forster, op. cit., p. 206.

Sedgwick believes that Melville failed in not making Ahab a more poignant portrayal.²⁴ I cannot agree. For me "Ahab" and "poignant" comprise a contradiction in terms. One might as well wish to cuddle Achilles or play darts with Hercules. Intellectual sympathy we must and do feel for Ahab; to separate his monomania from his great underlying humanity is to ignore the cause for the effect. The madness itself is enlisted in Ahab's fight against a hostile universe, perverted though his attack becomes. But to provoke emotional sympathy -- pathos -- Ahab would have to be more like us, i.e., less like himself. His very essence would be diluted, and it is this essence with which Melville is primarily concerned. "Sweetness and light" simply do not belong in this book. Starbuck shows that. This is not a representation of life; it is a representation of life's more fundamental and eternal element -- the spiritual turmoil. It has to do with tragic consciousness and the consciousness of tragedy. How does one feel "pity" at this? For whom? This bell tolls for thee, and obviously self-pity will not do. Lawrence understands this: "...as a revelation of destiny the book is too deep even for sorrow. Profound beyond feeling."²⁵ A cosmic consciousness is involved here --

²⁴ Sedgwick, op. cit., pp. 133-134.

²⁵ Lawrence, op. cit., p. 1048.

not just that of Ahab or Ishmael or Pip. There is tragedy aplenty in it. If one interprets Aristotle's theory to mean that tragedy produces a transcending of pity and fear, then Moby Dick is rightly included. The final tragedy is, as I have said, beyond pity, and the true tragic situation is the endlessness of conscious man's inevitable struggle with himself and his world. Sisyphus is a greater tragic symbol than Othello. So, I believe, is Ahab.

Symbol was bound to loom large in Moby Dick. For one thing, it is impossible to present cosmic action or implication without the use of symbol, and conversely, no concreteness can be posited as having cosmic significance without its thereby becoming a symbol. It is the latter approach which is most relevant here, because Melville did not so much invent symbols as perceive them. The astounding penetration of his vision was bound to unfold for him the symbolic qualities of every object that he really looked at. It is, in truth, only such vision that is capable of producing great symbols, for the true symbolism (interconnections) of things lies far down beneath the many surface layers of superficial, specific, or formal resemblance. And the beauty of this kind of insight into the symbolic is

that it works through things, through concretenesses -- rather than pressing into action once again the tired old abstractions of Agamemnon and apple trees. Melville almost inevitably keeps his symbolism tied to concreteness and fact. What is more, he does not alter the shape of the concrete by pushing it around a bit to fit in with his symbolic purpose. Sedgwick says that Melville "felt instinctively that the effective use of a fact as symbol...depended on the preservation of its objective reality."²⁶ But this is exactly what is so difficult to do -- and so completely rewarding when successfully done.

What it amounts to is using what I call vertical rather than horizontal symbol. In using horizontal symbol, one abstracts and compares metaphorically a like quality between given objects. All the unlikenesses can go hang. They may comprise nine-tenths of the objects under comparison, but they are nonetheless ignored. But in using vertical symbol, the likeness is traced all the way down through the objects. The dissimilarities are noted, and then one is shown how even these resolve in "the little lower layer." It attempts less to be

²⁶ Sedgwick, op. cit., p. 12.

precise than profound. And the final result is, since the object is retained in its entirety, in all its manifold aspects, a dynamic symbol. The final comparison is not the static parallel, but the flashing jagged lines that meet at the end of a horizon. Perceiving this final meeting, one is able to trace back endlessly all the separate strokes and seemingly disparate directions which were leading inevitably toward it. Thus the symbols, though already tied together fundamentally, are in a constant state of flux in regard to one another, resultant upon ever-new discoveries of separate facets of relationship. This, I believe, is why the Greek gods are so much finer symbols than the Christian -- or the American Indian or Mohammedan, for that matter. Sweet Mary is always Sweet Mary, but Athena is not always wise. The human qualities of the Greek gods gave them a breadth and depth of meaning, as well as a dynamic kinship with human experience and concept. They were fluid rather than rigid. The rigid symbols can be used only horizontally.

Melville's symbols are vertical -- Ahab, the white whale, the sea. They are real and they are various. Every time one looks at them they seem to have shifted position. Not radically -- but enough to make one go back and look at them again. And yet again. They become

somehow great art defining itself. It must take cosmic insight to produce cosmic art.

2 - Heart of Darkness (1902)²⁷

Conrad has some of it. Like Moby Dick, Heart of Darkness deals with the very foundations of consciousness, the primordial "lower layer." Conrad's powers are not so great as Melville's, nor his scope so vast, but there is something of the same penetration and the same preoccupation. He has, too, the same ability to find symbolic significance in objective reality, and though the realities of this book are even more remote from common experience than those of Moby Dick, they are nonetheless concrete -- and remain so. But Conrad's device of interpolating a narrator between us and the action (and keeping him there at all times, which Melville does not do) gives his symbols a different tone than Melville's: they become more like dream symbols -- possessing us completely, but remaining somehow impalpable. One might say that they are emotional rather than intellectual symbols. This is, of course, a conscious effect on Conrad's part, believing as he did in the primary efficacy of sense impression and feeling rather than reflection. Thus

²⁷ Joseph Conrad, "Heart of Darkness," Great Modern Short Stories (New York: Modern Library, 1942), pp. 3-110.

detail, setting, and atmosphere take on an exoticism which increases sensual impact but at the same time shields the reader psychically from a head-on collision with it. The exotic quality, plus the indirections of style, make of the final effect a suffusion. The reader absorbs the separate and final insights by capillary action rather than direct and immediate exposure.

A salient result of this technique -- so different from Melville's -- is that Heart of Darkness, which, like Moby Dick, is concerned with the tragic split in man's consciousness, is equally void of the tragic feeling of pity. Again the issues are too big for pity. I would not agree with David Daiches that the reader of the book is "interested, but not implicated."²⁸ He is implicated to the hilt, just as he is in the hegira of Ahab -- or, for that matter, of Don Quixote. But he is implicated without being appealed to. He is being shown without being "worked on," for he can identify himself with the protagonist only abstractly. Why? Because the protagonist is primarily a symbol! And so is the villain. It is not our hearts that palpitate when the cosmos acts upon us, -- it is our minds.

²⁸ David Daiches, The Novel and the Modern World (Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 1939), p. 57.

One sees clearly the difference I am getting at by comparing the effect I have described here with that of Jude the Obscure. Insofar as Hardy deals with cosmic evil, he deals with it in the same light as does Conrad, i.e., natural law has no regard for man's ethic. But Hardy wants us to cry about it, and so he gives us Jude to identify ourselves with. To repeat terms, this is the horizontal approach. Conrad, like Melville, goes vertically. And the result again is a book that does not stand still, that will not be neatly capsuled, that combines the most palpable reality with the glistening evanescence of consciousness. Forster has excellently put into words this quality of Conrad:

These essays do suggest that (Conrad) is misty in the middle as well as at the edges, that the secret casket of his genius contains a vapour rather than a jewel; and that we need not try to write him down philosophically, because there is, in this particular direction, nothing to write. No creed in fact. Only opinions, and the right to throw them overboard when facts make them look absurd. Opinions held under the semblance of eternity, girt with the sea, crowned with the stars, and therefore easily mistaken for a creed.²⁹

Sedgwick, speaking of Melville's attitude toward darkness in Moby Dick, sums it up as follows:

²⁹ Quoted by Lionel Trilling, E. M. Forster (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1943), p. 169.

The dark principle is in man's instinctive subterranean being. It lies in that far region where consciousness does not trouble to define itself, where it is closer to blood than brain.³⁰

He could not, if he tried, have made a better statement of the theme of Heart of Darkness. Since, for the sake of ready comparison with Melville, I have already said a good deal about the way in which Conrad projects the theme, it might do better if I add the rest of what I have to say abstractly about his technique now, so as to keep it all together. (I will, of course, be commenting upon technique when I discuss the subject-matter; as in all good art, the two are largely inseparable.)

Conrad has, unlike Melville, compressed his cosmic insight. He has given his book the sustained intensity of a short story and the scope of a novel. In telling it he has broken through formal narrative patterns so that he can move easily and without statement backward and forward in time. Melville does the same. It is necessary when one is writing of consciousness, for consciousness observes no barriers of time. But where Melville switches back and forth from Ishmael's to the omniscient point of view, Conrad stays always

³⁰ Sedgwick, op. cit., p. 129.

within the mind of Marlow. He treats Consciousness through a consciousness. And the verisimilitude he attains is wondrous.

He envelops the entire experience in a conventional pattern, i.e., a group of people are assembled, they have time on their hands, one tells a story. Even the story itself begins, like any experience, normally enough. The simple, direct narrative does not change until Marlow reaches the central station on the African river. Then the reader becomes aware of some ambiguousness. He is not certain of the identities of all the characters. The thread of the story begins to curve. On the trip to the inner station (these stations themselves are symbolic), this thread becomes snakelike, curving back upon itself as it moves forward. Finally, at the station itself (the heart of darkness) it is like a wild thing -- doubling back, flying forward, both ends moving at once toward the middle. Hint and statement, conjecture and fact, thesis and antithesis, are thrust upon one almost indistinguishably. The mind begins to stagger and pound like Marlow's heart. One is suddenly himself in a darkness where the thick and fetid air clogs the mind, leaves only feeling by which to comprehend. Then follows the quick trip out and the sudden transmigration

to the simple beginning scene. A tide has ebbed. All is quiet. Too quiet. Nothing obscures the echo of African drums. One has been for an instant -- for as long as was bearable -- in the heart of darkness. This technique -- or a variant -- of showing in process the impingement of evil upon the human consciousness is requisite to any novel in which the evil portrayed is cosmic, for it is only the depths of fluid consciousness -- rather than the surface of stereotyped event -- which can fully record cosmic force.

Marlow tells the story, tells it on all its levels. In reconstructing it (which is the only way I see to talk about it), I will try as often as possible to let him speak; I think it will get across better that way, and in any event he makes all the necessary comment (probably more than is necessary). But first there are some observations. The narrative is formed by an interweaving of two minor themes and a major. They are, respectively, human avarice (with its necessary concomitants of cruelty and stupidity), Kurtz (more symbol than man), and finally Nature -- including human nature and therefore including at the last both the other two.

The story begins with the first of the minor themes. An introductory, but nonetheless startling, scene shows a French battleship shelling the coast of Africa. There is not a building or person in sight! It is, so to speak, firing at a continent. Almost immediately upon landing at the first company station, Marlow, who has been hired to captain a steamboat up an inland African river, becomes aware of a thorough lack of any outward directing force in the activities of the station. The air is that of insidious confusion on the one hand and indifference on the other. There is a slow but unceasing waste of energy and materials. Supplies sent across an ocean lay smashed and forgotten in a ravine. Quite unnecessarily, men are blasting a cliff, which yields not a loosened stone to their efforts. Amid all of this tramps a chain gang of blacks, with their gimlet-eyed white guard. "Criminals?" "Enemies?" It is hard to tell their designation. One only knows they are working, always working. At what, one cannot tell. But he knows they are always working because up on the hillside, in a dark glade, many of them sit and lie unguarded. Dying. Dead. From starvation? overwork? illness? heartbreak? Any of these will do. But they are dying. And dead.

Farther up the hill, in the Company shack, sits the Clerk, totting up his figures. On the floor in a corner of the room, a Company agent from the interior lies moaning. He has a tropical fever. Bad. But the clerk goes on with his figures. He retains sanity by concentrating on them incessantly, just as he retains his connection with the outer world by wearing fresh linen and keeping impeccable.

At the Central station, farther up the river, there is the same nightmare feeling of suspension in a void of futile action and senseless cruelty. But a purpose has emerged -- a purpose which is king:

The word "ivory" rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed. You would think they were praying to it. A taint of imbecile rapacity blew through it all, like a whiff from some corpse.³¹

With this purpose comes, as it must, intrigue and treachery. The station is a gangrenous mass of self-seeking and rapacity. The men are scheming, cruel, lawless -- but without, as Marlow notes, the bravado or genuine daring of the forthright criminal. These men are the kind who later on will fire from the safety of their boat upon the mournful savages, and who will do it with a fox-hunt joy, keenly regretting the one that

³¹ Conrad, op. cit., Sec. 1, p. 31.

gets away. These are the men whose facsimiles Marlow sees when he returns to Europe, "hurrying through the streets to filch a little money from each other."³²

Over and against all this is Kurtz, who is from the beginning a symbol -- albeit a changing one. He becomes for Marlow a light in the darkness, the one man who is known to have come out here with a purpose beyond exploitation. His aim is to make of the trading posts centers of education and medical care for the savages. He will trade, yes, but he will help, too. He is known at the other stations as an important man who is an impractical dreamer, dangerous to the status quo. Marlow is anxious to talk to him. From afar, his voice seems to Marlow to be the only sound of humanity -- civilized humanity -- in all the blackness. Kurtz develops as a kind of counter-theme to the dominant savagery and predatory ugliness. He is the relieving note which, though light, sounds almost heroic among the inexorable drum beats. He is the reassertion of humanity in the midst of the inhuman.

And yet the note does not come through strong and clear (any more than Starbuck's does). One hears that

³² Ibid., Sec. II, p. 101.

he is ill, that he sends no reports even when well, that his behavior has been erratic, that he moves in a veil of self-imposed silence. The note seems to waver on its major key, and the reader finds himself trying to support it, to hold it steady. But it keeps slipping. Then suddenly, without one's being able exactly to grasp how or when it has happened, this counter-theme is no longer counter. It has, with an almost imperceptible shift in tone, become a high-register echo of the drums, a shrill reinforcement moving inevitably toward a frightening resolution. (This is amazing as an evocation of our subconscious attitude shifts.)

Kurtz, one finally realizes, has lost his battle with the darkness, lost it more completely than any of the others. No half-way man, he has not bowed to the pull of this wild freedom by becoming a mean thief. He has bowed to it with everything in him, taken it to himself completely and, as "king" of a savage tribe, become as wild and cruel, as dark and demonic, as the force that has claimed him. He has not so much lost a battle as switched an allegiance. And there is no doubt that this new allegiance plumbs the depths of his soul: "No eloquence could have been so withering to one's belief in mankind as his final burst of sincerity."³³

³³ *Ibid.*, Sec. III, p. 94. The voice of these quotations is always Marlow's.

Why should one man's fate be "so withering to one's belief in mankind"? Why does Kurtz' story, for us as well as for Marlow, radiate such intensive and extensive significance? The answer lies in the nature of the man.

The reader never truly sees him. One's only glimpse is of a dying man. He is only a rumour and a voice -- a voice which, aside from a few dying words, does not even come to one directly. One gets only dim echoes through Marlow, and even then they are transmuted. The words themselves seem to be for Marlow inexpressible; he can only translate them in terms of emotional impact. And yet one comes to know a good deal about Kurtz. He knows, for example, that "all Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz;" that he is a well-bred, well-educated, well-placed man; that he is talented on several levels, and artistic in the deeper sense of having inner vision; and that he is known as an idealist, a man who attracts people by his goodness. He is, in short, a man fitted to represent humanity in the struggle with darkness. He is in part a symbol of man's evolutionary achievement, of the whole process of civilization.

And yet he falls as if his entire life, and the life of all the ages which produced him, had been nothing but a waiting for this return to jungle darkness. He

absorbs it unreservedly, with every fibre of his being. He responds to it with a strength which erases every trace of civilized restraint. Even the shrunken heads impaled on his fence seem to give little hint of the rites over which he now presides. His plans, his schemes, are beyond the fantastic; they have crossed an underground river over to the reality of the phantasmal. Marlow understands the type of man he has to deal with in the Kurtz he finds:

a being to whom I could not appeal in the name of anything high or low...There was nothing either above or below him (cf. Ahab) . . . He had kicked himself loose of the earth.³⁴

Kurtz bears in this sense a startling resemblance to Ahab. He too was good; he too has become a monomaniac. And there is another tight connection:

Believe me or not, his intelligence was perfectly clear -- concentrated, it is true, upon himself with horrible intensity, yet clear;³⁵

Despite retaining his intellect, Kurtz -- who was to be the symbol of man's staunch rationality -- has become the apotheosis of man's animal-echoing savagery, his innate drive toward freedom from restraint -- a drive which lies crouching always in the thickets of consciousness,

³⁴ Loc. cit.

³⁵ Ibid.

waiting for the chance to spring free. It is this insight into the darkness of the human heart, rather than the simple, direct savagery of the jungle (which Marlow himself feels), that breaks Kurtz:

....his soul was mad. Being alone in the wilderness, it had looked within itself, and...it had gone mad.³⁶

Thus it is not external nature alone which is dark, but human nature too, which is somehow at one with this darkness, at home with it, part of it. It is in this meeting, this mutual surrender of nature and man to Nature, that the heart of darkness is found.

Nature is, as I have said, the major theme. It is the merging force. It is the source of all, as well as the river into which all flows. This is a somber, brooding, eternally wild and inscrutable nature. It is, as presented here, all nature -- not African nature. There is no killing or terror by wild animals. Nothing so peripheral or accidental. What is faced here is cosmic, eternal nature. Marlow leads up to his story with a parallelism of the wild, savage Britain which faced the first Roman invader:

Imagine him here -- the very end of the world, a sea the color of lead, a sky the color of smoke, a kind of ship about as rigid as a concertina -- and going up this river (the Thames) with stores, or orders, or what you

³⁶ Ibid.

like. Sand-banks, marshes, forests, savages, -- precious little to eat fit for a civilized man, nothing but Thames water to drink..... Here and there a military camp lost in a wilderness, like a needle in a bundle of hay -- cold, fog, tempests, disease, exile, and death -- death skulking in the air, in the water, in the bush.³⁷

This is not, in feeling, different from the kind of thing facing Kurtz, Marlow, and the others on an African river two thousand years later:

The smell of mud, of primeval mud...was in my nostrils, the high stillness of primeval forest was before my eyes; there were shiny patches on the black creek. The moon had spread over everything a thin layer of silver -- over the rank grass, over the mud, upon the wall of matted vegetation standing higher than the wall of a temple, over the great river I could see through a somber gap glittering, glittering, as it flowed broadly by without a murmur. All this was great, expectant, mute, while the man jabbered about himself....What were we who had strayed in here?³⁸

It is manifest that what we have here is hardly the peace and beauty of Hawthorne's forest; it is the fearful immensity of Melville's sea:

And this stillness of life did not in the least resemble a peace. It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid., Sec. 1, p. 7.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 36-37.

³⁹ Ibid., Sec. 11, p. 47.

Nature's call here is not to the simple sincerity of a Hester, nor does it sound a challenge to the furious enmity of an Ahab; it enfolds, absorbs:

I tried to break the spell -- the heavy mute spell of the wilderness -- that seemed to draw Kurtz to its pitiless breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts, by the memory of gratified and monstrous passions.⁴⁰

Here is the story's central terror -- this concept of an evil in nature which does not simply plague a Jude or kill an Ahab, but which absorbs one into itself by its legitimate claim upon the recesses of the human consciousness. The umbilical cord which binds human nature to Nature can only be hidden, not severed. Nature's dark places have their counterparts wherever the human heart is.

What does man have to shield him, to keep himself and his fellow man afloat? His power of expression? Language? Eloquence? Savages have it. Kurtz has it equally before and after his downfall:

Kurtz possesses the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness.⁴¹

And, of course, falsehood may be as eloquent as truth.

⁴⁰ Ibid., Sec. III, p. 93.

⁴¹ Ibid., Sec. II, p. 66.

It is used by man to hide his heart, both from others and from himself. Marlow sees its deeper significance:

There is a taint of death, a flavor of mortality in lies -- which is exactly what I hate and detest in the world -- what I want to forget.⁴²

How ironic that at the end Marlow, suffering under the eloquent idealizing sorrow of Kurtz' fiancée, bows to mortality -- with a lie.

Perhaps it is this girl, with her constancy, her beautiful trust, her lonely visions, who is the saving grace? Perhaps such a one has only to remain within civilization's purlieus to be safe? No. Not a bit of it. For one thing, she cannot stand the truth. Like Emma Bovary, her dreams are the only thing in her life which is set in concrete. And what has Kurtz' death done to her? Has it brought her Sonia's sorrow -- the kind that leads to light? No, the reverse is true. She has wrapped up this sorrow in her heart, bound it around with a thousand thick, black layers, and made of it her own jungle. Marlow feels that in going to her house (in Europe) he has "blundered into a place of cruel and absurd mysteries not fit for a human being to behold." Marlow feels in the house an echoing:

....the sound of her low voice seemed to have the accompaniment of all the other sounds, full of mystery, desolation, and sorrow, I had ever heard -- the ripple of

the river, the sighing of the trees swayed by the wind, the murmurs of the crowds, the faint ring of incomprehensible words cried from afar, the whisper of a voice speaking from beyond the threshold of an eternal darkness.⁴³

Is it in love that salvation lies? No, for this love has saved neither of them. And there is yet another parallel, for Kurtz had a jungle love, too. As Marlow watches the European girl stretch her tortured arms out into the air, as if trying to command and enfold Kurtz's essence, he recalls a similar scene on the African river when his steamboat departed with the dying Kurtz aboard.

I shall see this eloquent phantom as long as I live...resembling in this gesture another one, tragic also, and bedecked with powerless charms, stretching bare, brown arms over the glitter of the infernal stream, the stream of darkness.⁴⁴

In the case of the European girl, the irony is extreme, for her particular "darkness" is predicated upon unreality, upon a false vision of a dead man. So much, then, is darkness in the human heart: it does not even require objective reality as stimulus. One sees that to a large extent the force of objective reality depends upon the ratio of human acceptance. There may be a complete negation, in which instance a

⁴³ Ibid., Sec. III, p. 107.

⁴⁴ Loc. cit., pp. 108-109.

synthetic reality is created which has all the transferred force of that which was negated. Conrad shows this same process extended into European society, a society which is a good deal less than a Pandora-proof box in which civilization can entrust for safekeeping the stormy human heart:

Their bearing (the people of a European city), which was simply the bearing of commonplace individuals going about their business in the assurance of perfect safety, was offensive to me like the outrageous flauntings of folly in the face of a danger it is unable to comprehend.⁴⁵

Neither love nor society can protect us from the void.

We are alone:

No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence -- that which makes its truth, its meaning -- its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream -- alone...⁴⁶

And our life is what? How is it characterized?

By futility, by meaninglessness. From the moment that Marlow's adventure begins, we are struck by the singular futility and lack of common purpose among the people concerned: the medical examiner, who is interested only in cranial measurements; the woman in the Company office

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 101.

⁴⁶ Ibid., Sec. 1, p. 38.

who sits knitting, as busy and indifferent as Fate itself; the thorough confusion at the African stations. Everyone seems to have an ostensible purpose which has little or no connection with reality, a purpose which seems to have been thrust upon him, and which he pursues frenziedly without knowing quite how or why. And this lack of a directing force becomes more manifest and increases in intensity the farther inland Marlow goes, until finally it seems as if all connection with a logical world outside is severed. Conrad's parallel with the human heart is patent.

It is, perhaps, only at the moment of death that one can see life whole, in all the glare of its truth. Kurtz, we feel, has such a vision. And what is his summing-up? "The horror! The horror!" Marlow states some of this horror:

Destiny. My destiny! Droll thing life is -- that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose. The most you can hope for from it is some knowledge of yourself -- that comes too late -- a crop of inextinguishable regrets.⁴⁷

It is because of this that the final struggle with death bears so little resemblance to what we expect. It is:

....the most unexciting contest you can imagine. It takes place in an unpalpable grayness, with nothing underfoot, with nothing around,

⁴⁷ Ibid., Sec. III, p. 99.

without spectators, without clamor, without glory, without the great desire of victory, without the great fear of defeat, in a sickly atmosphere of tepid skepticism, without much belief in your own right,⁴⁸ and still less in that of your adversary.

There is no afterlife, only "that oblivion which is the last word of our common fate."

Thus is the world, the man, the life. And yet, even the darkness is not monochromatic. There is chiaroscuro. There is conflict. We see it partially in the dying Kurtz, for whose soul "both the diabolic love and the unearthly hate of the mysteries it had penetrated fought for possession." But Marlow objectifies for us the conflict as he feels it himself. He analyzes the adversaries:

The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there -- there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly and the men were -- no, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it -- this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled and leaped and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity -- like yours -- the thought of your remost kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough

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Loc. cit.

you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you -- you so remote from the night of first ages -- could comprehend. And why not? The mind of man is capable of anything -- because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future.

(Thus there will be no end to this particular conflict.) What was there after all? Joy, fear, sorrow, devotion, valor, rage -- who can tell? -- but truth -- truth stripped of its cloak of time. Let the fool gape and shudder -- the man knows, and can look on without a wink. But he must at least be as much of a man as these on shore. He must meet that truth with his own true stuff -- with his own inborn strength. (Here is the "how" of the battle.) Principles won't do. Acquisitions, clothes, pretty rags -- rags that would fly off at the first good shake. No; you want a deliberate belief.⁴⁹

A deliberate belief in what? In two things: 1) truth, 2) the battle for it, which becomes the battle of civilized life for its own sake.

It is because of the first factor that Kurtz emerges not as an evil man, nor even a defeated one; on the contrary, his life is a victory, for in its last moments he achieves the vision of truth. As he struggles on his deathbed, groping for the cosmic key, his words bring an echo of Ahab: "'Oh, but I will wring your heart yet!' he cried at the invisible wilderness."⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Ibid., Sec. II, p. 50.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Sec. III, p. 97.

But, though he dies with all of Ahab's despair, he dies understanding the whale. His judgment is two words, repeated twice: "The horror! The horror!" Surely a strange kind of triumph, but a triumph nonetheless:

He had summed up -- he had judged. "The horror!" ...this was the expression of some sort of belief; it had candor, it had conviction, it had a vibrating note of revolt in its whisper, it had the appalling face of a glimpsed truthIt was an affirmation, a moral victory paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions. But it was a victory.⁵¹

A terrible victory, and yet the very terror involved in its achievement makes it a greater one than the earthly victory being enjoyed by the little Russian (who, one notes, is instinctively loyal to Kurtz without ever truly understanding him). But this simple, innocent, adventuresome soul is the only one besides Kurtz for whom Marlow can feel admiration. Since he does feel it, and since this little fellow is the very antithesis of Kurtz -- being involved in no struggle simply because he is unaware of the grounds for one -- then Conrad must recognize the validity of another way of life: the way of instinctive goodness, which is after all the end for which truth is the means.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 100.

But the genuine naif is as rare, as much an extremity, as Kurtz. Most of us are somewhere in between, like Marlow. And there is a way for us. It involves a belief in the struggle regardless of the outcome, a belief in the civilized life (in the internal, not external, sense of "civilization") despite its impossibility of full attainment. This is Marlow's (and Conrad's) way. He tries, in what I take to be the book's most explicit statement of belief, to explain it:

You can't understand. How could you? -- with solid pavement under your feet, surrounded by kind neighbors ready to cheer you or to fall on you, stepping delicately between the butcher and the policeman, in the holy terror of scandal and gallows and lunatic asylums -- how can you imagine what particular region of the first ages a man's untrammelled feet may take him into by way of solitude -- utter solitude without a policeman -- by the way of silence -- utter silence, where no warning voice of a kind neighbor can be heard whispering of public opinion? These little things make all the great difference. When they are gone you must fall back on your own innate strength, upon your own capacity for faithfulness. Of course you may be too much of a fool to go wrong -- too dull even to know you are being assaulted by the powers of darkness. I take it, no fool ever made a bargain for his soul with the devil: the fool is too much of a fool, or the devil too much of a devil -- I don't know which. Or you may be such a thunderingly exalted creature as to be altogether deaf and blind to

anything but heavenly sights and sounds. Then the earth for you is only a standing place -- and whether to be like this is your loss or your gain I won't pretend to say. But most of us are neither one nor the other. The earth for us is a place to live in, where we must put up with sights, with sounds, with smells, too, ... breathe dead hippo, so to speak, and not be contaminated. And there, don't you see? your strength comes in, the faith in your ability for the digging of unostentatious holes to bury the stuff in -- your power of devotion, not to yourself, but to an obscure, back-breaking business.⁵²

Marlow perhaps predigests for us too much. And he certainly talks too much. But he talks well. And what he has to say here is good: what counts is to lead a civilized life, to retain one's civilized qualities in the face of a triple onslaught by nature, the world, and your own inner darkness. It is an obscure and difficult business, because it has reference to nothing but itself; it is its own end. The living soul is All, has All within it -- present, past future. Underneath its several surface layers lies a darkness. In the search for its own truth, this too must be seen and known. There is no bad truth. There is only truth itself, which is good -- always, forever. It is the Affirmation.

One thinks of our great modern writers, from Shakespeare to now; one thinks of the men under discussion

⁵² Ibid., Sec. 11, p. 69.

in this paper -- and sees as their indissoluble link this passionate search for truth within the human consciousness. And one thinks of their antagonists -- the modern chorus which, like a perverse parrot, automatically contradicts:

Chorus: Did they find this truth? What is it?

Voice: They found it for themselves.

Chorus: But they don't agree.

Voice: Should they? Each is an individual.

Chorus: They talk of little but evil.

Voice: They speak of truth, which is good.

Chorus: But they tear down my world, and give me nothing to replace it.

Voice: They tear down your walls and give you the chance to live.

Chorus: What is such a life to me? They leave nothing to be heroic for.

Voice: There is the testimony of your life to be heroic for.

Chorus: Yes, but "Mistah Kurtz -- he dead."

Voice: Ah, but Eliot forgot. Mr. Kurtz died with a bang.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

1 - The Matter of Content

Any study such as this, covering so rich and significant a group of novels, is bound to yield both fact and impression which lead toward plausible generalization. I am aware of the dangers involved in generalizing, but -- assuming that one works always toward the broader, more inclusive truth -- the attempt is worth the risk. The reader will do well to test that which seems suspect and, more important, to conclude for himself that which I, perhaps too far into the forest, have not seen.

There is first the matter of content. I have focused primarily upon the vision of evil in these novels, but, as must have been apparent, I have had continually to enlarge the beam until my analysis included most of the total content of each novel under consideration. Two facts made this enlargement necessary: 1) in almost every case the author's full vision of evil could not be revealed without close examination of character and/or plot -- there were no easy simplifications;

2) more significant is that in every one of the novels under consideration evil was the major preoccupation. From this alone one might deduce that modern man is not only acutely aware of evil, but has become sensitive to the fact of its dominance over him -- not alone in the life-and-death issues, but in the thousand conscious and unconscious thoughts and actions of his everyday life. One might also deduce from this preoccupation of great novelists that the mainstream of literature (which from the 1630's to today has been the novel) has not followed the Baconian path, has not in any sense divorced itself from morality; quite the reverse -- it serves most accurately as a barometer of moral atmosphere. Perhaps the most intense protest literature of all is the "naturalistic" novel, which uses objective means for a most subjective end.

None of the novelists advanced an original concept of evil, but neither did any fall back upon belief in the Devil. One hardly goes far in asserting that the rational temper of modern man has relegated Satan to myth. To all intents and purposes, Western diabolism has given way to a cloudy mixture of individual responsibility limited by socio-scientific determinism.

In this connection one notices also that of the eleven novelists studied, only Hawthorne, Tolstoy, and Dostoyevsky look to an orthodox God for a solution of evil. And of these only Hawthorne seems willing to wait for heaven; the others seek a solution to life on earth. None disagrees that, at least quantitatively, evil dominates this life. None foresees an end to this domination, though Hardy predicts amelioration. There is no "solving" of the problem; the closest approach is a recommending of a way of life which enables one either to accept evil as a necessary part of life (Tolstoy) or to retain one's sense of human purpose in the midst of it (Conrad).

What one sees philosophically in this composite picture depends, of course, upon the depth of his perception and the direction of his own inclinations. But certain possibilities are manifest. The very diversity of opinion about evil suggests that man has not progressed far in his efforts to solve this most basic of problems. Many of his old myths, though they present it in different terms, have theories of evil which adumbrate some of those put forward in these works, e.g., The Scarlet Letter has connections with every "garden" story, Moby Dick with Promethean legends, War and Peace with battle-and-odyssey stories, Crime and

Punishment with Greek "eros" myths, and Heart of Darkness with the Pandora story, Bluebeard tales, and all those which center about the unlocking or forbidden-entry theme.

The diversity of opinion, wider perhaps than that of any previous century in the history of Christianity, suggests itself also as another sign of the loosening of religion's grip upon the individual mind. When Copernicus upset the fixed cosmos, the Reformation became possible; science was the godfather of Protestantism. And it threatens to outlive the child. Together they have freed man's mind, but the freedom of science, which has come to dominate, is morally anarchic. (It must be; it cannot thrive otherwise; there is no sense going to the scientist for moral leadership because he deals with fact and measurement, not spirit and value-judgment.) The result is a breakdown of spiritual certitudes. Part of the new freedom is the liberty to be confused. And when this confusion reigns in the fundamental area of belief about good and evil, thinking man must necessarily concentrate his efforts toward an individual solution. He will be preoccupied with it. He will write about it. Thus there need be little surprise that the content of the novels is in this respect uniform.

The three divisions into which these novels fall need also occasion no surprise. Man has always had three major concerns: himself, his state or society, and his cosmos. Usually there is an emphasis upon one or two of these at the expense of the third. It is an emphasis that shifts with history. We of the modern world have seen it shift from religion to state, with the consequent transference of authority. We can go back to Chaucer to see attention moving away from religio-mythic absolutes, and from truth for its own sake, to dynamic truths and their relation to the individual who perceives them. This dual emphasis upon the individual and society -- compatible in a democracy, antithetic in an authoritarian state -- has largely resolved itself into the inclusive problem of man-in-relation-to-his-society. It is this which constitutes the subject-matter of a majority of our novels. The problem of evil has become largely the problem of social evil. So much is this characteristic of the modern temper that we tend often to overemphasize or inexactly adapt the seemingly parallel social comment found in the older novels. I have spoken of the modern "use" to which War and Peace and The Red and the Black have been put. But, as much as much as one regrets the overemphasis upon the moral

"message" of art, this kind of thing is significant insofar as it illustrates the full weight of content in determining the relationship of a novel to another novel or another age.

It is content -- rather than form, chronology, or geography -- which decides the basic relationship between separate works of literature. By "content" I do not mean subject-matter. War and Peace is not closely related to The Red Badge of Courage simply because both examine the actions and reactions of men in battle. Such a resemblance is superficial, for subject-matter is, so to speak, no more than the receptacle that contains the insight or intuition, which is the true content. It is the kind of intuition, the type of insight, which must be the final determinant in any interlinking of literary works. Reverting to a previous figure of speech, I would say that the interrelating of works by form, chronology, or geography is the horizontal approach, while interconnecting by content is vertical. Thus Canterbury Tales is a good deal closer to Life on the Mississippi than it is to Pearl. King Lear is closer to Moby Dick than it is to Sejanus. Gray's Elegy is closer to Jude the Obscure than it is to the Essay on Man. This manner of grouping cuts across all extrinsic barriers,

and brings together in a natural companionship varied works of various ages.

This is not so much illustrated in my paper as deducible from it. I have in the main restricted by remarks to the novel -- to certain specific novels -- and to a limited time-span. But my concentration upon the visions of evil has not been restrictive because, as I have maintained, the major intuitions of all these novels are mainly concerned with evil. In order to construct natural groupings all that remained was to divide them according to their emphasis upon one of the three sources of evil -- personal, societal, or cosmic. This is, of course, a very broad grouping principle, necessary in this case because the works were not chosen with preconceived interconnections in mind. What I have done is to differentiate among them by field of observation rather than by final intuition. If the latter procedure were followed, War and Peace would belong with the other two novels of faith: The Scarlet Letter and Crime and Punishment. This is a closer relationship, since it has to do with the spirit behind the novel, the attitude of the author toward his material. This attitude is to be found always in the intuition itself, since one's attitude toward any problem is determined by the way in which he sees it, which includes any "answer" he may have. Classification by attitude or spirit will often involve problems of

interpretation and intentional heresy, but it is the basic test of blood relationship between works of art.

The method I have used -- concentrating upon the field of observation, the problem itself rather than the solution -- is, I think, both valid and useful. Certainly as long as the novel continues to preoccupy itself with the problem of evil, this method provides a good departure point. But it has also a permanent relevance, for the novel must always concern itself with individual, group, or cosmic action. To group works accordingly, without reference to other criteria, is to assemble a rich variety of human reaction to man's three fundamental problems. And it is very likely the portrayal of man's reactions to his ideas rather than the ideas themselves which furnishes the content of the novel with lasting pertinence. Furthermore, it is the particular field of observation, the scope of the intuition, that largely determines the influence which content has upon form in the novel.

2 - The Matter of Form

What I have found true in this study is that the manner of presentation of evil in the books depends largely upon the concept of it. This is simply another way of saying that the content of a work of art influences

its form (the intuition determines the expression). For example, one would not expect to hear "L'Après-Midi d'un Faunè" scored for ten kettle drums and a tuba, to see Van Gogh's landscapes reproduced by Grant Wood, or to read Life on the Mississippi rewritten by Henry James. The broad effect of content upon form in these eleven novels is patent.

For instance: Wuthering Heights, The Scarlet Letter, Crime and Punishment, and The Wings of the Dove all emphasize personal evil -- the evil that stems from man upon man. As a result, they are structurally tight and concentrated. They present detailed psychological studies of the main characters, and rely heavily upon action within the mind. Furthermore, the heroes and heroines are in some way beyond the average run of people, since they must possess within themselves the major force or stimulus for their actions. Consequently they tend to be intense, and to infuse the story itself with their intensity. They must also be real, be three-dimensional, if the personal evil they represent is to be projected with true force and significance. (Hawthorne's deficiencies in this respect detract from the power of his novel.) In turn, this intense reality of character produces an affinity between these novels and tragedy. The emotional component is always large, and the process of reader-identification

important. Humor is rare. Concentration upon a central, climactic incident is uniform (Emily Brontë's repetitive-ness hurts her novel aesthetically, just as Hawthorne's economy of incident makes his novel structurally effective as a presentation of personal evil).

The second group, which deals largely with societal evil, is closer in form to tragi-comedy. The Red and the Black, Père Goriot, Madame Bovary, War and Peace, and Jude the Obscure tend to be novels of ideas. As is true of tragi-comedy, their final appeal is to the mind. Such novels are apt to have a thesis, and to take on at least partially that air of didacticism to which social theorists are given. This thesis is illustrated by a scientifically careful and detailed examination of character, event, and the interrelationships of society and man. Occasionally characters or incidents seem to be invented for the main purpose of proving a theory, e.g., the ministerial conspirators in The Red and the Black, Lheureux in Madame Bovary, Father Time's suicide in Jude the Obscure. This is one way in which the novel of social evil runs an aesthetic risk. Another obvious risk is the temporal aspect of a book based upon a transient social dilemma. There is also the danger that

the "message" of such a book will, aesthetically speaking, weigh it down (War and Peace) or, as is true of Jude the Obscure where the message itself is not unified, break it up.

Actually, the "hero" of the social novel is society, and therefore the emphasis tends to fall upon situation and incident rather than upon individual character. The central situation must be microcosmic so as to give it broad social application. This has two important influences upon the kind of characters to be found in such a novel: 1) they will include representatives of both ends of the social scale as well as the middle, which makes for a larger, more variegated cast and a broader setting; 2) the central characters must, since a microcosmic effect is required, approach the nature of epitomes -- epitomes of characteristics rather than of character. From here it is but a small step to the "types" of comedy, e.g., Iheureux. This need not in itself be aesthetically bad unless the novelist wishes to retain an element of the tragic. Stendhal solves it by allowing his central character to break his static mold, to triumph over social evil; Joyce attempts a solution by emphasizing the symbolic rather than the typical nature of Leopold Bloom. In so doing, Joyce

approaches closer to the third group.

Moby Dick and Heart of Darkness present evil as primarily a cosmic emanation. Since in Chapter Five I discussed at some length the influence of content upon form in these two novels, only a short summary is required here. Because these books deal with aspects of the universe, they are structurally broad and flexible so as to allow room for hugeness of setting, situation, and character. Furthermore, since cosmic evil includes both personal and social evil (man and society are both phenomena of the universe) the scope of observation and meaning can be encompassed only by symbol. Both books demand of their authors a profound insight into the symbolism of things, and of their readers a perception which can both feel and construe the full weight of the symbols.

All of these conclusions manifest the profound influence of content upon form. To the extent to which my thesis holds true, then as long as evil continues to be the major literary concern of our novelists, we may expect that the form of our novels will be influenced by the prevalent concept of evil. This fact constitutes a large part of the aesthetic value to be gained from an understanding of the ethical temper of any given generation of novelists. I believe that, on the basis

of this study, some plausible predictions may be made concerning the direction which the novel is likely to take in the future.

3 - Tomorrow's Novel

The most profound influence upon the form of the novel has been a combination of the breakdown of universal certitudes plus the increasing awareness and knowledge of individual psychology. It is perhaps not going too far to say that the shift in ethical concern from the abstract to the particular made the novel plausible as an art form. Surely poetry is the better way to handle allegory or pure idea (as is evinced by the novelist's use of poetic language and symbolism when he deals with either of these, e.g., Melville, Joyce). It was only when a thorough examination of individual experience was desired, and when the full significance of this experience per se was realized, that the novel could come into prominence. It was psychology, for instance, that brought to the surface not only the universality but the equality of suffering, and thus made possible a bringing down of tragedy from its kingly level. A traceable line runs from Oedipus to Othello to Julien Sorel (Joyce partially illustrates this with Leopold Bloom). And it was psychology plus distrust of universals

which made possible the great flexibility and variety of the novel.

The chronologically increasing structural complexity of novels and the discarding of the old Dickensian shadings was necessitated by growing psychological awareness both in the novelist and his public. It was this same factor which led to the strong demand for realism in the novel. It is an art form for the individual, and the individual wants to see himself portrayed recognizably, i.e., realistically. Moreover, it is the so-called common man's art (e.g., Panels), and thus another demand for realism is postulated. This in itself has an effect upon the form of the novel. Harry Levin states one aspect of it:

The history of the realistic novel shows that fiction tends toward autobiography. The increasing demands for social and psychological detail that are made upon the novelist can only be satisfied out of his own experience. The forces which make him an outsider focus his observation upon himself. He becomes his own hero, and begins to crowd his other characters into the background. The background takes on a new importance for its influence on his own character. The theme of his novel is the formation of character; its habitual pattern is that of apprenticeship or education; and it falls into that category which has been distinguished, by German criticism at least, as the Bildungsroman.¹

¹ Harry Levin, James Joyce (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1941), p. 41.

It is this same demand for realism, heightened by a new taste for scientific accuracy and objectivity, which leads the novel toward naturalism. This trend was aided by the modern attitude toward the ubiquity of evil and the inclination to bypass the mystic or cosmic source for the social and personal. The scientific temper characterizes our contemporary approach to ethics as well as to eugenics. And it has, as it must, its influence upon aesthetics.

Certainly the naturalistic novel cannot have "big" characters, people who rise above their environment; it would run counter to the naturalist's thesis. To a lesser degree, the same will hold true of those novelists who see evil as primarily personal or social. They may create a deep and significant character such as Raskolnikov, or a poignant one such as Julien Sorel, but they will not create an Ahab. The great tragic protagonist -- a Lear, an Ahab, an Oedipus, a Satan, a Faust -- is not one to be conquered by man-made evil. He must go to the very roots of eternal life, bow only to a cosmic principle -- whatever that principle may be or whatever form it may take. Christ did not die because there were Romans and Jews; he died because of the eternal nature of man. If, as is true of most modern

novelists, external evil is to be seen more as societal than cosmic, the more forceful character is less apt to be "great" than to be unique. His greatness is not put to the final test, and so he cannot measure up to the ones who have been proved. But if he is a unique character, he attains to a certain artistic greatness because the freshness of his particular reaction to familiar stimuli gives the conflict a new dimension for us. Ahab has something of this uniqueness, but better examples are Don Quixote and the little animal in Kafka's "The Burrow." In such a case the emphasis falls upon the experience itself -- as is true of most Greek tragedy and of novels wherein the protagonist is mainly symbolic, e.g., Kurtz -- rather than upon the man, as is true of Lear. (Ahab falls somewhere between.) This would seem a logical "out" for the modern writer, coping as he does with an age in which heroism is out of fashion and in which the whole of man's experience and knowledge is being re-examined and re-evaluated. But it militates against greatness of character creation, and it precludes myth.

The strange mixture of sophistication and raw transitional confusion which characterizes our age makes the creating of myth close to impossible. Myth

presupposes the existence of a certain teleological concept of the universe which is more or less generally accepted by a people. As has been seen, no such thing exists in this epoch. Our variety of beliefs about the cause and nature of things, our tendency to think in terms of a patternless pattern -- both evident in this study of evil -- work toward the very opposite of myth -- toward a literary concentration upon the individual person and situation. This stems not from any sense of romanticism, but from the very nature of our dominant thought process, and the contrast between it and the thinking of the past.

This is the age of induction. The individual and his particular experience are for us either all that we can know or they are the only roads open which lead forward toward new universals. Our literature exemplifies this. The pattern of deduction, wherein the particular dilemma of Oedipus is deduced from larger known facts about the universe has given way to the inductive method, by which certain facts about the world at large are perceived through Kurtz' individual experience. Surely this is the dominant modern trend in literature, and it seems to be getting stronger rather than changing direction. Notice the segmentary

New Yorker short story, the spotlight concentration of character and situation by which Hemingway expresses his insights, the attempt by Joyce to pick all of history out of Leopold Bloom's day. This pattern will persist until content changes, and this cannot happen until there are new ideas.

In the meantime there can be only further exploration of the same material, with consequently little in the way of significant change in form. There is, of course, non-objectivism, which in fiction takes the shape of the "sketch" or the fragment. But this seems to me a process of reaction from the overworked realistic prose story, rather than a valid new direction. More important, I think, is the increasing emphasis upon symbolism, and the attempts at synthesizing meaning by experimenting with language. The latter is perhaps best illustrated by Joyce's use of the pun and of synthetic associative language and syntax. The former is manifest everywhere. There is hardly an author worth his royalties who has not a working knowledge of Freudian symbol -- and even fewer who do not overwork it. But the fact remains that this psychological interpretation of ancient symbols -- whether always valid or not -- has tended to revitalize them. And the

discoveries of anthropologists have to some extent substantiated the psychologist's interpretation of these symbols (and have stimulated primitivism in modern art).

The contemporary writer, aware of this, has almost frantically scrambled to repossess these symbols. But symbols alone do not make a literature. Too many authors do not know how to use them and have not the perception required to get beyond horizontal usage. Symbols become dead things in their hands -- mere allegorical conveniences. Of the authors I have touched on, Hawthorne furnishes the best example of this, just as Melville furnishes the best example of the dynamic, vertical usage. It requires a profound poetic imagination to animate symbols, to make them as alive and uniformly pertinent as the bow of Cupid or the arm of Mars. Surface vividness will not do, any more than will choral repetition. It is for this reason that I would not be surprised if the next truly great novel takes a form closer to poetry than to prose. Joyce may well be pointing the way, for the area of the subconscious needs to be reproduced in the rhythm and figurative language of poetry. It needs poetry's ambiguity and concentrated emotional impact. As long as we keep our focus upon individual experience, this may well be the new direction.

Certainly the synthesis, when it comes, will speak of the universal with the voice of the individual, and certainly the area of universality "discovered" by the modern world is the human consciousness. It is here that the new symbols have their existence; it is here that the new universals lie hidden. Genius will ferret them out. When it does, the novel will undergo a sea-change.

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