

MARTIN BOYD'S LANGTON NOVELS :

AN INTERPRETATIVE ESSAY

by

Pamela Nase

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PREFACE

The editions of the Langton novels I have used and quoted from throughout are: *The Cardboard Crown*, revised edition, Penguin Books, Melbourne; *The Man*, 1955; *The*, London, 1957; *Abelard-Schuman*, London, 1957.

This thesis is my own work and all the sources used in its composition have been acknowledged.

I particularly wish to acknowledge the generous assistance of Mr Martin Boyd in checking the Bibliography and giving permission to listen to the tape made with him in Rome and held by the National Library of Australia. I would like to thank Professor A.D. Hope for making available the manuscript of his article "Martin Boyd, Myself and the Whore of Babylon", and for the assistance he has given at all stages of the thesis. I am grateful too for the help given me by Mrs Dorothy Green and Dr W.S. Fanson.

Pamela Nave

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Martin Boyd is a member of the Anglo-Australian upper classes; he has advocated that life should be lived for pleasure, and has written poetry, novels, autobiographies, articles, and letters on various subjects to the editors of the leading newspapers of his time. He has mixed with dukes and duchesses, has fought in a world war, studied to be a priest and an architect, but become neither. Not surprisingly he has been labelled a dilettante.

It is true that by any standards he would be described as a civilized man of refined tastes, but less true to suggest that he has skimmed across the surface of life. His was a temperament that made his championship of the life of pleasure something other than an advocacy of the simple gratification of appetites. From an early age he was more acutely aware than most people of the worm in the rose. One of his earliest memories is of

himself as a child of about five spilling his glass of mulberry juice down a well and weeping, blaming God and his parents for his irreparable loss, believing that they should have arranged a world wherein such happenings were impossible.¹ Another is of himself, in the barefooted carelessness of youth, standing on the edge of the shingle separating him from the sea and wailing, "Carry me over the stones."²

He had all the advantages that his family's position could give him, and might well have led a simple life of aimless pleasure, save perhaps for that strain in his temperament which made him wail so passionately over his spilt mulberry juice, and, more importantly, for that quality in his nature which led him to regard the memory of it as significant when, in his later years, he came to write his autobiography. Like certain of his fictional characters, he has in his blood "the awareness of evil combined with an obsession with the good."³

1. *Day of My Delight* (Lansdowne, Melbourne, 1965), p.2.
2. *ibid.*
3. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.16.

Martin à Beckett Boyd was born in Switzerland in 1893. His parents, Emma (née à Beckett) and Arthur Merric Boyd, had, for several years before his birth, lived at Penleigh House, the Wiltshire home of the à Becketts since the twelfth century. Since the early nineteenth century, however, both the à Becketts and the Boyds had taken their place among a colonial aristocracy, living at the head of Melbourne society and making frequent visits to Europe. Martin Boyd's parents' stay at Penleigh House was of a temporary nature, and it was, in fact, during one of their visits to Europe that he was born.

He spent his early years in Australia living a carefree life at Sandringham on the shores of Port Phillip Bay. His childhood pleasures were those familiar to anyone brought up in the Australian countryside: the enjoyment of active and sunny days and a feeling of security in a world where the only dangers to life were natural menaces such as snakes and centipedes.¹ But from an early age he was brought into contact with a different life, a life to which he instinctively responded. At his grandmother's house in

1. *Day of My Delight*, p.4.

St. Kilda he felt that he had "penetrated further into that civilisation of which ... [he was] on the outer fringe at Sandringham."¹ The house, with its fine paintings and eighteenth century furniture, seemed to have more old-world dignity than most houses.²

It is ironical, yet strangely appropriate, that Boyd's first entry into the world he had come to admire so much should have been through a war he came to repudiate. He first went to England in 1915 to get a commission among people "of ... [his] own class."³ The imbecility of the war became one of his deepest preoccupations.⁴ It became for him an expression on a grand scale of the evil in the world, forcing him to come to terms in an adult way with that inexplicable shadow which in childhood was symbolised by spilt mulberry juice and shingles on the sea-shore.

1. *Day of My Delight*, p.5.
2. It still creates an impression of old-world grace and dignity. It is a white two-storied house with grey gables, surrounded by trees, and beautifully preserved on the corner of Inkerman Road and Hotham Street in East St. Kilda.
3. *Day of My Delight*, p.54.
4. Martin Boyd, "Preoccupations and Intentions", *Southerly*, xxviii (1968), p.83.

His return to Australia after the war was brief. By 1921 he had returned to England, determined to become a novelist. He stayed there until 1948, when, with an established reputation as a novelist, he again returned to Australia, this time with the intention of remaining. He moved into The Grange, his grandfather's house at Berwick, which he began to renovate.¹ In 1951 he went on a holiday to England from which he has never returned, and since 1957 he has been living in Rome. Unlike the members of previous generations of his family, Boyd has not had the security of a family home on either side of the world, and the search for a spiritual home has probably emphasised for him the search for one's own identity and the acquiring of self-knowledge, both of which play an important part in his novels.

Boyd's immediate family has made a remarkable contribution to the arts in Australia. Both his mother and father were painters of note, as was his brother Penleigh. His other brother Merric, who has provided

1. This house becomes the Westhill of the Langton novels. For details of Boyd's renovations, see Eve Gye, "Author Rejuvenates Old Home", *The Australian Women's Weekly*, 5 November 1949, pp.56-57. For details of the murals Boyd commissioned his nephew Arthur to paint on the walls of the dining room at The Grange see Franz Phillip, *Arthur Boyd* (Thames and Hudson, London, 1967). Mr Phillip links Arthur Boyd's paintings at The Grange with the paintings at Westhill in *The Cardboard Crown*.

the basis for the fictional portrait of Dominic, was known for his art pottery. The artistic tradition has passed to the next generation with Merric's sons, all notable figures in the arts; Arthur and David are painters and Guy a potter. Robin Boyd, the architect, is Penleigh's son.¹ Through his immediate family and their connection with both the English aristocracy and the world of the arts, Boyd came naturally to regard tradition as valuable, and art as a natural part of life.

Given this background, it is not perhaps surprising that Boyd's novels stand somewhat apart from the main tradition of Australian fiction. They have a sophistication of style and manner not characteristic of Australian novels; their form, style and view of the world are much closer to the English and European traditions than to the Australian. This, and the fact that Boyd has spent most of his adult life outside the country, has led to often expressed doubts about whether his novels should be regarded as Australian novels. Though there may be times when such a discussion would be both

1. The best source of family detail is Martin Boyd's autobiography *Day of My Delight*. But for an interesting short account of the recent generations of the Boyd family and their artistic achievements see Pamela Ruskin, "Those Brilliant Boyds", *Walkabout*, xxxv (February, 1969), pp. 20-23.

profitable and interesting, it should not in any way affect one's estimate of the novels and would, therefore, in the terms of this thesis, be irrelevant. I am not concerned to place Boyd in the Australian tradition, but simply to offer an interpretation of the novels as they stand. This seems to me the first step - and one so far not undertaken - before Boyd can be either judged as a novelist or placed into any tradition.

It was not until 1924, at the age of thirty-one, that Boyd began to write his first novel, *Love Gods*, which was published, under the pseudonym of Martin Mills, in 1925. This was the first of eight novels not dealing directly with his family or with life in Australia,¹ though introducing some of the concerns which were to remain in his later works. The best of these novels is, in my opinion, *Such Pleasure*, published in 1949. For all its faults it is a book of unusual interest, expressing in a simple form some of the central concerns of the Langton series: the close relation between good and evil and the dangers of false values and escapism.

1. The most reliable survey of these early works is contained in G.A.Wilkes's article, "The Achievement of Martin Boyd", *Australian Literary Criticism*, ed. Grahame Johnston (Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1962), pp.158-168.

The Montforts, published in 1928, also under the pseudonym of Martin Mills, was Boyd's first attempt to write a novel based on the life of his own family. It is an over-crowded family saga, and one of Boyd's lesser achievements. His next attempt at portraying a family with ties in both Australia and England was *Lucinda Brayford*,¹ published in 1946. This is perhaps his best single work; indeed it is the novel on which Boyd himself has laid his claim to be considered an artist.²

The first novel of the Langton series with which this thesis is concerned, was published in 1952. The central concerns of the series are in many respects similar to those revealed in *Lucinda Brayford*, but Boyd here attempts a different kind of work. Whether or not it constitutes "the consummation of all ... [his] earlier experiments and the finest display of his talents",³ is difficult to estimate, partly because it *is* a series,

1. For a sensitive critical account of the novel see Dorothy Green's article " 'The Fragrance of Souls': A Study of *Lucinda Brayford*", *Southerly*, xxviii (1968), pp.110-126.
2. Martin Boyd, "Dubious Cartography", *Meanjin*, xxiii (1964), pp.5-13.
3. G.A.Wilkes, "The Achievement of Martin Boyd", *Australian Literary Criticism*, ed. Grahame Johnston (Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1962), p.165.

and as such presents peculiar difficulties for the critic, and partly because it presents the usual problems of estimation that any unfinished work of art must present.¹ But that it is one of Boyd's best and most interesting works can not, I think, be disputed.

The series recounts the life, over several generations, of a family of Anglo-Australian gentry, as they move between the two countries in which they have their homes. The first novel, *The Cardboard Crown*, covers a period of roughly the last forty years of the past century. The story is told by a middle-aged narrator, Guy Langton, and concentrates on the generation of his grandparents, Alice and Austin Langton.

The central episodes concern Alice's and Austin's marriage and their associations outside marriage. Austin becomes involved with Hetty - a cousin who has had designs on him since childhood, and who, over a number of years, bears him four sons. Alice and Austin are in England when she discovers his relationship with Hetty. Feeling that her past has been betrayed, Alice goes on

1. Boyd intended the series to cover a hundred years in the life of his family.

a holiday to France. At the end of this holiday, and still unable to return to Waterpark, the Langton estate in Wiltshire, she continues her holiday in Rome, where she meets Aubrey Tunstall, a civilized, slightly decadent and extremely charming Englishman who has made his home in Italy. Alice falls in love with him - or at least is strongly attracted by him - but finally decides she must return to her life with Austin.

These relationships are not worked out in isolation. They take their place within the shifting framework of the Langton family as it moves between Australia and Europe, and the shifting pattern of time, as Guy Langton, the narrator, imposes the present onto his story of the past. Guy himself, as the novel opens, appears a civilized but somewhat isolated figure living in the house his grandparents once lived in outside Melbourne. The novel he decides to write is to be a reconstruction of the life of his grandmother, based on her diaries, on the recollections of her friend and brother-in-law Arthur, and on the memories and interpretations of Guy himself.

It is as a result of Alice's personal distinction, and of the money she has inherited, that her husband becomes heir to Waterpark, the family estate in England. The novel traces Alice's and Austin's movement between Waterpark in England and Westhill in Australia at a time when the invasion of a new social class was taking place - a class which valued money and material possessions above all else and determined a person's worth according to the impressiveness of his worldly possessions.

The precarious position occupied by the Langtons in this changing world is suggested by the image of Baron Corvo's onion woman, which is used to describe Alice. Alice keeps not only herself but all of her family above the surface. She finances trips, maintains a way of life, and hands out money to her children. The implications of this image are that her children, the younger generation, do not contain within themselves the power, or the potential, or the money, to maintain their position in society. The precariousness, then, of the family's existence, is suggested in the figure of a woman whose passing means the end of a way of life and the dispersion of strength and money. In a similar way it is suggested

that as time passes the Langtons' connection with European tradition is obscured and their sojourns into that world are of a temporary nature. The Langtons are connected with the past through their presence at Waterpark, but Waterpark is no longer self-supporting. Like the younger generations it is not in possession of its own means of survival, but relies on Alice and, through her, on money made in a distant commercial world.

That Boyd had some idea of the structure of the series at this stage is suggested by the fact that although Guy has an obvious interest in his brother Dominic in the opening chapter of *The Cardboard Crown*, he writes that novel with little attention to him, reserving him for the second novel, *A Difficult Young Man*. At the beginning of that novel he writes:

When I told Julian that I would write this book, the first intention was that it should be about my grandparents, but we agreed that it should also be an exploration of Dominic's immediate forbears to discover what influences had made him what he was, and above all to discover what in fact he was.¹

1. *A Difficult Young Man*, p.9.

The novel attempts to discover what Dominic was, by recounting the episodes of his life from his youth up to the time of his marriage with his cousin Helena.

He is, as the title suggests, a difficult young man, continually in conflict with his family, with society and with himself. All the Langtons are considered slightly eccentric, even difficult, by society. They adhere, Guy perhaps more consciously than the others, to a different way of life, a way of life based on an established tradition which makes allowance for individual development and expression. Dominic is difficult largely because he does not fit into the ordinary or expected patterns of social behaviour. He feels too strongly to adapt his behaviour to the expected pattern - or even, at times, to be aware of its existence.

The second novel, then, concentrates largely on Dominic. We see him as a child at Westhill, and as a boy growing up at Waterpark, where he becomes engaged to Sylvia Tunstall, the daughter of an English Peer. It is fitting that Dominic, regarded by his family as the "black sheep", should be the one to make, in one sense, the most desirable engagement. But it is also inevitable,

in the terms of the novels, that the engagement should be an impossible one and finally broken off. Dominic returns to Australia and causes Melbourne's greatest social fiasco by eloping with his cousin, Helena Craig, on the day she is to marry Wentworth McLeish. McLeish represents the world of commercial values so different from those held by the Langtons, and different especially from those represented by Dominic.

The society into which Dominic must attempt to fit has changed markedly since *The Cardboard Crown*. Although the Langtons still go back to Waterpark, their hold upon it has become more tenuous. When they return to Melbourne, they find it is being invaded by people who have made a lot of money, often out of the land, and who place a disproportionate value upon their worldly wealth. Typical of such a class is Baba, a grasping girl from Moonee Ponds, who marries Dominic's Uncle George. Baba is snobbish, shallow, selfish and ridiculous, but representative of what gradually becomes, in the novels, the new society.

The third novel, *Outbreak of Love*, looks forward, in the sense that the new society which was beginning to

force its way in *A Difficult Young Man*, has intruded further into Melbourne society. But the past is asserted equally in the similarity of situation and personal qualities of Alice and her daughter Diana.

The novel opens in 1913 when Diana Langton, now forty and married to a temperamental German musician, Wolfie von Flugel, is living at Brighton on the outskirts of Melbourne. A 'situation' develops as Diana discovers Mrs Montaubyn, Wolfie's colourful though disreputable Cockney mistress, and rediscovers an old childhood friend, Russell Lockwood. Russell has spent most of his adult life in Europe and reappears in Melbourne, as Diana says, "trailing clouds of civilization".¹ After deciding to leave Wolfie and to go away with Russell, Diana comes to realize that this is something she cannot do. The novel closes with Diana having lunch with Wolfie on the veranda at one of the farms at Westhill.

In the fourth novel, *When Blackbirds Sing*, Boyd returns to the story of Dominic and recounts his

1. *Outbreak of Love*, p.8.

experience of the First World War. The war completes the decline of the social class with which Boyd has been particularly concerned. The novel opens with Dominic's voyage to England, where he goes to join an English regiment because his family feel that he would be more at home there. In England he renews his acquaintance with the Diltons and again becomes involved, this time sexually, with Sylvia Tunstall, the girl he was once engaged to and who is now married to an English army officer.

Dominic's experience of the war forces him to become aware of the disparity between personal and social morality. His personal values are revealed to him through the companionship of the soldiers, in particular the spiritual harmony he enjoys with a young subaltern, Hollis. During a raid he comes face to face with a young German soldier who looks rather like Hollis. Their eyes meet in involuntary recognition, but Dominic does not stay the movement of his own arm. He shoots, and the boy rolls dead at his feet. At this point Dominic becomes aware that authority condones behaviour which his own strongest convictions condemn. Personal and social morality are, for him, in conflict.

All his life Dominic has been trying to unite his experiences, trying to reconcile his own behaviour with that which is expected of him. Now he is no longer able even to attempt this. He is forced to condemn the actions of society and the values implicit in them, and thus free to recognize the validity of his own moral convictions. When he returns to England, he is unable to take any further part in the war; and when he then returns to Australia it is to find that his wife Helena, the only person he has ever felt truly at home with, does not understand what has become his most important realization - that the war he has been fighting stands in direct opposition to all the values he upholds.

What Boyd would have chosen to develop in the fifth novel of the series is, of course, a matter for speculation, but it seems clear that he is working his way back to the point at which the series begins. Boyd is providing an explanation for Dominic's final breakdown and partial derangement, and for that state of mind reflected in the crucifixion scene that he paints at Westhill.

Having abandoned the Langton series,¹ Martin Boyd has turned, in his latest novel, *The Tea Time of Love*, to a more exclusively comic mode. The novel is semi-satirical, and the more serious concerns are still present, but Boyd's wit and sense of fun have free play.

Martin Boyd's novels have, until recently, had a rather curious reception in Australia. Perhaps because they have, among other things, illuminated limitations in the Australian way of life, they have aroused a certain amount of hostility. All too often critics have allowed themselves to be so side-tracked by nationalistic concerns that they have neglected the substance of the novels.

In almost the first full-length piece of criticism of Martin Boyd's writing, Kathleen Fitzpatrick stated that Boyd was "from the outset crippled by the 'complex fate' of having one's physical home in one

1. Boyd has stated quite emphatically, both on tape (taped interview with Martin Boyd, made for the A.B.C.* by Desmond O'Grady in Rome and held by the National Library of Australia) and in *Day of My Delight*, that he has no intention of finishing the series.

*the de Berg collection, no 137

hemisphere and one's cultural traditions in another."¹

Although she did not repeat this judgement in her later work on Martin Boyd, she there concluded that

Australians should value him as the regional novelist of Melbourne and its environment, as the witness and historian of an Australian leisure-class and its way of life which was once significant but has now vanished, as the Australian novelist who has best expressed the predicament of having one's physical home in one hemisphere and one's cultural traditions in another, and for the benison of his unfailing wit and style.²

Although these concerns are not central to Boyd's novels - he is not simply the recorder of a social class and its way of life, nor is he primarily concerned with the predicament of having one's physical home in one hemisphere and one's cultural traditions in another - many of the later critics have followed Kathleen Fitzpatrick in assuming that they are. Harry Heseltine, for example, talks of Boyd's "pursuit of his Jamesian theme the relation between Australia and the parent culture of

1. "Martin Boyd and the Complex Fate of the Australian Novelist", *Commonwealth Literary Fund Lecture* (1953), p.13.
2. *Martin Boyd* (Lansdowne, Melbourne, 1963)p.29.

England and Europe."¹

Even when critics have chosen to endow Boyd with a philosophy or a definite attitude towards his characters and towards life, they have suggested that it is a limited view - a view that places severe restrictions upon his characters. In 1938 M. Barnard Eldershaw, writing about *The Montforts*, saw in the influence of Madeleine du Remy des Baux upon her descendants, "a symbol of the author's philosophy" - a philosophy in which chance events become part of the natural law which governs men's actions: "In the last resort men are puppets, the life force pulls the strings, but at random."² C. Wallace-Crabbe, writing in 1960 about *The Cardboard Crown*, points to something similar, which he calls "Boyd's fundamentally limiting view of life." He concludes that Boyd seems committed to a destructive determinism and that his vision is basically pessimistic.³ Such views are no more accurate than those which rest on a conception of Boyd as primarily a social historian or a regional novelist. Yet they do perhaps guide discussion in a more relevant direction.

1. "Australian Fiction Since 1920", *The Literature of Australia*, Geoffrey Dutton ed., (Penguin Books, Melbourne, 1964), pp.214-215.
2. *Essays in Australian Fiction*, (Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1938), p.140.
3. "Martin Boyd and *The Cardboard Crown*", *Melbourne Critical Review*, No.3, (1960), p.29.

One of the best general accounts of Boyd's work appeared in 1957 when G.A.Wilkes delivered his Commonwealth Literary Fund Lecture, "The Achievement of Martin Boyd", in which he argued that Boyd's

... singularity is not adequately accounted for, however, by regarding him as the historian of an epoch or the exponent of a mode. The latest novels, taken together with *Lucinda Brayford*, suggest a further dimension in his work that we may recognize, on looking back, as being responsible for a pattern directing his novels from the beginning,... It could roughly be described as the theme of aspiration and fulfilment.¹

This statement is much closer to the novels. Yet Wilkes's own admission that in the later manifestations of this pattern there is usually an additional twist -

Not only does Lucinda meet Pat Lanfranc after she has married Hugo, not only does Hugo's death from war injuries occur exactly when this relationship, sustained so long, has just broken off - but Lucinda also comes to realize at the end that she has been deceiving herself, that Pat, once she sees him clearly, is only a second Hugo, with whom her life would have been a second edition of the life from which she tried so long to escape. Alice Langton

1. "The Achievement of Martin Boyd", *Australian Literary Criticism*, Grahame Johnston ed. (Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1962), p.167.

looks back on her romantic interlude in Italy with Aubrey Tunstall and regrets the pattern seen too late; but she too deceives herself, since Aubrey's only real attraction is to the pretty footmen who wait at his table.¹

Lucinda, Alice and Diana are all faced with the test of recognizing not only their ideal, but also their actual natures. They have to face both the circumstances of their lives and the duties these circumstances impose. They must realize the distinction between self-indulgence and self-fulfilment. The centre of the novels lies, not in the theme of aspiration and fulfilment, but in Boyd's search for the truth about the characters, or his attempt to discover and reveal what he calls their "essential self." The theme of aspiration and fulfilment is one expression of this search.

There has been very little criticism which has viewed the Langton novels as a series,² and explored the

1. *loc cit.*, pp.167-168.
2. Even if they have recognized that the novels should be regarded as a series, critics have rarely proceeded on the basis of this recognition. *The Bulletin* review of *Outbreak of Love* (11 September 1957, p.2) is a good example. The reviewer does indeed say that "the book must be read as one in the series.... It does not take place, as it seems to, almost in a vacuum, but in the stream of those novels." Yet he has not really accepted the implications of his own statement, as he goes on to say that the whole purpose of the book is the establishment of Australian values.

connections between the four novels. Consequently, little mention has been made of any internal structure which might provide the series with unity. The appropriateness of the form, if seen at all, has been described in rather negative terms. Brenda Niall, for example, sees the series as "discursive, allusive, given unity only by its narrator" and suggests that it is the form best suited to Boyd since it makes "less noticeable ... [his] inability to show change and growth in his characters".¹ Brian Elliott implies that the form allowed Boyd to sprawl more comfortably² and G.A. Wilkes says that the

... general technique - Boyd's last solution to the artistic difficulties of the family chronicle - reconciles amplitude (in the series as a whole) with the intensiveness of treatment (in each individual novel) which his peculiar gifts demand.³

All these critics assume that in the Langton novels Boyd is simply trying to improve upon what he had

1. "The Double Alienation of Martin Boyd", *Twentieth Century*, xvii (1963), p.203.
2. "Martin Boyd : An Appreciation", *Meanjin*, xvi (1957), p.15.
3. "The Achievement of Martin Boyd", *Australian Literary Criticism*, ed. Grahame Johnston, (Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1962), p.165.

already done, trying to find a more appropriate form for the family chronicle which, even in *Lucinda Brayford*, had provided him with formal problems. Leonie Kramer is the only critic to suggest that Boyd may have written a sequence of novels not because it provided answers to a so-far unsolved technical problem, but because he was trying to write a different *kind* of work:

Faced with this curious and extremely effective design, one must ask what is its significance. It is clear that had Boyd wanted simply to write a family chronicle, he could have done so in much less elaborate a manner than this. It is always dangerous to speculate about a writer's purpose, but something in this case certainly can be said about the effect of Boyd's arrangement of his material; something which may well provide a clue to his intention.

This I believe to concern character, but character seen in a certain kind of perspective.¹

It is, I believe, by being more specific about the nature of Boyd's interest in character that one arrives at the heart of the work, and detects an internal pattern in the series. The perspective in which Boyd

1. "Martin Boyd", *The Australian Quarterly*, xxxv (1963), p.37.

views character is, it seems to me, hinted at in what he describes as the search for "the Memlinc in the cellar - the beautiful portrait of the human face, lost in the dissolution of our family and our religion."¹ It is a search which takes him beneath the level of social action to those areas of the human soul which contain, again in his own words, the "essential self" of each individual, and a search which necessitates placing characters within a pattern created by the lives of members of their family over several generations.

The search for the "beautiful portrait" is neither simple nor entirely romantic. It suggests, in fact, a rather frightening aspect of Boyd's vision and implies an awareness of the fragility of man's "beauty". It is easy for the reader, charmed by Boyd's lively wit and sophisticated tone as he writes about the privileged classes, to forget that beneath the civilized surface of his fictive world lie hidden evils. It is something I think Boyd himself never forgets. He constantly sees man's achievement in the light of them. In his novels these evils take the form of self-centred actions such

1. *A Difficult Young Man*, p.223.

as Hetty's, misguided values such as Baba's, the inversion of the true Christian way of life as in Sarah, or those maléfic forces which hover round Bobby and Dominic, presumably transmitted from their Spanish ancestor, the duque de Teba.

I would, then, suggest that G.A.Wilkes is not quite accurate when he writes of Boyd:

His ambition to return to 'the centre of civilisation' was realized on the outbreak of war. Boyd was sent to England to obtain a commission in the army. Though he served with the infantry in France, and later with the Flying Corps, the experience of the war has left a slighter mark on his work than his experience of English society, to which he was introduced (in training and on leaves) through the English branch of the family.¹

It is perhaps true that Boyd's contact with English society left a more *obvious* mark on his novels. But his war experience has undoubtedly coloured his view of life and strengthened his apprehension of evil. Through the war the evils man continually has to battle

1. *loc cit.*, p.160.

against came to the surface. Boyd came to see the war as representing the submergence of true values:

From this disruption [the disruption caused by two world wars] it was inevitable that a miasma should arise, infecting the wounded civilisation. Its carriers are the intellectual delinquents, those who think and reason in a moral vacuum.¹

His war experience affected Boyd profoundly. The passages in his novels which reveal the obvious influence of Boyd's contact with English society are always placed in a larger context in which an awareness of the life of civilized pleasures, and of the destructive forces within English society, are equally present.

The awareness of good and evil, and of the necessity to assert the true value of man's nature, are, then, some of Boyd's essential concerns, and they continually shape the family material out of which he writes his novels. That he has based the Langton series on the life of his family does not involve a simple transference of detail from life into fiction. The novels may be seen as the re-creation of Boyd's experience of his family, and the shaping of it into artistic form

1. *Day of My Delight*, p.282.

so that it reveals his own view of life. This thesis makes little specific use of the two autobiographies, *A Single Flame* and *Day of My Delight*, as the introduction of autobiographical material can do more to obscure than illuminate this view. Critics who have relied, in my opinion too heavily, on the autobiographies, have been led to regard the novels as essentially a family saga, and have seen Boyd as primarily a social historian or a spokesman for those who suffer from "geographical schizophrenia."

Boyd's own comments on the criticism of his work are relevant. He has been deeply affected by the response of critics,¹ and, although some of his reactions may be defensive,² his most constant complaint has been that critics do not regard his novels as works of fiction. Referring to Kathleen Fitzpatrick's comment that he is stunted as a novelist by having no real home, Boyd writes:

1. Refer to the taped interview with Martin Boyd, made for the A.B.C. by Desmond O'Grady in Rome and held by the National Library of Australia.
2. In particular, his reaction to the neglect of *When Blackbirds Sing*.

But I am concerned primarily with human beings, the proper study of mankind, and there is no reason why a complete nomad with this concern should not be a good novelist, provided he can find some quiet place to sit with his exercise book and pencil.... I am, or was, a writer of *fiction*.¹

Because many of the incidents in the novels are similar to those Boyd recounts in the autobiographies, the temptation to regard the novels as fictionalised versions of his own life is great. A similar scene to that in which Dominic is instructed to lecture his men on the "physical pleasures of fighting" appears, for example, in *Day of My Delight*. In *When Blackbirds Sing* Boyd tells us that Dominic

... did not merely give ... [his soldiers] a few facts to which they could listen in half-hearted boredom. He touched their imagination. Their fundamental decency was disturbed.... Even the bloody-minded sergeant thought he had gone too far....²

In *Day of My Delight* Boyd says about himself

1. Letter, *Twentieth Century*, xviii (1963), pp.73-74.
2. *When Blackbirds Sing*, p.116.

We were ordered to lecture our platoons on bayonet fighting and the spirit of offensive, to try and stir them to a vicious hatred of the Germans. I thought: "There is no escape from doing this filthy thing, so I will go the whole hog." In an old barn, built of thatch and clay and smelling of cows, I gave them a lurid and savage harangue on the delights of murder, on kicked genitals, and jabbed guts. Unless they cultivated these pleasures, the war for civilisation could not be brought to a successful conclusion.¹

This is only one incident, selected at random. There are many others. But even if many of the incidents are based directly on Boyd's own experience of the war in this way, it is a mistake to equate Dominic and Boyd. In the scene above, Boyd feels that "there is no escape so I will go the whole hog." When he transfers the scene to fiction, he places it after Dominic dreams that he has met the evil in himself face to face. The scene described above becomes part of the process of Dominic's realization that the force of his own capacity for evil is now being supported by the voice of authority. The motives for Dominic's spirited lecture belong to Dominic rather than to Boyd:

1. *Day of My Delight*, p.88.

To Dominic alone this instruction was poison. If authority endorsed the evil that was in him, at last he would be obedient. He could, as it were, say "evil be thou my good" with a clear conscience. Returning from exhaustion, with an empty heart and mind he took violence as his god, and in this spirit he addressed his men.¹

Many characters and situations from the autobiographies appear in the other novels as well, but as in the quotations above, they have become something different. It is therefore very dangerous to assume that such incidents appear purely autobiographically in the novels. Boyd's imagination appears to need a starting point in the world he knows, but given it, he changes that world, or orders and patterns it, towards an artistic end.

The aim of this thesis is to discover the internal structure of the series and the kind of achievement the novels represent. The final task of the critic may be to pass judgement on a work of art, but his primary task - and in many ways his most important, since it is on the basis of this that his judgement is arrived at -

1. *When Blackbirds Sing*, p.115.

is to elucidate the nature of the work which confronts him. Martin Boyd himself has said that a positive critic is one who is able to reveal the essence of an author's work.¹ One may take this a step further and say that the only meaningful critical judgements are those which are based on such an understanding.

One thing which emerges from the brief outline of the Langton novels in the last chapter is that Boyd is not only writing about a society in decline, or simply bemoaning the passing of a social class and its way of life. These social concerns are present in the novels, but they are accompanied by - and in a sense provide the background for - the assertion of positive values and the expression of an individual and interesting view of life. It is in this context that the method of narrative becomes important - in particular the use of a narrator who is himself a character in the story.

1. Taped interview with Martin Boyd. Made for the A.B.C. by Desmond O'Grady in Rome and held by the National Library of Australia.

CHAPTER II

THE NARRATIVE METHOD

One thing which emerges from the brief outline of the Langton novels in the last chapter is that Boyd is not only writing about a society in decline, or simply bemoaning the passing of a social class and its way of life. These social concerns are present in the novels, but they are accompanied by - and in a sense provide the background for - the assertion of positive values and the expression of an individual and interesting view of life. It is in this context that the method of narration becomes important - in particular the use of a narrator who is himself a character in the story he tells.

Several critics have commented on the use of Guy. Both C. Wallace-Crabbe¹ and A.L.French² criticise

1. "Martin Boyd and *The Cardboard Crown*", *Melbourne Critical Review*, no.3, (1960), pp.25-26.
2. "Martin Boyd : An Appraisal", *Southerly*, xxvi (1966), pp.231-233.

him adversely, and Thelma Herring says that, because he had found the method unsatisfactory, Boyd ceased to use Guy as narrator in *When Blackbirds Sing*.¹ In a review of *The Cardboard Crown* Peter Elkin says "It is difficult to understand why Mr Boyd, who for the most part writes freshly, should have used this outworn device to get his story going."² Such comments suggest that these critics do not see Guy as much more than a technical aid. Since he seems to me to be closely connected to the central themes of the novels and important in establishing Boyd's view, I shall, in this chapter, be mostly concerned to show the role Guy Langton plays in the novels - how his presence contributes to the 'meaning', and helps determine the shape of the series.

Guy is not simply a "device to get ... [the] story going", though someone who had read only the first novel of the series might be excused for thinking that he is. His full importance is only realized as the novels progress and his role becomes more complicated. He is,

1. "Martin Boyd and the Critics : A Rejoinder to A.L.French", *Southerly*, xxviii (1968), p.130.
2. "Stories within Stories", *Southerly*, xv (1954), p.111.

of course, closely related to all the major themes of the novels, but his importance does not reside only in this. Boyd has not chosen a character at random for his narrator. Through Guy's changing role over the four novels, in what becomes almost an unstated theme, Boyd shows the creative process at work. He uses his narrator to assert the power of man's creative ability in the face of the deterioration of all that appears valuable. This, as I hope to show, is extremely important to the total meaning of the series.

Guy's role as artist within the structure of the novels may be made clear by viewing it in relation to two central and related concerns - his desire to present the truth despite difficulties, and the range of perspective within which he is able to view character and event.

In the opening chapter of *The Cardboard Crown* Guy first mentions his belief that it is dangerous to reveal the truth:

It is this [Guy's desire to pierce truth to the heart] which makes me so tempted by this dangerous idea of writing the truth about all of us, about all I know, not merely putting it in a light which will be acceptable to Aunt Maysie.¹

One may ask why Guy should see the idea of "writing the truth" about his family as dangerous, since no explanation is offered at this point. One obvious reason, of course, is that one does not have the liberty to publicise all one knows of the private lives of friends and family. But Guy's concern with truth has a deeper basis. He is aware that even truth has a destructive potentiality:

Unless one has access to a find like the diaries, or acquaintance with a reckless old gossip like Arthur, the preceding generation must always appear uniformly respectable And this is quite right, as the sins of the fathers should not be allowed to destroy their authority, or there would be no civilization left.²

In revealing the truth about his family, Guy may well be afraid of disrupting a natural process.

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.17.
2. *ibid.*, p.101.

This possibility gains support and significance from one of Boyd's strongest beliefs. If man is to continue to live a full life, he must acknowledge and include in his own existence, the existence of the great achievements of the past. To some extent, of course, this involves an act of faith. In Boyd's view, man has the power to destroy the authority of the past, reduce the great heroes, and destroy the beauty of the greatest artistic achievements - and with them the quality of his own life. It is, in fact, the indiscriminate debunking of past achievements that Boyd sees as one of the main causes of the modern world's spiritual illness. He expresses it thus in *Day of My Delight*, in a chapter appropriately called "The Sick Country" :

The intellectual delinquents appear daily to gain more power to deny the individual value of the human soul. They deny all that has nourished the mind and heart of mankind from the beginning of history. In the art of every civilization - Chinese, Greek, mediaeval, Renaissance, down to the French Impressionists - there is a common element of beauty, which is denied by the majority of modern painters. To them it is "tiresome romanticism" as it is to the teachers and writers. They refuse to be present in all ages and are marooned on an infinitesimal island of time.¹

1. *Day of My Delight*, p.287.

It is not necessary to agree with Boyd's interpretation of the modern world¹ to appreciate, in terms of the novels, the weight of his final sentence : "They refuse to be present in all ages and are marooned on an infinitesimal island of time." This belief emerges through Guy Langton in his realization that to present the whole truth about a past generation may also be to undermine the positive achievements which, for their own well-being, the present generation ought to be able to see intact.

If, at this point, one remembers Boyd's own view of the function of art, the importance of seeing Guy as being deliberately placed in the novels as the figure of the artist begins to emerge. Boyd says that "The function of art is to enhance the quality of our lives, and to give us intensity of vision."² Guy's awareness of the dangers of revealing the truth leads to a particular way of looking at the past and at people. Among other things, the novels are an exposition of his

1. For comments on Boyd's view of the modern world see A.D.Hope's article, soon to be published, "Martin Boyd, Myself and the Whore of Babylon."
2. "Preoccupations and Intentions", *Southerly*, xxviii (1968), p.89.

vision. Guy does, for the most part, prevent the "sins of the fathers", even where revealed, from destroying their authority.¹ He does so partly through the introduction of the artistic perspective into the novels, and partly through Guy's own recognition of the changes caused by changing perspectives.

Guy's particular concern, in the opening chapter of *The Cardboard Crown*, with both the possibility and the danger of revealing the truth is, then, quite understandable. At this point he is as much an ordinary member of society as he is an artist, as much the man who goes to Toorak parties as the man who "when young felt faint gusts of this desire to pierce truth to the heart."² The origins of the feeling that it will be dangerous to reveal the truth are probably largely sub-conscious. It is natural for someone who is a part of society to be frightened of revealing a truth which can be arrived at only through creative and imaginative processes - if only because he is aware that doing so will be considered strange, and perhaps disturbing, by the society of which he is a part.

1. His method of depicting character is partly the result of such a concern. See Chapter IV.

2. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.17.

In the first chapter of *The Cardboard Crown* there are plenty of indications that the truth Guy is likely to reveal will not be in harmony with the assumptions on which this society bases its existence. One indication is Guy's account of the party he has just been to, where his reference to Christian values "...shocked the millionaires and their wives as much as if I had used an obscene word, because of its reference to a standard of values of which they did not seem to have heard."¹ It is clear from this incident alone that Guy lives in accord with a set of values quite different from those held by the people around him. His awareness of the gulf between himself and a society which nevertheless provides him with companionship - and his natural reluctance to widen that gulf - creates his initial self-consciousness as artist, before he is irrevocably committed to his work of creation. This leads to subtle shifts in tone, to continual reference to his own method and technique, and, of course, to his awareness of the danger of revealing the truth he is imaginatively able to grasp.

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.7.

But it is not only in Guy's concern with truth that he is presented as an artist. His role as artist is suggested more positively by the way in which he is set apart from other characters in the novels. The perspective in which these other characters view one another is largely governed by their own selves - or, in the childhood language of Brian and Guy, by their own particular "soul-mixtures". Thus, Dominic would have seen Aubrey Tunstall suffering nights of spiritual torment, while Mildy would have seen in Alice's room not a bouquet, but a bed of roses. Arthur too, despite his occasional flashes of insight, colours his view with his own sentimentality or ribaldry, and with his personal likes and dislikes. But it would, I believe, be a mistake to see Guy's own perspective as determined by the self in the same way.

Guy's perceptions are distinguished from those of the people around him and given a special kind of validity. Our confidence in him comes from the hints he gives us about the way his imagination works. Through him we are made aware of the kind of truth the novels are going to reveal, the truth of artistic perception, which has little to do with verifiable fact. Thus, at

the beginning of the third chapter of *The Cardboard Crown*, Guy qualifies the observation in the previous chapter that in the midst of his golden idealistic view of the past, the first thing he remembers is the "small black figure of Cousin Hetty" :

All history is a little false. It is only fair to remember this when judging the characters in my book. You see them only as they exist in my imagination. To go back to the last chapter, I write of 'the small black figure of Cousin Hetty.' She was not black at all, neither her skin, nor at that age her clothes. I am not even sure that her hair was black, as when I knew her it was grey. It may originally have been bright red but I imagine her as somehow black against the bright landscape.¹

By the end of the novel we are in a position to give credence to this imaginative truth. Hetty does indeed become black against a bright landscape - a 'fly in the ointment' - her self-centred and wilful pursuit of Austin affecting both his and Alice's happiness and peace of mind.

That Guy's perceptions contain a validity which truly belongs to the artist is suggested in the novels

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.30.

by reference to other characters besides Guy. Frequently when a character sees beyond the levels on which social concerns, respectability, embarrassment, and all forms of self-centred endeavour, operate, Guy makes the point of telling us that this person possesses an artistic capacity. He does so, for example, with Steven's reaction to Dominic's "worshipping Helena". The situation, in worldly terms, or on the level of social action, is embarrassing, and since he is with Helena's father when he discovers it, Steven is forced to see it in this way. The action, in the light of accepted social behaviour, would inevitably have been regarded as strange, to say the least. But although Steven is annoyed, he is able to see a strange and innocent beauty in the act. It is at this point that Guy chooses to remind us that Steven is an artist.¹

A similar point is made during Guy's conversation with his artist cousin, Julian Byngham, in the opening chapter of *The Cardboard Crown*. Julian is viewing the portraits of his great-grandparents with a disinterested eye - he sees them, in fact, with the perspective of the artist. (Also, of course, with the

1. *A Difficult Young Man*, p.117.

perspective possible to a great-grandchild as opposed to a grandchild). Referring to Austin's portrait, Julian asks "Who is this man in the pink coat?.... He looks very important, but not quite at ease with himself." And of Alice's portrait he says "She has a good face, kind and strong You wouldn't think she was his wife Their faces don't seem related to each other."¹

Two things are worth noting here - the validity of the perceptions, as revealed later by all that we learn of Alice and Austin, and the effect Julian's comments have on Guy:

At Julian's remark the faint balloon-like ghost of my grandfather suddenly shrank to its proper size in history. With the collapse of the bubble, I felt that I began to see him as he really was, and that in his shrunken image I began to perceive the nature of the treasures and calamities he had left us.²

Julian's observations are bewildering, even annoying to Guy the person, tied to normal relationships and subject to the protective generational scheme of things, but

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, pp.9-10.
2. *ibid.*

they have the effect of liberating Guy the artist.

It is this artistic capacity which allows Guy to assume what seems at times to him the "eye of God." When he returns from the ball at Government House, which Mildy had refused to attend and at which Mrs Montaubyn had behaved in unseemly fashion, and once he is alone again in the sobering moonlight outside Mildy's house, the misfortunes and embarrassments he has suffered during the evening seem to increase his sensitivity:

While leaning on the gate I was subject to a curious experience, an enlargement of the understanding, extremely painful. I saw Mrs Montaubyn and Mildy with, as it were, the eye of God. I understood that the degradation of the former and the folly of the latter were irrelevant to their true natures, and had come upon them like physical sores, under which they were bewildered and pitiful. I felt an intolerable anguish at the thought of them.¹

Guy places much value on such insights and constantly reminds us that his own perception and imagination will colour what he reveals.

1. *Outbreak of Love*, p.140.

One may wonder at his insistence on the importance of his own experience, but, remembering Guy's position as artist within the novels, and coming to his comments on pp.134-135 of *A Difficult Young Man*, one sees the significance of the nature of his own experience, and the effect it is likely to have on the writing of the novels. On pp.134-135 he says, in effect, that if he had continued with his public school education, instead of being privately educated and placed in contact with mysticism and traditional religion, he "... might have assimilated conventions and adopted an attitude which would have regarded all art, writing, painting and music as despicable pastimes, unfitted for the men of our island race."

Had Guy gone to a public school it is likely that he would have turned into a "pickled schoolboy" - so common among the populace of the novels. He would have been forced to develop according to a pattern which caters for the mediocre and so does not allow for individuality of expression. His capacity to view things in a number of perspectives, to really see the world as fluid, flexible, complex, and in the end - in defiance of all man's theorising and analysis -

a mystery, would have been destroyed. The capacity Guy possesses is what Keats refers to in his letters as negative capability: "...when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason".¹ This capacity of Guy's affects the whole structure of the novels.

To see more precisely the importance of Guy as a character in the novels, it is helpful to look at the last pages of *A Difficult Young Man*, one of the few places in the novels where Guy, as a character, is to act in a way which will have an important effect on the lives of other characters and on the larger span of action of the series of novels.

In these pages Guy delivers Helena's note to Dominic, and so becomes partly responsible for the fiasco which follows, when Dominic and Helena elope, leaving Wentworth McLeish - Helena's intended husband - standing complacently unaware at the altar. It is perfectly true, as Guy says, that he was not fully aware of the significance of his action - "I also felt

1. John Keats to George and Thomas Keats, 21 December 1817.

guilty at delivering the letter, though I would have felt worse if I had not done so."¹ Before he delivers the note, his intellectual processes tell him both 'yes' and 'no', so he leaves it for something deeper in himself to decide. That Guy is compelled by the voice of his inner self to deliver the note to Dennis.

What is particularly interesting at this point is Boyd's method, which makes acceptable, even to a reader who places more weight than Boyd does on man's powers of reasoning, the view that decisions can be made in this way. Guy himself tells us that he was living "in a cloud of unknowing, not realizing the implication or effect of half the things ... [he] did",² and goes on to record the episode quite simply on the level of action.

The reason these pages are successful, and that we not only find Guy's action convincing, but are moved by it, is that although Guy is not responding intellectually to the demands of the situation, neither is he responding in an arbitrary way. His responses are in accord with that final arbiter, the "essential self".

1. *A Difficult Young Man*, p.264.
2. *ibid.*, p.263.

In this instance we have in part seen that "essential self" in the process of being created. The past, which has been responsible for creating this self, is recalled in a precise, though far from explicit way, making clear the fact that Guy is compelled by the voice of his inner self to deliver the note to Dominic.

The episode really begins with the scene in which Helena is showing relations her trousseau. Her lack of interest in it is clear. There is no real involvement of the self. "Helena answered ... [Baba's] questions about the dresses as if she had little to do with them, and she called them 'the' not 'my'."¹ On top of this comes Baba's typically stupid and ill-mannered comment: " 'The McLeishes are good sound stock. They've no rotten Spanish blood to make them kill horses and carry on with servant girls'."² A comment of this kind has the power to shock Mildy out of her customary romantic silliness, and in her rebuke to Baba she reveals the dignity and sense which all the Langtons are capable of showing when the situation demands it. Guy too is outraged at Baba's comment, but he tells us that

1. *A Difficult Young Man*, p.258.
2. *ibid.*, p.260.

his anger was nothing compared with Helena's. "Baba had roused her heroic loyalty to her own kind, that quality she shared with Dominic."¹ In this way Helena's marriage with Wentworth comes to reflect the differences between the values of the Langtons and those of the people like Baba, or the McLeishes themselves, with their upholstered ladies, who are making inroads on society. Through the introduction of certain characters and comments, Boyd connects much of the past action of the novel with this scene - all of Baba's hostility to Dominic, his night ride on Tamburlaine, and Diana's behaviour on that occasion.

The way has been prepared for Guy's decision to deliver the note, and on the basis of their childhood experience and the values with which they have grown up, Helena makes her request to Guy: " 'Will you give this to Dominic tonight?' I said I would, and she said, 'Promise?' I nodded, and she added, smiling, 'Cross your breath?' the guarantee we used in our childhood's games."² The introduction of family values has already brought us close to Guy, and Helena's request, made on the basis of their childhood experience, affects us as it affects him.

1. *A Difficult Young Man*, p.260.

2. *ibid.*, p.262.

Guy has to interrupt a small dinner party consisting of his Uncle Bob, Aunt Lucy, Steven, Laura and Dominic, to deliver the note. The introduction of the dinner party is skilful, as it asserts the continuity of the family, the courtesies which are insisted upon and the forms of communication which exist in spite of, or perhaps because of, them. Because he is young, Guy is humoured when he interrupts the dinner, and we feel his slight embarrassment although it is not mentioned, since Guy is determined only to fulfil his mission. When he finally succeeds, having escaped from the dinner table with Dominic, the action is touching:

In the darkness I was aware of the sudden bewilderment that came over him. He stood for a minute without speaking. Then he said, calling me by a name which he had given to me in my childhood, and which came from a character on some blue illustrated plates we used in the nursery: 'I don't think I'll come to the tram with you, Pompey. Goodnight.' He went back into the house, and I did not see him again for seven years.¹

These last words between Guy and Dominic arise out of a world of childhood experience. One recalls the validity Guy gives to the spiritual perception of a child. The whole passage is written with such a sure touch and

1. *A Difficult Young Man*, p.265.

such complete understanding of Guy's predicament at this point, that we not only respond to these suggestions of the past, but we are also given a precise suggestion of their value. For Guy to have behaved otherwise here, one feels, he would have had to throw out the past. In this final scene, Helena and Dominic and Guy are all acting on the basis of their inner selves which, having been shown to us in their childhood, have acquired certain recognizable forms. Given this fact, and the importance of retaining the past - at least the parts of it which are valuable - the final pages of the novel take on a special kind of validity.

The final scene *is* a little melodramatic. Dominic interrupts the wedding of the year by eloping with the bride while the bridegroom and the expensively dressed guests wait at the church. But the action originates deep in the souls of Dominic and Helena - and of Guy himself. In view of the confrontation between their innermost selves and the Babas and Wentworths of their world, the only means of expression open to them would probably have had to be slightly melodramatic. In any case, it is a mistake to assume that this makes the action any less serious. Boyd is showing the surface

action, with all its humour and embarrassment, and at the same time suggesting other levels of experience.

Having said this about Guy, one must notice the change in narrative method which occurs over the four novels, and which is related to the position, both as narrator and character, that Guy occupies in each novel.

The change in perspective which occurs over the four novels reflects Guy's gradual commitment to his subject and his gradual assumption of the artistic perspective. Guy's position as narrator seems to me to follow the stages he goes through in the creative process of revealing the truth about his family, and through them the truth as he sees it about life in general.

In *The Cardboard Crown*, as I suggested, Guy is still unsure of the propriety of his undertaking and still subjects himself to the restraints imposed by his position in time - by the generational scheme of things. In this novel he presents events through the eyes of various people, but suggests as well his own interpretation. In this way he allows things, as much as

possible, to establish their own value, and attempts to prevent certain preconceptions or losses of perspective.

This attempt affects the narrative method in *The Cardboard Crown*, and explains an ambiguity of tone which may at first be bewildering. Guy places himself in a position from which he is able to communicate with an audience whose viewpoints differ. Ambiguity of tone frequently arises from his conscious reference to two sets of values.

An example occurs when Guy is talking, with typical Langton levity, of Austin's idleness:

Austin had conversations with Sir William about his future. He said that he wanted to breed horses and when any comment was made on his idleness, he went off to inspect a site for a stud-farm, but he always came back and said that it was unsuitable. He had originally wanted a stud-farm so that he could have good horses, as a child might say: 'When I grow up I'm going to have a sweet shop.' Austin could now afford what sweets he wanted without the shop.¹

The reference to the sweet shop is a characteristic

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.36.

lapse into the levity typical of the Langtons. It is only possible for Guy to talk in this way to people of his own kind, or to people who can appreciate his viewpoint without assuming that every statement is to be taken at face value. It is not a way of talking which can be used for general communication. If misunderstanding is to be avoided, Guy must qualify what he says, and he does so by referring to a different set of values and, at first sight, by offering us a straight contradiction. Having described Austin in terms which may well suggest that idleness is indeed one of his qualities, Guy goes on to say in the next paragraph that "Austin was never an idler", and to explain that although he had probably not married Alice because he knew she had money, he was "...untouched by the modern idea that it is dishonourable to marry a girl with a great deal more money than oneself...." Guy concludes the paragraph by reverting once more to a witty flourish typical of the Langton language:

Austin was more like the saintly Alyosha Karamazov, who was indifferent as to who paid for his food and shelter, though he was a quite unconscious parasite, and would not have sponged on anyone who could ill afford it. Also he would not have cared to live with the poor.¹

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.36.

This apparent contradiction is central to Guy's view of the world and arises from his awareness of different viewpoints and of the different meanings which different terms, like 'idleness', can assume. Guy's position in this novel acknowledges different sets of values and allows various viewpoints and interpretations to be presented. For the most part he himself stands in a mid-way position, placing one interpretation beside another, suggesting alternative viewpoints, or, at the appropriate moment, allowing Alice's diary to speak for itself. Thus Guy creates an apparently fluid and flexible world which is, nevertheless, given its form from his own power of observation and the view of life to which it has given rise.

In *A Difficult Young Man*, since Guy himself is now a character in the story he tells, the shifts in perspective become more numerous as he alternates between his childhood and his adult view of the action he is describing, as well as between his own view and other people's views. Whereas in *The Cardboard Crown*, much of Guy's tone is influenced by the difficulty of his position mid-way between two sets of values, in *A Difficult Young Man* he is more sure of his own

position and sufficiently confident to make explicit those methods of revealing character he had used unobtrusively in *The Cardboard Crown*. In that novel Alice is revealed in action. We see her coming to terms with her situation, we see her as she sees herself and as others see her, but through all of this we have the unmistakable impression that we see her as she *is*. The impression, given Alice's character and her own reserve, seems even stronger for the reticence Guy displays. Towards Dominic, his attitude is very different. The same problems of respect and authority do not come between his desire to present characters as they are. In this novel Guy is beginning to abandon himself to his subject and is motivated primarily by his desire to get to the bottom of Dominic's character. The same principles underly the method he uses, but now, partly because of the closer relationship between Guy and Dominic, the method, despite the shifts between Guy's childhood and adult views, becomes more direct.

In *Outbreak of Love* the adoption of a new perspective is obvious from the opening pages, where Guy begins with a general statement of observed truth and continues with a new assumption of authorial

knowledge and confidence. Guy begins to remove himself as a character in the novels and, as narrator, he begins to stand back from his material. He does not involve us in the process of creation as he does in the first two novels. This change in method is made without comment, but the links to earlier novels are made clear at the beginning. The novel opens with a general statement:

Our minds are like those maps at the entrance to the Metro stations in Paris. They are full of unilluminated directions. But when we know where we want to go and press the right button, the route is illuminated before us in electric clarity.... The right button is more often pressed by some accident than by our own choice, as when a line of poetry or a glimpse through a doorway may show us where we long to go.¹

This statement takes us back to *The Cardboard Crown* and to Alice's diary entry: "I sometimes think I see what the pattern of our lives ought to be."² It is significant that in *The Cardboard Crown* this idea is revealed by Alice and that by the third novel it has

1. *Outbreak of Love*, p.5.
2. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.163.

become a general statement made without apology and stated as a fact. It is as a direct result of Guy's role as artist within the novels that a change of perspective of this kind takes place.

Two other aspects of Guy's position in *Outbreak of Love* should be mentioned. First, over the three novels he gradually covers a shorter space of time and a smaller area of interest. In *Outbreak of Love* the central concern, Diana's finding of herself, is a concern Guy himself has experienced, both personally and through the novels he has already written. Secondly, his removal as narrator is made possible by the general movement of the subject from past to present. By the third novel the reader is in possession of an added dimension. The characters have, by this time, become part of a larger scheme. They have a meaningful past and exist within a given social context.

In *When Blackbirds Sing* Guy, both as character and as narrator, does not directly appear. This time there is no need of him. By now we have come through the world of the three previous novels with Guy and are aware of the problems; and by now we, like him, have a view of life and a past into which experience

must be placed to gain its true definition. We know, too, that Guy himself has fought in the war, that his own experience lies behind his understanding of, and his total commitment to, the telling of Dominic's story.

With each novel, then, the focus of attention becomes more specific and Guy removes himself from the novels, gradually assuming the role of omniscient author, and stabilizing the perspective in which events are being viewed. It should be clear from this movement that the structure of the series does not depend on obvious schematic links, but on subtle shifts in perspective, the placing of one novel beside another to define the action of both, and the gradual removal of Guy as he becomes totally committed to his subject in *When Blackbirds Sing*.

This is, in a general way, Guy's position in the novels. His own artistic search is reflected in his changing position throughout the novels and the changing method of narration. But the view of the artist is only a part of the total view presented by the novels. The material Guy works with reveals to

him many things, and through him Boyd introduces his main themes and establishes a coherent view of life, which accommodates and defines the action of the novels.

after a Tourak dinner party. As he enters the lobby at Westhill, he is greeted by his young artist cousin, Guy's relation to the themes of the novels is most conveniently revealed by looking at the opening chapter of *The Cardboard Crown*, one of the most concentrated and fully dramatized passages of the series. This chapter may almost be seen as a microcosm of the world of the novels. As the quotation from Proust suggests, Guy is at that stage of his own life where "...the soul of the child that we were, and the souls of the dead from whom we spring, come and bestow upon us in handfuls their treasures and their calamities."¹

This chapter is concerned with the series of events which lead to Guy's recognition of the truth and personal relevance of Proust's statement, and so to his decision to write the novels.

As Guy nears Westhill, he uses terms to describe his surroundings. The action of the chapter takes place in the present, when Guy Langton, now middle-aged, is living at, and in the process of restoring, the family house

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.7.

outside Melbourne, where he had lived as a child. When the series opens, Guy, with a sneering reference to his brother Dominic playing on his mind, is driving back to Westhill after a Toorak dinner party. As he enters the lobby at Westhill, he is greeted by his young artist cousin, Julian Byngham. It is in the course of the conversation they have together that most of the themes of the novels are touched upon and so, unobtrusively and naturally, introduced. By the end of the chapter Guy discovers the French entries in his grandmother's diaries - and decides that here, after all, are the seeds of his "one real book."

The theme of the past, one of the most significant themes, is introduced, of course, in the very first sentence, but throughout the chapter it is never far below the surface action. To show exactly how this is so, would be to re-write the chapter - I can merely suggest the way in which the theme is present. As Guy nears Westhill, he uses terms to describe his surroundings which arise from an awareness, not only of the past, but also of the relationship between past and present:

At last I left the Prince's Highway, and roared up the hill, where my grandfather eighty years earlier

had driven his four-in-hand and blown his coaching horn. I passed the smart new gate of Burns the dairy farmer, and came to my own, which was removed from its posts, one of which was knocked askew, while the gate itself, old and weather-stained, leaned against the stump of a fallen tree.¹

In these few lines, and without any specific comment, Guy's awareness of the past, and of the passing of a way of life, is revealed. There is a sense in which the world he lives in now 'belongs' to Burns the dairy farmer, with his smart new gate, but also a sense in which the dilapidated Westhill, though out of step, is richer. As Guy enters the house, he views Westhill as itself embodying a somewhat discordant association of past and present. In the drawing room:

There was nothing ... later than 1780, and in the soft light from the chandelier its beauty was a little deathly, the grey walls only relieved by the velvet and satin in bewigged portraits, and the rusty pink and pale gold of the aubusson carpet²

And Guy himself is perfectly aware of the "almost

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.7.
2. *ibid.*, p.12.

surrealist incongruity of this room, set down in the midst of a derelict garden in the Australian bush."¹

But it is not only through its civilized and sophisticated interior that Westhill is a custodian of the past. It contains within it, as well as the sophisticated European furniture, the terrible crucifixion painting painted by Dominic in the last weeks of his life. As the crucifixion painting dominates the room Guy has been forced to turn into a chapel, so the figure of Dominic begins to dominate this first chapter. It is inevitable, even at this stage, that Dominic must play a large part in the novels Guy feels he must write. Guy's concentration on Dominic is, of course, significant in itself, but it also leads to the introduction of several of Guy's ideas about the nature of things, and so, unobtrusively, the themes of the novels, most of them interrelated, rise naturally to the level of action.

The interrelationship of themes in this chapter can be seen in the way Dominic enters the conversation through the introduction of the theme of

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.12.

Aristocracy. As Guy and Julian talk about the propriety of revealing in a novel the truth about the people one knows, Guy introduces his concept of a vertical division in society:

At the top on the Right is the duke, and at the top on the Left is the international financier.... On the Left ... are ... all men whose sole reason for working is to make money.... We on the right cannot make money. When we have it, it has only come to us as an accident following on our work, or from luck.¹

Although Guy is only half serious, these ideas are later developed.

It becomes clear throughout the novels that the chief virtue of the aristocratic way of life is that it allows life to be regulated in accordance with the demands of the individual human soul. Because of this, it represents the ultimate in civilization - its values are in harmony with man's natural desires. No details in the first chapter of *The Cardboard Crown* are unconnected, and the presentation of this idea of the aristocracy leads naturally to the introduction of Dominic,

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.13.

and is further revealed in Guy's attitude to Dudley the hound, who acts absolutely in accord with his animal nature - with "the superb integrity of animals." Dudley takes his place amongst the valuable furniture more naturally than would the people at the Toorak dinner party from which Guy has just returned, and he is seen by Guy and Julian with the eyes of the artist and an appreciation quite above material considerations: "...the rusty pink and pale gold of the aubusson carpet, on which Dudley now sat, dribbling horribly at the biscuits, but looking as if the whole room had been designed only as a setting for his golden coat. Julian pointed this out"¹

With this background of art and aristocracy, the conversation proceeds naturally, by way of Julian's paintings, to Dominic:

'Your painting' [Guy says to Julian, is] traditional, rooted in nature, Catholic, it breathes the inescapable sorrows of the human race. It denies flatly that science can cure the soul of man'
 'You're trying to get away from the novel.'
 'Not at all. What I have been saying has to do with it. All

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.12.

these people you want me to write about were far on the right side of the pale. One must understand what that means before you can understand them. I might write this book, and let all the skeletons come tumbling out of the cupboards, but allow only you to read it. Then you would bear our curse in your heart,.....'

'What curse?' asked Julian.

'Doesn't it appear to you that we are cursed? I don't know where it comes from, probably the duque de Teba,'¹

At the mention of the duque de Teba, the Spanish ancestor who because he did not have the power to create beauty, destroyed it by murdering two altar boys in a cellar, Guy's mind goes immediately to Dominic. He and Julian then proceed to the chapel, where they are to select brocades to cover Dominic's painting. Guy, although unable to leave the paintings uncovered, is also unable to paint it out; and Julian has been unable to relate it to his own murals, which cover the other three walls of the chapel. As they enter the chapel, their eyes turn "automatically to Dominic's painting" : " 'It is pure duque de Teba,' I said. 'So is yours. Those murals could only be painted by someone whose ancestors had looked into

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.14.

hell'.... 'It's the highest praise I could give you. All I mean is that in your blood is the awareness of evil combined with an obsession with the good.'" ¹

Through this conversation, and through Dominic's and Julian's paintings, the notion of hereditary influence is, almost unavoidably, introduced, and along with it Guy's view about the intermingling of good and evil in most human situations. Both notions are to become themes of the novels Guy will write.

The origin of the evil strain in the Langton family - a strain which is obvious in the paintings of both Dominic and Julian, Guy assigns to the duque de Teba. Though he considers this hereditary explanation at least partly valid, he employs it primarily as a kind of 'sign-post', a way of explaining or pointing to processes which are apparent in the lives of his characters. This is a characteristic manner of speaking which belongs to Guy and is based on his belief that the truth cannot be revealed by science, or even, with any accuracy or precision, by words. So he is forced to use an oblique suggestive method. Unless one understands this method of proceeding and its motives, one will be likely to pull Guy up on a

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, pp.15-16.

comment which, although superficially suspect, has been knowingly left as merely suggestive of the truth, or put in simply to point to areas of experience which are inaccessible.

As Guy and Julian leave the chapel, Julian suggests that they bring in Alice's diaries from the harness room to which they have been relegated by Dominic. As they re-enter the house carrying the black tin uniform case which contains, among other things, the diaries, Guy feels that he is bringing back into the house the ghosts of the past:

Some ancient peoples had a rite, performed in the spring, of 'carrying out death' from their houses. Dominic may have had something of the same idea. The things which he had put out in the stables and the laundry were all those which had to do with the past, particularly the past of our family. He may have been trying, in a desperate, negative and superstitious way, to find new life. He may have been pouring contempt on all his pride. I felt, a little uneasily, that Julian and I were putting the process in reverse.¹

Guy *is* putting the process in reverse, but doing so is an act to which the novels give positive value

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, pp.18-19.

and about which Guy himself gradually ceases to feel uneasy.

I have stressed Guy's own development, or at least the process he is going through, in the novels. He has, I have suggested, made a special point of telling us that had he been sent to a public school, he would not only have failed to write the novels, but would also have regarded all forms of art as unworthy. He would have been hampered by artificial conventions. As it is, he has a flexibility, a fluid capacity to perceive the value of experience outside his own. In a sense, Dominic's experience of war, recounted in *When Blackbirds Sing*, is the most significant thing this capacity of his reveals. In the earlier novels, Guy not only provides the background to this novel, but also demonstrates his own capacity to enter fully into the experience of other characters. We are told, at the end of *Outbreak of Love*, that Guy himself goes to the war. Given the logic of the novels, it makes perfect sense that, as Guy's personal experience becomes closely identified with that of the person he is writing about, he withdraws himself and withholds discussion of the

process of artistic creation. In the earlier novels he has built a picture of his characters from a series of fragments. In the fourth novel this is no longer necessary. All of those fragments have formed themselves in our mind; we have a knowledge of and a confidence in Guy, and we, like him, are in apposition to be shown Dominic's experience directly.

CHAPTER III

STYLE AND LANGUAGE

To separate style from narrative method is in this instance to pursue a somewhat arbitrary course. Guy and the style of his narration cannot really be separated; a way of life becomes in him a way of speaking. The change this way of speaking undergoes over the four novels reflects, in turn, Guy's position as artist and his changing relationship to his subject. Yet it is important that the style be discussed because through it, just as through the use of the narrator, one can see reflections of the view of life which takes shape over the four novels.

It is customary to describe Boyd's style as 'witty', 'urbane' or 'sophisticated'. These are apt terms, yet the style is distinguished by its capacity to accommodate more than they suggest. The Langton family characteristics and way of life lead to a

sophisticated and witty speech which Guy, naturally, has inherited. Yet he is also touched with the Teba influence and able to be in touch with the past and the achievements of the past in a quite personal way. If his language has the sharp, slightly brittle wit of a Langton Sunday luncheon, it also bears with a natural ease the weight of European tradition, in its constant allusions to the world of learning, literature and art. It is not simply the presence of these allusions which demands attention, but the way in which they are introduced and affect the texture of the novels.

Throughout the first three novels Guy frequently alludes to works of literature, or talks quite freely and naturally in half quotations, suggesting that the accumulated creative work of the past is not a separate part of existence, nicely packaged up and labelled, but a living presence. It has become a natural part of life.

When Josie enters the party at which Wolfie plays his newly created preludes, Guy comments on the beauty of young girls and the kind of attention it

demands "... until that bloom fades and they are aware that something has gone from their lives, a brightness has left the air, but they do not know what it is."¹ The allusion to Nashe's poem,² contained in his comment, is probably largely sub-conscious, but it touches the observation with a wider significance. These lines from Nashe add an extra shade to the picture:

Beauty is but a flower
Which wrinkles will devour;
Brightness falls from the air,
Queens have died young and fair,
Dust hath closed Helen's eye.
I am sick, I must die:
 Lord, have mercy on us!

Similar echoes are set up in *The Cardboard Crown* when Guy says of Julian's comments on his great-grandparents' portraits:

I was a little startled. The hungry generations had at last trodden into oblivion my grandfather, whose forceful and highly-coloured personality, even after his death had dominated the scenes of my earliest childhood.³

The fleeting reference to Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale"

1. *Outbreak of Love*, p.52.
2. "Adieu, Farewell, Earth's Bliss".
3. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.9.

illustrates the kind of connections which are made easily and naturally in Guy's mind. Observations made by poets and artists of the past are feeding in to experience of the present. As the reader recalls the lines of Keats

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down

he may recognize in Guy a similar desire for permanence. This reinforces the original observation of transience and mortality, of the movement of time and passing of ways of life, of the submergence of certain characters such as Austin, and of the passing of one language and the beginning of another. Guy's way of talking is common to other members of the Langton family, and it is quite natural that Diana's first comment to Russell Lockwood should be "I expect you've come back trailing clouds of civilization"¹ which is, of course, a half quotation from Wordsworth.²

There are occasions on which Guy refers simply to literary characters or titles. One of these

1. *Outbreak of Love*, p.8.
2. Boyd himself talks in this way. See *Day of My Delight*, p.46, where he writes "...to me they came trailing clouds of glory."

references which touches on central concerns in the novels occurs in *A Difficult Young Man*, when Guy delivers Helena's note to Dominic just before her marriage.¹ He tells us that he was living in a "cloud of unknowing", not realizing the implication or effect of half the things he did. This is not an arbitrary reference to the mediaeval mystical writing *The Cloud of Unknowing*. As with the other quotations, the significance is fundamental. Guy, as I suggested in the previous chapter is, at this point in the novel, in a situation where intellectual processes are inadequate. In any case he is not in a position to employ them. What he does is act in accordance with something deeper in himself, based on childhood knowledge and experience. And one of the ways in which the novels place value on this kind of activity is through the allusion Guy makes to *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Some lines from that work make clear what is being evoked:

When you first begin, you find only darkness, and as it were a cloud of unknowing. You don't know what this means except that in your will you feel a simple steadfast intention reaching out towards God. Do what you will, this darkness and this cloud remain between you and God,

1. *A Difficult Young Man*, p.263.

and stop you both from seeing him in the clear light of rational understanding, and from experiencing his loving sweetness in your affection. Reconcile yourself to wait in this darkness as long as is necessary, but still go on longing after him whom you love. For if you are to feel him or to see him in this life, it must always be in this cloud, in this darkness. And if you will work hard at what I tell you, I believe that through God's mercy you will achieve this very thing.¹

Guy is not alluding specifically to these lines of course, but they contain the central idea which lies behind his words - that a truth exists which can only be found in the cloud of unknowing, the state of knowing which arises from unknowing in worldly terms.

Allusions or half-quotations of this kind may be found too frequently to list, but each time the quotations are apposite and wide ranging, though, significantly, not taken from obscure places. Many, for example, are from Shakespeare or the Romantic and Victorian poets. I shall refer to just one more, since, again, its implications and allusions relate to central concerns in the novels. Guy is talking of Wentworth McLeish, the wealthy young squatter Helena

1. *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Penguin books, Harmondsworth, 1961), translated by Clifton Wolters, pp.53-54.

is to marry:

I felt that he would have only contempt for those things for which I still had the most tender veneration, things which might be symbolized by a Franciscan washing the feet of a beggar, an exiled Bourbon princess selling her last jewels, or a great poet whose work did not pay. I saw also that he would be incapable of dissolving a quarrel in laughter, and I knew the intruder on my ancient home.¹

The lines from the end of Arnold's "The Scholar Gypsy" are appropriate:

And saw the merry Grecian coaster come,
Freighted with amber grapes, and Chian wine,
Green, bursting figs, and tunnies steep'd in
brine -
And knew the intruders on his ancient home.

Guy is aware that a new class is forcing its way onto the social scene, the goods it offers being chiefly, great wealth, practical energy and a superficial smartness. The introduction of Arnold's poem at this point extends the significance of the observation from a particular to a more general level. It is characteristic of Guy's method of proceeding that he brings in the central idea of a work in this way. The literature of

1. *A Difficult Young Man*, p.254.

the past exists for him in these terms - the present is in a very real sense the result of the past.

The tradition of visual arts is just as important in Guy's language as literature. There are many incidental references to art, such as this one from *A Difficult Young Man*. "People in the grip of emotion should be fat; large, blowsy Rubens figures with plenty of tears."¹ And it is not surprising that Guy finds a comparison from the world of art when he describes his own method of revealing Dominic's character: "...I can only proceed like the painter Sisley, who when he wished to convey an effect of green, put a dot of blue on his canvas, and then a dot of yellow beside it."²

Allusions to the world of art are continually made in the first three novels, but, in *When Blackbirds Sing*, images from the visual arts figure even more importantly, and the literary allusions almost disappear. The understated references to the war are balanced by allusions to tradition made mostly in terms of visual art. In this novel the style changes markedly. One of the changes is that there is none, or very little, of

1. *A Difficult Young Man*, p.199.
2. *ibid.*, p.26.

the wit we have grown accustomed to. The language is simple and quiet, but it has sufficient strength for the purposes of the novel. One of the sources of its strength is the way in which images from the arts are drawn upon to introduce the traditional world, its falling away and, worse, its distortion in Dominic's mind.

Twice Sylvia is described in terms of a portrait: "It was cold, but bright and sunny. She was wearing a dark coat with a sable collar, and a black velvet hat, so that her fair skin and her golden hair shone out as in some Renaissance portrait."¹ And, again, when after making love she and Dominic dine together in her flat: "Sylvia again wore a dress of stiff yellow silk, and in the shaded light of the candles looked as if she were a portrait in the room."² Sylvia, in Dominic's mind if not in any deeper sense, is aristocratic; she is a part of his past and of the Langton's life in England. But that life is passing, and with it the world of art is passing from everyday life. The pictures which glowed richly on the walls of Waterpark have

1. *When Blackbirds Sing*, p.48.

2. *ibid.*, p.88.

now gone and are replaced by the books of a dull academic who has rented the house. So too the colourful pictures have been removed from the ward in Hermione's house, leaving the walls stark and white - a fact which Dominic observes and comes to regard as appropriate. The reason he does so is made clear by his visit to the chapel at Waterpark. He comes to renounce all the beauty, all the religious achievement of the past. Tradition is linked in his mind with the senseless brutality of a war in which he has been forced by authority to take part:

No Langtons had been buried here for two generations. The last was Cousin Thomas, to whose memory his grandfather had put up that window blazing with escutcheons. As a boy he had been proud of its brilliance and grandeur. Now it had no meaning for him Or, if it had a meaning it was a deathly one, not because it was a memorial to the dead, but because all those shields were themselves part of the panoply of battle and murder and sudden death. They should be taken from the church, as the pictures had been taken from Hermione's dining-room, to make it a place of healing.

Yet how had he felt in that hollow room? More deathly than peaceful, with its breathing colour gone. Was it possible that the only things that coloured his own life, that made his blood flow, were in themselves deathly? He wanted to escape the past.¹

1. *When Blackbirds Sing*, p.155.

The constant references to works of art give to the novels this background of breathing colour, and contribute to the creation of a world, not merely a description of it. The result of superficial contact with art - when art becomes little more than a supply of impressive sounding names and terms with which to impress one's companions at the dinner table - is obvious in the twins' conversation in *Outbreak of Love*. The twins are presented with a delightful display of wit, but it is clear that the break of genuine and natural contact with the past is entering the Langton family itself. It is perhaps most apparent in conversations about art. When they visit Guy's artist brother at Warrandyte, Cynthia talks with gay abandon of "significant form" - a term she has picked up from an English review, and has the following conversation with Guy's brother:

"We don't live in the world of the Old Masters," she said.

"Their world is eternal. It's the natural world."

"Perhaps the time has come for us to rise above the natural," said Cynthia.

"How are we going to do that - by fitting ourselves with tin entrails?" asked Brian brutally.¹

1. *Outbreak of Love*, p.166.

One has the sense that Dilton and Waterpark, and their owners, are in touch with the riches of the past in a way that the twins would never comprehend. Houses in Boyd's novels frequently take on something of the nature and quality of the lives lived in them,¹ and come to be used almost metaphorically. This happens, for example, with Waterpark. On Alice's first arrival there she is impressed by the harmony between indoors and out and the feeling that the house has a soul.² Throughout the novels Waterpark comes to stand for a life lived in close contact with the past and in absolute harmony with its surrounding. Since the house is given this almost symbolic significance, we are made more acutely aware of the change, and the implications of the change, which comes over it when the academic Mr Cecil moves in as tenant. Even Diana's Brighton house is described as having absorbed something of the life lived in it. Diana, as she prepares to leave it, sees the house in these terms:

1. It is a view commonly expressed by English writers whose lives have been connected with country houses. V. Sackville-West writes in *All Passion Spent* (Penguin books, Harmondsworth, First pub. 1931. Reprinted 1940), p.65 :

Nor could one expect them to feel how strange a thing a house was, especially an empty house; not merely a systematic piling-up of brick on brick ... but an entity with a life of its own

2. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.45.

The walls seemed to reproach her, to send out emanations they had absorbed from the children's lives. All their laughter and their pains seemed to have been absorbed into their surroundings, into the things they used.¹

Once one has become aware of the significance houses assume in the novels, it is easy to look back to Guy's comment in the first chapter of *The Cardboard Crown*, when he talks of the "...almost surrealist incongruity of this room, set down in the midst of a derelict garden in the Australian bush",² and to see that this is not only an accurate description of the house and its setting. The incongruity is, at a deeper level, a reflection of the impossibility of a Waterpark in a Westhill setting - that is, the ways of life which become associated with these two houses.

And in association with houses we find the nature and personality of characters reflected in the decorations and adornments they add to the place they inhabit. The references to such signs of taste are characteristic of Boyd's writing, and important since

1. *Outbreak of Love*, p.176.
2. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.12.

it has been fashionable for many modern writers to ignore externals when determining personality, and to go straight to the dark regions of the sub-conscious. Boyd knows that there is no direct access to these dark regions, but that their nature is expressed in the nature of the surface. So he frequently asks us to form a notion of a character on the basis of his manners, speech, clothes and general bearing. Colonel Rogers, for example, reflects his personality in the decorations he has in his house. These are mainly weapons of war. On his mantelpiece he displays shrunken heads, and Guy tells us that "The Colonel had given up his hopes of turning me into an English gentleman when he found that I preferred Dresden china to skulls."¹ In a similar way, and in a very short space, we learn one of the most important things about Miss Vio Chambers - her capacity for simple creative expression:

On the way home Miss Chambers picked some wild cherry blossom from the hedge-row.

When we arrived back at Waterpark, Dominic had not yet returned, but he came in about twenty minutes later. Miss Chambers had placed the cherry blossom before a console

1. *A Difficult Young Man*, p.151.

mirror at the end of the drawing-room, and the beauty and generosity of the arrangement seemed to reflect her own nature, as the dazzling white sprays were reflected in the mirror.¹

A similar scene from *Outbreak of Love* influences our idea of Diana. She and Russell prepare an impromptu supper:

Diana pulled out a low wide tea-table and opened it. She went out and returned in a few minutes with glasses, knives and forks, a bottle of hock and a bowl of passion-fruit and oranges. She put the things on the table with the candles from the writing table.

"You take elemental things and make them elegant," he said, looking appreciatively at the table. "That is civilization."²

Russell makes a similar kind of statement about Diana, when, at Arthur's party, she adds some yellow petals to the floral design the children have made on the sun dial. Russell tells her she adds a stroke of genius to all she touches. And this is true of Diana; it is true of the way she dresses and of the way she behaves. Diana's creative ability finds expression not in art, but in life.

1. *A Difficult Young Man*, p.180.
2. *Outbreak of Love*, pp.96-97.

But through the style of the novels art and life enjoy a comfortable relationship. Art does not remain a separate thing, but belongs in houses where it takes from and gives to the life around it. When, in *A Difficult Young Man*, Boyd talks in artistic terms about his method of revealing Dominic's character, he makes explicit what has been implicit in all that I have so far said about the language of art in the novels. He there stresses discrimination and the natural ability to recognize the value of art and of people:

...just as a collector will value more a stained and mildewed Memlinc found in the cellar, than a two-acre canvas by a Victorian Royal Academician. That is really what I am seeking for throughout this book, the Memlinc in the cellar, the beautiful portrait of the human face, lost in the dissolution of our family and our religion.¹

It is not surprising that the focus of the view of life being expressed through the novels should be revealed in artistic terms. The Memlinc in the cellar is the metaphoric expression of that essential self wherein resides the beauty of man's nature. Memlinc's paintings are not a random choice, and the significance

1. *A Difficult Young Man*, p.230.

of the reference to them can best be understood by looking at almost any of the portraits. They reveal that serenity, simplicity and spirituality typical of fifteenth century painting and not to be found outside it in the same form. "The Portrait of a Man" and the donor portrait of the "Diptych of Martin van Nieuwenhove", painted with the greatest respect for the human face, epitomize this quiet, confident and accomplished style.

The reference to Memlinc suggests that the novels are written out of a belief in the mystery of man's nature - that something which exists beyond the level of everyday concerns, untouched by the passage of time. This does not mean that Boyd turns his back on the world. Far from it. He uses the social customs, the social existence of a group of people, putting down all that he knows about them, all that he has learned from them. But he orders his material so that it reveals a view of life which involves seeing within the lives of people the "beautiful portrait" which underlies all their socially imposed behaviour.

It is not only in the assertion of tradition

through the style of the novels that the reader becomes aware of the view of life governing both the presentation of the material and his own interpretation of it. Other aspects of the style are just as important: the way in which details are given a metaphoric quality and certain scenes made almost symbolic in significance as they bring one action into relation with another.

Perhaps the most striking example of details given a metaphoric quality is the frequent reference to the damp patch beneath the staircase at Waterpark. It appears first in *The Cardboard Crown* and is continually introduced so that an echo is set up throughout the novels. At first a simple observation, it gradually becomes associated with the passing of time and the passing of a way of life. The presence of the damp patch nags away like a dull ache, a signal which may be temporarily ignored, but which, if allowed to persist, becomes the symptom of some major disorder. And with each appearance of the damp patch we are forced to become aware that the Langtons are being subtly forced from England.

One of the first references to the damp patch is made by Alice when she returns briefly to England with Mildy:

It is a little depressing here now, the house not in good repair. I think that Mr Langton must be short of money There is the same damp patch on the wall of the main staircase.¹

Similar reference is made to it several times throughout *The Cardboard Crown* and *A Difficult Young Man* until, towards the end of *A Difficult Young Man*, Guy makes explicit its significance. It is a significance which we, like Steven, are already aware of. The damp patch becomes a sign of the seeds of the future apparent in the present:

Our endings seemed generally to be on the grey side. A sense of discomfort and of things going wrong were omens of the approaching end. To illustrate this I mention a very trivial thing which seemed to depress Steven....There had for years been an apparently incurable damp patch on the staircase, sometimes disappearing for as long as two or three years and then coming back again....It now

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.115.

appeared again.... But now it increased Steven's feeling of worry.¹

Although there is nothing supernatural about it, and its cause is found to be very much of this world, its reappearance in *When Blackbirds Sing*, is strangely appropriate:

He [Mr Cecil] took Dominic from room to room, a door-handle was needed here; a piece of skirting broken there; and the mysterious patch of damp had appeared again on the staircase wall.²

Many other things in the novels are treated similarly. Among them is Dudley the labrador, who within a short space in the opening chapter of *The Cardboard Crown* comes to represent a kind of animal nobility - he is a being capable of acting in accord with his own inner nature. The idea this suggests is more fully developed in the treatment of the theme of aristocracy, and in particular of Dominic. Dominic's crucifixion painting also assumes a significance far beyond itself. Its dominance over its surroundings is felt throughout the first chapter of *The Cardboard Crown*, and to some

1. *A Difficult Young Man*, pp.239-240.
2. *When Blackbirds Sing*, pp.23-24.

extent throughout the four novels.

Scenes in the novels come to be used in much the same way as these details. There are many examples one could point to, but there are two scenes in particular to which Boyd attaches a kind of symbolic significance and which I shall look at in some detail, since they relate to two of the most central themes and suggest clearly the method which is being used to reveal a coherent view of life.

The first of these is the final scene of *Outbreak of Love*, where Diana has lunch with Wolfie on the veranda of their house in the country: "... while the winter sunlight gleam[s] on the hock bottle, and tinge[s] with pale gold the far purple forests of Gippsland."¹ Contained in the imagery of these lines are suggestions of the two things which have contributed to Diana's acceptance of herself and her love for Wolfie: her relationship with Russell Lockwood and Wolfie's relationship with Mrs Montaubyn. By evoking earlier scenes of the novel, Boyd is able to suggest the complex

1. *Outbreak of Love*, p.254.

nature of human situations. The hock bottle on the lunch table Diana shares with Wolfie brings to mind "... the empty hock bottle, somehow so much more suggestive of wanton gaiety than a mere claret or burgundy bottle, lifting its elegant neck between ... [herself and Russell]." ¹ This is one of the central scenes of Diana's and Russell's relationship - a scene at the height of mutual attraction, before decisions and demands make their entry. The "pale gold" and "purple forests" recall in a similar way Mrs Montaubyn - in particular the love-making scene where she is described in these terms, and the concert where, through Wolfie's music, her presence is so graphically suggested.

Contained in this scene with Diana and Wolfie, then, are the conditions which made it possible, conditions which determine its nature and guide our interpretation of it. As a result the action of the scene is made to reveal some of the conclusions Guy has reached about human experience. We are not only told by Guy, but see for ourselves, how good and evil are inextricably mixed, how nothing in life is totally unattached

1. *Outbreak of Love*, p.104.

and isolated, no human situation just what it seems on the surface. Everything is part of a continuing process.

A scene in *When Blackbirds Sing* consolidates in a similar way much of the earlier action, and concentrates within itself much that is important in the novel. The scene I refer to is Dominic's farewell to Hollis:

He had a dreadful feeling of inadequacy. He should have said something, done something that Hollis expected. Should he like St Francis have bent and kissed that hideous cheek? Then he thought what a beastly thing that would have been - when the boy offered him his whole face, to kiss only the side that was distorted and horrible, ignoring what he still had of life and health, the smooth fresh skin of his youth.¹

Dominic's recognition that he must still acknowledge and accept the beautiful side of Hollis's face, is a clarification of all that he has so far experienced. He has been trying to unify his existence, trying to reconcile authority with personal morality. One of the main contrasts made between Dominic and Sylvia

1. *When Blackbirds Sing*, pp.169-170.

is that she divides life into compartments, thereby making inconsistencies tolerable. This Dominic cannot do. He cannot isolate his shooting of the German boy. It is connected to human experience at a deeper level and cannot be set aside under arbitrary labels such as 'soldierly action', 'war', even 'self-defence'. It certainly is not, for Dominic, something that 'had to be done'. In the same way he does not isolate his sexual and religious experiences - he is striving towards some kind of unification of experience. When he first sees Hollis's face full on, Dominic offers him his hand, accepting him in spite of what has happened and ignoring his injury. He comes to realize that this is less than honest and a distortion of experience. He must accept *all* of Hollis, but continue to see and be able to concentrate on that which retains life, health and beauty. Dominic's realization involves an adjustment of vision, and it is this new vision that governs the structure of the series of novels. Dominic discovers what Guy is searching for: "the Memlinc in the cellar."

The reader is asked, by the style of *When Black-birds Sing*, to undergo a shift in perspective, or adjustment of vision, similar to that which Dominic himself has undergone

Boyd's polished, witty and urbane style has undergone a marked change. There is much less of the sparkle and wit which in the first three novels is frequently introduced through the Langtons in scenes such as the luncheon party when the family meet Baba for the first time, or in Guy's comments on the twins, or in Arthur's manner of describing the past. In *When Blackbirds Sing* Guy is removed both as character and narrator.¹ He assumes authorial confidence and, without mentioning his sources, tells of Dominic's war experiences. I suggested in the previous chapter that by the fourth novel, Guy is completely committed to his subject. His own personal qualities are submerged, and he comes as close as he can to Dominic's experience. It is natural - though not necessarily conscious on Boyd's part - that Guy's customarily witty way of speaking, which is natural to the Langtons, should be submerged with him and overtaken by an idiom belonging to Dominic, who has never been witty or brilliant in the Langton sense. The novels contain these two ways

1. In itself this implies a change of style. There is no longer the necessity for fluctuation of viewpoint and shift in tone, partly because it is probable that no-one else is really able to 'see' Dominic's tragedy and Guy really believes he is in possession of a truth.

of speaking as reflections of two distinct strains in the Langton family.¹

After the earlier novels, *When Blackbirds Sing* may at first sight appear tonally grey and even and stylistically flat.² There is a muted quality about the language. The toning down and refusal to overdramatise which has been present in the other novels, now becomes dominant. The war itself, which had such a profound effect on Martin Boyd, is described in an unsensational way:

Towards the end of this calm, cold period Burns, strolling along the reserve trench on a sunny April morning, was blown to pieces by a stray shell³

Suddenly in the stillness of the dawn, the serene empty heavens rained down hell. The men climbed out of the trenches and stumbled across under the protection of the barrage. It was as on the evening of the raid. A section would be blotted out by a shell. A man would fall over like a doll.⁴

1. These will be discussed in Chapter V, as they are important in the structure of the series.
2. Brenda Niall described it as a "dull book, flat and heavy and with no real power even in the descriptions of the horrors of war...." "The Double Alienation of Martin Boyd", *Twentieth Century*, xvii (1963), p.206.
3. *When Blackbirds Sing*, p.73.
4. *ibid.*, p.119.

What is striking about these passages is not so much the understated toned-down quality, as the air of unreality in which Boyd shrouds most of the pictures of the war. The description of Burns's death captures precisely the unreal nature of wartime experience. Natural processes continue, the seasons pass as usual from winter to spring. Burns, on a sunny April morning, goes for a stroll - a quite usual English occupation on a fresh sunny April morning - but this time a "stray shell", something quite arbitrary and meaningless, appears and kills him. Similarly, in the second passage there is a dreamlike quality - the heavens rain as usual, but they rain "hell" instead of water, and the men fall down like toys.

That the unreal quality of the war is revealed through the style of the description in such passages, enables us to share Dominic's experiences. The war has just this unreal quality for him, and by experiencing it ourselves we are able to arrive with him at the end of the novel. If we have allowed the writing to have its full effect, the final scenes of the novel will not only be powerful, but perfectly

understandable. Helena's final question, "You're not serious?" will recall the whole of Dominic's experience. We do not need Dominic's answer.

One question which might legitimately be asked is why Boyd chose to tone down his account of the war. Did he in fact choose to do so, or is it simply that he lacks the imaginative power to describe it in terms which would re-create all its horror and brutality? The second question can probably not be answered. What one can show is that the style of this novel is appropriate. It would be destructive to the whole plan of the sequence if the war experience were to dominate - except insofar as it influences Dominic's life.

By understating the horrors of the war, Boyd establishes a perspective for the reader which enables him to see Dominic not only facing the senseless brutality of war, but also reaching a standpoint from which he is able to accept his own moral position, and his most fundamental beliefs and their consequences. Because we are not distracted by the war, we are able to see the process more clearly. Like Dominic in the

final scene with Hollis, we are able to remain aware of the "beautiful portrait" despite what we have been shown of the futility and brutality of the war.

The changing style of the novels, then, reflects Guy's changing role as he gradually removes himself from the novels. And the change in language forces us, as Dominic himself is forced, to discover the "beautiful portrait" which lies beneath the deterioration of the Langton family and the society of which they have been a part.

It may appear that I have paid insufficient attention to certain of Boyd's stylistic skills, but these have received sufficient comment elsewhere¹ for it to be unnecessary for me to do any more here than mention them. One of the chief sources of delight in the novels is the skill with which Boyd is able to catch precise idioms and inflections in the speech of

1. See, in particular, the following articles: G.A. Wilkes, "The Achievement of Martin Boyd"; Leonie Kramer, "Martin Boyd"; C. Wallace-Crabbe, "Martin Boyd and *The Cardboard Crown*" and Brian Elliott, "Martin Boyd : An Appreciation".

his characters. Among the most revealing things about Boyd's characters, in fact, is their conversation. There are, too, extremely shrewd observations of social behaviour - observations touched with wit perhaps, but also with the cruelty which often accompanies precise observation. This way of speaking is part of the language of a society which is passing - the language belonging to the Langtons and to an English aristocracy that assumed the responsibilities of a ruling class, and in return enjoyed the freedom of living for pleasure.

I have chosen to talk in this chapter about those elements of style that contribute to the serious nature of the novels without in any way detracting from the pleasurable quality of the Langton language. One of the essential strengths of the novels is the balance achieved between the serious and the comic. If it would be impossible to read Boyd's work without responding to the fineness of the dialogue, and delighting in the witty, urbane quality, it would also be unfair to read it without acknowledging the presence of an author who is not simply a recorder gifted with a good ear and a good eye, but a man with a view of life whose implications extend beyond the immediate world of the Langton family.

CHAPTER IV

MEN AND WOMEN

What I have said in the last two chapters provides a necessary background for consideration of Boyd's interest in character and his method of depicting character. He has himself stated that the value of a novel lies in its content of humanity.¹ Thus it is not surprising that the centre of interest in his own novels is mankind - what man is, what he can be and should aim at being.

One of Boyd's basic beliefs about the nature of man and of human action is that each individual possesses what he calls an "essential self". It is in a way a theory of innate morality: man's essential self can recognize good and evil, and only when this self becomes distorted or obscured may good be mistaken for evil. Boyd expresses this in *Day of My Delight*

1. "Preoccupations and Intentions", *Southerly*, xxviii (1968), p.90.

when he writes:

When a young man of a thousand years ahead feels delight, the delight we felt is immortal. When he feels the same response to a girl's face, or to an orchard in bloom, or to an aspect of truth, to that extent, apart from all theological speculation, we continue to live.... I do not mean that art forms or social habits or games must be the same, but that man's essential self must cherish the values which the good men of every known civilisation have held to be eternal.¹

The essential self is neither intelligence nor emotion, but something underlying both. In *A Single Flame* Boyd refers to a guiding principle which will enable men to distinguish between good and evil when the authority of the Christian religion and the 'standard of gentleman' have been debunked:

There is still the classical morality. It hardly needs stating but every day it needs reaffirming. Even so, it may be stated as the group of principles on which those men of whatever age or country who have drawn to themselves the universal admiration of the human race, have based their thought and action. Primarily, what is against reason and truth and justice is against the classical morality.²

1. *Day of My Delight*, p.279.
2. *A Single Flame* (J.M.Dent & Sons Ltd., London, 1939), pp.263-264.

There is a comment too in *Day of My Delight* which suggests the way in which Boyd relates the concept of the essential self to individual action. Boyd is talking to a friend of his and saying that the only important thing is to be adjusted to one's environment:

She replied: "Indeed it isn't. The only important thing is to be adjusted to one's self." This showed that even though an agnostic, she recognised the existence of her Holy Ghost, and had realised a truth towards which I was only groping, that when we feel mentally ill-at-ease, it means that we are sinning against our essential selves. This is all we know and all we need to know. The Kingdom of Heaven is within us.¹

Such beliefs are, of course, unfashionable. Modern psychological thinking has aimed at providing explanations for every human motive and action, based on observations of the individual's relation to his environment and his relationships with other people. Boyd's is essentially a view of people which accepts the existence of something beyond the sum total of a person's actions and relationships. It may be that his view is romantic. It may also be that man would have something new to fear if he really were within

1. *Day of My Delight*, p.147.

reach of all the answers or in possession of a total and proven explanation of his existence.

Whether or not one accepts these beliefs, they must be recognized if one is to understand and fully appreciate Boyd's fictional characters. It becomes clear from Guy's narration that all the central characters are proceeding towards that point from which action may be seen for what it is, where the inner self can be recognized and asserted in terms of its relation to the outside world. In other words, through Guy's narration, Boyd establishes the essential elements of a character's inner existence, but establishes them in terms of the social world in which they must find expression.

One of the most immediate results of this view of character is that a question mark is placed over values of conformity and normality. One must conform only to one's essential self and if this self is not distorted one will be acting in one's own and society's best interests. As the major characters in the series are gradually isolated by social change, the conflict between the essential self and the norms of a misguided

society is prepared for.

It is in Dominic that the conflict is made most explicit. He is, and always has been, further removed from social acceptance than anyone in the novels, even within his own family. Among members of his own generation he is completely accepted only by Helena, and even that relationship is threatened at the end of the series by her acceptance of authority and her inability to understand Dominic's position. For the most part Dominic's true nature is more easily recognized by people of an older generation who live a completely different life from that which, by the end of the novels, has become dominant.

It is not surprising that most of Dominic's valuable human contacts are made with people of an earlier generation, since he, more than any other character in the novels, is linked inevitably and inflexibly with the past. Among the significant contacts he makes with an older generation is that with Dane Tunstall, the sister-in-law of Arthur, who, like Dominic, is a descendant of the duque de Teba. Dominic characteristically steps over the barriers of age to meet a person he

finds he can respond to, even if doing so shocks his family.

Early in the novels, then, it is clear that Dominic is in greater conflict with his surroundings and more intimately connected with the past than is any other character. One of the ways of explaining, or at least pointing to, this fact about Dominic, is to attribute it to hereditary influence. Dominic descends directly from the ducque de Teba, and since the Teba strain passes from generation to generation untouched by the line it mingles with in marriage, it is perhaps inevitable that Dominic should be out of harmony with his surroundings. The people who are touched by the Teba strain have ancestors who have looked into hell, and have in their blood an awareness of evil, combined with an obsession with the good.¹

The progress of Dominic through the two novels, *A Difficult Young Man* and *When Blackbirds Sing*, shows something of the individuality he possesses in spite of changing fashion, and something too of the difficulty

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.16.

he has in finding any means of expression acceptable to the people who surround him. By looking at a series of events from the novels I shall hope to show not only how Dominic is made a credible character, but also how we are forced to take him seriously. His character is revealed both on the level of social action and on the level of the underlying unity of motivation which defines the essential elements of his character. He is also frequently revealed through the people who surround him, and our feelings about him are in part determined by our attitude towards them. This is most clearly revealed in *A Difficult Young Man*, and in those of Dominic's actions about which Guy writes:

There are times in our lives when the Fates seem to drive us on with blows of increasing tempo, when we are hesitant about the road they intend us to take. This may not be a very acceptable explanation, but the succession of shocks which Dominic quite involuntarily gave the family at this time did cause Steven to move in a resulting direction, and when he had done so they ceased, at any rate for some years.¹

1. *A Difficult Young Man*, p.112.

The series of incidents begins, appropriately, with Alice's gift of the horse Tamburlaine, which she is prompted to make as a result of Dominic's spontaneous gesture of generosity when he welcomes the family home from a trip he has himself been unable to make. Shortly afterwards he upsets his own birthday party with a heated defence of Tamburlaine. He rushes at Owen Dell, who has just ridden Tamburlaine to triumph in a childhood race, and refuses to apologize for his action. As a result he finds himself at the centre of a crisis:

Dominic like some dark oracle which would not speak and relieve the anxiety of a threatened city, or a miraculous image which would not bleed at the appointed time, sat sullenly in the library where various people went to plead and expostulate with him, and all the time the parlourmaids were laying the magnificent tea which might never be eaten.¹

The next of Dominic's shocking actions occurs during a family holiday in Tasmania when he leaps from a drag after Helena, once again puzzling the onlookers. Two years later he is expelled from Mr Porson's school,

1. *A Difficult Young Man*, p.38.

and as a result is sent to George and Baba to learn farming. He is not there for long when again his actions shock. He walks naked through the bush and, it is thought, seduces Baba's maids. As a result he is sent to an Agricultural College, where he is ill-treated and to which he refuses to return. So he is again sent to Westhill where, provoked by Wolfie's misguided lecture, he rides his beloved Tamburlaine to death. It is not difficult to see what effect these actions would have on Dominic's family. Even though the reactions vary, and the variations are both interesting and significant, it is clear to all that Dominic is difficult.

Despite Dominic's behaviour, the reader is able not only to sympathise with him, but also to see the value in his responses to each situation. I have suggested that this chain of events really begins with Alice's gift of Tamburlaine. From *The Cardboard Crown* we are aware of Alice's values, and our memory of her, as she is presented in that novel, makes the gift more meaningful. Dominic's liking for effective 'welcome homes', which prompts Alice's gift, arises from his own capacity for spontaneous feeling, as well

as from his feeling of isolation from his fellow men. Yet these same qualities, combined with his instinctive loyalty to his own kind and his acceptance of certain values, when transferred to another situation, lead to his expulsion from school and to his subsequent feeling of even greater isolation.

His expulsion from school is particularly complicated. Mr Porson, the head-master of the school Dominic and his brothers attend, is one of the uncivilized people who are invading a world which has until now been inhabited by people like the Langtons. He values money and position in an arbitrary and superficial way, and turns on their head the values which Dominic instinctively upholds and responds to. Mr Porson's attack on Brian, Dominic's brother, for wearing a uniform a size too large for him is, to say the least, in extremely and inexcusably bad taste. Dominic's response to it is not only in perfect accord with all that we already know of him, but justifiable.

The consistency of Dominic's response can be seen by viewing this incident in relation to the

incident at his birthday party. The basis of Dominic's response to Mr Porson is similar to that which provokes his attack on Owen Dell, when first his pride is affronted and then his fury aroused by the Dells' inappropriate and offensive comments.

Guy suggests that the Langton children may have instinctively recognized the Dells as outsiders because of their origin.¹ Like so many of his comments, this does not need to be literally true to be suggestive of a validity. There is an important similarity in the responses of the Dells and Mr Porson. In Mr Porson, of course, one finds blatant snobbery with values quite off-centre, but both Mr Porson and the Dells reveal fear or discomfort when confronted with imagination, or simply with evidence of what appears to be almost another level of existence. So when Brian gives an enthusiastic performance demonstrating the virtues of Tamburlaine, Owen Dell is not able to enter into the spirit of the performance: "He was embarrassed by any flight of imagination...."² Mr Porson, in the superb

1. *A Difficult Young Man*, p.40. (The Dells are the sons of Austin and Hetty).

2. *ibid.*, p.30.

scene where Dominic snubs him by kissing his mother's hand,¹ likewise recognizes that Dominic - and probably the Langtons in general - have access to a set of values or a way of life beyond his reach. The reactions of both the Dells and Mr Porson contain a large element of self-defence. By their own attitudes and actions people in the novels divide themselves into kinds; and the division between the Porsons and Dells, and the Langtons is perhaps the most fundamental. The Langtons are alive with the freedom to accept their imaginations. Mr Porson has smothered his true life by accepting a superficial and artificial one.

Dominic's reactions to the Dells and Mr Porson, of course, reveal something else about him: his instinctive response is so strong and so uncompromising that he reacts in a similar way to a child who is teasing and a head-master who is revealing the worst forms of bad taste and snobbery. But what Dominic sees is that element in their behaviour which is common to both.

In this way Dominic's essential self gradually becomes apparent. Beneath the unpredictable level of social action and reaction there is a fluid movement

1. *A Difficult Young Man*, p.47.

created by the consistency of Dominic's responses. Although so clear to the reader, this movement is not seen at all by most of the characters in the novels. It is probably only Guy himself who is able to be fully aware of it.

While what we know of other characters in part determines our attitude towards Dominic and the value we attach to him, the impression we gain of Dominic in turn reveals much about other characters. This kind of interplay is constantly present in the novels, and in our appreciation of any character cannot be overlooked.

Almost as much as anything else, the contact she has with Dominic labels Baba for us, and helps to define the nature of one type which is superseding the Langtons. After Dominic goes for his midnight walk through the bush and gives as his reason "It was quiet"

Baba was incredulous at the inadequacy of Dominic's explanation. She was certain that he was either vicious or mad or both. She recalled his attack on Owen Dell at the sports, his senseless leap from the drag, his threatening Mr Porson with a sword.

"We might be murdered in our beds," she exclaimed, and did not make clear whether this was her chief fear, or that one of the neighbours might have seen Dominic naked....¹

The reader is, of course, in a position to view these actions in a different light: Baba's comments reveal more about herself than about Dominic. Her comment "We might be murdered in our beds," is wide of the mark. It is most unlikely that Dominic would murder anyone - though it is perhaps true that if he did, Baba would have just cause to be nervous of her own safety.

But if it is not in Dominic's nature to murder anyone, he is, in the course of the novels, forced, largely as a result of the values being imposed by society, to be responsible for at least two lives: his horse Tamburlaine's and the young German soldier's. (His riding Tamburlaine to death is, of course, partly the result of his own nature as well). It is, ironically, Baba herself who presumably tries to murder Dominic at the bull-fight in Spain. The links between this scene

1. *A Difficult Young Man*, p.72.

and Baba's earlier comment are not made explicit, but in an indirect way Baba's comment reinforces the idea that though Dominic's values are not acceptable to society, they have a genuine base as her own values do not. Unlike Baba, Dominic does not, for the most part, remain unaware of the significance of his actions. In the young German soldier he sees beneath all surface distractions, with that brief flicker of human recognition valued by the novels and shown to be all too rare. He is made aware of the wonder, the mystery, and the value of a living person and of genuine human contact, and realises that it is this that he has affronted and this that he has no right to kill:

In that act he had violated the two things to which his whole being responded in worship; the beauty of a living human body, all the miracle of its movement and thought; and the relation of two souls in brotherhood.¹

The transference into physical violence of Baba's fears and resentments at the bull-fight may for the moment terrify her, but she is not seriously or permanently disturbed. It is one of the most important

1. *When Blackbirds Sing*, p.137.

things about Dominic that he does not suppress or submerge his inner self and that he comes to see clearly the implications of accepting it.

The value placed on this characteristic of Dominic's rests on Boyd's belief that only in the search for this essential self does one find what is beautiful and noble in the nature of man and see what he should strive for. The interest in character therefore becomes an interest in the quality of life which is possible. This is suggested by the passage from *A Difficult Young Man* in which Guy says that in this novel he is searching for the Memlinc in the cellar.¹ The search for the Memlinc in the cellar influences Boyd's method of presenting not only Dominic's character, but also Alice's and Diana's.

The first mention of Alice occurs in the scene where Hetty screams for possession of the cardboard crown so that she can play Queen Elizabeth to Austin's Sir Walter Raleigh. This is an important scene and one which is, significantly, referred to

1. *A Difficult Young Man*, p.230.

when Alice is attempting to understand and to justify Austin's relationship with Hetty:

She was ill. She knew Austin's strong appetites, what it would mean to him, after the first rapturous months of marriage, to find himself deprived of his young wife. And there at hand was Hetty, who had always wanted him, ever since she was a child in the school-room, and had snatched the cardboard crown.¹

It is significant that Boyd chooses to suggest that Alice achieves the real crown and Hetty only the cardboard crown, while Alice is suffering what seems to her a personal betrayal, temporarily upsetting some of the most important assumptions on which she has based her past life. Alice's stature derives, in fact, partly from her capacity for suffering. It is true that Hetty too suffers and gains our sympathy, but the basis of her suffering is different, and she is not really able to get beyond it as Alice does. Alice's suffering is the suffering natural to the human condition and inescapable for those who recognize and accept this condition. Hetty appears in the

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.69.

novel as a person blindly seeking her own satisfaction, regardless of her surroundings and situation. What she gets at the end of this self-centred pursuit is only the cardboard crown - *that* she can deprive Alice of. The real crown belongs to Alice, and she achieves it both in spite of and because of all that is put in her way. One of the central things revealed by her life, in fact, is the disparity between the real and the ideal, and the recognition that circumstances dictate to certain areas of life and must be taken account of if one wants to attain the only kind of 'crown' worth having.

Alice learns that justice is one ideal rarely attained on the level of action. But the novel makes it clear that there is an area in which justice does operate, and it is in this area that Alice achieves the real crown. There is a kind of justice operating in the fact that Alice's dignity, her stature and her self-awareness, are the reward for the blows she has not only taken, but also accepted. So that although Alice does live, to a far greater extent than Dominic, in terms of, and in accord with, the society of her time, one of the things made clear by the way Guy

reveals her character is the disparity between true worth and its recognition in the world. It is, in a sense, inevitable that Alice should not receive justice on the level of action, since the nature of her own actions elevates her from the level of most of the people surrounding her.

The isolation of the central characters is not only due to the passing of time and the changing social structure that accompanies it. Boyd implies that people of stature are necessarily isolated, since their stature is dependent upon their being to some extent exceptional, and superior to most people around them. His is a view of life which can claim people as superior without embarrassment - it allows for this kind of judgement while still seeing what is valuable in people who cannot develop themselves in their own terms.

It is worth looking a little more closely at the method by which Guy establishes Alice's superiority. Our impression of her when the novel ends is well-defined despite the fact that, as the novel proceeds, we may feel we are being told little enough about her.

Her return to Rome after twenty years, when she again spends time with Aubrey Tunstall, is one of the most significant events of her life. Yet it is described simply and straightforwardly by a comparatively short extract from her diary. She tells of her activities in Rome and of her own feelings:

'12 Octobre. Jeudi. S. Donatien.
 The situation *is* the same as it was twenty years ago. My reason tells me it is impossible, but my heart denies my reason. What can I do? Nothing of course. Imagine what all the family would say, with their strong sense of the ridiculous, if I were to elope again, thirty-three years later. I have no intention of doing so, yet I cannot deny that if A. asked me to, it would not be easy to refuse....¹

There is little extraneous detail, and little interpretation. It is simply the account of these few days Alice chose to record in her diary, followed by Guy's interpretation in the next chapter. This interpretation is placed beside the diary entries in a way which seems perhaps closer to the method of a historian than a novelist and in a style which seems at first explanatory

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.152.

rather than exploratory. Guy brings out certain implications contained in the diary entries and produces an interpretation which would not have occurred to Alice. But he does not suggest that he knows the whole truth about her.

Yet even although Guy does not pretend to know the whole truth, we have a sense of completeness in relation to Alice's character. What it is that gives us this sense is difficult to determine precisely, but several things at least contribute and can be pointed to. The structure of the book is such that no one character could be called 'central'. Although Alice comes closer to being so than anyone else, the conventional term of 'heroine' would not fit her well. It is partly through the diffuse nature of Guy's attention, in fact, that Alice gains her identity and stature. It is not that any of her actions, taken singly, would make a striking impression, so much as that as we see her continually in action, we become aware of the strikingly constant way in which she places herself squarely in front of situations, and the integrity with which she deals with them.

In this way, Guy appears to allow Alice's nobility and dignity to establish themselves, while he is re-creating, as accurately as he can, his story of the past generations of his family. The impact of the novel is gradual. There is a sense in which we may feel we have been told nothing, and at the end of the book the question of why we are convinced of Alice's stature poses itself most forcibly. At this point, her life is being seen largely from a negative standpoint - fate destroys all her hopes, hopes not only for herself, but for her children as well. Yet we are not allowed to see her as weak, or as an object of pity. She evokes a sadness much deeper than pity, and if we shed tears, it is for the lot of all men as much as it is for Alice. Of her we are more likely to remember how, with dignity and integrity, she faces what all men have to face.

If the reader expects to find Alice's character revealed through psychological analysis, or analysis of her development, he will be disappointed. I do not want to suggest that the more conventional method of revealing character may not, for a given purpose, be just as effective as the method Guy uses here. In

Lucinda Brayford, for example, Lucinda's character is concentrated on in a more conventional way and, in fact, the exposition of her motives and reactions in the third section is extraordinarily astute and sensitive. It is, in many ways, Boyd's finest piece of writing. But the method used in *The Cardboard Crown* is different, and the difference must be acknowledged. In the Langton series Boyd is attempting something on a larger scale. His aim, as it always has been, is to reveal character, but now his interest is in both the uniqueness of each life and each spirit and their relation to a much larger pattern of life - the sweep of time over generations.

In the first chapter of *The Cardboard Crown* Guy arouses our interest in certain general observations of human existence through his discussion with Julian and through his description of Westhill. One of these observations is the way in which good and evil are inextricably linked in any human situation. The ways in which such observations as this relate to Alice's own life are not made explicit. In this first chapter Guy conditions our minds to certain observations and then places the life of his character before us.

In this way our response is guided in a given direction; we are bound to see the life of the character to some extent through his eyes, and to notice what we have been conditioned to notice. This is not difficult, since our credulity is never strained. There is an internal pattern in Alice's life which provides an illustration of Guy's initial observation about good and evil. This pattern can be suggested by viewing just one incident in Alice's life.

When Lady Langton's husband dies, she tells Alice that along with the natural order of our lives there come periods of misfortune - misfortunes sent from God. Alice refuses to believe that evil can result from good. Yet one of the things she is to learn is that there are no fixed laws of this kind, that good and evil mingle in apparently inexplicable ways. She must have become aware, for example, that had Austin's misdemeanours not taken place, she would not have been in Rome under such auspicious circumstances and would not have been free to experience what she regards as one of the most valuable experiences of her life. Indeed she builds on this awareness and reaches a

conclusion different from Lady Langton's:

Alice began to be aware of the germ of evil fortune inevitably concealed within the good, at any rate in her own life. Times which she had thought were entirely happy, like the first months of her marriage, or the night by the Fountain of Trevi, turned out to be fools' paradises. Now she could not free her mind from anxiety for Diana, living with Wolfie and Sarah at Westhill. She wrote:

'We should never let a subsequent evil spoil the memory of a good we have known. If we have loved someone who later proves indifferent to us, we should remember the time of that love in all its freshness, and not let the mistrust which followed impair that memory. When we see the autumn rose-trees, with a few discoloured and frost-bitten blooms, we do not say that because of these the summer roses were worthless. As we grow older we become to some extent different people. I must separate the memory of the children at Westhill from whatever they may become later.'¹

The strength behind this diary entry is impressive. It is in this way that the impression we have of Alice at the end of the novel is formed. We have seen her disappointment with Austin, her deep hurt, and her moral indignation. We have seen her awakening to entirely new prospects in Rome, when the fulfillment of her ideal self appears as a possibility. We have seen how, when forced to reject this possibility, she turns to her

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.125.

family and centres her hopes on Diana, only to have those hopes shattered when Diana insists upon marrying the undistinguished German pianist, Wolfie von Flugel.

Alice's reactions in the diary entry just quoted show that she is now able to accept any contingency, to face and to meet what life has to offer her. Far from bearing a grudge against Diana for the pain she has caused, Alice is quite unselfishly concerned for her. The diary entry is the outward sign, the end result, of what is probably one of the most painful lessons Alice has had to learn - that experience refuses to be shaped according to plan, and that we must give value to the moment, see it for itself and as it exists in time. For comparison one can see how much further than Lady Langton Alice has taken her perception of the nature of things. Lady Langton sees life working in accord with a natural law, but subject to extra and unaccountable spells of misfortune. Alice is able to incorporate the spells of misfortune into the pattern of her life. Her view of the natural order of things is more sophisticated.

Alice's diary entries themselves, in a curiously understated and unobtrusive manner, consistently contribute to the idea we have of her strength, and of the dignity with which she is able to face the circumstances of her life. The diary entry when Bobby is killed provides a good example. Here Alice captures perfectly the youth, purity and beauty of the boy before he is killed:

'This morning I was gathering apples in the orchard. Bobby saw me and ran to help me. I was carrying them in my skirt and he said, "Granny you will spoil your skirt," and he went to fetch a basket. He climbed the tree and we gathered quite a lot and brought them in together. At luncheon Steven told him that he might ride Pride this afternoon, when I went to Harkaway to take some plants to Mrs Daly I have never seen a boy so happy. His eyes were alight with happiness and his face was so rosy with its clear and flawless skin. He looked really beautiful. We were all pleased and amused to watch him, and he said such funny things.¹

But what is really striking about the diary entry is the perfectly balanced sense of the event that Alice is able to reveal. She does not omit to mention that it was she who put the idea of riding through the lobby into Bobby's head. But neither does she admit to blame,

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.164.

or dwell on thoughts of 'if only I hadn't'. The final proof of her integrity in this passage is unnecessary in terms of our knowledge of Alice - but it remains impressive:

Dominic said: "When will [Bobby]... be back?" I said that he would see him there some day. Dominic said: "Can he see God?" and I said "Yes" because I am sure that his angel does behold the face of the Father, as we are told.¹

There is something strangely touching about Alice's desire to be honest with the child, and to take his question seriously.

Thus the method of depicting Alice's character is constantly determined by the author's desire to allow things to establish their own value, and by his attempt to prevent the intrusion of certain preconceptions or losses of perspective. One of the most impressive things about Alice is the extent to which she succeeds in coming to terms with her own life; her actions have a curiously integrated quality. After her initial despair at discovering Austin's infidelity, she needs time to

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.164.

think in different surroundings, and so she leaves her travelling companions and goes to Italy. If she were a lesser character she would there have found the means to escape from an intolerable situation. And, no doubt, in her relationship with Aubrey Tunstall, there is an element of escape. But it is not total escape. If it is escape from the situation with Austin, and from a life in Australia which never seemed absolutely satisfying, it also appears to her as a possible means of fulfilling that other side of her nature. Her attraction to the world of European culture and tradition is a genuine attraction. She faces a split world - one half of it the life she has in Australia, where all her deepest ties are, and the other half the life of civilized Europe, towards which she is drawn by her own inner nature. We see her coming to terms with the conflicts in her own nature in the situations in which she finds herself.

The same may be said of Diana, Alice's daughter, yet it is interesting to see how the difference in situation and in character produces a quite different picture. All that we learn of Diana in *The Cardboard Crown* suggests that she is slightly eccentric, wilful

in her insistence on marrying Wolfie, and selfish in her disregard of her mother's wishes when she is taken to Europe. She and Wolfie rarely invite Alice to concerts or to join them on trips - despite Alice's obvious liking for travelling *en famille* - and they do not make her feel welcome in their house in London. In *Outbreak of Love*, Guy allows Diana's better qualities to be revealed through action, and gives us a quite different picture from that of the wilful and selfish Diana in *The Cardboard Crown*. Life offers its test to Diana as it does to all the major characters, and Boyd ensures both that we see her facing this test, and that we notice not only her shortcomings, but also her strengths. That she remains a less impressive figure than Alice, her mother, is partly the result of the passage of time and the changes that it brings.

Guy's method in this novel is to create a situation which constantly reminds us of Alice's life, while at the same time dramatising Diana's situation in such a way that the individual worth of her achievement impresses itself upon us. The particularity of Diana's situation is strongly present at the same time as we are being reminded of Alice's life. We are reminded of

Alice's life not only through the similarity of situation - both Alice and Diana are forced temporarily to pursue an ideal existence outside marriage - but also in the way their situations embody some of the central concerns of the novels. The experience of both Alice and Diana illustrates, for example, the intermingling of good and evil. Both characters are forced to ponder this in much the same terms. Alice, in *The Cardboard Crown*, wonders " 'If one could take hold of the ends of the threads of evil and misfortune which are woven into the good to make our lives, and draw them out, would the rest fall to pieces?' " ¹ She writes this after a disappointment with Diana, and it is interesting to note that Diana herself is forced to ponder something the same question as she takes the bramble out of the rose bushes;

She cut the dead shoots close to the roots. Wearing thick leather gloves, she tugged at them, and the whole branch came away, disentangling itself and damaging those which remained. She enjoyed pulling them out, and thought one ought to do the same sort of thing with one's own life, though that too would damage the still living parts of one's being.²

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.132.

2. *Outbreak of Love*, p.23.

Diana, at the end of the novel, sees herself as a "rather dim reflection of her mother."¹ This comment arises from her increasing self-knowledge - in a sense she is that. Alice we have seen as a more imposing figure, totally devoid of Diana's "high-souled rot"; and until *Outbreak of Love* our knowledge of Diana has been mostly of her perhaps dignified eccentricities. But in this novel we are shown her capacity for seriousness. And it is interesting to see how Boyd is able to reveal her seriousness within a context which is inevitably less impressive, and in a novel which would generally be regarded as the lightest of the series and in which the comic mode is certainly more persistent.

Diana's surroundings are obviously less impressive than Alice's. Alice's relationship with Aubrey, for example, is carried out against the backdrop of Europe. But Diana cannot seek her other self in Europe. The closest reflection of Europe she has is in Russell, a much less substantial character than Aubrey. One feels that Aubrey - though himself slightly decadent - belongs in Rome. His conversation is not as theoretical

1. *Outbreak of Love*, p.234.

as Russell's - he does not have the same need to be explicit about the 'civilized'.

But despite her more humble life in Brighton, Diana is shown to have that style which cannot be acquired, because it is the result of a lesson which does not fit into one lifetime. It is a style Russell recognizes at once, as does Miss Rockingham. So also, I think, seeing Diana at the ball, at Wolfie's concert, and at Josie's wedding, and seeing her prepare an informal supper with Russell, must the reader. Even the descriptions of her clothes are revealing. She is not dictated to by fashion in the way that people are who slavishly adhere to it, and the result is that her clothes have the air of belonging to someone special.

The novel shows in what way she is special, and both gives validity to, and shows the limitations of, Russell's view of her distinction when he first sees Diana walking down Collins Street and is struck not so much by her clothes as by the way she wears them. Although, for complex reasons, we may not feel that she is as 'special' as Alice, we are shown the nature of her own achievement, which results in her ability to write

to Russell:

I wrote two letters before this, trying to give excuses for what I am doing. In one I said that it was because Wolfie was a German and that it would be unfair to leave him now. That may be true but it is not the reason. The real reason is that I am married to him, whatever he does.... It is curious to think that we imagined that our meetings were only a foretaste of pleasures to come, when they were the whole substance of those pleasures. But I always expected too much of life.¹

Diana has, in her own way, arrived at this conclusion, and the last scene of the novel,² shows its validity.

It shows that one cannot escape from the past - that the present contains within itself, and is determined by, the past. To turn one's back on the past is to deny a central fact of life - that nothing is isolated, nothing stationary.

It is obvious, then, from Boyd's method of elucidating character, that the process of writing becomes for Guy a search for the "beautiful portrait" of the human face, which underlies the apparent deterioration of the Langton family. The portrait that

1. *Outbreak of Love*, p.252.

2. Discussed in Chapter III, pp.92-94.

he discovers is really a portrait of several faces. It is, for example, a composite picture of the persisting face that passes from Alice to Diana, and Diana to Josie. This does not mean that the individual differences between these characters are not important. The differences form the very substance of the novels. What is common to all these characters is that they achieve that kind of integrity which enables them to live life in terms of an open assessment of their surroundings and of themselves. They go through a process of finding themselves and living in accordance with their discovery. But the firmest lines and the darkest colours of the portrait come from Dominic. In him the struggle for harmony between the inner and outer worlds is more dramatic, the demands of the inner self more powerful and less compromising. It is a portrait too to which even the most minor characters contribute, if only, as in the case of Baba, to add contrast and indirectly help emphasize the values being upheld in the notion of the beautiful face.

CHAPTER V

THE STRUCTURE OF THE SERIES
AND "THE MEMLINC IN THE CELLAR"

The structure of the Langton series rests upon two conflicting yet complementary truths about man's nature. The first is suggested by the image of the Memlinc in the cellar, which represents something enduring and unchangeable in human nature. The second emerges from Boyd's awareness of the passing of time and the changes it inevitably carries with it. The structure of the novels may, then, be said to be based upon the fixed and the fluctuating, the temporal and the eternal aspects of man's nature.

In one of the most dramatic scenes of *The Cardboard Crown*, Sir William and Lady Langton's dinner party is interrupted by the butler's announcement: "Mr and Mrs Austin Langton." In this way Austin's parents learn of his marriage to Alice. But for Guy

viewing it in retrospect, the scene has a larger significance:

Then came that evening from which spring so many of our treasures and calamities; not all of them, not Dominic's nor Julian's which have their origin in the dying cries of the altar-boys at Teba. They come later in this story. Our more external destinies were fixed on that evening at Bishops-court, about which Arthur was extremely eloquent.¹

This division between the family's internal and external destinies reflects the changing and the fixed aspects of man's nature as Boyd sees them revealed in the history of his family. The presence of these two destinies is first suggested in the opening chapter of *The Cardboard Crown* where Westhill retains evidence of the family life lived in it by the Langtons, as well as of the haunting and somewhat isolated suffering of Dominic. In his decision to write the truth about his family, Guy is forced to explore, and to suggest explanation for, both aspects of his family history. His search for the "beautiful portrait" within the decline of his family must, therefore, be carried out in terms

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.29.

of these two destinies.

The movement of time and the inevitability of change are built into the structure of the external destiny of the Langton family, while the internal destiny, although connected inevitably with the past, is connected in a more static way:

[Dominic] ... always imagined that his elders understood perfectly the motives of his behaviour, and then punished him. He did not know that their minds moved almost in different centuries.¹

The Teba influence, to which Dominic is subject, is not diluted by any other family strain, and those characters through whom it is transmitted are set against the pattern of change which the rest of the family undergoes: on the one hand is the Langton tradition - a developing, changing and, in the end, a vulnerable and collapsing tradition; on the other hand is that enduring Teba strain, transmitted unchanging from one generation to the next.

The structure of the external destiny that Guy

sees as springing from Alice's and Austin's union. is revealed most clearly in the relationship which exists between *The Cardboard Crown* and *Outbreak of Love*. The changes which have overcome the Langtons by the time we reach the third novel are marked. In *The Cardboard Crown* Alice and Austin still move with comparative ease between Waterpark, their country house in England, and Westhill, their Australian home. Austin, though eccentric, is a respected member of Melbourne society and Alice, a woman of stature and dignity, moves with the freedom belonging to people in her position, and of her financial standing. In *Outbreak of Love* Boyd pictures the last flowering of the society to which Alice and Austin belonged, before it finally collapses with the advent of the First World War. Diana occupies a very different position in society from that enjoyed by her mother. She lives in Brighton, on the outskirts of Melbourne and its society, and does not have the money, or perhaps the strength, to support a comparable way of life.

By placing Alice and Diana in similar situations, Boyd is thus able to emphasize the kind of changes which operate within the Langton tradition. But the similarity

of situation in the two novels has another effect. In my discussion of the characters of Alice and Diana,¹ I suggested how Boyd gives an extra dimension to their portraits by deliberately placing them in comparable situations. Despite the great change which has overtaken society and placed Diana in a vastly different position from that which her mother enjoyed, that solidity brought to the Langtons by Alice is not totally lost. Although the differences between the situations of mother and daughter are great - Wolfie's misdemeanour, for example, is of a different order from Austin's, and Russell is made of softer stuff than Aubrey - something of that strength we saw in Alice, we see again in Diana. When the progression of action is seen over the whole span of the two novels in this way, the existence of the enduring "beautiful portrait" within the changing Langton tradition becomes apparent.

Thus in the progression of the external destinies we see flux and change and the deterioration of a vulnerable tradition, but we also see something which is valuable and which though affected is not wholly lost. The reader cannot overlook the deterioration and decline

1. See Chapter IV, pp.130-135.

of the family - or at least the apparent passing of a way of life - but the whole method of the novels is one which places against this decline the "beautiful portrait of the human face", which remains untouched. Although some of Boyd's best comic writing is to be found in the scenes which deal with Mrs Montaubyn and Wolfie and although characters like Baba are memorable, the emphasis remains on those characters through whom the values upheld by the series are expressed. Through the manipulation of emphasis, and through the presence of Guy as artist, these values become associated with the artist's point of view, implicitly asserting the belief that the function of art is to enhance the quality of life, and to illuminate the good and the beautiful so that it becomes a source of inspiration to man.

To give this view the weight and the precise significance it has in the novels, one must turn to the internal destinies of the family where one sees a different process from that I have just described. The search for the beautiful portrait is seen in a new perspective created by the presence and awareness of evil which is an essential part of the internal destiny of the family. Although evil is always present in the

external destinies, in the Teba strain it is more powerful and compelling because more immediately felt, just as the expression of the good is more uncompromising.

The external destinies of the family, as seen particularly in the more general descriptions of the fortunes of the family in *The Cardboard Crown* and *Outbreak of Love*, are only affected incidentally by the presence of evil. There it frequently appears as a further explanation of a character or situation. We have, for example, already been given an idea of Mildy's character before Guy makes this comment:

It has always been assumed that Mildy's unfortunate characteristics were born with her, and that her nasal voice with its humble note was inculcated at the age of four by Sarah. This may not be true at all, and the injury which produced the traits we laughed at, calling her behind her back 'Aunt Mildew', may have resulted from an incident which happened in her seventeenth year.¹

Sarah is, in fact, seen as a source of evil: "Alice was unsuspecting and satisfied in her life, while Sarah

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.110.

had all her frustrated senses alert, all her evil antennae extended to contact sin."¹ With vicious righteousness she tells Mildy that Austin is father to the Dell boys. Thus it is not simply the destruction of the authority of an earlier generation that stunts Mildy's growth, but also the presence of characters who wilfully destroy this perspective by asserting their evil genius.

It is not, however, only through particular characters that the presence of evil is felt. The force of evil is present in a less explicit way, colouring many scenes throughout the novels and leading to Guy's frequent observation of the "close connection between evil and fortunate happenings."²

Even while we are being told of Sarah's evil influence on Mildy, Guy reminds us of Bobby's tragic death, when as a child of beauty and promise he is killed by falling off a horse: "At Westhill they passed the most gloomy day the house has ever known, except one other, some fourteen years later, when it was

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.109.
2. *ibid.*, p.174.

darkened by an irrevocable tragedy."¹ Bobby's death may appear as a simple and unfortunate accident, but it is linked by Guy with the Teba strain.² This is the evil that does not contaminate, but is expressed in the death of an innocent child and the profound suffering and total isolation of a grown man. Apart from Bobby's death, the shadow of uncontaminating evil is most apparent in the life of Dominic. Even Sarah's evil genius³ pales before the force of evil that haunts Dominic. Throughout *A Difficult Young Man* his actions are out of harmony with his surroundings and his sense of isolation and his conviction that he is a source of evil increases. This continues in *When Blackbirds Sing* until the inherent strain of evil within him does find expression in terms of accepted action. This is brought home to Dominic as he is returning to the front and on the train has nightmares which spring from his own recent actions and his awakening sense of the distortion of values embodied in the war in which he is fighting:

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.112.
2. See discussion pp.148-149.
3. She does, of course, affect Dominic, as in the birthday scene at Beaumanoir, but the original source of his suffering lies elsewhere.

He knew that there was violence in his nature, and that it was said to be inherited from a Spaniard who had strangled altar boys in the crypts of his castle, the ancestor who was a joke to his brothers. To Dominic he was no joke, but a horror latent in his blood....

Dominic woke up with a jolt, sweating and nauseated. He believed that he had met the evil in himself face to face, and he was afraid to go to sleep again.¹

Dominic's last days, apparently spent in isolation at Westhill, are perhaps the immediate result of his war experience, but they are closely linked too with the internal destiny of the family which derives its initial force from something beyond circumstance.

To explain this characteristic of the internal destiny, there are suggestions that there is a curse resting on the family as it does on Oedipus and on Agamemnon and Orestes. They are only *suggestions*, and should not be over-emphasized. Yet the series cannot be fully understood unless these suggestions are acknowledged and drawn into the total picture. There is a sense, of course, in which the curse is not to be

1. *When Blackbirds Sing*, pp.106-107,

taken literally. Though it may be the expression, in biological terms,¹ of that same phenomenon which in Greek legend was labelled a curse, it is, above all, Boyd's way of describing or accounting for certain apparently unchangeable elements, and certain inexplicable and destructive forces, present in man's nature.

The idea of a curse is first introduced in the opening chapter of *The Cardboard Crown*. Guy and Julian have been discussing the novel Guy may write and Guy has been led to expound his vertical division of society into Left and Right. When Julian comments that he had always thought the Left was right, Guy answers him in terms of Julian's own painting which, he says, "...breathes the inescapable sorrows of the human race" and "...denies flatly that science can cure the soul of man."² Julian accuses Guy of deliberately trying to avoid the subject of the novel, to which Guy replies:

1. There is certainly a tendency for physical defects to run in families, one of the best known examples being the transmission of the haemophilia gene from Queen Victoria through her daughters and grand-daughters to the Russian and Spanish royalty. The precise workings of heredity, however, have yet to be determined.
2. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.14.

'...I might write this book, and let all the skeletons come tumbling out of the cupboards, but allow only you to read it. Then you would bear our curse in your heart, like that Scottish family whose eldest son never smiles after his twenty-first birthday.'

'What curse?' asked Julian.

'Doesn't it appear to you that we are cursed? I don't know where it comes from, probably the duque de Teba.'¹

And after his reference to Alice's account of Bobby's death, Guy writes:

The above is an entry which I feel in a way that I should not have included, but Julian expressed surprise when I said that we were cursed. Even so this was a simple tragedy compared with what happened in later years. Or was it so simple? We do not know, assuming a *damnosa hereditas* to exist, how it may work, whether the malefic stars strike the innocent natures from without, or rot the guilty from within. Bobby and Dominic, their two most evident victims, are buried in the same grave in the Berwick cemetery, the old man the younger brother of the boy.²

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.14.
2. *ibid.*, pp.164-165. Boyd has, in the revised edition, deleted from this passage a more explicit reference to the Teba strain - "Was Bobby making expiation for one of the duque de Teba's altar boys?" - which appeared in *The Cardboard Crown*, (The Cresset Press, London, 1952), p.251.

This comes at the end of *The Cardboard Crown* and makes direct reference back to the above passage from the first chapter of the same novel, thus linking the ill fortunes of Bobby and Dominic with each other and with Guy's discussion about the novels he is to write. The evil influence within the Teba strain is, in fact, closely connected to the world of art which has been so important in the series. In this way the internal and external destinies of the Langton family are brought together.

This can be illustrated by another reference to the presence of evil, in which comment is made implicitly on the creative process. Mildy's friendship with one of the Dell boys - in fact her half-brother - prompts Sarah, as we have seen, to take what turns out to be a destructive line of action:

She now had every right to disclose her secret. Mildy must know, to save her from sin. There was no one to whom she would have greater delight in revealing it. Before bedtime she called her into her room, that horrid little room which I myself remember, with its smell of vinegar and cough-drops, and its little black religious books, from which Cousin Sarah tried to teach

us a religion which bore no resemblance to Christianity. There was no mention of considering the lilies, of turning water into wine,... of forgiving harlots,... but only of Jezebel flung down for the dogs to lick up the blood. When I told Julian to paint the Assumption of the Virgin in the chapel, I think my motive as much as anything was to send the black ghost of Cousin Sarah and her hell-born Calvinism, shrieking out into the Australian bush. I can imagine the look in her eye as she drew Mildy into her room, probably the same expression she had when she carefully broke the lamp, with the fire extinguisher all ready, in exactly the position where it would destroy the Teba portrait and nothing else - a smile¹ of dishonest, vicious righteousness.

It is not too fanciful to suppose that the act of writing the novels is, for Guy, prompted by a motive similar to that which prompts him to commission Julian's painting of the Assumption of the Virgin. At least it is not surprising that, as he begins to create or re-create the life of his family and discovers these strains, Guy sees the work of art he is creating as in some sense an act of exorcism. It is this in the sense that it imposes a perspective onto the life of his family which makes it possible to view the beautiful portrait.

Thus the Teba "curse" is closely connected with the creative process and not seen as a purely destructive phenomenon. In the opening chapter of *The Cardboard Crown* Guy deliberately relates the two when he says to Julian:

It's your Teba blood that gives you your passionate impulse towards forms of art, that makes you see in the Australian landscape not only sunlight and dreamy distances, but dark forces lurking in the trees. When you feel that creative tingling in the tips of your fingers, you have the same impulse as the duque. He could not create beauty, so he could only release his impulse in destroying it.¹

The 'morbid' is closely linked with the creative by the suggestion that the impulse underlying both is the same. The notion that evil - at least some forms of evil - is a perverted or baffled creative impulse is a fundamental idea in the novels. It perhaps throws another light on Guy's feeling about the danger of trying to pierce the heart of truth.² Unless he is

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, pp.16-17.
2. See discussion in Chapter II, pp.35-40.

gifted with the power to create, his impulse will lead to destruction since the two processes spring from the same impulse. The Langton heredity is *not* creative, but it has the power to activate the dormant creative genes transmitted from the duque de Teba.¹ Thus the novels Guy writes illustrate the dangers that lie in presenting the truth and the difficulty, when in possession of the whole truth, of concentrating on the beautiful portrait.

Other structures within the novels also place emphasis upon the search for the Memlinc in the cellar, or the beautiful portrait. The geographical movement, for example, as the setting of the novels shifts between Europe and Australia, allows the idea of change to be introduced and makes possible the presentation of characters moving towards that stage where their essential self is able to find expression in terms of the circumstances of their lives.

The dangers inherent in a family trying to live in two countries and two civilizations are perhaps

1. Guy, like Julian and Dominic though to a lesser extent, has in his blood that "awareness of evil combined with an obsession with the good" which springs from the duque.

most clearly stated in this paragraph from *The Cardboard Crown*:

Waterpark was the magnet which drew my family back at intervals across the world, whisking them away just as they might have been thrusting their roots fruitfully into Australian soil. This distraction went on for four generations.... Not only were the family themselves whisked backwards and forwards - to Westhill when they felt the cold, to Waterpark when they felt the heat and sighed for that restfulness in their surroundings which only comes after centuries when nature is utterly conquered.¹

A home in two countries, as expressed in the quotation above, offers a means of escaping from the hardships which are a natural part of life; the family goes to Westhill when its members feel the cold, to Waterpark when they feel the heat. But it is also used to sort out those characters who allow themselves to fall prey to the temptation of escape from those who do not.

Lady Langton, a character not really strong enough for survival, has been looking forward to returning 'home' to England. The trip, however, seems to

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.44.

carry its own misfortunes and while they are in England Sir William's health deteriorates and they are forced to Italy for the winter, where he dies. This is how Lady Langton sees the situation:

When she left Melbourne she achieved the ambition of more than half her life. Her long exile was over. Now she saw her departure as only a terrible mistake, her advent in Europe as an immense defeat. She could talk of nothing but an immediate return....she said she must go home. 'Home' had switched again to the antipodes.¹

She is using the possibility of life in two countries as a means of escape from the periods of misfortune which beset her. Her reaction may be compared with Alice's when she too, in a crisis period, is tempted towards what appears to her an ideal existence in Rome. The situation there, of course, is complicated and the reader may see what Alice herself could not see - the impossibility of a complete life with Aubrey. Yet it is one of Alice's strengths that she overcomes the temptation to escape from herself and what the past has made her. It is this kind of integrity which all the characters who are

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, p.51.

presented favourably have in common. The gradual stabilizing, over the four novels, of the geographical movement, allows the focus of attention to be fixed on all the characters who are able to rise above the temptations inherent in the movement, but most particularly on Dominic.

The structure of the series, then, is based on the two traditions within the Langton family: the tradition which is subject to change and the passing of time, and the tradition which is fixed and unaffected by time. Within this broad division other structures, such as that based on the shifting geographical setting of the novels, also operate to place emphasis upon the beautiful portrait of the human face existing within the social decline of the Langton family and their way of life. In this way the total structure of the novels places value upon the individual and implies a criticism of society.

There has, of course, been social criticism throughout the novels in the satirical wit directed at Mrs Montaubyn and Freddy Thorpe, in the sharper treatment of characters like Baba, and in Guy's attitude to

the academics who reveal a superficial and deadly contact with the greatest expressions of civilization. Such criticism is, however, given weight and more precise definition by the emphasis placed upon characters through whom positive values are asserted. In Julian, and his artistic expression, for example, one finds the positive expression of a genuine contact with tradition which is lacking in the world around him. Dominic, too, reveals the values being upheld by the novels - honesty, compassion, and both an awareness of traditional values and the courage to live in accord with them. Thus through characters like Dominic, who uphold values in spite of social opposition, the novels are placing emphasis upon individual worth and achievement.

I have said that early in the novels a question mark is placed over the values of normality and conformity. Dominic is living testimony to the propriety of that question mark. He is someone for whom the struggle for harmony between the inner and outer worlds involves great suffering, and someone who is many times in terms of the accepted views of society forced to appear slightly ridiculous. Yet majority opinion is not allowed to affect any estimate of Dominic's worth adversely. His

individuality carries its own validity and its own strengths and weaknesses.

It is a characteristic of the point of view of the novels that individuality, Dominic's in this instance, should be expressed and carefully explored in its own terms. In this Boyd may be regarded as spokesman for the English upper classes and defender of an apparently doomed way of life. It is a view which has been often expressed by members of the English upper classes, and a view which, in my opinion, ultimately requires more courage than the view that all men are equal, since it acknowledges the existence of the unknown and the unknowable. Harold Nicolson, another spokesman for the English upper classes who was involved in world affairs during Boyd's lifetime, expresses similar views on the value of individuality in his book *Good Behaviour*:

In an epoch, moreover, when egalitarianism is quickly expanding, when the whole earth is menaced by uniformity, it is comforting to recall that mankind has progressed owing to difference rather than to sameness, owing, not to similitude, but to variation Warmly as I advocate equality of opportunity, I do not believe that all men are created equal or that a society

based upon such a fallacy will advance very far in the pursuit of happiness.¹

In following and placing value upon the individual development of Dominic, and of characters like Alice and Diana, the novels are forced, as I have shown, to take into account the presence of evil - both that existing in the inherited Teba strain and that present in society - and having faced it, to shift the focus. Out of an awareness of evil comes a concentration on the good. Thus the method and structure of the series provide an illustration of Boyd's own view of the function of art: "The function of art is to enhance the quality of our lives, and to give us intensity of vision. Whatever degrades us, however brilliant its technical achievement, is bad art."²

To this end a continual adjustment of vision is carried out over the four novels. In *The Cardboard Crown* continual shifts in perspective lead to the appearance of Alice as a dignified and noble figure, despite the quite

1. *Good Behaviour : being a Study of Certain Types of Civility* (Constable & Co.Ltd., London,1955),pp.1-2.
2. "Preoccupations and Intentions", *Southerly*,xxviii (1968),p.89.

ordinary messiness of some of the circumstances of her life. A shift in perspective reveals the emergence of Diana, in *Outbreak of Love*, as a figure of some strength who accepts, as the final scene shows in another adjustment of vision, herself and her past. Yet another shift in perspective appears with Dominic who is finally forced to choose between the inner voice and that of society. It is through these continual adjustments of vision that the composite portrait of the beautiful human face is created.

Yet if the process of isolation which Dominic goes through emphasizes his value in human terms, it also implicitly criticises what achievement is possible to him. By his isolation and estrangement it becomes impossible for those around him to see the 'portrait' he represents - Guy has, in fact, to re-create him and represent him before his value can be asserted. Although the connoisseur may prefer the mildewed Memlinc in the cellar to the two acre Royal Academy painting, he would also presumably prefer the Memlinc not to be mildewed and to take its rightful place in the house. It seems that the series, in its incomplete form, ends in this

gap between the possible and the ideal.

to the point at which the novels begin - say at the 1850s

wherein such * * * * *

must remain a matter for speculation, and I do not want

to speak. For the most part I have been writing about the series as a single narrative and dramatic structure. Although each novel can stand by itself, each loses by doing so. This is one reason why reviewers have frequently been misguided. Most reviews of *Outbreak of Love*, for example, saw that novel as a light comedy depicting Melbourne society before the First World War. And, of course, it is that. But because it deals with characters and events which fit into the larger pattern created by the other novels of the series, it is very difficult to think of it as a completely separate work or as merely a 'light comedy'. In the view of the world presented by the novels, no one moment is totally isolated - each contains the past within it and will in turn become part of the future. Since the novels deal with the life of a family over a long period of time, it is inevitable, given Boyd's view, that links should be obvious and significant between characters of different generations. It may be said that the novels exist in isolation in proportion to Boyd's view of the existence in isolation of the individual.

What Boyd would have had to write to return us to the point at which the novels begin - Guy at Westhill wherein much of the past he writes about has been lived - must remain a matter for speculation, and I do not wish to speculate here more than is necessary. From the interpretation I have put forward, it is at least clear that certain difficulties would have been involved in finishing the series. At the end of *When Blackbirds Sing* Dominic is isolated even from Helena - who represents one of the few genuine human contacts he has made. Although the passage of time is shown, in the novels, to bring change, the progression of Dominic's life has a more fixed nature. One way of explaining this has been to say that Dominic is subjected to the Teba influence and that he lives more in the past than do other characters. Yet it is suggested that Dominic, in his last days, was trying to throw out the past and thus, presumably, violating an essential part of his nature:

Some ancient peoples had a rite, performed in the spring, of 'carrying out death' from their houses. Dominic may have had something of the same idea. The things which he had put out in the stables and the laundry were all those which had to do with the past, particularly the past of our family.

He may have been trying, in a desperate, negative and superstitious way, to find new life. He may have been pouring contempt on all his pride.¹

This, combined with the presence of the family curse and the suggestion that Dominic may be paying for the sins of the duque, would have made it difficult to conclude the novels without showing him simply as a broken man, and therefore increasingly difficult to assert anything positive through him. To make the last years of Dominic's life convincing may have required an effort that Boyd no longer felt able or willing to make.²

1. *The Cardboard Crown*, pp.18-19. The quotation ends with one of Boyd's quotations or half-quotations. The comment that Dominic may have been pouring contempt on all his pride brings to mind the well-known hymn:

When I survey the wondrous Cross
On which the Prince of Glory died
My richest gain I count but loss
And pour contempt on all my pride.

The reference to this hymn suggests, however tentatively, that Dominic *may* have found salvation in a quite literal sense.

2. Boyd was, after all, sixty-nine when the fourth novel of the series was published. This, and his disappointment with the reception of his work, suggest sufficient reason why he may have felt disinclined to meet the demands which writing the fifth novel would have placed upon him.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

I did not find a word in the printed criticism of Synge's *Deidre of the Sorrows* about the qualities that made certain moments seem to me the noblest tragedy, and the play was judged by what seemed to me but wheels and pulleys necessary to the effect.¹

What Yeats is saying here of Synge's play and its criticism comes close to the feeling which prompted me to write an interpretation of Boyd's Langton novels. Whether or not I have got beyond the wheels and pulleys must be for the reader to decide.

Implicit in my discussion of the novels is the argument that, contrary to usual critical comment, Boyd is not simply writing a family saga, or recording the

1. W.B.Yeats, "The Tragic Theatre", *Essays and Introductions* (Macmillan & Co.Ltd., London, 1961), p.238.

existence and the passing of a certain social class.

These social concerns provide the material of the novels which is ordered in accord with a quite different pattern of thought.

The narrative method and style, the depiction of character and the structure, all work together to reveal the progress of the search, over three generations of the Langton family, for the "Memlinc in the cellar." It is the search for man's most noble and beautiful capacity - that "perfection and integrity of being, which on their level is still retained by the animals."¹ Or, as Boyd again expresses this notion in *Much Else in Italy*, the search for that which is symbolised in the figure of Christ:

So God sent that part of himself which was Beauty, to show mankind how they might live again under the law of innocence, and their redemption began. But at this they were filled with the rage of Caliban, not seeing his own face in the glass, and they destroyed the body in which that part of God had clothed himself. In this destruction his splendour was fully declared, for evil is most often defeated by the willing suffering of the innocent, not to gratify the nostrils of a savage god, but because the war still continues in heaven, in the spiritual world.²

1. *Much Else in Italy* (Macmillan & Co.Ltd., London, 1958), p.14.
2. *ibid.*, pp.14-15.

The novels reflect this war in their concern with good and evil as I have described it in Chapter V. The form of the series is derived from the presentation of this conflict, along with the effort to find, and to place emphasis upon, the Christ in man. This implies a belief in an abstract good or source of good which man has the capacity to possess or to destroy. "...man's essential self must cherish the values which the good men of every known civilisation have held to be eternal."¹

One cannot finally prove the validity of such a reading of the novels. But there is evidence outside the Langton novels which lends support to it.

As I have said, most critics have assumed that in the Langton novels Boyd is simply trying a form which will more comfortably accommodate his family saga. They see his first attempt in *The Montforts* as revealing the problem of including in one novel the material of several generations of his family. Although this problem was partially solved in *Lucinda Brayford*, it has been suggested that a series of novels provided a more complete solution

1. *Day of My Delight*, p.279.

by allowing Boyd to sprawl comfortably,¹ or, as G.A. Wilkes says:

... Boyd's last solution to the artistic difficulties of the family chronicle - reconciles amplitude (in the series as a whole) with the intensiveness of treatment (in each individual novel) which his peculiar gifts demand.²

There are, however, reasons for supposing that the family material Boyd had used before is, in these last novels, seen in a different light, and that the problem of finding a suitable form is, therefore, not the problem faced in *The Montforts* or *Lucinda Brayford*.

Boyd began writing *The Cardboard Crown* when he returned to Australia in 1948. At The Grange he found the impetus and the material for the Langton series. In 1951 he returned to England. There he continued writing *The Cardboard Crown*, making a trip to Rome with the uncompleted manuscript. In 1954 he again went for a holiday to Rome, from which he returned with Italy in his blood.³ He went

1. Brian Elliott, "Martin Boyd : an Appreciation", *Meanjin*, xvi (1957), p.15.
2. "The Achievement of Martin Boyd", *Australian Literary Criticism*, ed. Grahame Johnston, (Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1962), p.165.
3. *Day of My Delight*, p.257.

again to Rome in 1955, but returned to England for eighteen months before finally going to live in Italy. During these eighteen months he wrote *Outbreak of Love* and *Much Else in Italy*, his Italian travel book.

His renewed contact with Italy began, then, at the time he was writing the first novel of the Langton series. His feelings about Italy were strong, and it is reasonable to suppose that the effect his life there had upon him would be reflected in the novels. One of the most persuasive reasons for feeling that this is so is suggested by the striking similarity between the central concerns of *Much Else in Italy* and those of the Langton novels. It is as though in the Langton novels Boyd is again taking up the Australian and English material used in earlier novels, but this time with a focus which, if not entirely new to him, is sharpened by his renewed contact with Italy and with European traditions.

In *Much Else in Italy* the narrator, accompanied by a "kind of White Boy in search of God",¹ takes us through the temples of Italy. They embark upon a search for what is called throughout the book "the Perfect Drawing";

it is the equivalent of the Memlinc in the novels:

On our last day at Amalfi we went again to the cathedral, to see the tomb of S. Andrew, whose body was brought here from Constantinople in A.D. 1208. On the wall of the stair-case is a fourteenth-century crucifix, of which the face is neither suffering nor sentimental, and for this reason attracted the notice of the Irish boy, who had unconsciously begun to look for the face which might be that of the Perfect Drawing.¹

The significance of the search becomes more clear to the Irish boy as he reflects on the relics of the martyrs in SS. Quattro Coronati:

There is no *must*, the Irish boy declared. No one has got to do anything that revolts his nature. You can always die. You can be and you must be - this is the only must - like M. Anouilh's ermine which will rather be destroyed by dogs than spoil its beautiful white fur, its *raison d'être*, by crossing the muddy stream....

As for the spirit of our age, every age is doomed. Here in Rome nothing is more evident. What we have to reflect is the Perfect Drawing of ourselves, conceived in the heart of the

1. *Much Else in Italy*, p.27.

Supreme Nōos.¹ What distorts that reflection we ignore, even if the dogs get our bodies.²

In the Langton novels, through the presentation of his family, Boyd strives to reveal the presence of this Perfect Drawing.

With the above passage in mind, one can see more clearly certain things about Dominic. Dominic refuses to allow his nature to be distorted by the demands of society, even although his refusal may result in his own destruction. M. Anouilh's ermine provides an illustration of the kind of thing Dominic stands for, and makes specific the reason it is not important that he is not more intelligent, or more consciously self-aware. The central fact about Dominic is that he refuses to allow his nature to be distorted, and in this there is something of the principle of the ermine. It *does* involve a kind of blindness,

1. Boyd explains the meaning of this term:

The Supreme Noumenon is that object of intuitive apprehension (not to us 'intellectual') which is generally called God. As the word noumenon is in derivation related to the word Nōos, 'the Active Principle of the Universe', we shall, making the distinction, as it were, between God and the angels, describe this supreme power as the Nōos.

Much Else in Italy, p.3.

2. *Much Else in Italy*, p.101.

but in the terms of the novels there is a blindness with positive merits.

In the final pages of *Much Else in Italy* the narrator and the Irish boy look out onto the harbour where men in boats are lighting candles on the water. Among these boats is one which puts out the candles. It belongs to a millionaire communist who

... hopes after the revolution to become a super-commissar owing to his great managerial efficiency, and so make little alteration in his way of life. He is at the moment engaged in smashing any small businesses and farms that remain, the units of English freedom and potential mirrors of Bethlehem, a project equally dear to the heart of the man with the *New Statesman*. As neither of them have any conception of the Perfect Drawing, of the divine humanity which should inform our society, they are like a pair of architects with the most up-to-date equipment, a complete knowledge of strains and stresses, but with not the faintest idea of what a house should look like, or what kind of people should live in it.¹

1. *Much Else in Italy*, pp.183-184. This passage, incidentally, reveals Boyd's tendency to make sweeping statements about large sections of society. In the novels, however, he is less given to this, because he places too much weight on the individual not to show that within a given group, individuals may exist who do not conform to the group characteristics.

In a general way the passage relates to the novels in that those characters who are particularly valued in the novels are those who exhibit an awareness of the "divine humanity which should inform our society." The chief characteristics of the society overtaking that of the Langtons may also be described in the terms of the above quotation. Its members are like the architect with the most up-to-date equipment, but "...with not the faintest idea of what a house should look like, or of what kind of people should live in it."

Boyd's faith in both the validity and the necessity of upholding ideals shapes the Langton series from the beginning. It is a faith which has inspired some of the greatest artists and has perhaps nowhere been more precisely stated than by Tolstoy when he wrote:

The ideal of neither the material nor the spiritual life can be recognized by the earthbound. The whole point is in the continual effort to approach the ideal. If the ideal were attainable, it would cease to be an ideal.... A man striving after Christ's ideal is like a man carrying a lantern on a long stick. The light will always

be ahead of him, and yet it will
shine and show him the right path.¹

How successful Boyd has been in writing a series of novels informed at the deepest level by such ideas and beliefs, however, is a question still to be considered.

One immediate problem for the critic is raised by the fact that Boyd chose to write a series of novels rather than a single work. Underlying my discussion throughout has been the assumption that these four novels must be regarded as a series. Each novel has a pattern of its own, and in a sense is able to stand on its own, yet each takes its place within a larger structure, and derives part of its meaning from its relation to the other novels. This raises questions about the criteria one ought to adopt in order to judge a series, and emphasises the fact that any estimation of the Langton series will be necessarily limited by the fact that this larger structure is incomplete.

It seems to me that a series of novels presents certain difficulties, not present to the same degree in

1. Quoted by Cynthia Asquith in her book *Married to Tolstoy* (Icon books, London, 1964), p.147.

a single work. The problem of completely integrating the vision one is committing to paper is emphasised by the fact that one is completing small structures within a larger one - writing novels complete in themselves, but fitting them into a pattern created by the other novels. Critical opinion of the Langton series has been influenced by the fact that the structure of the series is easily obscured by the existence of each separate novel. That the series is incomplete makes it even more difficult to perceive the structure and is relevant too to any discussion of the success of Boyd's characters - Dominic in particular. In discussion recently with one of Boyd's critics I encountered the view that Dominic deteriorates from a figure of Dostoyevskian proportions in the opening chapter of *The Cardboard Crown*, to an interesting but confused adolescent in *A Difficult Young Man*, to an unconvincing character in *When Blackbirds Sing*. Part of the reason for such a view may be that we are left without the last part of Dominic's development. If one thinks of *Hamlet* left unfinished at the end of Act III or Act IV, *Hamlet* without the tragedy, one would probably be left with the impression that Hamlet is an unsatisfactory, even an unconvincing, character.

There are other reasons for the critics' dissatisfaction with Dominic. Some of these reflect the limitations, or the bias, of the critics, but some perhaps suggest a limitation in the novels.

Boyd's explanations for his characters' behaviour are not 'psychological' or 'social', and for this reason, it seems to me, have frequently not been taken seriously. Critics have dismissed the suggestions of hereditary influence, for example, as either unscientific or destructively deterministic. I have attempted, throughout my thesis, to show that if Boyd is to be taken seriously as a novelist, it must be recognized that in his depiction of character he attempts causal explanations of behaviour that underly the psychological and social.

Yet having accepted Boyd's method and judged the view of life he expresses through his characters to be mature and valuable, one wants still to say something on the negative side - something about the quality of the author's imagination. Critics have suggested that the limitations of Boyd's imagination are apparent in the fact that he so often used his actual experience as a starting point. This fact, however, is not necessarily

indicative of a feeble or deficient imagination. Even a novelist as great as Tolstoy used situations from real life to an almost unprecedented degree, without in any way diminishing the force of his novels. Boyd too is able to transform the details of the life of his family - he does not seem tied to them in such a way that his imagination is distorted or his artistic integrity threatened. It is rather in the nature of his portrayal of character that the nature of his imagination is revealed. Figures like Alice, Diana, and Dominic, for all their life and individuality, lack the specificity of the characters who dominate the greatest novels.

There is, perhaps, something to be said too about the view of life expressed by the novels. It would be easy to say that Boyd is romantic in over-estimating human possibility. M. Anouilh's ermine is relevant because through it Boyd suggests that an absolute refusal to compromise one's nature is both desirable and justifiable. Yet, as I have shown, Boyd's is not a view that ignores the circumstances of life which make absolutes of any kind so impossible to realize. Particularly when he writes of Alice and Diana he does not demand that they be absolutely

above compromise. Although his depiction of character is based on a conviction of an essential self which must not be affronted, it also relies on an awareness of the circumstances of life in relation to which the essential self must find its expression.

Given Boyd's preoccupation with good and evil, and his awareness at an early age of the interrelationship between the two, it is in a way appropriate that his greatest strength as a novelist should contain within it his greatest weakness. His novels are unusually suggestive and introduce into the reader's mind endless possibilities. But the very range of possibility suggests the limitations of his imagination. A work that is precisely imagined is suggestive in a different way - the suggestion is in a way as controlled as the work itself. One may think of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. There is a sense in which that novel does not suggest but only shows, yet in the showing is suggestive. Works written out of the highest order of creative imagination are precisely imagined in every detail; it is the quality of the details that is suggestive.

There is a tradition in English Literature of

minor poets and novelists, extremely valuable in their own way and with much to offer the individual reader. They depend for their effect, however, a great deal upon the sensibility and circumstances of the reader. The discovery of a minor work is rather like the discovery of a friend, someone with whom there exists a certain sympathy. The discovery of a great work of art is different. It is possible not to feel anything for, or get very much from, some of the greatest works of art, but it is on the whole unlikely that this will happen, since it is one of the qualities of a great work of art that it has the power to enforce itself upon the reader or the beholder and so get beyond, or to some extent make irrelevant, the boundaries of purely personal response. It is, I think, true that Boyd's novels do not have that power which shifts a reader's sympathies. Given a reader, perhaps similar in sympathies to Boyd, or at least willing to move with his writing, the novels reveal themselves as embodying the kind of success I have shown. It is a success which, in my opinion, has not so far received sufficient recognition.

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1. PUBLICATIONS

- (a) Verse
- (b) Fiction
- (c) Non-Fiction
- (d) Published Extracts

2. MANUSCRIPT AND TAPED MATERIALS

3. CRITICAL MATERIAL

- (a) General works in which Boyd's writings are discussed.
- (b) Articles, Lectures, Theses, etc.
- (c) Reviews.

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The following Bibliography attempts to list all Martin Boyd's published work to date, any manuscript material held by Australian libraries, and all major critical material. The section of book reviews is a listing of reviews in major Australian, English and American newspapers and journals.

The listing of editions of Boyd's work is, as far as I know, complete except for the following details. Curtis Brown Ltd., who acted as Boyd's agents in London, have informed me by letter that they sold the rights of *The Picnic* to Jos. R. Vilinek of Prague, Czechoslovakia in 1937. I have not been able to find any record of this publication, although Mr Boyd has written to me that *The Picnic* was translated into Czech. He has no further details of the publication. As Jos. R. Vilinek does not appear in the Publishers' *International Year Book*, I have so far been unable to contact them for details. I have also been unable to find an official listing of the Danish edition of *Lucinda Brayford*. The publishers, Skandinavisk Bogforlag, have no details of the publication other than those I have listed and no record of the translator. Mr Boyd has advised me that *Lucinda Brayford* is coming out in a new edition (Lansdowne) this year. As far as I know it has not yet appeared, so has not been included in my list.

There are certain omissions in the list of book reviews. Mr Boyd has told me of the following reviews of *Much Else in Italy* which I have not listed as the newspapers and journals in which they appear have not been available to me: *The Sphere* 12 July 1958; *Weekly Scotsman* 31 July 1958; *The Lady* 24 July 1958; *Express and Star*, Wolverhampton, 16 August 1958;

Month (a Jesuit? journal) October 1958; *Yorkshire Evening News* 14 August 1958; *British Weekly* August 1958; *The Sunday Times* 20 July 1958; *The Church Times* 15 August 1958 and *The Birmingham Post* 8 July 1958. There is also a review of *Such Pleasure*, by C.P.Snow, in *The Sunday Times* circ. August-September 1949. I have so far been unable to locate this in either the Public Library of New South Wales or in the National Library of Australia.

My listing of reviews of *Lucinda Brayford*, particularly those which would have appeared in Australian newspapers, is almost certainly incomplete, despite the fact that I have checked all the major newspapers for the relevant months. It was Boyd's most popular novel and certainly would have received reviews other than those I have listed. This item requires a more extensive search than I have so far been able to make.

I have not compiled a separate "List of Books and Articles Consulted", as I have consulted all the material listed in the Bibliography except for a small number of English and American reviews which have not been available in Australian libraries.

Five of Martin Boyd's novels have won awards or been selected as Readers' Union or Book Society choices: *The Montforts* was awarded the gold medal of the Australian Literary Society and *Lucinda Brayford* was selected as Readers' Union choice in England and was a Literary Guild Choice in New York. (In America it sold half a million copies). *The Cardboard Crown* and *A Difficult Young Man* were both selected as a Book Society Fiction Choice in England and *A Difficult Young Man* was awarded the gold medal of the Australian Literary Society.

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2. MANUSCRIPT AND TAPED MATERIALS

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(b) The National Library of Australia

- (i) From the Palmer correspondence.

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- (ii) Taped interview with Martin Boyd, made for the A.B.C. by Desmond O'Grady in Rome.

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