MORAL ABSOLUTISM IN THE NOVELS OF ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON, ROBIN JENKINS AND MURIEL SPARK: CHALLENGES TO REALISM

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I declare that the work of which this thesis is a record was undertaken entirely by myself and that all sources have been fully acknowledged.

CONTENTS

Abstract		i
Acknowledgements		iv
Introduction		1
Chapter 1	Moral Absolutes and the Challenge to Realism	4
Chapter 2	Robert Louis Stevenson: The Exotic and Unfamiliar	82
Chapter 3	Robert Louis Stevenson: The Scottish Novels	141
Chapter 4	Robin Jenkins: Confrontations with Literary Realism	204
Chapter 5	Robin Jenkins: The Moral Quest	269
Chapter 6	Muriel Spark: Imaginative Extensions of the Truth	322
Chapter 7	Muriel Spark: A Paradox You Live With	374
Conclusion	An Alternative Configuration	424
Appendix 1	An Interview with Robin Jenkins	436
Bibliography		452

Abstract

Scottish fiction has almost inevitably suffered in critical comparisons with the 'great tradition' of the English realist novel. Yet it is possible that both the concept of an organic 'tradition' and the form of the realist novel may be inappropriate to the reflection of Scottish life and culture.

Taking three writers, Robert Louis Stevenson, Robin Jenkins and Muriel Spark, none of whom are generally perceived as belonging to the mainstream of Scottish literature, and whose work cannot be described as following the conventions of literary realism, I consider the reasons behind their uncategorised and apparently peripheral literary positioning by examining the nature of their moral perspective and the effect which this has on their fiction. I begin this process of relocation by discussing the forces which have shaped Scottish attitudes to art and morality, concentrating in particular on the influence of Calvinism. In its expression of an absolutist philosophy the Calvinist cast of mind makes impossible the holding of a liberal humanist view of existence. For writers exposed to this residual, yet still powerful, influence in Scottish life, the writing of realist fiction, with its implicit assumption of liberal humanist ideology, also becomes problematic. Unable to accommodate a view of existence which incorporates an awareness of moral absolutes, the realist novel is therefore an unsuitable vehicle for such writers in the reflection and exploration of their ontological position.

In different ways, Stevenson, Jenkins and Spark - all responding to their consciousness of, or desire for, an absolute dimension to existence -

challenge the conventions of realism. I therefore examine their approaches to fiction and the moral vision conveyed, by considering a selection of novels from the works of each author. In Stevenson's case, his concern with an absolute pattern providing an external definition to human existence emerges most clearly in those fictions set in rich and unfamiliar locations; his use of exotic imagery and his manipulation of the adventure _genre_ are therefore considered in some detail. His Scottish novels, however, may also be seen as providing a fruitful area for examining his moral outlook; in them, by confronting contexts familiar from his own formative experiences, he must balance his use of the fantastic with the representation of a recognisable 'reality'. Robin Jenkins, apparently more securely located within the realist mode, nevertheless tests the human desire for moral absolutes against the constraints of the reality depicted in his novels. His developing challenge to realism may be traced from early novels which confront the literary conventions of realism with the intractability of absolutes, to those later works in which, through more radical experiments with the novel form, he faces the darker implications of moral polarities. As very little critical material exists on Jenkins - a prolific writer, receiving critical acclaim, but nevertheless remaining in relative obscurity - I include in an appendix my record of a recent interview with him. The achievements of Muriel Spark are more widely recognised but her moral outlook has generally been explained in terms of her Catholicism. Emphasising the impact of her early years in Scotland, I examine her works as both a testing of the absolutism implicit in her own witty departures from the conventions of realist fiction and an exploration of the implications - positive and negative - of an absolutist perspective on human existence.

In considering the literary methods and moral outlooks of these three writers it becomes apparent that together they present a structure of feeling - also to be found in other Scottish writers - quite distinct from that of English humanism. In their approach to the novel they offer an alternative pattern of fiction which is both identifiable as a response to Scottish experience and in itself a valid extension of the novel form.

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INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I take as my subject the works of Robert Louis Stevenson, Robin Jenkins and Muriel Spark, three novelists who may, at first glance, appear very different in style, in reputation, and in background. Robert Louis Stevenson, next to Scott the most prominent Scottish literary figure in the nineteenth century, was born in Edinburgh in 1850, moved in the major literary circles of his time and, mainly due to ill-health, was an exile from Scotland for most of his life, dying in 1894 in the South Seas. Best known for his children's romances and adventure stories, it was two of his ostensibly non-Scottish works, 'Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde' and Treasure Island, which gained him international recognition. In contrast, Robin Jenkins is one of Scotland's most prolific yet most neglected writers. Born in 1912, he is now a retired headmaster, living in Dunoon. Jenkins too has spent some time working abroad but his best known works, such as The Cone-Gatherers and Fergus Lamont, are distinctively Scottish both in location and subject matter. Although born, like Stevenson, in Edinburgh, Muriel Spark left Britain for Africa in the Nineteen Thirties while still in her teens, returned to live in London during the war, moved to New York, and has now settled in permanent exile in Italy. Acclaimed internationally as a writer of slender, witty novels, which indicate a sharp and innovative intelligence, her most famous work is, ironically, her only novel to be set in Scotland, The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie.

Connections between the three writers, literary or otherwise, are not immediately apparent. Nevertheless my attention and interest was first caught by two features they seem to have in common. Firstly, all three

have failed to fit into the pattern of Scottish literature as it is usually perceived. Neither their various forms of exile from Scotland, nor their ambivalent relationships to Scottish culture can fully account for the fact that three such major writers remain on the sidelines of what is generally seen as the mainstream Scottish literary tradition. Yet the second feature which they have in common, that of a shared concern, may serve to account for their isolation; writing in very different ways, all three respond in their fictions to the problematic concept of an absolutist morality. Stevenson, Jenkins and Spark each explore the challenge which is presented to the conventions of the realist novel by the contradictions created in the attempt to reconcile, within fiction, the possible existence of external moral absolutes with the relativity of an earthly and practical morality. And through such a confrontation with conventions they challenge both the standard idea of the realist novel in general, and that of the Scottish novel in particular, thus making their work difficult to place within the dominant concepts of literary tradition. I would therefore suggest that, without directly influencing each other or noticably sharing a common heritage, they can nevertheless be seen as constituting an identifiable pattern of fictional response within Scottish writing. It is the nature of this pattern that I wish to examine, by studying the techniques of each author, their adaptations of style to their subject matter, and the manipulations of form necessary to the expression of their moral perspective. In the process of such an examination I will also seek to identify the underlying reasons for the particular pattern created by these three novelists.

Yet before proceeding to an exploration of the ways in which Stevenson, Jenkins and Spark respond to their particular metaphysical concerns in individual works, two questions must be asked. Firstly, what is it

in the nature of dominant views of Scottish literature that makes assimilation of these three writers so problematic? And secondly, why should an apparent concern with moral absolutes, arising from three writers with such different backgrounds, be in any way an identifiable manifestation of a Scottish consciousness? In order to answer both those questions it is necessary first to consider the concept of 'tradition' in its relation to a Scottish literary context, and to discern its effect on the development of the Scottish novel in particular. Equally vital is an examination of that most obvious form of an absolutist philosophy in a Scottish context - that represented by the principles of Calvinism. Through the conjunction of these two elements a context may be created from which the literary characteristics of the three novelists, and the theoretical implications of their approach combine to present a possible alternative to previous perspectives on the Scottish novel.

CHAPTER I

MORAL ABSOLUTES AND THE CHALLENGE TO REALISM

(i) SCOTTISH FICTION AND THE CONCEPT OF TRADITION

Tradition in a Scottish Literary Context

The development of the novel as a literary form in Scotland appears to have been long overshadowed by a concept of 'tradition' which has found its most cogent formulation south of the Border. Compared with writers operating out of a long line of 'great' English Novels, Scottish novelists have suffered from a sense of lack - whether real or imagined - of a literary inheritance upon which they can establish a similarly satisfactory and nationally individualistic concept of fiction. In many instances therefore, they have either been forced to seek patterns and examples within a familiar, yet culturally alien, legacy - that of the English tradition - or have tried to create a role for themselves within their own national literature - an idiosyncratic place within an already disparate group. The ambivalence thus created in many writers towards their own culture finds a parallel in the malaise frequently affecting critics who attempt to discuss the novel. Unwilling to concede that Scotland may not possess 'a great tradition' along the lines of its English counterpart, yet unable to find a suitably organic line of development to compete, Scottish critics are often forced into a defiant negativity. And once again, the inability to make the most of the material at their disposal appears to stem from the highly developed concept of an English Tradition.

The concept of an 'English Tradition' - in both poetry and the novel - is one which has dominated twentieth century criticism since it was first highlighted by one of the century's foremost poets and critics, T.S. Eliot. In _Tradition and the Individual Talent_ Eliot set out to establish a critical appreciation of 'tradition' in a sense which he saw

as being previously neglected.[1] Condemning the fact that most people interested in a poet focus on 'those aspects of his work in which he least resembles anyone else', Eliot suggested that 'tradition is a matter of much wider significance.' It involves, he stated, a 'historical sense' which both allows the poet to assimilate 'the whole of literature of Europe from Homer', and for his/her work to be accepted into, and in its turn alter, the ideal order of literature. 'No poet, no artist, of any art, has his complete meaning alone,' continued Eliot. In what Graham Martin describes as 'the most ambitious feat of cultural imperialism this century seems likely to produce',[2] Eliot put forward his vision of an organic tradition, developing naturally along healthy lines - although certain more 'unhealthy' strains, which must be rejected, would occasionally creep in. Among those unhealthy elements which Eliot rejected were Romanticism and Protestantism - both in themselves features of Scottish literature from Burns and Scott onward.

Eliot's concept of masterpieces forming a certain ideal order, which in turn validates the individual works, was soon applied to the novel form and developed, although with a different political impetus, by F.R. Leavis, in The Great Tradition. 'With breathtaking boldness Scrutiny redrew the map of English literature in ways from which criticism has never quite recovered,' comments Terry Eagleton.[3] Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, D.H. Lawrence, and - after recantation - Dickens, were given the Leavis seal of approval, while other novelists

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1. T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', (1919), Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot, ed. Frank Kermode (London, 1975), 37-44, p.38.

2. Graham Martin, Introduction, Eliot in Perspective, ed. Graham Martin (London, 1970), p.22.

3. Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory: An Introduction (London, 1983), p.32.

were pushed to the sidelines of this 'major' tradition. Wuthering Heights, for example, is described as a 'kind of sport', although Leavis concedes: 'It may, all the same, have had some influence of an essentially undetectable kind ... Out of her a minor tradition comes, to which belongs, most notably, The House with the Green Shutters.'[4] And Leavis argues: 'To insist on the pre-eminent few in this way is not to be indifferent to tradition; on the contrary, it is the way towards understanding what tradition is.'[5] It is in his discussion of Lawrence, one of the 'great' novelists he most admired, that we can find Leavis indicating the criteria for his judgements. Lawrence is not only innovative and experimental in form; he also possesses a 'most serious and urgent kind of interest in life.'[6] In this statement Leavis reinforces the primacy of realism in approach, and humanism in morality, that have become the main characteristics for English criticism of the novel. And, despite his protestations to the contrary, Romanticism and Protestantism are again relegated to the 'minor' tradition. Moreover, the organic tradition becomes seen as the reflection of an 'organic' society, characterised by the qualities of 'Englishness'.

The pronouncements of the two major figures in twentieth century literary criticism therefore appear to leave little space for the Scottish novelist who may be writing outwith a realist, humanist tradition as established by the 'great' English writers of the nineteenth century. And even those critics who have more recently advanced beyond the stances

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4. F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (London, 1948), p.27.

5. Leavis, The Great Tradition, p.3.

6. Leavis, The Great Tradition, p.24.

of an Eliot or Leavis, still cling to the validation of 'social relevance' in the English novel when making critical judgements. Studies in Scottish fiction, however, have lacked an assurance in the validity of any lines of development within their culture which does not conform to what is seen as the 'norm' of English fiction. Scottish critics are therefore frequently forced either to seek the 'English' standard of criteria for assessing value - social relevance, 'seriousness', a realist approach - or have to create and justify an equally valid concept of 'tradition' which can be applied to a Scottish context. They then meet the problem of a body of literature which refuses to be categorised into a line of 'organic' development. And in both cases they fail to consider the relevance of their imported criteria for the literature and the culture under discussion.

Much of the criticism of the Scottish novel tends therefore to be characterised by a far larger degree of self-justification - and a correspondingly greater element of uncertainty - than that found in writing on the English novel. To take an example contemporaneous with T.S. Eliot, William Power in Literature and Oatmeal, after arguing that literature means as much, if not more, to Scotland than to England, launches into a poetic defence of his examination of Gaelic literature:

> The 'Celtic' spirit in actual history and fact may be this or that, or a dozen different things. What we are concerned with are the broken golden threads which emerge from the Celtic past, and which may with advantage be taken up and woven into our scheme of life. 7

Pleasing as the image of a 'golden thread' may be, it hardly constitutes

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7. William Power, Literature and Oatmeal: What Literature has meant to Scotland (London, 1935), p.31.

a discriminating criterion for access to a Celtic past. Kurt Wittig attempts a similar defence of his endeavours in The Scottish Tradition in Literature:

> Let me emphasise, too, that in speaking of a tradition I am not postulating any inherited racial characteristics. Some well known architectural motifs ... are often said to be characteristically Scottish. Does that imply that none of them can be found elsewhere? Or does it mean that they all express a Scottish spirit? The implication is, I take it, that they reflect an underlying, essentially Scottish conception of beauty, and the same essentially Scottish conception of it is to some extent reflected in certain other Scottish arts. 8

Wittig then proceeds to argue that such traits in the arts are 'collectively a spontaneous expression of the national character, as shaped, inter alia, by geography, climate, history, social conditions, education, religious beliefs, and various conventional Scottish attitudes, opinions and prejudices.'[9] Once again the Scottish geist is seen in terms of some mysterious animism. More recent criticism has moved away from the perspectives of Wittig and Power. David Craig, for example, in Scottish Literature and the Scottish People 1680-1830, does focus on the more specific social relationships between literature and history but in a sense denies his own potential achievement by quoting Leslie Stephen on the point that literature is 'too small a part in the whole activity of a nation, even of its intellectual activity, to serve as a complete indication of the many forces which are at work.'[10] And even a historical approach is not immune from the demands of justification. F.R. Hart, for example, adopts an almost apologetic tone when arguing the validity of his subject in The Scottish Novel:

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8. Kurt Wittig, The Scottish Tradition in Literature (Edinburgh, 1958), pp.4-5.

9. Wittig, p.5.

10. David Craig, Scottish Literature and the Scottish People 1680-1830 (London, 1961), p.14.

> But surely we can postulate that the novel as a form of historical and cultural representation must be significantly influenced or conditioned by the history or culture from which the practioners came or within which they work.
> This book seeks what general understanding of the novel in Scotland may be found in its historical development as well as its development in history. 11

Yet, despite his determination to create an organic line of development, Hart tends to rely on various abstract thematic groupings to categorize the novels in his study. Therefore, although all the works mentioned here possess individual values in their discussions on Scottish literature, none of their authors appear to have found a methodology which they can apply with complete confidence to their subject, nor do they seem to have reached any real confidence in the validity of their undertaking.

Burdened by the influence of English literature, with its strong emphasis on the concept of an 'organic' tradition, the majority of Scottish critics appear to have lost sight of possible alternatives in the patterning of fiction and continue to focus all their attention on chronological influences and shared themes. Yet, ironically, an alternative is available, although it is one originally postulated by a writer best known for his work on English society and its cultural configurations. Through the development of his concept of 'a structure of feeling' Raymond Williams has opened up a wider perspective on the possible patternings of fictions within a culture, and between a society and its literature. In a discussion of 'tradition' in The Long Revolution he points out that although a principle of selection is involved, in deciding which works are to be included, the process is not simply one of a 'continual selection and reselection of ancestors.'[12]

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11. Francis Russell Hart, The Scottish Novel: A Critical Survey (London, 1978), p.viii.

12. Raymond Williams, The Long Revolution (London, 1961), p.52.

Rather the cultural tradition 'is not only a selection but also an interpretation.'[13] Therefore, although in his own work on English literature Williams may find the dominant structure of feeling to be one of a humanist philosophy of social relevance, his theoretical awareness of the interaction between the observer and the tradition observed, of the various configurations which may be termed 'tradition', provides a useful means of opening out the question of 'tradition' when applied to a Scottish context. The implications of a 'structure of feeling'[14] allows for a far greater flexibility when considering elements within Scottish fiction than the need to trace parallels between the Scottish and English situation, yet it also permits consideration of social and historical factors when looking at the culture.

Certainly the two situations possess radical differences in both history and social ideology. And one of the major differences is that highlighted by E.P. Thompson in his introduction to The Making of the English Working Class, when he explains why he will not tackle the Scottish situation:

> But the Scottish story is significantly different. Calvinism was not the same thing as Methodism, although it is difficult to say which, in the early nineteenth century, was worse. We had no peasantry in England comparable to the Highland migrants. And the popular culture was very different. It is possible, at least until the 1820's, to regard the English and Scottish experience as distinct, since trade union and political links were impermanent and immature. 15

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13. Williams, The Long Revolution, p.53.

14. 'Methodologically, then, a 'structure of feeling' is a cultural hypothesis, actually derived from attempts to understand such elements and their connections in a generation or period, and needing always to be returned, interactively, to such evidence.' Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature (London, 1977), pp.132-133.

15. E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (London,1963), p.13.

Thompson emphasises the significant role of English religion in the development of a working class consciousness just as Raymond Williams in Culture and Society discovers the salience of a paternalistic and individualist humanist philosophy which has dominated English cultural ideology.[16] A very different pattern emerges when looking for a similarily dominant feature in the development of a Scottish consciousness, a pattern dominated by the aspect of religion noted by Thompson - that of Calvinism. The uncompromising tenets of Calvinism had a far longer lasting and more widespread effect on Scottish society than they did in England where all real hope of official sanction for such absolute beliefs was lost after the Restoration. Even today Calvinism continues to be an implicit, often unacknowledged influence on the moral and philosophical outlook of Scottish culture, and no-one who studies the effects of Scotland's past on its present can avoid the force of Calvinist ethics or practice, however much they may be reviled. In many ways, therefore, whether condemned or, in rare cases, approved, Calvinism remains something of a national obsession.

In this thesis Calvinism has a dual importance. Firstly it operates as the representative of a particular moral philosophy within a Scottish context, a set of ideas which, although they may have lost their original impetus through continued social application, nevertheless retain a powerful influence over Scottish culture and thought, just as English humanist philosophy continues to have a cultural and moral impact even though the society and attitudes which gave it birth have mostly disappeared. Secondly Calvinism has a less positive role in this discussion. The

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16. Raymond Williams, Culture and Society 1780-1950 (London, 1958).

constraining effects which the proximity of a flourishing English novel has had upon the way in which Scottish fiction has been perceived can be seen in the defensive tone of its critics. As an extension of their need for self-justification there has developed the desire to find something to blame for the implicit 'failure' of Scottish fiction to compete with its English counterpart. Calvinism, an important element in the context in which the Scottish novel is perceived, offers itself as an ideal scapegoat. One of the most severely condemned elements of Scottish national life is the destructive force of the Calvinist religion. The force then which represents the type of morality out of which Stevenson, Jenkins and Spark operate has also been a central point in a perception which allows them no real place in Scottish literature. Such a perception, however, ignores the fact that Calvinism as the abstract source and representative in a national context of a particular moral philosophy is very different from the social phenomenon which has become the bogeyman of Scottish literary criticism.

In order to understand the context in which I wish to discuss these three authors, therefore, it is necessary first to consider those attitudes to Scottish fiction which have operated as constraints on both the writing and the discussion of Scottish novels. Not only does such a consideration involve an assessment of the standard views of Calvinism as it affects Scottish literature, but also requires an examination of the other predominant feature of Scottish criticism - an emphasis on the literature known as the Kailyard, which is frequently seen as a major turning point in the signs of decline in Scottish fiction. The over-emphasis and distortion of these two ideas have often limited perspectives on the novel in Scotland and need to be viewed with some detachment as providing a background against which the moral concepts and the status of the three authors can be viewed.

Calvinism and Criticism

Calvinism has tended to be seen, both in and out of Scotland, through a veil of Victorian morality, with its basic ideas being lost in the continued emphasis on the repressive nature of its social practices. Not only has John Knox become a representative villain, obstructing all that might have been to the good of Scottish culture or society, but other, and perhaps more significant, elements of a Calvinist heritage have been dismissed from Scottish popular history. The Covenanters, for example, have never captured the imagination of Scots in the twentieth century to the extent which Mary Queen of Scots, or Charles Stewart, both fighting for the Catholic cause, have; and the religious conflict of that time has never received the attention given to the Cavalier and Roundhead confrontation in England.[17] Attitudes to Calvinism are, therefore, ambivalent: while many

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17. The Covenanters, however, did retain their power over the imagination for much of the nineteenth century. In 1913, for example, James King Hewison writes:

> In my youth it was my privilege to dwell among a peasantry whose ancestors fought and fell for the Covenant. Their vivid traditions, narrated with awe-inspiring reverence around their hearths, in sight of the trusty weapons which once guarded them, are now substantially corroborated from the indestructible records of whose existence the raconteurs never heard.

James King Hewison, The Covenanters: A History of the Church in Scotland from the Reformation to the Revolution, second edition, 2 vols (Glasgow, 1913), I, p.xi.

Ian Cowan also indicates the once-favourable view held of the Covenanters:

> This estimate, which remains unsullied in popular lore, reached its height of popularity in the nineteenth century when seceders from the established church increasingly identified their own struggle with the Church of Scotland and their state with that of the Covenanters. But in recent years a marked change has taken place. Views expressed in modern works of scholarship have alternated between outright condemnation of the Covenants and their adherents and condemnation qualified by praise for the Covenanters and their consistency under persecution if not for their principle. The changing emphasis from excessive adulation to denigration and oblivion is an interesting one and appears related to changing ecclesiastical attitudes. In earlier eras the Covenanters were liked or disliked as opponents of state control of the Church. Today they are more likely to be seen as unreasonable men who prevented rapprochement between episcopacy and presbyterianism from becoming a reality.

Ian B. Cowan, The Scottish Covenanters 1660-1688 (London, 1976), p.13. Certainly the image of the popular Scottish hero projected today is far likelier to be that of a Jacobite than a Covenanter.

Scots have tried to ignore, or write out of their historical consciousness, a religious force which at one time permeated every level of Scottish life, others have tried to distance themselves from it by loading on to Calvinism the blame for all that they perceive as being wrong in the nation's culture and spirit.

The most extreme forms of conscious Calvinist paranoia emerged in the early twentieth century as part of an attack on the 'failure' of Scottish art and literature - indeed on national life in general - which was motivated by the writers of the 'Scottish Renaissance'. Edwin Muir was a prime mover in this onslaught; in Scott and Scotland he writes:

> I have often wondered why the Scots, who have shown themselves in the past to be a theological and speculative race, should have produced scarcely a single verse of good religious or metaphysical poetry ... Now it is clear that there are other reasons for this poverty of Scots poetry in the seventeenth century and since than the fact that Scotsmen already felt in one language and thought in another, and that there was no effective collaboration between their sensibility and their intellect. It will be best, therefore, to consider some of the reasons first. One of them was without doubt the strict Calvinism of the Scots, which was adverse both to the production of poetry, and to poetry itself. Another was the complete prohibition put upon poetic drama by the Reformers just when it seemed on the point of developing; a prohibition which killed not only the drama itself, but also a great number of other forms of poetry which normally flow from it. This matter of dramatic poetry, indeed, or rather the lack of it, was probably crucial for Scottish literature; and if that is so, then the Reformation truly signalized the beginning of Scotland's decline as a civilised nation. 18

As Muir takes the great age of Elizabethan drama as his standard of comparison he is presumably expressing an argument that he sees as equally applicable to prose: his rhetoric is therefore worthy of some analysis. Throughout this passage he implies that no development at all

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18. Edwin Muir, Scott and Scotland (London, 1936), p.23.

took place in Scottish literature - not that it may have developed, but in a different manner. Scotland is thus seen as possessing, not an alternative culture, but no cultural traditions at all. Refusing to allow that the influence of Calvinism and the Reformation may have shaped Scottish literature's forms and traditions in a different direction from that of England, he talks only in terms of loss, opposing 'flow' to 'prohibition' and 'killing.' Having established the sense of a lacuna, he further strengthens it by his remarks on Scott:

> The hiatus between cause and effect in Scott's novels, the imperviousness of his heroes to the consequences of their actions, cannot be explained, I think, except by the fact that he was born and brought up in a sort of vacuum, a country without a centre which could gather up within itself and give meaning to all the actions of the people who composed it. 19

Accepting the phenomenon which Muir describes, and which he presumably also attributes to the eschatological nature of Scotland's religion, we are left without any explanation of what should be there, except for the negative comparison with countries who are in possession of a 'centre'. And whereas this feature of Scott's writing could be seen as an accurate fictional embodiment of a certain ideology, Muir chooses to view his work only in terms of flaw. He also chooses to ignore the fact that other world literatures might prove more suitable models for comparison.

Muir is, of course, not the only offender - although one of the more perceptive and convincing - in this case. In Literature and Oatmeal William Power extends the areas in which Calvinism can be castigated:

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19. Muir, Scott and Scotland, p.171.

> Literature was to mean less and less for a people who had lost the sense of national continuity, who were immersed in perpetual squabbles over an open Bible every phrase of which was held to have equal and absolute authority as a rule of faith, life and politics, and who were under the domination of a largely lay Kirk that usurped the powers of Parliament and extended its Mosaic interference to every detail of private conduct, except the sacred business of exploiting one's tenants or workers. 20

Once again the rhetoric extends far beyond the historical context of the remarks - in Power's case, the Reformation. Apparently unaware of the inconsistency of condemning the Kirk for virtually governing the whole nation, while expressing the desire for 'national continuity', Power relies on the emotive appeal of his criticism, in the ironic 'sacred business of exploiting', and shows no interest in analysing the cultural implications of Calvinism itself. Blurring the distinctions between its effect on daily life, on the individual psyche, and on a sense of identity, he also confuses Calvinist ideas with its causal effects leading to union with England. And, like Muir, he is careful to distance himself from Calvinism, denying any influence it had on his own inheritance, relying on words such as 'usurped' and 'extended' to make Calvinism appear as a yoke thrust upon the unwilling people of Scotland, and from which they must escape to be free of ideology - as if such a state were possible.

The perspective expressed by Power can be found in even more emotive terms in the writings of Fionn MacColla. The Reformation, as he describes it in <u>At the Sign of the Clenched Fist,</u> represents a deliberate attempt to separate the people from their basic desires, a subversion of the 'natural' course of history:

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20. Power, <u>Literature and Oatmeal</u>, p.53.

> Europe had grown up by, with, and in the Church, which had been the generating element of the vast and sustained social, intellectual and moral effect which produced the 'Thing' that was Europe, a varied and diverse society, which was, nevertheless 'One Thing', with common intellectual, moral and social ideals, a common 'mind' upon life, and a common language of cultural and intellectual activity. It was this Unity of life and traditions which the Reformers set out to overthrow, in order to replace it - not by freedom of choice in religion: such a notion was never conceived - but by their own governance: in Scotland in particular the sect of Calvinists claimed nothing less than that the civil power itself should be directly subject to their supervision and control. 21

Again through the use of emotive and abstract language - 'common mind upon life'; 'unity of life and tradition'; 'vast and sustained ... effect' - MacColla presents the world before the Reformation as possessing an all-embracing and totally fulfilling concept of existence, upon which Calvinism was then imposed, ignoring the fact that both Luther and Calvin received the support of the people surprisingly quickly, and embodied, on a practical, if not a theological level, much of the resistance to the Catholic church of the time.[22] In opposition to the supposedly 'organic' and free nature of pre-Calvinist society, MacColla depicts Calvinism as unnatural, disruptive and reductive, always denying fulfilment, again overlooking the fact that Calvinism served to relocate 'fulfilment', by emphasising it as essentially a feature of the next world, as opposed to this one. Yet assuming Calvinism's intrinsic inferiority, MacColla also views it as a tyrant, a force of oppression to which escape, not analysis,

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21. Fionn MacColla, At the Sign of the Clenched Fist (Edinburgh, 1967), pp.59-60.

22. As the following description of Martin Luther's influence indicates: 'Luther's revolt thus occurred as a protest against an especially obnoxious example of the long-standing tendency to reduce salvation to a business transaction. His initial protest had less to do with the theory of indulgences than with their practical effects upon simple men and women.'
A.G. Dickens, The Age of Humanism and Reformation: Europe in the Fourteenth, Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries (London, 1972), p.146.

is the only solution.[23]

A similar theme now begins to emerge from these various criticisms of Calvinism: all the writers talk of an ideal state of unity, of community, even of civilisation, which has been destroyed by the advent of Calvinist religion, most noticably in a Scottish context. Art, nationality and religion are perceived as a single entity, organically interacting in those countries to which Scotland is compared. In our case, it is implied, any possibility of achieving such coherence has been taken from us. Yet these writers ignore the terms in which they themselves are discussing the problem: in spite of complaints of the fissures that have been created between art, religion and national identity, they are in fact talking of them as being inextricably linked - with the qualification that the result of this interaction does not fulfil their expectations. Although they may see the influence of Calvinism as purely negative, they are unconsciously emphasising the extent of its power and the pervasiveness of its influence - not only in Scottish life but also on their own art. Imposing their own ideals of what Scotland should be - based either on an age long gone, the period before the Reformation, or on another culture, usually that of England - they expend their very real powers of analysis in discussing absences rather than presences within their culture. George Mackay Brown's writing on the Reformation epitomises this attitude and provides a final example for the present discussion:

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23. See, too, the work's conclusion: 'IN OTHER WORDS, WHAT THE REFORMATION DID WAS TO SNUFF OUT WHAT MUST OTHERWISE HAVE DEVELOPED INTO THE MOST BRILLIANT NATIONAL CULTURE IN HISTORY.' p.204

> What was broken, irremediably, in the sixteenth century was the fullness of life of a community, its single interwoven identity. In earlier times the temporal and the eternal, the story and the fable, were not divorced as they came to be after Knox: they used the same language and imagery, so that the whole of life was illuminated. 24

Once again Calvinism is the victim of a preconceived ideal; the organic community and the sense of self it provided have been destroyed by a national religion, story and fable torn apart. Yet Brown sees Calvinism purely as a force imposed on Scottish life: if it is seen as arising as an expression of general reaction then story and fable are not unnaturally torn apart, but simply placed in a different conjunction, and one that is less easily categorised.

George Mackay Brown is representative in his attitude of a general view which holds that Calvinism has always been inimical to art. Yet those adhering to such a view not only ignore the fact that art has been produced under Calvinism, although that art may not conform to their desired ideal, but also fail to inquire as to whether their desired ideal may, in fact, be inappropriate to the representation of a Calvinist society. In the case of the novel the desired ideal appears to conform to that of the English novel 'norm', which has been predominantly the realist expression of humanist values in a social context. This form of art may not, however, be totally relevant to a world influenced by Calvinist metaphysics. In a Calvinist society the world is seen as a place in which the individual is left face to face with an omniscient and judging God in private. In public life, however, the individual

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24. George Mackay Brown, 'The Broken Heraldry', Memoirs of a Modern Scotland, ed. Karl Miller (London, 1970), 136-150, p.145.

must also prove membership of the Elect through social roles.[25] Operating in two very different spheres the Calvinist consciousness would be unable to find accurate representation in a realist novel which deals with the social and public aspects alone as the manifestation of private morality. The private dimension, dominated by an all-powerful God and in which absolutes may operate contrary to the workings of everyday reality, would have no place in such a form. Calvinism, therefore, may demand a reordering both of the conventional view of human experience and the traditional means of expressing it.

It is not, therefore, surprising that the problems of assimilating the full implications of Calvinist theology experienced by writers such as MacColla, Muir and Brown has also been felt by critics approaching the issue with less polemicism. F.R. Hart, for example, divides the development of Scottish fiction into two strands, gothic fantasy and social history, which he sees as possessing two correspondingly different techniques, fantasy and realism. Thus Stevenson is viewed as adopting the gothic element, writing in the tradition of romance, and there finding consolation for his failure to come to terms with an increasingly industrialised society: 'the hellish realities of industrial urbanism seems to have been beyond the imaginative tolerances of the novelist.'[26] Robin Jenkins, 'a natural moralist', he classes as a 'novelist of survival' - one who advocates the survival of 'limited vision'. And Hart accounts for the element of the grotesque in Jenkins' work as a deviant form of Gothicism.[27] Spark is perceived as one of a group of

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25. 'If the Calvinists agreed with Luther that good works availed nothing to save a man, they accepted the converse belief that such works provided an evident sign of divine grace.'
Dickens, The Age of Humanism and Reformation, p.169.

26. Hart, The Scottish Novel, p.399.

27. Hart, p.286, p.272, p.284.

expatriate novelists who 'took exile, homelessness, and flight as existential metaphors, but also as inevitable betrayals of a cultural inheritance at conflict with itself.'[28] In each case the gothic elements, the use of fantasy and the grotesque, is seen as a total denial of realism. Hart thus imbroils himself in yet another Caledonian antisyzygy, obliterating any possible fusion of the fantastic and the real. By assuming that they are opposite he evades the issue of whether there may be circumstances - and from a Calvinist perspective such an interaction is not at all unlikely - in which the real and the fantastic may exist in conjunction. Hart is well aware of the power of Calvinism: 'The severest anti-Calvinist seems unable to escape a sense of its power, or for that matter to shake off its convictions of a man's pettiness, idolatry, delusion and distance from old Eden', and he also acknowledges its ability to produce art.[29] He tends, however, to limit his attention to its powers as expressed only through social manifestations. He states: 'A noteworthy feature of Scottish fiction is the moral primacy of community, the faith (some would say Calvinist in genesis) that the community is the ground of individual worth and a condition of salvation.'[30] Since one of the essentials of Calvinist teaching is that a public facade is no absolute guarantee of salvation, his comments simplify the extremely paradoxical nature of Calvinism's social effects and soften its role in the Scottish community.[31]

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28. Hart, p.400.

29. Hart, pp.400-401.

30. Hart, p.401.

31. See Cairns Craig, 'Fearful Selves: Character, Community and the Scottish Imagination', Cencrastus, 4 (1980/81), 29-32, for further comment on this issue.

Moreover, his emphasis furthers the distinction of social and private subject matter and categorisation of fantastic and realist techniques, without looking at their interaction in any fruitful way.

Some critics have, of course, considered the more theoretical and spiritual implications of Calvinism. David Craig, for example, comments on the ways in which Calvinism prevented public or ritualistic art: 'it is through such processes in the sensibility, rather than in any outward censorship that 'Calvinism' mainly affected the deeper life of the country.'[32] Yet in spite of his sensitive awareness of the effect Calvinism may have upon the consciousness rather than its purely social manifestations, Craig's writing still contains a note of blame, presumably stemming from his belief in the necessity of a 'public' art for the survival of a nation's literary heritage. William Donnelly too, in an unpublished doctoral thesis on Scottish poetry,[33] has discussed the spiritual effects of Calvinism. In describing the effects of the Reformation he states:

> the means by which man might reconcile his material and spiritual being was eradicated. Spirit and world came to be divided absolutely. Given that in reality a life at one with the spiritual ideal is impossible, one result of this was that tradition of contradiction to which such characters as Holy Willie, Robert Wringhim, and Dr Jekyll bear witness. 34

Yet although Donnelly explores what he sees as a negative metaphysical effect, the characters he uses as examples are among the most vivid in Scottish literature. Moreover, he restricts his detailed analysis of

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32. David Craig, Scottish Literature and the Scottish People, p.76.

33. William Joseph Donnelly, 'Religion and the Poetic Imagination: A Study of the Relationship between Religious Vision and Poetic Expression in Scotland from the Fifteenth Century to the Present' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1981).

34. Donnelly, 'Religion and the Poetic Imagination', p.148.

the religious dimension of Scottish literature to poetry, and his important research has never found a counterpart on the novel.

Novelists and critics alike share the difficulty of assimilating Calvinism. While this thesis will examine, through detailed discussion of individual novels, the variety of approaches used within one pattern of development, it is worth noting at this point three main avenues which have been open to novelists apart from Stevenson, Jenkins and Spark. The literature of the Kailyard offered one model, in its depicting of the everyday implications of Calvinist theology. J.M. Barrie's Auld Licht Idylls balances the severe Kirk of the 'Auld Licht'[35] with the more liberal theology which was becoming fashionable in the 1880's. Satire offered an alternative approach. Burns' 'Holy Willie's Prayer' remains the best example of this kind. And in the last century an amalgam of both approaches has appeared, attempting to deal both realistically and critically with the everyday manifestations of a Calvinist inheritance in society. From A.J. Cronin's Hatter's Castle (1931)[36] through Fred Urquart's Time Will Knit[37] to Consider the Lilies by Iain Crichton Smith (1968)[38] the different social faces of Calvinism have been depicted with both accuracy and resentment. Thirdly, there exists a group of Scottish novels in which the attempt is made to bypass Calvinism and return to a pre-Reformation golden age.

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35. J.M. Barrie, Auld Licht Idylls (London, 1888).

36. A.J. Cronin, Hatter's Castle (London, 1931).

37. Fred Urquart, Time Will Knit (London, 1938).

38. Iain Crichton Smith, Consider the Lilies (London, 1968),

Fionn MacColla and George Mackay Brown in particular offer examples of this approach in their work, although traces of it can also be found in the novels of Edwin Muir and, to a lesser degree, Neil Gunn.

All these approaches, however, share one characteristic, in that they represent attempts to move away from Calvinism rather than acknowledge its psychological and philosophical impact as well as its social force. The major English novels of the nineteenth century - with the exception perhaps of Wuthering Heights - can be seen as encapsulating the ideas of Protestant teaching, precisely because such ideas are concerned with public behaviour as the manifestation of private morality. The difficulty experienced by novelists who choose only to portray everyday life as imbued with Calvinist ethics may be attributed to the fact that Calvinism as a religion is not concerned merely with relative social expressions of morality: its focus is on preparing for the next world, not on teaching how to live in this. The teleological approach means that, despite its social effects, Calvinism also demands a more abstract application of its ideas which may have only a limited applicability for everyday existence. Its emphasis on day to day reality is only as a dimension in which to prepare for, or despair of, an eternal existence. Indeed, Fionn MacColla's powerful image of Calvinism (along with Gnosticism, 'Englishism', Communism and German National Socialism, amongst others) as 'THE BRANDISHING OF A CLENCHED FIST IN THE FACE OF APPREHENDED BUT REPELLED OR REPUDIATED REALITY', (his capitals) is surprisingly accurate, although originally intended purely as condemnation.[39] As such Calvinism presents a demand for the movement away from literature's conventional methods of dealing with apprehended reality and its

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39. Fionn MacColla, At the Sign of the Clenched Fist, p.178.

significance, creating the necessity for a shift of focus. It also calls for a different perspective on the role of literature. If a writer is at all influenced by the Calvinist belief that since the Fall all humanity is sinful, literature then loses the function of seeking actively to improve the individual but is instead pushing the reader to a point of recognition at which a metaphysical dimension to reality can be appreciated. Therefore, although there has been a tendency to perceive the alternatives presented by Calvinism as a blight upon the norm, it is also possible to see its ideas as presenting an exciting demand for a new approach to the novel form, both in function and technique, within a Scottish context.

Criticism and the Kailyard

The second major obsession of Scottish writers and critics, and one which has served to reinforce a sense of deficiency, has been with the literature of the 'Kailyard.' Like Calvinism, the literature of this particular period and its subsequent development into a genre, has been castigated and attacked for the so called inadequacies of the Scottish novel when compared to its English or European counterpart. Although now viewed as a recognised literary form, 'Kailyard' was the name given by the critic J.H. Millar to a group of novels written in the 1890's, published under the auspices of a Free Church Minister, William Robertson Nicholl, editor of the influential British Weekly.[40] This term, taken from an old Scots song which was used as a frontispiece for one of the most popular novels of the group, Ian Maclaren's Beside the Bonnie Briar Bush:[41]

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40. J.H. Millar, Literary History of Scotland (London, 1903).

41. Ian Maclaren, Beside the Bonnie Briar Bush (London, 1894).

> There grows a bonnie briar bush in our kailyard,
> And white are the blossoms on't in our kailyard.

was first applied to novelists in Nicholl's enclave, including J.M. Barrie, S.R. Crockett, and John Watson, writing under the name of Ian MacLaren. However, although their novels sold in great numbers, it is unlikely that they would have been seen as representing a major stage in the development of the Scottish novel if anything else had been written at the time which came anywhere near the expectations created by comparisons with the English Victorian novel. Stevenson may have been producing some of his best work around this time but it was never seen as belonging to any mainstream tradition, partly because it was somewhat alien to nineteenth century conventions. Kailyard literature, however, could be viewed as a poor and backward relation of the English novel, a simplistic attempt to represent social reality using familiar, albeit degenerated, conventions.

Through such comparisons Kailyard literature has come to be seen as a major stage in the development of the Scottish novel. A more worrying aspect of this perspective, however, is the way in which it has also become a central point - although an inglorious one - to which Scott and Galt lead, and from which an 'anti-kailyard reaction' and the twentieth century Scottish novel has emerged. It is often viewed as an abyss into which previously great writers fell, and from which all subsequent novelists have been scrambling out, in a desperate attempt to escape its ethos. It therefore appears to have assumed dimensions out of all proportion to its original form.

Yet this perception is as blinkered as that which loads all opprobrium

for the patterns of Scottish literature upon Calvinism, since it too excludes all forms of fiction which do not fit into a certain narrow line of development. Obviously some of the criticism on the Kailyard has performed a valid function in tracing certain aspects of the Scottish novel but it also places certain constraints upon its development, by preventing it from accommodating writers such as Stevenson, Jenkins and Spark, who do not immediately fit into the pattern, and by claiming so many other writers as examples. A brief glance at the rhetoric of this kind of criticism reveals the way in which such constraints operate. Ian Campbell's book, Kailyard, contains the fullest and most recent discussion of the *genre* and is therefore a valuable addition to Scottish literary knowledge, but he concludes:

> The Kailyard, inheriting possible modes from the history of Scottish fiction, expanding them into an immensely possible version of Scottishness, and sustaining this creation through several generations of literary activity, brought a version of Scotland to millions, but made what many would regard as a legitimate functioning of the Scottish imagination impossible, or extremely difficult, for generations.[42]

Not only does this statement indicate that the Kailyard is responsible for all that is 'wrong' in Scottish life and culture, but it also places it in an undeniably central position in any perspective on the Scottish novel. Given a role of prime importance, it is viewed as actually carrying Scottish fiction forward - although into a period of stagnation - through the use of words such as 'sustained' and 'expanded' which again attempt to imply some concept of organic growth. More importantly, the use of the phrase 'legitimate functioning of the Scottish imagination' raises the question of how such a concept is constituted in terms of our

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42. Ian Campbell, Kailyard (Edinburgh, 1981), p.128.

expectations, both of the role of the imagination and its 'proper' mode of expression.

Inevitably, when considering what is legitimate in the fictional imagination, 'realism' appears as the technical norm that should be in the centre of the Scottish novel but is strangely missing. And if the Kailyard can be perceived as almost fulfilling that criteria but in a debased populist form, over-simplifying and sentimentalising what it claims is a presentation of social reality, then far more significant Scottish novels must either be left out of the 'central' pattern of development, or distorted to fit it. Thus a damaging selectivity begins to operate in criticism of Scottish fiction: Jeanie Deans, for example, is seen as an early representation of Kailyard virtues, while the violent, even revolutionary implications of the Porteous Mob in the same novel, Heart of Midlothian, are frequently ignored.[43] Annals of the Parish and The Ayrshire Legatees[44] are cited as examples of Kailyard prefigurations in John Galt's social documentaries, but his novel on the Covenanters, Ringan Gilhaize,[45] has been sadly neglected.[46] Moreover, although both the Annals and the Legatees attempt to expand the horizons of enclosed communities, mocking parochialism and analysing its role in such societies, rather than praising or sentimentalising it,

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43. Walter Scott, Heart of Midlothian, ed. Andrew Lang, Waverley Novels, Border Edition, 48 vols (London, 1892-1894), XI-XII (1893). All further references to Scott's novels are to this edition.

44. John Galt, Annals of the Parish; or The Chronicles of Dalmailing; during the ministry of the Rev. Micah Balwhidder (Edinburgh, 1821) and The Ayrshire Legatees; or The Pringle Family (Edinburgh, 1820).

45. John Galt, Ringan Gilhaize; or The Covenanters, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1823).

46. Although, see John MacQueen, 'Ringan Gilhaize and Particular Providence', 107-119, and Patricia Wilson, 'Ringan Gilhaize: John Galt's Neglected Masterpiece', 120-150, both in John Galt 1779-1979, ed. Christopher A. Whatley (Edinburgh, 1979).

critics have found the actual subject matter of more use in making supposed connections with the contents of Kailyard novels than in trying to differentiate the angle of approach. Stevenson, too, suffers from this process of selectivity. Writing during the vogue for the Kailyard, certain of his novels, most notably Weir of Hermiston, have been chosen as suitable examples of Kailyard elements, while the significance of his South Sea works, his travel stories, and his fantasies, has received scant attention, despite the fact that they too deal with questions familiar to the Scottish consciousness.[47] The fantasy novels of George MacDonald may have been denied assimilation into the Scottish 'tradition' for similar reasons.

The Kailyard, then, frequently represents for critics of the Scottish novel, a clear point of (obviously unfavourable) comparison with what a novelistic 'tradition' should be. And rather than seeing the Kailyard as representing only the failure of the Scottish novel's development in one possible, and perhaps unsuitable, direction or, alternatively, viewing it as a period of transition which has evoked a strong response because it draws attention to its own inappropriateness in discussing our culture,[48] many writers on the Scottish novel have continued to focus on the Kailyard and its influence as an unchanging and unchangeable blight on Scottish literature.

Nevertheless, the significance and the powerful effect of such attitudes cannot be discounted. Campbell's statement implies that since the

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47. Stevenson and Victorian Scotland, ed. Jenni Calder (Edinburgh, 1981) and Robert Louis Stevenson, ed. Andrew Noble (New York, 1983) both contain essays which attempt to redress the balance.

48. This line of thought has been fruitfully developed in relation to American Literature in Ann Douglas, The Feminization of American Culture (New York, 1977).

Kailyard could only function as a 'version' of reality, the true role of the Scottish imagination is to capture reality. As we have seen, the Kailyard is presented as an unsuccessful version of what the realist novel 'should' be achieving in a Scottish context. Yet it could be argued that the Kailyard may represent the attempt to emulate an external, imposed and perhaps inappropriate model upon the fictional representations of a Scottish consciousness: and such a view might also provide a reason for its failure. Christopher Harvie, in Scotland and Nationalism, answers his own valid question of 'Why did the tradition of realist literature fail?' with, 'The bogus community of the Kailyard was promoted as an alternative to the horror of the real thing.'[49] However, a further question could be asked as to whether the 'realist tradition' of the novel was either the only or the most suitable means of expressing the 'real' things in Scottish life and consciousness. Harvie's argument that Scotland's affinity for the Kailyard was a form of escape, a shying away from reality, may be true, but it can also be transmuted into the reasoning that the Scottish imagination may have had deeper reasons than social dissatisfaction for being unfulfilled by the representation of only the everyday realities of existence. It is possible that the Kailyard offered a middle road upon which writers and readers alike could evade facing up to the implications of their own disquiet with realism as a method.

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49. Christopher Harvie, Scotland and Nationalism: Scottish Society and Politics 1707-1977 (London, 1977), p.144.

(ii) ABSOLUTE MORALITY IN A LITERARY CONTEXT

Literary Realism

The novelist in Scotland is, of course, faced with the problems of the novelist in any society, searching for approaches to fiction that will permit a full imaginative recreation of that society's consciousness without oversimplifying its contradictions and complexities. In English society the classic realist text appeared to offer the dominant model in the nineteenth century, a model which, in spite of the innovations of modernism, seems still to offer a fairly satisfactory, or at least popular, means of achieving social representation and an adequate expression of most aspects of the national consciousness. In Scottish literature, however, the realist novel appears never to have enjoyed a period of flourishing as the most adequate means of representing the Scottish consciousness. Neither Scott, Hogg, Galt nor Stevenson can be categorised as such, and in the twentieth century the most impressive Scottish novels, such as Lewis Grassic Gibbon's A Scots Quair,[50] and Lanark by Alasdair Gray,[51] are those which have avoided direct literary representation of social realism through narrative experiments. Scottish distancing from the conventions of realism would appear to support the idea that it is not the most appropriate form for encapsulating the various aspects of Scottish experience. Yet in order to discover why it should be so inappropriate, it is useful to consider the ways in which the conventions of the English novel, its nearest and most accessible counterpart, should be suited to representing its society.

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50. Lewis Grassic Gibbon, A Scots Quair: A Trilogy (London, 1932-1934).
51. Alasdair Gray, Lanark: A Life in Four Books (Edinburgh, 1981).

Within the conventional English novel, and here I am thinking of authors such as Jane Austen, George Eliot, Mrs Gaskell, Thackeray, Trollope, and Thomas Hardy - and admittedly glossing over the problems posed by Emily Brontë, Meredith and, to a certain extent, Dickens - each human being has a flexible position within a clearly defined society, has a role to fill and, more importantly a potential personal and social fulfilment to achieve. He or she operates within a morally relative universe in which it is possible to improve, to learn, and to adapt as a member of society. Each individual is seen as possessing a certain freedom within the realities of their everyday existence and that provides the sphere in which the moral interest operates. And within the confidence created by such a perspective it is possible to believe in the validity of a metaphysical understanding which can be successfully applied to reality. Even in those periods when it might most be expected to disappear, such an outlook has governed most of English literature. In his discussion of Romanticism, for example, Raymond Williams points out that the Romantics' apparently revolutionary views on art concealed an innate confidence in their medium which had characterised previous periods of English literature:

> The tendency of Romanticism is towards a vehement rejection of dogmas of method in Art, but it is also, very clearly, towards a claim which all good classical theory would have recognised; the claim that the artist's business is to 'read the open secret of the Universe' ... The artist perceives and represents Essential Reality, and he does so by virtue of his master faculty, Imagination. 52

It is therefore clear that within English culture certain moral and social beliefs allowed its writers a confidence in the reality around them and a justification of the prime significance of their endeavours.

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52. Williams, Culture and Society, p.39.

It is, then, reasonable that 'realism' as a literary method and structure of thought should so affect the development of the novel within their society.

A rather different religious and philosophical perspective can be traced running through Scottish history, since Calvinism was a far more dominant force and had a further reaching effect than in England. As a more abstract theology it relocates the sphere of humanity's moral operation away from earthly reality, and emphasises the relationship with God as being of equal importance as social or cultural considerations in the shaping of consciousness. Humanity must be continually aware of its flawed existence in a world that is essentially alien, governed by a God who demands moral absolutes. Salvation is always a matter of uncertainty, no matter how confident anyone may be of their membership of the Elect. Confidence even in an acknowledged earthly identity or in temporal considerations would be misplaced. Allan Massie hints at the nature of Calvinism's effects on the national consciousness when he writes:

> What do we mean by Calvinism when we speak of Scotland? Not merely the beastliness of Predestination and Holy Willie's Prayer. The image is the Kirk in the moorlands, man face to face with God,; _reductio ad simplicatem_. It is God felt as a pure wind of Reason and also as something beyond reason ... It makes an intellectual appreciation of the existential position and adds 'and yet ...' 53

The expression of such a perspective is, therefore, one avenue open to the Scottish novelist, and one which would appear to interest particularly the three novelists under discussion, even when they may have abandoned belief in the actuality of God. Yet it is a perspective which obviously

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53. Allan Massie, 'Retrospective', in _Jock Tamson's Bairns: Essays on a Scots Childhood_, ed. Trevor Royle (London, 1977), 66-77, pp.67-68.

brings its own challenges to the conventions of the novel form.

The impact of Calvinism in literary terms would generally lead away from the 'real' as traditionally defined. Reality is to be considered not for its own sake but for the implications of a higher meaning and purpose which may be revealed to those who can see this dimension in the real. In order to examine the question of realism in a Scottish context, it is therefore necessary first to understand the nature of Calvinism in Scotland in particular, to consider the type of morality which it embodies, and to assess literary treatments of it outwith the works of Stevenson, Jenkins and Spark. And by understanding its psychological and technical effects upon the novel form reasons for the limitation of realism in the total imaginative recreation of a Scottish structure of feeling may become apparent.

Calvinist Morality

The pervading ethos of the English novel has been what one might broadly characterise as Aristotelian. Relative and humanitarian in its precepts, it sees each individual as possessing the opportunity and ability to do either good or evil. As such, it has close links with Aristotle's statements in his Ethics:

> Since, while the end is an object of wish, the means to it are objects of deliberation and choice, the actions that are related to the means will be performed in accordance with choice, and voluntarily. But the exercise of moral virtue is related to means. Therefore virtue lies in our power, and similarly so does vice; because where it is in our power to act, it is also in our power not to act, and where we can refuse we can also comply. So if it is in our power to do a thing when it is right, it will also be in our power not to do it when it is wrong; and if it is in our power not to do it when it is right, it will also be in our power to do it when it is wrong. And if it is in our power to do right and wrong,

> and similarly not to do them; and if, as we saw,doing right or wrong is the essence of being good or bad, it follows that it is in our power to be decent or worthless. 54

The philosopher Gilbert Ryle has in his writings discussed with some success the applicability of this perspective to English morality and to literature, although again there are exceptions within the English novel tradition.[55] (Wuthering Heights is again the obvious example of such an exception.) Ryle, however, puts forward a convincing case for viewing the morality of the English novel in general - and most notably in the nineteenth century - as Aristotelian. Calvinist morality offers a direct contrast to this Aristotelian viewpoint. By its absolutist perceptions the universe is defined in unqualified terms of the polarities of good and evil. The individual either belongs to the Elect or is damned, and the element of choice to be 'decent or worthless' is ultimately denied humanity, although the potential for doing good or evil may remain.

A Calvinist outlook also leads to very different rules of social practice from those of a relative, Aristotelian morality which, in novelistic terms, may permit a social resolution of moral difficulties. Calvinist morality in social practice can only create contradictions between its theory and its practical realisation. Individuals who believe themselves damned are admitting defeat and giving access to the temptations of the Devil, since their lack of hope could lead to a dangerous disregard for the quality of deeds and action. In order to be one of the Elect

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54. Aristotle, The Ethics of Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics, translation J.A.K. Thomson, revised Hugh Tredennick, with an introduction and bibliography by Jonathan Barnes (Harmondsworth, 1976) Book Three, v., p.122.

55. Gilbert Ryle, 'Jane Austen and the Moralists', Critical Essays, Collected Papers vol.1 (London, 1971), 276-291.

therefore, it is necessary to appear as preferred, to act as if Election were assured, and to lead a worthy life to the extent that all actions may be 'justified'. Calvinism thus demands a public face as proof of the desire to share God's grace. The essential paradox of Calvinism, however, lies in the fact that even if 'saved' the individual remains fallible in judgement because of Original Sin, and may not be assured of salvation in spite of adherence to a rigid code of behaviour. The individual thus cannot judge his or her position within Calvin's description of an apparently arbitrary process of selection:

> In actual fact, the covenant of life is not preached equally among all men, and amongst those to whom it is preached, it does not gain the same acceptance either constantly or in equal degree. In this diversity the wonderful depth of God's judgement is made known. 56

The Elect, moreover, cannot be sure even of the validity of their actions but must believe them to be part of a larger plan. As François Wendel explains in his influential analysis of Calvinism, Calvin, the Elect soul: 'is an instrument of the Divine Will, although this is not to say that his will is annihilated. On the contrary, regeneration liberates his will, but by making him will what God expects of him.'[57] But the paradox still remains; the fallen mind can have no sure access to the mind of God, and cannot be sure of a place among the Elect, even by good works; as Calvin states in the Institutes: 'none excel by their own effort or diligence.'[58] Indeed, Calvin almost actively discourages

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56. Jean Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, ed. John T. MacNeill, translation Ford Lewis Battles, The Library of Christian Classics, 2 vols (London, 1961), Book III, xxi, 1, pp.920-921.

57. François Wendel, Calvin: The Origins and Development of his Religious Thought, translation Philip Mairet (London, 1965), p.274.

58. Calvin, Institutes, Book III, xxii, 7, p.941.

the individual from pursuing the nature of predestination, giving a warning to those interested in it:

> First, then, let them remember that when they inquire into predestination they are penetrating the sacred precincts of divine wisdom. If anyone with carefree assurance breaks into this place, he will not succeed in satisfying his curiosity and he will enter a labyrinth from which he can find no exit. For it is not right for man unrestrainedly to search out things that the Lord has willed to be hid in himself, and to unfold from eternity itself the sublimest wisdom which he would have us revere but not understand that through this also he should fill us with wonder. 59

As Wendel concludes: 'The separation of the elect from the reprobate is effected by God, but that as far as we are concerned we cannot clearly distinguish the elect from the reprobate in spite of some 'sure signs' to that effect given in the Scriptures.'[60] A dichotomy is thus created between the need to act as if saved and simultaneously to acknowledge an implicit uncertainty as to salvation; the psychological conflict, it produces is, then, an essential feature of Calvinist thinking.

Writing on Calvinism, Max Weber quickly perceives the social implications of this theological perspective, as Gordon Marshall, in Presbyteries and Profits, explains:

> Weber stated that, at the level of pastoral theology, the Calvinist was taught the 'terrible' decree of predestination, but also that in order to resolve the crisis of unknown status, the recommended means generated by this doctrine were: first, to assume one's election (since to have doubts about this was to doubt God's mercy, which was surely the work of the Devil); and, secondly, that in striving for this assurance diligence in one's worldly calling was commended. 61

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59. Calvin, Institutes, Book III, xxi, 1, pp.922-923.

60. Wendel, Calvin, p.266.

61. Gordon Marshall, Presbyteries and Profits: Calvinism and the Development of Capitalism in Scotland, 1560-1707 (Oxford, 1980), p.88.

On the one hand, therefore, the individual must live by certain rules, which instil in him a supreme confidence in the moral structuring of society, while on the other he is thrown into an abyss of uncertainty, trying to achieve absolutes of morality that cannot but be refused because of humanity's flawed state of sin. The only avenue left open is that of 'good works' and even this offers little assurance for, as John Knox pointed out: 'Now seeing that good workes spring furth of election, how can any man be so foolish to affirme that they are the cause of the same?'[62] The rigid - and almost inevitably hypocritical - everyday morality demanded by Calvinism thus sits in conjunction with a sense of the ultimate futility of adherence to such codes, and to an uncertainty about one's position in a world defined by moral absolutes, governed by an incomprehensible God. Obviously such a perspective will have powerful implications when expressed on a national level, since Calvinism advocated the practice of its religious precepts through the machinery of the state. Writing on the 'quality of seriousness' behind the Reformation, Campbell MacLean points to the inevitable result:

> Only a people who took themselves seriously could have embarked upon so ambitious a programme. For it was nothing less than an attempt to dedicate the total life of the nation to a single end. In theological terms, it was the attempt to realise the kingdom of Heaven on earth. 63

The dimensions of such a design and its unavoidable failure gives some indication of why Calvinism should be a force of such strength in shaping a national intellectual and moral structure of feeling, and why it should

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62. Marshall, Presbyteries and Profits, p.88, quoting from John Knox, 'An Answer to a Great Number of blasphemous cavillations written by an Anabaptist', in The Works of John Knox, ed. David Laing (Edinburgh, 1846-1864), v., p.36.

63. Campbell MacLean, 'Who Is Their God?', Alistair MacLean introduces Scotland, ed. Alastair M. Dunnett(London, 1972) 194-208, p.201.

linger on as a means of perceiving the world, even in the minds of those who have long ago rejected the God of Calvin, but who cannot escape the influence of its ethos.

The power of Calvinism thus becomes clear; but the question still exists as to why the effect of its moral absolutism was so overwhelming in a Scottish context. This is a question to which few totally satisfactory historical or sociological answers have been given. Weber's thesis on the sociology of religion in relation to the development of the Protestant work ethic and the growth of capitalism does not adapt easily to the Scottish situation.[64] Discussing the relevance of Weber's thesis for Scotland, Gordon Marshall makes a strong case, in Presbyteries and Profits, for Calvinism's influence on the development of the spirit of modern capitalism but is forced to admit that the economic support for this abstract spirit was somewhat lacking in Scotland at the time of the Reformation. In emphasising the dual nature of Weber's argument - that Calvinism both governs everyday life, and produces psychological sanctions for the behaviour it advocates - he omits discussion of the divergence between the effect of psychological instigations and the actual means of their fulfillment. Scotland's economic underdevelopment at the Reformation must have made it extremely difficult for the individual to 'prove' salvation in either commercial or social terms, as was the case in Germany, France or even Geneva. Therefore, although Scotland's economy did pick up in the eighteenth century, providing a more practical basis for expressing religious precepts, it would appear that Calvinism initially could only operate successfully

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64. See Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism translation Talcott Parsons (London, 1930).

in conceptual terms.

Lacking the material opportunities to justify preferment, greater emphasis will inevitably be placed on the psychological impulses of the religion in the abstract; and this is one aspect of Scottish Calvinism which has received attention. In Scotland and Nationalism Christopher Harvie writes:

> A backward, semi-feudal, northern society adopted a religious ideology - Calvinism - associated with advanced urban commercial communities ...
> The Calvinist theology, with its stress on an autonomous and capricious God ... both liberated and imprisoned. On the whole it led to a practical stoicism. Predestination recognised the same sort of lottery in life as in death. Over this pit, Calvinism constructed rules to keep civil society together. As James Hogg showed in Confessions of a Justified Sinner, it could mask tendencies far darker than those Burns caricatured in 'Holy Willie's Prayer', but it provided the hard and fast rules a frontier society needed. 65

The contrast Harvie makes between the 'pit' and a 'bridge' of social rules, with the resultant sense of an uneasy balance, is a feature of all literature which makes a serious attempt to come to terms with Calvinist theology. Tom Nairn, in an early essay, offers an explanation of the peculiar consequences this double perspective had in Scotland:

> originally the Reformation movement was an absolute attempt at moral and religious order, isolated from the very conditions that would have made it an integral part of history ... Just because it could not be the veiled ideology of a class, the Scottish Reformation was bound to be an abstract, millenial dream - in effect, a desperate effort at escape from history, rather than a logical chapter in its unfolding. The Scots wanted, and needed, Salvation in the most total sense imaginable. The Scottish Revolution gave it them neat. 66

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65. Harvie, Scotland and Nationalism, pp.125-126.

66. Tom Nairn, 'The Three Dreams of Scottish Nationalism', Memoirs of a Modern Scotland, 34-54, p.36-37.

Since Scotland lacked the economic and social structure by which the Elect could be seen to 'get on', the philosophical and psychological implications of a theology dependent on material conditions for practical fulfilment assume overwhelming significance. Seeds of a metaphysic were planted in Scotland long before the behaviour codes aligned with it could take root. On an ontological level, the Scots were led to see themselves in a void, governed only by the absolutes of morality. Considering that those behavioural codes, once established, have remained a strong influence - indeed, can be seen in Scottish life even today - it is not surprising that the original metaphysical implications of Calvinism, which preceded and dominated its social patterns, have also remained a pervasive force in Scottish thought. Obviously neither Calvinist strictures on behaviour nor its particular mental set are still recognised in specifically religious terms. Nevertheless, even if God has been rejected, Calvinist theology may be translated, in secular terms, into a philosophy which balances human awareness that our fallibility and uncertainty must be concealed in public life, with the recognition that such a sense of uncertainty is, nevertheless, the irreconcilable fate of humankind. Although no longer inducing a specific wish to attain Heaven, the remnants of Calvinist thought encourage a philosophy which still turns to moral absolutes as the ideal means of defining the universe and of ascertaining humanity's position within it.

'Moral Realism'

The moral implications of Calvinism can also be viewed in terms of the psychology of moral development. The influential child psychologist, Piaget, describes in his work on the moral development of the child, two major stages through which children pass; firstly they go through a phase of 'moral realism', and then subsequently 'mature' into a 'morality of cooperativeness', with each stage being represented in a different type of moral awareness.[67] As Derek Wright points out in The Psychology

67. J. Piaget, The Moral Judgement of the Child (London, 1932).

of Moral Behaviour, Piaget sees the second stage of development as the more desirable:

> The basic elements are the child's awareness of other people's points of view, his realization that moral rules grow out of human relationships, and his incipient moral autonomy ... Conscious of the 'need for reciprocal affection' among equals brings with it a dawning realisation that morality is not a matter of obeying authorities but of evolving guiding principles for achieving mutually agreed and valued ends. 68

Such a moral outlook can be seen to have close affinities with Aristotelian morality as previously described, from the Ethics:

> It is the way that we behave in our dealings with other people that makes us just or unjust ... Hence we must give our activities a certain quality, because it is their characteristics that determine the resulting dispositions. So it is a matter of no little importance what sort of habits we form from the earliest age. 69

Both statements refer to a relativist perspective on morality, to a belief in the reciprocal exercise of virtue. And this view of morality, as something allowing for choice and acquired through habit, is one which has generally characterised the English novel, with its mature and reasoned relativism and its belief in the educative potential of experience. Once again the nineteenth century novel, with its faith in 'the growing good of the world' offers a prime example of this type of morality.[70]

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68. Derek Wright, The Psychology of Moral Behaviour (London, 1971),p.157.

69. Aristotle, Ethics, Book Two, i, p.92.

70. See the concluding paragraph of George Eliot, Middlemarch:A Study of Provincial Life, 4 vols (Edinburgh, 1871-1872), and also the ideas on progress set out in Samuel Smiles, Self Help: with Illustrations of Character and Conduct (London, 1859).

The earlier stage of the child's development, according to Piaget that of 'Moral Realism', has a far less rational basis for its precepts, as Wright again indicates:

> Piaget groups together the characteristic features of the young child under the label moral realism. They all share the assumption that moral rules are external and rooted in authority with the consequence that their application tends to be literal and socially insensitive. Moral realism is 'the tendency which the child has to regard duty and the value attaching to it as self-subsistent and independent of the mind, as imposing itself regardless of the circumstances in which the individual may find himself.' 71

It would appear therefore, that certain similarities exist between this outlook and a Calvinist-influenced view of the world. With its emphasis on the external law of God, on the individual as unalterably damned or saved, with its literal interpretations of the Scriptures, and its historical development from an abstract code to an unyielding social practice which sees every action and every soul as either black or white, good or evil, the analogies between Calvinism and 'moral realism' are fairly evident. Wright himself points to the connections between 'moral realism' and certain kinds of religious thought:

> It will not have escaped the reader that there are aspects of Christian morality, at least as popularly understood, which parallel the moral thinking of the immature child...
> However, it does not necessarily follow that Christians are psychologically immature in their moral thinking... The important distinction must be drawn between having rational grounds for holding a moral opinion and being psychologically compelled to hold it. 72

And, as we have seen in discussion of the Scottish context, the psychological compulsion of Calvinism is one of its most powerful

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71. Wright, The Psychology of Moral Behaviour, p.157.

72. Wright, p.165.

features, giving sanction to a particular frame of mind. As Wright indicates: 'in Piaget's view the crucial factor in retarding moral development is a relationship of fear, dependence and respect towards authority.'[73] Here too the relationship of the individual to a Calvinist God offers a comparison.

Although Piaget's thesis can be disputed, in that children may rebel against authority, and can be criticised for a failure to take into account the effects of actual moral teaching, such arguments serve only to highlight the dichotomies between the social practice of morals and abstract conceptualisation of morality. And although much research on the development of morality in children has been undertaken since Piaget, few psychologists would dispute the existence of a category similar to that which he labels 'moral realism'. Lawrence Kohlberg, for example, the most prominent figure in theories of moral psychology today, divides the child's development into six stages.[74] His first category out of the six, however, is very similar to the first phase of development as described by Piaget; in Fairness in Children, Michael Siegal sets out the characteristics of that stage according to Kohlberg in an accessible tabular format:

> What is Right: To avoid breaking rules, backed by punishment, obedience for its own sake, and avoiding physical damage to persons and property.
> Reasons for doing Right: Avoidance of punishment, and the superior power of authorities.
> Social Perspective: Egocentric point of view. Doesn't consider the interests of others or recognise that they differ from the actor's; doesn't relate two points of view. Actions are considered physically rather than in

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73. Wright, p.163.

74. Lawrence Kohlberg, Essays on Moral Development, vol 1; The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice (San Francisco, 1981).

> terms of psychological interests of others. Confusion of authority's perspective with one's own. [75]

Again the divergence between this and a relative, reciprocal morality is self-evident. One further aspect of this early moral stage, which Kohlberg only touches upon, citing the stages of development as set out by another child psychologist, Fowler, provides interesting links between the psychological implications of a Calvinist moral perspective and the question of realism. According to Fowler, in the first stage which he labels 'Intuitive-Projective Faith': 'Typically there is little concern to separate fantasy from fact. Narrative ability is limited. Causal relations are vague to the child and notions of effectance in the world tend toward magical explanations.'[76] So it would appear that one product of such a morality could be either an 'inability' to cope with, or a desire to avoid the conventions of literary realism which places considerable emphasis on the 'narratability' of the world, on causal relationships and on the embodiment of facts. The term 'moral realism' can therefore be seen as one which is appropriate for describing an absolutist morality, such as that of Calvinism, and will be used in this way throughout the thesis, although with the awareness that paradoxically 'moral realism' translated into a moral perspective within the novel would appear to preclude a commitment to literary 'realism' as a technique.

Literary Realism in relation to Moral Realism

Literary realism as a technique offers the form most appropriate for conveying a relative, Aristotelian morality. Yet the material of

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75. Michael Siegal, Fairness in Children: A Social Cognitive Approach to the Study of Moral Development (London, 1982), p.141.

76. Kohlberg, Essays on Moral Development vol.1, p.324.

literary realism cannot wholly transcend the world in which it must be located and is, therefore, an inadequate means of expressing the absolutes of moral realism. It cannot remain rooted in reality and also make that leap of the imagination necessary for encapsulating a sense of external authority. In any case, one of the strengths of realism, as found in the English novel, is its focus on contemporary material from a secular viewpoint, and on the play of forces within the parameters it creates. A world of external absolutes is, as J.P. Stern points out, in his study of realism, inimical to the realist approach: 'A world governed by a divinely pre-established harmony would be as little amenable to a realist approach as a world of absolute freedom.'[77] By this criterion both moral realism and a philosophy of absolute freedom-such as existentialism - would preclude the adoption of realist techniques as a satisfactory way of expressing their metaphysics. Indeed, French Existentialism and American Puritanism would appear to share the problematics of Scottish Calvinism in this respect. Although each would view the 'external authority' in different terms (and as an absence in the case of existentialism), in all cases there exists an awareness of an alternative dimension outwith the boundaries of everyday reality and its conventions. Moreover, the nature of this dimension is such that it cannot be directly imitated or represented by realist fiction.

Writers who cannot share a relative moral outlook have, therefore, been forced to create their own forms of representation for their philosophies and its effects on the psyche within the novel. Such perspectives have even made some impact on the English novel. In discussing Puritanism in

77. J.P. Stern, On Realism (London, 1973), p.173.

the English novel - with particular reference to Defoe - Arnold Kettle acknowledges a 'tension between two sorts of realism. On the one hand ... the shrewd realism of acceptance ... on the other the more dangerous and exciting realism of potentiality - the realism involved in the ability to see the inner forces at work.'[78] The latter category would seem to be represented, in an extreme form, in works by Scottish novelists influenced by Calvinism. Yet throughout Kettle's discussion the concept of 'potentiality' is used in almost purely social terms, which obviously operates as a restriction on its applicability. Kettle would presumably accept Marx's definition of religion as 'a fictional perfection that compensates for society's imperfections ... men locate in Heaven the fulfilment denied them on earth.'[79] English Puritanism can thus be seen as a fiction in which the divergence between the real and the ideal is perceived as functioning in terms of a social directive: Heaven provides the inspiration for what could be achieved on earth. English Puritanism, which enjoyed only a brief period of autonomy, has otherwise always existed in conjunction with a Royal ruler and an established social system. It has, therefore, almost always received a social check to its abstract philosophy. And any threats which it could have posed to the literary representation of social reality have thus always been mitigated. The concept of 'potentiality' which Kettle describes has not moved far beyond its expression through social realism. So although novelistic representations of English Puritanism may offer some interesting parallels, they provide little solution for the Scottish novelist faced with the abstract complexities of Calvinism in which the gap between Heaven and earth is viewed as static, unable to be bridged. Focus on the ideal must inevitably change under such a perception and it becomes impossible

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78. Arnold Kettle, 'The Precursors of Defoe: Puritanism and the Rise of the Novel', On the Novel, ed. B.S. Benedikz (London, 1971), 206-217, p.207.

79. Harold Fallding, The Sociology of Religion: An Explanation of the Unity and Diversity in Religion (London, 1974), p.35.

to find a total function in the representation of social reality, since no real hope of change or evolution can be indicated. The contemporary and secular ceases to be a relevant parameter and the terms of realism are no longer wholly applicable.

Nevertheless, the problems faced by Scottish writers are not their's alone. Forms of French Calvinism, for example, create similar contradictions. André Gide offers one instance of a writer brought up in a strong Protestant tradition, and he explores certain preoccupations very similar to those of writers such as Stevenson, Jenkins and Spark.[80] In The Counterfeiters he considers the question of an individual's autonomy in relation to the novel through his central character, Eduoard, a novelist:

> because the novel, of all literary genres, is the freest, the most lawless,' held forth Eduoard, 'it is for that very reason, for fear of that very liberty (the artists who are always sighing after liberty are often the most bewildered when they get it), that the novel has always clung to reality with such timidity? 81

And through Eduoard's discussions the intractability of the problem is emphasised:

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80. André Gide was, in fact, mainly responsible for a renewal of interest in the Confessions because of his introduction to the Cresset edition of 1947, in which he expresses amazement that the work is not better known:

    > How explain that a work so singular and so enlightening, so especially fitted to rouse passionate interest both in those who are attracted by religious and moral questions, and, for quite other reasons, in psychologists and artists and above all in Surrealists who are so particularly drawn by the demonaic in every form - how explain that such a work should have failed to become famous? (p.ix)

    He also remarks: 'It is a long time since I can remember being so taken hold of, so voluptuously tormented by any book.' (p.x) And he concludes: 'I consider it an extraordinary achievement and shall be happy if what I say of it awakens the belated glory to which, I believe, it has a right.' (p.xvi)
    André Gide, Introduction to The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner, translation Dorothy Bussy (London, 1947).

81. André Gide, The Counterfeiters, translation Dorothy Bussy (Harmondsworth 1966), p.66.

> 'But I thought you wanted to abandon reality.'
> 'My novelist wants to abandon it; but I shall continually bring him back to it. In fact, that will be the subject; the struggle between the facts presented by reality and the ideal reality.'
> The illogical nature of his remarks was flagrant - painfully obvious to everyone. It was clear that Eduoard housed in his brain two incompatible requirements and that he was wearing himself out in the desire to reconcile them. 82

In this dialogue about a novelist writing a novel about a novelist Gide sets out very well the nature of the dilemma that is faced by some Scottish novelists, unable to settle for the boundaries of reality, but unsure as to what formal alternatives exist. Yet through this example it is possible to see that alternative models to the English novel do exist and may be of use in understanding the Scottish situation.

American literature also provides some interesting examples of concerns akin to those of the Scottish writer, especially in the works of Hawthorne and Melville. As Austin Warren states in The New England Conscience: 'Hawthorne ... had a deep faith ... which was skeptical of humanitarian reform, skeptical of traditional aristocracy, skeptical of solutions to the enigma of life.'[83] A similar ambivalence can be seen in the work of Melville, as Ann Douglas indicates in The Feminization of American Culture: 'While he distrusted fiction ... Melville could, by complex and brilliant tactics of displacement, use and expand the narrative form itself to express his hostility to it.'[84] She then relates this conflict to a similar duality in his attitudes towards belief,

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82. Gide, The Counterfeiters, p.169.

83. Austin Warren, The New England Conscience (Ann Arbor, 1966), p.137.

84. Ann Douglas, The Feminization of American Culture, p.290.

supporting her argument with Hawthorne's own comments on Melville:

> It is strange how he persists - and has persisted ever since I knew him, and probably long before - in wandering to and fro over these deserts, as dismal and monotonous as the sand hills amid which we were sitting. He can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief; and he is too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other. 85

However, in America no single religion possessed the control over the machinery of the state as Calvinism did in Scotland.

Indeed, the power which Scottish Calvinism possessed served, paradoxically, to curtail its own representation in literature. Forms of unspoken censorship led to an open and direct assessment of Calvinist precepts becoming almost impossible. An obliquity thus became necessary which further complicated the novelist's search for a suitable means of expression. Yet although it is all too easy to take Edwin Muir's line and see a result of censorship as the total failure of Scottish writers to produce significant work, it is of more value to examine the work that was produced in relation to the possibilities and challenges with which Calvinism confronted its authors. In order to fully comprehend the nature of such a challenge, it is necessary to examine, in both a general and a historical context, specific treatment of Calvinism within Scottish novels, to assess the more abstract response to its influence on art and, in particular, fiction, and then to consider the pattern of literary approach which emerges as being necessitated by the overall metaphysical impact of Calvinism and its contingent problematics.

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85. Douglas, p.292, quoting from Jay Leyda, The Melville Log: A Documentary Life of Hermann Melville 1819-1891 (New York, 1951) ii, p.519.

(iii) CALVINISM AND THE SCOTTISH NOVEL

Calvinism as subject matter

In examining the representation of Calvinism in the Scottish novel three nineteenth century works, James Hogg's The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner,[86] J.G. Lockhart's Adam Blair,[87] and John Galt's Ringan Gilhaize, offer useful illustrations of the ways in which writers attempted to deal with the dialectic between the private implications of Calvinism for the individual and the public face it demanded as a religion.

Hogg's famous novel of 1824, taking into account the Editorial introduction and conclusion in addition to the narrative of the Sinner himself, can be read as a 'justification' of the difficulties of coping with the metaphysical implications of Calvinist theology. The Sinner turns to religious fanaticism as a means of dealing with the polarities of good and evil which face him. Yet, having become a member of the Elect, he is faced with another set of polarities represented by the pure evil of his mysterious 'Friend' and the unexplained goodness of men such as old John Barnet who became his victims. Neither the symbols of good or evil, however, present him with any reasonable modus vivendi that the Sinner could accommodate within his world. His attempts to find any means, fair or foul, whereby they might be reconciled, leads ultimately to his own destruction. His memoir ends:

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86. James Hogg, The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner (London, 1824).

87. J.G. Lockhart, Some Passages in the Life of Mr Adam Blair, Minister of the Gospel at Cross-Meikle (Edinburgh, 1822).

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> But, ah! who is yon that I see approaching furiously - his stern face blackened with horrid despair! My hour is at hand. - Almighty God, what is this that I am about to do! The hour of repentance is past, and now my fate is inevitable. - Amen, for ever! I will now seal up my little book and conceal it; and cursed be he who trieth to alter or amend! 88

The Editor of the novel, however, can be seen as making a similar and ostensibly more successful attempt to apply reason in order to evade full consideration of irreconcilable opposites. After considering all the evidence he can only conclude:

> Were the relation at all consistent with reason, it corresponds so minutely with traditionary facts, that it could scarcely have missed to have been received as authentic; but in this day, and with the present generation, it will not go down, that a man should be daily tempted by the devil, in the semblance of a fellow-creature; and at length lured to self-destruction, in the hopes that this same fiend and tormentor was to suffer and fall along with him. It was a bold theme for an allegory, and would have suited that age well had it been taken up by one fully qualified for the task, which this writer was not. 89

By using documentary evidence and his literary 'taste' the Editor attempts to maintain a 'realistic' world view and avoid assenting to the vision of the world implied in the Sinner's narrative. Therefore, although he does not actually 'alter' the memoir, his reasoned conclusions can be seen as an attempt to 'amend' its implications. As such his attempt is cursed - or doomed to failure. His inability to explain the discrepancies in the various accounts of events indicate the full extent of his failure to set boundaries on the fantastic; the final metaphysical vision remains unreconciled with, and uncircumscribed by, 'reality'. For the reader, the overall effect is to make us

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88. Hogg, Confessions, pp.367-368.

89. Hogg, Confessions, pp.389-390.

recognise that conventional methods of assimilating facts, both in our rationalising of existence and in our moral ordering of the world, may have limits and may be broken down completely if brought into contact with a different frame of reference, such as is provided by the extremes of Calvinism.

J.G. Lockhart's Adam Blair (1822) is a less technically sophisticated attempt to confront similar issues, and much less successful as a novel than Hogg's work. Nevertheless, it merits consideration for the dualities which it reveals in the author's response to Calvinist ethics. Very much a man of the Enlightenment, Lockhart is obviously influenced by the contemporary fashion of Gothic romance, but the material of his melodrama brings him uncomfortably close to the metaphysics of his national inheritance. Although his choice of Adam Blair, a local minister in a small village, for the central character in this tale of adultery is in itself significant, the technique he uses when confronted with the moral issues his subject raises is even more striking. Evil receives its strongest expression in the novel not through actually wicked deeds - the act of adultery is the single action constituting Adam's 'fall' - but through a dominant sense of sin in the individuals concerned. Their consciousness is presented in highly melodramatic moments, such as Adam's flight to rescue Charlotte, or his meeting with her in the graveyard. Notable too is their encounter after adultery has been committed, by a pool of unknown depths, out on the moorland:

> When he stopped, he threw his eyes round him, and saw nothing but a narrow circuit of heathy and stony desolation; and in the centre of the barren amphitheatre a small dark mountain tarn, the still waveless waters of which reflected nothing but the surrounding gloom - and that so truly, that he stood almost on the margin ere he had discovered that there was anything but heath below him.

> This melancholy tarn, formed where three hills descend into the bosom of the earth together, is of such depth that no plummet could ever sound it, and it shelves from the very brink sheer down into this unfathomable blackness. 90

Only through such images can Lockhart indicate the moral abyss which threatens his hero and which destroys humanity's capacity for rationalising actions and judgements. Yet Lockhart describes this moment as 'these profounder meditations of misery to which the writer of a story such as this can venture no more than an allusion', thus indicating his own doubts as to how such a perspective of 'the secret miseries of a soul prostrate under the sense of spiritual abandonment' could ever be accurately represented in fiction. Evil can only be fully expressed through images of a surrealistic horror - such as Adam Blair seeing his father's tomb; 'with filthy things crawling up and down upon the face of the marble.' (p.227) Likewise, the near-drowning of Adam's daughter is used as an excuse for evoking emotions not usually permitted to disturb the surface of civil society.

Yet despite the duality of this approach, the underlying reverberations which are prevented from becoming too threatening, Lockhart continually draws back from the implications of his own writing. Just as Adam only commits adultery when drunk and then escapes recriminations through being struck down with a physical fever, so Charlotte conveniently dies to avoid any fuller assessment of the action's significance: her presence is no longer there to impede the plot's progress into forgiveness for Adam. Yet even with such cautious sidestepping Lockhart appears unable to control the power of his own images, or to face the moral

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90. Lockhart, Adam Blair, p.225.

horror implied by the situation that is his subject. Throughout the novel there is a conflict of Old and New Testament moralities. In an introduction to the novel David Craig writes: 'Lockhart's own generation was notable for a drift away from formal religion',[91] thus indicating the importance of the development of a more liberal theology, not only for Adam Blair, but for the Scottish novel in general. This more humanitarian aspect of religion is seen to lie with the community. Hints are given as to Adam's Covenanting family history but this lies safely buried in the village churchyard. And what Adam seems to fear, as much as any eternal damnation for his sins, is isolation from the community. Wakening from his adulterous sleep he hears the bells of his local church and is struck with horror at his future alienation from this way of life because of his sinning. Ultimately he is forced to expiate his sins by living apart from the community until they are willing to accept him back. The fact that he is received by them once again, and reinstated as minister, would seem to indicate that the community is adverse to being governed by pure good and by pure evil, and that Adam offers a middle of the road alternative. A central image in the novel is that of the 'rod of love' which both indicates Lockhart's ambiguity and would seem to hint at the movement towards a more mitigating religion than that of Calvinism. This religion is seen as one which can survive successfully with a foundation in the community, thus avoiding the awesome ideas of a face to face encounter between the individual and God. Nevertheless, Lockhart's writing indicates that Adam Blair is only a stage of transition towards a more humanitarian and relative morality. Although liberal theology triumphs in the context of the plot, since Adam is forgiven, the most obvious imaginative excitement is still generated by the language used to express Adam's

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91. David Craig, Introduction to Adam Blair, Scottish Reprints 1 (Edinburgh, 1963), p.xxii.

sense of sin within an absolute framework.

The emphasis on liberal theology to be found in Adam Blair came to predominance in the literature of the Kailyard but the process was a slow one. In 1823 John Galt published Ringan Gilhaize; or The Covenanter, a novel which again showed the still powerful influence of Calvinist thought. Like Hogg's novel, it justified its subject matter by establishing a historical context - that of the Covenant - which set it even further back in time than the Justified Sinner. And it too takes an extremely circuitous route to that past. The novel is narrated by the 'Covenanter', Ringan Gilhaize, whose grandfather was involved in the early days of the Reformation and the social disturbances around the time of John Knox's return to Scotland. Since this is obviously a significant historical contextualisation for the Covenant, much of the novel's three volumes is taken up with a first-hand account of the grandfather's adventures as narrated to Ringan. When Ringan then describes the events and misfortunes of his own life it is no surprise that his outlook on life, strongly influenced by his grandfather, provides Galt with an excellent opportunity for dramatising the fanatical Calvinist imagination. In the novel this influence is usually revealed through Ringan's sudden moments of poetic vision, such as:

> For my spirit was as a flame that blazeth in the wind, and my thoughts as the sparks that shoot and soar for a moment towards the skies with a glorious splendour, and drop down to the earth in ashes ... (p.296, vol 11)

and,

> In the same moment I looked up and there was a vision in the air as if all the angels of brightness, and the martyrs in their vestments of glory, were assembled on the wall and battlements of Heaven to witness the event ... (p.308, vol. III)

As with <u>Adam Blair</u> the rich language is used only to convey moments of extreme metaphysical consciousness, which have little place within reality as ordinarily conceived.

<u>Ringan Gilhaize</u>, however, also illustrates a more technical aspect of the problems faced by writers dealing with the philosophical implications of Calvinism: that of temporality. The retrospective narrative used in the novel is one way of coping with the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. Ringan's hints as to what will become of him:

> So that, although I rose from the rock where I was sitting in the clear conviction that our array would be scattered like chaff before the wind, I yet had a blessed persuasion that the event would prove in the end a link in the chain, or a cog in the wheel, of the hidden engineering with which Providence works good out of evil (p.251, vol II)

become slightly more acceptable when seen as part of a narrative that looks back over his life. The convolutions of the narrative ensure that the lack of suspense is not so immediately noticeable, and also permit Galt some characterisation of the interesting arguments of Providential self-vindication which had become a feature of Calvinist reasoning. Ringan's brother, for example, having broken the news to him of his daughter's rape, says: 'Ringan ... we have met with a misfortune. It's the will of Providence and we maun bear it. But surely in the anger that is caused by Providence, the Creator tells us to resent.'(p.76, vol. III) Such a perspective, which would no doubt appear unpalatable in a straight-forwardly chronological narrative, is slightly more acceptable in a narrative which incorporates temporal disjunctions as part of its format.

Yet although Hogg and Galt experimented with narrative as a means of

exploring the mental implications of Calvinism for the individual and the writer, the public face of Calvinism, as seen in Adam Blair increasingly became the focus of attention. This interest can, however, be traced as far back as Scott. In his fiction Scott appears to have shied away from dealing with the implications of Calvinist theory as his subject matter, and to have concentrated, rather unfavourably, on its social aspects. In Old Mortality,[92] for example, Burleigh is presented as an unpleasant fanatic by nature, while the Royalists are depicted to a much greater extent as being a product of their social value-systems. In Heart of Midlothian Davie Deans' religion leads to his 'stubborn resolution' and lack of support for his fallen daughter Effie. And in Redgauntlet Scott goes so far as to transpose fanaticism to the Jacobite side, with their leader Redgauntlet sneering at Calvinist hypocrisies: Darsie Latimer's 'note from some Geneva sermon' is seen merely as an excuse for plodding and cant.[93] Burns' 'Holy Willie's Prayer' is an attack along similar lines on the social face of Calvinism, and by the nineteenth century Calvinism was increasingly criticised or defended in terms of its governing a way of life, rather than as a significant theology.[94]

By the period of the Kailyard, literary attacks on Calvinism were made primarily on the grounds of its social severity, with its main exponents, the Kirk elders, seen as predominantly grim and humourless,

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92. Walter Scott, Old Mortality, IX-X (1893).

93. Walter Scott, Redgauntlet, XXXV-XXXVI (1894)

94. See A.L. Drummond and J. Bulloch, The Church in Victorian Scotland 1843-1874 (Edinburgh, 1975), especially p.282.

unless they too could be softened by liberalising influences. The Lilac Sunbonnet ,[95] which tells the story of the last days of the 'Marrow Kirk', and Auld Licht Idylls which focuses on the 'Auld Licht' kirk, both concentrate on the effects of communal hypocrisy which sanctifies itself in acts of petty meanness: 'The plate for collections is inside the church, so that the whole congregation can give a guess at what you give.'[96] Mocked in this way, Calvinism was gradually rendered impotent as a theological threat. Writers who subsequently turned against the Kailyard, such as George Douglas Brown and J. MacDougall Hay, attempted to redress this balance to a certain extent, by exploring the matter of religious influences in a wider and more metaphysical way. Their position in this respect was, however, rather awkward: the Kirk could also be seen as a pillar of the community ethos which they were trying to attack. Their only avenue of escape, therefore, was to gesture, through the use of melodrama, in the direction of vast cosmic forces unrestrained by petty village moralities. In both Gillespie and The House with the Green Shutters anger at social phenomenon is translated into the image of a wrathful God, but in the latter case this figure is not even identifiably Christian. So by this stage it would appear that the majority of Scottish novelists had abandoned any close analysis of the psychological and philosophical implications of Calvinism in any depth, but had turned their attention to the much more recognisable public side of that religion, which provided a far larger target for their criticism and satire.

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95. S.R. Crockett, The Lilac Sunbonnet (London, 1894).

96. J.M. Barrie, 'The Auld Licht Kirk', Auld Licht Idylls, 60-93, p.64.

Calvinism and Art

There is, however, another element of Calvinism which has also been described as creating problems for the Scottish writer - the supposed Calvinist opposition to art in general and to the 'dangers' of fiction in particular. Certainly Calvin himself warned against the setting up of false idols:

> Meanwhile, since this brute stupidity gripped the whole world - to pant after visible figures of God, and thus to form gods of wood, stone, gold, silver or other dead and corruptible matter - we must cling to this principle. God's glory is corrupted by an impious falsehood whenever any form is attached to him.... But God does not compare these images with one another, as if one were more suitable, another less so; but without exception he repudiates all likenesses, pictures and other signs by which the superstitious have thought he will be near them. 97

But this warning does not contain the outright hostility to all forms of art that has often been attributed to his teaching in a Scottish context. As G.G. Coulton points out in Art and the Reformation: 'Calvin was far less definitely inimical to art than is generally imagined',[98] and he quotes from the Institutes as proof:

> Yet I am not so scrupulous as to judge that no images should be endured; but, seeing that the art of painting and carving images comes from God, I require that the practice of art should be kept pure and lawful ... Therefore men should not paint nor carve any thing but such as can be seen with the eye; so that God's Majesty, which is too exalted for human sight, may not be corrupted by fantasies which have no true agreement therewith. 99

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97. Calvin, Institutes, Book II, xi, 1, p.100.

98. G.G. Coulton, Art and the Reformation (Oxford, 1928), p.407.

99. Coulton, p.407, quoting from Institutes, Book I, xi, 2.

Nevertheless, despite such defences, the image of Calvinism as being opposed to art appears to have captured the public imagination - and may actually have been incorporated into social practices in Scotland in a very crude form, ignoring the fact that Calvin's true criticism was of the intermingling of secular and religious in such a way that the former affected respect for the latter.

Yet Edwin Muir, as we have seen, held that the rigid repressions of post-Reformation Scotland stunted the growth of a national literature; John Home's Douglas is frequently mentioned in histories of Scottish literature as a defiance of the Kirk's attitudes towards drama;[100] and even in the literature of the Kailyard we can find references to Calvinist censorship. In Barrie's Auld Licht Idylls one of the short stories tells how Chirsty finally triumphs over her husband Tammas' dangerous interest in Shakespeare and his dalliance with a Literary Club; the tale which begins; 'The ministers in the town did not hold with literature', ends:

> Chirsty saw a deterioration setting in and told the minister of her suspicions. Mr Dishart was newly placed at the time and very vigorous, and the way he shook the truth out of Tammas was grand ... Mr Dishart was not a man to be beaten, and he landed Tammas in the Auld Licht kirk before the year was out. Chirsty buried Shakespeare in the yard. 101

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100. Then, just before Christmas 1756, the capital was electrified by the production of 'The Tragedy of the Douglas', a sensationally popular play made doubly sensational by the fact that it had been written by one minister, John Home of Athelstaneford, and presented in the very obvious presence of another, the redoubtable and flamboyand Alexander Carlyle of Inveresk, who for good measure got himself publicly involved in a scuffle with a drunk in the audience. Both men were notable members of the Moderate party and had powerful friends in the General Assembly; the attack upon them by the outraged high flyers had therefore to move circumspectly. T.C. Smout, A History of the Scottish People 1560-1830, Second Edition (London, 1970), p.237.

101. J.M. Barrie, 'A Literary Club', Auld Licht Idylls, 231-250, p.250.

Once again Calvinist distrust of literature is given only a superficial and purely social face which can be easily mocked.

Deeper reasons for Calvinism's ambiguous influence on literature do exist however. In Calvin and Art Mary Ramsay points to one of its problematic aspects by quoting Calvin's plea: 'Let this be a principle: that in the using of God's gifts we depart not from his intention, when it is referred to that end, unto which the author himself created and appointed them for us ...'[102] Of course, as we have seen, humankind can never be wholly sure of God's intentions and may not have access to divine truth. The possible falsity of art therefore leads to the inherent dangers of literature, which can be viewed as a form of lying. Again this is a far remove from the concept of 'Essential Reality' and the confidence in the imagination which Raymond Williams describes as part of the English creative spirit. As Pierre Macherey points out in A Theory of Literary Production: 'The proposition that the writer or artist is a creator belongs to a humanist ideology.'[103] For the writer influenced by Calvinism to see him or herself as a creator would be an obvious usurpation of humanity's inferior position to God. Moreover, it could be interpreted as falsely implying access to divine, absolute truths. In humanist ideology, as Macherey states: 'man is released from his function in an order external to himself, restored to his so-called powers. Circumscribed only by the resources of his own nature, he becomes the maker of his own laws.'[104] Within a Calvinist ideology, however, the

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102. Mary P. Ramsay, Calvin and Art (Considered in relation to Scotland) (Edinburgh, 1938), p.29.

103. Pierre Macherey, A Theory of Literary Production, translation Geoffrey Wall (London, 1978), p.66.

104. Macherey, A Theory of Literary Production, p.66.

universe is defined by, and centred around God, not 'man', so the humanist perception, with its confidence in humanity, is impossible. Writers influenced by this structure of feelings cannot wholly trust nor totally commit themselves to fictions.

The effect of this kind of religious thought on literature is not confined to Scotland. American literature again shows interesting parallels in this respect, especially in the works of writers influenced by Puritanism. In the Prologue to The Scarlet Letter Nathaniel Hawthorne writes:

> 'What is he?' murmers one grey shadow of my forefathers to the other. 'A writer of storybooks! What kind of business in life - what mode of glorifying God, or being servicable to mankind in his day and generation - may that be? Why, the degenerate fellow might as well have been a fiddler!' 105

Austin Warren, in The New England Conscience, points out that the abhorrence of fiction mocked here represents an attitude that extended into his fiction:

> He was embarrassed to 'tell a story', to construct a downright fiction. It is extraordinary how few of the 'tales' in his three books of alleged short stories are really tales - how many of them are 'sketches', half-essays and meditations ... how many take refuge as scenes from New England history ... or as allegories and parables... 106

And the results of this attitude can be seen even in an apparently conventional fiction such as The House of the Seven Gables, which he begins with a defence of the work as Romance:

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105. Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter, with an introduction by R.W. Butterfield (London, 1971), p.16.

106. Warren, The New England Conscience, p.134.

> When a writer calls his work a Romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain lassitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume, had he professed to be writing a Novel. The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience.... In the present work, the Author has proposed to himself ... to keep undeviatingly within his immunities. The point of view in which this tale comes under the Romantic definition, lies in the attempt to connect a by-gone time with the very Present that is flitting away from us. 107

The concept of 'disguised' fictions that Warren indicates, the circuitous avoidance of admitting that a fiction is a ' Novel' that Hawthorne demonstrates, and the converse need to prove that a fiction does have some valid function, can also be traced within Scottish literature and has had significant implications for several of its novelists.

Sir Walter Scott is generally recognised as the originator of the 'historical novel', especially since Lukács' famous essay.[108] Nevertheless his 'histories' are rarely considered important for their historical accuracy alone, for Scott is also known as a writer of adventures characterised by a blend of historical fact and romance. It is possible to argue at some length about such polarities in Scott's work - the manner in which he assimilates his own obvious attraction to romance and the adventures of a violent past to a real fear for the repercussions of such violence within civilised society - but on a more mundane level it is worth considering the simple fictional devices through which he reinforces his ambivalent position. The use of frames for his narratives - such as Dr Dryasdust's conclusion to Redgauntlet - simultaneously concedes the

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107. Hawthorne, The House of the Seven Gables, ed. Milton R. Stern (Harmondsworth 1981), pp.1-2.

108. See Georg Lukács, The Historical Novel, translation Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (London, 1962).

tale's fictionality while attempt to justify or reinforce its historical verisimilitude. Scott appears afraid of revealing himself as wholly an author of either romance or historical reconstruction. In Old Mortality, for example, the reader is led into the tale through a funnel created through textual accounts of the novel's various sources - Jedediah Cleishbottom, the Schoolmaster, the Parish Clerk and Peter Pattieson all contribute to give the impression of an oft-told tale - yet the story itself begins with a historical justification of Old Mortality's existence and the truth of his account: 'I have been able to qualify the narratives of Old Mortality and his Cameronian friends by the reports of more than one descendent of ancient and honourable families ... who yet look proudly back on the period.'[109] Likewise in The Antiquary Scott pleads against the confusion of reality with fiction although the novel is itself centred round such confusion: 'I have further to request my reader not to suppose that my late respected friend resembled Jonathon Oldbuck either in his pedigree or the history imputed to the ideal personage.'[110] And ironically the novel is one of the most heavily allegorical of Scott's novels, thus emphasising the element of conscious artifice which he seeks to deny.[111] Rob Roy presents the hero of folk-legend but surrounds the tale with a welter of appendices detailing 'accurate' and conflicting reports of the hero's 'real' life. And even in The Heart of Midlothian when Scott's attention is diverted from grander historical matters, he has to give an account of the 'real-life' character whom he 'improved upon' for the character of Jeanie Deans.

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109. Walter Scott, Old Mortality, p.15.

110. Walter Scott, The Antiquary, V-VI (1893), p.ix.

111. I am grateful for this insight to Professor J. MacQueen, School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh, given in a seminar on 'Allegory in The Antiquary', 1984.

Such examples show a definite pattern of contradiction in Scott's writing. Accepting that texts can 'place' themselves, creating restraints to their interpretation, then Scott's historical addenda can be seen as performing exactly this function. Edward Said, discussing such effects in 'The Text, the Word and the Critic', uses Conrad as an example of a writer who prefaces his tales with dialogue, so as to place the text in the situation of an interplay between speech and reception.[112] Scott can be seen as creating a similar interplay between the admission of fictionality and the proof of historical validity, using the framing narrators both to imply their own role in the fiction making but also to indicate that they possess an on-going relationship with 'reality' outwith the text. Discussing Clarissa as an example of just such a text, Said writes:

> Surely the novelistic imagination has always included this unwillingness to cede control over the text in the world, or to release it from the discursive and human obligations of all human presence; hence the desire, which is almost a principle of action of so many novels, to turn the text back, if not directly into speech, then at least into circumstantial, as opposed to meditative duration. 113

In the more extreme case of Scott, therefore, the text can be seen as containing a conflict between the desire to address the reader so that recognition of historical accuracy can be shared (and thus disclaiming any element of fictional fancy), with a need to highlight that very fictionality as part of the authorial fear of claiming to influence 'reality' by what has been written, leaving the text firmly placed in the realms of fancy and thus avoiding any accusations of presumption. The ending

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112. Edward Said, 'The Text, the Word, the Critic', Textual Strategies, ed. J.V. Harari (London, 1980), 161-188.

113. Said, 'The Text, the Word, the Critic', p.177.

of Old Mortality provides a clear example of this strange conjunction; the author solves the problem of his own duality by vicariously addressing the reader with questions and complaints about the novel through the character of Miss Buskbody, his 'fair critic'. Having achieved that identification Scott leaves us, too, trapped within the text and its questioning of its own conclusions, unable to draw back from that or to take the fiction with us into our 'reality'.

The constraints within which Scott operates take a slightly different form in the works of James Hogg, although they are still very much in evidence. The 'Ettrick Shepherd' was less a recognisable part of the dominant cultural fashions and could more easily depart from the conventions of fiction. Nevertheless he too found ways of expressing his own uneasy relationship with the 'novel' form. Certainly his links with the folk tradition allowed him a greater choice of forms which explicitly accept an obvious fictionality, offering alternatives to realism and freeing him to explore the interaction between fiction and reality. As we have seen, the Confessions focuses upon just such a dichotomy, exploiting the readers' uncertainty as to their own positions in the game of interpretation. A similar process can be seen operating in The Brownie of Bodsbeck, [114] in which Hogg places the Covenanter and Royalist conflict against a background of hauntings by a local spirit, the 'Brownie'. The device displaces the serious import of the battles involved - deaths and mutilations are described with a degree of detachment which helps create a meta-perspective whereby the ludicrous nature of earthly conflicts becomes apparent. And even when Hogg offers

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114. James Hogg, The Brownie of Bodsbeck and other Tales, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1818).

a supposedly 'realistic' explanation of the Brownie's activities at the end of the novel, several supernatural occurrences are left unexplained. The fact that the supernatural holds sway for so much of the novel means that the final dénouement has little effect in detracting from the non-realistic dimension that has been so well established.

Hogg's concessions to realism, therefore, remain minimal but are sufficient to indicate the tensions of a dichotomy. In The Three Perils of Man he uses a far simpler device to point to the disjunction between established fact and the freedom of fiction.[115] By making Michael Scott, the magician, a pivotal character in the plot, and by using magic and the power of physical transformation to reveal the arbitrary nature of human 'laws', he bypasses the conventional view of the novel as a vehicle for representing reality. And yet, like Walter Scott, he backs off from the implications of his own approach by stressing his ignorance as to the truth of the plot - he heard it all from 'Simon the Curate'. He thus effaces his own role as narrator. Of course, in so doing, he places himself again in the role of selective narrator, thereby implying that some 'reality' does exist outwith those elements of the tale that he has chosen to tell. Richardson uses much the same technique in Pamela, but the difference lies in his possessing sufficient Editorial confidence to proclaim the morally-improving nature of the tale he has to tell: a justification which Hogg never offers. Hogg appears simply to delight in exploring the contrasts between the artificiality of fiction and the supposed 'truth' of reality by placing them in unusual conjunctions. And in so doing he achieved one of the

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115. James Hogg, The Three Perils of Man; or War, Women and Witchcraft: A Border Romance 3 vols (Edinburgh, 1822).

most successful explorations of antinomianism and its metaphysical implications in _The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner_.

John Galt, in contrast, adhered more to the conventions of the novel than Scott or Hogg, lacking the liberation of a folk-tale inheritance. Yet Galt is, paradoxically, much more explicit than Hogg in admitting his distrust of the novel form. _Annals of the Parish_, which he claimed to be a 'theoretical history',[116] does provide a wide perspective on the social history of the period through its presentation of scenes full of local details. The breadth of Galt's view, however, is achieved by the conjunction of such information with what he does _not_ detail. The divergence between the consciousness of the narrator, the Reverend Balwhidder's perception of events, with the reader's awareness of their larger implications, serves to insinuate what is happening 'off-stage' in the novel. It is to the author's advantage therefore to appear to share the naivety of his narrator. Balwhidder constantly delimits the dimensions of his role: 'But it is not for me to make reflections, my task and duty is to note the changes of times and habitudes.'[117] The similarity here with Hawthorne's concern for a function and a 'duty' is quite clear, but the statement also shares parallels with Scott's appendices in that it attempts to deny any creative fictionalising on the part of the author, while also avoiding the claim to total truth.

116. For a useful discussion of this idea see Keith M. Costain, 'Theoretical History and the Novel: the Scottish Fiction of John Galt', _English Literary History_ 43, 2 (1976), 342-365.

117. John Galt, _Annals of the Parish_, p.102.

Considering Galt's argument, Annals of the Parish could almost escape the title of 'novel'. Yet even in those works which are more obviously worthy of the term, Galt continues his anti-fictionalising approach. The Entail, for example, contains a narrator who addresses the reader most of the time as if relating a story, but also occasionally inserts himself into the fiction as a character/observer.[118] And when the narrator of The Last of the Lairds appears in the fiction it is as an active participant in the plot. Nevertheless, this narrator, who appears quite conscious of his role as author of a novel, is attacked by other characters in the tale as an anglicised intruder: 'Haud your hand.' Nane o' your parleyvooing, ye loon that ye are!''[119] Galt reinforces such paradoxes when discussing his relationship to the novels. Writing on The Last of the Lairds he states:

> owing to some cause, which I no longer remember, instead of an autobiography I was induced to make it a narrative and in this respect it lost that appearance of truth and nature which is, in my opinion, the great charm of such works. 120

An 'appearance of truth and nature', of course, prevents any questioning of the form's fictionality and avoids the imputation of it possessing any poelmical quality in relation to reality - hence Galt's regret. Indeed, his writings on his own work can be seen as a continuation of the process of disclaiming fictions. It also indicates his search for a new form, not the 'novel' in which he could encapsulate his view of the world. Writing about Annals of the Parish and The Ayrshire Legatees,

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118. John Galt, The Entail: or The Lairds of Grippy 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1822).

119. John Galt, The Last of the Lairds (Edinburgh, 1826), p.32.

120. John Galt, The Literary Life and Miscellanies 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1834) 1, p.270.

he describes how they: 'have generally been received as novels and I think, in consequence, they have both suffered, for neither of them have, unquestionably, a plot.'[121] Galt, too, is clearly troubled by, and seeking to avoid, definitions of his work based on conventional expectations of the form and function of the novel.

It would seem from the above examples, therefore, that Scottish novelists have evolved means of encompassing recognition of the philosophical and artistic paradoxes of Calvinism in their work, and of expressing an intrinsic awareness of the dichotomy between the metaphysics of 'moral realism' and the techniques of 'literary realism.' And in spite of the so-called failures of Scottish fiction, it would appear that an encapsulation of Scottish concerns has been possible, although the forms which this takes may offer challenges not only to realism but also to conventional expectations of the nature and role of the novel. Thus it is reasonable to assume that the approaches of certain Scottish writers can be identified as constituting definite patterns of fiction, as necessitated by the remnants of religion within their culture and society.

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121. Galt, Literary Life, 1, p.226.

(iv) CHALLENGES TO REALISM

Since Calvinism first came to Scotland the original religious impetus has obviously been lost, but until recently many of its social practices remained. Yet this evolution does not mean that writers who attack the hypocrisy, the intolerance and the social faces of Calvinism have wholly escaped its influence as a way of looking at the world and at humanity's position within it. Neither Stevenson, Jenkins nor Spark would give their approval to the manifestations of Calvinism in Scottish society - in all three cases they would be more likely to attack them - yet they retain a moral perspective which can be seen as adopting stances typical of theoretical Calvinism. Attacking Calvinism in society, they postulate a vision which is even more extreme in its desire for absolutes of morality which cannot be realised in this world. With such a vision, of course, they cannot use their novels as a means of showing the reader how to live. The Calvinist belief that all activity on earth is simply a stage through which fallen humanity must pass before reaching Heaven, if Elected, or Hell, if Damned, lingers on. Those writers who, perhaps unconsciously, have assimilated the legacy of this attitude, translate it into a recognition that the novelist's role need not primarily be concerned with guiding the reader into any social morality, since the social world is potentially transient anyway. Their strong sense of an ideal world, as opposed to a fallen reality, means that for them fiction is the only possible means of realising their unattainable vision. And yet, of course, another aspect of the Calvinist legacy, a distrust of art, ensures their awareness of contradictions inherent in their medium.

Tensions between the need to attack the public faces of moral hypocrisy which may result from Calvinist ethics, the desire to give fictional expression to the concept of an absolute morality, and the awareness of fiction as a potentially deceptive medium, creates a fascinating construct in which Scottish novelists, and Stevenson, Jenkins and Spark in particular, must operate.

Attacking the public face of Calvinism may seem a fairly simple exercise in social criticism, but in the Scottish context it does have deeper implications for the novelist. Writing of Calvinist teaching on hypocrisy, Gordon Marshall states:

> Calvinist pastors were themselves aware of this danger and continually exhorted their flocks, on the one hand, to seek assurance, to prove themselves in the faith by their works ... but, on the other, warned them repeatedly against the dangers of arrogant self-confidence and dead faith. 122

The latter part of this comment gives some indication of the role into which writers may be forced - that of destroying confidence in a world ordered by relative moral values. And in achieving this end the writer may, once again, have to question typical forms of the English novel which tend to reinforce the reader's position through recognition of shared values and a secure acceptance of the nature of reality within society. In contrast the kind of Scottish writer under discussion has to find forms which break down secure concepts of selfhood, destroying the familiarity of social structures and forcing the reader to abandon the usual rules for judging moral worth. Stevenson, Jenkins and Spark can be seen experimenting with various devices in order to achieve this effect; they rely on surprising shifts of moral condemnation,

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122. Marshall, Presbyteries and Profits, p.64.

dislocations of authorial sympathy, and simple temporal discontinuity, which all serve to place the reader in a position of subjectivity and even uncertainty.

The subjectivity they achieve must, however, be balanced by their presentation of some alternative concept of existence, an alternative perception of values. They must also, therefore, create moments of awareness for the reader, in which access to a different dimension may be gained, a dimension removed from the restrictions of reality. Yet by their very nature such moments of insight can only be temporary, and can only be justifiable within the fiction. It is their task to find fictional forms which can accommodate the expression of such complex purposes. In the search for suitable forms, however, new problems arise. Emphasising the subjectivity of the reader leads to a focus on the control of the authorial persona. If the novelist assumes an external objectivity, providing the only means of definition and understanding them s/he may be open to accusations of playing the role of the God of Calvinism. Such a stance would be a total denial of their sense of the inherent fallibility of humanity. As author, the novelist must also find a means of acknowledging his or her own fallibility, or of proving that authorial control is only temporary, is for the duration of the fiction, and is not making any claims for a total superiority of perspective. The writer must therefore evolve a method of indicating that s/he is only aiming for moments of clarification, offering a reorganisation of perspective that can find no reasonable correlative in reality. If the writer is to play God, the novel must be no more than a passing glimpse of Heaven. Naturally the paradoxes of this situation produce a highly developed awareness of the pitfalls in fiction expressing an absolutist

outlook, and a recognition that the reading process must be explicitly highlighted as a conscious operation.

Attempting to fulfil all these needs in the various areas of the novel, the writers under discussion are forced to develop variations of the form. As a result the stable conventions of the realist novel are either departed from or questioned in several significant ways. Detailed examination of the novels of Stevenson, Jenkins and Spark will obviously provide the best opportunity for discussing the individual manipulation of such devices, but at this stage it is worth pointing to some factors which represent a shared concern. Despite the differences between the authors, the question of language, the issue of temporality, and the creation of character are all important elements which contribute to their most significant shared characteristic - the challenge to realism itself.

Language is recognised as a writer's central means of definition but one which is always loaded with moral values, whether of approbation or condemnation. Language also serves to create the illusion that literary representation and verbal explanations have power over the basic mysteries of existence. Language can achieve this almost invisibly since, encouraged by the traditions of the English realist novel, and without the benefit of post-structuralist treatises on the matter, most readers still tend to treat language as if it were transparent. The writers under consideration have therefore to ensure that their words *fall short*, to such an extent that the reader can recognise language's limitations, ambiguities, contradictions and inadequacies. Not only does this force the reader into continual definition and reinterpretation but

also creates an awareness of the uncertainties endemic to conventional guidelines for making moral judgements. The awareness of the limitations of language has, of course, greatly increased in the last eighty years - a change which has been reflected in fiction to a certain extent. But the difference between a modernist or post-modernist approach and those of the three Scottish novelists under discussion is that in the latter case a distrust of language is used to mirror the moral and philosophical patterns of their novels, to enact their sense of the temporaneity and arbitrariness of this world, and to reflect their uneasiness with the assumptions of the fictional medium.

The time spans of reality also begin to be questioned. In Ringan Gilhaize and Confessions of a Justified Sinner the effects of a Calvinist concept of predestination on the representation of time could be clearly seen. This force therefore contributes to a loss of focus on the accuracy of chronological representation as found in the 'realist tradition'. Seen from an external and 'atemporal' perspective, with even the slightest consciousness of the doctrine of predestination, the usual novelistic ordering of cause and effect ceases to have the same importance. Time can be manipulated either to establish new moral perspectives or simply to reinforce a sense of uncertainty. Human temporal logic may be seen as representing only one possible ordering of the world and does not provide any real answers or secure interpretations in a universe governed by moral absolutes. Even Sartre, admitting his own desire for extremes (in a world of absolute freedom), points out that they can so easily pass unperceived in the apparent logic of existence. And it is this apparent logic of existence which tends to be imitated in the realist novel.[123]

123. The realist novel accommodates determinism, the processes of cause and effect, but not predestination.

Here, then, is another convention from which those writers concerned with absolutes must depart.

A similar need for a shift of emphasis can be discovered in the representation of character. If humanity can know neither itself nor God, any attempt to represent a 'rounded' character in full must have limits. The Calvinist perspective thus highlights another 'deception' in fiction which is usually concealed by the conventions of realism - the idea that all facets of a person can be described either by another character or by a narrator. As C.H. Rickword pointed out in 1926:

> for 'character' is merely the term by which the reader alludes to the pseudo-objective image he composes of his responses to an author's verbal arrangements. Unfortunately, that image once composed, it can be criticised from any angle and its moral, political, social or religious significance considered, all as though it possessed an actual objectivity, were a figure of the inferior realm of real life. 124

Through the awareness inherent in Calvinism, however, a character may be judged in moral, political, social or religious terms but always with a consciousness that this cannot be a full representation, that an element of mystery must remain. That knowledge which is concealed by the assumptions of realism must, again, be made explicit. Novels written from this viewpoint gain a paradoxical freedom through the process since the reader is both permitted to interpret the characters within an apparently realistic framework and to see them functioning in a symbolic and representative way, without any kind of contradiction. Once again the three authors obviously achieve this through different methods but in each case a variety of characterisation techniques can

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124. C.H. Rickword, 'A Note on Fiction', Edgell Rickword, Essays and Opinions 1921-1931, ed. Alan Young (London, 1974), 231-241, p.232-233.

exist since the authors make total commitment to none.

All these elements within the works of Stevenson, Jenkins and Spark would appear to present challenges to the conventional representation of reality. Yet in order to examine those aspects of realism which they challenge it is necessary first to consider the implications of realism which they wish to avoid. Realism can be seen as a way of offering a paradigm of reality, a means both of directly representing the world and of coming to terms with that representation. Stendhal describes the novel as 'a mirror journeying down the high road. Sometimes it reflects to your view the azure blue of heaven, sometimes the mire in the puddles on the road below.'[125] And George Eliot reinforces the conventional realist position when she states: 'I aspire to give no more than a faithful account of man and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind.'[126] Both remarks indicate the way in which realism is a matter not only of technique but also of attitude. In George Eliot's case, for example, it implies a certain assurance in the world and its depictability, in its abundance of material, and a confidence that a consequential and logical pattern will emerge from the examination of such material.

'Realism' is a term which has held and developed various meanings since it was first used in the middle ages. Kant, however, defined it as being opposed to idealism - an opposition which has useful implications for a literary as well as a philosophical discussion. It is a definition

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125. Stendhal, Scarlet and Black, translation Margaret Shaw (Harmondsworth, 1953), p.365.

126. George Eliot, Adam Bede, second edition, 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1859), 11, p.2.

which J.P. Stern uses in his work on realism, pointing out that realism implies an assent to the world whereas with idealism: 'the relation that obtains between a work of literature and the world outside is ... negative, expressive of a problematic attitude towards the world.'[127] Stern, however, goes on to discuss an aspect of idealism which differs slightly from the opposition to realism that can be found in Scottish writing. Arguing that idealism is still concerned with the world, he states that it: 're-enters the world as realism knows it and becomes an element in a portrayal of that world... At this point idealism ceases to be a philosopher's abstract scheme of 'universal laws' and takes on the form of ... a character's concrete beliefs.'[128] Yet if the philosophical implications of Calvinism are to be accepted it would appear that in the novels under discussion - although to a varying degree - this second stage described by Stern is never reached; the ideal moral position is seen as having very little effect in reality, nor can it be fully described through those operating within that reality. Moral idealism in a Calvinist context is not a force with the potential for changing the world. And even for those who adhere only to its desire for moral absolutes, idealism is an essentially pessimistic force since it insists on acknowledging the limitations of reality.

Nevertheless, in order for the writer to point to a gap between the ideal and the reality s/he must also admit contact with the latter. Indeed, in the cases of Stevenson, Jenkins and, to a certain extent, Spark, their dislike of the material manifestations of Calvinism is so great that they need to create some opportunities for attacking its social

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127. Stern, <u>On Realism</u>, p.44

128. Stern, p.45.

realities. Their search, therefore, is for a means of accommodating their own brands of 'moral realism', their absolutism, in conjunction with those conventions of literary realism they may find useful. For this reason none of them completely abandon realist conventions and turn whole-heartedly to techniques of the experimental novel; although, of course, the commitment of writers from such different backgrounds to one method or another obviously varies. Nor is it possible for them to reduce their novels to the level of linguistic games alone, since fiction's integration with reality is the only point at which they can bring both moral dimensions together. In this respect Stern's definitions again prove a useful contrast. He describes idealism as being tested from 'the vantage point of the real.'[129] In the novels under discussion here it would appear that the situation is reversed; that reality is being tested from the vantage point of the ideal - and is found wanting. The authors under consideration are not questioning our actual experience of reality per se, but are asking us to look again at our interpretations of reality and to see their limitations in forming a total explanation of the moral dimension to existence. They are not attempting to destroy all semblances of reality in fiction, but merely to undermine our confidence in its authority. Given that the awareness of a national religion, without necessarily a belief in it, can structure our responses to existence, it is possible to see Robert Louis Stevenson, Robin Jenkins and Muriel Spark as writers who share the strong influence of Scotland's Calvinist past. That shared past has instilled in them an awareness of the dichotomy between a morality of absolutes and the translation of such values, through the mitigations of social experience, into a purely relative morality. Their novels, as a

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129. Stern, p.45.

result, are explorations of the implications, for fiction and for metaphysics, of the awareness of an external morality. Without necessarily believing in divine order, they nevertheless investigate the effects of perceiving reality as a realm in which perfectability may never be realised. Attempting in their work to effect a realisation of a moral dimension which is external to practical considerations, even if only temporarily, they avoid a total commitment to the conventions of realism. In so doing they may indicate the complexities of their moral perspectives, but they are also forced to move outwith traditional images of the patterns of Scottish literature. By questioning the conventions of realist fiction they create their own individual variations on the form of the novel. The nature and significance of their innovations can, however, only be fully discerned through the detailed examination of a range of their works.

CHAPTER TWO

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON: THE EXOTIC AND UNFAMILIAR

> What is right is that for which a man's central self is ever ready to sacrifice immediate or distant interests; what is wrong is what the central self discards or rejects as incompatible with the fixed design of righteousness.
>
> To make this admission is to lay aside all hope of definition. That which is right upon this theory is intimately dictated to each man by himself, but can never be rigorously set forth in language, and never, above all, be imposed upon another. 1

This comment by Robert Louis Stevenson, from his essay 'Lay Morals', not only provides a clear illustration of his moral philosophy and his own awareness of its inherent contradictions, but also indicates the nature of the problem which he chose to confront through the processes of fiction. The following two chapters will explore the implications of the dualities expressed in the above statement, with reference to individual works, and will attempt to show that the apparent liberalism of morality expressed in his comment is, in several important ways, an illusion.

Stevenson's statement emphasises the essentially self-ruled nature of moral behaviour, pointing to a measure of disbelief in the efficacy of moral rules as laid down by society. Yet his words also assume that an 'inner sense' of morality, which conforms to 'some fixed design of righteousness', does exist. And his references to the impossibility of definition through language, in the course of which he himself defines morality through linguistic expression, reflects the paradoxical nature

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1. Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Lay Morals', The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson, Skerryvore Edition, 30 vols (London, 1924-1926), XXII, 155-209, p.182. (All further references to Works will be to this edition.)

of his viewpoint. In spite of his assumption of moral judgement as being ultimately attributable to the individual, his language indicates a belief in the abstract concept of a definite and absolute moral system, at least as a potential. The phrase 'that which is right' strongly implies the need to recognise good and evil as part of the external structuring of our universe. The paradoxes evident in a man who believes that morality resides with the individual but who wishes for a system of absolutes to which the individual may aspire, who doubts the validity of language as a means of moral definition, yet who continues attempting to define morality in his writing, are contradictions which find reflection both in the style and the subjects of Stevenson's fiction.

The paradoxes of his moral perception also present certain parallels with those of Calvinism. Although Stevenson rejected the religiousity of his parents and the even more fervent zeal of his nurse, Alison Cunningham, those childhood influences remained a potent force in his mind.[2] And for all his later condemnation of the social manifestations of Calvinism, his fictions display a clear desire to return to moral precepts very similar to those of original Calvinism, before it became a rigid behavioural code for Scottish society. Many of his works reveal a particular cast of mind which relates closely to that basic duality of perspective found in the writings of Calvin; and those works operate as the embodiment of an individually developed metaphysical concept which has many links with a Calvinist outlook on the world.

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2. 'For the only grim thing about Cummy was her faith, learned under the elaborate expoundings of Calvinist doctrine in cold seaside churches. So, long before he could read, he was two thirds of a bigot... His parents were seriously religious. She was a daughter of the Manse and an enthusiastic amateur of foreign missions... Thomas was an able amateur theologian.'
J.C. Furnas, Voyage to Windward: The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson (London, 1952), p.31.

The view of humankind as existing in a void, an awareness of the basic mystery of personality, and a sense of human limitations in comprehending both the external world and the inner self, are all mental characteristics which Stevenson shared with the Calvinism he castigated. Although he did not attribute the omniscience lacking in humanity to any specific God, he nevertheless used his fiction to point towards an external structuring of the world which could allow it to be seen in terms of absolute moral values. And in his fictions, by recreating that state of uncertainty which he perceives to be humanity's, he places the reader within a context of his own desire for moral absolutes. Lacking that belief in God or Heaven which provides the ultimate source of inspiration for any Calvinist, his novels and short stories offer no concrete resolution of the dichotomies they create, yet through these fictions Stevenson instils in his readers the awareness of a potential alternative to the relativity of 'reality'. Nevertheless, in order to achieve even that perception, he is forced to signify absolutes within his work at the same time as he indicates that such insights can only be temporary, by his stressing of the fictionality of his own creations, and his avoidance of a total commitment to the reassuring illusions of 'realism'.

By way of presenting this dual perspective he uses the distance between life and art as a means of indicating fiction's central contradiction, pointing to its failure to encompass all of life's dimensions, but emphasising its capacity for illuminating definitions of existence which may be lost in the muddled totality of everyday reality. As a result he had no choice but to deny realism total validity as a technique. 'Life,' he wrote, 'is monstrous, infinite, illogical, abrupt and poignant;

a work of art, in comparison, is neat, finite, self-contained, rational, flowing and emasculate.'[3] His fiction can be seen as taking this contradiction, both in form and in metaphysics, as its core. From this centre he can create those surfaces which explore the significance of conflicts not only between art and life but between the possible and the actual, the spiritual dimension and the earthly reality, and, of course, between the techniques of 'literary realism' and a philosophy of 'moral realism'. Yet he also avoids limiting the significance of his fiction to single interpretations which must be directly applicable to reality. His awareness of this intrinsic 'duplicity' of fiction is linked to his suspicion of language as expressed in his 'Lay Morals'. His novels and short stories combine the awareness of humankind's basic inability to define, with a demand that definitions need to be made in order to give some pattern to existence. By linking these two ideas he offers a fictional recreation of that most essential contradiction between subjectivity of being (the awareness that ultimately all perception and valuations are dependent upon self) and the desire for some external moral objective which will give meaning to life.

The contradictions which Stevenson presents in his work are, arguably, always evident in the fictional medium to some extent. Nevertheless, they appear to be more noticeable in the work of those writers who are interested in philosophies of existence rather than those of social behaviour. Kierkegaard, for example, struggling to bring his philosophies into line with his religious thinking, found it necessary

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3. Stevenson, ' A Humble Remonstrance', Works, XXV, 155-168, p.160.

to present his philosophical writings as fiction, illustrating a dialectic somewhat similar to that of Stevenson. As Edith Kern writes of Kierkegaard:

> Thus he believed in an eternal essential truth of which the individual in his most passionate inwardness, was able to partake, a truth which was totally subjective and yet transcended subjectivity. Here, in fact, Kierkegaard saw the paradox of existence; that in man - and in Christ in the most exalted way - eternal essential truth had come into being in time. 4

The struggle with such a paradox obviously cannot be satisfactorily encapsulated by realist techniques of fiction; a realist approach to fiction will order life into a describable form and in so doing not only glosses over the deeper dimensions of existence but also helps reinforce a sense of confidence, even complacency, in a reality which can be easily accommodated within human frames of reference. In contrast, fiction which moves away from a complete adherence to the techniques of realism may break down beliefs in an order of existence which can be empirically described, and draws attention to the ambiguities and ironies of being. Stevenson's aims in his fiction therefore appear as ambitious as those expressed by Jean-Paul Sartre's narrator in Nausea, Roquentin, who gives up his attempt at biography and decides instead to write a new kind of book:

> I don't quite know what kind - but you would have to guess, behind the printed words, behind the pages, at something which would not exist, which would be above existence. A story, for example, something that could never happen, an adventure. It would have to be beautiful and hard as steel and make people ashamed of their existence. 5

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4. Edith Kern, Existential Thought and Fictional Technique: Kierkegaard, Sartre, Beckett (London and New Haven, 1970), pp.4-5.

5. Jean-Paul Sartre, Nausea, translation Robert Baldick (Harmondsworth, 1965) p.252.

Interestingly Sartre, who has claimed: 'A fictional technique always relates back to the novelist's metaphysics',[6] suggests much the same method of providing an alternative to the restricting codes of a relative reality as Stevenson finds. Although Sartre's existentialist solution is obviously very different, the desire to point at something 'behind the pages', however, is very similar to Stevenson's aims. And certainly in his adventure stories Stevenson does achieve fictions which as 'beautiful and hard as steel'.

Yet, in spite of this obvious lack of a total commitment to realism in Stevenson's oeuvre, his moral outlook has usually been discussed in terms of social elements of his character, experience and behaviour. His Calvinist upbringing and subsequent reaction against it, his bohemian youth, marriage to an older woman, and his South Sea Islands paternalism, have all been explored as both the evidence of, and the reasons behind his moral outlook.[7] However, it is also possible to see his fiction as belonging to an important tradition of dramatic presentations of metaphysical theories. And through this approach a far more complex moral awareness is revealed than ever becomes apparent through study of biographical details. It is in this light, therefore, that this thesis wishes to examine Stevenson's work, his moral perspectives and his fictional techniques.

In looking at Stevenson's work in the light of his metaphysical concerns

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6. Sartre, 'On The Sound and the Fury: Time in the Work of Faulkner', Literary and Philosophical Essays, translation Annette Michelson (London, 1955), 79-88, p.79.

7. See Jenni Calder, R.L.S. A Life Study (London, 1980); J.C. Furnas Voyage to Windward (London, 1952); and Leslie Fiedler, 'R.L.S. Revisited', No! In Thunder (London, 1963).

three aspects of his fictional technique reflect his interests: language, plot and imagery. Like Hogg and Galt, Stevenson displays in his work a marked distrust of language. As a device of pseudo-definition, creating the illusion of power over reality through the act of naming, it offers reassurance and a sense of identity. It thus can achieve a temporary denial of the basic mysteries of life and personality. And it is the value-laden nature of the naming process which enables us to create a system of moral imperatives which are both within our linguistic comprehension and our moral capacity. Stevenson, as aware of these limitations of language as he was of the limitations of fiction, took care that both should be conveyed to the reader. His linguistic approach therefore is to create a surface reality of events, as alluded to by the words on the page, but to allow this to <u>fall short</u> of the issues raised, exploiting the deluding consistencies apparently created by the story telling process. And in this way he achieves that undermining of apparently fixed linguistic values which is necessary in presenting his moral perceptions.

Such a technique obviously also has important implications for the story-telling process itself, since it must point to some kind of external significance beyond the events of the plot. Here the terms of <u>fabula</u> and <u>sjuzhet</u>, as used in Russian Formalism, offer a useful distinction, since the plot presentation of events, the <u>sjuzhet</u>, can be used to affirm some meaning which is not present in the actual chronological sequence of events, the <u>fabula</u>.[8] And since Stevenson tends to write

8. The terms <u>fabula</u> and <u>sjuzhet</u> are taken in the sense used by the Russian Formalists; <u>fabula</u>, the story as a series of events, and <u>sjuzhet</u>, the story as reported in the narrative.
See Jonathan Culler, <u>The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction</u> (London, 1981), pp.170-171.
Culler also describes the two elements as existing in a state of 'undecidability', which: 'is the effect of the convergence of two narrative logics that do not give rise to a synthesis.' (p.181)

adventure stories, or novels with clearly defined plots of action, the distinction is fairly easy to make. Nevertheless, his fictions lead the reader into unravelling the connections between the different levels of discourse, and through that exploration to share in the defining and interpreting process. By placing us in a position of access to both fabula and sjuzhet we are given a dual perspective. Although in the events of the plot, therefore, Stevenson may illustrate the reasoning that: 'Morals are a personal affair; in the war of righteousness every man fights for his own hand',[9] he also allows the reader an understanding of more complex moral paradoxes which may contradict the simple dictum.

It is through the use of images which point towards the problematics of his moral stance that Stevenson creates in the reader the expectation of some alternative to the significances established by the plot. Apparently arbitrary images are frequently stressed at the expense of descriptions of more 'major' events. Moreover, rather than using images to guide the reader into a single interpretation of events he varies symbols and their meanings, thus creating a sense of changing potential and of mutability. Images used in this way demand assessment from the reader not only in terms of their relevance to the events of the plot but also as general symbols in the context of an external universe, as part of a pattern that is beyond our more immediate and direct powers of comprehension. Again, because of his use of adventure story and folk-tale formats, he has full scope for introducing a range of such images which may be alien to our everyday processes of rationalisation.

Stevenson's concerns, therefore, can be seen as centred around the subjectivity

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9. 'Lay Morals', p.176.

of perception, both physical and moral, and in this respect he again parallels a Calvinist reaction to existence. 'Life,' he wrote, 'may be compared, not to a single tree, but to a great and complicated forest; circumstance is more swiftly changing than a shadow, language much more inexact than the tools of a surveyor.'[10] As a novelist, therefore, he is working with inexact tools to define a shadowy, undefinable entity. And, with his Calvinist inheritance, he also seems aware of the idea that the individual has no real fixity, and is incapable of fully communicating a sense of identity - a further complication of his perceptions. 'No man was ever so poor that he could express all he has in him by words, looks or actions; his true knowledge is eternally incommunicable, for it is a knowledge of himself',[11] he wrote. So, rather than attempting to force any kind of correlation between such fluid concepts, which would only lead to ommission and falsity every step of the way, Stevenson attempts to recreate the flux of humanity's state. A reading of his novels thus becomes a mimesis not of the empirical world but of our own attempts to decipher that world. By trying to comprehend the polarities which he establishes through a series of shifting significations, we too reach the point of recognising humanity's failure to encompass existence in any single understanding. Yet such a recognition also creates for the reader a momentary appreciation of the ineluctable. Aware of our own comprehension as limited, we proceed to seek means of bridging those gaps created by the author throughout the fissures of the text. And in this attempt we share with Stevenson the search, and desire, for some form of external and absolute structuring of the universe.

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10. 'Lay Morals', p.166.

11. 'Lay Morals', p.159.

The essentially ephemeral nature of the experiences offered by Stevenson's fiction, then, can be seen as bearing certain similarities to the dream process, with images and minor incidents apparently assuming a disproportionate significance. Moreover, the significance highlighted may have no direct correlation with the more obvious moral issues raised by the novel's events. A certain vague yearning after meaning, fulfilled only by glimpses of truth, with an indefinable sense of recognition, alien to waking experience yet familiar in dreams, is a feature common to all Stevenson's fictions. And he himself discussed the dream process in relation to his techniques. In 'A Chapter on Dreams', he describes the 'Brownies' who are the slaves of his imagination, labouring while he sleeps, and tells how they created for him a perfectly worked story of a young man, his father and the woman he loves. Relating the tale's neat conclusion, he adds: 'I could not outdo - could not perhaps equal - that crafty artifice ... by which the same situation is twice presented and the two actors twice brought face to face over the evidence.'[12] Obviously the symmetry and patterning gives him aesthetic delight while the concept of poetic justice appeals to his moral senses. But his greatest satisfaction seems to lie in the fact that the subconscious mind of the dreamer can throw out a definite meaning from the ineffable mass of the sleeper's thoughts. The duality of such a process - the contrast of sharp outlines and a hazy significance - can also be seen in Stevenson's writing. And, as an author, he chooses to adopt a position akin to that of the brownies' 'master'; the images and ideas may derive from his consciousness but he refuses to interpret their meanings, merely sharing with the reader a stance of half-understanding helplessness in a world that gains definitions from sources beyond his control. Since

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12. Stevenson, 'A Chapter on Dreams', <u>Works</u> XXVI, 124-137, p.134.

the fiction which he describes is also part of the dream process, it cannot be related too closely to the world of reality and of waking experience. Dreams may be interpreted but are rarely explained in terms of direct relevance to the 'real' world; the two realms remain linked but separate. So Stevenson likewise leads his reader into a struggle between the universe presented in his fictions - one in which absolutes can operate - and the reality that is the reader's experience. The disjunction thus created then becomes an essential part of the 'meaning' of any of his works.

A passage from 'Lay Morals' again helps to illuminate the necessary dichotomy established by his fictions. In the introduction to the essay itself he writes that this book:

> is truly secular and temporal, casts not a glance beyond the little lit, tumultuous island of man's life upon the vasty darkness of eternity; and still forgetful of the great myths or more majestic and mysterious verities busies itself close at hand with the pleasures and prudence of today. 13

The narrator's claimed intention to concentrate on the daily and mundane aspects of life is contradicted by the metaphorical image of an island against a background of eternity, an image which, by its visionary effect, implies that a higher, potentially transfigurative means of perceiving existence is possible. Furthermore, in its wider context, the image expresses the basic contradiction of Stevenson's fictional approach, with the opposition of extravagant language containing a hint of the fantastic - 'vasty darkness', 'tumultuous', 'majestic and mysterious verities' - with the pedestrian conclusion of'the pleasures

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13. 'Lay Morals', p.159.

and prudence of today.' The poetic language draws upon the imagination - contrary to the author's purported intention-while the banality of the final phrase draws only upon received convention and inevitably appears unattractive in comparison. The dialectic of aim and achievement is further maintained by the phrase 'still forgetful', which is in itself a contradiction, implying that those 'great myths' and 'verities' must exist, if to forget them involves an act of deliberate intent. And the terms of descriptions used in such phrases recognise, with obvious admiration, the potential existence of such absolutes; a strange admiration coming from a speaker who claims a desire to disregard them. Language and image thus permit the text to convey a meaning contrary to its stated intention, while allowing the contradiction itself to carry significance through the attention that has been drawn to it.

Through the processes described above Stevenson avoids making any didactic moral comments; and it is this internalisation of morality into fiction that has led some of his critics to argue that his fiction is not concerned with moral absolutism. Edwin Eigner, for example, points out: 'Stevenson was sufficiently aware that his belief in pure wickedness was dangerous to his art,'[14] and goes on to observe: 'Stevenson is not busy separating the sheep from the goats. Instead, he observes how Christians may regard the world, and how their creed sometimes makes them unable to accept nature, either human or external, incapable of living with their own passions or with the passions of the physical universe.'[15] Yet, in spite of appreciating the implications of some

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14. Edwin Eigner, Robert Louis Stevenson and Romantic Tradition (Princeton, 1966), p.117.

15. Eigner, p.142.

aspects of Stevenson's moral philosophy, by perceiving a belief in pure wickedness as inimical to the novelists art, Eigner is still adhering to certain critical positions dominated by liberal humanism, which demand that morality be pragmatic and that it be represented in realist terms. His view tends to ignore the alternative posited by Sartre, that different moralities demand different modes of fictional expression.

Even those critics who are directly interested in the links between Stevenson's moral philosophy and his fiction tend to view both in the light of established English traditions. Writing on Kidnapped Wallace Robson presents an interesting case for seeing a movement from Calvinist to Aristotelian morality in Stevenson's work, with Kidnapped signifying the point of transition.[16] His argument is based upon those categories provided by Gilbert Ryle in his article on 'Jane Austen and the Moralists'. Ryle's definition of the two moralities echoes the division of 'moral realism' and 'reciprocal' morality as defined by Piaget and discussed in the first chapter of this thesis:

> A moralist of the Calvinist type thinks, like a criminal lawyer, of human beings as either Saved or Damned, either Elect or Reject, either children of Virtue or children of Vice, either heading for Heaven ... or Hell, either White or Black, either Innocent or Guilty, either Saints or Sinners. The Calvinist's moral psychology is correspondingly bi-polar ...
>
> In contrast with this, the Aristotelian pattern of ethical ideas represents people as differing from one another in degree and not in kind, and differing from one another not in respect just of a single generic Sunday attribute, Goodness, say, or else Wickedness, but in respect of a whole spectrum of specific week-day attributes. 17

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16. W.W. Robson, 'On Kidnapped', Stevenson and Victorian Scotland, ed. Jenni Calder (Edinburgh, 1981), 88-106.

17. Gilbert Ryle, 'Jane Austen and the Moralists', Critical Essays, Collected Papers vol.1 (London, 1971), 276-291, p.284.

Ryle supports this distinction with example and evidence of its correlative effect on fictional technique. It is, however, necessary to be aware of the direction of his argument; in particular his idea that Jane Austen's more Aristotelian morality is an advance on that of the eighteenth century novelists. The distinction therefore implies approbation for the Aristotelian morality and carries certain notions of 'progress' which are then carried over into Robson's argument. In the latter's article on Kidnapped this leads to the condemnation of Calvinist morality being extended to criticism of its adverse influence on fictional sophistication. According to Ryle, non-Aristotelian characters are, if evil; 'black cardboard and nothing more';while: 'The less frequent angelic or saintly characters are equally unalive, flat and forgettable.'[18] Robson, who obviously admires Stevenson, therefore has good reasons for wishing to see an Aristotelian sensibility operating in his work.

Such a viewpoint, however, highlights one of the problems created by writing from a Calvinist or Absolutist perspective. Robson bases his assessment of moral perspective on the quality of the rounded character; yet although a character may be rounded as a creation, it may also be placed outwith a realist context, and can be placed in a position where it should be judged in absolutist terms. Moreover, even an apparently 'rounded' character can contain extremes of good and bad which are not integrated and may run contrary to relativist expectations. Robson's argument about the morality of Kidnapped calls for a more complex response to the characters of David Balfour and Alan Breck, in light of the difficult moral decisions they are seen to make, especially after the

18. Ryle, p.284.

Appin murder. His argument for them as representatives of an Aristotelian morality will be discussed in more detail in the section on Kidnapped in the following chapter, but at this point it offers a useful illustration of the common focus on characterisation as being the major feature of a novel. Such an emphasis, however, ignores the fact that characters may be presented within the context of a novel whose moral code they do not themselves represent, and that the main thrust of a novel's morality may lie within the perspective which is established by the whole reading process - a process which may not be intended to achieve a direct representation of reality. Accepting that a novel may involve more than characterisation, it can be seen as a series of interrelated events, images, descriptions, reflections and characters which together provides a background for the search for meaning and for definition. Stevenson, in fact, appears to present his readers with situations which cannot be comprehended in terms of a relative, Aristotelian morality. Yet neither do they directly advocate a Calvinist outlook. Rather, by a process of confrontation and reinterpretation they force the reader to seek definitions and to consider the limitations with which they are faced. In this way Stevenson succeeds both in indicating the potential for a metaphysical dimension to existence, and in making us aware of the impossibility of our ever achieving complete access to that dimension. Therefore, although Robson may perceive in Stevenson's work a morality which is 'problematic, relative, regionally and culturally conditioned',[19] it may be a type of morality which the author does not wish us to accept. This morality cannot offer a total solution since the novel has already made us aware

19. Robson, 'On Kidnapped', p.100.

of an alternative to it, one which - because of the non-realistic nature of his ideals - cannot be taken outwith the novel and applied to 'reality' in so far as it is defined by the realist novel.

Through such a method of opposing contradictions Stevenson explores the implications of his own 'ideal' desire for an immanent structure to the universe. And in his best works - noticably in The Master of Ballantrae and in The Ebb-Tide - he allows the reader to share his desire for an external, absolute morality. There appears, however, to be little purpose in arguing that this is the expression of a specifically Calvinist morality (in the sense of the Scottish kirk), or even of Christian dogma. Critics have attempted to reconcile his opposition to Calvinism with his moral writings but fail to achieve a satisfactory resolution. In The Faith of Robert Louis Stevenson John Kelman can only reconcile his description of himself as a 'youthful atheist' with his morality and his sporadic churchgoing in later life by describing his beliefs as a: 'religion of sentiment.'[20] Jenni Calder in R.L.S. A Life Study argues that Stevenson was directly opposed to Calvinism: 'To place any human being beyond the reach of fulfilment and salvation, which was precisely what Calvinism did, was intolerable and destructive. He tried to say this over and over again.'[21] Yet even she cannot deny the influence it had on his thinking. In talking of 'Jekyll and Hyde', for example, she states: 'It is the Calvinist view that man must maintain a constant struggle with evil, that the slightest lapse in vigilance will allow the

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20. John Kelman, The Faith of Robert Louis Stevenson (Edinburgh, 1903), pp.4-5.

21. J. Calder, R.L.S. A Life Study, p.190.

Devil to triumph',[22] and she appears to take for granted Stevenson's understanding of such precepts. Therefore, although it is reasonable to assume that Stevenson was opposed to the practices of Calvinist religion as he had experienced them in his childhood, and in the teachings of the nineteenth century Scottish church and the social codes of Edinburgh, it is also clear that his metaphysical concerns were deeply affected by the most basic Calvinist precepts which lingered on in the Scottish cast of mind, changing little despite social dilution. And, although he may have rejected it as a religion, Calvinism still remained an important structuring element in his world view, expressed as a desire for moral absolutes; a desire which had a striking effect upon the kind of fiction he wrote.

The remainder of this chapter, therefore, will be devoted to two novels, one, Treasure Island, from the beginning of his career, the other, The Ebb-Tide, from near the end of his life. In the consideration of these works, and of his other most notable South Sea fiction, the short story 'The Beach of Falesá', the clearest and most successful expression of his moral concerns, an expression liberated by the foreign location and unclouded by the problematics of a real Calvinism which beset his Scottish novels, can be found. The Scottish novels, with their less clearly defined approach to moral absolutism, will then be discussed in the subsequent chapter.

Treasure Island

Stevenson's disregard for realism has led to his being frequently described as a writer of romance and, on first impression, Treasure

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22. Calder, R.L.S., p.221.

Island[23] would appear to provide strong evidence for this view. Yet although Stevenson may adopt some of the conventions of the romance genre, he is not content merely to play by the rules of that form; even in this apparently simple adventure story he adapts formal elements to encompass a distinctive moral dimension.

The world of Treasure Island, that of sea-captains,pirates, desert islands and buried treasure, immediately locates itself in the map of fiction. Stevenson may provide detailed descriptions of setting, may pay attention to material necessities such as food and clothing, but such information serves only to facilitate the reader's entry into, and acceptance of, adventures of the imagination. Only at the beginning and end of the novel are any pointers given as to considerations outside the enclosed world of the tale, to that other world in which social contingencies, financial constraints and legalised justice operate. In the novel's conclusion it is hinted that Jim will return to a steady, secure and 'normal' life through choice: 'Oxen and wain-ropes would not bring me back again to that accursed island.' (p.227). Nevertheless his adventures are seen as a necessary step of preparation for that safe existence. The reader, aware of a relative moral code existing outwith the parameters of the story, beyond the comprehension of the buccaneers who operate in terms of black and white values, can also respond to an absent 'real world' which is always implied as a correlative to Jim's experiences. The simple device of first person narration, for example, acts as a reminder that he survived his adventures and escaped from 'Treasure Island.' The novel therefore operates as a 'Bildungsroman',

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23. Stevenson, Treasure Island, Works II. All further page references are to this edition.

in the sense that it provides the opportunities for Jim to expiate inner moral conflicts through encountering various absolute concepts of morality before taking his place in the world of relativist values. And the opportunity for a similar experience is given to the reader. For the duration of the novel we both accept the adventure world and the morality which dominates it. Yet we also bring to the novel an awareness of the confines of our own reality, and of the relativity which it tends to impose. A disjunction is thus created between our awareness of a reality outwith the fiction and our experience of the world within its boundaries. And this disjunction allows the novel to express a duality of perspective similar to that of an absolute morality which is continually having to come to terms with disparity between the real and the ideal.

Stevenson is able to contain such tensions in Treasure Island because of its apparent allegiance to the romance form. Northrop Frye defines adventure as 'the essential element of plot' in romance,[24] and Stevenson, through the sequence of adventures in the novel, sustains our expectations of its romance format. However, from this basis of apparent formal consistence, he can also examine various conflicting perceptions of morality. The fiction presents the reader with contradictions in ideas of morality, yet we are never asked to choose a single morality and use it as a means of judging plot events. But from the safety of the formal conventions, held together by the strong adventure element, Stevenson can focus on clashing interpretations of morality. The reader, however, need never extrapolate them from the apparent 'romance' and apply them

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24. Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton, 1957), p.186.

to reality. The effect thus achieved is in marked contrast to later novels such as The Ebb-Tide, in which the adventure element is not so clearly distinguished from the moral issues, and in which fragments of the tale remain unresolved by the artistic schema, disturbing any attempts to reach a coherent single interpretation of the work. Treasure Island also defies single interpretations of its morality, but its plot and its form nevertheless operate as means of containing thematic contradictions.

The novel's allegiance to the romance form is also, however, exploitative in nature, manipulating romance conventions of image and symbol. As Northrop Frye indicates: 'We may call this major adventure, the element that gives literary form to the romance, the quest.'[25] Although the title of 'The Sea-Cook' was originally considered for the novel, 'Treasure Island' offers a more suitable clue to the tale's central motif: the treasure, although not immediately of central significance, does serve to provide an ostensible reason for the 'quest' theme. Yet by linking the treasure motif with that of the 'island' Stevenson extends the effect of his image. The concept of an island, an isolated microcosm framed by the sea, is of prime importance to his concerns. And the sea round Treasure Island is restless and inescapable:

> I have never seen the sea quiet round Treasure Island. The sun might blaze overhead, the air be without a breath, the surface smooth and blue, but still these great rollers would be running along all the external coast, thundering and thundering by day and night; and I scarce believe there is one spot in the island where a man would be out of earshot of their noise. (p.140)

Not only does the sea-surrounded island indicate an environment outwith the confines of everyday existence, but the image also presents a

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25. Frye, p.187.

paradigm of the adventure novel itself, in the concept of a wider, external and inescapable world, pressing in on and framing an inner world which has rigidly defined boundaries. In symbolic terms the sea is also a useful image of flux and lack of definition, providing a representation of those relative values inherent in the reader by which the morality of the novelistic experience is framed. Our perceptual uncertainty emerges in sharp contrast to the definition and clarity with which Stevenson presents his fictional world.

The use of such images is a recurring feature of the novel. In his book on Stevenson David Daiches mentions the novel's emphasis on interiors and exteriors, pointing in particular to the intrusion of Billy Bones into Jim Hawkins' secure world, with the Squire's residence offering Jim his last chance of a safe interior until he returns from the island.[26] However, this imagery is also apparent in the more minor incidents: Jim in the apple-barrel, his walking into the stockade when it is full of pirates, Jim and Israel Hands on board the drifting Hispaniola, the image of Silver standing in the shadow while Jim stands in the light: 'The sky was bright and cloudless overhead, and the tops of the trees shone rosily in the sun. But where Silver stood with his lieutenant all was still in shadow, and they waded knee deep in a low white vapour.' (p.124) Dominating all, of course, is the image of the Black Spot, especially the one given to Silver by the pirates, cut out of a Bible and, by chance, bearing the message on the back: 'Without are dogs and murderers.' (p.192) It does not, therefore, seem too tenuous a connection, to relate such images to the central theme of the novel, to the search for a means

26. David Daiches, Robert Louis Stevenson: A Revaluation (London, 1947).

of resolving moral roles through the creation or destruction of boundaries, through the merging of internal and external perspectives. And on a more general symbolic level this would seem to constitute the most essential quest of all in the novel. Seen in such terms, the moral quest as represented by the novel as a whole, is based upon the relationship of text and reader. By taking part in the defining and interpreting of the fictional process, we are enacting our own form of moral quest. On the level of the plot, however, within the novel itself, the central figure of any quest motif is that of the narrator, Jim Hawkins. Billy Bones' intrusion into the world of the Admiral Benbow is only the beginning of a series of pressures and disturbances placed on the boy. Initially he can respond to such figures in a fairly confident, if naïve, way. His description of the Captain, of the violence of Black Dog, and the arrival at the inn of Blind Pew, adequately conveys a sense of fear and, more importantly, indicates his recognition of evil. But at this stage their savage characteristics, directed towards someone and to a very specific purpose, can be assimilated into his consciousness by the act of mentally labelling them 'wicked'. (And, as such, because they are not like Jim, he believes they are nothing to do with him.) Textual images, of course, aid this easy identification of evil, since all these figures are depicted as physically mutilated.[27] Moreover, at this point in the novel Jim is shown to have clear grounds of comparison for his moral judgements, especially from the encounter between Dr. Livesey and Billy Bones:

> I remember observing the contrast the neat, bright doctor, with his powder as white as snow, and his bright, black eyes, and pleasant manners, made with the coltish country folk, and above all, with that

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27. For a discussion of mutilated father-figures see W.W. Robson, 'The Sea-Cook: A Study in the Art of Robert Louis Stevenson', On the Novel, ed. B.S. Benedikz (London, 1971), 57-74.

> filthy, heavy, bleared scarecrow of a pirate of ours, sitting far gone in rum, with his arms on the table.
> (pp. 7-8)

Only on meeting the man 'with a face as big as a ham - plain and pale, but intelligent and smiling', (p.50) does Jim's compartmentalising fail, leading to an increased confusion in his moral judgements, until Silver and Smollett, the true and false 'captains', are eventually presented as displaying an almost twin-like resemblance: 'the two men sat silently smoking for quite a while, now looking each other in the face, now stopping their tobacco, now leaning forward to spit. It was as good as the play to see them.' (p.128) Here, although the confrontation is ostensibly between good and bad, Jim's friendship with both characters blurs the distinctions in his mind.

Long John Silver, indeed, becomes a testing point for Jim's moral judgement throughout the novel. On first meeting John, Jim is incapable of making the obvious connection between a 'one-legged sea-faring man' as described by Billy Bones, and the innkeeper who greets him with such kindness, despite the latter's obvious physical disability. His retrospective comment: 'he was too deep, and too ready, and too clever for me' (p.53) throws some light on Silver's character, but does not effectively excuse Jim's original response. Silver retains an essential ambivalence throughout the novel. 'Good' characters such as Dr Livesey and Captain Smollett also initially recognise his value, and thus reinforce Jim's opinion. Only on overhearing the plan to corrupt the crew does Jim begin to realise that moral categorisations can break down. And, of course, Silver's betrayal is made more poignant for Jim by his using the same language to corrupt the young seaman as he used to flatter Jim. Even language, the boy learns, can be untrustworthy. As

this consciousness impinges upon him, trapped in the enclosed world of the barrel by his desire for that original symbol of corruption, an apple, Jim begins to discover the distinction between means and their ends. From this point onwards, Jim is faced not only with a quest for treasure but also with the need to comprehend and rationalise the figure of Long John Silver.

Comparing Silver with Israel Hands, Edwin Eigner states: 'Hands' character, unlike Silver's, is not at all a mixed one.'[28] But the assumption that Silver's character constitutes a moral grey area is not affirmed by the pattern of the tale. The Sea-Cook is presented as being able to encompass and assimilate the morality of other characters in the novel, but does so in a totally committed, if only temporary way. Israel Hands is perhaps the purest example of evil in the tale, with his dogmatic moral reasoning: 'I never seen good come o' goodness yet. Him as strikes first is my fancy; dead men don't bite.' (p.164) Such an attitude, however, is not beyond Jim's powers of comprehension, and through his experiences he can easily slot Hands into a place on his moral scale. But Silver can show kindness and even the will to do good - as when he attempts to save Jim from the pirates before becoming fully aware of the gain to himself in the action. Expressing a wish to murder the entire crew, he can also show absolute evil. Near to the treasure he abandons all his intentions of saving Jim: 'he plucked furiously at the line that held me to him, and, from time to time, turned his eyes upon me with a deadly look.' (p.213) And yet, after being rescued from his own men, he adapts easily to his new allies: 'And there was Silver, sitting back almost out of the firelight,

28. Eigner, p.119.

but eating heartily, prompt to spring forward when anything was wanted, even joining quietly in our laughter - the same, bland, polite, obsequious seaman of the voyage out.' (p.221) His moral mutability, which allows his pleas to the Captain when they are bargaining in the stockade to be transformed to 'the foulest imprecations' within seconds (p.129), means that eventually he comes to represent all points on the moral spectrum for Jim.

By using such a multivalent figure Stevenson can be seen as reversing the conventional structure of romance characterisation as described by Northrop Frye: 'A quest involving conflict assumes two main characters, a protagonist or hero, and an antāgonist or enemy ... The central form of romance is dialectical: everything is focused on a conflict between the hero and his enemy, and all the reader's values are bound up with the hero.'[29] This pattern obviously does not apply to Treasure Island, in that firstly, Silver actively aids the central protagonist, and secondly, that Jim is not a hero in the more obvious senses of the term. Although he helps, and even saves, his friends on more than one occasion, it is usually more by accident than any heroic intention. Moreover, because of the first person narration the reader cannot avoid sharing Jim's sympathetic identification with Silver. Any dialectic between hero and enemy therefore, remains purely internal, fixed in Jim's moral consciousness. Throughout the novel he attempts to maintain a humanist and relative morality, but his stance receives a parodic reflection in Silver's adaptability. Yet Long John Silver also upsets Jim's moral standards by forcing him to encounter extremes. And once again the reader can only share Jim's perspective on this alternative morality, since we are rarely

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29. Frye, p.187.

given access to judgements from those characters, such as the Doctor and Captain Smollett, who are more secure in their own moral values. Silver, therefore, comes to represent much more than an enemy or antagonist.

Aware of the complexities of Silver's character, Jim is not threatened by the potential evil in him so much as by the essence of what he represents - an embracing of the polarities of the moral spectrum. At the close of the novel Silver muses that he and Jim: 'might have done a power of good together!' (p.184); good and evil are clearly seen in his eyes as equal forces of positive commitment. However, as Jim realises, if such an equation were to be recognised in reality it would destroy all conventions of morality. Such extremity would pose a threat which, like the Elect and Damned dichotomy of Calvinism, could tear apart the carefully preserved illusions of the integration of personality and the moderation of moral relativism. Stevenson wrote: 'It is to keep a man awake, to keep him alive to his own soul and its fixed design of righteousness, that the better part of moral and religious education is directed.'[30] Such an awareness can only be given practical illustration through exploitation of fiction or abstract expression in philosophising, rather than through a direct mimesis of reality. Jim, therefore, is faced with moral conflicts but can finally escape from them on leaving the island. Significantly not Scottish, he is kept at a distance from Stevenson's own contradictions and thus offers an ideal means of exploring them.

In the context of the novel's moral concerns, therefore, Long John Silver

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30. 'Lay Morals', p.186.

operates as a focus of Jim's moral dilemmas and also functions as a way of keeping the reader morally awake, aware of contradictions, preventing us from settling into complacency. Such a function precludes his appearing realistic and also prevents the usual concept of a 'character' being applicable to him. Edwin Eigner admits that Stevenson: 'shared to some extent the greatest fault of the romantics - thinness of characterisation' because, as he explains, 'To the romancer ... the theme or the vision comes first, and this priority occasions, we should not say a falsification of character, but certainly a less vital interest in it.'[31] In this instance an apparent 'failing' of the romance tradition is particularly suited to Stevenson's purpose. In realist fiction the concept of 'character' implies a system of mixed personality traits integrated in a fixed and assessable individual, capable of operating in a variety of ways according to the constraints of circumstances and of moral codes. Stevenson is not interested in such relativity. Instead he wishes to explore the interaction of various moralities rather than embodying values to the reader through any one character. In the tradition of romance characterisation, as Frye indicates: 'Characters tend to be either for or against the quest. If they assist it they are idealized as simply gallant or pure; if they obstruct it they are caricatured as simply villainous or cowardly. Hence every typical character in romance tends to have his moral opposite confronting him, like black and white pieces in a chess game.'[32] Such confrontations occur in Treasure Island but only as a backdrop, and between the minor characters, as in the opposition of the Squire and Tom Redruth to the pirates. Coming to such characters with a

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31. Eigner, p.39.

32. Frye, p.195.

relative morality the reader can easily accommodate them in the moral spectrum. Yet, making a chessboard of black and white within his own character, Silver remains a cipher which Jim must attempt to decode. His inability to do so creates a similar sense of impasse in the reader. Aspects of morality and identity are thus revealed as intractable to assimilation into the relative morality that Jim brings with him from the world he shares with us.

Yet although Jim operates as a representative of relative morality, that of the reader from the world of 'reality', and although we can find a sympathetic identification with his plight, his many adventures also allow us to view him in action, with a certain objectivity which enhances our understanding of his plight (and our own predicament.) Throughout the novel he is portrayed as being threatened by forces which could engulf his moral identity, although Stevenson does not allow this to happen. Indeed, Jim's narrative can be read as an attempt to preserve, even reconstitute his sense of self, against the threat of both metaphysical and real dangers. From the very beginning of the novel he is under attack. Blind Pew threatens him with an Old Testament morality of vengeance, quite literally an eye for an eye: '"I wish I had put his eyes out" cried the blind man.' (p.32) And a struggle is constantly taking place for possession of the boy. He is taken hostage by pirates and passes to and fro between the opposing factions in much the same way as the various locations of the novel - the ship, the stockade, even the island itself - shift between the sides. By the nature of this struggle Jim is forced to recognise a universe in which laws other than his own previously formed concepts of right and wrong operate. And while he is on the island, alone, at the furthest remove

from reality, he is forced to see these alternative laws invade his own world. When Tom, one of the sailors, is shot by Silver, Jim is amazed that: 'Everything else was unchanged, the sun still shining mercilessly, upon the steaming marsh and the tall pinnacle of the mountain and I could scarce persuade myself that murder had been actually done, and a human life cut cruelly short a moment since, before my eyes.' (p.91) He cannot believe that such a deed will not convulse nature, shake the very foundations of reality, since it provokes such a reaction in his own world of relative and humanitarian morality. Such an attitude, obviously based upon the expected demarcations of conventional society, could be that of any character in a realist novel, except for the fact that he expects his reaction to produce some change in his own perceptual faculties - a change which could only take place in such a fantastic context of the island and within a non-realist fiction. This kind of double consciousness as a response to moral horror can also be found in The Ebb-Tide, where the very unfamiliarity of the setting denies any reliance on conventions of perception, and appears to evoke a quite arbitrary response from the sub-conscious which has no place in reality.

Jim Hawkins therefore provides a vital link for the reader between the fantasy world of the island and a recognisable reality. His dislike of the island, his growing hatred of the sound of the waves, and his fear of being marooned all serve to symbolise the dangers that he sees the island as holding for him. Yet Jim's narration, beginning and ending in a more recognisable 'reality' means that we can also see him as belonging to our more familiar world. Only at one point in the novel does his link between a normative reality and the extremes of the island world seem in danger of breaking down. When he is wandering alone on

the island we lose his perspective on events for a short time and have to rely on Dr Livesey's somewhat stolid account of their taking of the stockade. His narrative, however, tends to be mainly functional; it is only when Jim re-enters the stockade that we are given any visual description of the place. Therefore, although Dr Livesey acts as a reassurance of the world of practical realism at the very moment when Jim, uncertain of his reception from either the pirates or the sailors, and overwhelmed by the strangeness of his surroundings, is most in danger of being immersed in the otherness of the island world, his narrative leaves the reader with only a partial perspective on events. We are thus in almost as much danger of being lost as Jim. And later in the novel we are in a position of ignorance equal to his, experiencing his sudden shock on finding the stockade taken by the pirates: 'The red glare of the torch, lighting up the interior of the block-house, showed me the worst of my apprehensions realised. The pirates were in possession of the house and stores; there was the cask of cognac, there were the pork and bread, as before; and, what tenfold increased my horror, not a sign of any prisoner.' (p.177) Thus, although we view events from the safety of our familiar world, we share with Jim the terrors of the unfamiliar and experience with him a sense of loss and confusion.

This uncertainty in Jim also provides the novel's moral dynamic. Although his initial judgements on the characters are vindicated by the plot, while on the island he is continually being forced to reassess both the world around him and his own values. And once again the reader may both identify with him and take an overview of the contradictions in his experience. We can see the various shifts of stance involved in Jim's

attempts to reconcile his previous code of morality with the events around him. Through this dual perspective we gain a sense of the immense difficulties involved in moral assessment, in the attempt to reconcile the extreme and unfamiliar into a code established by conventions. In a sense, of course, Jim never does fully resolve the implications of his experience. Although he returns to safe land, the heightened dimensions of the island world remain in his imagination: 'the worst dreams that I ever have are when I hear the surf booming about its coasts, or start upright in bed, with the sharp voice of Captain Flint still ringing in my ears: "Pieces of eight! Pieces of eight!"' (p.227) And of course, the most intractable puzzle with which Jim was confronted does not disappear when he returns to his 'real' life, ashore:

> Of Silver we heard no more. That formidable seafaring man with one leg has at last gone clean out of my life; but I dare say he met his old negress, and perhaps still lives in comfort with her and Captain Flint. It is to be hoped so, I suppose, for his chances of comfort in another world are very small. (p.227)

For the reader Silver also remains an unknown quality and the patterns of the novel as a whole remain centred around his ambiguous figure. Until we are able to leave or forget the novel his image persists as a force of mental and moral subversion - just as, even on safe land, Jim cannot escape having nightmares about his adventures.

If the novel's plot provides little solution to the issues it raises, the novel's imagery serves to deepen the ambiguities. The images, the symbols and the moments of significance within the tale all combine to emphasise the existence of depths of experience beyond the limits of linguistic description, by acquiring a power that would appear to be

'indefinable'. In Treasure Island it is often the minor moments which illustrate this feature. On his first meeting with Ben Gunn, for example, Jim states: 'What it was, whether bear or man or monkey, I could in no-wise tell. It seemed dark and shaggy; more I knew not.' (p.93) Although he then does discover that Ben Gunn is, in fact, a man, the impact of the initial description and its significance is in no way mitigated by the subsequent explanation. Epitomising Jim's fear of being marooned, the moment remains a confrontation with the basics of existence and a return to the primitive. Indeed, in his narration Jim can only accept the image Gunn presents by dealing with it in terms of relativity, through comparison: 'Silver himself appeared less terrible in contrast with this creature of the woods.' (p.93) Jim's encounter with sea-lions for this first time produces a similar effect of horror: 'I beheld huge slimy monsters - soft snails, as it were, of incredible bigness - two or three score of them together.' (p.149) The language here ('soft' is used throughout the novel as a term of disgust, and Silver is at his most dangerous when his voice is 'soft') ensures that Jim's subsequent knowledge of the nature of these creatures does not detract from the power of the image in conveying a sense of fear and disgust. And even before Jim reaches the island, he experiences a hint of future horror at the sound of Blind Pew tapping on the road with his stick:

> When we were about half-way through, I suddenly put my hand upon her arm; for I had heard in the silent, frosty air, a sound that brought my heart into my mouth - the tap-tapping of the blind man's stick upon the frozen road. It drew nearer and nearer, while we sat holding our breath. Then it struck sharp on the inn-door, and then we could hear the handle being turned, and the bolt rattling as the wretched being tried to enter; and then there was a long time of silence both within and without. At last the tapping recommenced, and, to our indescribable joy and gratitude, died slowly away again until it ceased to be heard. (p.28)

The single sound in the still night, the description of Pew as a 'wretched being', and Jim's 'indescribable' relief at his departure, all serve to indicate a dimension both outwith the boundaries of conventional experience and beyond the powers of description.

The images in Treasure Island thus add to the novel's emphasis on alternative perceptions of reality's dimensions. In Philosophy in a New Key Susanne Langer writes: 'Images are ... our readiest instruments for abstracting concepts from the tumbling stream of actual impressions. They make our primitive abstractions for us, they are our spontaneous embodiments of general ideas.'[33] In Treasure Island this effect has obvious relevance for the reader in our relationship to Jim's perceptions. The images which he perceives come to represent not only his alienation because of the unfamiliarity of his surroundings, but also his moral bewilderment which increases as he becomes more distanced from convention. And it is on this more metaphorical level that the novel's images assume a significance of their own. Susanne Langer adds:

> It is characteristic of figurative images that their allegorical status is not recognised ... In our most positive primitive presentations - the metaphorical imagery of dreams - it is the symbol, not the meaning, that seems to command our emotions. We do not know it as a symbol. In dream-experience we very often find some very commonplace object ... fraught with intense value or inspiring the greatest terror. We cannot tell what makes the thing so important. It simply seems to be so in the dream. The emotional reaction is, of course, evoked by the idea embodied in that object, but so long as the idea lives only in this body we cannot distinguish it from its symbolic incarnation which, to literal-minded common sense, seems trivial. [34]

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33. Susanne K. Langer, Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite and Art (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1942), p.145.

34. Langer, Philosophy in a New Key, p.149.

It is precisely this disjunction between image as the vehicle of definite meaning and image as vague, indefinable symbol, that Stevenson exploits. Characters may offer interpretations of the incidents which provide the images, but the symbolic significance remains undisturbed, and the reader's attempts to decipher their 'meaning' only ensure that they remain some of the most vivid images to be taken from the novel. Such a process is ideally suited to Stevenson's expression of his own attitude to the dimensions of existence, since the interplay between reader and text, symbol and meaning becomes analogical to the disjunction between literal, pragmatic interpretations of reality and those which attempt to encapsulate a further, metaphysical structuring to the universe.

Through imagery and plot, therefore, the novel defies any attempts to impose upon it a satisfactory resolution. The reader can participate in the quest with Jim, share the discovery of the treasure, and return to safety, but the problematics of morality encountered in the process are neither explained nor resolved. We may discover all Blind Pew's motives, even learn where and when he received his disfigurement, but the horror of 'that soft eyeless creature' remains. The island may finally be left behind, its treasure removed, but the image of a melancholy place, surrounded by the ceaseless booming of the surf and by a sense of evil, remains to haunt the reader as well as Jim. Thus, although we trace our way through the map of the island, and the map of the tale, by way of plot events, the central significance of the tale remains in the minor incidents and images. And it is through the struggle to make sense of such elements that we gain our understanding of the moral problematics expressed by the novel.

Stevenson's tactics therefore appear to contravene the usual reading process whereby our response to later events is conditioned by the experience of, and expectations created by earlier events. Stevenson avoids such a mobile relativity, and aims for static moments of recognition rather than a process of learning. However, since such moments are not the major plot events they do not impede the novel's dynamic. Indeed, it is the impetus of the plot action itself, rather than any psychological or social conflicts, which carries the novel forward. The function of this technique is two-fold. Firstly, it keeps the novel firmly placed within the adventure story and romance genre. Through this generic consistency a certain unity is maintained which might otherwise have been threatened by tensions created by the novel's subject matter. Secondly, the recognisable form of the novel affirms the overt 'literariness' of the work, denying any claims to be seen as specifically relating to an external reality. The reader can therefore confront the same moral contradictions as Jim but with a much more secure footing in reality, at some distance from the fiction. And, whatever our own morality, we can view his situation with a certain detachment.

The reader's dual involvement and detachment from the dilemmas of Jim, however, highlights the possible disjunction between different kinds of perception. Stevenson therefore exploits this to the full, by emphasising the limitations of the fictional 'solutions' which provide no answer to the questions that have raised through the heightened dimensions of the fiction. He wrote in 'Lay Morals' of: 'that supreme self-dictation which keeps varying from hour to hour in its dictates with the

variation of events and circumstances', and states: 'it may be founded on some reasonable process, but it is not a process which we can follow or comprehend.'[35] The reader therefore is temporarily immersed in that process and made to see what it consists of; we are not only presented with a fictional map of our moral environment but are also asked to decipher that map's iconography. And it is only through our failure to break this code - inevitable since we are ultimately bound by the conventions of reality - that we can gain some sense of a 'fixed design of righteousness' and the flux in which it operates.

Treasure Island, of course, is given no identifiable descriptive details, it is a place without any recognisable location. It is for this reason that Stevenson can create a series of events outwith the codes and conventional of the morality operative in everyday reality. Later, in his South Seas tales, he was to exploit again the strange and exotic, although the alien environment described was by then of real familiarity to him.

'The Beach of Falesá'

As Stevenson's best known short story set outwith the British Isles, again in an exotic location, 'The Beach of Falesá'[36] not only provides an interesting introduction to the issues raised in The Ebb-Tide, but also illustrates Stevenson's reasons for using a South Sea setting in his fictions - apart from the most obvious biographical one. 'The Beach of Falesá' indicates three important areas in which Stevenson's South Sea experiences served him well in his fiction: firstly, as seen in Treasure Island, an alien location provided an ideal context in which to examine moral issues away

35. 'Lay Morals', pp.193-194. See also p.159.

36. Stevenson, 'The Beach of Falesá', Works XII, 3-86. All further page references are to this edition.

from the familiar codes of convention; secondly, through his characterisation of the island's natives he could explore the paradoxes and problems of the concept of innocence and, of course, the nature of corruption; thirdly, in describing the islands he found a new and exciting range of visual symbols. The short story also provides an ideally limited context, in which Stevenson could concentrate on the moral issues which so much concerned him. In 'The Beach of Falesá' he does so by bringing together two different types of morality, and two different levels of fictional experience, placing them in a situation of confrontation without allowing them ever to become totally divisive.

At a first reading it would appear that the first-person narrator of the tale, John Wiltshire, provides a humorous and realistic perspective on events that take place on Falesá, and represents a relative moral outlook, while the villain of the piece, a man known as Case, who tricks the natives with so-called magic, exploiting them and Wiltshire in pursuit of his own evil ends, belongs to the world of a more absolute morality as one of the Damned. The dichotomy, however, is not quite so simple. Although a conflict does exist between these two central characters, contradictions in attitude may also be traced within the personality of Wiltshire, as they emerge through his experiences on the island.

Wiltshire is an unusual narrator for Stevenson. His account of events is colloquial and, at times, crude - a voice far removed from Stevenson's own. Moreover, he is a character who appears to learn from the events of the tale. On his arrival in the island he is presented as an ill-educated, bigoted white man, the epitome of exploitative colonialism.

And yet, as the tale progresses he seems to improve in his attitudes, learning from his experiences, which include falling in love with his native 'bride', falling out with those other whites on the island who are even more exploitative than himself, adopting new patterns of behaviour and, finally, settling down to a fairly respectable existence. He would appear, therefore, a perfect illustration of a 'realist' character, being educated into social responsibility, and establishing a successful, Aristotelian morality by which to operate. Indeed, Wiltshire himself seems eager to present such a picture of events for he is, above all, a man who favours relativity.

His sense of relativity emerges through the tale as one of the bases from which he can face up to his alien experiences on the island. On meeting his native wife Uma, he is amazed at the innocence of her immediate judgement: 'You good!' (p.14), and the compliment which he later returns: 'I would rather have you than all the copra in the South Seas', is qualified by his sense of the statement's extravagance: 'which was a very big expression, and the strangest thing was that I meant it.' (p.35) Obviously this is as near absolute praise as his relativity will permit. Similarly, he can quite easily believe the missionary's description of the chief Faiso as: 'a great formenter of rebellions, and a thorn in the side of the mission. For all that he is very shrewd, and, except in politics and about his own misdemeanours, a teller of the truth.' (p.48) He even describes himself to Uma as: 'a good sort of fellow, Uma, as fellows go.' (pp.57-58) And in the resolution to the story, even his comments on island life can be seen as the judgements of a relative mind: 'But what bothers me is the girls. They're only half-castes, of course; I know that as well as you do, and there's nobody thinks less of half-

castes than I do; but they're mine, and about all I've got. I can't reconcile my mind to their taking up with Kanakas, and I'd like to know where I'm to find the whites?' (p.86) If moral relativism provides the code by which Wiltshire forms his opinions, it is also the mode in which his actions operate. He can disassociate himself from the evil Billy Randall, for example, and in Uma, find a wife who demands the treatment accredited to white women; in both instances he reveals a genuine adaptability. His confrontation with Case, too, can be seen as stemming from a desire to differentiate himself from him as a man. And he is able to reason out his pledge of honesty given to the missionary:

> I used to be bothered about my balances, but I reasoned it out this way. We all have queerish balances, and the natives all know it and water their copra in a proportion so that it's fair all round; but the truth is, it did use to bother me, and, though I did well in Falesá, I was half glad when the firm moved me on to another station, where I was under no kind of pledge and could look my balances in the face. (p.86)

Even here he can be seen as attempting to justify his actions as right or wrong according to an extremely relative code of morality, since even when 'reformed' he finds it difficult to be totally honest.

Yet, throughout the tale, running contrary to this relativity, there is another perspective on the world of Falesá which is presented through Wiltshire's less conscious response, and through the context of magic and the supernatural established by the plot events. Moments at which Wiltshire's relativism breaks down, failing him as a means of ordering his universe, are signalled by a change in tone, a move towards less prosaic language, and an attention paid to the alien and absolute aspects of the landscape. The island itself immediately creates in him a sense

of unfamiliarity and otherness; 'I saw that island first when it was neither night nor morning. The moon was to the west, setting, but still broad and bright. To the east and right amidships of the dawn, which was all pink, the daystar sparkled like a diamond.' (p.3) And after this strange half-light gives way to day he remarks that: 'the world was like all new painted.' (p.7) Experiences on the island, such as the taboo put on him because of Uma, and the scare stories put around by Case, lead him to philosophise further on human recognition of elements over which we have no control, on the threat of the unknown: 'They say it scares a man to be alone. No such thing. What scares him in the dark or the high bush is that he can't make sure, and there might be an army at his elbow.' (p.19) The uncertainty which this statement indicates can thus also become the basis of an impulse towards definition, a desire for the clarification of absolutes. And although he may not be aware of it, Wiltshire's language does carry an implication of uncertainty, a fear of forces which cannot be accommodated within the degrees of categorisation which form his own relative morality. The bush, for example, creates just such a confrontation with the confines of existence: 'The brightest kind of a day it is always dark down there. A man can see to the end of nothing; whichever way he looks the wood shuts up, one bough folding with another like the fingers of your hand; and whenever he listens he hears always something new.' (p.62) Here Wiltshire's determined efforts to assess everything with reference to man - comparing boughs to fingers and so on - has little effect in face of the rhythm and poetic imagery of his words, so different from his usual slanging prose.

The juxtaposition of the exotic and the familiar thus becomes both the most powerful force for realising alternative perspectives in the story, and the most potent threat to Wiltshire's complacency. With Case and Uma he

may be faced with extremes of good and evil but he can accommodate them by concentrating on their human failings. Case tricks the natives with false images - and Wiltshire can reveal how petty and trivial these images really are. Case is thus defeated but the power of the images presumably still remains for the natives. Uma he can tease and annoy, in addition to acknowledging her undoubted heroism. But he cannot so neatly defuse or accommodate the power of the landscape; and it is through his description of such features that Stevenson helps to break down our own categorisation processes, making us aware of potentially new significances in objects. Thus when Wiltshire is visiting Case's hideaway he notes a 'green-and-yellow bird' that 'began to tear the hair off the head of one of the figures.' (p.66) The image is not mentioned again but that single moment serves to epitomise the real savagery lurking behind Case's cardboard terrors. It also remains an image for which no explanation can be given, so again it belongs to the realms of the unknown, of that world which demands definitions beyond those of our relativist outlooks.

Through the plot, Wiltshire here too moves beyond his stance of relativism. By destroying Case's magic he assumes an even greater power himself, a power which bears little relation to his own plodding attempts to understand the nature of good and evil. Failing to educate the natives out of their superstitions, he can only meet one form of absolutism - that of tyranny, - with another, by destroying Case's artefacts. And it is this act which finally triumphs, rather than any obviously moral confrontation; a fact which Mr Trevelyn, the missionary, recognises as he bemoans the fact that when Case won respect by pretending to pluck coins from his ears, he could not perform the same feat and thus lost

respect for his god. Through such incidents the reader is confronted with elements that cannot be fully explained by Wiltshire's somewhat limited narrative, and which we cannot assimilate into our own experience of a relative reality.

'The Beach of Falesá' indicates salient features of Stevenson's South Sea fiction - the use of vivid topographical imagery conveying a sense of alienation from the conventional orderings of existence, contradictions within the text which lead to the recognition of limitations in comprehension and definition, a gradual undercutting of relativist processes of assessment - but perhaps its greatest triumph is Stevenson's success in indicting a relativist morality by the lips of one who professes to hold and act by it. Moreover, the contradictions inherent in Wiltshire are analagous to those which we experience not only in the attempts to decipher fiction but also to comprehend and define existence. And, as the story indicates, such attempts can only meet with success if the traditional boundaries of judgement and perception are shifted in order to incorporate the extreme dimensions of an absolutist perspective.

The Ebb-Tide

Building, perhaps on the successes of Treasure Island and 'The Beach of Falesá', Stevenson attempted his most ambitious exploration of a South Sea location in The Ebb-Tide, co-written with Lloyd Osbourne.[37] Yet he was well aware of the problems intrinsic to his aims. In a letter to Edmund Gosse he describes the novel: 'The Ebb-Tide: a dreadful, grimy business in the third person, where the strain between a vilely realistic

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37. Stevenson, and Lloyd Osbourne, The Ebb-Tide, Works X, 201-353. All further page references are to this edition.

dialogue and a narrative style pitched about (in phrase) "four notes higher" than it should have been, has sown my head with grey hairs'.[38] Yet, in spite of his own disquiet, in The Ebb-Tide he finds a more cohesive way of relating fictional concepts to the dimensions of reality than in many of his earlier works. The novel is based on Stevenson's acknowledgement that humankind will inevitably rely upon relative moralities as a defence against our natural position of inherent subjectivity, our essential inability to understand the machinations of our universe, and our basic uncertainty as to self-identity. Yet, from this position, it moves towards postulating an absolute morality as a means of alternative. It is through the dialectic thus created that Stevenson explores the effects on moral precepts of having to adapt to circumstantial conditioning.

His achievement in The Ebb-Tide is partly due to a more direct correlation between plot and theme than is usual in Stevenson's other novels. The simple narrative device of having the sympathy shift between the four central characters of the novel - the drifters, Herrick, Huish, Davis, and the 'missionary', Attawater, gain and lose moral approbation at various points in the story - ensures that the essential mutability of self is emphasised. And once again, Stevenson exploits the exotic location to the full through his descriptions of unfamiliar, almost animated, surroundings which demand new efforts of perception from both the characters and the readers, and which offer the author a wide range of images for conveying significance in symbolic terms. The cohesion of the novel can be partly attributed to the fact that setting and scenery, as a repository of meaning, is not only important for the author and the

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38. Stevenson, Letter to Edmund Gosse (June 10th, 1893), Letters, vol.4, 1891-1894, Works XXX, ed. Sidney Colvin (London, 1926), p.206.

reader, but also provides signposts within the text for the characters who, as morally and financially impoverished drifters, are continually seeking some signs of significance in their existence. And in their search for the elusive goal of final definition that will allow them to rise above the flux and change of life, they become mimetic of our role as novel readers, looking for an ultimate meaning. Finally, Stevenson's success in the novel may also be due to his ability to move between four characters, but to retain identification - although not necessarily our approval - with one character, Herrick. More highly educated and supposedly more sensitive than the others, his attempts to resolve the contradictions inherent in his own nature present a reflection of Stevenson's own concerns and conflicts. Moreover, the moment of recognition which he does achieve following his attempted suicide both indicates that clarification of human uncertainty can be achieved through extremes, and shows that such clarification can only be temporary, that no credible final resolution can be achieved, and that, in the struggle with the contradictions of human nature and the environment of morality, only a momentary and non-pragmatic understanding is possible.

The novel therefore operates through a subtly interrelated structure of situations and characters, with a plot that is held together by the idea of contingency and of chance. Its three main characters, Davis, Huish and Herrick, are found 'on the beach' at the opening of the tale; both literally and figuratively they are on the peripheries of society. Without money or occupation they are unable to admit their real names - and this loss of identity is a significant indication of their position. We are told of Herrick, for example, that 'the alias betrayed his moral bankruptcy.' (p.207) The novel thus begins with these three individuals

making one last attempt to write to their relatives at home, to establish contact with the world of recognisable social codes and moral allegiances; if you can't write a letter, muses Davis, the Captain: 'it's about the high-water mark of being a brute beast'. (p.222) Even in the practical sense, therefore, the men are presented as seeking a function - although 'seeking' is perhaps too active a term for their despondent aimlessness. They are also searching for some escape from their present existence and, at the beginning of the novel, Herrick encourages them to achieve this by imagining ideal situations for themselves, creating an alternative existence through the words of their fictions. Herrick, however, realises that such visions of another lost world will not help them in this, especially since the dreams of Davis and Huish are essentially materialistic. Herrick himself can only achieve any sense of clarification or escape by drawing on the walls of the calaboose where they are hiding a musical symbol denoting, 'Destiny knocking at the door.' Such an action is shown as the only response to reality left him: 'it was the bare sense of his existence prompted him.' (p.228) The incident serves to give the reader some indication that any real escape for these men, any 'success' in the terms of realism, is unlikely. What the novel itself will offer, however, is some kind of symbolic representation of their state of existence and, beyond them, a paradigm of humanity's position within the confines of reality.

For Huish and Davis, however, Herrick's symbol-drawing has little significance and is of no practical help. Therefore, when they are hired to crew the schooner Farallone, whose previous crew have all taken fever and died, they welcome the chance of a function and persuade Herrick to join them. Their sense of purpose is further increased when they decide to steal the schooner's load of champagne; nor do they see this

decision as particularly evil for, as they persuade Herrick, they are merely adapting to circumstances. Unlike the reader, the men feel no sense of foreboding either at the ship's name, or her entry in the harbour with: 'the yellow flag, the emblem of pestilence' flying upon her mast. (p.216) Herrick at first does attempt to maintain some adherence to conventional morality despite his circumstances but comes to realise that, in the abyss he inhabits, such systems no longer apply, since the only alternatives to crime are prison or death. And although Herrick may believe that he possesses a standard of moral consciousness, his attitudes are continually shown to change, as he justifies each response according to circumstances. As such, his morality can be seen as only a more extreme version of the relativism of conventional morality; the nature of the void in which he finds himself illustrates the dominant effect of circumstance and the arbitrariness which lies behind so-called moral 'judgements'.

The dangers of moral relativity may be seen having a particularly corrosive effect when the men discover that the champagne they planned to steal is, in fact, only water: 'The difference between a bottle of champagne and a bottle of water is not great; between a shipload of one or of the other lay the whole scale from riches to ruin.'(pp.267-268) By exploiting contingency in this way Stevenson reveals relativity as breaking down when faced with extremes, much as he did in 'The Beach of Falesá.' Relativist concepts are presented as a means of concealing the real positives of good and evil. And once relativity has been lost, any validity in comparisons between the three men also disappears. Rather than possessing mixed qualities of good and evil which provides them with a fixed reaction to each event, all, like the character of Long John

Silver, are capable of assuming,with complete commitment, various different points on the moral compass. Even Herrick's comparison of the three white men with the natives on the schooner: 'It was thus a cutting reproof to compare the islanders and the whites aboard the Farallone ' (p.257), is of little value, since by this time he is so conscious of the positive and irremediable capacity for evil in his companions that he cannot place them on a sliding scale of values. In the first part of the novel, therefore, Stevenson aims at revealing how humankind imposes structures of values on existence and then inevitably betrays these values when the restrictions they create are found to be too great.

The second part of the novel contains an even more explicit and dramatic confrontation with relative values. On arriving at 'New Island', owned by Attwater, the three men are able to escape from the shifting moral balance of their relationships and each sees the mysterious Attwater as a static point in a world of flux and uncertainty, imbuing the pearl-fisher with all the power and ambiguity of an immovable figure of justice. Attwater's own deliberate presentation of himself as a God-like figure: 'He was dressed in white drill, exquisitely made; his scarf and tie were of tender-coloured silks; on the thwart beside him there leaned a Winchester rifle' (p.285), and his proud stance of possessing in his island paradise all that the drifters lack, in both spiritual and material senses, is reinforced by his apparent ability to assimilate contradictions within himself and yet survive. Even his external appearance seems to testify to this capacity:

> He was a huge fellow, six foot four in height, and of a build proportionately strong, but his sinews seemed to be dissolved in a listlessness that was more than

> langour. It was only the eye that corrected this impression; an eye of an unusual mingled brilliancy and softness, sombre as coal and with lights that outshone the topaz; an eye of unimpaired health and vitality; an eye that bid you beware of the man's devastating anger. (p.284)

The description serves to indicate even the physical contradictions that he can accommodate within his person.

Attwater's alternating cynicism and Christianity, revealed through his conversations with Herrick, and the mixture of benevolence and cruelty expressed by his actions, likewise present paradoxes within a single personality. In his religion too, he appears to be happy with contradiction. The notion of grace he illustrates by a parable of the diving machines: 'Well, I saw these machines come up dripping and go down again, and come up dripping and go down again, and all the while the fellow inside as dry as toast! ... and I thought we all wanted a dress to go down into the world in, and come up scatheless.' (p.297) Nevertheless he later refutes this not only by his primitive and Old Testament view of justice, shown in the tale of the native he punished by a cruel death, but also in the anger he expresses at seeing the work of his mission struck down. Such a fate seems to him an insult to his endeavours: 'I was making a new people here; and behold, the angel of the Lord smote them and they were not!' (p.299) Attwater's extremes of passion and his fatalism can be seen in polar opposition to the relativism which the _Farallone_'s crew attempted to maintain. Certainly this is a view which appears to be vindicated by the events of the novel in that, supported by his strong belief in his ability to save all their souls, Attwater does win one man for his god. In this respect, at least, he can be viewed as bearing a parodic resemblance to the Calvinist god.

His sense of justice and his belief that: 'religion is a savage thing, like the universe it illuminates; savage, cold and bare, but infinitely strong' (p.298) adds credibility to this perspective. Yet, although the potential for absolutism expressed in Attwater remains of significance in itself, his system — being only that of a man — is ultimately shown to break down. By assuming that he himself possesses the power of removing burdens from people, and of acting as intermediary between their external selves and the sense of their own deepest existence, he is acting contrary to a truly absolutist perception and must be rejected as such by anyone who believes that humankind exists in a universe over which they have very little control. And this, finally, is the perception of Herrick who rejects Attwater, deciding that: 'I must struggle on to the end with the pack of my responsibility.' (p.302)

Nevertheless, although Attwater is ultimately revealed as offering only an illusory solution, the importance which he assumes for the three men does indicate a response on their part to the absolutism he _appears_ to represent, and of which, in terms of his initial symbolic impact, he does remain an image. Although Davis, Huish and Herrick all begin by wishing to exploit or even rob him, according to their individual inclinations, the contingency plans adopted by each come to an end in direct confrontation with Attwater. And in each man he arouses a reaction of extreme dimensions. Huish tries to kill him, Davis surrenders his soul to him, and Herrick is forced into an attempted suicide. The actions of each also indicate the development of their individual philosophies. Huish shows the forces of positive evil in action; in many ways his attitude shows similarities to Attwater's whom he tries to draw into the circle of complicity by referring to him as _H_attwater.

His admiration of the ability to put extreme actions into practice: 'Murder ain't genteel, it ain't easy. it ain't safe, and it tykes a man to do it' (p.340) indicates his recognition of similar qualities in Attwater. Yet the actual murder attempt on Attwater reveals just how destructive such a philosophy can be when it is allowed to enter the realms of reality, rather than remaining a conceptual positive:

> And then, at almost the same moment, the indomitable Huish decided to throw, and Attwater pulled the trigger. There was scarce the difference of a second between the two resolves, but it was in favour of the man with the rifle; and the jar had not yet left the clerk's hand, before the ball shattered both. For the twinkling of an eye the wretch was in hell's agonies, bathed in liquid flames, a screaming bedlamite; and then a second and more merciful bullet stretched him dead. (p.350)

The destructive nature of falsely imposed absolutes is also revealed through Attwater's conversion of Davis who, at gunpoint, has no choice but to be saved:

> The memory of that dreadful passage returned upon him in a clap; again he saw Huish lying dead, again he seemed to himself to totter on the brink of an unplumbed eternity. With trembling hands he seized hold of the man whom he had come to slay; and his voice broke from him like that of a child among the nightmares of fever: "Oh! isn't there no mercy? Oh! what must I do to be saved?"
> "Ah!" thought Attwater, "here's the true penitent."
> (p.352)

And after this conversion Davis completely loses all independence of personality, preferring Attwater's service to the hell he had glimpsed.

Herrick's reaction to the figure of Attwater is a more complex one, since Attwater initially pays him more, and latterly less, attention that he gives to the other men. Herrick's failed suicide indicates the impossibility of realising absolutes of experience within the realms of reality; nevertheless, he does reach an awareness of some dimension of

existence outwith himself. In pondering the sequence of past events, for example, he realises: 'He had complied with the ebb-tide in man's affairs, and the tide had carried him away; he heard already the roaring of the maelstrom that must hurry him under.' (p.304) He can also perceive that the failure of his suicide attempt was due to his being in 'the grasp of an external fate ineluctable as gravity.' (pp.327-328) Throughout the novel's events he has attempted to judge his experiences according to an increasingly fluctuating standard of moral values, but by this stage he is prepared to reject the conventional moral spectrum in favour of any form of absolute alternative; and at this point in the novel the choice appears to be between Attwater and death. Both, however, elude him. Death is unattainable because to achieve it he would have to rely on his own vacillating and unreliable character. And Attwater is revealed to Herrick as a religious tyrant, an illusory figure of a false absolutism. Yet, although in both instances he reaches the conclusion that absolutes are unattainable, that human nature prevents their existence operating within our limited conception of reality, Herrick achieves a valid sense of the need to acknowledge and be aware of such limitations. Within the novel his desire for some absolute of morality which would define his existence is shown to be an essential element of the human psyche. Moreover, in spite of Attwater's failure as an absolute, he performs the function of a testing point in the novel, a means of revealing character, and becomes a significant image for the reader, one whose power is not wholly mitigated by the subsequent exposure of character flaws.

Apart from plot and characterisation Stevenson also points to the significance of absolutes through his use of images, especially those

which indicate a surprising mutability in an apparently fixed reality. Alastair Fowler, while putting forward a specifically Christian interpretation of the novel which can, and has been, questioned, nevertheless offers a convincing analysis of its technique: 'The reader may never resolve the quartette into a settled scheme of relations. Partly because he is reading about change, his feelings are perpetually disturbed by some unanticipated turn, or some new valuation, which forestalls the equilibrium of their understanding.'[39] Throughout the novel the aura of moral superiority shifts from one character to another, emulating their changing fortunes as described by Herrick: 'The three lives went up and down before him like buckets in a well, or like the scales of balances.' (p.303) Moving from one position of sympathy to another, with the shifting narrative allegiance, the reader begins to distrust the relativity which the novel is establishing since we are left no real grounds for forming conventional character judgements. The search therefore begins for some form of absolute definition; either for a static point to which we can hold and from there form some moral assessment, or for a moral philosophy which can accommodate the extremes with which we have been presented. The machinations of circumstantial morality are thus seen as a terrain which we explore in search of absolutes.

As in Stevenson's other novels this search for significance is both encouraged and confused by the continual emphasis on images and symbols. And once again this is most clearly noticeable in the passages of scenic description. A comment on the schooner Farallone, lying at anchor in

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39. Alastair Fowler, 'Parables of Adventure: The Debatable Novels of Robert Louis Stevenson', Nineteenth Century Scottish Fiction: Critical Essays, ed. Ian Campbell (Manchester, 1979), 105-129, p.124.

the bay at Papeete, indicates the techniques used:

> Seen from the beach through the thin line of shipping, two objects stood conspicuous to seaward: the little isle, on the one hand, with its palms and the guns and batteries raised forty years before in defence of Queen Pomare's capital; the outcast Farallone, upon the other, banished to the threshold of the port, rolling there to her scuppers, and flaunting the plague-flag as she rolled. A few sea-birds screamed and cried about the ship; and within easy range, a man-of-war guard boat hung off and on and glittered with the weapons of the marines. The exuberant daylight and the blinding heaven of the tropics picked out and framed the pictures.
> (p.238)

Not only is the passage visually vivid and superbly atmospheric in its yoking together of incongruous images, but it offers in microcosm a reflection of the devices Stevenson uses throughout the novel. The intensity of the scene, and the definition of each object by its dissimilarity to those around it, creates a process of signification framed by the alien tropical surroundings. In this respect Stevenson can be seen as a forerunner of such early twentieth century novels as Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness, E.M. Forster's Passage to India and D.H. Lawrence's The Plumed Serpent, which set spiritual quests in alien environments containing the power to destroy conventional expectations of character, disturb traditional means of assessment and prevent reliance upon personal experience on the part of the reader. Stevenson, however, is less interested than these writers in the realities of the culture clash, but concentrates on the alien location as a metaphor for his metaphysical concerns. The artefacts of landscape are thus used to exploit a sub-conscious response, to connote dream images and to widen the significance of the language in the text by encouraging the potential for almost allegorical interpretations.

The images of location also provide shifting avenues of response which support the sense of mutability established by the novel. This effect can be most clearly traced in the descriptions of Herrick's responses to the alien environments. Herrick's first reaction to Attwater's island indicates how the process operates on both the level of a moral sign being given to the characters, and of signifiers of the textual quest being presented to the reader. We are told: 'The isle - the undiscovered, the scarce - believed in - now lay before them and close aboard; and Herrick thought that never in his dreams had he beheld anything more strange and delicate.' (p.279) The situation is at once removed from the level of pure reality, and is imbued with expectation. Herrick tries to find some means of relating the vision to his own experience: 'He tortured himself to find analogies. The isle was like the rim of a great vessel sunken in the waters; it was like the embankment of an annular railway grown upon with wood' (p.280). In this way the significance of the natural world of the island is stressed at the expense of human limitations in comprehending it. And Herrick's plight is shared by the reader who searches the textual descriptions for any explanation or continuation of this apparent significance. Herrick's traversal of the island, when on his way to meet Attwater, offers another illustration of this process:

> When he now went forward, it was cool with the shadows of many well-grown palms; draughts of the dying breeze swung them together overhead; and on all sides, with a swiftness beyond dragon-flies or swallows, the spots of sunshine flitted, and hovered, and returned. Underfoot, the sand was fairly solid and quite level, and Herrick's steps fell there noiseless as in new-fallen snow. It bore the marks of having been once weeded like a garden alley at home; but the pestilence had done its work, and the weeds were returning. (p.294)

This passage opens itself to readings on several levels; already the island is being presented as a place of retreat from the heat of the ship, with its shadowy paths implying a potential hiding place. The hovering sunshine adds to the sense of unreality, as if the whole island is transient, liable to disappear at any moment, with the apparently solid land vanishing in much the same way as Attwater's supposed reliability does. The terms of description also imply a certain animism in the scene, again indicating natural forces which are outwith human control. Enhancing the novel's moral preoccupations in a more direct way, images such as Herrick's steps being as in new-fallen snow serve to remind us of his deep desire for some form of purity or innocence. Even his view of the island as having been tended like a garden can be seen as stemming from his desire for order, the attempt to impose civilised conventions upon the wilderness. Only the mentions of weeds and pestilence give some idea of the contradictions of innocence and civilisation, hinting at Herrick's future disillusionment.

Such textual analysis leads us into paralleling the actions of the characters by attempting to impose moral significance upon the natural world, trying to find in the scenic descriptions some indication of meanings external to our conscious awareness. Yet it is for this very reason that the process does yield a temporary significance, since we learn that the import of the images cannot be extrapolated from the text as a whole, nor related to our own experience of reality. This does not mean, however, that the images lose their metaphysical significance. One final illustration - the appearance of Attwater flanked by two natives - shows just how effective the original impact of an apparently reasonable description can be:

> The sun glistened upon two metallic objects, locomotory like men, and occupying in the economy of those creatures the places of heads - only the heads were faceless. To Davis between wind and water, his mythology appeared to have come alive, and Tophet to be vomiting demons.
> (p.346)

Despite the fact that such strange beings are identified as natives in diving suits at the next instant, the language and the image is sufficiently powerful for them to impress upon the reader an impression of alien beings from another world. The 'realistic' explanation in no way mitigates their impact. The image also indicates how the reader has, by this stage, come to accept a certain extra-realistic form of perception, and to understand a register of thought which actually seeks metaphysical significance rather than normative interpretations.

Although such moments appear to have only a temporary meaning they also arouse the expectation of significance which is central to the tale's dynamic. In the search for ways of achieving imaginative transformations of reality through description, Stevenson is paralleling the search of the characters for external significance to their existences. The unity thus achieved must also, however, be reflected in the limitations of both the fiction and its moral concerns. The power of the image, therefore, is only temporary, and the various identities which the characters attempt to create for themselves are shown simply as fictions. The failures of Attwater, Herrick, Davis and Huish, and of their dreams, are necessary illustrations of the dangerous ways in which fictions can bolster an illusory sense of self. The tale thus denies not only the possibility of any concreteness of perception in interpreting the physical environment, but also prevents us from forming any consistent moral assessments. The reader is left to fall back upon Stevenson's maxim:

'We must walk by faith indeed, and not by knowledge.'[40] By pointing to the potential for absolutism and then attacking the attempt to put such a philosophy into practice on purely human terms, Stevenson creates the awareness of a lack in human consciousness and human powers of comprehension ; it is around this dimly perceived absence that the tale is centred. And this absence comes to assume its own significance as a symbol of human limitations.

The story also increases the sense of limitation by denying us any satisfactory resolution to the fictional plot. Davis loses his identity while Attwater's false sense of self is reinforced by his saving of a sinner's soul. Triumphantly he has the last word in the novel, through the mouthpiece of his victim, Davis:

> But, O! why not be one of us? why not come to Jesus right away, and let's meet in yon beautiful land? That's just the one thing wanted; just say; Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief! And He'll fold you in His arms. You see, I know! I been a sinner myself!
> (p.355)

Herrick, however, who has been previously told by Davis before his conversion 'Go to Hell in your own way!' finds that he can no more achieve Heaven than Hell on his own. He remains fixed within reality, realising that from now on: 'he must go back into the world and amongst men without illusion.' (p.328) The grim cognition that in order to survive he must acknowledge the limitations of his own nature shares with Calvinism a sense of Original Sin, of the flawed nature of humanity. But it also indicates a recognition that in order to survive happily within reality all absolutist ideals should be rejected and that flexibility, self-justification, even hypocrisy - the expressions of a

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40. 'Lay Morals', p.193.

relative morality – are necessary for a comfortable existence within the confines of this world. Hence the note of sadness, and of anti-climax at the novel's end, for here Stevenson comes close to a weary acceptance of the limitations of human reality, and a resigned understanding of the human condition.

Nevertheless, the ideal that has been 'realistically' rejected remains a potent force as projected not only by the contents of the fiction but by the reading processes involved. By indicating the reductive quality of circumstantial reality, and the illusions of human attempts to create absolutes, the novel forces the reader to become involved in the process of searching for some solution, and thus to recognise limitations in self as well. Moreover, the exotic location easily establishes a recognition that, on completion of the text, the reader will return to his or her relative reality. Through our response to the fictionalisation of an extreme state of subjectivity, which is placed in contrast with 'a fixed design of righteousness', we gain a sense of the dichotomy which interests Stevenson. Yet after dramatising his sense of limitations, imperceptions and the problems inherent in moral judgement, he then leaves his reader to re-enter the world of reality with a feeling of impotence and uncertainty. Only by internalising the search for absolutes in the fictional process can the subject even be broached: to depict the human desire for, and loss of absolutes in any realist form would be both difficult in technical demands and depressing, even destructive, in content. As it is, by circling around the loss of absolutes, presenting them as an absent centre, Stevenson can achieve a temporary understanding of absolutes, presented to the reader in terms of comprehension on an imagistic level rather than through concrete

analysis or didactic discussion. For, as he himself wrote: 'It is only by some bold poetry of thought that men can be strung up above the level of everyday conceptions to take a broader look upon experience or accept some higher principle of conduct.'[41]

Stevenson's South Sea novels have been criticised for being merely exotic, for abdicating their responsibilities to realism. Andrew Noble, for example writes of: 'the manner in which, arbitrarily and often consciously, Stevenson aborts a serious enterprise into escapist, picturesque adventure. 'The Merry Men', 'The Beach of Falesa' and The Ebb-Tide are outstanding examples of other stories which share this auto-destructive capacity'.[42] Yet it is possible to see that only by such 'bold poetry of thought', by exploration of alien, 'escapist' environments, can Stevenson explore issues which are every bit as 'serious' as those expressed in realist fiction.

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41. 'Lay Morals', pp.163-164.

42. Andrew Noble, Introduction, Robert Louis Stevenson, ed. A. Noble (New York, 1983), p.11.

CHAPTER THREE

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON: THE SCOTTISH NOVELS

In the preceding chapter I discussed the various ways in which Stevenson transposes his moral concerns, and that absolutist perspective which owes much to his Scottish upbringing and the influence of Calvinist theology, into exotic settings which permit topographical, incidental and symbolic representations of those dichotomies which are part of his philosophical vision. By using such locations he could create that, 'personal poetry, the enchanted atmosphere, that rainbow work of fancy that clothes what is naked and seems to enoble what is base,'[1] which he saw as missing in the 'haunting and truly spectral unreality of realistic books.'[2] The three fictions, with their adventure plots, the unfamiliarity of the world which they describe, and the clear distinction of fabula and sjuzhet, illustrate Stevenson's belief that: 'no man lives in the external truth, among salts and acids, but in the warm, phantasmagoric chamber of his brain, with the painted windows and the storied walls.'[3] Yet not all Stevenson's novels point towards this phantasmagoric world; within his oeuvre a noticeable difference exists between those fictions set in foreign locations and those with more recognisably local situations. This chapter therefore considers what effect writing in a context familiar not only to himself but probably also to his readers has on the author who gave the injunction: 'Continue to testify boldly against realism!'[4]

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1. Stevenson, 'The Lantern Bearers', Works XXVI, 110-123, p.122.

2. 'The Lantern Bearers', p.121.

3. 'The Lantern Bearers', p.122.

4. Stevenson, Letter to W.H. Low (October, 1883), Letters vol.2, 1880-1887, Works XXXVIII, ed. Colvin (London, 1926), p.172.

How does he fulfil this demand when the subject matter of his fictions is so much nearer his own experiences - geographically, historically and emotionally?

The novels which do have more familiar locations appear to offer a less consistent indication of his interests than his foreign fiction; even the finest works within this group contain more contradictions, in both artistry and intent, than his more exotic tales. And the very fact that such conflicts are more noticeable would seem to indicate that the author is less able to distance himself from the fictional world, since that world is closer to his own experiences of 'reality'. His Scottish novels, and in particular Kidnapped and The Master of Ballantrae, clearly reveal the nature of the demands which realism can make upon the novel form and partly explain Stevenson's reasons for abandoning that method. Yet they also show the pressures of a philosophy of 'moral realism', the consciousness of absolutes which, when linked with the complicating factors of personal experience, with nostalgia and with national myth, force Stevenson into a variety of formal and generic experiments.

The degree of literary realism used by Stevenson, especially in his Scottish and more 'adult' novels, has been much argued over by critics. Stevenson, himself, however, is quite explicit about his own attitude. Giving advice to the 'young writer' in 'A Humble Remonstrance', he writes: 'And as the root of the whole matter, let him bear in mind that his novel is not a transcript of life, to be judged by its exactitude; but a simplification of some side or point of life, to stand or fall by its significant simplicity.'[5] Nevertheless, in writing

5. 'A Humble Remonstrance', p.166.

about areas and periods close to him - imaginatively if not always geographically -- Stevenson opens his work to interpretations which overlook the serious nature of his concerns, and forget the concept of 'significant simplicity'. Despite the fact that many of the same generic features are present, and in greater abundance in his South Sea fictions, certain romance elements in his Scottish works have led to his being viewed as a writer of nostalgia. And by way of pseudo-psychological criticism, he has been accused of trying to re-enter the world of his childhood - a criticism levelled at him by G.K. Chesterton and Robert Kiely, amongst others.[6] Kiely, however, does link Stevenson's search for a child's perspective on the world with his desire for 'significant simplicity'. And in an unpublished thesis which develops the concept of a child's viewpoint, Daniel Balderston draws interesting paraallels with post-modernist fiction by building on the idea of play in Stevenson's work.[7] Certainly, if Piaget's argument on 'moral realism' is to be accepted, analogies existing between Stevenson's moral outlook and that of a child, could be reflected in his fiction. Yet, without disregarding the elements of adventure and play in Stevenson's Scottish fiction, it is also important to recognise the complexity of his aims in these works and to be aware of the conflicting influences which beset him. In the South Sea fiction we can see how he de-contextualises his fiction by placing it in an alien environment which easily becomes imbued with symbolic significance. Such a context, therefore, appears well suited to the integration of an extreme and

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6. See both G.K. Chesterton, Robert Louis Stevenson (London, 1927), pp.49-57, and Robert Kiely, Robert Louis Stevenson and the Fiction of Adventure (Massachusetts, 1964), pp.61-105.

7. Daniel Balderston, 'Borges' Frame of Reference: The Strange Case of Robert Louis Stevenson' (Ph.D. thesis, Princeton University, 1981, Ann Arbor Mi. University Microfilms).

absolutist moral perspective. Obviously such a process of defamiliarisation is not so easy in a Scottish (or even a British) situation. In contrast with the South Sea works, his techniques in the Scottish novels appear as either immensely subtle or as confused; yet in either case they can be seen as an accurate reflection of his own conflicts. For rather than stripping away all that is familiar, he achieves a perspective of 'otherness' by juxtaposing relative and absolutist perceptions, realist and romantic contexts, thus creating a sense of duality and difference. Perhaps here the child analogies are of most use as a metaphor for his technique, for the positing of innocence and knowledge in a contrast from which neither emerges as superior. Writing on what can be lost in the development from childhood to adulthood, Stevenson comments:

> At the same time, and step by step with this increase in the definition and intensity of what we feel which accompanies our growing age, another change takes place in the sphere of intellect, by which all things are transformed and seen through theories and associations as through coloured windows. We make to ourselves, day by day, out of history, and gossip, and economical speculations, and God knows what, a medium in which we walk, and through which we look abroad. 8

In his South Sea novels Stevenson removes the coloured windows of our conventional perceptions and allows us to be dazzled by the light this lets in. In his Scottish novels, whether by conscious decision or failure of nerve, he permits us to look through one coloured window, that of our own realist and relativist perception, and through one clear window which again lets in new light. Through the interaction thus created we gain a new perspective but also an awareness of the essential conflict between the two views, at least in terms of our 'real' existence.

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8. Stevenson, 'Child's Play', Works XXII, 122-133, pp.123-124.

The manipulations of form and of realism as a technique which arise in Stevenson's Scottish novels have led to much biographical speculation. Robert Kiely, for example, hazards, somewhat vaguely: 'perhaps his Scotch Presbyterian training made him too mistrustful of the possibility of representing ideal reality in concrete terms.'[9] Unfortunately Kiely offers this idea in a dismissive rather than introductory fashion. Another potentially fruitful allusion to Stevenson's situation is made by V.S. Pritchett: 'When we complain of Stevenson's mannerisms and of his artificiality, we ought to distinguish between the purely mannered, and that ingrained love of the devious and elaborate which comes naturally from the rich and compressed scruples of the Scottish character and from the tribal ironies of Scottish religious history.'[10] Despite the rather rash generalisations about the 'Scottish character', Pritchett does indicate philosophical reasons for Stevenson's method: again, however, the comment is never followed up in his essay on the subject. And, indeed, it could be argued that Stevenson's Scottish fictions are, in fact, less 'mannered' than his others. Furthermore, it would appear that the strongest link between the works set in familiar and in alien locations _is_ the element of adventure, the significance of plot: it is this emphasis which indicates most clearly Stevenson's continued avoidance of a complete commitment to realism.

Indeed, Stevenson's use of adventure earns him a place with other great writers who illustrate their moral concerns through plots of action. As Leslie Fiedler has pointed out, Stevenson's artistic approach can be

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9. Kiely, _Robert Louis Stevenson and the Fiction of Adventure_, pp.61-62.

10. V.S. Pritchett, Introduction, _Novels and Stories by Robert Louis Stevenson_ (London, 1945), p.ix.

seen in the context of writers such as Melville, Conan Doyle and Graham Greene, who begin with outward romance of incident in their novels and then move through allegory into 'the naïve or unconscious evocation of myth.'[11] Indicating the moral nature of literary form, the divergence between what can be idealised in art as opposed to nature, Fiedler comments on the potential of seeing such writers in a definite category:

> such an understanding may lead to the more general appreciation of an honourable alternative to realism, somewhat out of fashion but by no means exhausted in its possibilities, a game in which the serious contemporary fictionist may find a strategy for closing the distance between himself and the large audience of novel readers ordinarily immune to serious literature.[12]

In his subsequent discussion of individual Stevenson novels, however, Fiedler does not build on this connection between moral form and the lack of realism. Yet, following his idea of an 'honourable alternative to realism', this chapter will concentrate once again on the interaction between Stevenson's 'moral realism' and his fictional techniques, but this time examining them within a familiar, culturally and historically bound, context. It will also consider those short stories - such as 'Jekyll and Hyde' and 'Markheim' which, although context-less, obviously have local rather than exotic settings.

Although recognising changes in Stevenson's aims, approaches and position as a writer in the course of his career, in this chapter I will follow an achronological order, necessary for exploring the nature of his concerns and the variety of his techniques. It should be emphasised however, that my aim is not to categorise the works in any definite

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11. Leslie Fiedler, 'R.L.S. Revisited', _No! In Thunder: Essays on Myth and Literature_ (London, 1963), 77-91, p.78.

12. Fiedler, 'R.L.S. Revisited', p.79.

pattern, rather to explore their configurations for, as Stevenson wrote: 'In the highest achievement of the art of words, the dramatic and the pictorial, the moral and romantic interest, rise and fall together by a common and organic law.'[13] The short stories, as brief experiments in narrative, will be considered first. Kidnapped will then be discussed as one of Stevenson's most equivocal examinations of morality. His follow-up to that novel, however, Catriona, indicates a movement away from 'moral realism' and, to a certain extent, towards literary realism in its technique. It therefore merits a brief consideration before moving on to The Master of Ballantrae. Possibly Stevenson's finest work in a Scottish context, this novel also offers the most complex representation of his moral concerns and provides the greatest challenge to realism.

'The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde'

Stevenson's short stories, although very much expressions of the dialectic between a subjective awareness of reality and the desire for an external and morally objective dimension to existence, tend to adopt the approach of Treasure Island, in that a specific literary generic form is used in order to contain the dichotomies and prevent them becoming too destructive. The short story form - ideally suited to accommodating ambiguity - contains the conflicts to such an extent that no clear resolution is expected or given; the ambiguity itself becomes part of the conclusion. Stevenson, a master of the form, also uses it to develop his techniques of deliberately displaying narrative as a self-conscious artefact, thus creating significance through the reading process as a whole - a significance which may contradict the ostensible meaning of the text.

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13. Stevenson, 'A Gossip on Romance', Works XXV, 140-154, p.147.

In any discussion of morality 'The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde' is the Stevenson text that immediately comes to mind.[14] Although still divided about the elements of detective mystery in the tale, most critics have now dismissed the assumption that the story is merely an allegory intended to prove: 'that if you weren't careful, the evil in you would swallow up the good.'[15] Nevertheless, many still settle for the explanation that Stevenson is depicting moral conflicts in terms of a single divided self. Certainly such a view allows for the author's alignment with the traditions of the period, of the double self as presented by Dickens, Wilkie Collins, Mary Shelley and, of course, Edgar Allan Poe's William Wilson.[16] Yet in none of Stevenson's fiction is the self simply divided into two: rather it is dramatised into a series of characterisations through a holistic approach to the fiction. His figures are presented and re-presented, defined and redefined by their situations. And nowhere is this more explicitly indicated by the structure than in 'Jekyll and Hyde'.

'The harm was in Jekyll, because he was a hypocrite... The hypocrite let out the beast Hyde,' wrote Stevenson in a letter.[17] The text itself makes it quite clear that the central character Jekyll, although a respectable doctor, is falling far short of leading a saintly life

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14. Stevenson, 'The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde', Works IV, 3-85. All further page references are to this edition.

15. Eigner, p.149, quoting from C. Kieth, 'Stevenson Today', Queen's Quarterly (Winter, 1950-1951), p.456.

16. See discussion of this by Andrew Lang, after a correspondence with Stevenson on the subject, 'Unsigned Review', Saturday Review (9th January, 1886), Lxi 55-56. (In Paul Maixner, Stevenson: The Critical Heritage (London, 1981), pp.199-202).

17. Stevenson, Letter to John Paul Bocock (November 1887), Huntington Library, H.M. 2414, Maixner, The Critical Heritage, pp.230-231.

even before he begins his experiments. Enfield, an acquaintance, on hearing of Jekyll being indebted to the character known as Hyde, remarks: 'An honest man paying through the nose for some of the capers of his youth' (p.8). And Utterson, the character closest to the narrative consciousness, also gives credence to the blackmail theory: '"I thought it was madness" he said, "... and now I begin to fear it is disgrace".' (p.12) Even on this most basic level of interpretation there exists no 'good' Jekyll and 'bad' Hyde. Jekyll himself, in his confessional statement, admits to his behavioural hypocrisy: 'Hence it came about that I concealed my pleasures; and then when I reached years of reflection, and began to look round me, and take stock of my progress and position in the world, I stood already committed to a profound duplicity of life.' (p.65) In considering Jekyll's character therefore, it is important to remember another of Stevenson's remarks made in the letter quoted above: 'I dare to say, you know as well as I, that bad and good, even to our human eyes, has no more connection with what is called dissipation than it has with flying kites.'[18] The relatively clichéd expressions of Jekyll's dissipation, only darkly hinted at and vaguely defined in the story, can therefore be seen as merely superficial indications of his flawed moral condition. The emphasis in Stevenson's statement of 'to our human eyes' is a significant guide to the distinctions he makes regarding moral purpose and human judgement. It also provides some indication of the purpose behind the complex narrative structure - that of illustrating to us a wider perspective on morality than is usually apparent to our 'human eyes'.

Although the story is written in the third person, the character closest to the narrative is Mr Utterson. We are obviously intended to identify

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18. Letter to John Paul Bocock.

with him, being given a lengthy description of his person at the beginning of the tale, as well as having access to his opinions and interpretations. Through Utterson we also have access to the narratives of Dr Lanyon and Jekyll himself. This funnel effect creates the impression of a multiplicity of perspective but also draws attention to the element of interpretation based on 'human eyes'. The narrative can thus be read as a process of attempting to define moral consciousness with reference to a series of situations in which the moral character of participant and spectator (and, ultimately, reader) is tested. This pattern of reflection means that not only Jekyll's statement itself can be read as an exposition of his moral perceptions, extending into a justification of them, but also that the tale as a whole may be seen as an attempt in a similar vein, by Utterson, trying to come to terms with his own consciousness of morality by defining it through external fictionalising rather than introspection. Jekyll, after all, adopts the third person approach in his confession when talking about Hyde.

Presumably the whole group of bachelors in the story would not be totally averse to Jekyll's 'vices' and even Utterson admits to a milder version; he 'drank gin when he was alone, to mortify a taste for vintages.' (p.3) Moreover, when Utterson considers Jekyll's possible 'disgrace' he becomes aware of his own vulnerability: 'His past was fairly blameless; few men could read the rolls of their life with less apprehension; yet he was humbled to the dust by the many ill things he had done.' (p.19) Although his deeds may be innocuous, there is an obvious similarity here with Jekyll's focus on and fascination for the potentiality of evil. And while Utterson may assert his respectability, are we to take as morally viable a man who states: 'I let my brother go

to the devil in his own way' (p.3), especially when considering the apparent fate of Jekyll? Expiation of guilt through the act of narration is not confined to Utterson. Dr Lanyon's narrative, although it deals with an experience which forces him to recognise deeper aspects of human nature than he would care to acknowledge, can also be seen as an attempt to rationalise and externalise his response. The very act of writing gives him a pause to reflect on what has happened to himself: 'My life is shaken to its roots; sleep has left me; the deadliest terror sits by me at all hours of the day and night.' (pp.63-64). And the full import of the encounter with Hyde cannot be described; 'What he told me in the next hour I cannot bring my mind to set on paper.' (p.63) Nabakov offers an explanation for this proliferation of marginally involved bachelor characters, seeing them as providing a middle ground between reality and fantasy, so that the reader may achieve the requisite amount of recognition and identification with the tale.[19] Without discounting this explanation, however, it is also possible to emphasise the integrated nature of the narratives. Despite the fact that, if we believe in Jekyll's plight Utterson's account must be read as valid, and if we see Utterson as self-delusory then we cannot trust his account of Jekyll's transformation, no single interpretation of the tale can be achieved. A variety of readings continues to co-exist yet they also continue to be mutually destructive; this dialectic, more than anything else in the tale, expresses the duality - not of the self -but of the position of the self trying to make sense of the surrounding moral universe.

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19. Vladimir Nabokov, 'The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde', Lectures on Literature, ed. Fredson Bowers, introduction John Updike (London, 1980), 179-204.

At the centre of the fantasy, however, and as the clearest expression of that duality in one character, stands Jekyll's narrative. It also serves to indicate another mode of concealment; by recognising the extreme nature of good and evil as concepts, but by seeking to internalise them within his character, Jekyll sees the moral polarities of the universe exemplified in the drama of his own persona. Despite its melodramatic nature, his narrative can be read as an attempt to mitigate the significance of such external absolutes. 'It was on the moral side, and in my own person,' he writes, 'that I learned to recognise the thorough and primitive duality of man.' (p.66) Yet through his experiments we can see him not only attempting to reach a recognition of human potential for evil but also trying to place such an awareness within the context of science, to translate it into terms which can achieve a concrete existence within his own frame of reference. His attempt to resolve such dualities in this way, however, fails, and in the language of his narrative we can hear the metaphysical, emotional dimension of his experiences breaking through, powerfully conveying the real sense of evil that he is afraid to acknowledge. The effect is partly due to the Gothic violence of his description: 'Certain agents I found to have the power to shake and to pluck back that fleshly vestment, even as a wind might toss the curtains of a pavilion' (p.67); 'The drug ... shook the doors of the prison house of my disposition.' (p.70) And here we can see that the actual process of transformation is more to be feared than what he might eventually become. His style also evokes a consciously self-dramatising tone of despair: 'Instantly the spirit of hell awoke in me and raged... A mist dispersed; I saw my life to be forfeit.' (p.77) His voice, while admitting that 'the veil of self-indulgence was rent from head to foot' (p.77), also

glorifies a strong sense of self-importance: 'I saw my life as a whole: I followed it up from the days of childhood ... to arrive again and again with the same sense of unreality, at the damned horrors of the evening.' (p.77) In so doing, Jekyll can be seen as attempting to set up barriers against that disintegration of perception, the fragmentation of a unified self, that emerges as one of the main fears of all the characters in the tale. Jekyll fears above all the otherness that will face him if he can no longer distinguish between the Jekyll and Hyde parts of his character; even when he can no longer maintain a physical distinction between the two, he attempts to keep them separate in prose. As his end draws near even this solace will be denied him: 'It is useless, and the time awfully fails me, to prolong this description.' (p.84) Significantly, the tale ends with the close of Jekyll's narrative; there is no narrative conclusion provided by Utterson. The various narratives can thus be seen as providing the last bastions against the unknown with which we are finally faced, while, at the same time, the language they use gives some sense of the horrors concealed behind the apparent verbal control.

The world of an unknown moral dimension, and the world of narratable experience also succeed in intersecting through points of imagery in the tale. This is most noticable in Utterson's dream, which, apart from indicating an altering environment of existence, also creates a reflection of the story's patterning; he sees the figure of the troglodyte: 'glide more stealthily through sleeping houses, or move the more swiftly and still the more swiftly, even to dizziness, through wider labyrinths of lamp-lighted city.' (p.14) This image of the labyrinth is a

recurring feature, pointing not only to the confusion of narrators in their search for definitions, but also to our own attempts, as readers, to make our way through a variety of accounts, never reaching a point of clarification. Such a feature, of course, is not restricted to this one tale; recent work has examined just how much an element of Stevenson's work this was, and how it relates him to post-modernist writers such as Borges. As Daniel Balderston remarks in a comparison between the two authors: 'In their fiction the act of duplication usually generates a momentum which causes it to happen again and again, and hence, sometimes, to form an endless chain.'[20] Images of fog in 'Jekyll and Hyde' add to this sense of an endless multiplicity: 'A great chocolate-coloured pall lowered over heaven, but the wind was continually charging and routing these embattled vapours' (p.26) while also providing a contrast with the sudden shafts of sunlight that reveal the full horror of Hyde. Once again the process is a dual one of revelation and concealment.

By bringing together such images, by breaking down interpretations almost as soon as they are made, Stevenson both indicates the limitations of language and of humanity's experience, but also points to the void existing behind our world of words. It is not surprising that, of all Stevenson's works,' Jekyll and Hyde' should have attracted the greatest diversity of interpretations - for in themselves these analyses are attempts to rationalise and explain. Yet the void the tale creates, by virtue of its tightly integrated structure which prevents any one explanation from being totally satisfactory, has been responsible for its transportation into the realms of myth. The story

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20. Balderston, p.185.

plays upon the reader's desire to be given a verbal explanation of a mystery, but also emphasises the impossibility of such interpretations ever being totally valid for our reality.

In 'Lay Morals' Stevenson wrote of the limits to human comprehension of morality and stated: 'His inner soul appears to him by successive revelations and is frequently obscured. It is from study of these alternations that we can alone hope to discover, even dimly, what seems right and what seems wrong to this veiled prophet of ourself.'[21] In 'Jekyll and Hyde' he succeeds in representing our relationship with this 'veiled prophet', but not simply through the duality and enigma of 'Jekyll and Hyde'. The tale itself is fully entitled: 'The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde', and it is the intransigence of that case to the efforts of all the narrators/bachelors to solve it, along with our own inability to penetrate the web in which they are enmeshed, that finally defeats us but also brings some enlightenment to the 'veiled prophet'. The bottomlessness of the fiction itself offers a recreation of the universe in which humankind, with all its uncertainty, searches for points of definition but cannot find such absolutes except in extremes which are unacceptable to our reality. And yet, through the fiction, we are also offered a fairly 'safe' means of facing up to that consciousness without threatening our everyday 'reality'.

Short Stories

A remark made by a character in 'Will O' the Mill',[22] another of Stevenson's short stories, helps elucidate his method within that genre.

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21. 'Lay Morals', p.183.

22. Stevenson, 'Will O' the Mill', Works VII, 65-95.

The tale's central character, Will, who lives in a valley among the mountains and is feeling restless with his lot in life, is visited by a young man from the outside world. The stranger begins his philosophising on existence by asking Will: 'Can you apply a parable?', proceeding to explain: 'It is not the same thing as a reason, but usually vastly more convincing.' (p.74) In this particular instance the parable is achieved by contrasting a squirrel who turns a wheel in his cage all day with another who sits contemplating the nuts in his possession. The image has a profound effect upon Will, who takes it to mean that contemplative passivity can equal possession of the world, and is as valid a means of assimilation into it as any illusion of useful activity. This small incident not only indicates the way in which Stevenson, too, would desire his fiction to be interpreted - as an applied image, more convincing than the processes of reasoning - but also indicates the nature of the effect for which he is aiming. The parable, the impact of its image, is of meditative significance; there is little point in forcing a correlation between the image and our actions in reality. And, as the stranger claims, the act of contemplation may be of greater value than the illusion of activity: an attitude which Will himself learns to appreciate.

Yet the tale offers more than this single moment of wisdom. It also provides an interesting example of the type of reaction often provoked by Stevenson's fiction in general and his short stories in particular. David Daiches is not alone amongst critics when he complains that although the tale is a superbly atmospheric piece, it does not sufficiently realise the allegory it purports to contain.[23] The loading of

23. Daiches, Robert Louis Stevenson, p.12.

significance in Stevenson's work, indeed, often seems almost to demand allegorical interpretations for it certainly contains no immediate relevance to, or direct discussion of, reality. Yet to read his work as 'allegorical' in this way would be to draw as direct a correlation between life and art - although in a purely symbolic way - as any reading which perceives his work to be 'realist'. Stevenson is not concerned to create characters, events and settings which only represent meanings independent of the action in the story, to convey a definite structure of ideas by his fiction. His projection of significance would seem to elude such a formulated approach.

Therefore, although the strength of his arguments against realism forces us to look for alternatives to it, careful assessment must be made of exactly what it is that he sets up in place of it. 'Our art,' he wrote, 'is occupied, and bound to be occupied, not so much in making stories true as in making them typical.'[24] As he points out, 'typicality' involves a fusion of all elements of experience, creating an image which allows a clarification - not a representation - of life. As he continues: 'The novel which is a work of art, exists, not by its resemblances to life, which are forced and material, as a shoe must still consist of leather, but by its immeasurable difference from life, which is designed and significant, and is both the method and the meaning of the work.'[25] The dimensions of existence as he views them, heightened by his moral perceptions, cannot be given concrete realisation either through allegory or through realism, but must be projected through a more flexible form of fiction, able to

24. 'A Humble Remonstrance', p.159.

25. 'A Humble Remonstrance', p.160.

create new perspectives, which then bring their own insight into life.

'Markheim'[26] provides another illustration of this fictional process. The tale, with its obvious resemblances to Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment, centres round a dialogue between Markheim, a would-be robber and a murderer, and a mysterious stranger, an apparition who suddenly confronts him as he carries out his evil deeds, demanding that Markheim attempt to justify his criminal intentions. Much debate has focused on the identity of this stranger - an angel or devil, a mirror image of himself, his conscience, or even a figment of his tormented imagination, have all been offered as possible explanations. Whether the advice given by the stranger is good or bad has also aroused discussion. Such speculations, however, evade the central significance of the tale for it is the very appearance of the stranger, the illusion itself, which provides the essential image with a function of destroying Markheim's complacent self-justifications. And, in this process, the apparition indicates how the way in which humankind places security in self-created moral contexts and in explanations which can be contracted or expanded as expediency demands, can be easily broken down; the very essence of relative morality is thus revealed as fallible.

But in this tale it is not only the 'ghost' that breaks down Markheim's sense of an established moral identity, so carefully built up through his recounting of the circumstances which led to his present low situation. The extremity of his criminal act, the awareness of his evil actions, also leads Markheim into feeling that his whole perception

26. Stevenson, 'Markheim', Works VII, 99-118.

of reality is threatened. Even before the ghost appears we are told that Markheim: 'feared tenfold more, with a slavish superstitious terror, some scission in the continuity of man's experience.' (p.109) Reality, it seems, carries a built-in supposition that there is a continuity to being, and that humanity's progress within reality is dynamic, avoiding points of stasis which may call for contemplation of extremes alien to reality and demand recognition of external absolutes. Markheim's fear, therefore, has a moral basis, stemming from the fear of confrontation with the extreme and absolute nature of his deed in murdering the old shop-keeper. This fear leads him to see the world as mutable; he believes: 'that the solid walls might become transparent and reveal his doings like those of bees in a glass hive; the stout planks might yield under his feet like quicksands and detain him in their clutch; ay, and there were soberer accidents that might destroy him; if for instance, the house should fall and imprison him beside the body of his victim.' (p.109) His fear of the unknown here, although located in a fairly ordinary house, is similar to that experienced by Herrick on his alien island in The Ebb-Tide, and the images used - of softness and mutability - are very similar. When the 'ghost' does appear, therefore, we have been prepared for the sensations of strangeness, and the apparition simply draws together and clarifies the various strands of Markheim's fear.

In spite of the apparition's strangeness, Markheim, by the end of a dialogue in which he has narrated his plans, his experiences and his regrets, and has talked over his future, is able to: 'steadily regard his counsellor', and to state: 'If I be condemned to evil acts ... there is still one door of freedom open - I can cease from action.'

(p.118) Having gone through this process of narration, the dangerous mutability of his world seems to have disappeared for Markheim; he can return to a decipherable reality. And indeed, it is soon after his story is completed that the mysterious stranger disappears. In this tale, therefore, Stevenson represents the horror of evil acts and the devastating effect a moral awareness of such acts can have on our secure acceptance of reality, as extremes destroy the solidity of the world in which we believe we operate. But he also incorporates into the tale his own suspicion that the act of narration, of representing such evil in fiction, is in itself an attempt at expiation, that it mitigates our deeper awareness of moral polarities - just as telling his tale relieves Markheim's imagination. The confrontation of such forces in fiction, however, paradoxically clears the way for a return to reality. A double process is thus in operation. The powerful imagery, the expressions of mutability, destroy our sense of security and convey Stevenson's pessimism as to our potential for a valid functioning within reality. Yet the continuity and dynamism established by the organisation of events in the narrative, that is, by the _sjuzhet_, creates suspense, and an expectation of progressive action which carries the reader through the story and out of its horror. The _sjuzhet_ thus prevents us being caught up in the mythic implications of elements of the _fabula_. And here the term _fabula_ is used in an extended sense of not merely the _events_ behind the narrative but also

as the matter behind it, the mythic aspect.[27] Perhaps, too, this conjunction of fabula and sjuzhet may account for the face that 'Markheim' has never been seen either as a successful ghost story or as a convincing psychological exploration.

A story such as Markheim shows Stevenson experimenting with the tensions of literary form and moral philosophy, but the short story which comes closest to his later works in its complexity is 'The Merry Men.'[28] Prefiguring the achievements of The Master of Ballantrae and The Ebb-Tide, the tale stretches form to the limits in order to contain those elements which represent Stevenson's concerns and fears at their most destructive. 'The Merry Men' is also fairly typical of Stevenson's work in that it uses the topographical conjunction of two physical worlds as a means of setting out the problematic of an absolute morality against the various dimensions of relative experience. Aros, the location of the tale, is

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27. In one sense the definition of terms I am aiming at here comes close to Edwin Muir's distinction of 'the story and the fable'. In An Autobiography he describes how: 'our first intuition of the world expands into vaster and vaster images, creating a myth which we act almost without knowing it, while our outward life goes on in its ordinary routine of eating, drinking, sleeping, working and making money in order to beget sons and daughters who will do the same.(p.48) And he continues:

> In themselves our conscious lives may not be particularly interesting. But what we are not and can never be, our fable, seems to me inconceivably interesting. I should like to write that fable, but I cannot even live it; and all I could do if I related the outward course of my life would be to show how I have deviated from it; though even that is impossible, since I do not know the fable or anybody who knows it. One or two stages in it I can recognize: the age of innocence and the Fall and all the dramatic consequences which issue from the Fall. But these lie behind experience, not on its surface; they are not historical events; they are stages in the fable. (p.49)

It could be suggested, therefore, that the distinction of story and fable, of sjuzhet and fabula, is particularly appropriate in reflecting the functioning of the Scottish imagination.
Edwin Muir, An Autobiography (London, 1954).

28. Stevenson, 'The Merry Men', Works VII, 3-62.

not quite a piece of the Ross - the mainland: 'nor was it quite an islet. It formed the south-west corner of the land, fitted close to it, and was in one place only separated from the coast by a little gut of the sea, not forty feet across the narrowest.' (p.5) This little world is therefore connected to the land, but totally surrounded by the sea - a feature which emerges as significant in the course of the tale. And to this location comes the youthful Charles Darnaway - another familiar device for Stevenson since, as a first-person narrator, he is representative of an apparently mundane normality, like that of Utterson, and of MacKellar in The Master of Ballantrae, whose normality is not quite the immediate guarantee of virtue that it might at first appear.

Indeed, the degree of self-interest in the narrator, Charles Darnaway, is soon made evident. A nephew of the island's inhabitant, Gordon Darnaway, he has temporarily left the world of everyday experience to visit his uncle on isolated Aros but still holds very much to the conventions of the world he has left. Like his uncle, he is attracted to the idea of treasure to be found from the ships that have perished on the breakers around Aros - the Merry Men. But unlike his uncle he is able to rationalise this desire, saying: 'I must acquit myself of sordid greed; for if I desired riches, it was not for their own sake, but for the sake of a person who was dear to my heart - my uncle's daughter, Mary Ellen.' (p.9) His determination to rationalise, to purge himself of any dangerous traits of character, and to maintain a secure, adaptable and relative morality, ultimately leads, however, to the destruction of his uncle. Gordon Darnaway is obsessed with treasure, but is also maddened by guilt at his supposed murder of a seaman, wrecked

from one of the ships. Yet as far as we can tell from the narrative this deed is mainly impugned him by the suspicions of his nephew. By the end of the tale he is driven mad by guilt and greed, unable to stand that knowledge of himself which appears to be epitomised by a strange black man, another shipwrecked mariner, who arrives on the island. Attempting, on Charles' instructions, to catch the madman, the black man finally chases Gordon Darnaway into the sea, where both men drown. On one level, therefore, the tale can be seen as representing Charles' continued purgation of all such threatening features from his consciousness and his life; a furtherance of his own success. Inadequate as it is, his final explanation of events is clearly aimed at revealing his deliberate uninvolvement: 'The thing was now beyond the hands of men, and these were the decrees of God that came to pass before my eyes.'(p.61)

In contrast to Charles, Gordon Darnaway, both villain and victim of the piece, personifies the tensions created for existence by the dichotomy between absolutes of morality and the relativity of reality. He cannot move outwith the world of Aros: 'He feared, cumbered as he was with the young child, to make a fresh adventure upon life; and remained in Aros, biting his nails at destiny.' (p.3) His conception of the moral dimension to existence would render him immobile in the real world - since he lacks the ready adaptability of Charles - and he remains on Aros, creating an environment in which his strict Calvinist adherence to religion and his Baudelairean delight in evil as a positive force, can find full expression. And he focuses, with a wild delight, on the malevolence of breakers called the Merry Men, on which ships come to destruction:

> There, it seemed, was my uncle's favourite observatory. Right in the face of it, where the cliff is highest and

> most sheer, a hump of earth, like a parapet, makes a place of shelter from the common winds, where a man may sit in quiet and see the tide and the mad billows contending at his feet. As he might look down from the window of a house upon some street disturbance, so, from this post, he looks down upon the tumbling of the Merry Men. On such a night, of course, he peers upon a world of blackness, where the waters wheel and boil, where the waves joust together with the noise of an explosion, and the foam towers and vanishes in the twinkling of an eye.
>
> (p.44)

Here Darnaway finds a conjunction of his Calvinism and his admiration for evil and violence, which threatens to overwhelm him. And as soon as a glimpse of the external world, that of normative morality, is let in through the advent of his nephew, he perceives the conflict between the forces of evil and righteousness in him. This clashing of metaphysics in one person is too much, both for his nephew and for human experience; he is therefore driven from the recognisable world into the undefinable, into the sea, by the avenging figure of the black devil.

Charles Darnaway's sanctimonious absolution of any responsibility for his uncle's death reveals the limitations of conventional understanding when faced with such extremes; and yet he is also partly responsible:

> I took to my heels to interfere, and perhaps I had done better to have waited where I was, for I was the means of cutting off the madman's last escape. There was nothing before him from that moment but the grave, the wreck and the sea in Sandaig Bay. And yet Heavens knows that what I did was for the best.
>
> (p.61)

Charles Darnaway himself is open to thoughts of extremes, of visions from outwith the definable world, but he is always able to control or repress them. At one point for example, we are told: 'Sad sea-feelings, scraps of my uncle's superstitions, thoughts of the dead, of the grave, of the old broken ships, drifted through my mind. But the strong sun

upon my shoulders warmed me to the heart, and I stooped forward and plunged into the sea.' (p.29) He can therefore shake off the kinds of thoughts which torment his uncle. In the course of the tale, the reader is presented with two worlds, two outlooks and, once again, is finally left to balance the contradictions between them,while presented simultaneously with descriptions of an insupportable fear and unconvincing narrative reassurances. The narrative of Charles Darnaway thus operates to quell the images projected in the tale of Gordon Darnaway itself. And in this particular instance, the imaging of fear, of the vision of an extreme and alternative world, is so powerful - centred as it is round the symbol of the wild waves - that narrative reassurances seem inadequate. Yet once again it is possible to see that the fabula is raising issues not resolved by the sjuzhet ; it is around this contradiction, this tension, that the success of the tale lies. And, in this story Stevenson's techniques can be seen as prefiguring those used in The Master of Ballantrae.

Before moving on to the specifically Scottish novels, however, two other short stories demand some attention. 'Thrawn Janet'[29] and 'The Tale of Tod Lapraik', from Catriona,[30] are both tales in Scots dialect which deal more openly with the supernatural than any of Stevenson's other works. Stevenson himself appears to have been well satisfied with them artistically; talking of 'Tod Lapraik', he comments: 'If I had never writ anything but that and 'Thrawn Janet', still I'd have been a writer.'[31]

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29. Stevenson, 'Thrawn Janet', Works VII, 112-133.

30. Stevenson, 'Black Andie's Tale of Tod Lapraik', Catriona: A Sequel to Kidnapped, Works VI, 136-146.

31. Stevenson, Letter to Colvin (April, 1893), Letters, vol.4, p.182.

Although both tales deal with the fantastic and, in both instances, a narrative frame is used around the supernatural events to lead into the story, the tales themselves appear to possess a greater degree of realism in their technique than most of Stevenson's other short stories and novels. This is partly attributable to their use of dialect, which prevents any distance being created between the narrator's mode of speech and that of the characters. Each tale is also given a very specific location, within a small community, at a point in the narrator's past; the geographical, social and historical situation is therefore clearly identifiable. This impression of realism, however, might seem to be at odds with the actual events of the tales which, in each case, are of a supernatural, extraordinary nature. Indeed, both stories deal with the break in experience which occurs when supernatural events take place, and when usual interpretations of reality can no longer operate. Yet, in spite of this, the tales have never been seen as essentially problematic: neat and coherent, they have remained popular 'ghost stories' rather than puzzling explorations of reality. And, I suggest, it is precisely because both the real and the supernatural are so clearly defined in them that they pose no threats. The supernatural remains alien to the 'reality', and 'reality' is clearly located within a recognizable context. Although both stories concern the punishment of evil, the external justice which is invoked is placed in each case as an intrusion of a strange element into an essentially familiar world. The supernatural elements remain 'strange', but we are not asked to assimilate them into our own idea of reality; that remains untouched by the element of the unknown.

The second reason for the tales presenting no real threat to our sense

of 'reality' is that their general applicability is limited by that very realism of technique which places them within such an identifiable world. Stevenson himself acknowledges this with reference to at least one of them: ''Thrawn Janet' has two defects; it is true only historically, true for a hill parish in Scotland in the old days, not true for mankind and the world.'[32] And, of course, it is this limitation which makes the tales so successful as short stories, rather than explorations of more general tensions and contradictions. Yet the two tales also indicate a problem which Stevenson faces in his Scottish novels. If he wishes to make some expression of the nature of universal dichotomies, he must broaden the implications of his material beyond their context, avoiding any accusations of parochialism and achieving more than a credible historicism. In a Scottish setting he is in danger of limiting himself by the 'reality' of his fictional locations, of settling for a cosy consistency of place and time, and of losing the impact of the unknown and unfamiliar. He must also avoid being seen merely as a writer of nostalgia. In his Scottish fictions, therefore, he has to find new ways of creating significance and of emphasising the power of the 'brute incident'.

Kidnapped

In his essay 'Lay Morals', drafted in Edinburgh seven years before the publication of Kidnapped[33] in 1886, Stevenson described: 'a type of that righteousness which the soul demands'; 'It demands that we shall not live alternately with our opposing tendencies in continual see-saw of passion and disgust, but seek some path on which the tendencies shall no longer

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32. Stevenson, 'Note for 'The Merry Men'' (1887), Maixner, The Critical Heritage, pp.250-251.

33. Stevenson, Kidnapped, Works V. All further page references are to this edition.

oppose, but serve each other to a common end.'[34] And bringing together the concerns of 'The Merry Men' and the techniques developed in 'Thrawn Janet' and other short stories, this union is what Stevenson seems to achieve in Kidnapped. Yet in discussing the novel critics have continually emphasised the opposing tendencies rather than their conjunction. As previously mentioned, Wallace Robson sees the novel as signalling a transition from Calvinist to Aristotelian morality through the development of David Balfour; Edwin Eigner contrasts the character of David, the Lowlander, 'paralysed' by his conscience, with Alan Breck, the Highlander, possessing the courage for action but lacking in moral purpose;[35] and David Daiches points out that while David's character develops, Alan's remains static.[36] All three arguments offer relevant insights, as each perspective intersects validly with a different point in the novel's overall pattern. However, by viewing the novel as a whole it is also possible to see such thematic contradictions as operating within a web, which is created and set in motion by the tension between the adventure story form and the narrative voice.

From general criticism on the novel, however, four significant features emerge. Firstly, throughout the novel, David Balfour, that: 'steady lad ... and a canny goer' (p.4) does struggle with an Aristotelian morality as defined by Gilbert Ryle.[37] However, his confrontation with

34. 'Lay Morals', p.184.

35. Eigner, p.95.

36. Daiches, Robert Louis Stevenson, pp.51-73.

37. See Chapter 1, p.35.

such a morality does not necessarily mean that he eventually assimilates it or totally accepts it as a code. His encounters with various characters representing extremes of morality - Ebenezer Balfour, Mr Riach, Cluny, Alan Breck himself - who operate in a world of absolutes, force him to draw upon his limited experience, his moral teaching, and his religion, in an attempt to place them within a certain world view. Yet his world view is also frequently incapable of accommodating such extremes - a fact which has significance both for the development of the plot and the tenor of David's narrative. Secondly, his inability to assimilate such extremes, and their persistent strength which is maintained through images embedded in the text, contributes to the novel's dynamic, reflecting the balance between motion and stasis noted in Treasure Island. On one level the historical adventure story is unrolled but its flow is interspersed with static moments of significance in which the absence of action permits important moral recognitions to emerge, indicating the more mythic aspects of the adventure/quest motif. A third feature of the novel is the support given to such moments of significance by the use of recurring images, the most common being that of the image of an enclosed world into which the hero is thrown. Again obvious similarities exist with Treasure Island. Images of darkness, of the indefinable, rendering all attempts at relative explanation futile, are also common and are closely linked to the pattern established by the fourth important aspect of the novel - David's first person narration.

The four features are obviously integral to the novel's overall effect but nevertheless merit individual examination. The novel's pattern, which reflects and enacts the struggles with an Aristotelian morality, consists

of David being pitched into various adventures, travelling across country from one incident to the next, in an attempt to re-establish his lost inheritance. In each adventure he escapes only through the help of an outside agent; not only Alan Breck but various other characters, who are also alien to his cautious Protestant ethics, come to his aid. Mr Riach, for example, helps him escape when he is actually kidnapped and twice on his journey he is forced to rely on obvious rogues for guidance. Even the outlaw Cluny provides shelter for him in his Den. Edwin Eigner believes that such events raise the question of whether David is capable of transcending his conscience in order to accept help, and obviously this is an element in such situations, when viewed from the stance of a sympathetic identification with the narrator. Yet from an <u>external</u> point of view, in terms of the events alone, David actually becomes part of that world of dubious morals; as he himself realises: 'So we sat again and ate and drank in a place where we could see the sun going down into a field of great, wild and homeless mountains, such as I was now condemned to wander with my companion.' (p.141) And it would appear that only through encounters with an alien, 'homeless' experience can he be galvanised into action. To those in pursuit of him, believing him part of the Appin murder plot, he is seen totally as one of the rebels and as a wrong-doer. Naïve expectations held by David, that the innocent will ultimately be vindicated, are soon quashed by Alan Breck:

> "Justice, David? The same justice, by all the world, as Glenure found a while ago at the roadside."
> This frightened me a little, I confess, and would have frightened me more if I had known how nearly exact were Alan's predictions; indeed it was but in one point that he exaggerated, there being but eleven Campbells on the jury. (p.139)

No matter how much David may believe he is clinging to an Aristotelian

form of morality, and may seek a world in which it operates, he is also always conscious of travelling through a terrain of extremes and oppositions. He therefore cannot avoid becoming part of its patterning.

An essential part of the patterning of that world is the balance of motion and stasis which emerges from the novel. As recent work by Mary McKenzie has shown, this can be seen as a characteristic of Stevenson's fiction in general.[38] David may travel onwards on his quest, but the truly significant events - those which McKenzie refers to as 'epoch-making scenes' - are those scenes which give the greatest shock to his moral assumptions.They are also the scenes in which the most vivid images occur within the text at those moments when the action has ceased. In David's case it is often in reaction against the moral or immoral forces represented by such scenes that he is spurred into continuing his journey. His quarrel with Cluny is perhaps the most specific example of the impact of such a moment; David has been lying on his sick-bed but after what he sees as Cluny's infamy, he is encouraged to make a stand:

> I am sure if ever Cluny hated any man it was David Balfour. He looked me all over with a warlike eye, and I saw the challenge at his lips. But either my youth disarmed him, or perhaps his own sense of justice. Certainly it was a mortifying matter for all concerned, and not least for Cluny; the more credit that he took it as he did. (p.188)

And after this encounter David can continue on his journey.

Such encounters are frequently signified in the novel by variations on the image of an enclosed space in which extremes operate. In such

38. Sister Mary Louise McKenzie, 'Experiments in Romance: Theory and Practice in the Fiction of Robert Louis Stevenson' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1974).

circumscribed settings most of the novel's climactic moments take place: David's entering of the House of Shaws; his capture in the hold of the 'Covenanter'; the fight aboard ship which takes place in the confines of the Roundhouse; David's stay upon the 'island' of Earraid; his time in Cluny's 'cage'; and, in a slightly different form of enclosure, his day spent with Alan on top of the rock, all provide reinforcements of this theme. In each of these situations he comes into contact with forces of positive action - whether for good or evil - and is made to come to terms with them. In the hold of the ship he survives only because of Mr Riach, and in the Roundhouse he is obligated to Alan for his safety. The House of Shaws forces him into definite contact with evil, in the shape of Ebenezer. And in Cluny's cage, where he becomes totally passive, physically unable to move, partly because those allies who can protect him are quarrelling amongst themselves and are, in fact, doing him harm, he is at his most vulnerable. Through such moments within the plot Stevenson appears to be indicating that only those with primitive resources for action, the more 'unrealistic' characters, can survive within a world of moral extremes, and that David's relative morality is unable to deal with such different frames of existence. Significantly, it is his experiences upon Earraid, when he is completely isolated in an environment governed only by natural laws which he cannot comprehend, where the morality he has been taught has no function, that he describes as, 'the most unhappy part of my adventures.' (p.100) And through such images of enclosed worlds the reader receives some clarification of humankind's presence within a universe which it cannot comprehend, and which our rules cannot deal with.

Although David himself may refuse to face up to the full implications of such encounters, which highlight the insubstantiality of his faith in

his own perception of the world and which point to that void which exists at the centre of self in spite of society's compensatory and preventative structuring, the reader is immediately alerted to their significance within the novel by the use of textual images. The most evident of those is that of darkness, which hints at the undefinable and, when used in contrast with light, reinforces the idea of opposing forces in conjunction. Our first encounter with this image is David's experience in the House of Shaws, when he is sent to climb the stairs in the deserted tower adjoining the house:

> The house of Shaws stood some five full storeys high, not counting lofts. Well, as I advanced, it seemed to me the steps grew airier and a thought more lightsome; and I was wondering what might be the cause of this change, when a second blink of the summer lightning came and went. If I did not cry out, it was because fear had me by the throat; and if I did not fall, it was more by Heaven's mercy than my own strength. It was not only that the flash shone in on every side through breaches in the wall, so that I seemed to be clambering aloft upon an open scaffold, but the same passing brightness showed me the steps were of unequal length, and that one of my feet rested that moment within two inches of the well. (p.28)

Although his slow progress up the stairs after this realisation can be seen as mimetic of his apparently cautious and convoluted movements throughout the novel, the real impact of the incident is made clear when he becomes aware of an abyss of darkness lying before him:

> Well, I had come close to one of these turns, when, feeling forward as usual, my hand slipped upon an edge and found nothing but emptiness beyond it. The stair had been carried no higher: to set a stranger mounting it in the darkness was to send him straight to his death; and (although, thanks to the lightning and my own precautions, I was safe enough) the mere thought of the peril in which I might have stood, and the dreadful height I might have fallen from, brought out the sweat upon my body and relaxed my joints. (pp.28-29)

The danger of the stair is revealed to David by a flash of light, the opposite of the dark, but a force which is in itself capable of

destruction. The moment thus forces David into recognising the existence of extremes and the vulnerability of his own creeping motions - a recognition which is shared by and amplified in the reader. Darkness may be a force which this hero does not wish to recognise, even in himself, yet it is just such a recognition which confronts him through the novel's development.

The reader, of course, receives even greater clarification from such moments through an awareness of the overall pattern which they create. Through cognizance of the novel's patterning we can appreciate the continued oppositions set up in the images and incidents. Daniel Balderston, quoting Stevenson's comment that: 'It is not character but incident that woos us out of our reserve.'[39] points out: 'the anomalous detail which carries the reader outside or beyond the text ... is clearly linked with the attempt to 'woo' the reader, to challenge or tease the imagination, and to elicit participation in the creative process.'[40] The incidents described in Kidnapped not only elicit participation but force upon us a recognition of significance greater than that which is experienced by the character. The author is thus creating a context in which we are liberated to a certain extent from the constraints of the characters' moral reactions.

Other images, such as the blind beggar, and Alan and David's sojourn on the rock, are also used to illustrate the paradoxical dimension of the world in which David finds himself. He meets the blind beggar after his escape from the island of Earraid:

> In about half an hour of walk, I overtook a great, ragged man, moving pretty fast but feeling before him with a

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39. 'A Gossip on Romance', p.151.

40. Balderston, p.56.

> staff. He was quite blind, and told me he was a catechist, which should have put me at my ease. But his face went against me; it seemed dark and dangerous and secret; and presently, as we began to go on alongside, I saw the steel butt of a pistol sticking from under the flap of his coat-pocket. To carry such a thing meant a fine of fifteen pounds sterling upon the first offence, and transportation to the colonies upon a second. Nor could I quite see why a religious teacher should go armed, or what a blind man could be doing with a pistol.
>
> (p.115)

The beggar brings into collusion two of the novel's important images. He is travelling along a road, and therefore represents motion, and would seem to be operating in the world of progress and relativity, but in his blindness he inhabits a static and enclosed world. The encounter with him is one from which David cannot simply 'move on', since both are on the same road, and the conjunction of absolute evil in nature as well as in person, combined with his ability to move in the world of concrete existence, makes the beggar one of the most threatening figures in the novel - more powerful than Blind Pew, his counterpart in Treasure Island; perhaps more on a par with Long John Silver. For once, David is forced to adapt his own standards in order to cope with such a creature, eventually descending to his level. David is amazed that anyone can travel simply by reassuring himself of the solidity of his surroundings with a staff: 'I said I did not see how a blind man could be a guide: but at that he laughed aloud, and said his stick was eyes enough for an eagle.' (p.116) However, it is this same reliance on instinct which leads David into recognising the beggar's inherent evil by noticing the pistol, protruding from the pocket to its owner's ignorance. Pure evil, it seems, cannot exist openly in the context of everyday reality but requires some form of concealment. Yet the imminent threat of the pistol leads David into exploiting darkness, making use of the beggar's blindness, by pretending that he too has a

pistol. In so doing he is abandoning his own standards of truth to ensure survival. To the reader this incident not only conveys a powerful impression of the sense of evil, but also indicates the ambiguous nature of the moral standards adopted by convention, determined by the outward appearance of behaviour.

Similar contradictions are apparent in the incident when Alan Breck and David take refuge from the searching soldiers upon a large rock:

> You are to remember that we lay on the bare top of a rock, like scones upon a girdle; the sun beat upon us cruelly; the rock grew so heated, a man could scarcely endure the touch of it; and the little patch of earth and fern, which kept cooler, was only large enough for one at a time. We took turns about to lie on the naked rock, which was indeed like the position of that saint that was martyred on a gridiron; and it ran in my mind how strange it was, that in the same climate and at only a few days' distance, I should have suffered so cruelly, first from cold upon my island and now from heat upon this rock. (p.157)

In order to escape detection Alan and David must place themselves in the most exposed position possible; although they gain a vantage point above the soldiers it is that very position which traps them, preventing their escape from danger. The extremity of such an incident, symbolised in David's mind by the transition from hot to cold, obviously upsets his notions of right and wrong, teaching him a new code of survival in which conscience and justice have only limited roles. And for the reader the incident provides yet another insight into the contradictions of existence, the paradoxes of being, as well as disturbing our fixed moral codes.

Although such incidents, and the powerful effect of the images they create, are an essential part of David's adventures seen in the overall context of the novel, they are always balanced by his own account of events and by his presence as the central character. His development therefore is signalled only in terms of what he chooses to reveal and, more importantly, the way in which he reveals it. David's role in the novel thus

requires consideration on two levels: the degree of narrative control which he exerts; and the kind of characterisation possible in a first person narrative within the adventure story form. Use of the adventure mode and of a historical context means that David is established in a framework within which he can relate events without having to consider their specific moral implications. Conversely, however, it is the adventure format that draws the reader's attention to certain images and incidents. And the images used quite often create a significance which acts in opposition to David's interpretations, a feature which is made possible through the novel's particular mixture of adventure and realism.

It is also through David that Stevenson illustrates the inadequacies of a relative morality which tries to accommodate extreme external circumstances into an internal pattern based upon the conventional operations of morality. His real condemnation of such manipulations of moral and social conventions, however, is reserved for David's pursuers. (And in Catriona the dangers of such a viewpoint are made even more explicit in the character of Prestongrange, who displays all the worst aspects of civilised adaptability.) Yet although David is shown as experiencing the dialectic between forces of absolute good and absolute evil, and feels the need to establish some comprehensible and relative moral pattern for himself in order to diffuse the threat of absolutes, he is less susceptible to this other dimension of existence than his counterpart in Treasure Island, Jim Hawkins. David is portrayed as almost an adult and therefore more sophisticated in his moral perceptions; he is less willing than the cabin boy to accept the idea of an external structuring to the world, whereas Hawkins does recognise the existence of an alternative to the relativism of reality - even if he ultimately rejects

it. David's narrative, in comparison, is firmly rooted in reality. Through it he convincingly describes specific historical events, recognisable places, and portrays such unglamorous characters as Mr Campbell, the minister. His narrative can, therefore, be seen as an attempt to deny any need for accepting alternative dimensions to his experience, in spite of the extremes which he does encounter in the course of his adventures.

By virtue of his narrative role, and as a representative of a realist perspective confronted with absolutes, David is characterised in a fairly full manner. The same cannot be said, however, for all the other characters in the novel. Kurt Wittig complains of the 'staginess' of Alan Breck as a character, while David Daiches describes him as 'an artificial, mechanical construction.'[41] Yet it should be remembered that he is described in the terms of David as narrator, discussing a person on whom he depends but who represents a structuring of the universe that is morally anathema to him. (He is, for example, completely shocked by Alan's apparently trivial hatred of all Campbells, expressed in his flippant comment after the murder of the Red Fox: '"And here is a great deal of work about a Campbell!" said he. "They are not so scarce, that I ken!"' (p.137)) Alan Breck cannot be easily accommodated within David's conception of a 'real world', nor can he be given the profundity of character for which Daiches and Wittig wish. From the beginning of their relationship David tends to see Alan in a romantic light; on their first encounter he describes him as possessing eyes which: 'were unusually light and had a kind of dancing madness in them, that was both engaging and alarming.' (p.60) By making Alan into a figure of romance David can avoid the dangerous aspect of the dancing eyes, convincing himself that Alan has no place within the reality which, it is implied, exists

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41. Wittig, The Scottish Tradition in Literature, p.261; Daiches, Robert Louis Stevenson, p.54.

in the world outwith their adventures - the normality to which David wishes to return. As Leslie Fiedler writes: 'The characters of Stevenson seem to have an objective existence, a being prior to and independent of any particular formal realization. They are, in short, not merely literary creations, but also embodiments of archetypal themes.'[42] Such a feature may be partly attributable to stylisation of character, but in Kidnapped can also be seen as a result of the narrator's perceptions. For David, the world which Alan represents may be admired for the quality of its adventures but, like the adventure story itself, must always remain at a distance. And only from that distance does he feel safe to contemplate the embodiment of 'archetypal themes'.

Yet the approach of David as narrator to the characters which he describes finds a curious parallel in the characterisation of the narrator himself. For Stevenson, well aware of the illusory elements of the fictional process, only goes so far in making even David a fully rounded character. Once again he focuses on the degree of distance between reality and fictionality, exploring the implications of the difference. The dialectic established by his technique is illustrated by Stevenson's comments on character in the essay 'Some Gentlemen in Fiction': 'At bottom what we hate or love is doubtless some projection of the author; the personal atmosphere is doubtless his; and when we think we know Hamlet, we know but a side of his creator.'[43] He then proceeds to disparage the reality of those 'verbal puppets' which are:

> things of a divided parentage: the breath of life may be an emanation from their maker, but they themselves are only

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42. Fiedler, 'R.L.S. Revisited', p.78.

43. Stevenson, 'Some Gentlemen in Fiction', Works XXII, 269-279, p.271.

> strings of words and parts of books; they dwell in, they belong to, literature; convention, technical artifice, technical gusto, the mechanical necessities of art, these are the flesh and blood with which they are invested. 44

Although the essay itself is fairly inconclusive, it expresses a definite and almost cynical awareness of the artificiality behind the concept of 'character' which indicates that Stevenson himself would not necessarily see Daiches' view of Alan Breck as criticism. Daiches notes that as a character Alan is static while David develops; their different functions however can be seen as analogous to the different movements and moments of the text. In 'A Humble Remonstrance' Stevenson makes his attitude to the role of 'character' even more explicit. Pleading with the author to: 'allow neither himself in the narrative, nor any character in the course of the dialogue, to utter one sentence that is not part and parcel of the business of the story or the discussion of the problem involved', he points out: 'a passion or a character is so much the better depicted as it rises clearer from material circumstance'.[45] Quite clearly he does not perceive character in fiction as a fixed entity. David is as much a figure of artifice, in embodying the author's own moral dichotomies, as Alan Breck is in representing to David one type of morality.

With its emphasis on dichotomies, the novel inevitably ends on an unresolved note. David claims his identity and inheritance, securing a place in the world implied to exist outwith the novel's parameters; Alan is forced to disappear, to go into exile. Yet his exile also

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44. 'Some Gentlemen in Fiction', p.277.

45. 'A Humble Remonstrance', p.166.

gives his role in the novel some form of conclusion, whereas the openness of David's fate - with the last sentence in the book reading: 'The hand of Providence brought me in my drifting to the very doors of the British Linen Company's bank.' (p.251) - not only leaves room for a sequel, but also implies a return to a form of reality that can no longer be fictionalised within this particular context. The novel thus runs up up against its own boundaries. Yet the moral dilemmas raised by David's experiences are also left unresolved. Alan is successfully embedded in the mind of the reader, through the images surrounding him, as part of the adventure fiction and its world. David, however, is left in a kind of limbo, creeping out of the novel, and coming disturbingly close to the reader's own uncertain, non-fictional reality. And this aspect of the conclusion is made all the more poignant because of our sympathetic identification with David that has been evoked from the start through the first person narration. David, therefore would finally appear to represent our own difficulties in reconciling the dimensions of fiction and reality and the potentially very different moral perspectives of each.

In utilising his concept of fiction as a defence against reality and an escape into romance, and by emphasising it in Kidnapped through the juxtaposition of an apparently 'realist' narrator and an adventure story sequence of events, Stevenson indicates both the power of his alternative vision and the temporary, even dangerous, nature of the insights it offers. The novel's adventures provide David with glimpses of new forms of experience, and affirm to the reader the potential for alternatives to our restricted view of existence. And the conflicting affirmation and denial of the 'otherness' present in fiction, the contradictions of movement and of stasis, both represent and are determined by Stevenson's

outlook on moral issues. Neither 'realism' nor the presentation of a single truth can be seen as the aim of the novel. Instead Stevenson appears to be striving for what he describes as 'fitness': 'One thing in life calls for another; there is a fitness in events and places.'[46] His intention that: 'The right kind of thing should fall out in the right kind of place',[47] indicates his desire that the novel should both be aesthetically consistent in its adventure form - which Kidnapped certainly appears to be - and that it should offer some expression of the conflicts and contradictions which he saw as an inherent part of existence. By both seeking to achieve this latter aim within the novel, through David Balfour's experiences, and through the process of reading the novel as a whole, he does create a certain tension between realism and the challenge to it, just as he brings different moralities into confrontation. But it is also through this tension that he achieves his other aim, once again that of a 'bold poetry of thought'.

Catriona

Before moving on to The Master of Ballantrae it is worth considering Catriona,[48] the sequel to Kidnapped, since it indicates a direction that Stevenson's Scottish writing took towards the end of his career and which, by its departure from his previous style, reveals the nature of the problems he had encountered. Kidnapped shows an awareness of moral relativism but one which is contained within the adventure form. In Catriona Stevenson moves away slightly from this genre, from the visual glamour and the action of romance, to a more subdued plot

46. 'A Gossip on Romance', p.142.

47. 'A Gossip on Romance', p.144.

48. Catriona: A Sequel to Kidnapped, Works VI. All further page references are to this edition.

and a serious attempt at characterisation, which almost contradicts his previously stated views on the matter. His former concerns, however, are still apparent; indeed they appear to become more problematic once outwith the framework he had specifically established for them, with the result that Catriona as a novel is curiously fragmented and somewhat unsatisfactory. The main problem seems to lie in the fact that the author seeks to resolve, in relative terms and in the context of a greater degree of literary realism, situations which still point towards absolutist issues. And, as if in response to this problem, the judgements made by David also seem to fall short of his own awareness as a narrator.

Arguably Stevenson found it difficult to recapture the Scottish atmosphere in his South Sea retreat. Nevertheless, the novel seems not so much a chance failure, but a deliberate attempt to create something different. Stevenson even anticipates the reaction of his public to the novel, by defending his use of David Balfour; 'One thing is sure, there has been no such drawing of Scots character since Scott; and even he never drew a full length like Davie, with his shrewdness and simplicity, and stockishness and charm. Yet, you'll see, the public won't want it; they want more Alan! Well, they can't get it.'[49] An obvious change can be seen here from the concept of characterisation as indicated in Kidnapped. Another noticable feature of this novel is its lack of visual elements - a point which drew comment from Henry James and, as a result, again elicited a response from Stevenson: 'Your jubilation over Catriona did me good, and still more the subtlety and truth of your remark on the starving of the visual sense in that

49. Stevenson, Letter to Colvin (April, 1893), Letters 4, pp.182-183.

book.'[50] He then goes on to describe his aim as 'death to the optic nerve' - a development in his writing which also has interesting implications for Weir of Hermiston.[51] It is therefore worth examining the effect of this aim in Catriona.

The desire for greater characterisation and the emphasis on moral judgement in the individual according to circumstance, argues for a greater moral relativism in the novel - a feature noted by most critics. F.R. Hart, for example, writes that: 'Balfour has become quite sophisticated; unpolished still, but bravely ethical in a world where simplicity and innocence are duped and endangered, and where a desperate realpolitik not only forestalls David's efforts to see justice done, but is more or less understood and half accepted by him.'[52] Here he is, of course, referring to Prestongrange's prevention of David's testimony being heard. Yet a certain divergence exists between form and response. David may be more perceptive with regard to the devices that are used against him, he may even be glad of the fact that he does not need to make any moral decision; contrast his conscious passivity and acceptance of it: 'I should trifle with my conscience if I pretended my stay upon the Bass was wholly disagreeable. It seemed to me a safe place,

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50. Stevenson, Letter to Henry James (December, 1893), Letters 4, p.272.

51. In Weir of Hermiston realism and moral relativism are certainly more in evidence than in Stevenson's other works. Like 'Thrawn Janet' and 'The Tale of Tod Lapraik', the novel relies on conventional story-telling devices and on folk-lore; it is also placed very definitely in a historical past, thus allowing for a certain element of nostalgia. The tale's implications are therefore more successfully contained within the fiction. Yet Stevenson's moral concerns are still evident in his questioning of earthly justice (ironically represented by Hermiston, the Lord Justice-Clerk) and it seems possible that, following such implications, the novel in the end would still have relied on elements of adventure and fantasy, as in the suggested hints about the ultimate role of the Four Black Brothers. It therefore appears unlikely that Stevenson could have kept wholly within the realist mode, despite his apparent intentions of so doing. As the tale is unfinished, however, this suggestion can only remain conjectural.

52. Hart, The Scottish Novel, p.160.

as though I was escaped there out of my troubles.' (p.132), with his railing against the enforced passivity of Cluny's cage in Kidnapped. Yet, in terms of the novel, his actions are nearly all enforced and, structurally, can be seen as externally imposed. Stevenson's only way of coping with the need for relativity he has set up by the device of the trial, is to divorce completely the elements of action from the responses of the characters. Therefore, although a relative morality is implied more strongly than in previous novels, it is not shown in free operation.

The essential structure of the novel, of course, is also very different. As David Daiches notes: 'Stevenson has moved further from the pattern of adventure as originally laid down in Treasure Island than he did in Kidnapped.'[53] Certainly the movement of the book does show alteration. David is no longer hunted by external law so much as forced into action through moral obligation. The hide and seek pattern is still present to an extent but each refuge - the Bass rock, the house in Holland, Prestongrange's home - enforces conditions which demand not that specific escape action be planned but rather that means of assimilation to the current situation is required. Even the element of moral relativism in the novel can be seen as entrapping rather than liberating. As Eigner points out of David: 'his virtue does not lead to action, for the path of duty, in Stevenson's works, clearly is not the road to glory.'[54] Yet, in considering the moral decisions that David makes, a duality can again be noted. We are presented with David's difficulty of reconciling Prestongrange's paternalism and pragmatism with his manipulative control

53. Daiches, Robert Louis Stevenson, p.87.

54. Eigner, p.116.

of justice, an effort which leads him, with all the force of his moral relativism, to moderate his attitudes to that master of the adaptable moral outlook. Stevenson allows David to express disquiet at this character through the use of a powerful image in a statement which appears to make his attitude perfectly clear: 'He was kind to me as any father, yet I ever thought him as false as a cracked bell' (p.183), yet does not fit in with his subsequent behaviour in accepting Prestongrange's charity. Catriona's father, James, provides another focus for such contradiction. David's attempts to come to terms with the man and his weaknesses, for the sake of Catriona, seem curiously at odds with the harshness of his final comment on him: 'But even now I find I can scarce dwell upon his end with patience ... and when after some four days he passed away in a kind of odour of affectionate sanctity, I could have torn my hair out for exasperation.' (p.311) Although James was never so evil in his actions as, say, Long John Silver, such condemnation is much more severe; as if Stevenson was permitting his characters to rail against the expedient action they were forced into in order to establish a relative resolution to plot events.

Despite their differences in approach, critics have tried to transfer character roles in Kidnapped to Catriona, but without any real conviction. To repeat Stevenson's dictum: 'It is not character but incident that woos us out of our reserve'; and incident is never really allowed free play in Catriona, never pushes beyond any moral boundaries or reserves. F.R. Hart sees Prestongrange as a counterpart of Alan Breck,[55] but surely a significant difference is created between them by the fact that the former operates within society, in a position of responsibility, and

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55. 'Prestongrange replaces Alan in the book as a counterforce to David's brave and pious civility.'
Hart, p.161.

therefore cannot point to those external dimensions indicated by the outlawed Alan. Significantly, Alan is pushed to the peripheries in Catriona ; the only other character who threatens established moral concepts is the unattractive, almost laughable, James More. And the fact that James is so closely linked to Catriona prevents him from being seen as any real danger. As for Catriona herself, whom some critics have described as romantic a figure as Alan,[56] she remains so idealized and stereotypic, that she acts only as a motivating force for David's action. (Note how love is the galvanising force here, whereas in Kidnapped it was the threat of danger.) Perhaps the greatest actual threat to the relative morality which dominates so much of the novel is posed by the scene when David finally escapes and makes his way to take part in the trial of James Stewart. For a short while it would appear that David has the potential for anarchy but this possibility is soon defused, partly through his dislike of the intrigues of those around him, and partly through his own caution. And yet the trial motif, almost in spite of, yet also because of, its crooked and disillusioning nature, becomes in itself a plea for some form of external justice outwith the world of relativity. This plea is reiterated by David in his own disillusionment with: 'the detestable business they call politics.' (pp.203-204) 'Innocent men,' he remarks, 'have perished before James, and are like to keep on perishing (in spite of all our wisdom) till the end of time.' (p.203)

Robert Kiely sees a disillusionment in Stevenson with his authorial role in Catriona, a disenchantment with the games he had previously played.[57]

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56. Eigner, p.97.

57. Kiely, p.90.

Yet it could be argued that this novel still represents another means of exploring the issues with which he was concerned in his other works. By entering into a world closer to the relativism of reality, and reflecting a profound pessimism in so doing, Stevenson can be seen as still projecting the necessity of some kind of absolute morality, by way of depicting its absence. And in the novel he also comes closer to revealing the impossibility both of achieving such absolutes within reality, or of resolving the dichotomy between them in fiction. David's final resolution reflects, by its tone, the authorial attitude:

> a plain, quiet, private path was that which I was ambitious to walk in, where I might keep my head out of the ways of dangers and my conscience out of the road of temptation. For, upon retrospect, it appeared I had not done so grandly, after all, but with the greatest possible amount of big speech and preparation had accomplished nothing. (p.204)

Perhaps the inserted story of 'Tod Lapraik' acts as a small gesture of defiance against this resignation to the mundane, pointing towards another dimension through its use of the supernatural but, like Catriona itself, it still serves to indicate an awareness of a vast divergence between two worlds and the impossibility of reconciling them in reality - or even in fiction.

The Master of Ballantrae

'Thus in the best fabric of duplicity, there is some weak point which, if you strike it, will loosen all.' So writes Ephraim MacKellar, the narrator of The Master of Ballantrae.[58] In this novel, first published in 1889, Stevenson both weaves a fabric of duplicity and guides the reader to those points at which it is at its weakest; a contradictory process which reveals the intractability of his moral and literary concerns.

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58. Stevenson, The Master of Ballantrae, Works IX, p.103. All further page references are to this edition.

And, with the role of narrator once again being exploited to the full, the disjunction between the attitudes of MacKellar and the contents of his narrative becomes in itself the 'weak point which loosens all'.

The novel has certainly caused considerable debate amongst critics trying to account for its disparate structure: a beginning in Scotland, heavily weighted with burdens of the past; an inserted account of 'the master of Ballantrae', the eldest and disinherited son as he journeys amongst pirates and indians, in a style familiar from Stevenson's adventure tales; a climax in the wastes of North America; and, pervading all, as dry and conventionally couthy a caricature Scot as one could wish for, as narrator. Overwhelmed by the peculiarity of this mixture, many critics have deemed the novel a failure. Alex Clunas views Stevenson as being reluctant to release his hold on the adventure story;[59] David Daiches believes that the author, unable to come to terms with his relationship both to his family and his native land, had 'delved too deeply into character and destiny to be able to come easily again to the surface';[60] and a recent study by Carol Mills, whose title 'The Master of Ballantrae: An Experiment with Genre' appears to offer a more interesting line of argument than is perhaps achieved, ends her essay by attributing the novel's peculiarities to the author's mode of existence at the time of writing.[61] Playing on Stevenson's own comment that: 'the devil and Saranac suggested this dénouement',[62] she concludes:

59. Alex Clunas, 'R.L. Stevenson: Precursor of the Post-Moderns?', Cencrastus 6 (Autumn, 1981), 9-11.

60. Daiches, Introduction, Robert Louis Stevenson (Laurel Reader edition, New York, 1959), p.16.

61. Carol Mills, 'The Master of Ballantrae: An experiment with Genre', Robert Louis Stevenson, ed. A. Noble, 118-133.

62. Stevenson, Letter to Henry James (March, 1888), Letters vol.3, 1887-1891, Works XXIX, p.54.

'The devil and Saranac' have something to answer for; he might have been advised to ignore their suggestions.'[63] Stevenson's own remarks on the conclusion also appear critical and have often been read as apologetic: 'For the third supposed death and the manner of the third reappearance is steep: steep, sir. It is even very steep, and I fear it shames the honest stuff so far'.[64] However, his comments do not necessarily mean that the violence of the last few chapters has no place if one considers his aims as being directed at the reading of the novel as a whole, including the interaction of the various elements. Within a firmly located, nostalgically familiar environment, yet with elements of a romance and adventure mode, he was creating a dialectic of good and evil capable of breaking the moulds of both, and within the narratorial conflicts he was pushing even further the conflicts between _sjuzhet_ and _fabula_; the 'steepness' would therefore appear an intrinsic part of the novel's final effect.

One of the most stimulating interpretations of the novel - although perhaps also ambitious and contradictory in itself - is that of Douglas Gifford in his essay 'Stevenson and Scottish Fiction; The Importance of _The Master of Ballantrae_.'[65] Acknowledging the contradictions inherent in the work, Gifford nevertheless sees them as Stevenson's implicit recognition of conflicts in his own attitudes to Scottish history and to morality. Gifford finally interprets the novel in the light of

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63. Mills, p.132.

64. Letter to James (March, 1888), p.54.

65. Douglas Gifford, 'Stevenson and Scottish Fiction: The Importance of _The Master of Ballantrae_', _Stevenson and Victorian Scotland_, ed. J. Calder (Edinburgh, 1981), 62-87.

father and son conflicts in the author's life, but by way of arriving at this viewpoint he makes several interesting points as to the work's moral ambiguity. He believes that two interpretations of the tale are possible: either that Henry, the younger and supposedly 'good', steady, brother, is a victim, that the mysterious James is the villain, and that MacKellar is a reliable narrator; or that James and Henry are not dissimilar and that MacKellar is as much the familiar of Henry as Secundra Dass, the Indian with strange powers, is of James. MacKellar in this light could no longer be seen as a reliable narrator. Creating these alternatives, Gifford argues, 'would release Stevenson from all his previous needs to struggle confusedly with emblems of a shifting moral consciousness',[66] and he concludes: 'Stevenson thus rose above his own personal divisions on this one occasion, transforming what, on the whole, was a confused and immature vision into a remarkably modern and widely applicable comment on the difficulty of arriving in a Godless age at moral conclusion.'[67] This holistic interpretation certainly seems a more convincing view of the novel than seeing it as a series of parts which fail to unite. Moreover, it allows for the ambiguities and openness of the tale to be recognised. However, it is also worth considering that Stevenson may still be struggling with 'emblems of a shifting moral consciousness' even if they are deliberately inserted into the plot, and to discuss both the ways in which such conflicting emblems operate and the purposes to which Stevenson puts them.

To make such an interpretation is, of course, to put more emphasis on the structure rather than the content of the novel, since so many of its

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66. Gifford, p.76.

67. Gifford, p.86.

inherent tensions derive from the form. The use of first-person narration is especially important, as the relationship between the narrator and his material pulls apart the various strands of the fiction and again creates a distinction between the description of events within the tale, and the significance of the events themselves. MacKellar's narrative operates on a level in which the various moral choices, created by the conflicts over money and a woman between the two brothers, are clearly presented but are still seen very much within the terms and moral vision of the narrator, their steward. The events of the plot, however, and the interaction of Henry's and James' moral values, succeed in opening up a wider moral dimension; and many of the images used in narrating events also contribute to this alternative significance which is beyond the limits of MacKellar's comprehension. The form of the novel thus raises very different questions from the narrative, although both aspects operate in conjunction since the perspective gained from the form of events inevitably affects the meaning of the narrative and vice versa.

According to the novel's conclusion a relative morality triumphs - with inscribed gravestones (raised, of course, by MacKellar) being all that is left of the extremes represented by the two brothers. And the morality which remains is nearest to the cautious evaluations of MacKellar, the survivor, the man who first appeared at the house of Durrisdeer appropriately, 'in a mighty dry day of frost.' (p.16)[68] Yet even he is at times willing to share his master Henry's view of his brother James

68. Notice that in some editions, the Skerryvore included, the novel has the subtitle of 'A Winter's Tale'. This could be seen as pointing to the theme of 'Scotland's winter'.

as the devil, and thus occasionally to accept concepts of good and evil in absolute terms. The two brothers who indulge in more absolute perspectives for most of the novel destroy each other, as both fail to adopt their moral behaviour to circumstances: James unashamedly glories in his evil; Henry conceals the darker side of his nature until it breaks through with fearful effect. Only the faithful steward is left to ensure the continuation of the ancient house of Durrisdeer. And the defeat of the brothers and their unacceptable philosophies becomes all the more damning when it is implied that MacKellar cannot even ensure the survival of the house as it was in the days of 'the old Lord.' 'My old lord, eighth of that name, was not old in years, but he suffered prematurely from the disabilities of age; his place was at the chimney-side; there he sat reading, in a lined gown, with few words for any man, and wry words for none: the model of an old retired housekeeper; and yet his mind very well-nourished with study and reputed in the country to be more cunning than he seemed ' (p.4) is how the head of the Duries appears to MacKellar on his first encounter. Yet the last of the line, although also old, possess none of this dignity or wit, and are described almost in terms of Kailyard pathos: 'the last lord and his old maid sister who lived in the back parts of the house, a quiet, plain, poor, humdrum couple, it would seem - but pathetic too, as the last of that stirring and brave house - and, to the country folk, faintly terrible from some deformed traditions.' (p.xxiii) Yet in a sense the ending is a complete vindication for MacKellar since the house of Durrisdeer loses all traces of absolutism, with neither of the brothers being allowed to return to the so-called civilised and liberal world. Their passions have taken them outwith Scotland and they can only confront each other within an area as large as America; Scotland itself is seen

as weakened by their loss, becoming the province only of McKellar's and old 'humdrum', sterile, couples.

The conflicting moral polarities expressed through the feud of the two brothers cannot be accommodated within MacKellar's narrative, so in some ways he is as much of a moral failure as either of his 'masters'. All three men adopt sets of rules by which they imagine they could live; and all fail in the attempt. In this common failure the novel seems to point towards an external moral spectrum which supersedes that established by the characters themselves - a spectrum, however, which does have a potential for realisation within those parts of their natures that each have suppressed. As the conclusion indicates, once James and Henry recognise the moral vacuum in which they operate, death is the only possible answer, so for most of their lives they attempt to avoid knowledge of themselves. The brothers converge on the same point, towards the same abyss, but from opposite perspectives on life. Yet the means by which they reach this point is the same in that both label their actions in such a way that they can gain the apparent security of being given tags of 'good' or 'evil', externally imposed upon their behaviour by society. In so doing they can avoid recognition of the polarities within their own natures.

The novel makes quite clear from the beginning the dangers of ignoring extremes in character and of over-easy moral categorisation. The political allegiances of the two brothers, for example, is decided in a quite arbitrary manner: 'It took the three a whole day's disputation, before they agreed to steer a middle course, one son going forth to strike a blow for King James, my lord and the other staying at home to

keep in favour with King George.' (p. 6) In such a fashion Henry becomes a Loyalist and James a Jacobite. Initially, too, it appears that James is popular in the countryside around whereas Henry is at first forgotten, and then becomes generally disliked:

> The Master of Ballantrae, James in baptism, took from his father the love of serious reading; some of his tact perhaps as well, but that which was only policy in the father became black dissimulation in the son.... I think it notable that he had always vaunted himself as quite implacable, and was taken at his word; so that he had the addition among his neighbours of 'an ill man to cross'. Here was altogether a young nobleman (not yet twenty-four in the year '45) who had made a figure in the country beyond his time of life. The less marvel if there were little heard of the second son, Mr Henry (my late Lord Durrisdeer), who was neither very bad nor yet very able, but an honest, solid sort of lad like many of his neighbours. (p.415)

James, because of his social prominence, is obviously easier to label at this stage in his life, whereas it is only when he becomes more of an active figure locally that Henry becomes unpopular. And yet from these two different points both arrive at the same state. Henry, passive at first, conceals his feelings of jealousy, even hatred, and asserts his will to do good, aiming to be generous to his brother for the family's sake: 'Besides which, although I speak little of my family, I think much of its repute.' (p.24) However, the need to prove that he is indeed a virtuous man forces Henry into escape to America. There he sets a whole state against his brother and, tortured by plans for revenge, finally arranges his brother's murder. In contrast, James begins the novel setting the people of Durrisdeer against Henry, arranging a duel with him, and is seen as being actively evil in both his person and his plans. Yet he eventually decides to lead a passive existence abroad since all that he hoped to achieve - wealth, fame at court and other worldly gains - has fallen through; becoming a tailor in America he appears content until his brother's anger forces him into again adopting his old diabolical ways and taking action. The progress of the brothers can

thus be seen almost as mirror images reversals of each other's actions. Each galvanising the other into action, pushing each other through the whole moral spectrum from good to evil, proves that none of the categories of 'good' or 'evil' given to them in the process are ever totally accurate, since each brother is capable of accommodating both extremes. And in this way they push beyond the limits of MacKellar's comprehension, just as the character of Long John Silver escaped the boundaries of Jim Hawkins understanding.

No diametric opposition which is totally conclusive can ever be made between the brothers ; they finally defy both the conventions of labelling morality and the limits of socialised moral behaviour. Their death scene, when they are surrounded by onlookers clad in animal skins, signifies an absolute and atavistic morality. The journey taken by MacKellar and the now seriously disturbed, Henry, through the wilderness, leads them to the Master's grave:

> The situation of the Master's grave was, between guides, easily described; it lay, indeed, beside a chief landmark of the wilderness, a certain range of peaks, conspicuous by their design and altitude ... Our boats we left under a guard upon the river; it was, indeed, probable we should return to find them frozen fast; and the small equipment with which we set forth upon the expedition, included not only an infinity of furs to protect us from the cold, but an arsenal of snow-shoes to render travel possible, when the inevitable snow should fall. (pp.251-252)

The naked primitivism of the moment when they reach the grave and find Secundra Dass trying to dig his master up and resurrect him, seems again to point towards a different, asocial, moral code. Amidst the uncivilised surroundings Dass is seen practicing his unsophisticated magic:

> It is always moving to come upon the theatre of any tragic incident; to come upon it after so many days, and to find it (in the seclusion of the desert) still unchanged, must have impressed the minds of the most careless. And yet it was not that which struck us into pillars of stone; but the sight (which yet we had been half expecting) of Secundra ankle deep in the grave of his late Master. He had cast the main part of his rainment by, yet his frail armsand shoulders glistened in the moonlight with a copious sweat; his face was contracted with anxiety and expectation; his blows resounded on the grave, as thick as sobs; and behind him, strangely deformed and ink-black upon the frosty ground, the creature's shadow repeated and parodied his swift gesticulations. (p.256-257)

The moment not only points towards a world of 'moral realism' in which such magic might work, in which black and white can be clearly distinguished in relation to each other, but also indicates the very basic revenge which the Master will have on Henry, when the threat of his resurrection kills him with shock.

There is, of course, a certain fitness in this concluding scene, since Henry, closer to MacKellar than James, is less capable than James of accepting potential absolutes. James belongs more to the world of fantasy, as is indicated by the adventures he has with pirates and indians, in best adventure story style - told through the narrative of the Chevalier Burke - at the same time as Henry is enduring domestic dramas described in the best realist manner by MacKellar. Although the brothers act as mirror images, it is implied that from his adventures James has gained an awareness of evil as a positive force, and therefore is more conscious than Henry of his own nature and his self-delusions. His statements on morality reveal his awareness of the complexity of the subject: 'A bad man, am I? Ah! but I was born for a good tyrant!' (p.197) For most of the novel, however, he also refuses to recognise his own insights, by postulating worldly objectives for himself towards

which his 'wickedness' can be directed, and thus mitigating by justification, his own actions. Nevertheless, his policy of tossing a coin to make major life decisions reveals how deep is his awareness of the arbitrary nature of moral codes. Just as he undermines relative decision-making processes by parody, so he undermines conventional moral judgements. As he says to MacKellar: 'You suppose yourself to love my brother. I assure you, it is merely custom ... Had you instead fallen in with me, you would today be as strong upon my side.' (p.195) Yet, in spite of his dislike of circumstantial morality he is quite content to exploit his brother Henry's attempts at a respectable and accommodating relativity, which goes against his own brooding inclinations. Both brothers thus collude in concealing the absolutes within their nature.

The brothers continued refusal to recognise absolutes within themselves contrasts sharply with the courses of action which they take as the novel progresses. Through this contrast the reader can recognise the falsity of their reasoning and becomes aware of the absolutes which lie behind the facade of relativity. The void which is pointed to as lying behind the brothers' behaviour is further emphasised by the images and incidents described in the novel, and in particular by the highly 'unrealistic' and 'steep' conclusion. This element of contradiction, however, which lies between the way in which the characters wish to see themselves - in a 'realistic' and relative way - and the significance of their actions, which point towards extremes of morality, is further complicated by being encompassed within the narrative of MacKellar, which is in itself, an attempt to deny the absolutes that appear to break through in the course of events. The <u>sjuzhet</u>, the patterned narrative

of events, therefore can be seen as attempting to impose restrictions upon or even to deny the import of the fabula - the events themselves, which are, by now, full of contradiction, as the distinction between action and interpretation of action becomes blurred. The 'fabric of duplicity' can, in one sense at least, be seen as disintegrating before the reader's eyes. Even MacKellar's narrative, which at first appears familiar and securely structured by his moral perceptions and religious principles, is revealed as untrustworthy.

Yet despite the divergence of fabula and sjuzhet, the two worlds which they indicate are not separate but are united by incident and allusion. MacKellar, for example, may call James a 'devil', mainly because of the stereotyped shallowness of his moral reasoning, yet by naming him as such he gives to the reader an archetypal resonance to James' actions. And James' trick of coming back to life may eventually be explained by the narrative to be simply a clever illusion, but the impact of the instances when he achieves the trick are not diminished.
MacKellar's cautious, 'square-toes' attitude to life, which makes him see all action in terms of extreme melodrama, aids the impact of such incidents. Through his horror at the brothers' feuds, Stevenson can convey a sense of excitement equal to that generated by the exotic locations of his South Sea novels. MacKellar's description of the duel between the brother indicates how effective this technique can be:

> I took up the candlesticks and went before them, steps that I would give my hands to recall; but a coward is a slave at the best; and even as I went my teeth smote each other in my mouth. It was as he had said: there was no breath stirring; a windless stricture of frost had bound the air; and as we went forth in the shine of the candles, the blackness was like a roof over our heads. Never a word was said; there was never a sound but the creaking of our steps along the frozen path. The cold of

> the night fell about me like a bucket of water; I shook as I went with more than terror; but my companions, bare-headed like myself, and fresh from the warm hall, appeared not even conscious of the change.
> "Here is the place", said the Master. "Set down the candles."
> I did as he bid me, and presently the flames went up, as steady as in a chamber, in the midst of the frosted trees, and I beheld these two brothers take their places. (p.110)

His horror, his fear, and the melodramatic quality of his language, all combine to lend the scene an air of unreality, and to emphasise the mythic dimensions of this Cain and Abel conflict. Paradoxically it is MacKellar's fearful nature and mundane morality which conveys to the reader the power of absolutes, the alternative dimensions of the world which the brothers inhabit - although MacKellar himself is resolutely determined not to appreciate events on this level.

Without the resonances created by MacKellar's response to incidents, without the images he allows into the narrative in spite of himself, the reader would have to rely purely on MacKellar's morally relative code for assessing the behaviour of the characters, seeing them in the only web of circumstances, aims, desires, and social pressures which MacKellar would like to establish. The events themselves, however, continue to break through this mesh. The novel, therefore, not only allows for an appreciation of the narrator's account, but also for an awareness of his character, and the inconsistencies in his narrative to develop. Yet, unlike a similar technique used to deal with extremes in Wuthering Heights, no alternative narratives exist to contradict each other. The reader is forced to rely on MacKellar's narrative, as well as looking for significance beyond it. A tension between our reading of the account and our reaction to it can thus never be satisfactorily resolved. We may be shocked at James' actions, disapprove of MacKellar's

attitude towards him, and still perceive behind his adventures a world of absolutes which totally escapes our attempts to comprehend or judge. Rather than Stevenson struggling with confused 'moral emblems' the struggle becomes that of the reader with the text.

The contradictions of fabula and sjuzhet which thus permeate the novel can also be found in its conclusion. In terms of narrative progression the novel ends with MacKellar's return to Scotland, yet in terms of a strong concluding image the novel ends with the death of the brothers in America. By providing this duality of ending, Stevenson would seem to be anticipating the 'open-ended' novel, which began to appear in the late nineteenth century. Indeed, he appears to offer both a 'closed' ending - defined by Alan Friedman in The Turn of the Novel,[69] as one in which the flow of ethical experience and the novel's dynamic is finally contained, and in which climactic moments of moral expression will be followed regularly by a limited moral situation leading to a final recognition of experience which ultimately restricts - in MacKellar's return to Scotland, and an 'open' ending in the continuing significance of questions raised by the brothers' deaths. Their fate produces a sense of horror, of the unexplained, which cannot be contained within direct interpretations of motive and causality, and which finally defeat relative morality. This final event can only create what Friedman describes as characteristic of the 'open ending', namely 'unleashed experience' and 'unrelieved tension.'[70]

In the conjunction of the two endings Stevenson creates a work which fits very neatly into his description of fiction as 'the tying and untying of a knot.' And, paradoxically, it would seem that by choosing a Scottish

69. Alan Friedman, The Turn of the Novel (New York, 1966)

70. The Turn of the Novel, p.26 and p.33.

setting for The Master of Ballantrae, he gains a greater scope for establishing the complexity of his moral dichotomies. It brings together two opposed perspectives which would be irreconcilable in reality - MacKellar's stereotypic and stultifyingly social version of Calvinist ethics, and the metaphysical expression of moral absolutes, nearer to the implications of Calvinist philosophy, through Henry and James - and unites them momentarily in fiction. The novel therefore can be seen as yet another confrontation with that dialectic of absolutism and relativism, of the limits of fictional realism and the projection of significance reaching beyond the boundaries of fiction, which characterises all Stevenson's work and which makes the tension he creates a continued challenge.

'Man's one method, whether he reasons or creates,' wrote Stevenson, 'is to half shut his eyes against the dazzle and confusion of reality.'[71] Once again his prose writing provides a valuable insight into his fictional techniques. In both his foreign novels and his Scottish fiction Stevenson faces the reader with the dazzle of a meta-perspective on reality. Through the use of images, incidents, and exploitation of narrative, he allows this perspective to undermine the surface of the text, and reveals an underlying significance. Edwin Eigner describes the romance writer as someone who: 'tries to capture an internal vision, never expressed on the surface of the real world.'[72] Stevenson's interests lie not so much in 'capturing' that vision - he is only too well aware that it can never be realised - but in conveying an understanding of the terms of that vision. Rather than attempting to render the conditions of life in dramatic form, in order to enhance our

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71. 'A Humble Remonstrance', p. 159.

72. Eigner, p.13.

understanding of them, he transforms the events and incidents of his adventures into correlatives of our deepest awareness of moral contradictions, revealing ontological threats which we normally avoid. Although he accepts that a relationship between circumstance and a socially contingent morality may exist in reality, it is neither the subject of his fiction, nor his philosophical concern. Through the 'poetry of circumstance'[73] he dramatises the concept of humanity's essential indefinability ; his moral punctum emerge from a fictional topography that encompasses and represents life's fluidity without imposing upon it static restrictions of realism. His concessions to realism may vary according to the particular genre in which he is writing, but he always questions its premises and allows his fiction to posit alternatives to its relativity - alternatives that are not possible within 'reality.' Therefore, although his techniques and his subject matter may develop in the course of his career, the thematic and literary concerns to which he is committed remain essentially the same.

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73. 'Romance is the poetry of circumstance', 'A Gossip on Romance', p.141.

CHAPTER FOUR

ROBIN JENKINS: CONFRONTATIONS WITH LITERARY REALISM

In moving from a consideration of Robert Louis Stevenson's fiction to an examination of the novels of Robin Jenkins, certain basic differences between the two writers must be acknowledged. In focusing on Jenkins I am making the transition from a writer who was, and is, internationally recognised, to one who is little known outwith Scotland, whose novels are often out of print, are difficult to find in the libraries even of Scottish universities, and are usually relegated to the popular fiction shelves of public libraries. Moreover, Stevenson was an author in personal contact or in correspondence with many of the major literary figures of his day, while Robin Jenkins, although one of Scotland's most prolific writers in this century, lives in relative obscurity; a retired headmaster who admits that he sees his novel writing as mainly a hobby. And, of course, the two writers are separated by almost a century; Stevenson wrote until his death in 1894, while Jenkins, born in 1912, is still writing novels in 1984. In Stevenson's novels the legacy of Scott and Hogg, the influence of a childhood and adolescence in post-Enlightenment Edinburgh, is still evident. Growing up in Lanark, teaching in the West of Scotland, living through two World Wars, Jenkins inherits a very different set of influences. His view of a Scottish literary 'tradition' must also differ, since he emerged onto a scene in which the Literary Renaissance of the 1930's had done much to change the face of Scottish poetry, but in its revaluation of the Scottish novel had done little more than reinforce a sense of inadequacy. Yet in spite of coming from such very different backgrounds, these two writers share the absolutism of their moral outlooks, linked by concerns which can be seen as reflecting a Calvinist cast of mind. Moreover, in both cases the expression of their metaphysical concerns has had a profound effect on their use of the conventions of realist fiction.

Jenkins' first novel, So Gaily Sings the Lark,[1] was published in 1950, at the beginning of a decade in which an increasing emphasis on social realism and the proletarian experience led to the fashion for 'angry young men' and 'kitchen sink drama'. In both Scotland and England the modernist experiments of the 1920's had been assimilated into the literary establishment but appeared to have had little influence on the novel's form; realism remained the dominant mode. Scotland's finest innovative work of this period, A Scots Quair (1932-34), offers a clear illustration of this pattern. Although writers such as Neil Gunn, Ian MacPherson, and Fionn MacColla learned from its linked vision of the people and the land, few - if any - faced up to the challenge of its narrative experiments. And even those writers who followed the other avenue opened by Gibbon, the depiction of an industrialised world and an urban proletariat, did so in the prevailing mode of social realism, ignoring Gibbon's radical experiments with the voice of the 'folk'. So in George Blake, Fred Urquhart and Archie Hind, we can see writers making a genuine effort to chronicle working class Scottish experience, but finding that the language and the forms they use serve only to distance themselves from that experience. Yet to use that form at least offered some reassurance that their experiences could be 'described'. As Malcolm Bradbury points out, in an 'afterword' to Eating People is Wrong, his own novel of the 1950's: 'it is worth remembering that realism represents a serious propensity of fiction, but one most easy to achieve in a phase of culture when people do have a sense of possessing a common and shareable reality, as I think the 'fifties did.'[2] Whether Scots writers of the period did enjoy this

1. Robin Jenkins, So Gaily Sings the Lark (Glasgow, 1950).

2. Malcolm Bradbury, Eating People is Wrong: with an afterword by the author (London, 1978), p.295.

shared reality with their English counterparts is debatable, but it certainly appears as if they wished to do so. Thus both in those novels which turned to the land, to the golden rural past, and in those which faced a sordid urban present, few alternatives were provided to the given 'reality' presented by the fiction; the moral and political outlook of the writers tended to remain confined to this world of solid, describable circumstance.

Nevertheless Robin Jenkins chose Scotland, at least initially, as his setting and his subject, and appeared to settle for established realist conventions in form and technique. In this respect he again differs from Stevenson - and also from Muriel Spark. Both Stevenson and Spark can be seen as writers who make their distrust of fiction quite explicit, openly challenging the realist form. Stevenson's generic experiments always provide him with the means of evading a total commitment to realism, while Spark, making radical narrative experiments for her own particular reasons, is nevertheless seen as part of a post-modernist reaction against realism in which fictional manipulations are almost the norm. Both writers, therefore, are free to use language to draw attention to itself, to highlight discrepancies between fiction and reality, and to express their awareness of the indeterminacies of existence. Through such individual devices their absolutist perspectives emerge. Jenkins, however, who, I would suggest, shares certain aspects of their moral outlook, has chosen to work within a narrower framework and within an ostensibly less radical form. And it is because his work does appear closer to realism that he occupies such a significant position in my argument.

Certainly in all his early works Jenkins shows a greater sense of social determinism, a more active engagement in ideological debate, a greater reliance on apparently 'omniscient' narrators, and a stronger sense of 'character', than either Stevenson or Spark. Yet these features of his work which would appear to indicate an attitude to, and assumptions about reality which, translated into fictional terms, become the characteristics of realism, are in fact deceptive. Moving away from the specific social and political issues with which they initially appear concerned, his novels frequently veer towards more ambiguous concerns with the metaphysics of morality, and in particular with the potential existence of absolutes of pure good and pure evil. And in the process the apparent conventions of realism are adapted to suit his particular moral outlook to such an extent that their limitations soon become evident. His novels thus test the very conventions on which they appear to be based.

Jenkins' explorations and manipulations of the realist novel in this way, being fairly subtle, are obviously best discussed in relation to the individual novels. Yet in general his experiments lie in three main areas. The position of the narrator is perhaps the most perplexing area of development in his work, since it incorporates two deviations from the 'norm' of realism. Firstly, except in Fergus Lamont, Jenkins uses third person narrators, capable of describing all events and characters pertinent to the story. As in most realist novels with third-person narration the narrator is shown as possessing a perspective superior to that of the characters involved in events, both sharing and understanding their human response, but also elevated or detached from them. Moreover, this 'omniscient' narrator is usually seen as being in command of a describable reality and may even, if narratorial and authorial roles are blurred - as,

for example, in Middlemarch or, with some irony, in Vanity Fair - appear to control the characters. Yet although Jenkins' narrators at first appear to conform to the convention of omniscience, they are frequently exposed at a later point in the novel as being fallible in their judgements. Revealed as uncertain about the world being described, as lacking in insight into the characters, they are, at times, even shown to be suppressing information that we, the readers, feel we require. In spite of this, having first created the impression of omniscience through the dominant uniformity of the narrative voice, Jenkins maintains our expectations of realism - and hence increases his power to disorient and unsettle the reader. Any reading of the reviews of his novels will show just how successfully he defeats categorisation and creates a sense of puzzlement and uneasiness.

Yet, paradoxically, the other area in which Jenkins deviates from realism through the use of the narrator is in his pushing of the conventions of omniscience to their limits. For, if the narrative voice in his novels is often ambiguous and fallible, it also exploits to the full the capacity of omniscience to change perspective at will. Frequently changing its allegiance in identifying with the various characters, the narrative voice gains and loses access to a variety of perspectives. Thus it often appears unable to interpret equivocal actions in those characters with whom it has 'lost' access. So once again the realist conventions disintegrate since, through this process, the reader not only loses confidence in the narrator but also in the consistency of the characters and situations themselves as they shift before us.

In both these aspects of his use of narrative voice Jenkins is able to manipulate perceptions of reality itself in a moral context. By his ambivalent use of the omniscient narrator he avoids committing himself to a position of God-like power, but also prevents himself from being restricted to the constraints of human perception. Moreover, by denying our sense of character he helps maintain a sense of the essential and undefinable mystery of personality, the inner essence of the human being which is inaccessible to other humans. And as well as showing his narrator to be fallible, Jenkins places his characters in conjunctions which reveal how little they understand one another. Through this shifting process, Jenkins also reinforces our sense of the subjectivity of perception in ourselves, by emphasising our inability to 'know' others, even in fiction.[3] He thus denies us the usual fulfilment given by realist fiction in which the narrator appears capable of giving the reader all the information necessary for deciphering the world of the fiction.

The third area affected by Jenkins' challenging of realism is that of the plot and subject matter in his novels. Here too his techniques may initially appear to conform to our expectations of realism. However, the attention of the reader is once again side-tracked, as those events which appear to be of major significance are eventually shown to be of little importance, while the more minor incidents become the main vehicle of meaning. (In this respect noticeable similarities do exist between Stevenson and Jenkins.) Yet although the settings which he chooses - central Scotland against a background of urban poverty or, in those novels written after his return from teaching in Afghanistan and Malaysia, the colonial

3. Expressing his disquiet with the American habit of asking 'Who am I', Jenkins appears to see such definitions as limiting and restrictive, and the attempt to reach them a process of illusion. Even in his use of third-person narrative, therefore, he tends to be selective in his supply of information, frequently implying that the narrative perspective may be lacking in knowledge or may even by wrong in its interpretation. He thus denies the reader that degree of sympathetic identification with either narrator or characters that we expect from realist fiction and which palliates and justifies our own sense of self. See the interview with Robin Jenkins, Appendix p. 441.

world of expatriates - appear to be very similar to those of many other writers of his generation, the situations which he creates within these environments almost seem to be parodies of the conventional 'social concern' novel. Jenkins' interest is not in expressing the characters' responses to social dilemmas of a certain period or place: although he presents the social environment as one of the determinants of human behaviour, it is a determination whose consequences he wishes to reject or to see his characters challenge. He uses the limitations of the environment to throw into a prominence events, judgements and moral imperatives which refuse to be defined by their context, and which negate any morality based on an acceptance of the conditioned and conditional nature of human experience.

His moral vision is not the liberal humanism found in the realist novel of the 1950's; above all he seems to abhor the spiritual lassitude that renders people incapable of recognising or responding to pure good or evil. As he is, however, an avowed aetheist, his apparent adoption of the realistic frame emphasises the material limitations upon the sources or objectives of such moral and spiritual imperatives. The absolutes by which his characters are tormented - and which his plots force them to confront - cannot be projected upon or derived from any religious source external to the limits of a human world defined by given social conditions or outwith the frame of the realist novel. Jenkins' aim, however, is not merely the presentation of a flawed humanity; the conventions of realism have been fully exploited by other novelists in achieving that end. For Jenkins, the human condition is defined by a double awareness both of the limitations of our spiritual potentialities and of our desire to transcend these

limitations. Aware of the destructive effects of the effort to live according to those absolutist moral schemes towards which such spiritual potentialities tempt us, he also detects a failure to fulfil our humanity if we do not aspire to such absolutes. His characters are caught in a tragic impasse, as their awareness that human values are socially conditioned and contingent comes into conflict with their consciousness of the possibility of ultimate values which demand that they reject or transcend the limitations imposed on them by their society's values. Those moral imperatives which create this conflict, however, when shown from another perspective, are revealed to be socially conditioned themselves, to have no universal validity and therefore to be as contingent as the values which they are meant to replace. Jenkins' characters, like his novels, are haunted by the possibility that some set of values will be able to represent a pure, unconditioned, and absolute good or evil. The novels point towards extremes which, if actually realised in our experience, would tear the fabric of its relativity, the relativity by which we have come to live, apart. And this tearing apart of the relativity of our moral values would also be the tearing apart of the realist frame of the novel. The paradox of Jenkins' art has always been that it both accepts that realist frame and desires its overthrow, seeking out characters who will represent absolute values and then trapping them within a conditional and relative universe.

Jenkins' long writing career reflects the changes and ambivalences which he has experienced in trying to convey such a complex sensibility. At times even subsequent novels appear to differ greatly in format; on closer examination, however, the same character types, the same moral dilemmas, and essentially similar philosophical concerns can be found in each. Above all

an increasing confidence in his ability to test the conventions of realism and the outlook that they represent, can be seen with each novel. And although his novels may appear conventionally accessible and thematically simple, a close reading of his works reveals their complexity. In the following two chapters, therefore, I will concentrate in detail on a selection of novels from the span of his writing career. In this first chapter I begin by discussing the seeds of his later concerns to be found in an early novel, Happy for the Child, prior to examining their flourishing in The Cone-Gatherers and The Changeling - two novels which represent salient but divergent strands of his work. The basic issue of his confrontation with realism can then be assessed in relation to one of his apparently more conventional novels, Guests of War. Moving to one of his most ambitiously epic novels, Dust on the Paw, in the subsequent chapter, I will examine similar manipulations of realism in a non-Scottish context, then discuss the more radical experiments of A Very Scotch Affair and A Would-be Saint, which lead to one of his finest but most ambiguous novels, Fergus Lamont.

Happy for the Child

Happy for the Child, Robin Jenkins's second novel, published in 1953, points towards the direction which future developments in his writing would take.[4] Initially it appears to adhere closely to realist techniques and, twenty years later, was still being acclaimed as 'a small classic of realism in Scottish fiction.'[5] The work nevertheless mixes the conventions of realism

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4. Robin Jenkins, Happy for the Child (London, 1953). All page references are to this edition.

5. Moira Burgess, 'Robin Jenkins: A Novelist of Scotland', The Library Review, 22, no.8 (Winter, 1970), 409-412, p.409.

with an element of fantasy, a combination which hints at Jenkins' early interest in metaphysics and at his refusal to accede totally to the demands of the realist novel.

Happy for the Child opens by focusing on a subject matter often to be found in Scottish Kailyard fiction; in John Stirling, the central character, parallels can easily be found with the typical 'lad o pairts', the local boy who makes good. And certainly Stirling, despite his mother's poverty, succeeds in going to the local Grammar School and surpassing all his wealthier fellow-pupils with his brilliance. Of course, Jenkins, in true realist style, goes further than the sentimentality of the Kailyard by investigating the social implications of this elevation, its psychological effect on the boy's family and friends, and the influence on the child of his own ambiguous position. Yet two aspects of the novel would seem to indicate that all of Jenkins' interests are not circumscribed by this fairly conventional subject. Firstly, the novel contains so many references to Scottish fiction and its traditions, that a degree of pastiche, or at least of ironic self-awareness, is implied. Secondly, Jenkins places the Stirling plot in conjunction with the story of 'Gourlay', a youthful counterpart of John Stirling's but characterised by his extreme poverty, his sordid family background, and his own cruelty. Although he is linked to the main plot through his acquaintance with Stirling, and can be seen as representing the extremes of urban poverty and lack of affection which Stirling fears, he develops in the course of the novel into a larger than life figure, a fantastical creation who, although demanding sympathy, also threatens to overwhelm the relative and humanist interpretations of social reality which are expected in the reader's response to the tale of John Stirling. And through these two elements, worth examining in some detail, Jenkins' first implicit

questioning of the realist novel can be seen.

Although the literary references in the novel to other Scottish fictions and characters are not central to the novel, they nevertheless provide an interesting echo of, and comment on, its main themes. The actual title of the novel, used as an epigraph, is taken from a poem by Robert Louis Stevenson, in which the second verse begins:

> Home was home then, my dear, full of kindly faces,
> Home was home then, my dear, happy for the child. [6]

Although Jenkins is reluctant to acknowledge the direct influence of Stevenson, he does seem to believe that he is one of Scotland's finest writers - until recently, not a widely held opinion.[7] The phrase, along with the poem from which it is taken, appears both to indicate the vision of an older, warmer Scotland and, in Jenkins' use of it, to acknowledge the nostalgia behind it. Indeed Stevenson becomes quite a force within the novel. His adventure stories (along with Westward Ho!) provide John Stirling with his main means of escape from his meagre circumstances into another world. And Stevenson is seen by others as a symbol both of Scottish potential for genius, and of the flight from Scotland and its constraints. Hoping to see Stirling as a future writer, a teacher on his first day at school thinks: 'Perhaps this small black-haired boy, so shyly holding the cheap case, was to be another Dailly, perhaps even a Robert Louis Stevenson or a Walter Scott.' (p.84) On that first day, too, the pupils are welcomed in the name of Burns, of Shakespeare and of Robert Louis Stevenson.(p.90) A moment later

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6. Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Home no more home to me, whither must I wander', Works XX, p.239.

7. See interview, Appendix p.436-437.

Stirling is questioned about Kidnapped by the English teacher who: 'thought Kidnapped the perfect novel: those who preferred Madame Bovary were deluded.'[8] (p.93) Once again, of course, in Kidnapped flight and nostalgia are linked.

Another set of echoes, which point to quite a different strand of Scottish fiction, are those referring to The House with the Green Shutters. Although Jenkins denies basing his novel in any way upon that work the similarities are difficult to ignore. The figure of the local bully in both novels is called 'Gourlay', and Sam Gourlay's family, like that of John Gourlay's in the earlier work, consists of a coarse, stupid character and a 'dwaibly body', although the roles of husband and wife are reversed. The parallel is even highlighted when the comment made on Sam Gourlay: 'You're rotten, ... you're rotten to the core!', (p.114) echoes the condemnation of Deacon Allardyce made by Tam Wylie in The House with the Green Shutters: 'Deacon Allardyce, your heart's black-rotten.'[9] And Douglas Brown's novel also features the plight of a sensitive boy, with an overvivid imagination, in a world which overwhelms him. Without placing too much emphasis on these literary echoes, they can be seen as Jenkins' reminder to his readers both of their fictional heritage, and of their participation in the fictional process. As such they operate as a counterforce to the novel's apparent commitment to realism, although Jenkins never again indulged in literary games to the same extent.

The other threat which Happy for the Child presents to realism, in the character of Sam Gourlay himslef, is one which is more obviously

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8. Sandy Stranger in Muriel Spark's The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie also experiences a temporary obsession with Kidnapped, having imaginary conversations with Alan Breck.

9. George Douglas Brown, The House with the Green Shutters (London, 1901), p.306.

related to Jenkins moral concerns. If John Stirling's situation illustrates one of the clichés of Scottish writing, Sam Gourlay's would at first appear to provide another stereotype. The boy who never has a chance, who turns to violence through being the victim of poverty and cruelty, who finds little support in his broken-down, philosophising father, his overbearing and monstrous mother, and his sentimental sister, Gourlay is the archetypal 'villain to be pitied'. Yet in spite of our human sympathy for him, Gourlay assumes gigantic proportions within the novel. On one level the tragic hero, a figure of wasted potential who nevertheless retains his ability to enjoy life until even that is forced out of him, he appears to deserve an understanding response. And the baiting of him by his supposed friend Charlie Deans increases our sympathy for him.[10] At other times he evokes a sense of disgust and also of despair. His cruelty is so extreme, his enjoyment of it so gleeful and defiant, that all his emotions assume fantastic dimensions. So even at this early stage in his writing career Jenkins is creating characters who deny the reader a consistent and easy response.

As the novel progresses the force of Jenkins' writing when he describes this character soon begins to assume a power which trivialises the treatment of John Stirling. Compare Stirling's response to the traumas of school life:

> The suspense, the constant defensiveness, and the frequent isolations, of course, did him harm. Often he had headaches; his heart would suddenly race and become audible; he felt sick; but worst of all, and most regularly, he suffered from depressions. (p.151)

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10. Charlie Deans could be seen as an echo of the Deans family in The Heart of Midlothian.

with Gourlay's real need for any money:

> At last, in desperation, snarling like a dog threatened with the loss of a bone, Gourlay took the purse and, straining it across his chest, ripped it apart so that for a moment he seemed to be playing a concertina. Next moment he was delving into its numerous empty compartments with demented betrayed fingers ... Then finally he took it out and held up, between finger and thumb, for the whole treacherous world to see, the only coin in the purse, a ha'penny with a hole in it ... Once he tried to speak, to express his devastated hopes, but had to stop, for it was evident he would have wept. (p.142)

Both the language used and the experience described in the second passage easily overshadow that of the former. And Gourlay himself overshadows the petty spectrum of emotions which are experienced by the sensitive Stirling, representing both a threat and a need, neither of which can be accommodated by the relative reality established by the Stirling side of the novel.

Gourlay, moreover, is shown as actually experiencing moments of perception which seem to break down the boundaries of reality. After killing a cat - one of his favourite misdemeanours - the world seems to change: 'Because it lay black and sinisterly still among them the green leaves and white flowers suddenly blazed and seemed themselves to be alive. At any moment the whole bush might fly up and away.' (p.36) Gourlay can experience such moments because he is so desperately seeking some alternative dimension to the reality which constrains him, is seeking any kind of significance, yet in himself he comes to represent that alternative, a world of extremes, to the reader. Jenkins chooses Gourlay as the character who sticks earwigs on pins, an action which he sees as representing 'the evil of the world',[11] and in so doing

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11. See interview, Appendix p.443.

indicates a kind of morality which cannot find a place within the reality of an ethically relative society: it is too extreme. But Sam Gourlay also senses a lack of all extremes in the world around him - not only of evil. In Jenkins' first novel, So Gaily Sings the Lark, a roadmender comments to David, the central character: 'A man kens in his heart that this is an unfinished sort of place, not perfect like heaven; and when he sees something that he thinks is complete he looks roond, without meaning to, for the disappointment.'[12] Gourlay, by the end of the novel, epitomises this sense of something lacking in life:

> He wept for a greater reason: again he felt, but much more poignantly, that something important, something indispensable, something without which he must always fail as he had failed tonight, had come close to him but had passed him by ... There had been nothing in the purse; there had been nothing tonight; there would be nothing always.(pp.206-207)

Here Gourlay's sense of an indefinable absence can be seen as reflecting that idea of the lack of absolutes within a conditional, earthly reality, which dominates Jenkins' moral concerns and shapes the form of his fiction in future novels.

Meanwhile, although the text of Happy for the Child concludes with Stirling, its real focus is made clear in the final mention of Gourlay, as Stirling, departing for home having expiated his own feelings of rebellion, views him cowed and ill: 'As he went into the house he was laughing at this demonstration of the ultimate defeat of evil and the victory of good. The likes of Gourlay were always crushed, whereas boys like Stirling himself, clever and deserving, always succeeded in the end: that was surely how the world went, that was how God had

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12. Jenkins, So Gaily Sings the Lark, p.43.

arranged it.' (p.230) The narrator's irony exploits the tension in the fact that Stirling's view is accurate to the experience of the two characters within the development of the plot, in that Stirling has been victorious and 'that was surely how the world went', while the invocation of an absolute morality supporting that outcome is countermanded by the reader's own necessary concern, not with the smugly self-congratulatory Stirling but with Gourlay, sleeping in the coal cellar and demanding an alternative to his existence:

> Nor could he say where he wanted to go. Not home to bed with curses and a drink of cold water; not to the lighted street where cops would grab him and demand why he was wandering about so late; not down to Charlie's gate, where no one ever came; and not up the drain pipe into the store, for in spite of his angry boasts to Charlie he knew it would be agony to climb with his boils so inflamed.
>
> There seemed no place except back into the cellar, and thither after two or three minutes he crept with a baffled grin. It was a pity though the candle was done. (p.249)

The alternative demanded by Gourlay is an alternative to the world of social relativity and conditioning. While Stirling was threatened and fearful he-like the reader - saw Gourlay as representing an absolutism that challenged his own relative morality and mocked his own desire to build a success on the weak and insecure foundations of social contingencies. Once successful, Stirling attributes that success to fundamental and absolutist principles governing the universe; Gourlay, in whom he had previously seen an evil absolutism, now becomes the victim of a conditional and contingent set of circumstances for which there has been no reprieve since no one has taken the conditionality of his circumstances sufficiently seriously. Here then can be seen, in an embryonic form, the impasse that dominates all Jenkins' novels, between two different dimensions of moral judgement and two different perspectives on the nature

of human responsibility. In this case each perspective undermines the positive power of the other. When the sense of absolute good is weak, the sense of absolute evil is strong, and the threat it poses makes all efforts at alleviating conditioning circumstances which create evil impossible; when a sense of absolute good is strong, it is easier to become careless of evil and all its circumstances, to see it simply as a necessary part of a pre-ordained universe. In Happy for the Child Stirling appears to triumph by this dichotomy: in later novels, however, the 'Gourlay' element becomes the focus of Jenkins' concerns.

The novel which followed Happy for the Child shows a similar concern with the social conditions of urban life. Moreover, the fact that The Thistle and The Grail,[13] deals with football, one of Scotland's national obsessions, in the context of a small community, gives it a specific location and frame of reference - although even within this framework Jenkins still introduces his moral concerns. It is in his next novel, however, in The Cone-Gatherers, that this interest comes to the fore.[14] By concentrating on an isolated setting, an unusual situation, and on characters who are not recognisable types, he creates a world in which the social determinism and the expectations of realism cannot be so securely grounded. And by removing the comforting presence of social norms he forces his readers into recognising the subjectivity of their own perceptions and into becoming more open to the transformations of apparent reality described in the novel.

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13. Robin Jenkins, The Thistle and the Grail (London, 1954).

14. Robin Jenkins, The Cone-Gatherers (London, 1955). All page references are to this edition.

The Cone-Gatherers

The Cone-Gatherers focuses on two brothers, Neil and Calum, who have been given the job of gathering cones on the estate of Lady Runcie-Campbell, located somewhere in Scotland. Their task is made necessary by the stringencies of the Second World War, which has caused tree seed imports to cease. On the estate, carrying out their unusual and isolating job, the brothers come into contact with the few other characters in the novel, who all seem to be defined by their attitude to the cone-gatherers. Their main antagonist Duror, the embittered and malevolent keeper on the estate, cannot come to terms with Calum, who is a hunchback and slow witted, a figure of child-like innocence, totally dependent on Neil for care and protection. Lady Runcie-Campbell, administrating the estate in her husband's absence, is also made uneasy by the brothers, although her son, Roderick is fascinated by them. Mr Tulloch, the head forester who employs them, also remains kind and supportive towards them. The natural setting of the estate thus provides the background and the characters for the novel's events - an isolated environment whose seclusion is emphasised by the war being enacted outwith this little world.

The paucity of character, the isolated setting, the apparent moral polarisations, and the deceptively simple plot structure, thus give the story certain affinities with fable. The novel, however, also sets up a process of revealing ambiguities in the characters, setting, and in the apparent moral centres it has established: a process best illustrated by an obvious example for the novel's location. Since events mainly take place on the estate, in a beautiful, natural environment, the novel inevitably carries Edenic overtones. And through the unfolding of the plot, through the contradictions and ambiguities revealed by events within the wood, the

image of its 'untouched innocence' is continually threatened. Even the cone-gatherers, after all, are involved in a process which is against nature in that they are organising the artificial pollination of trees. The novel is thus based on an oscillating opposition between two different realms of existence: on the one hand there is the territory belonging to the war, against which the setting of the novel in an Edenic and peaceful natural world provides an image of innocence; on the other hand, within the domain of this Eden, evil - mirroring the nature of the war - is already at work. The innocence is an illusion but an illusion which is, nevertheless, compelling because the framing effect of the war is to turn into symbols what might otherwise have been seen as conditional features of the characters' existence; Calum's backwardness and love of nature, for example, become symbolic of an enduring potentiality for that innocence which the war negates but which would not have been realised even as that potentiality except for the war. Eden has retained its power as an image precisely because humanity has been expelled from it; in the novel it is also a domain which has been recreated by, and lost again to, the forces of evil which that original expulsion set free into the world. Eden is not in the past; rather it is a possibility which evil itself is always regenerating as an image and destroying. This process of destruction thus creates a sense of absent ideals which become a new source of potential positives; and although those positives cannot survive the actualities of the world, their destruction only makes our sense of their absence from the delimited world in which we have to live more potent. The absolute moralities which appear to live on in the Edenic frame of the woodlands incapacitate the characters in their dealings with the 'real' world; and yet their destruction comes not at the hands of the real world with its circumstantial morality, but through the conflict of absolutes. Jenkins'

approach within the novel is thus one of considerable subtlety in which we are led towards an awareness of our desire for absolutes and then revealed the inadequacy of those absolutes in our actual lives. Yet this destruction of absolutes only makes our desire for them and their potency all the more profound.

Jenkins can thus be seen as adopting an apparently realistic strategem, and using an apparently consistent narrative tone, to give the impression of unity within his work. Yet in reading this novel it soon becomes clear that realism and fable, narrative omniscience and partial vision, metaphysical problematics and petty moral dilemmas all rub shoulders within it. And it is these contradictions which provide the dynamic of his fiction. As all the elements within the work gradually undo the unity that it initially appears to possess, the reader is drawn into the process of making sense of contradictions, adjusting his or her own sense of reality in order to decipher the novel's paradoxes. In The Cone-Gatherers the central tension is created by the foregrounding of two opposing areas around one central and contradictory concept. Establishing two very different worlds, one being that of the wood, the isolated realm of fable, and the other being the world of social reality, of relative morality, Jenkins brings them into a confrontation centred around the problem presented by the concept of innocence. These three central elements dominating the novel, through the woodland setting, through the impositions of a social hierarchy, and through a pervasive vision of innocence, interact at different levels within the work and illustrate the complexity of Jenkins' aims.

The woodland setting, as stated, provides a closed world, a useful frame

in which conflicts may be explored. Yet the concept of the wood as an escape from reality, a world isolated from the evils and antagonism of the war, is soon shown to be an illusion. In the first paragraph of the novel we are presented with the image of the two brothers high up in a tree, gathering cones. Isolated even within the woods by their lofty position, the Edenic overtones are very strong. However, as the description of surrounding nature continues in the second paragraph, a more sinister note is introduced:

> Seals that had been playing tag in and out of the seaweed under the surface had disappeared round the point, like children gone home for tea. A destroyer had steamed seawards, with a sailor singing cheerfully. More sudden and swifter than hawks, and roaring louder than waterfalls, aeroplanes had shot down from the sky over the wood, whose autumnal colours they seemed to have copied for camouflage. In the silence that had followed gunshots had cracked far off in the wood. (p.7)

The gradual alignment of natural and military, as one world takes on the characteristics of the other, breaks down our expectations of the natural environment, leaving us uncertain as to whether the guns mentioned are sporting or warlike. Not only is the texture of the external military world woven into the realms of nature, but it is done so in such a way that the isolation of the cone-gatherers is presented as the only point from which this strange conjunction can be viewed. From the very beginning, therefore, their isolation is represented as the only position in which such dangerous oppositions are accessible. But, because of that position, they can also be seen either as exposed or sheltered in the highest trees, victims or survivors.

Apart from their symbolic ambivalence, however, the woods also serve a more concrete function in the novel; the different values of the various

characters can be gauged according to their interaction with the woodland environment for it tends to reflect their attitudes to the world in general. Neil, for example, dislikes the woods, cannot accept the stasis of the environment and is continually watching for some change in its nature:

> Neil, the elder of the brothers, had often paused, his hand stretched out from its ragged sleeve to pluck the sweet resinous cones, and gazed at the great house with a calm yet bitter intentness and anticipation, as if, having put a spell on it, he was waiting for it to change. He never said what he expected or why he watched; nor did his brother ever ask. (pp.7-8)

Any change, even when it is only the approaching darkness of an imminent storm, is welcomed by the elder brother as a confirmation of the suspicion with which he treats the woods, an expression of the insecurity he feels and of his disbelief in benevolent nature or natural justice:

> Neil opened his eyes. It was now as dark as twilight. The rain still plopped down in single large drops. As yet there seemed no enmity or hatred in its falling, only a kind of sadness and pity; but in five minutes, or less, it would come roaring down mercilessly. He would be soaked; his rheumatism would be so aggravated it might cripple him for ever. If he was unable to walk, far less climb, who would look after Calum with his derided body and his mind as foolish as a child's? Wherever that light had shone from, it had not been from heaven. (p.153)

Nature thus confirms his belief in the world as potentially treacherous and inimical, reinforcing his expectations that he and Calum will be overwhelmed, both by the natural environment and by the man-made systems operating within it. Inevitably Neil resents the fact that Calum, with his delight in the minutiae of the natural surroundings, can easily accept the world in which he lives and is unable to perceive external impositions. Indeed, Calum's oblivion to such factors ensures that he suffers from them to a far lesser degree than his brother. Calum, for

example, has no sense of the social stigma attached to their task, viewing the gathering of seeds as a means of bringing new life. Conscious of those factors outside the woodland world which condition their employment, however, Neil is forced to operate according to restrictions on his behaviour of which he is well aware but nevertheless deeply resents.

In contrast, Calum operates according to an asocial, purely 'moral', instinct. While presenting the world through Calum's eyes, therefore, the narrator can point towards a vision of the universe free from social pressures and from their categorisations of the individual. Within Calum's world even physical restrictions can be broken down or transformed simply through acts of imagination and empathy: 'Calum fancied he was resting in the heart of an enormous flower. As he breathed in the fragrance, he stroked the branches, and to his gentle hands they were as soft as petals.' (p.9) Similarly, Calum can easily imagine himself as an owl, suffering, 'in the ineluctable predicament of necessary pain and death' (p.9), again becoming part of the natural world. His control over such transformations, however, is minimal since they are effected purely through his own subjectivity of perception; his role as victim throughout the novel reveals the precariousness of such a position. Nevertheless, just as he can empathise with the woods, unaware of any barriers between himself and nature, so he can ignore what Neil sees as the insurmountable burden of circumstances which stand between humanity and moral ideals. Calum accepts that the natural world operates according to larger laws than he is able to perceive. The fact that: 'Daylight announced it must go' (p.8), for example, causes him no fear. Recognising his own role within this larger universe, his moral capacity,

the potential for good, is freed. But Calum is set apart from the majority of people both by his physical deformity and by his innocence of mind. Neil, in contrast, is, like most of humanity, aware of constraints and restrictions which prevent us from acting according to free moral choices but force us to comply with the pragmatics of reality. Yet by knowing Calum and his perception on the world Neil is more aware than the majority of people exactly how these social constraints trap us. Denied the means of transcending the limitations of self-concern and public facade most of us are forced to rely on a pragmatism which frequently betrays us; Calum however, belongs to the world of idiots, children and fanatics who can believe in an existence outwith humanity's self-determined universe. And through this opposition between the brothers Jenkins can be seen exploring a concept central to all his works: the impossibility of coping with a fully idealistic, non-pragmatic perception of moral polarities in a world dominated by oppression, injustice and social constraints.

It may seem then, that Calum possesses the moral advantage in conceptual oppositions within the novel; the novel's events, however, reveal that the type of morality practised by Neil, one mitigated by expediency, is the kind which will ultimately survive. Calum's adherence to ideals, his potential for good, is shown through events to be self-destructive. Indeed, an early incident in the novel, when Calum is unable to kill a trapped rabbit in order to put it out of pain, illustrates the paralysing effect of his 'goodness'. Capable only of doing good in a pure and absolute way, his morality is incapable of coping with the actualities of a world that does not conform absolutely to the terms of his own consciousness. The events of the novel therefore

lead the reader into an awareness of moral relativism and compromise as necessary for a functional existence within the limitations of the human world, as Calum is forced to endure a deerhunt, is accused of obscenity and corruption, and, finally, is murdered. Yet the moral innocence which he represents emerges strongly through the novel's images and succeeds in sustaining an ideal, indicating the possibility of transcending a relative morality which accepts the predominance of social conditioning within our experience.

The ideal of innocence which Calum represents is emphasised even more strongly by being placed in conjunction with another pole of morality - the evil represented by the gamekeeper Duror, an equally powerful but self-destructive force. And Duror is also a character whose perceptions are used to invest the woods with significance in a process of self-revelation. Like Calum, Duror sees the woods as capable of magical transformations, of liberation from the constraints of a fixed and static reality. Believing that the autonomy of nature offers redemption and an affirmation of his own form of moral extremism, Duror links them with an all-encompassing sense of purpose that he recognises is lacking in himself: 'This wood had always been his stronghold and sanctuary; there were many places secret to him where he had been able to fortify his sanity and hope.' (p.18) Here it is possible to see how Jenkins uses the characters' own desires for symbols and significance to amplify the symbols established by the pattern of the novel. Thus Duror's resentment of Calum stems not only from the fact that the latter's deformity makes the woods seem 'invaded and defiled', but also from Calum's appropriation of the wood's apparent powers of transformation to his own vision of innocence; Duror feels that, 'its cleansing and reviving

virtues were gone.' (p.18) With his own wife physically distorted by illness, Duror had wished to see the woods as a reassurance that perfection could still exist; Calum therefore becomes another instance of physical imperfection, a violation of the natural environment. Most galling of all, however, to the gamekeeper, is Calum's apparently innate good, for Duror has also used the woods as an environment in which he can see only that side of his self which he wishes to preserve, ignoring the perversions in his own moral character. But Calum: 'had made acceptance no longer possible for Duror himself.' (p.18) By acting as a physical reflection of those parts of his nature he had tried to conceal, Calum makes Duror aware of his own spiritual deformity - a recognition made all the more forceful for Duror because of the hunchback's own moral purity. On realising that Calum, 'in some dreadful way had become associated with him, in fact had become necessary to him' (p.99), Duror can no longer conceal his true moral nature; the only action left to him is to destroy that antithetical image of himself by destroying Calum, aware nevertheless that in so doing he is giving way to his own capacity for evil, destroying himself in the process. Although Calum and Duror are thus shown as characters who can only achieve a fullness of existence within the woods, being unable to make the compromises necessary for survival outwith its boundaries, the enclosed environment of the wood - by bringing them together - forces them into realisations of self which they wished to avoid. Indeed, at one point Duror feels: 'It was almost as if there were not two brothers, but three; he himself was the third.' (p.222) The isolation which ensures their existence and the expression of their full moral potential for absolutes of good or evil is therefore also responsible for creating their mutually destructive symbiosis.

Calum and Duror's relationship, however, is only brought to the point of actual destruction, in Duror's murder of Calum and subsequent suicide, by the intrusion of those social factors which operate as constraints upon the other characters. Like Huck and Jim sailing down the Mississippi on the raft, they are gradually invaded by restrictions emanating from a world outwith their isolation which then precipitates the climax of events. And here Jenkins balances the fabulistic elements of his story with an awareness of social responsibilities and human hierarchies more commonly to be found in the realist novel. Even within the woodland environment characters such as Mr Tulloch and Lady Runcie-Campbell find it difficult to function according to 'pure' moral instinct alone. Lady Runcie-Campbell, for example, is continually torn between her sense of moral justice and her desire to preserve the social conventions. Unable to forget class barriers, she cannot recognise 'good' when it is manifested in those with whose behavioural patterns she is not familiar; yet she also desperately wishes to achieve goodness in her own life, as her son reminds her:

> "You told me yourself," he muttered intensely, "never to be quiet if I saw injustice being done."
> She started, and was painfully embarrassed by having that grandiloquent precept, that maternal counsel of perfection, repeated to her there, by him, in the open, in the presence of strangers, of inferiors. (pp.97-98)

Representing a conventional goodness, as mitigated by strong conditioning and circumstantial reality, she is not condemned in terms of the narrative sympathy, yet the novel nevertheless apportions her considerable blame for the final sequence of events. By maintaining the pressure of social restrictions on the cone-gatherers and remaining uncertain of how to deal with Duror, she forces the two polarities into an essentially asocial conflict. Her failure to face up to the extremes of the

situation is, however, explained away by Mr Tulloch - himself in favour of moral relativism - who states: 'She seemed to him to be a victim, rather than a persecutor.' (p.168) And within the novel she does function as a representative of the victimising processes of historical and social conditioning which prevent her from taking effective action when faced with moral extremes and which deny her full understanding when confronted by problematic moral concepts.

The most problematic concept with which she is faced in the novel, and which also makes stringent demands upon the reader as well as the other characters, is the idea of innocence. Once again Jenkins uses a shifting focus, demanding a variety of approaches to the concept according to the various levels operating within the novel. Obviously Calum acts as a concrete manifestation of the possibility of innocence, being seen by the more enlightened characters as a representative of goodness, with his retarded mental growth fixing him as the child who alone can enter the gates of heaven.[15] Of course, as is revealed to the reader, much of Calum's goodness is due to his naïvete and ignorance, but it is for this very reason that characters within the novel endow him

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15. Calvin held that children too are sinful, since they will inevitably grow up and commit evil once they attain knowledge of the world:

> And the apostle himself most eloquently testifies that "death has spread to all because all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). That is, they have been enveloped in original sin and defiled by its stains. For that reason, even infants themselves, while they carry their condemnation along with them from their mother's womb, are guilty not of another's fault but of their own. For even though the fruits of their iniquity have not yet come forth, they have the seed enclosed within them. Indeed, their whole nature is a seed of sin: hence it can only be hateful and abhorrent to God.

Calvin, Institutes, Book II,, i, 8, p.251.
Since Calum, however, is arrested in his mental growth, his progress towards a state of sinning does not have the same inevitability.

with special qualities, making him acquire symbolic significance. In him they see a refusal to accept that worldly knowledge which inevitably restricts their own behaviour and makes compromise a means of survival. Indeed, they wish to see Calum as making decisions in favour of good, ignoring the fact that his behaviour stems as much from the inability to perceive the complications of existence as it does upon innate goodness. Roderick, the son of Lady Runcie-Campbell, for example, taught to be unafraid of moral absolutes by his 'Christian' grandfather, perceives Calum as a point of definition, a symbol of goodness otherwise lacking in the world around him. Moreover, he imagines that Calum is actively demanding some kind of positive response from Roderick himself, and it is this projection of conscious values upon the hunchback which leads to Roderick becoming stuck up a tree as he tries to emulate Calum. Inevitably his attempt to climb the tree fails; unlike Calum he is only too aware of the dangers inherent in the endeavour. On reaching the tree's heights his trust in 'ignorance' fails, and his knowledge of the reality of his position paralyses and traps him. Thus the principle which he wishes to see as an ideal in Calum fails him in practical terms.

Calum, offering as he does a focus for the potentiality of pure good, illustrates how Jenkins uses paradox to present his moral perspective. On a symbolic level, aloft in his tree, high above the word, with an empathy for his surroundings as shown in his ability to carve animals, feeling at one with them and with nature, Calum represents an unresisting acceptance of the universe around him, and an uncomplicated capacity for good; he therefore functions as an ideal. And yet, on the level of its realism, the novel highlights his inability to cope with the totality of the world, his failure to achieve the relativity accepted by Neil,

Mr Tulloch and Lady Runcie-Campbell. The image of innocence is thus attacked on both sides; if characters perceive pure goodness in him they are victims of their own illusions, yet if his goodness is not perceived all that remains is his incompetence. And in the novel two alternatives only are offered to his innocence: on the symbolic level it is opposed by the pure evil of Duror; on the realist level it is faced with the compromises of the relative morality accepted by the majority of the other characters. Both alternatives, however, are brought together at the moment of Calum's death which presents the same tension between destruction and reinforcement of ideals as did his life:

> Though he smiled, he was dead. From his bag dropped a cone, and then another. There might have been more, but other drops, also singly, but faster and faster, distracted her: these were of blood.
>
> With moans and yelps of lamentation like an animal his brother was struggling along that branch to try and reach him.
>
> As she watched, with Baird as horrified as she, another gunshot rang out. She glanced at him and saw that it had not occurred to him so soon what it meant. She knew that somewhere, on her beloved promontory, Duror, with his face shattered and bloody, lay dead.
>
> Then, while she stood there emptied by horror, she heard far away a voice she loved screaming in excitement: "Mother, he's down. It's all right. He's safe. Harry got him down."
>
> Baird thought she had not heard. Not looking at the cone-gatherer still trying to reach his dead brother, and not daring to approach too close to her, he took a step forward and told her what Sheila was still screaming. What she did then shocked him, even there amidst these shocking sights.
>
> First she said: "Help him, Baird." Then she went down on her knees, near the blood and spilt cones. She could not pray, but she could weep; and as she wept, pity, and purified hope, and joy, welled up in her heart. (p.222)

Although his death is presented with pathos, it also acquires positive value in terms of symbolic significance.[16] It offers Duror a chance to realise his own potential for a destructive, yet absolute, act of evil. Yet it also holds out the possibility of a temporary redemption of sorts

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16. Iain Crichton Smith comments: 'At the end when Calum is killed by Duror, his body is seen as almost crucified, like Christ's, and the lady of the estate is brought face to face with her own contradictions in a conclusion of violence and hope.' Introduction to The Cone-Gatherers (Edinburgh, 1980), p.3.

for Lady Runcie-Campbell. Although Calum illustrates the precept that the innocent must suffer, and becomes almost sanctified by his death, his real effect is to save the surviving characters from the continued necessity of self-definition in the face of extremes. Lady Runcie-Campbell weeps, but will be able to return to a world in which such absolutes as presented by Calum and Duror are no longer there. And yet, for the novel, Calum's death offers a conclusion of climactic significance and provides the dominant closing image - one which points beyond the constraints of a relative reality, reinforcing the symbolic potential of absolutes. By indicating the inoperability of ideals within human reality it also registers a protest against the results of such relativism.

In assimilating these tensions within his novel, in bringing contradictory levels of myth and story together, Jenkins obviously has to make some adjustment to the conventions of realism. One of the main difficulties in expressing the problematics of morality by bringing together conflicting moral perspectives, is in deciding how to handle the narrative voice. Jenkins, in this novel as well as in most others, settles for a third person narrative but remains aware of the tension created between the narrator as a human persona - and therefore engaged in the struggle with 'reality' - and the author behind the narrative, occupying a position of control and power, able to escape from the constraints of the real. Jenkins adopts a fairly conventional stance in The Cone-Gatherers in that he appears to maintain a consistent narrative voice but to leave the interpretation of events to the characters themselves. Yet although he thus avoids imposing a dominant narrative perspective upon the reader, he nevertheless finds means of allowing the narrator subtly to guide the reader into certain, suitably metaphysical interpretations of

events. This he achieves by integrating authorial guidelines into the apparent mimesis of characters' thoughts. Passages which may seem mimetic of the characters' interpretations of events and of themselves are, if examined in detail, revealed to be a form of diagesis, with the narrator translating and reinterpreting the characters' mental processes according to the wider themes of the novel.[17]

This process is most obvious with those characters upon whom Jenkins closely focuses. Lady Runcie-Campbell, of course, often thinks in terms of metaphysics but this seems appropriate to such a thinking, Christian, woman. Duror, however, depicted as much less articulate and conscious in his reasoning, is also shown to be 'thinking' in terms of metaphysics. Arriving home after watching the cone-gatherers' hut, for example, we are told: 'He allowed himself no such gestures as putting hand to brow or closing his eyes. Why should he no longer simulate pleasure at being home? What salvation was he seeking under the cypress?' (p.29) Although both questions in this passage are formulated in the same way, they relate to very different levels of experience, with the former referring to Duror's own reaction to his unhappy home life, but the latter introducing a more metaphysical concept, that of salvation. But because we accept the former as a valid reaction from Duror, we can also accept the question about salvation as something that is in his mind. We cannot, however, be certain of his actually thinking in such terms, since no indication is given as to whether this is a conscious thought being reflected by the narrator's words, or whether the narrator is actually leading the reader into seeing Duror's situation in terms of salvation. Likewise, when

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17. The theoretic implications of the mimesis/diagesis distinction are discussed in more detail on pp.264-5 but for the moment the terms can be seen as relating to the distinction between 'showing' and 'telling', between 'scene' and 'summary'.

Duror views the beauties of nature we are told: 'It was a morning that seemed to beguile the mind with recollections of a time of innocence before evil and happiness were born.' (p.41) Once again wider concepts - here the opposition of good and evil and the context of a Golden Age - are introduced into an apparently banal reflection on the morning and expand the mimetic significance of the observation.

Duror, of course, is also depicted as a character existing a certain level of intensity, but Jenkins applies his technique to other characters who have a less conscious response to extremes. Mr Tulloch, for example, is described walking through the woods after the storm which brought the cone-gatherers into confrontation with Lady Runcie-Campbell: 'Before he moved on, he plucked up a handful of old leaves still damp from yesterday's deluge, and scattered them in the air. One or two fell upon him, but he did not immediately brush them off. This was his gesture of grief.' (p.164) Once again, that final sentence introduces a very different dimension of experience from the purely descriptive details of action previously given. And again we cannot be certain whether Mr Tulloch himself is thinking of his action in such terms. Later in the same scene we are told of his admiration for the cone-gatherers: 'Such fidelity to so simple but indispensable a task was to the forester as noble and beautiful a sight as was to be seen in that wood so rich in magnificent trees.' (pp.165-166) No indication is given as to whether the forester is conscious of his own reaction or whether this is a guideline for the reader in interpreting his behaviour.

It is not uncommon for the realist novel to imply that a deeper level of reaction may exist of which the characters are not fully aware;

indeed, it is often seen as the task of the novelist to convey such emotions. Yet where Jenkins differs from writers such as D.H. Lawrence, who are interested in mining the sub-conscious realms of experience, is that he gives us little indication as to whether we can actually trust the narrator's interpretation as accurately reflecting the experience of the characters, or whether the narrator is all the time imposing a certain kind of reading upon us. When the village men, for example, are described as 'disciples in the religion of endurance' (p.132),[18] we have little evidence to judge for ourselves since we are only shown them drinking in the village bar; the voice which has made the particular comment seems to belong to a narrator determined to see existence in terms of metaphysics. And are we really to believe that Calum, with his simple thought processes is waiting, in conversation with Neil, 'to have his vision accepted'? (p.153) Again we are led into a metaphysical level of speculation about the situation by a narrator who subtly guides our thoughts in that direction. However, the same narrator, by the very consistency of tone which conveys the details of both prosaic and metaphysical reaction, creates the impression of a single and unbroken level of interpretation both for character and reader. For the duration of the novel, therefore, we remain trapped within his particular vision.

Just as this apparent consistency of narrative tone can both conceal and reveal contradictory levels of subject matter, so Jenkins' use of symbolism allows for the existing of different levels of significance. By moving away from conventional realism in allowing his characters apparently to 'notice' symbols - helped here by the blurring of

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18. The name 'Duror' suggests too, that the stoic Duror is a leader in this 'religion of endurance'.

mimesis/diagesis distinctions - he reinforces the readers' sense of characters moving in a spiritual dimension as well as in the describable world of an apparently 'solid' reality. The symbols within the text thus become open to various levels of interpretation. The wooden doll found by Calum is seen by the hunchback as a symbol of all wounded existence to which he must extend his sympathy, yet Duror views it as a symbol of Calum's obscenity; and once he points this out to Lady Runcie-Campbell, she looks on it as a symbol of all the obscenity contained in the world. On another level yet, as readers, we can perceive that the doll embodies both Calum's innocence and Duror's ability to pervert reality into an expression of his own evil. Jenkins fills the novels with such images, open to a variety of interpretations: the cone-gatherers up a tree in the storm; the rabbit in a trap; Roderick's cake rotting under a tree; the mingled cones and blood dropping from Calum's poor body. Where Jenkins' use of symbolism differs from that of say, D.H. Lawrence or E.M. Forster, is that, although they allow both character and reader to appreciate symbolic significance, Jenkins then mocks the characters for so seeking significance within the deceptive world of reality.[19] This is clearly illustrated by the way in which the characters themselves frequently move into a symbolic mode - or at least, are presented as seeing themselves so doing. Roderick for example, thinks of himself as a pilgrim seeking the Holy Grail - in Calum. Yet because we are aware of the inconsistencies of that Grail we can view Roderick as the deluded innocent trying to effect a doomed escape from reality.

Of course, if characters can be wrong about the myths in which they see themselves or which they desire, then the reader can be equally wrong in

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19. For a more detailed discussion of Jenkins' use of symbolism, see Chapter 5.

interpreting the symbols presented by the novels. So while symbols - by being apparent absolutes - challenge the world of ethical relativity, the relativity of symbols revealed by the shifting process of the novel challenges the absolutes which the characters strive after. Aware, surely, of this dichotomy Jenkins exploits it to the full by continually emphasising the shifting nature of both real and symbolic perspectives on the world. And here the technique developed in Happy for the Child - in which characters lose confidence in the solidity of the world around them - is further developed. Thus Duror experiences a moment of mutability within the woods:

> While waiting, he had imagined them in the darkness missing their footing in the tall tree and coming crashing down through the sea of branches to lie dead on the ground. So passionate had been his visualising of that scene, he seemed himself to be standing on the floor of a fantastic sea, with an owl and a herd of roe-deer flitting by quiet as fish, while the yellow ferns and bronzen brackens at his feet gleamed like seaweed, and the spruce trees swayed above him like submarine monsters. (p.17)

The physical world thus seems to be altered for Duror by the depths of his emotion. Roderick experiences a quite different, although equally distorted, vision of the woods when he is pretending to be Sir Galahad:

> The wood was enchanted, full of terrifying presences. A knot in a tree glowered like a green face. Low-hanging branches were evil birds swooping with talons ready to rip his face and pluck out his eyes. The sky was now a vast kingfisher's wing, now myriad eyes, blue and watchful. (pp.145-146)

Such perceptions are momentary but magical rearrangements of the world which point towards a breaking through the constraints of that limited world which the characters have accepted as their 'reality'. By breaking through the world of social reality the limits of moral relativity are also breached, with relativity being revealed as no longer wholly applicable

or able to encompass the dimensions of this new world. The potential for extremes of good and evil is thus also revealed in the process. A different vision of what constitutes the 'reality' of human experience, then, is presented to the reader; a vision which co-exists with the more limited, conventional and safe world which we normally accept as constituting the boundaries of experience and of morality. Lady Runcie-Campbell, for example, in just such a moment of heightened, although temporary, perception, glimpses a vision of another dimension in which Duror exists as a personification of evil:

> To Lady Runcie-Campbell he had not come merely from the rhododendron thickets behind the house, where every leaf, and every insect on every leaf, had its ordained shape and shadow. He was from some gruesome other world where a child's toy became an obscene symbol and potatoes boiled over as a housewife watched horrors rearing out of the dark icy pools of her mind.
> (p.192)

This world of extremes, although always potentially present behind our secure acceptance of what we believe to be a solid 'reality' can thus break through and destroy all our conventionally held perceptions, including not only our necessary acceptance of a relative morality but also our belief in the nature of 'reality' itself.

In The Cone-Gatherers such moments clearly occur within an environment that has already been set apart from familiar reality. In addition to the effect of the enclosed woodland setting, characters such as Calum and Duror who belong to the world of absolutes and extremes dominate the novel's images. Those characters who are shown struggling with their own relative moralities, are represented as uneasy intruders into that world, unable to deal with the extremes confronting them. The novel, therefore, is more clearly located in the world of fable than of a recognisable and desirable social reality. And because of the shifting

nature of perception within the novel, the changing values of symbols which initially appear fixed, the reader is also left to struggle with a fabulistic world. In the process we too begin to share in the desire for some point of fixity, for absolutes - although we are simultaneously being made aware of our own inability to translate absolutes into the relativity of our own 'reality'.

The Cone-Gatherers, locating itself in the realms of fable, and in a world of potential absolutes, represents the best of one strand of Jenkins' work - a strand of fantasy which also manifests itself in novels such as The Missionaries[20] and The Holy Tree.[21] These novels are, however, relatively unusual within his oeuvre in being so immersed - although always suspicious of - the fabulistic. More frequently he adopts a consciously realistic frame for his novels, exploring the intrusion of absolutes into that frame of 'normality', rather than placing 'normal' characters in the struggle with a world of absolutes. Nevertheless, The Cone-Gatherers maintains the balance of worlds so subtly, and is so successful in evoking a genuine human sympathy, that it remains one of the finest of Jenkins' works.

The Changeling

In contrast to The Cone-Gatherers, The Changeling[22] belongs to the group of novels which consciously adopt the framework of social realism. It is characteristic in many ways of his subsequent novels, including Some

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20. Robin Jenkins, The Missionaries (London, 1957).

21. Robin Jenkins, The Holy Tree (London, 1969).

22. Robin Jenkins, The Changeling (London, 1958).
All page references are to this edition.

Kind of Grace,[23] A Love of Innocence,[24] and A Toast to the Lord.[25] Yet in both plot and technique it reveals the same concerns which dominated The Cone-Gatherers: an exploration of morality and a confrontation with fictional presentations of the real and the ideal.

In terms of its plot, The Changeling initially appears to express a negative attitude towards moral issues. A boy is taken from the slums of Glasgow by his idealistic yet egotistical teacher, Charlie Forbes, and allowed to share the family holiday at an island resort on the west coast of Scotland. At first this precocious yet alien child, Tom Curdie, refuses to accept the friendship offered him, realising that not only is he being presented with the opportunity of temporarily achieving a way of life which will cause dissatisfaction with his normal mode of existence, but also that this act of charity towards him may destroy his carefully achieved cynical introspection, thus rendering him unfit for survival in that moral jungle which is his usual environment. Using various devices to block the kindness offered in an attempt to preserve his own moral identity, such as stealing from Woolworths and encouraging delinquent friends from home to come and camp on the island, he tries to maintain his isolation and reserve. Yet, as the charity of the Forbes family begins to soften his soul, the altruism of his benefactors, which has from the first been slightly flawed, begins to wane as they find his acts of defiance too much of a strain on their already fallible morality. They are therefore unable to follow through their original good intentions. Just as this realisation dawns on them, the boy's disreputable family

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23. Robin Jenkins, Some Kind of Grace (London, 1960)

24. Robin Jenkins, A Love of Innocence (London, 1963).

25. Robin Jenkins, A Toast to the Lord (London, 1972).

arrives on the island; the one event that could have encouraged him to maintain his reserve happens too late. Tom is now over-sensitive and vulnerable. The obvious moral disarray and squalor of the boy's family poses no threat to the schoolteacher and his wife, but rather allows them to display their moral superiority; the masks of 'good' and 'bad' can now be confidently resumed without further consideration of the deeper and more subtle moral complexities that Tom presented. As for the boy, forced into a state of complete moral uncertainty, convinced only of his own inability to function in any kind of society, he becomes as doomed as Calum in The Cone-Gatherers, suffering an even more isolated fate. And in one way his fate is more extreme than Calum's because Tom has been led to a recognition of his own alienation which leaves suicide as the only solution. Yet, although his death indicates the failure of humanity to achieve acts of pure-minded altruism and follow them through to their conclusion, his own act also emerges as a moment of transcendence; outwith the control of circumstances, unobserved, it is a positive action without compromise.

As readers we can accept that moment as transcendent because by this stage we have ourselves been led into a state of uncertainty about moral values through that attempt to comprehend attitudes and decipher motives which is necessary for a reading of the novel. We too, therefore, welcome any clear and positive action, and can accept Tom's death as such. Nor does his fate prove to be too emotionally disturbing, for we can place it as belonging to that other world of which we have had glimpses throughout. This world, outwith the control of pragmatic moral compromises, cannot be categorised in terms of conventional 'reality', but nevertheless serves to throw some light upon that world which is perceived as 'real' by a majority

of the novel's characters. This new light shows up that 'reality' in different and distorted proportions. Like The Cone-Gatherers this alternative perspective in The Changeling is partly made possible by the isolated setting - here that of a holiday on an island - which indicates a removal from 'normality'. Charlie Forbes, however, soon begins to realise that his island paradise is very much a construct of his own desires for an ideal; as such it may contain greater depths of horror than 'normality' as well as offering greater possibilities for 'good'. Finally Charlie rejects the possibility for either pure good or pure evil held out to him; being human and fallible he is unable to face up to the challenges of this new dimension.

Nevertheless the presence of this alternative perspective operates both upon the so-called 'real' world of the novel and upon the conventions which are used to create it. Literary realism, therefore, is threatened in three main areas in the novel: in the making explicit the role of the reader as observer and judge; in the breaking down of the solid idea of 'character' into a series of shifting perceptions; and in the use of minor incidents which have a power beyond their obvious and logical significance but which, by remaining embedded within the main plot, may reflect upon it and alter our responses to its terms.

The Changeling begins:

> Though no-one would belittle the benevolence of the Good Samaritan, in one respect he was lucky: he was alone with his conscience and his neighbour in trouble.
> There were, for instance, no business or professional colleagues to warn against the folly of interference; and no wife to cherish him for his altruism but also shrewdly to point out likely repercussions. (p.5)

As an introduction this statement immediately establishes a theme common to all Jenkins' novels: the difficulty of performing absolute moral acts within a world flawed by circumstantial conditioning. However, the

passage also contains a certain structural irony. Charlie Forbes, would be do-gooder, envies the Good Samaritan the isolation of his act of charity, emphasising the fact that he was alone and unobserved. Yet in so doing he ignores the place of 'The Good Samaritan' as one of the most popular New Testament parables; its central character is, therefore, one of the most 'observed' in Christendom. Since the tale is intended for an audience, not only is the Samaritan 'observed' by the narrator but he is also intended to be judged by all who read the fiction. The character is formed by this narrator-reader relationship yet, because he is within a parable, we are nevertheless meant to see him as presenting an ideal within a 'reality'. In this paradox resides one of the contradictions of fiction that Jenkins explicitly incorporates into his own novels. He apparently writes about a recognisably real world yet frequently reduces this to a microcosm - islands, foreign countries, small communities such as colonial exiles, conscientious objectors, and so on. Within these small worlds ideals often seem possible but are destroyed because the human beings within the communities are still fallible and impose their own relativism. Nevertheless they are more aware of the potentiality of ideals, of moral absolutes, than they can perceive in the wider world. Similarly, Jenkins projects through each fiction the recognition of ideals for the reader, through symbols, through images, through an anti-realist sub-text, but does so in the knowledge that this perception is only possible within the medium and will disappear once the novel is closed and his readers return to the constraints of their own perceived reality. Therefore, although we function as observers and judges of the characters and events within his novels, we too are part of the process of continual readjustments and reassessments of the tension between the 'real' and the'ideal'. Nevertheless, within the novel the reader still functions as an observer and a judge -

even if our confidence in such roles may be somewhat shaken. In The Changeling Tom and Charlie Forbes are presented through many of the conventions of literary realism, encouraging identification and participation on the part of the reader. However, the unfamiliar setting to which they are removed from their normal environment and fixed social roles demands that we interpret their actions according to more than the criteria of social realism. We are therefore guided in this extended interpretation - as in The Cone-Gatherers - by the narrative voice, which ensures that we do not forget the wider moral dimensions of even the most minor events by translating the reactions of the characters into the language of metaphysics. Charlie is thus described as casting his qualms about the success of the holiday venture aside with: 'But that black belief could not possess his mind forever; out it had to go, or rather into some deep dark hole in his subconscious it had to plunge, when the steamer began to leave Dunroth pier.' (p.63) The final detail about the steamer, of course, returns us to a world of everyday reality, reminding us that this is simply a local schoolteacher taking a wayward pupil on holiday; and through such concrete details Jenkins covers over the tracks of narrative impositions, claiming for his narrator an objective attention to a solid reality. However, the language of metaphysics, describing deep dark holes in the subconscious, has raised a quite different level of interpretation. And throughout the novel Jenkins uses this language, demanding that we also judge the characters in terms of the universals at which the narrative voice has hinted.

Again, as in The Cone-Gatherers, Jenkins uses apparent mimesis of characters' thoughts as a means of concealing narrative diagesis; yet in The Changeling he uses it to a slightly different effect. Here too the thoughts of

Charlie Forbes provide the best example. At one point in the novel, regretting bringing Tom to the island, he retreats into solitude to consider his position: 'Then, as he listened, those noises of the sea were no longer tranquil and neutral: they combined into a hostile indictment of him: as a man, as a husband, as a father, as a teacher, they roared, he had failed.' (p.109) Even if there is a certain element of mockery of the teacher's dilemma in this statement, the power of the language, the support of the sea imagery, would seem to indicate that this is a moment of significant moral recognition. And certainly Forbes is shown treating it as such. Returning to his wife, to tell her of his decision to send Tom home the next day, he thinks:

> Silence and acquiescence must be his part now, until he felt sure enough of his new self to begin to have trust in it; in the meantime he would depend on Mary's advice and judgement.
>
> As a result he was appalled by the look she cast at him as he slunk discreetly in; resentment and hatred were surely in it, turning her face almost unrecognisable... "All right," she said. "You've won." (p.111)

It is then revealed that Forbes' daughter Gillian has, in fact, taken back the accusations of stealing which she had levelled at Tom Curdie and which had led to her father's agonising. A moment that would appear to be a major turning point, signalling a new awareness in Forbes' moral consciousness, is quickly deflated before it can have any consequence in the events following it. This pattern of apparent recognition, moral decision, and then an absence of behaviour stemming from it, so that the decision is lost, recurs throughout the novel; it makes it extremely difficult, therefore, for the reader to judge the novel according to the usual pattern of cause and effect, motive and result, decision and action. Charlie Forbes, for example, 'realises' half way through the novel that his motives for adopting Tom are ambiguous - but we have been given hints of this

ambiguity from the start. Likewise, it is never made quite clear at which point Tom decides to respond favourably to the kindness shown to him. Frequently such decisions appear to have taken place while the character is lost to the narrative perspective, is 'off stage'. And even when moments of decision are revealed, as in the example given above, the reader is given no indication as to whether this is a moment of anagnosis, following a reassessment of past actions and leading to a significant change in behaviour, or whether it is a moment of introspective self-indulgence on the part of the character, with no resultant action. Any judgement which the reader might wish to make must be suspended until an overview is established by the ending of the novel. Through this technique, therefore, Jenkins can be seen avoiding the usual notions of moral 'growth' to be found in conventional realist novels, and also moving the reader's interest away from the characters, since we are no longer able to accept them as capable of recognising or acting upon moments of apparent moral insight. Nor can we even trust in the existence of such moments on this consciously spiritual level.

In spite of his language of reinterpretation, the narrator too refuses to give total endorsement of a character's perceptions, be they moral or emotional. It therefore becomes impossible to securely locate the characters on a scale of relative value. Jenkins thus develops his exploration of the mutability of perception, the examination of the uncertainty which lies behind an apparently solid moral and physical reality. And, as in The Cone-Gatherers, he develops this theme by allowing moments of insight to occur when reality itself seems distorted. One such incident occurs when Forbes and his children come upon a rabbit suffering from myxomatosis: 'that head was so monstrous that even a St. Francis would have

hesitated to stroke it in pity. It was a pinky-purple swollen mass, in which the eyes, bulging hugely, were no longer organs of sight.' (p.81) The reference to St. Francis immediately links the rabbit as a symbol to one of the novel's central themes - the limits of human charity. Yet the grotesque physical description also presents it as possessing the horrific impact of a creature from another dimension in which earthly value cannot apply. Ironically, of course, the rabbit is also a victim of human expediency, and of a disease artificially spread. Existing now as a projection of all that threatens human morality, it also represents the result of human pragmatism. The scene therefore implies not only that it would require a saint to deal with this extreme from a world of horrors, but also that such horrors can be created by us as our own 'reality', demanding similarly heroic acts of charity - a demand which the normal human being, circumscribed by social reality, could never meet.

Throughout the novel similar images indicate a world of gigantic dimensions, a world which calls upon a degree of moral heroism beyond that of human capability. Yet the fact that such images are placed against a background of apparently mundane normality would seem to imply that similar demands may be made upon humanity within its own perceived reality, but which it may choose to ignore, settling instead for a moral mediocrity. In the novel we are therefore continually confronted with the incipient threat of transformation - transformation of a safely recognisable 'reality' which will both alienate us from our own circumscribed conventions but also make us aware of an alternative, extreme and absolute pattern of moral values. In order to convey this threat Jenkins utilises small symbolic moments which then grow in significance. Already suffering from moral disillusionment with the holiday expedition, Charlie Forbes decides to take

his small group up Canada Hill, one of his favourite haunts of the past. His idyllic conception of the scene, however, is soon threatened by a 'real' but grotesque, intrusion: 'Hanging to one bush, like an obscene fruit, was an object, the most disenchanting on earth: a contraceptive.'(p. 167) This distortion of the Edenic fruit becomes for Forbes a symbol of his own spiritual desolation: 'He felt lost in a wilderness of thorned bushes to which clung contraceptives as numerous as Alastair's bubbles.' (p. 169) Reality has thus momentarily been extended, transformed into an extreme dimension - a result of Forbes' search for some correlative of his own despair. Unable to find a realisation for his feelings in the confines of reality, a process of mutation is undergone. Already in the first few pages of the novel we see how the pylon that the teacher views from his schoolroom window becomes representative not only of slum conditions but also of his own spiritual barrenness: 'A pylon rose like a gigantic spider out of a garden of dandelions protected by barbed wire; and all round soared other fantastic growths, tall factory stacks, branchless, leafless and blossomless.' (p.6) The 'fantastic' image meets the need of Forbes when he makes a demand on the 'reality' of objects around him that it cannot possibly fulfil. Seeking in the apparently solid world around him some expression of extremity which would answer his own desire for absolutes, his perceptions here too extend the dimensions of 'reality'. And in this moment of expanded perception he can find an alternative both to his own fallible, relative, morality, and to the limits of his usually circumscribed vision.

The problem, however, with such moments of 'recognition', as Jenkins indicates, is that once his characters have glimpsed that world of absolutes and extremes, they cannot return to a full acceptance of their previously limited conception or reality and all its constraints. Obviously the techniques of literary realism are also unable to accommodate the force of these new perceptions.

In Jenkins' novels, therefore, a common feature is the retreat of characters from narrative access, with the reader being denied knowledge of their thoughts and responses to events. A later novel, A Toast to the Lord, is perhaps the most extreme example of this. But even in The Changeling Tom Curdie's decision in favour of suicide, once the confrontation of the Forbes family and his own has overwhelmed his newly developed moral awareness, is left unrecorded. Only with Gillian's discovery of his almost dead body do we realise what he has been planning. He therefore ends the novel as more of an enigmatic symbol than a solidly realised, suffering, character. Tom, the changeling, is operating in both worlds within the novel, is both a symbol and a victim of symbolism; in him Jenkins bridges the gap between the world of expeditious morality which operates within a social reality, and the world of absolutes necessary for coping with the moral extremes that exist beneath the social surface. As such he can neither be a complete symbol, nor a fully realised character whose every action is explained in terms of motives and causes. The 'changeling', therefore, the alien being, not only moves between the two societies shown in the novel, that of the urban poor and that of the respectable 'altruistic', middle class, but he also becomes a focus, for those of heightened perception, of the uneasy conjunction of two dimensions of existence, providing a perspective which it is both easier and safer to ignore. And so Charlie Forbes, abandoning his attempts to do good, returns to a world of relative morality, while Tom, abandoning his own morality of safety, moves into a dimension of extreme and absolute acts. Neither course, however, is seen as offering a complete solution to the complexities of existence.

By thus bringing together two worlds in the novel, that of social reality

which is the subject matter of realism, with the vision of absolutes in a dimension outwith the confines of that reality, Jenkins keeps his readers in a state of uncertainty both as to the type of moral behaviour he is advocating and to the kind of fiction which he is writing. His general perspective on morality itself, however, is made evident; through the uncertainty he creates he leads the reader into sharing the desire for moral absolutes yet simultaneously becoming aware of the impossibility of realising such absolutes within the confines of a circumstantial reality.

Jenkins' manipulation of the conventions of realism, however, has caused some confusion amongst critics and reviewers who, recognising his interest in moral issues, try to relate his outlook to that of a relative and humanist moral perspective; in the process they also tend to assume the realism of his novels. Yet in trying to see him in this way certain elements of his novels then begin to cause disquiet. Most critics initially assume that the solidity of the world about which Jenkins writes is indisputable. As early reviewers comment: 'How well Mr Jenkins knows these people';[26] 'Mr Jenkins has performed the near-miracle of making her credible';[27] and, 'One can rely on finding a vigour and freshness of imagination that needs no tricks of angled or superficial contrivance.'[28] More recently, and perhaps even more surprisingly, his work has been described as: 'characterised by a classically pure concentration on theme, on the development of a psychological and moral predicament in a specific milieu... Robin Jenkins' fiction thus has

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26. 'Problems of Adaptation', Scotsman, 26 July 1956, p.11.

27. 'New Fiction', The Times, 26 July 1956, p.11.

28. 'Limitations of Sympathy', Scotsman, 13 March 1958, p.8.

much in common with the earlier Naturalists and Determinists, though without their frequent diffuseness.[29] How then can these interpretations of his work be reconciled with the subjectivity of perception, the shifting nature of character and the mutabilities of reality, which can also be found in his fiction, and how does his work relate to the theories of realist conventions? In order to answer both questions, I suggest that it is useful first to examine one of his apparently most 'realist' novels, and then to consider the theoretical implications of his techniques.

Guests of War

Of all Jenkins' novels Guests of War (1956)[30] appears closest to the format of a traditional realist novel fashionable in the 1950's. Expansive, discursive, it is based on a real incident - the evacuation of eight hundred women and children from the slums of Gowburgh (Glasgow/ Edinburgh) to a small middle class town in the Scottish Borders. The subject obviously offers plenty of scope for Jenkins' ironic humour, in exposing pretension, revealing social friction, showing class and family divisions. Contemporary reviews praise the novel for its evocation of time and place, his 'solidly drawn Scottish characters' and his 'memorable' central figure, Bell McShelvie, mother of a large family from one of the poorer homes who emerges as a source of strength for the other woman while guiltily rejoicing in her escape to the country from city slums.[31] Yet one reviewer also expresses concern that the novel remains 'obstinately incomplete' asking: 'Is it enough merely to present, however robustly, a slice of life, and leave it there?'[32]; another complains

29. Paul Binding, 'Ambivalent Patriot', New Edinburgh Review, 53 (February, 1981), 20-22, p.20.

30. Robin Jenkins, Guests of War (London, 1956). All page references are to this edition.

31. 'Home and Away', Glasgow Herald, 2 August 1956, p.3.

32. 'Problems of Adaptation', Scotsman, 26 July 1956, p.11.

that Jenkins: 'misses the more obvious and, it must be confessed, more entertaining opportunities his subject affords ..',[33] while a third points out that: 'Perhaps Mrs McShelvie's powers of philosophical self-analysis are occasionally expanded to a point that strains credulity.'[34] Critics therefore appear slightly uneasy about the novel's realism, complaining of a lack of solidity in the characters and the absence of any real conclusion in the 'message'.

Part of the reviewers' uncertainty stems from the fact that the novel's main concerns lie in very diverse areas. Firstly it operates within a social context, examining characters within the conditions of their environment; and within this sphere a certain social determinism is evident. Yet the positioning of the characters is deceptive, for the large number of people involved prevents their individual personalities being developed very far; Jenkins therefore uses them as part of a pattern of shifting significances, with their various thematic functions blending into the general moral implication. And although it might be expected that the war would play a fairly large part in a novel about evacuation, the war itself, as in The Cone-Gatherers, is kept very much to one side; conditioning factors have only a limited role. Secondly, Jenkins has once again chosen a subject with obvious archetypal overtones. The trip of the children and their mothers into the country is seen as a search for perfection and escape; even the headmaster leading the expedition frequently compares himself to Moses or the Messiah. The reader is thus forced into constantly testing this mythic ideal against the social reality. And thirdly, Jenkins creates two characters who

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33. 'New Fiction', The Times, 26 July 1956, p.11.

34. 'Home and Away', Glasgow Herald, 2 August 1956, p.3.

are shown as capable of envisioning an alternative dimension to existence, and whose successes and failures are often symptomatic of the reader struggling with the novel's morality. Bell McShelvie and the young schoolteacher Mr Roy thus provide Jenkins with identifiable, albeit fallible, mouthpieces.

Within the social milieu of the novel Jenkins takes certain characters and reveals how they have been moulded to an extent by their environment; he then removes them to another context in which such determinism can no longer fully operate. Once conventional social mores are lost, morality must find a different level on which to function. Meg Aitchison, Bell McShelvie's friend, is a good example of this process. Liveliest and most aggressive of the slum dwellers, described as having 'accepted her lot', and reached 'a faith in her own worth', (p.7) her departure from Gowburgh reveals her behaviour there to have been constructed as a necessary means of survival. Once she is removed from this struggle she can no longer face the threat of her husband's infidelity or her own danger from cancer. More importantly, perhaps, she is unable to cope with what she sees as the reality of her own self. At the end of the novel she realises that in the absence of conditioning factors her 'true self' is unknown; she can only be judged in terms of the facade she had created for herself. Thus the others believe that the tears shown as real grief for Bell were surely: 'coming from the wild jocular side of her nature.' (p.276)

Within the novel this process of 'defamiliarisation' holds good for most of the characters, although in varying degrees, as they are shown gradually losing the social personae they had so carefully established

in Gowburgh. Langrigg, the border town, is not only presented as an up-market alternative to their usual social environment - although much of the novel's humour stems from its original depiction as such - but also as a void; an alien, unfamiliar world in which established rules can no longer function. Thus Archie Campbelton, the schoolteacher who sees himself as an elegant, sardonic cynic, cannot cope with the real situational ironies with which he is presented; his pose is gradually revealed, not as detachment, but as a genuine inability to participate in human activity, a result of his innate selfishness. The novel continually sets up ideals in this way, then reveals them either to be false or unattainable within reality. The reader is made aware of this process both through the characters' consciousness of their own failures to achieve perfectability, and through our access to the series of shifting significations and revealing conjunctions in which the characters are placed.

Of all the characters in the novel, Bell McShelvie and Mr Roy are most central to its themes; a consideration of the presentation of their individual characters is therefore necessary before assessing their roles in the general scheme. Bell McShelvie, although an apparently 'ordinary' woman from Gowburgh, is shown as responding most favourably to the escape into the country, achieving more than her counterparts, in that she becomes a natural leader for the women, but also suffering more than anyone when her favourite son, Sammy, is killed in an accident. Retaining a belief in aiming high, she is convinced that people can 'transcend the dreary ugliness' of their lives (p.8); yet she is also conscious of the constraints and banalities of everyday existence which act as a barrier to such transcendence. Watching a small mongrel in

the city, for example, she views it as a victim of society: 'It yelped and squirmed into the wall of a high tenement when a lorry rattled by; perhaps its lameness had been caused by one.' (p.7) Yet her philosophy of social determinism does not prevent her from demanding that it make a stand against circumstances: 'Never, wee black dog, whine for mercy.' Combining a stoical accepting of struggle, she can also appreciate the value of ideals - although always recognising that survival entails compromise and the forgetting of ideals. Ironically, once she assumes a position of leadership, it is her capacity for endurance that makes her a heroine amongst the other women. Bell, however, recognises at that point just how fall short she falls of her own, and their ideals. The climactic point of recognition for her comes when she has failed to realise her ambition of climbing to the top of the mountain outside the little town. Half-way up, she has to abandon her attempt, and realises the extent of her own limitations: 'When in dusk by the wobbling gate she turned and gazed up at the darkened hill she no longer saw defeat or disappointment, but only a necessary resolution.' (p.286) Bell has been compared, by Alastair Thompson and Douglas Gifford, to Chris Guthrie and Jeanie Deans;[35] certainly the hillside scene has overtones of A Scots Quair, and thinking Scottish heroines are few and far between. However, it is unlikely that 'necessary resolution' is an ideal that would appeal much to either of the other two characters, who both aim for more specific goals. Bell's ideals remain so vague that the struggle for and acknowledgement of them remains in itself a point of definition and an achievement.

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35. The comment made by Alastair R. Thompson in 'Faith and Love: An examination of some themes in the novels of Robin Jenkins', New Saltire, no.3 (Spring, 1962), 57-64, p.64, is reiterated by Douglas Gifford in 'Scottish Fiction since 1945', Scottish Writers and Writing, ed. Norman Wilson (Edinburgh, 1977), 11-28, p.19.

Mr Roy, the schoolteacher, is another character dissatisfied with the limitations of existence who also ends up accepting a 'necessary resolution', confining his idealistic ambitions to the opportunities provided by his finally joining the airforce, and acknowledging the force of circumstances which prevented him from achieving his aims in Gowburgh or Langrigg. Telling scruple to 'go to hell' (p.93), going by instinct rather than principle, he nevertheless soon becomes aware that such heroics have little material effect upon the environment or its inhabitants. Bell and Mr Roy, although sharing an awareness of the novel's main themes of idealism and resolution, dislike and at times resent each other; it is possible, in fact, to see them as representing two different options presented by the author. Bell, in spite of her aspirations, remains firmly rooted in the social reality around her and returns to it, after her flight into a dream of country life. Struggling through the vissicitudes of reality, she recognises that many of her ideals offered only the illusion of escape; by the novel's conclusion she seems trapped in her hard-won philosophy of a 'necessary resolution.' By contrast, Edgar Roy appears to be a figure from adventure fiction, recklessly willing to push back the boundaries of reality into an anarchic world of fantasy. It is he who champions the cause of the Baxter brothers - the two pupils who seem closest to the 'Gourlay' element of grotesque in the novel: 'If Sam McShelvie was one of the elect, Willie Baxter was one of the damned.' (p.38) Flouting both the school authorities and the Gowburgh community, he decides that these two should be 'saved':

> Roy had consulted nobody when making up his mind that this flitting to Langrigg might be a turning-point for the Baxters. In any case, Gowburgh itself under the dark licensed conditions of war, would certainly mean

> final ruin for them. Soon they would be at the difficult stage of turning from boys to men: regeneration or lifelong depravity was ahead of them. Perhaps it was sentimental to hope that the fields and hills of Langrigg would purify what the streets and backcourts of Gowburgh had helped to pollute; but it was just as sentimental surely to believe that out of the brutality and bloodshed of war would emerge kindness and brotherhood. (p.39)

Within such a romantic vision Roy can create for himself the identity of a crusader. However, like Bell, he too ends up trapped in the identity he has worked so hard to establish. Indeed, even the cynical Campbelton warns him of this;

> You are a young man, Edgar: belief in the perfectability of your species becomes you; it is the Red Cross on your shield. Alas, swords plunged into the blatant beast of human nature break off in fragments until only the hilts are left. If not thrown away these turn into jewels, with which the crusaders' souls are bought. Throw away that hilt in time, Edgar: face the world empty-handed; you still then may prevail. (p.41)

Roy transmits the image of himself as a crusading hero so successfully that the people of Langrigg and Gowburgh can soon see him in no other light. Involved with the local 'young lady', Miss Cargill, he also assumes the mantle of romantic hero; entering the airforce, his role takes over to such an extent that he need never think deeply about the implications of the mask he has assumed. He too has become a more distant character by the end of the novel.

Presented as victims of their self-images neither character offers a resolution to the contradictions of the novel; for the novel itself is centred around this notion of image, self-image and symbolic significance. Within the apparently fixed realism of the novel's world, the main interest lies in the potential of characters to move within a series of shifting significations, acquiring meaning for others and - occasionally - for themselves. Thus Bell and Roy come to represent to the reader a potential striving for ideals, while their inaccessability to the other

characters makes them seen as representatives of actual ideals. Mr Scoullar, for example, brooding on his colleague, recognises for a moment the nature of his power: 'How in Christ's name, thought Scoullar, could such a man be called upon to preserve Christianity and civilisation from barbarism? ... Roy, he knew, might walk through the mucks of depravity, but he would also soar into the clear sky, in his silver aeroplane, and grapple with the dragons of the enemy.' (p.29) Scoullar dislikes Roy, but the strength of his language, and of the image, implies that a certain truth is being evoked. And Bell is presented as a similar figure of speculation: 'Those few, who divined the true source of Bell's revivification were more mystified than all the rest whose guesses were more humdrum.' (p.238) Yet the language of metaphysical searching for significance - used, of course, by the narrator - can also be applied to Bell and Roy's visions of others, for these two are also seen as being on moral quests. Mr Roy, for example, reaches a heightened moral sensibility through a view of Mrs Ross and her many children:

> Gazing after her, Roy had in his vision too the large red-sandstone West Kirk, with its fine steeple; but it was she and her children who brought the awe into his mind. Humanity, he had always known, was many-sided; it was comic, sad, wise, foolish, chaste, lustful, generous, greedy, sincere, hypocritical, and so on to the exhaustion of his vocabulary; but there was another element, not so easily named, there all the time possibly but seen only in glimpses, and when seen, as now in Mrs Ross, making all the vastness of churches intelligible. (p.104)

Bell also experiences a moment of heightened moral perception, although of the opposite side to existence, when she looks at the boy Gordon Aldersyde, whom she believes may have been responsible for the death of her son:

> She stared at him, trying to see him as a child, only months older than Sammy, and hardly any brighter at sums. She could not see him as such. Now he was an agent of destiny or of God or Satan. Guilt of some kind attached to those chosen for such purpose: it was inconceivable that they were altogether blameless. (p.259)

Here too the moral perspective of the character moves beyond the surface of a normally limited conception of 'reality' into a more extreme vision.

Roy and Bell, however, do not operate in isolation, but are part of a revolving pattern of significations, with the interaction of the different characters being used to point both to ideals, and to their contradiction by reality. Thus the Headmaster may see himself as Moses, leading his flock to the promised land, which is certainly one of the novel's more ironic implications, but the same man is incapable of leadership, terrified of 'the incompressability of human material.' (p.33) Mrs Ross and Mrs Aldersyde likewise revolve in an ironic examination of the ideal of motherhood. Despite her easy-go-lucky lethargy, Mrs Ross is shown as possessing an innate goodness, partly because - a favourite theme of Jenkins - of her lack of comprehension of the subtleties of evil: 'Thus with absolute humility claiming her present situation to have been the occasion of God's special foresight and wisdom before the evolution of the stars, she set sail along the main street, followed by her flotilla.' (p.104) Although we may pity her homeless state, we can also see her as an ironic comment on the theory of predestination when wholeheartedly and unthinkingly applied. Nevertheless, the image also operates as an affirmation of spiritual dignity, even if her moral and spiritual superiority gains her little recognition or respect within a relative, social reality. Mrs Aldersyde, in contrast, determined to get the most out of the world of circumstantial

reality through using a facade of morality, is shown to be trapped by her belief in grace: 'It was as if she took God's bounty to be limited, like a handful of sweets; and when so many had been given to her, how could there be enough for anyone else?' (p.170) And yet, as events within the novel combine to destroy Mrs Aldersyde's superiority, she too is allowed to have a momentary glimpse of true grace, through the kindness shown her by Bell McShelvie - although Bell herself is still aware of inadequacies in her own spiritual attitude: 'As Mrs McShelvie listened, she laid her hand on her neighbour's head and hushed her, as one would an infant that did not yet know language, but knew already fear and pain and an overwhelming need of love.' (p.220)

However, the lynchpin in this revolving pattern of shifting symbols is provided by the figure of Sammy McShelvie, Bell's son and, according to Roy, 'one of the elect'. (p.38) Like Calum in The Cone-Gatherers much of Sammy's 'goodness' is due to his naïvete, yet to Roy, Sammy, 'seemed to him to live in some hollow oak in a perpetually sunlit wood haunted by benevolent elves.' (p.36) Becoming a focus of moral delight for the other characters, including the family with whom he is billeted- 'they were completely captivated, by his immunity to ridicule of even the friendliest sort, by his gratitude unadulterated with shyness or calculation, and above all by his innocence' (p.112) - Sammy also provides an ironic and tragic illustration of the precept that only the good die young. Sammy's innocence, however, depends very much on his total acceptance of whatever rules or modes of behaviour are imposed upon him. (He remains, in fact, a perfect illustration of Piaget's theory of the 'moral realism' stage of development.) By establishing Sammy as a symbol of pure good, Jenkins points towards the potential realisation of

moral absolutes; his death, however, would seem to indicate that such absolutism will not work as a modus vivendi within a relative world. As a martyr Sammy provides a vision of goodness that has no place in this reality, thus reinforcing the contradictions of idea and reality present throughout the novel. The fact that other characters appreciate him in much the way the reader does also allows Jenkins to indicate the essential human desire - present in the reader as well - to impose symbolic significance on objects and characters in an attempt to bring some absolutes into our circumscribed and muddled world.

By moving significance from character to character, and treating each with the same narrative tone, Jenkins avoids the authorial persona being identified with any single point of view. He also prevents the reader from developing too strong a sympathy with any one character, since a rigid desire to adhere to a single fixed identity is seen as a form of submission to the constraints of reality. However, although his approach thus moves away from the conventions of realism, he cannot depart totally from realist techniques since a central theme in the novel is the effect a solid reality has on human ideals; the gradual mitigation of aims and ambitions according to circumstances. Yet co-existing with this theme is Jenkins' concern with the human search and desire for absolute symbols and extreme ideals; this moral perspective inevitably also denies him a total commitment to realism. He can therefore be seen as maintaining a very delicate balance between two world views and two forms - a balance, however, which seems the only possible means of reflecting his complex and contradictory view of human morality and of conveying the essential and continuing confrontation between ideals and reality which is the central theme of Guests of War.

Although Jenkins' deviations from the realist novel may therefore appear slight, it is worth examining their technical implications before moving on to a further consideration of his thematic concerns in the later novels. It is useful first of all to consider the aspects of his techniques which appear closest to the conventions of realism. One of these would appear to be his use of detail in order to create the impression of a solid and describable reality, a world of things. Gérard Genette, in Narrative Discourse, expands on Platonic precepts in describing such a method, taking as his example, the descriptive detail of 'the long-sounding shore':

> The long-sounding shore serves no purpose other than to let us understand that the narrative mentions it only because it is there, and because the narrator, abdicating his function of choosing and dictating the narrative, allows himself to be governed by 'reality', by the presence of what is there and what demands to be 'shown'. A useless and contingent detail, it is the medium par excellence of the referential illusion and therefore of the mimetic effect: it is a connotator of mimesis. 36

Apparently contingent information is very much a feature of Jenkins' work, and adds to the impression of a describable and solid 'reality' in which the majority of characters see themselves as operating. Details appear to be incorporated because they are 'there', without any apparent principle of selection. However, as can be seen from The Cone-Gatherers, The Changeling and - to a lesser extent - Guests of War, such extraneous details are frequently used to carry a symbolic, although temporary, significance. The image of the contraceptive in The Changeling provides an ideal example: it achieves a symbolic status in the eyes of Charlie Forbes and, although the reader is allowed to mock his spurious search for significance in such apparently mundane circumstances, the image remains impressed on our minds and becomes a symbol to us of the

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36. Gérard Genette, Narrative Discourse, translation Jane E. Levin (Oxford, 1980), p.165.

novel's themes. The momentary significance of such details emphasise the shifting nature of human interpretations of reality, mocking the human search and desire for absolutes. Yet at the same time such devices also succeed in pointing the reader in the direction of potential absolutes. Jenkins can therefore be seen as creating two domains within his novels - one is the world of social reality, limited, solid and circumscribed, while the other is the dimension of absolutes, of extremes which are unattainable for the majority of humankind. Within the fiction the only means of bridging the gap between the two domains appears to be through symbols which have a function in both realms. Yet the final irony of a Jenkins' novel is contained in the fact that such symbols are also shown to be temporary, to be shifting and, ultimately, untrustworthy; they cannot, therefore, be successfully used to bridge that unbridgeable distance between two worlds. The novels' symbols too, like all the devices of conventional literary realism used by Jenkins, are ultimately undermined.

In this complex deviation from the initial impression of a straightforwardly realist technique, Jenkins offers a useful testing ground for recent literary theory which has been directed towards an understanding of the mechanics of literary realism. In addition to his adaptation of symbols, his general manipulations of the narrative function can be illuminated by considering it in the light of recent critical debate. Once again Genette's comments provide a useful starting point:

> The strictly mimetic textual factors, it seems to me, come down to those two data already implicit in Plato's comments: the quantity of narrative information (a more developed or more <u>detailed</u> narrative) and the

> absence (or minimal presence) of the informer - in other words, of the narrator. 37

Genette refers here to the balance of mimesis and diagesis to be found in different types of narrative; a conventional realist novel relies fairly heavily on mimesis. And this could be said of Jenkins' work. There appear to be very few narratorial intrusions or comments upon the action; the narrator is usually only present as an 'informer', and would, therefore, appear to be involved in a process of mimesis. Yet, as we have seen from looking at the individual novels, this mimetic function is, at times, something of an illusion. However, in order to consider fully Jenkins' use of the narrator, some examination of the so-called 'classic realist' text is required. In James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word, Colin McCabe argues that in the classic realist text inverted commas are used as a means of concealing the important distinction between the 'saying' and the 'said', the enouncing and the enounced, and as such falsely implies that the area outwith the inverted commas is the product of no articulation:

> This unwritten text can then attempt to staunch the haemorrhage of interpretations threatened by the material of language. Whereas other discourses within the text are considered as materials which are open to reintrepretation, the narrative discourse functions simply as a window on reality. This relationship between discourses can be taken as the defining feature of the classic realist text. The normal criterion for realism (whether a discourse is fully adequate to the real) merely accepts the conception of the real which the classic realist text proposed for its own project... The classic realist text should not, however, be understood in terms of some homology to the order of things but as a specific hierarchy of discourses which place the reader in a position of dominance with regard to the stories and characters. 38

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37. Narrative Discourse, p.166.

38. Colin McCabe, James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word (London, 1978), pp.15-16.

At first glance Jenkins would appear to adhere closely to McCabe's description of the 'closed', classic realist text. However, I suggest that, in fact, Jenkins is subtly exploiting the 'relationship between discourses' in his novels. David Lodge, responding to McCabe's analysis of Middlemarch as the 'classic realist text', has pointed out that certain grey areas exist within the levels of discourse and that interpretation is not so 'closed' as might appear.[39] Discussing passages of apparently diagetic narrative he points out that the voice of the narrator may in fact give way at times to the 'voice' of one of the characters, thus moving into mimesis, although without any punctuational indications to this effect. Building on Lodge's perception of subtleties within McCabe's definition, it is also possible to see Jenkins as operating within a grey area between the 'hierarchy' of discourses. At first it would appear that Jenkins uses mimesis in the dialogue of his novels, and in the depiction of characters' thought processes. But, as we have seen, these thought processes are frequently translated into the language of the narrative voice, a language dominated by the novel's moral concerns. Characters can thus 'think' in language and in terms that may not be 'natural' or 'real' for them. It could be argued that this dominance of the narrative voice would be a reinforcement of the 'closed' text but, because Jenkins has concealed it behind a facade of mimesis, it actually has the effect of unsettling the reader's confidence in the characters' perceptions and in the apparent fixity of the 'realist' world of the novel; it thus had the paradoxical effect of opening up the potential for interpretation.

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39. David Lodge, 'Middlemarch and the Idea of the Classic Realist Text', The Nineteenth Century Novel: Critical Essays and Documents, ed. Arnold Kettle (London, 1981), 218-238.

Jenkins therefore operates on the borderlines of realism, exploring the boundaries between different dimensions of 'reality', and locating his moral concerns in the grey area between two moral philosophies. 'Realism' as a literary technique can be seen as 'fixing' the world it evokes, with the very act of description tending by its nature towards stasis. A movement away from realism opens up the potential for change in the fictional world, creating fluidity and the possibility of revolution. Jenkins, however, does not move too far in this direction; his novels are concerned with examining the potential for absolutes and for ideals within the constraints of a circumstantial reality, so the fixity of literary realism is as necessary to him as are the attempts to break through the barriers it imposes. It is in the conjunction of the two territories that his moral interests lie and his fictional techniques are formulated accordingly.

CHAPTER FIVE

ROBIN JENKINS: THE MORAL QUEST

While the novels discussed in the previous chapter illustrate Jenkins' own particular relationship with the conventions of literary realism, they also indicate the way in which so many of his novels contain almost obsessional reworkings of the same themes - explorations of the nature of moral absolutes and examinations of the role of ideals within human reality. In this chapter, therefore, I will examine these thematic concerns in greater detail by looking at some of his later, and, I believe, finest novels; these novels, Dust on the Paw, A Very Scotch Affair, A Would-be Saint and Fergus Lamont, continue and develop his experiments with the limits of the realist novel.

Dust on the Paw

In the late fifties and early sixties Robin Jenkins spent two years each teaching in Kabul, Afghanistan, Barcelona, Spain, and in Sabah, Malaysia. His experiences abroad provided him with stimulating new material for his fiction, and Some Kind of Grace, published in 1960, was the first in a line of novels departing from his previous Scottish settings and moving to more exotic locations. For the next ten years the strange mixtures of colonial and native races in Malaysia and Afghanistan allowed him to develop further the themes of moral alienation and the limits of human understanding which were central to the concerns of his Scottish works.

Dust on the Paw[1] is by far his most ambitious work of this period. Like Guests of War it has epic overtones, using changing perspectives to deal with a multiplicity of characters. Integrating the more overtly symbolic qualities of The Cone-Gatherers with the more consciously realist

1. Robin Jenkins, Dust on the Paw (London, 1961). All page references are to this edition.

framework of <u>Guests of War</u> and <u>The Changeling</u>, and exploiting to the full the unfamiliarity of the location, it also indicates an advance in Jenkins' use of symbols. With its abundance of apparently incidental details, it capitalises on minor events, imbuing them with symbolic significance. Yet in spite of these symbolic overtones, and the continually changing quantity and quality of information supplied by the narrator, Jenkins also succeeds in maintaining the <u>impression</u> of a conventionally realist novel.

Set in Nurania - a country bearing obvious resemblance to Afghanistan - the novel focuses on the ambitions and ideals of a Nuranian highschool science teacher, Abdul Wahab. Once it becomes known that he is planning to marry an Englishwoman, he is thrust into the conflicts and tensions within the British expatriate community there. Having met Miss Johnstone when studying in England, he has invited her out to Nurania, to give her the opportunity to assess her new environment before deciding whether or not to go ahead with the marriage. Her planned visit of course, immediately calls for decisions on the part of the expatriate community as well; should they welcome her to the country or warn her away from it? The situation presents ample opportunities for Jenkins to examine the hypocrisy of moral and racial attitudes, as well as cultural differences. The plot is made even more interesting by the fact that Nurania is in the throes of a process of increasing national liberation, cultural and political. The focus of this process is on the rumours that the shaddry - the all-enveloping robes worn by Nuranian women - will be abolished at the forthcoming religious festival or Jeshan; and the climax of the novel comes with this symbolic derobing, which signifies a major step into the twentieth century.

Throughout the novel Jenkins emphasises the tensions in both the characters and the situation by his striking use of symbols. Using minor incidents, little moments, he points towards the wider dimensions of a situation, indicating ideals and ambitions that have no place within a world of pragmatic moral relativity. These symbolic pointers to another dimension of existence which cannot be described but only indicated, thus acquire a significance beyond their function in terms of the general plot. And here elements of the sjuzhet can be seen to conflict with the potentialities of the mythic structure to which such moments gesture. An incident near the beginning of the novel illustrates this technique. Bob Gillie, the Consul, is presented with an American cigarette packet which the Ambassador had found on his front lawn. Although obviously displeased by his finding, the Ambassador offers no explanation of his reaction and the packet becomes an enigma to the rest of his staff. Is it an anti-litter protest, is it seen as a security threat, or is it perhaps simply a puzzle to test their own intelligence? The apparently insignificant object thus assumes gigantic proportions in their minds - proportions which are not wholly diminished on discovering that to the Ambassador it is both a manifestation and a justification of his anti-American prejudices, a symbol for him as well as for them. To the reader it stands for more than any of these single explanations; the incident itself becomes symbolic of the barriers which exist to human interpretations and rationalisations, exposing the flaws of each character and indicating how little each man knows or understands his fellows. And the incident also mocks human attempts to seek a greater meaning for this mundane object, which in themselves give rise to Jenkins' usual mockery of the reader's own search for moments of major significance within the text.

By showing the reverberations of one minor event upon another in this way Jenkins gradually draws in the complete cast of characters: Winfield, the flippant and sarcastic administrator, Wint, deliberately obtuse, Bob Gillie, with more insight than is credited to his slow exterior, Mrs Mossacur, with her easily swayed ideas of the truth, and Harold Moffatt. Next to Wahab, Moffat is the novel's most disturbing influence; a teacher at the local Nuranian University, married to a Chinese wife and uncertain about having children with her, his principles are tested more than any of the other characters - mainly because he has laid claim to more principles than them. Lan, his wife, despite being possessed of genuine good intentions, also undergoes a process of testing and is finally forced, like everyone else,into a compromise of her own creation. Tunnelling into the novel through one character then another, Jenkins finally introduces us to the central figure, Abdul Wahab. Although we first see him through the suspicious eyes of the British community, we are soon allowed to move fully into his perception of the situation. In Wahab Jenkins creates one of his most fascinating characters; a man who continually ponders the nature of truth itself as well as the paradoxes of morality, he nevertheless maintains a keen awareness of the necessity of deceit and of the propensity which compels him towards immorality.

The incident which gives the novel its title is, in fact, centred around this question of 'truth' which causes so many problems for Wahab. Having been shown different facets of each character, the contradictions and compromises in their lifestyles brought to the fore by the presence of Abdul and the advent of Miss Johnstone,the reader is revealed the heart of the moral dilemma in a dialogue between Abdul Wahab and the

Principal of the school, whom he is about to supersede. Both men have just been informed that the former is to take over the latter's position, a transition which encapsulates one of the novel's central issues in its move from old to new, from age to youth, from the weak to the suddenly powerful. This transition, however, is neither easy nor direct. Individual perspectives on the change alter quickly between the individuals involved, as the dialogue between the two men illustrates. At the time of the conversation both men are unhappily in exactly the same position since, due to Nuranian administration, both have received their letters of promotion and demotion at the same time. We are told that Wahab 'took note several times of that efficient but nevertheless unwise simultaneity' (p.222), and his observation reveals a pattern within the novel which indicates the divergence from conventional realism. Jenkins is not content to exploit coincidence while concealing its presence, in the more conventional realist manner, but actively draws attention to the fact that Laura Johnstone's arrival from England takes place shortly after Mrs Mohebzda, the only other English woman married to a Nuranian, finally leaves her husband, while both events are shown to coincide with the unveiling of the shaddry. Attempts to establish relative assessments of the situation are thus disrupted by this apparently arbitrary patterning.

The conversation between Wahab and the Principal becomes a pattern for the novel in other ways too, for the roles of the participants in the dialogue and their individual access to the truth is shown to change frequently - a process which all the characters experience at some point in the novel. Wahab initially attempts to ignore his ex-superior's whining protests, remembering the Nuranian attitude that life should be seen in terms of

one fly leaving a heap of camel dung while another immediately alights saying: 'It's my turn now.' (p.223) Yet, as he listens to the complaints of Mussein, he begins to envisage his promotion in political terms: a continual entanglement in the processes of the powerful. As he grows more anxious Mussein becomes more philosophical. Despite the similarities of their situation - both fellow-countrymen, both exploited - their minds fail to meet in any kind of 'truth' just as their words fail to communicate. Wahab illustrates the advantages of progress with examples of 'Sputniks and hydrogen bombs and television', but fails to make his point:

> Mussein opened his bloodshot eyes. "I know that television is wonderful", he muttered.
> "I have seen it, and it is not wonderful," said Wahab testily. "It is a toy. I used it as a symbol. It represents the twentieth century; far too much in Nurania still represents the first century. (p.224)

A basic disparity in their views of the world is thus revealed. Mussein is a student of Persian literature; he cannot see symbols in the terms of Wahab, the scientist. Nevertheless, the lines which he quotes from Furduzi to illustrate his situation are soon adopted by Wahab for himself: 'I am dust on the paw of the lion,' he muses, (p.225) and throughout the scene both men are affected at times by the pathos and heroism of that line. At one point the position of the dust holds attraction, while at another the role of the lion has more appeal. Wahab may rationalise: 'Be dust as you wish, Mussein; but do not protest when others prefer to be the lion,' (p.225) and may mock: 'Wahab laughed: it was amusing when the dust tried to impede the lion' (p.225) yet, as the conflict continues, he becomes aware of incongruities in his own position; the lion's tail: 'just wouldn't stay taut and proudly curled; no, it

kept wanting to droop and trail in the dust.' (p.226) He even goes so far as to gaze at the dust on his shoes: 'and for a foolish, passionate, heart-sinking moment felt envious of it. To be the lion's paw meant prowling and pouncing dangerously, and meeting in conflict other lions, older and fiercer.' (p.227) The symbol of dust on the lion's paw, therefore, is not in itself fixed and may easily be translated or adapted to suit different characters and situations.

In this example we can see how Jenkins adapts the use of symbols to convey his own moral perspective; the reader is asked to accept the image of 'dust on the paw' as symbolic, but is also shown the deceptiveness of such a symbol as Wahab and Mussein manipulate it to suit their own points of view. The symbol-making process in which the novel is engaged is therefore both valued and mocked. And Jenkins' idiosyncratic use of symbols can be clarified if we compare it to a more conventional approach in a novel which bears certain similarities to Dust on the Paw in its exploration of conflict between native and colonial populations surrounding a forthcoming marriage: E.M. Forster's A Passage to India.[2] In A Passage to India certain symbolic moments and incidents - the 'ghost' which hits the Nawab Bahadur's car, the transformation through chant of Mrs Moore into Esmiss Esmoor, and the incidents in the Marabar caves themselves - all come to acquire a range of meanings for both characters and readers. Yet, although such symbols are enigmatically vague, the novel nevertheless assumes that a definite significance does exist behind these moments, even if it is not fully comprehended; and this significance has a recognisable function in expanding perceptions of the

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2. E.M. Forster, A Passage to India, ed. Oliver Stallybrass, The Abinger Edition 6, (London, 1978). All page references are in this edition.

'real' world in which the characters exist. This solidity of the symbols used is emphasised by a consistency evident in the images which refer to them. When Mrs Moore emerges from the caves, overcome by the echo which reduces everything to 'Boum', we are told:

> Even the striking of a match starts a little worm coiling which is too small to complete a circle, but is eternally watchful. And if several people talk at once an overlapping howling noise begins, echoes generate echoes, and the cave is stuffed with a snake composed of small snakes, which writhe independently.
>
> (p.139)

Later, as Mrs Moore reflects on the nature of the experience, the same serpent image is used to describe her experience:

> What had spoken to her in that scoured-out cavity of the granite? What dwelt in the first of the caves? Something very old and very small. Before time, it was before space also. Something snub-nosed, incapable of generosity - the undying worm itself ... Visions are supposed to entail profundity, but wait till you get one, dear reader! The abyss also may be petty, the serpent of eternity made of maggots.
>
> (p.198)

Through the reiterated images of worm and serpent Forster gives the symbol a concrete identity, rarely found in any of Jenkins' symbols, which tend to be contingent to the situation and the character within it.

Two other main differences between the two writers may be discerned from this example of the Marabar caves. Firstly, through his use of the snake image, Forster relates the image very specifically to India - and to an alien country with a mysterious past, stretching back 'before time'. The European characters may therefore attribute the moments of insight to their encounter with this strange culture, but can then return with their new perspective into the recognisable moral context of

English liberal humanism and a familiar society. In Jenkins' novel the symbolic elements cannot be so securely located within the realm of the 'foreign'; what the characters in a Jenkins' novel find so alarming about moments of symbolic insight is their new awareness of another dimension which continues to co-exist with their previous conception of a limited 'reality'. Moreover, with this expanded perception they are left in a greater uncertainty as to ways of dealing with this ever present threat to their everyday life. In Forster's novel, in contrast, the effect of the moment of symbolic perception can be translated into direct behavioural patterns in the characters' lives as they emerge out of the incident; thus, after her encounter with the echo, Mrs Moore becomes 'sunk in apathy and cynicism' (p.149) and is seen as emanating 'resentment'. (p.190) Jenkins' characters, however, are unable to apply their moments of insight to any previous reality in this way, since the effect of these insights has been to destroy all their confidence in the boundaries of that 'real' world. And since the symbols in a Jenkins' novel never do attain the status of a consistent image, and are therefore much less reliable, it becomes impossible even for the reader to gain any confidence in them. Rather they become part of the characters' own desires and needs to seek significance without achieving any independent solidity within the novel.

In Dust on the Paw, this technique of oblique and shifting implication through symbols also reflects the novel's central themes: not only does it support the attitude towards lying and the truth which is seen as typically Nuranian, but it also reveals the extent to which any apparent 'truth' is always, in some way or another, 'culture dependent'. Moreover, Jenkins uses his symbolic images to subtly reinforce issues and

attitudes explored by the novel's plot. The image of the fly on a heap of camel dung, for example, illustrates the element of change always present in life but, because the image in itself is a fairly unpleasant one, it also conveys a sense of disgust at the whole fickle business of life itself. Similarly, when Paula Wint is described leaving Lan's house in the heat of the day, having felt both ill at ease and morally under attack, we are told: 'Sweat poured down her face and body like shame'. (p.336) Here too the choice of phrase is not an innocent one; considering the scene that has just taken place, 'shame' presumably is the sensation which Paula is trying to suppress.

This method serves Jenkins in a two-fold way. Firstly it reinforces his reluctance to describe 'character' as if it were something fixed, which could be fully 'known'. By using oblique symbolic transference he conveys a sense of character as something essentially mixed and contradictory. As Bob Gillie, himself often unaware of his own insights, remarks: 'To be a lump of conceit, ambition and hypocrisy does not disqualify from being a human being.' (p.374) Symbols which indicate conflicting aspects of character, however, do not overtly threaten the fabric of realism created by Jenkins; the impression of literary realism as the dominant form remains. Symbolic details are also used by Jenkins to build up this impression of realism in description; as Genette suggests, minor and apparently incidental details reinforce the sense of the narrator describing what is 'there'. Jenkins, however, as we have seen in his earlier novels, also imbues such minor details with symbolic significance. And in Dust on the Paw he moves one step further, by highlighting the way in which the characters themselves seek significance in the minutiae of the world around them. Prince Naim, for

example, comes to see Laura as a symbol of Nurania's liberation; Gillie is determined to elucidate the significance of the cigarette packet; Mrs Mossaour resigns herself to seeing the rubbish dumps surrounding her school as being of some educational value: 'They kept the pampered children of the West aware that here was no suburb of Washington or London or Paris, but the unprivileged East.' (p.38) The characters also attempt to interpret small actions in a similar way. Thus when Abdul Wahab picks Naim's flowers, the Prince has to interpret his behaviour: 'Could it be that the strange wanton pulling of the beautiful flowers by Wahab was in some mysterious way symbolic and prophetic? Was Laura coming, not as Wahab's inspiration and counsellor, but as his destroyer?' (p.140) And by the end of the novel Wahab, perhaps the most trapped of all the characters by his searches for significance, deliberately tries to avoid seeing additional meanings in the scorpion which bars his path to Laura: 'The dilemma was about to weave him into his customary web of self-doubt when the insect scurried off into the grass of the ditch. Grateful to it, he stepped forward and rang the bell.' (p.364) Apart from adding to our view of the character and understanding of events, such moments also teach us how to read the novel, encouraging us as readers to seek significance in the details provided in the text.

Yet in the course of the novel we are also led to mock and distrust our own search for symbols that will apparently provide encapsulations of the 'truth'. In spite of his use of symbolic images, Jenkins still leaves the reader adrift in a sea of changing perspectives. Even the images used often point only to 'significance' itself, to a world in which an alternative dimension of meaning may be possible; the nature of this meaning is rarely elucidated. Indeed, the reader is forced to fall back on the consistency of the narrative voice as the only 'trustworthy' element within the text, holding together conversations in which no

communication, no common idea of 'truth' is shared by the participants, and remaining constant in a world in which no final guarantee of what is 'real' can be given. A conversation between Moffatt and Lan illustrates the ambiguity which can be created. Moffatt is the centre of the narrative at the beginning of the dialogue, we see through his eyes, yet when he is described as looking at a photograph, he seems unable to interpret his own thoughts: 'He looked at it for almost a minute. She knew more clearly than he did himself what his thoughts were.' (p.33) In the subsequent analysis of his thoughts, therefore, we cannot be certain whether Lan or Moffatt himself is interpreting his responses. This uncertainty is increased by the fact that the sentence above is separated from the analysis which follows - 'By gibing so bitterly against racial prejudice, Moffatt more than helped to keep it in existence, he also kept himself infected with it' (p.33) - by a purely descriptive account of the photograph in question. We are therefore unable to say whether the analysis is Moffatt admitting his faults or Lan assessing his character. Our only certainty must be the narrative voice through which both possible interpretations would be filtered. The concrete detail of the photograph is thus used in this exchange to confute the certainties of realism rather than to create any solid and interpretable 'reality'. Similarly, Jenkins frequently destroys our confidence in the credibility of one character after it has apparently been established, by showing him or her from another angle. We are led through the first few scenes of the novel, for example, with the perspective of Alan Wint, relying on his observations. However, we are then told that another character sees him as being possessed of a 'peculiar unawareness' (p.17), which hardly enhances our trust in his point of view. The general effect of such devices therefore, is the creation of a lacunae within

the novel - within the boundaries of a fixed and recognisable 'reality'.

This sense of lacunae is reinforced by discussions between the characters which point to inconsistencies and absences within their definitions of 'reality'. Wahab and Naim, for example, have a conversation about lying, which is governed by their contradictory thoughts on the nature of truth: Naim enquires about Laura:

> "Has she been here before?"
> "No, but I have described it to her."
> "Truthfully?"
> "As truthfully as I could. I admit I also spoke with enthusiasm. Why should I not? I love my country, though I am impatient with its faults. But do not for a moment think, Your Highness, as Mr Moffatt evidently thinks, that I deliberately deceived her with falsehoods." He spoke with intense conviction, although he knew he was telling lies. "As a scientist I must revere the truth. Is it true that Mr Moffatt is a poet?"
> "He writes poetry."
> "I thought that poets also revered the truth."
> "A different kind of truth perhaps."
> "Sir, there is only one kind of truth."
> "Do you think so?"
> "I do." Thought really he didn't ...
> Do you mind if I ask you some questions? No, don't give me sanction until I have warned you that you may consider them too personal and indeed too dangerous to answer."
> "Sir, I have nothing to hide." Another lie. He had as much as any man to hide. Did he not spend a good part of his mental life in hiding from himself?
>
> (p.126)

This exchange both postulates and denies that only one kind of truth exists. It forces relativity and human indeterminacy to extreme lengths until that which is absent - some kind of certainty, some absolute - emerges as the only solution to the problematics of the situation. However, although absolutes are desired they are also quite clearly impossible within the framework of this limited view of reality, fraught as it is with misunderstanding and ambiguity: the only kind of truth available to flawed humanity is that based on compromise and misconception, as is revealed in the conclusion of the exchange between Wahab and Mussein, the Principal:

> They drew back a little so that they could stare into each other's eyes. Each saw that the other had been, not lying, though what they had said was not quite true, but bravely with their dreams defying the poverty, not only of themselves but of their whole country. (p.192)

As this moment illustrates, although truth is culture-conditioned and never purely expressed in reality, it can be postulated as an ideal, which in itself calls on shared recognition. And it is this elusive aspect of truth as an absolute which Jenkins focuses on in the novel. The shedding of the shaddry is therefore a fitting climax, overshadowing the partial resolutions and compromises achieved by the individual characters. Although the shaddry has operated as a symbol of darkness throughout - Josh Bolton, armed with a gun and dressed in the long robes is: 'in potentiality the most sinister figure since the history of the world began,' (p.66) - and its shedding offers a moment of hope and liberation, it also operates on a more general level in relation to the novel's morality. Once the woman in the shaddry is revealed at Jeshan - 'She was an excitingly beautiful, exquisitely groomed, superbly dignified woman.' (p.383) - the essential mystery of the image is lost, as it becomes describable. By abandoning ambiguity it becomes part of a 'reality' composed of all that is definable, is concretely known to humankind; and after the moment of revelation, the absolute power of the image will be lost, as Nuranian women may now operate within the same 'reality' as their Western counterparts.

The characters, however, are shown as suffering from a lack of a security in a fixed and describable reality around them, and needing absolute moments which appear to offer a temporary resolution. Wahab, for example, can only sum up his experiences in a stream of images:

> Into his mind there flashed memories; some were expected, but others took him by surprise: himself approaching with such careful modesty and demeaning terrors the group of people waiting for him on the International School verandah; his father's bare feet; Laura's naked bosom; Mussein boasting about dancing in private with his wife; Moffatt's hand with the emptied whisky glass held up as if some kind of toast had just been drunk; the flowers in the taxi; Mrs Mossaour at the airport, with her sex purposely displayed like a peacock's tail; and Rasouf leading the boys in the silly act of rubbing their hands in the sterile dust.
>
> (p.358)

So, if Dust on the Paw can be summed up in a series of images similar to Wahab's attempt at encapsulating his experiences, it is because such images and symbols are the only resource at Jenkins' disposal which can help his attempt to name the unnamable or, at least, to point to the existence of an unnamable dimension beyond the boundaries of a conventionally envisaged social reality. In this respect his technique can be seen as an extension and intensification of the normal processes of reading, as described by Gabriel Josipovici:

> It is only so long as the book is being read, so long, that is, as the human imagination is travelling along the arteries of the labyrinth, that we are aware of the boundaries, and therefore of what lies beyond them. When that activity ceases we fall back into our old habits, and enter once more that real labyrinth, which is so deadly just because we are unaware of it as such. Closed, the book becomes an object among many in the room. Open and read, it draws the reader into tracing the confines of his own labyrinth and allows him to experience himself not as an object in the world but as the limits of his world. And, mysteriously, to recognise this is to be freed of these limits ... 3

Through creating the illusion of a commitment to realism as a technique but then avoiding the enclosed world which it creates, Jenkins can draw the reader's attention to the boundaries of realism and point beyond them, just as his novels challenge the accepted liberal humanist notions of what constitutes 'reality'.

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3. Gabriel Josipovici, The World and the Book: A Study of Modern Fiction (London, 1971), p.309.

Dust on the Paw can therefore be seen as Jenkins' most detailed exploration of the literary device of the symbol; like Stevenson, he seems to have found the exoticism of unfamiliar locations particularly well suited to this endeavour. On returning to write fiction set in Scotland he appears to have benefitted from the change of subject matter, becoming more confident in the nature of the boundaries established by literary realism and therefore more adept at exploiting and challenging them. Moreover, after the wider perspectives and more complex human conflicts he found in those alien environments, he seems to develop a more cynical appreciation of the other boundaries involved in the concept of 'Scottishness' and to be ready to extend his challenge to more familiar and accepted settings.

A Very Scotch Affair

Written in 1968, A Very Scotch Affair indicates therefore, not only a return to a Scottish subject for Jenkins, but also an intensifying and confident streamlining of his concerns.[4] A difference is immediately noticable in the plot which centres very definitely around one character, Mungo Niven, and focuses on one main action: his decision, in middle age, to leave his wife, family and native Glasgow and to seek a better way of life with a newly acquired, rich, mistress. Despite his wife's fatal illness and continuous pleas for his attention, despite even her eventual death and the breakdown of his affair, followed by the disintegration of his family, Mungo maintains his resolve to escape from life in what he calls 'the ghetto'. The novel's canvas is therefore much smaller and more localised that Dust on the Paw; and, as a result, there is a greater concentration on the single character of Mungo, even if his wife, children

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4. Robin Jenkins, A Very Scotch Affair (London, 1968). All page references are to this edition.

and neighbours are all given their share of the narrative perspective.

Although the novel is concerned with Mungo's search for an ideal the narrative voice is not so noticable in translating his thoughts into the language of religion or metaphysics. The overall tone is conveyed through a fairly mundane vocabulary, leaving the more spiritual aspects to be represented in the paradoxes of Mungo's character. The novel therefore appears more realist in style, an impression reinforced by the absence of any overt symbolism in its incidents and the lack of fantasy in its location and subject. However, operating in direct contradiction to this impression of conventional realism, we are, firstly, asked to identify with a character who is not only morally unpleasant, but is shown to be a fraud both in his dealing with himself and with others.[5] Secondly, we are given only partial insights into most of the other characters. Usually they are tantalisingly characterised and then withdrawn from narrative omniscience, with this withdrawal taking place either before or after a major decision, thus leaving us in a world without cause or effect, only seemingly arbitrary decisions and judgements. This device results in our being denied knowledge just at the moment when we would most expect it. As in Dust on the Paw, the absences in the text are, therefore, as important as what is present. Through these absences Jenkins succeeds in conveying the problems and paradoxes experienced by Mungo in his struggle against his circumscribed experience. In attempting to build up a picture of the novel several factors which

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5. Moira Burgess may be quite accurate therefore in her condemnation of Mungo as someone: 'almost too bad to be true', although her judgement would seem to be made according to realist criteria.
Moira Burgess, 'Robin Jenkins: A Novelist of Scotland', Library Review 22, no.8. (Winter, 1970), 409-412, p.411.

contribute to its elusive quality therefore require examination; firstly, Jenkins' return to a Scottish location; secondly, the effect of the narratorial stances on the themes of irony and self-delusion; and thirdly, the moral stance evinced by the novel and the ways in which this affects its form.

Perhaps through having viewed other countries with the detachment of a foreigner, Jenkins displays a more intensely analytical approach to Scotland in A Very Scotch Affair than in any of his previous novels; indeed it is second only to Fergus Lamont in revealing his attitudes to the mind and morality of Scotland. His comment that: 'Scotland is now a small nation which is only too willing to recognise its smallness'[6] indicates one of the functions which Scotland has in A Very Scotch Affair: it becomes both a real expression and a paradigm of all the restrictions which encompass Mungo's spirit and which exist in his soul. Not only is he confined by his allegiance to the Glasgow 'ghetto', to an easy existence formed through habit, but his 'Scottish' attitudes are also shown to limit his chance of escape. At the beginning of the novel Myra, his mistress and prospective keeper, comments: 'The trouble with you, Mungo, is that you're too Scotch. You enjoy letting your conscience torment you.' (p.7) Mungo's attitude - at the root of all his problems - is not one that he consciously encourages; rather it is seen as a flaw which he attempts to overcome. His 'conscience' is a sense of sin instilled in him, not through any actual recognition of absolutes of good and evil, since the only absolutes presented within the novel are contained within his own ideals and aspirations, but by a communal guilt, established and held on to by those around him as a response to the

6. See interview, Appendix p. 437.

material circumstances of their society. Therefore, although the novel may initially appear to attack Calvinist philosophy - and it certainly does condemn the remnants of Knoxian morality - if any philosophy is truly attacked, it is that of the easy acceptance of determinism, of adapting to circumstances, and perceiving no alternatives. Mungo is depicted as arousing the anger of those who have known him for a long time, not because he has ideals - they seem to quite like his 'daft' ideas, as Nan Fraser shows: 'more than once he had amused her and Alec by telling them how he would like to live in the country, with trees round his house' (p.19) and may enjoy seeing him as trapped by circumstances, by his fat and ugly wife - but what they do resent is the fact that he manages to escape from their circumscribed world. In so doing he proves that determining circumstances are not all powerful and shows that they themselves are representative of Scotland, cringing in submissiveness. [7] Of course, ironically, their diluted form of Calvinism still has Mungo mentally in thrall: 'But the unrelenting morality of his native Glasgow could not be shaken off' (p.14), although, at least in his actions, he does appear to escape. Peggy, Mungo's daughter who succeeds in leaving Scotland at the end of the novel, although disagreeing with her father's behaviour, secretly shares his attitude: 'she knew that she too was a traitor, ready to escape when the chance came.' (p.85) On the level of experience, therefore, Scotland represents the 'innumerable coils of sheer commonplace habit' (p.24) that Mungo sees as holding him down.

Yet the concept of 'Scottishness' has another function in that it is used to reflect back ironically upon the circumstantial morality of the majority

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7. See interview, Appendix p. 437.

of characters. While the novel appears to be attacking the social effects of a long assimilated Calvinist morality, it actually does so through Calvinist precepts, showing how far from the ideal people have fallen. An awareness of absolutes, although only applied ironically to the characters, nevertheless impinges on the response of the reader. Therefore, when Part Two begins with the lines, 'the ultimate disruption was waited for, as if predestined. It was a very Scotch dissolution to a very Scotch affair' (p.137), the connotations of Disruption, and 'predestination' cannot pass unnoticed, despite the triviality of the subject. And although they may mock, they also, inevitably, create a further awareness of such issues to be sustained and related to the central concerns of the novel.

Even in these brief examples we can see the importance of the novel's ironic humour, operating both structurally and linguistically, either through the characters or through the voice of the narrator. Irony, of course, can be used to expose pretension and self-delusion, but Jenkins also utilises it in the novel to manipulate the narrative in order that the mockery reverberates upon our own expectations. On the most basic level, however, the irony and humour is directed towards Mungo and the seven week affair that leads him to renounce the relationships of a lifetime. The bite of this irony is felt from the start of the novel when Myra mocks Mungo and the narrator tells us that: 'He noticed no irony' (p.8); this mockery becomes even more explicit when Mungo is shown as admitting that he was always 'too honourable to cheat, bully, lie, and deceive.' (p.9) Although we laugh at the discrepancy involved in this assessment, the comment also raises important questions for the novel, such as the nature of honourable action and the significance of honourable intention. Is Mungo a coward, if judged by his intentions, or does his behaviour indicate nobility? Similar questions may be raised

about his behaviour in later life. Despite the failure of his affair and the sad state of his family, he has succeeded in breaking free; is such freedom, achieved by adultery, less valuable than any other kind of freedom? Mungo debates with Myra at an early stage in their relationship whether it is much worse to cheat at rounders or commit adultery. (p.9) Both are seen as deviations from the code of honour but can only be compared through their effects rather than the intention to be dishonourable. If this is the case, then the novel postulates that some vindication can be made for Mungo's attempt to escape, since he has discarded such relative determinism and is aiming purely for a certain end. The novel thus turns conventional morality upside down, advocating that the aim for absolutes is preferable to an adaptation to circumstance. Even those who are shown as being in the right are condemned. Mungo, for example, believes that Peggy is 'too just, too neutral.' (p.128) And yet the novel still acknowledges that such absolutes can only remain as ideals because humanity is unable to defeat that circumstantial reality which surrounds it. In this dichotomy is the essence both of Mungo's dilemma and of the appeal and disquiet he creates as a character.

The narrative's manipulations of our moral expectations is paralleled by an undermining of our expectations of fiction. Part of the confusion is created by what the narrator appears to withhold from us. Yet, as with his other techniques, Jenkins conceals his device as an external feature of the fiction by making it also apply internally, within the world of the fiction; in this particular case, the characters are also shown feeling a sense of bewilderment at their inability to understand other characters and events. Sometimes they fail even to understand their own

actions. Thus Mungo returns to Glasgow and debates the possible lines of action at his wife's funeral, is not aware of having settled on one consciously, yet realises: 'So apparently he had decided.' (p.157) The decision therefore appears to have been taken without him having any conscious access to his own mind. The narrative frequently denies insight in this way, mocking not only the idea that one character may 'know', another and translating this concept into a mockery of fiction's illusions, but showing that even as readers we may not 'know' everything about a fictional character. The limitations of the medium, concealed in a realist text, are thus revealed.[8] Once again our own expectations of fiction and of life are mocked, as we are shown how attempts to break through their limitations nevertheless always come to rest within them.

The novel therefore makes full use of a shifting narrative perspective. Jenkins himself admits: 'I don't like to write through the perceptions of one character - it's too limiting.'[9] Every character is viewed with a certain degree of obliquity. Even Mungo, who dominates the first few chapters with his own reactions and ideas, is formed in our minds with help from the attitudes towards him shown by Nan Fraser his neighbour, by comments made by others that she recalls, and by the reactions of his own family. The novel then proceeds to give a series of different perspectives on how the situation affects the various characters. Chapter four moves to Andrew's life, chapter five to Peggy and in chapter six, the whist scene that signals the beginning of Bess's illness is mainly

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8. 'As to character, well, people are never going to know everything about themselves or each other.'
   Interview, Appendix p.441.

9. See interview, Appendix p. 443.

viewed through the eyes of Flo MacTaggart. Curiously, Bess herself is given little insight on the situation; even the nightmare journey back to her house is described in the terms of the disinterested Mr Peffermill. It would appear, therefore, that we are rarely given the perspective of the main character in an incident, with the exception of Mungo's appearance at the funeral. By moving around in this way the narrator not only denies us the opportunity to make judgements on the dominant character, but also allows us to see the self-interested and more unpleasant characteristics of the side-line spectators, thus establishing the sense of a commonly flawed humanity. Mungo is permitted to dominate to a greater extent because he has, by the later stages, acquired some insight into his own failings and can face up to the unpleasant aspects of his character. He can also recognise the limitations of that self-knowledge. In this respect Mungo prefigures those characters who will appear later in Jenkins' _ouevre_, also unpleasant and ultimately indecipherable. However, we have slightly more access to Mungo's self-doubt than to those central characters in subsequent Jenkins' novels who finally elude our full comprehension; we can therefore identify more easily with Mungo, especially since he is so central a representative of the search for redemption which establishes the novel's most interesting thematic contradictions.

While the novel implies that the only salvation for humanity is to search for some escape from the restrictions of the circumscribed view it takes of 'reality' - an escape which is essentially unattainable - it also implies a paradox in the vision of that restrictive society. 'Life,' muses Mr Peffermill, 'was not a clean, tidy, well-run, well furnished house. Society and civilised behaviour which prevented him for instance from raping her there and then, were founded on brute force.' (p.114)

If civilisation survives only on such a contradiction, by concealing the forces which underly it, Mungo's actions appear to raise the question of whether similar paradoxes are not applicable to humankind. The local minister, for example, attempts to excuse Mungo's behaviour by pointing out that, 'A man can commit a great sin because there is greatness in his soul.' (p.119) This idea would seem to indicate that, despite Mungo's own equivocation, he achieves in some ways the moral extremism necessary to break out of the confines of mediocre circumstance. Moreover, Mungo is shown as wishing to use the extremity of his own actions to force others, especially his children, into alternative, and perhaps more worthwhile, forms of escape: 'That hardening of vision which sooner or later blinded most, would have been prevented or at any rate delayed in them. They might suffer but it would redeem them.' (p.62) His actions thus bring Mungo a greater understanding of the terrible effects of reduction to a relative morality and the victimisation of circumstance, an understanding which eventually illuminates his perspective on those around him. By the end of the novel he can view Bess's family and neighbours at the funeral with a sense of the momentary glory which they achieve in their opposition to him:

> These faces, familiar, commonplace, and stupid, were suddenly seen to be nevertheless of great value, in a way he could never have explained; and any explanation would have been regarded by the minds behind those faces with suspicion and distrust, for in that vision of them he by no means bestowed on them qualities they did not have. They were valuable as they were, with all their imperfections; and the most valuable, to him, was now lost forever. (p.172)

This sense of the hopelessness of any attempt at communication between people 'as they are', perhaps best epitomises the novel. The alternative which is presented is that of an extremism which can only

arouse fear and condemnation and which in most cases is far less preferable than the easy alternative of remaining with habit, with compromise and with an acceptance that surrounding circumstances comprise all of 'reality' and therefore demand adaptation. Mungo is shown as someone who, in spite of a series of self-doubts, rejects easy acceptance and adopts extremes. Contemplating the possibility of a return to the 'ghetto' he realises that: 'Here too self-contempt would be encountered, but as a mangy old cat to be kicked out of the way, not as a huge devouring beast.' (p.160) Mungo, however, settles for the latter alternative, breaking away from the codes of those who are, as Jenkins describes, 'mediocrely good together.'[10]

Throughout the novel, in spite of his unpleasantness, Mungo has been allowed a far greater degree of identification from the reader than Jenkins usually accords to any one character. We see his limitations and failings but we are also led into sharing his rejection of the constraints of a circumstantial morality. We are made to understand both the attraction and the danger that he perceives in absolutes. And, because the reader is permitted this identification, A Very Scotch Affair, although presenting an unpleasant and disquieting situation, also allows us a greater awareness of the compassion displayed by Jenkins in his treatment of the desire for impossible absolutes. The novel as a result also displays a greater cynicism than is found in previous works about the human capacity to live well and to be 'good' within a liberal humanist tradition dominated by a morally relative view of reality.

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10. See interview, Appendix p.450.

A Would-be Saint

Jenkins' cynicism about the realisation of 'good', as seen in A Very Scotch Affair, is taken one step further in A Would-be Saint.[11] His own ironic comment on the central character of that novel gives some insight into his aims in it: 'Gavin is supposed to be a good man. No novelist ever depicted a good person successfully. Wicked persons are easy. There's been no portrayal of a credible Heaven. Gavin Hamilton is an attempt to portray a good person, but things go wrong. The only solution is an escape into silence but that in itself is a defeat'.[12] A Would-be Saint attempts to portray goodness in a credible form and, for the first time, without using children, natives or simpletons, but an adult as a possesser of that quality. Jenkins would appear to have been working on this development for some time, through novels such as A Very Scotch Affair in which he concentrates on one main character, examining moral imperatives in relation to his position. In A Toast to the Lord Jenkins again focuses on an extremely unpleasant character, Agnes, a pseudo-Christian who, by the end of the novel, appears to have gained access to a genuine source of transformation, becomes possessed by the Lord and, by virtue of her access to an absolute, is lost both to the narrative and to the reader's comprehension. As his statement above indicates, A Would-be Saint, in developing this line of interest, presents a challenge to the limitations of fictional realism, as well as philosophically acknowledging the reasons for failure and the limitations of goodness in the flawed state of humanity.

As an examination of the life of Gavin Hamilton and his 'ruinous goodness',

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11. Robin Jenkins, A Would-be Saint (London, 1978). All page references are to this edition.

12. See interview, Appendix p.442.

the novel begins with Gavin's view of the world as a child. Although still using third person narration, such an approach is unusual for Jenkins who tends to show characters through a variety of perspectives and to avoid tracing the development of children into adults, preferring to work on a shorter time scale. However, as A Very Scotch Affair would seem to indicate, Jenkins has exploited to the full the effect of shifting focus on a multiplicity of characters in combating the fixity of realism; he now appears more confident about adapting his techniques to dealing with a single character. In A Would-be Saint, moreover, it is essential to his purposes that we initially see Gavin in wholly realist terms. By beginning the novel with a world which is governed by Gavin, which takes him, as a child, as its central subject, Jenkins encourages our identification with him from the start. We are also led to view him as an ordinary little boy. Indeed, Jenkins goes to some lengths to produce this effect in a first chapter which describes Gavin's explorations of the environment around his home: 'One sunny afternoon, at the end of July when the wild roses were in bloom and in France the Germans were being bloodily defeated he set off alone with girr and cleek for a tour of his world.' (p.8) Here the boy's perspective is enclosed by local descriptions and by external social detail, adding solidity to the scene. This impression of a child's domain is continued: 'He had a right to go anywhere in Auchengillan. It was his world.' (p.10) The concept of 'right', of being at one with the surroundings, is an important feature of this scene, because it establishes Gavin's 'normality' and indicates his sense of confidence in himself - two factors which, later in the novel, will radically diverge. The only slightly jarring element in this first chapter in Gavin's assertion that he likes everyone because he believes everyone likes him; this perspective may be excusable in terms of a

child's point of view, but it indicates the demand for or, at least, expectation of justice on Gavin's part that will cause him so many problems later in the novel.

The novel then proceeds to trace Gavin's childhood, through the death of his father in the war, his attendance at the local Academy by virtue of his winning a bursary, his noted brilliance at both football and at academic subjects, the death of his mother and the subsequent cruelty of his grandparents who adopt him yet deny him the chance of further education. Up to this point Gavin is presented very much as a victim, although a self-contained and fairly passive one. Once his secure world has disintegrated, however, this passivity is pushed to extremes. Rescuing a 'fallen woman' who was a childhood friend, he loses the love of a worldly fiancée. Abandoning football because it creates too much violence, he also alienates friends and admirers. And when he decides to become a conscientious objector in the Second World War, he comes near to losing the friendship of even those closest to him. From this description of the novel's events two structural perspectives can be seen to emerge: we are allowed into the world of Gavin and his 'good' intentions, but are also presented with the view that Gavin is mad, a view gradually taken by all who encounter him. Both perspectives are given a certain amount of credibility but as readers we are never allowed to settle totally for one or the other.

The novel thus gradually begins to reveal traits in Gavin which are difficult to accommodate by the conventional 'lad o' pairts' image he initially presented - acceptable in personality, academically bright and with potential upward social mobility, and possibly important to Scotland

because of his football skills. As his desire to do good becomes more pronounced, as he undergoes suffering and alienation for his aims, with even his friends excluding him from their social activities - 'They seemed to be under the misapprehension that the companionship would be objectionable to him, as well as the whisky' (p.67) - his sense of self-sufficiency increases. As a child he believes the best of people: 'He did not think that if he failed anyone would laugh at him. He had a higher opinion of people's goodwill than she. It often had her shaking her head at him, as if she foresaw disasters in store because of his reckless trust.' (p.26) As he grows up, however, his attitudes begin to cause difficulties. He believes, for example, that everyone has a conscience: 'Surely, Gavin thought, everyone has a conscience.... Gavin could think of no one who was not concerned to some extent about such responsibilities.' (p.41) His belief is recognised as dangerous by others apart from his mother: 'Anybody's to be pitied,' remarks an old lady, 'that hasn't learned to harden his heart by the time he's twelve.' (p.43) The perceptions of others gradually does impinge upon Gavin's consciousness, but does not lead him away from his idealism into a worldly attitude for he is unable to accept any alternative to his beliefs; it rather has the opposite effect, pushing him towards 'fanaticism'. And this pattern of behaviour within the novel means that Gavin no longer fits the conventional mould of the realist character, refusing to develop along lines formed by his experience, and losing the identification of the readers as his unusual qualities begin to be perceived as dangerous.

The realisation towards which Gavin moves in the course of the novel is a much more complex one than simply a learning from experience. He recognises that he cannot escape the opinions of others, that he will

always be watched. Although this theme bears certain similarities to the Good Samaritan tale, and to the plight of Charlie Forbes in The Changeling, Gavin emerges as a far more complex figure, for he is well aware of the public dimension as the context in which he must operate, recognising that in this area the real challenge lies. As a young boy, when told of his mother's death, he feels very strongly the need to be alone:

> As he looked at the face of each of them it was as if a door slammed in his mind. If more people had been present, more doors would have slammed.
>
> Alone, with no faces to see, the effect would surely be the opposite, doors would open and his spirit would be free.
>
> This was wrong, he knew. It was going against everything he believed in. For all the pain they caused, and the frustrations, the company of people was as necessary as food. (p.48)

From this point on, then, until the novel's conclusion, Gavin can be seen as trying to resist the desire to escape totally the company of others. His reaction in this passage and his subsequent struggle reveals one of the novel's central dichotomies: should pure goodness try to prove itself capable of operating within the confines of society and of other human beings, or does it demand the ultimate isolation of the hermit, of a total withdrawal from the world?

The choice between these alternatives is not, however, expressed only through Gavin's responses. The reader is able to appreciate the dimensions of the question through also seeing Gavin with the eyes of those around him, and thus experiencing his increasingly enigmatic features. For example, Gavin is shown as arousing wonder in those who think they know him. Julia, his girlfriend, is, 'afraid that one day he would commit some act of utterly irresponsible and ruinous goodness.' (p.63)

Gradually, through their inability to understand him, the community of Auchengillan begins to feel the same way. Escaping from the norm, from the restriction of the stereotype, Gavin becomes an unknown quantity which makes them uneasy:

> It was noticed how, though Gavin was very friendly, and never failed to stop you in the street and ask with undeniable sincerity how you and your family were, you always felt awkward talking to him...
> Some said it was because Gavin, without ever saying a word that could be called preaching, made you feel that there were lots of good deeds you should have done and lots of bad deeds you shouldn't. He was, alas, the genuine article, He was the last person to talk to if you wanted to feel satisfied with yourself. (p.97)

This indictment is one of the last comments made on Gavin before he actually makes a move outwith that community in his role of conscientious objector. By this stage the reader is also experiencing difficulties in identifying closely with Gavin and in finding a fulfilment of expectations. The fact that Gavin was, from the beginning, presented as the central character, through detailed description of the number of events affecting his life that are given, would lead us to expect to see in him, by this point, some kind of adaptation to circumstances, or at least a reaction against them. Moving out from the child centered world of the novel's first chapters, we would expect an increasing interaction on Gavin's part with those around him: instead, the reverse seems to operate. Increasingly we share the view of others, looking at Gavin externally and wondering at his behaviour, becoming less capable of comprehending him. Yet, because the novel began in an apparently conventional manner, in spite of the divergence of perspectives we still try to identify with Gavin, making a conscious effort to understand his reasoning while it is still explained to us, prepared to participate in the spiritual search for the fulfilment of his aims and desires. Only in the final stage of the novel, when he

moves to working in the forest as a conscientious objector are we finally kept at a distance from him.

His move to the forest might be expected to signal that stage in the novel at which the two worlds - that of Gavin's responses, and that of the uncomprehending society which looks upon them - would be dissolved into one; at least Gavin is supposedly meeting with others who share his moral stance and are in a similarly isolated position. However, the men with whom he works on the estate are depicted as likable if quarrelsome men, there for a variety of reasons and with varying degrees of conviction. Above all, they are presented as 'normal' examples of flawed humanity. Inevitably the reader warms towards them, identifying with their doubts and contradictions, while feeling increasingly distanced from, and unable to identify with, Gavin. Disappointed that the men do not see themselves as touched by 'any special grace' (p.154) Gavin slowly isolates himself. The question of pride, which has been underlying all Gavin's action - it is possible, for example, that he is deliberately seeking some form of revenge on his grandparents by showing them such kindness - fully emerges.[13] Gavin is determined to be 'beholden' to no-one who is involved in the war, coming to believe that isolation is the only way to achieve that impartiality, even purity, which will allow him to pity others and to see what is good. Only then can he extend his compassion to humankind:

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13. His fiancée, in fact, ponders on this aspect of Gavin's character:

> He did good deeds; but she sometimes wondered if he did them out of pure compassion and not out of a wish to show up the selfishness of others, including herself. His grandmother had done him the greatest wrong, therefore he showed her the greatest forgiveness. As a way of getting revenge it was very effective. What the causes of the old woman's mental agonies were was not easy to tell, but Julia was sure being beholden to him was one of them. (p.60)

> They were to be pitied. But who had a right to pity them? Not ministers or priests who told them that Christ's commands to love their enemies did not apply. Not politicians who promised them a guilt-free future when the slaughter was over. Not airmen who thought that the killing or maiming of children was a risk that could be honourably taken. Not soldiers who killed other soldiers who were the fathers of children. Not even their own parents who accepted as a legitimate consequence of the war the deaths of other parents' children.
>
> And who had a right to pity those ministers, politicians, airmen, soldiers, and parents? Only someone completely uninvolved.
>
> (p.177)

Donald MacMillan, one of Gavin's co-workers, believes that if such a person existed, 'he would be a monster of spiritual arrogance whose contempt would be preferable to his pity.' (p.177) But Gavin believes that this view of arrogance and pity is an earthly one, judged in terms of circumstantial and relative morality, whereas God would come to a quite different interpretation. Gavin himself, therefore, posits the concept of an external God who alone can perceive and happily accommodate moral absolutes.

To a certain extent the novel vindicates this point of view established by Gavin. After the discussion described above, the novel moves into Part Four, five years after Gavin's arrival in the forestry camp, and to the end of the war. The most immediately striking feature about this section is that Gavin appears to have moved out of the novel's central focus. The narrator no longer appears to be tracing his development: the reader is therefore denied access and it is with some relief that we turn to the more easily comprehended characters. However, in so doing we may notice that in a sense the two strands of the novel have come together, although in an unexpected form, for Gavin has moved so far beyond the experiences of the others, that he has become for them a symbol of all that they could not achieve. As MacMillan realises, Gavin has become an ideal:

> Gavin was blossoms, sunshine and hope.
> He was sure that his companions, so contemptuous of religion, felt the same way. Thinking about Gavin gave them faith. They were prisoners, he was still free. Finding the burden too heavy or too shameful they had long ago put down their idealistic protest against the war. Gavin still carried his.
> Like me, thought MacMillan, they lie awake at night despising themselves for adding to the world's falseness and hypocrisy. Then they remember Gavin and feel instantly absolved.
> (p.192)

And it is almost inevitable that when we do encounter Gavin in this section we see him in a similarily symbolic light, since we are told so little about what has actually happened to him over the past few years or how changes in his personality have occurred. We see him finally in the role of prophet, with beard and home-made clothes, working in isolation and having given away all his worldly goods. In terms of his representative quality it would appear that he has achieved the status he sought.

For the reader this later view of Gavin creates a conflict between his status as a symbol and the Gavin we had previously 'known', at the centre of the narrative and the focus of our identification and sympathy. Gavin, the 'would-be saint',points towards a dimension of experience beyond our own. The world of 'reality' and this alien spiritual dimension are thus brought into an uneasy conjunction through the fiction, with the only links between the two worlds created by the hesitancies, doubts and ambiguities within the text which ensure our inability to be certain about what is true or real. It remains unclear, for example, how much Gavin's final stand is due to his pride; we cannot tell whether Gavin is governed by his slightly ridiculour 'huff against humanity', (p.205), or whether his own humorous self-mockery keeps this under control. The

novel ends with MacMillan, Gavin's single remaining contact with 'reality', half-wishing, half-fearing that this snowy night will be the one in which Gavin will finally disappear into the hills and achieve sainthood. His relief at finding that Gavin does not intend to disappear that night is combined with a vague disappointment on realising that the time for his retreat has not yet arrived. We are therefore left in ignorance as to whether Gavin will ever become a 'saint' and martyr. Our final glimpse has been of him earlier in the day, contemplating the ultimate action but coming to no decision: at the end of the novel, therefore, he still eludes us. In Gavin, Jenkins has created a character who is actually unable to inhabit the world of reality, with all its flaws and circumstantial constraints, and is thus a figure that will always evade the descriptive limitations of literary realism. Gavin, however, cannot be seen purely as an ideal either; since we can never be sure of the motivation or quality of his actions, he cannot be totally placed within a symbolic dimension or the world of allegory. Remaining a figure on the boundaries of realism and allegory, he indicates the limitations of each as a complete expression of the moral dilemma faced by humankind. In A Would-be Saint, therefore, Jenkins not only illustrates the problematics of his moral philosophy with considerable depth, but he also exposes the limitations of fiction in dealing with such material and in so doing, again reaches beyond the boundaries of conventional realism.

A Would-be Saint is in many ways a disquieting book, but for me it remains Jenkins' most serious examination of the impossibility of achieving pure good within a circumstantial reality; it also clearly indicates the limitations of fiction in conveying the vision of an absolute morality.

As a result it is a novel held together by the tension between its elements. In the novel which follows it, Fergus Lamont, Jenkins appears to relax slightly, aware of the paradoxes of the medium, and of his subject matter: and even allows himself an element of parody, lost to his works since Happy for the Child.

Fergus Lamont

In Fergus Lamont we can see Jenkins departing even further from the conventions of realism, although as a novel it avoids the extreme tension of A Would-be Saint.[14] And although it continues the analysis of morality found in that novel, it has more obvious links with A Very Scotch Affair, both in its ironic consideration of the Scottish context, and in the fact that its central character is so far from being a 'saint'. Fergus Lamont could also be described as Jenkins' most sophisticated novel to date, developing that refinement of focus on a single character begun in previous novels to such an extent that a first person narrator - a device which Jenkins had hitherto sought to avoid[15] - replaces the usual shifting narrative perspective on a wide range of characters. That the voice of the narrator is the voice of Fergus, the voice of a poet, makes the departure all the more striking.

Although the basic techniques of the novel are not extraordinarily innovative in fictional terms they nevertheless represent a new direction for Jenkins. Using a retrospective narrative which, with its interspersed flash forwards into the present, indicated by passages in italics, leads up to the final hour of Fergus' writing, Jenkins leaves behind the

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14. Robin Jenkins, Fergus Lamont (Edinburgh, 1979). All page references are to this edition.

15. See interview, Appendix p. 443.

linearity of his previous novels and adopts a more spatial approach. In his previous novels any spatial quality has been gained only by the movement of the narrative from the perspective of one character to another, but in Fergus Lamont it is achieved by allowing the reader to piece together information about the actual events in order to discover the nature of both the past and present. And the character on which Jenkins concentrates with such intensity is shown to be more eligible perhaps than previous characters for such close attention; although Fergus as narrator is only an old man living in relative poverty and obscurity, he is shown to be someone who once possessed considerable power and social status. Moreover, his being a poet, looking back on his life, gives him a special licence not only in arranging his life experiences in achronological juxtapositions, but also in supplying information about his past that he could not have known at the time. The novel thus develops two versions of Fergus; one the incipient hero, the other the old man sitting in squalor in a public library, writing his memoirs. The two are brought together in the narrative, however, in that the older Fergus makes comments on his more youthful actions while he describes them, as well as in the more obviously retrospective, italicised, passages. The narrator, therefore, is always implicitly aware of the act of narrating and can address the implied readership on the subject of his own role:

> I gaze at this old newspaper picture of a wartime wedding outside St Giles Cathedral. Only the bride's arm can be seen: the rest of her has been cut out. The groom wears the full-dress uniform of a Highland officer, with medals for valour on his chest. Between him and the small anxious boy who once pushed a barrowful of dung up the brae to his grandfather's cottage, what is the connection? And what have I, an old man with shaky hands, to do with either of them?
>
> (p.81)

As in Jenkins' earlier, and more conventional novels, therefore, the disparate characters, and even the many facets of the main character, are held together by the consistency of the narrative voice - even when it is commenting on its own actions.[16] Yet ambiguity is maintained through the movement in time between action and narrative; we are often unable to ascertain whether Fergus is acting in one way and simultaneously thinking in another, or whether he is looking back on, and reinterpreting past behaviour. An incident when, staying as a guest in a stately home, he encounters a poacher, offers an illustration of this ambiguity. Behaving with extreme severity, even brutality, towards the 'criminal', he nevertheless claims that he sympathized with him:

> I felt sorry for him of course, and would have liked to send him away with a five pound note in his pocket, to feed his family and buy medicines for his sick child; but if I had done anything so self-indulgent I would have let my side down, especially my little red-haired daughter, Dorcas, whose good opinion was very important to me.
>
> (p.135)

We cannot be certain here just how much of Fergus' analysis is a reflection of his hard-headed realism at the time or a retrospective self-justification. Such ambiguity is of course all to Jenkins' advantage in his portrayal of uncertain moral territory; by the end of the novel the narrator can look back and discuss what he has written but we still cannot be sure of the 'truth' of his comments. Yet the position of this first person narrator, looking back on his life, philosophising on the nature of God and morality, also means that Jenkins need no longer attribute metaphysical speculations to apparently unlikely characters; narrator and discourse now seem at one.

Nevertheless, although critics have admired the quality of Jenkins' 'story-

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16. Notice, for example: 'I am hurrying on too fast. Here is another photograph taken three years earlier' (p.81) and: 'Let me introduce the others. They were all sons of landed gentry.' (p.82).

telling', the novel has also been criticized for its plot.[17] It has been argued that the tale about a boy brought up in the slums of Gantock, going on to make himself an officer and a gentleman, marrying an author of sentimental novels who, in reality, is both callous and shrewd, writing poetry and finally finding ten years of happiness in a Hebridean idyll with a pipe-smoking Celtic goddess called Kirstie, is both too familiarly 'Scottish', and not quite credible.[18] Yet it is these very elements in the novel which offer some insight into Jenkins' aims; for Fergus Lamont can be read as a deeply ironic response to images of Scotland, a development, through parody, of the examination which he began in A Very Scotch Affair of the moral and intellectual bases of Scottishness. And the fact that Jenkins has allowed the fairly dubious and self-parodic character of Fergus to narrate can be seen as an intentional escape clause for our credibility, should it be tested too much.

Before moving on to a discussion of Scotland and morality as represented in the novel, however, one more innovation of Jenkins requires consideration. His use of a poet, a writer, as his main character, indicates a departure from his previous non-literary central character and, as in most novels, implies that such a choice has been made for very definite reasons. The kind of poetry written by Fergus - he wants his first volume of poetry

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17. Reviews praising the novel include:
    Stephen Glover, 'Recent Fiction', Daily Telegraph, 23 August 1979, p.11.
    Allan Massie, 'A strange and wonderful romance', Weekend Scotsman, 25 August 1979, p.3.
    Douglas Gifford, 'New Scottish Fiction', Books in Scotland, 5 (Autumn 1979), 14-16.

18. Such criticisms are made by David Craig, untitled review, Cencrastus, 2 (Spring 1980), 39-41.

to be entitled Gathering Dung and it includes poems such as 'The Stairheid Lavatory', while his war poetry is described as dealing with some of the most degrading aspects of war[19] - seems to reflect Jenkins' own aim for fiction of 'trying to break through all the facades that people hide behind'.[20] The role of poet, however, is shown to have another significance in the novel in that it represents a position of isolation from the community. As poet, Fergus is set apart from his other roles of gentleman and social climber. He first learns to make this distinction as a boy, when he is sent before his headmaster for using the word 'fart' in an essay. The rector finally excuses him for this, believing his language to be vigorous and accurate, but reminds him: 'it is only poets who can afford to speak the truth and defy convention. Are you a poet?' (p.59) The seeds of the idea that a poet is not only someone alien to society and its values, but also a person having greater access to the truth, is thus planted in Fergus' mind; and through portraying Fergus' growing confidence in this duality, Jenkins can explore the nature of truth itself.

As he advances in his career, Fergus increasingly leads a double life, developing the worst character traits possible in his officer persona, but believing this to be excused by virtue of his being a poet underneath the

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19. See, for example, his description of the poem entitled 'The Burning of the Boots':

> This poem, it may be remembered, tells how a night patrol stumbles into a field littered with scraps of decomposed bodies and dollops of human excrement. Evidently a mass grave and a huge latrine had been blown up together. Such freaks happened. Afterwards they could not get the stench of mortality off their boots, which had to be burnt. But, to their horror their new boots, no matter how frenziedly dubbined, gave off the same sad stink. (p.105)

20. See interview, Appendix p. 442.

public facade. Indeed in his memoirs he often talks of 'the poet in me' as if of a separate person.[21] Thus in the poacher incident described above, he retrospectively comments: 'Only arid perfectionists would have expected me to be as understanding of and as compassionate towards the poor in my capacity as an ambitious social being, as I was in my capacity as an inspired poet.' (p.136) He then proceeds to excuse his lack of such perfection: 'Poets have a hard enough task showing mankind what truth and love are, without their having to be truthful and loving themselves, at any rate all the time.' (p.136) In Fergus Lamont, therefore, Jenkins can be seen repeating, but encapsulating in one character, the central conflict of A Would-be Saint. One part of Fergus can, like Gavin, withdraw from the world, recognising the truth by escaping constrictions. The other lives in the world and must face its judgements. Arguably Fergus is in an impossible position; his experiences as a social climber obviously affects what he writes as a poet, even if his attitude differs. Yet, although he can write poetry about life in Gantock, about the War and the Hebrides, he must, for his own peace of mind, separate his moral stance from his actual behaviour. Perhaps only when he is in the Hebrides do the two worlds coalesce and for that reason his time there is seen as the spiritual climax of his life. At that point the balance between fact and fiction, between ideal and the real, seems finely poised. Yet after his return to the 'real world', when he devotes his time to being a writer, he becomes a disaster socially, and the process thereafter is seen as one of gradual decline.

It is perhaps surprising that Jenkins never used a poet or writer before this novel, since it seems to be the ideal stance from which to engage in

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21. Even at an early stage in the novel he comments: 'The poet in me, though subdued, nevertheless persisted.' (p.56)

metaphysical speculation and to represent his own moral outlook, through the conflicts experienced. However, it would appear that in Fergus Lamont Jenkins makes explicit certain anxieties about the nature of writing and the role of the author. Does the writer depict a truth which can be referred to reality or an ideal which can only be contained within the fiction? And does the author have the power to set up as a God-like figure with a key to the truth? These concerns have always been implicit in Jenkins' novels but have never been so directly explored or with such confidence. Although he may achieve some distance by the fact that Fergus is a poet and not a novelist - and, indeed, states that: 'I never had any interest in novels' (p.131) - he nevertheless examines the position and responsibility of the writer with considerable thoroughness. If Fergus as a character may not always be wholly credible he can nevertheless be seen as reflecting an ironic disquiet with the authorial role, rather than indicating any artistic failure on Jenkins' part.

Certainly Fergus is both an example of the paradoxes of the writer, and an explorer of their nature. Jenkins, as a Scottish writer, frequently has Fergus as Scottish poet discussing other Scottish writers, their anomalies and pretensions. And as the example closest to his own heart in social and moral attitudes, Fergus often discourses on Sir Walter Scott: 'In his novels,' he states, 'Scott rejoices in madwomen and fishwives, but it was duchesses he entertained at Abbotsford.' (p.136) He also describes his admiring reaction to a portrait of Scott: 'I studied this for some time, for he was a Scotsman who had done with success what it was my ambition to do; that was, write about common people and assort with nobility.' (p.90) Scott is thus used to demonstrate and justify the divergence between ideal and real, art and life, which Fergus sees as

governing his own existence. Fergus, himself furthers the ironic stereotype of the poet, as in his role in the Hebrides or standing as a ghost at the War memorial in Gantock; even his wearing of the kilt seems to be a poetic parody of his Scottishness. Nevertheless, Fergus also achieves a certain status by the end of the novel due to the fact that Jenkins closes the book with a framing, concluding note by Fergus' son, denying Fergus the last word, taking away his control and making him into an enigma of the fiction. Even Fergus' value as a poet is left uncertain. Calderwood offers him an explanation of his success: 'You could never have written such good poetry if you had been able to think things out to their nihilistic conclusion. Then you would have had to remain silent. Like me ' (p.290), but not only does this statement directly contradict Fergus' vision of himself as the poet, the man who sees the truth where others cannot, by implying that vision is successful only because it is limited, but Calderwood's praise of Fergus' poetry which initially so flattered him becomes a form of censure because of the malevolent, misanthropic nature Calderwood has acquired. The conclusion, therefore, offers us no final judgement on Fergus' worth as a poet, or of the validity of his insights, but retains an essential ambiguity. Nevertheless, through Fergus, Jenkins places his concerns within a tradition of Scottish writing, staking a claim for his idiosyncratic point of view, making his place in that tradition extend in reference beyond itself, and doing so with a far greater confidence in his right to such literary cross-references than he did in his early novel, Happy for the Child.

The novel's ambiguity and irony therefore reveal an expansion of Jenkins' moral concerns, a more open assessment of their wider philosophical and practical implications. Douglas Gifford offers an interesting explanation

of this new maturity when he writes:

> All his previous novels spoke either of redeeming grace or bleak scepticism about humanity: and Fergus Lamont seems to pull them all into one... Fergus Lamont has Fergus the quintessential Scottish snob, social climber, denying his background, and Fergus the private saint and martyr; with a final detachment from both which is most chastening.[22]

This quality of detachment seems worth emphasising, since it is achieved through the duality which permits us to identify with Fergus (but only to a certain extent)and also allows Fergus to represent the indecision and doubt as to moral standards that is so often the fate of the reader in a Jenkins' novel. As such, he becomes writer and reader of his own life, an well as a character within its fiction. The reader is therefore drawn more deeply into the dilemmas established by the novel but also allowed to view them with a more humorous awareness of the inherent ironies than is usual in a Jenkins' novel.

The problems of a social morality are also dealt with more explicitly than in previous works. In the incident when he first discovers he is a poet, Fergus realises that the teacher Birkmyre, represents the 'Presbyterian attitude' to literature and begins to wonder: 'Was there a contradiction between truth and gentlemanliness?' (p.57) He then proceeds to put this concept into practice in his life, although he is not always sophisticated in his awareness of its effects. Betty, his wife, makes a similar point with considerably more force when she indicates that the 'gentlemanly' minister will, in fact, condone her adultery: 'In realistic theology, Fergus, infidelities that save a marriage are not the same as infidelities that wreck it.' (p.147) Indeed, the idea of a 'realistic theology' is

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22. Gifford, 'New Scottish Fiction', Books in Scotland, 5 (Autumn 1979), 14-16, p.14.

seen as a basis of Scottish morality, at least by Fergus:

> I still believed, or rather felt as a poet, that Kirkhope, Cargill and Ettrick and their kind had throughout the centuries set up in Scotland a morality that put the ability to pay far in front of the necessity to forgive and love.
> (p.77)

In his condemnation of grocers, lawyers and managing directors Fergus is also presenting an argument against the social and economic faces of Calvinist morality that is sustained throughout the novel, although a distinction needs to be made here between the effects of a 'realistic theology' which can be applied to the practicalities of existence, and the metaphysics of Calvinist philosophy which can be linked to the idea of a single, external truth that Fergus so desperately seeks. Fergus' grandfather is seen as the prime exponent of the former,of a social Calvinism:

> My grandfather did not allow my mother to be buried in her own mother's grave; nor did he go to her funeral. He displayed atrocious callousness; yet, by the sheer effontery of faith, he compelled most people to think of him as a Christian of formidable and magnificent staunchness.
> (p.27)

It is this tyranny of the spirit - 'To the stern Calvinist no one was innocent, not even a new-born baby' (p.235) - that horrifies Fergus, and that he finds so pervasive in Scotland. Even on East Gerinish, the local minister exemplifies such cruelty: 'He had once knocked off the head of a cock with his stick because he had caught it treading a hen on the Sabbath.' (p.228) Yet Fergus can also trace the influence of Calvinist thinking in its worst aspects within his own character, such as in the moment when he rejects his son. At that moment, he also reaches an awareness of religion's essential contradictions: 'There must have been many moments, with his face against a closed door, as mine was now, when my grandfather had seen himself, not as one of the elect, but as one of those cast into

outer darkness.' (p.241) Yet, like his grandfather, Fergus can extenuate himself by seeing his actions as necessary to save his soul. Moreover, although a Calvinist sensibility is shown to be isolating when in an extreme form, it can also have value in preserving a certain distance: in battle, for example, Fergus sees himself as one of the Elect in order to survive: 'The men in my company called me anointed. They intended sarcasm and achieved truth.' (p.96)

In contrast to its stern moral rigidity, the other aspect of Calvinism which can set one apart is grace, a quality that Fergus also encounters, and which Jenkins treats with his usual ambiguous irony. Fergus' boyhood friend, Jock, offers him one of his first insights into its nature: 'He had done what among a graceless people always provokes angry derision: dressed in rags, he had dared to be chivalrous.' (p.10) Fergus thus realises that, like the other aspects of a true Calvinist morality, such qualities do not make for the easy operation of their possessor within the human community, since they signal 'difference'. He comments: 'Every man excused himself with the plea that he would be honest and truthful always, if only he could depend on all other men to be honest and truthful too, otherwise he would be shamefully taken advantage of.' (p.190) Yet within this inescapable circle, the form of behaviour adopted, that of moral relativism, is seen as only a poor means of preservation; no freedom of action is involved, since any choice is governed by fear of the unknown and unfamiliar. As a doctor in the novel remarks to Fergus: 'Most of us are prepared to tolerate only what we understand and approve of.' (p.261) The relativity of a public morality is thus revealed as a constraint, and the novel's highlighting of such restrictions becomes a cry for an alternative - a cry which is governed

by the realisation of the impossibility of that ideal. In Fergus Lamont, however, this acknowledgement of humanity's flawed and constricted state, seems less despairing and possessing more understanding than some of Jenkins' previous novels, partly since it emerges through the personality of the reprobate Fergus. As well as seeking for ideal states, he is all too familiar with the dangers of idealism: 'My own mirror had made me aware that the human face, if it tried too consciously to light up had with idealistic zeal, succeeded only in looking demented.' (p.155)
A certain balance is therefore achieved between conflicting forces, through Jenkins' use of ironic humour.

Such humour is even applied to the important concept of good. Carrying Kirstie's dead body on his back, Fergus thinks:

> I remembered that there was a kind of star so compressed that one thimbleful of it would weigh a million tons. Surely it was a similar compression, of unimaginable goodness, that caused Kirstie to be so crushingly heavy?
>
> (p.259)

The humour here shows both a new compassion for the situation, in Jenkins, and a new awareness and even acceptance, in one of his characters, of the ironies of morality in this life. Even when Fergus returns to civilisation after ten years on East Gerinish and begins to put his new-found philosophies into practice, he is aware that the fallibility of the human soul is still very much in evidence:

> I quickly had it confirmed that to be calmly tolerant of the nervous ill-temper of worldlings not only gave me satisfaction and confidence, it even exhilarated me. In effect and taste it outdid the finest whisky. Was it, in humbler degree, how saints and martyrs felt?
>
> (p.274)

Moreover, he can discuss moral qualities as if they were in some way set apart from consciousness, as if they occurred without any decision being made but were externally imposed: 'It could well be my experiences in East Gerinish, taken all together, had made me, unknown to myself, a good man.' (p.275) This attitude is an apt expression of the philosophy that led Fergus to create moral tests for his grandfather while not attempting to come up to any moral standard in his own behaviour. The God that Fergus perceives is not one who will help him to achieve any better moral attitude in life, or make his flaws seem more acceptable, as is the case with a more humanitarian view of God: rather, he states: 'I consider myself a wonderful and unique piece of creation, but believe nevertheless that for the Creator to perpetuate me, even in an improved form, for all eternity, would be an abuse of His powers. He has, I hope, better things to do.' (p.199)

Just as Fergus Lamont is more explicit in its comments on morality than Jenkins' other novels, so it more directly relates his ideas on morality to the state of Scotland, using Fergus both to epitomise and to parody experiences of 'Scottishness'. Aware of the dichotomy between moral absolutes and a relative morality that is established in his work, Jenkins then mocks the facile dichotomies that have been used in relation to Scotland - especially that of the Caledonian antisyzygy - merely in order to avoid more complex analyses. Seeing Scotland both as dominated in aspirations by Calvinist ethics yet also as a breeding ground for the social restrictions and practical limitations which stem from the attempt to apply such ethics on a day to day basis, he both mocks and sympathises with this conflict through Fergus. Fergus - himself a parodic figure in his kilt, and with his experiences of a Hebridean idyll - is shown as

attempting to divide the country and its culture into categories and oppositions. He sees, for example, two worlds of inheritance for Scotland's people; 'Theirs was by birth the Scotland of tenements and low-paid jobs. Mine was the Scotland of castles, famous families, and heroic deeds.' (p.52) Such an opposition is, of course, shown as spurious by the fact that Fergus himself moves in both worlds and thus transgresses the boundaries described. Likewise, when a young boy, he sees Scotland's intellectual life as being divided in two; watching an encounter between his English teacher and the rector this strikes him forcibly: 'I was watching, I realised vaguely, a clash between two traditions in Scotland, that of love of learning and truth, and that of Calvinist narrow-minded vindictiveness.' (p.58) Yet once again Fergus exemplifies aspects of both traditions, and the novel reveals that they are not mutually exclusive; part of Calvinism's original basis is, anyway, a love of truth. Fergus attempts even to see the two women who feature in his life contrasted in such terms; 'Here was another similar conflict between two aspects of the Scottish soul: in the one corner, represented by Betty, mendacious sentimentality, and in the other, represented by Mary, ironic truthfulness.' (p.120) Yet once again the comparison cannot be sustained, since Betty displays a shrewdness near to ironic truthfulness, and Mary betrays her political values during the war and joins with the party in direct opposition to her own. Even the simple distinction that the Scots, 'failed as artists and patriots, but succeeded as engineers and theologians' (p.73) is contradicted by that image of the arch-Scot and poet, Fergus. The novel thus continues to offer apparently simple explanations and categories of cultural phenomenon and then disputes them, thus not only reinforcing the idea of a complex reality but also showing human failure in attempting to impose their own patterns on this reality in order to justify their own place within it.

Fergus, is not unaware of contradictions in his own role. On the novel's first page he states: 'Puritanic and parochial Scots, you murdered my young and beautiful mother. As one of you I must share the blame', and throughout the novel the myths and images of Scotland are mocked, bankrupted, but emotionally reinvested. Fergus is told that he looks like Harry Lauder (p.43); Kirstie is supposed to be a Celtic Deirdre yet dresses like a man and smokes a pipe; Limpy Calderwood, supposedly one of a tradition of great teachers who inspire the young, teaches his own democratic brand of Scottish history by concentrating on the lives of the ordinary people, yet is ultimately revealed as hating those very people in the present because of their ordinariness. The novel sets up, yet mocks, stereotyped images of Scottishness; and Fergus, always struggling with his own sense of a Scottish identity is shown at the centre of this conflict. We see him having to work at possessing the right 'Scottish' accent, acquiring first that which was necessary for his social aspirations: 'From his [Lord Baidland] lips I heard for the first time, the authentic confident bray of the upper-class, and noted the instant obsequious effect it had on those bourgeois Scots.'(pp.53-54) Later, on returning from East Gerinish, he has to learn a middle-class, yet noticable, 'Scots' accent, very different from the language of his childhood:

> I used the accent that I had evolved in East Gerinish: not quite landed gentry, not quite officer-and-gentleman, but not mere school-teacherishly superior either; in short, it was an attempt to make an authentic Scottish accent sound refined without at the same time sounding artificial or effeminate.
> (p.275)

A contrast emerges here between what is required to establish identity in the eyes of the world and what is - or has been - a natural identity. A similar insecurity can be seen in Fergus' sexuality: a parody of the virile Scot in his kilt, he nevertheless blames his failure as a lover on

his Scottishness: 'A natural earthiness of mind added to a Calvinist conscience makes a combination prejudicial to any lover.' (p.62) Nevertheless, the most successful sexual relationship of his life is with Kirstie, another parody of the 'spirit of Scotland' figure. However, that relationship takes place in a setting well apart from what is seen as the everyday reality of Scotland; outwith the isolated context, it would appear that all Fergus' identity problems are caused by a conflict of external and internal pressures, of the contrast once again between an ideal and the real. This conflict is reinforced by the contradictions between Scotland the nation governed by a particular morality, and Scotland as a symbol of the problems created by its ethics. Fergus writes:

> It seemed to me that since Scotland was small, proud, poor, and intelligent, with a long history, she, better than any country I could think of ... had an opportunity to create a society in which poverty and all its humiliations had been abolished without refinement and spirituality being sacrificed. It would be a help that the Scots had never regarded themselves as particularly refined or spiritual.
>
> (pp.246-247)

Once again disadvantage and advantage are placed in an interchangeable relationship of paradox, still mocking both ideal and reality.

The paradoxes to which the novel points are not resolved in its conclusion. Fergus' experience of an almost apocalyptic return to Gantock - standing in Calderwood's garden watching as bombs fall on the town - is not permitted to stand as a moment of climax. If it had been, we would have been in danger of forgetting that old man writing his memoirs, who co-exists with and yet succeeds the 'fictional' Fergus. We would also be in danger of seeing the last response of that Fergus - 'I felt no hatred of the young German airmen doing their loathsome duty, and for the people of Gantock, at that moment suffering terror and pain and death, I felt only

pity and love.' (p.293) - as a moment of triumphant moral acceptance, a glimpse of the truth and understanding he had sought for so long. Instead, the concluding 'Footnote' reminds us of the strange 'author' who has rejected all admirers, even his son, who refuses any charity, any chance of 'salvation' from his fate, and who dies alone in poverty and sickness. The brief factual note from his son returns us to an awareness of the dual hero, and emphasises that moments of transcendence are inevitably followed by the continued need to survive with an implacable and often sordid reality. Even the one ideal, the one aspiration put forward by the aged Fergus - his desire for a full funeral on East Gerinish - is denied him, as the note informs us. And once again Jenkins has denied us a full commitment to the world of his fiction, by easing us away from any conclusive emotional response. Not only does the footnote cast some doubts on the 'truth' of what we have just read, by telling us that the important clues of Fergus 'the many poems scattered throughout, some in their entirety' (p.293) have been removed from the text, but it also creates a paradox in itself since its author 'T.C. L.', Fergus' son, is just as firmly rooted in the fiction as the 'character' of Fergus.

As in all Jenkins' novels, therefore, we are left in uncertainty as to how the moral injunctions expressed by the novel could be applied to our own existence, constrained as it is with the necessary relativity of circumstance. And, as in all his novels, the conclusion offered provides no resolution to the issues raised. The 'pity and love' felt by Fergus, like the 'pity and purified hope and joy' experienced by Lady Runcie-Campbell at the end of The Cone-Gatherers and the vision of Wahab taking Miss Johnstone's hand at the end of Dust on the Paw: 'as if he was about there and then to go running with her along, yes, along one of those

perilous sunlit roads' (p.384), is offered only as a temporary and ironic response to the intransigence of a moral dichotomy which no amount of compromise can resolve.

CHAPTER SIX

MURIEL SPARK: IMAGINATIVE EXTENSIONS OF THE TRUTH

'Fiction to me is a kind of parable. You have got to make up your mind it's not true', wrote Muriel Spark four years after the publication of her first novel in 1957.[1] Discrepancies between the realm of fiction and that world which is generally accepted as constituting our reality never appear to have greatly worried Spark. Even in that first novel, The Comforters, only a few, mocking, concessions are made to the conventions of literary realism and throughout her long writing career she has avoided any responsibility for the recreation of a recognisable reality. The idea of 'truth', however, is something with which she is very much concerned. Brought up in Scotland until she was seventeen, Muriel Spark, although half-Jewish, was exposed through her education to a rigorously Calvinist environment and, as The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie indicates, appears always to have been both attracted and repelled by the absolutes offered within the Calvinist philosophy of moral realism. Her conversion to Catholicism in 1954, however, seems to have provided her with an acceptable context for her own absolutist vision. Shortly after this she began to explore her moral perspective in the writing of fiction.

Unlike Robin Jenkins, Spark does not place her interest in a non-realist expression of moral absolutes against the humanist tradition of the realist novel. Having never adhered to the conventions of literary realism she has no need to confront them in her work. Indeed, in her often disparaging comments on fiction she betrays more allegiance to writers such as Hogg and Stevenson than to any of her more recent literary

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1. Muriel Spark, 'My Conversion', Twentieth Century, 170, no. 1011 (Autumn, 1961), 58-63, p.63.

predecessors or contemporaries with their commitment to social realism.[2] In her fiction Spark both assumes and implies in her readers an awareness of all the paradoxes and inconsistencies which Jenkins tends to conceal when creating his illusion of reality and only occasionally allows to break through; and she highlights those contradictions in the form which Stevenson exploits but never fully exposes. The control of the author, the paradox of authorial foreknowledge when opposed to the manipulation of suspense, the fixing, defining, yet limiting, qualities of language are all explicitly recognised in her novels, becoming a characteristic of her style.

Nevertheless, although she need never face up to and challenge realism, a process of literary confrontation is enacted within all her novels. Freed from the conventions of realism, the form of the novel which she adopts, with its exposure of control and foreknowledge, is one which closely resembles a Calvinist view of the universe, the view that all is known to an omniscient God with absolute control of human lives through the framework of predestination. Having transcended the problem of the novel as a kind of 'lying' by avoiding realism, she still has to confront the fact that the fictional form she has adopted displays the very characteristics

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2. Her attitudes to fiction reveal parallels with Robert Louis Stevenson, who wrote: 'There must be something wrong in me, or I would not be popular.'
Letter to Edmund Gosse (2 January, 1886), Letters vol.2, 1880-1887, Works XXVIII, p.311.

And in his behaviour James Hogg appears to have attempted a similar undermining of the seriousness of his fiction: 'he himself frequently set out to encourage the general interest in his character as a self-educated man of letters. Thus, on his visit to London he courted publicity by wearing a shepherd's plaid, and throughout his life he frequently referred to himself as 'the Ettrick Shepherd'.
Douglas Mack, Introduction, James Hogg, Memoirs of the Author's Life and Familiar Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott (Edinburgh, 1972), p.ix.

of that religion which, although it may have inculcated her with a desire for moral absolutes, has also made her fear the tyranny of absolutes which it imposes. In her own life Spark escaped from Calvinism to Catholicism. In so doing she moved away from a moral vision which imposes absolutes only through an external frame, thus rendering all human aspiration within it futile, to a religion which emphasises absolutes as a potential means of liberation from the constraints of an earthly reality. In her fiction too she seeks transcendence, a means of converting the imposition of limiting absolutes within the form to an appreciation of the potential within absolutes for making humanity perceive a new dimension to our apparently limited reality. Her own moral perspective, her own desire for moral absolutes, makes it impossible for her to write according to the conventions of the liberal humanist novel, as her comments on the subject consistently indicate:

> There is metaphorical truth and moral truth, and what they call anagogical, you know, the different sorts of truth; and there is absolute truth, in which I believe things which are difficult to believe but I believe them because they are absolute. And this is one aspect of truth, perhaps. But in fact if we are going to live in the world as reasonable beings, we must call it lies. But simply because one puts it out as a work of fiction, then one is not a liar. [3]

Spark must therefore - and in this she does resemble Jenkins - find a means of disrupting the very form of fiction which she has chosen to write. And only through this contradictory conjunction can she achieve the aim she has stated for her fictions:

> I don't claim that my novels are truth - I claim that they are fiction, out of which a kind of truth emerges. And I keep in my mind specifically that what I'm writing is fiction because I am interested in truth - absolute truth - and I don't pretend that what I'm writing is more than

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3. Frank Kermode, 'The House of Fiction: Interviews with Seven English Novelists', Partisan Review XXI, no.1 (Spring, 1963), 61-82, pp.80-81.

> an imaginative extension of the truth - something inventive. 4

Fiction for Spark thus offers both a paradigm of her own inner tensions about the function of moral absolutes, and a means of exploring and reaching a temporary resolution of them.

Each novel examined in this chapter can be seen as a variation on this central concern which is manifested in different attempts to disrupt the form of her fictions. In The Comforters she examines similarities between the novelist and God, assessing the responsibility of authorial foreknowledge, while also making quite clear her departure from the realist novel. Loitering with Intent, a novel written more than twenty years later, proves her continued acceptance of her particular position as a writer, but celebrates those contradictions implied in her first novel. In assessing the ways in which she has moved from the justifications of The Comforters to the rejoicing of Loitering with Intent, however, three other novels, which examine the same problematic yet indicate the direction her writing was taking, need to be considered. The Driver's Seat, Not to Disturb and The Hothouse by the East River, published within three years of each other, provide increasingly extreme expressions of the darker implications of the fictional form but, as a result, lead to an increasingly liberating disruption of that form, and provide a context for her enjoyment of all fiction's paradoxes as expressed in Loitering with Intent.

The Comforters

As Spark herself acknowledges, The Comforters[5] was both an innovation and

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4. Kermode, 'The House of Fiction', p.80.

5. Muriel Spark, The Comforters (London, 1957). All page references are to this edition.

an experiment for herself: 'I had to write a novel about somebody writing a novel, to see if it was aesthetically valid.'[6] And as it is an attempted validation of fiction, she makes little effort to conceal her preoccupations. The novel's central character, Caroline Rose, is herself a writer, currently working on a book entitled Form in the Modern Novel - and is having trouble with the chapter on Realism. Spark, however, making only a passing acknowledgement to the conventions of realism, appearing largely untroubled by it. When Caroline becomes involved with her ex-lover's attempts to discover the truth about his grandmother's connection to a smuggling ring, she seems to be in the situation of a typically English, detective novel, 'plot'. To her alarm, however, she soon begins to hear voices apparently writing her into scenarios within that novel, a novel which, she discovers after her initial fear and bewilderment, she will in fact write. As the cover blurb of the Penguin edition demands: 'Caroline Rose. Heroine or author of this novel?[7] The novel, however, sustains a more complex contradiction than this question seems to imply.

Initially Spark's own concept of a novel, with all the flaws and fissures of fictional illusion exposed, is placed in opposition to the readers' expectations of what a conventional novel should be and which we are led to believe, from the first few opening pages, this novel will be. Yet although the contradictions within her novel expose the illusion-creating devices conventionally concealed within the fictional form, they simultaneously make claims for the work as a 'truthful' revelation of the novel writing business. Thus, while adumbrating a different kind of

6. Ian Gilham, 'Keeping it Short' (edited interview), Listener, 24 September, 1970, 411-413, p.412.

7. Muriel Spark, The Comforters, Penguin edition (Harmondsworth, 1982).

'reality' by admitting the process of illusion, the novel also makes us distrust any fictional claims of presenting reality. Our conventional expectations of the form are also denied through the narrator. Firstly the figure of Caroline Rose blurs the distinction between the narrator, as someone relating all that has happened, and the character, who does not know what will happen next. Secondly we also have to contend with an authorial voice which apparently remains separate from Caroline's 'voices' until one becomes the other or both are subsumed into a single and unusually omniscient narrator at the end of the novel. Full identification with an authorial stance, a narrative voice, or even an 'innocent' central character, is thus denied the reader.

Once all illusions that this could be a 'realist' novel are destroyed Spark begins a more complex exploration of the deeper contradictions and moral implications of the form she has evolved. Indicating what will become a central problematic in all her novels, the focus of disruption in The Comforters is the novelist's power of control and foreknowledge. The novel opens by concentrating on Laurence Manders, but his limited position within the conventional novel 'plot' is soon made clear when he is described as being 'now in the present tense.' (p.4) Laurence, therefore, is trapped within the novel world. Caroline's 'voices', in contrast, are able to discuss even the future in the past tense. And, as Caroline begins to hear voices, and we become aware of a controlling presence behind the narrative, intruding into it, the conventional implications of a pattern of sequential events becomes distorted. This process begins simply enough when Caroline and Laurence send each other almost identical messages simultaneously: 'It was horrifying. Like predestination', Caroline remarks. (p.66) And soon all Caroline's most

instant thoughts are echoed by the sound of a typewriter and by her 'voices':

> Meantime, she was trembling, frightened out of her wits, although her fear was not altogether blind.
> Tap-click-tap. The voices again: Meantime, she was trembling, frightened out of her wits, although her fear was not altogether blind.
>
> (p.44)

The real force of this predestination becomes apparent, however, when the voices begin to anticipate Caroline's actions:

> "I've just jerked up to the fact," she said, "that our day is doing what the voices said it would. Now, we chatted about Eleanor. Then about ourselves. All right. We've frittered the day. The narrative says we went by car; all right, we must go by train. You do see that, don't you, Laurence? It's a matter of asserting free will."
>
> (p.108)

Despite all Caroline's attempts at resistance the car journey does take place and, due to her initial delaying tactics, the couple are involved in a car crash which later emerges as a necessary part of the novel's plot. In trying to assert free will she ends by complying with her destiny. The usual novelistic process, whereby all that happens next explains all that has happened before, is thus distorted in its emphasis throughout the novel as the external 'voices' and the voice of the narrator combine to precede the sequence of events leading up to a happening with an account of the event itself. And the most paradoxical expression of this distortion is reserved for the novel's conclusion, in which Laurence is shown puzzling over the way in which a letter he wrote to Caroline, destroyed and never posted, could appear in Caroline's finished novel, with a deeper irony implicit in the fact that we are reading an account of the incident from a source which is external to both Laurence and Caroline but is still part of the novel.

Spark's technique here is not merely one of playing games with chronology, a reordering of the fiction's events, but represents an attempt both to make the readers aware of fiction as paradigmatic of a moral universe, and to lead us into questioning this patterning. In all her novels Spark highlights the framework of absolute control implicit in her fiction, thus indicating that the events of her novels take place in a world in which absolutes may freely operate. Her exposure of this element of absolute control disrupts the usual patterning of events in fiction whereby suspense and the desire for dénouement are created. Through her technique therefore the readers' attention is not focused on the outcome of temporal sequences but is turned towards the presence of an authority which, through its control and foreknowledge transcends time. Yet although the authorial power of control, which establishes absolutes within the fictional form, may be seen as a form of imposition, limiting, defining, and fixing each part of the fiction in its place, the same power of control frees it from the necessity of 'realistic' logic, necessary causality, or confinement to the realities of temporal sequence. Within the absolute framework of the fiction, therefore, a potential liberation from the constraints of 'reality' can be presented. What is said in the fiction may limit and define but anything may be said. And in this apparent paradox the central contradiction of Spark's metaphysical position emerges, for, if an absolute framework in the Calvinist sense may appear a form of imposition, a tyrannical control, the Catholic outlook recognises that this same absolute framework may represent a potential liberation from human constraints. Within the fictional process, too, the same awareness of limitation and sense of potential is presented in combination, with both being created by the authorial presence.

The potential of fiction is indicated within the novel by ironic manipulations of the narrative position. At one point, for example, the reader is presented with the character of Eleanor, looking slightly worn, looking in fact 'like a framed portrait, indistinct, in need of some touching-up.' (p.92) If the pun on the physical and artistic implications of the phrase 'touching-up' is accepted the following chapter can be seen as supplying exactly what is required as in it we are given further information about Eleanor as she was in her youthful past. Her physical appearance is thus rejuvenated at the same time as her fictional character is given a greater depth. A similar instance of the controlling presence supplying the reader with whatever may be required or desired occurs when Caroline is lying in her hospital bed. We are told that the narrator does not know enough about hospitals to describe a ward in full detail, yet a few pages on we are given precisely that description, with the implication that Caroline has, by then, acquired the requisite experience to make such a description credible. And when Edwin Manders advises Caroline on her novel: 'Make it a straight old-fashioned story, no modern mystifications. End with the death of the villain and the marriage of the heroine' (p.231), the novel can ostensibly meet all his demands, with Georgina Hogg drowning and Louisa Jepp marrying Mr Webster. The authorial authority may thus meet all the apparently arbitrary demands made upon it.

Another example of the deeply ironic approach to the potential of fiction in The Comforters can be seen in the creation of Mrs Hogg, the novel's villain, and a character who simply disappears when no-one is looking at her. She is described as having'no private life whatsoever' (p.177) - which explains her ability to become invisible when on her own, although

by the end of the novel she is disappearing even when only asleep - and Spark uses her in two very different ways. On one level Mrs Hogg performs the fairly conventional function of being a testing point for the other characters who react to her in a variety of ways. To Helena, who cannot see the world in terms of a deeper moral dimension but judges only by appearances, Georgina Hogg is simply 'not all there' (p.208) whereas to Mervyn Hogarth, whom Mrs Hogg threatens with exposure throughout the plot, she is a creature of 'turbulent mythical dimensions' (p.159), and to Caroline, as novelist, she is 'not a real-life character ... only a gargoyle.' (p.157) Yet, since Georgina is also presented as a manifestation of evil - although convinced, nevertheless, of her own righteousness - she can be seen as operating within a world of absolutes and thus exposing the hollowness of the fictional process which tries to place her within a limited and relative reality. In her disappearances she mocks the fictional illusion that any character can be known and described. Her location within this other dimension of the novel is emphasised by the narrator's own ironic comment on her disappearance of 'God knows where she went in her privacy' (p.177), which, in addition to colloquial usage, could be given a literal interpretation. Spark's own comments on the nature of fictional 'characters' reinforce her reasoning behind the manipulations of Mrs Hogg:

> I don't understand about writers who tell you that the characters take over, develop a will of their own. I know the whole time that I'm making them up and I have to go on making up what they do, and this is very hard work. They must be real and behave logically and in character. I never believe in them myself but just have to hope the reader does. 8

In Mrs Hogg's more conventional role as a moral testing point Spark fulfils the readers' expectations of a solid character but, by allowing

8. Mary Holland, 'The Prime of Muriel Spark' (interview), Observer Colour Supplement, 17 October, 1965, 8-10, p.10.

her to disappear and then reappear, Spark completely disrupts our confidence in such conventions and makes us aware of the absolute power of the fiction's controller to create or destroy anything s/he chooses within the fictional world.

The limiting effect of absolutes (and of fiction as a form of absolute imposition) is also indicated throughout the novel however; and here Caroline Rose plays an important part. While she enacts the role of novelist by the end of the novel, her responses as she listens to the voices telling 'her' story can also be seen as reflecting those of the novel reader, resistant to narrative impositions. Moreover, through Caroline, Spark can convey her own resistance to the absolutism of her position within the fiction. As the car crash incident shows, Caroline resists the impositions of a foreknowing narrative presence in control of her. She also condemns Laurence for becoming involved in that very 'novel plot' which she is trying to resist: 'I can see clearly that your mind is working under the pressure of someone else's necessity, and under the suggestive power of some irresponsible writer you are allowing yourself to become an amateur sleuth in a cheap mystery piece.' (p.115) But, since in Caroline herself the distinctions between author, narrator and reader become blurred, her own resistance to 'someone else's necessity' is highly ironical. If she is 'the authorial presence' in the novel she can only achieve this status retrospectively, responding in some future time to her own past; any 'foreknowledge' in her case can only be gained by the end of the novel's events but before the writing of the same novel. As we are told at one point: 'Her sense of being written into the novel was painful. Of her constant influence on its course she remained unaware and now she was impatient for the story to come to an end, knowing that the narrative could never become coherent to her until she was at last outside it, and at the same time consummately inside it.' (p.206)

The image used here, of enclosing, overlapping boundaries which simultaneously define and yet undermine, is a frequent one in Spark's novels and it is an image which conveys the full paradox of fiction's absolutism. Yet in Caroline Rose Spark has also found a means of questioning and undermining that absolute control of the fictional narrator, as the control which Caroline later appears to possess is mocked throughout the novel.

At one point, Caroline condemns her 'voices' for showing 'Bad taste ... Revolting taste', but a few sentences later the narrative contains the comment: '"Bad taste" - typical comment of Caroline Rose.' (p.157) Apparently external comments are also made about the role which Caroline is intended to fulfil in the novel. In hospital, for example, she is supposed to be safely out of the way so that the plot can proceed without hindrance: 'Caroline among the sleepers turned her mind to the art of the novel, wondering and cogitating, those long hours, and exerting an undue, unreckoned, influence on the narrative from which she is supposed to be absent for a time.' (p.155) The statement thus creates a certain ambiguity as to whether we are being given a comment on the 'authorial presence' from an even more external 'author' or whether we are hearing Caroline herself analysing her own involvement. Indicating the problematic role of free will within an external determining framework - such as fiction - or within a divinely governed universe, framed by a system of absolutes, Spark juxtaposes the choice of either suffering under the impositions of absolutes or of becoming an absolute in oneself. But by bringing these alternatives together in the different aspects of Caroline Rose's position - the choice of either being within the fiction as a character suffering under authorial control, or the novelist outwith

the fiction determining and controlling events and characters - and by having Caroline simultaneously enact both roles, Spark herself transcends the necessity of making such a choice; she also offers her readers the recognition of another possible position. By separating out the roles of narrator, novelist, character, reader, through her exposure of the form's contradictions, while at the same time bringing them all together in Caroline, she diverts responsibility for that final element of control from herself. Avoiding any restrictive claims that could be made for her own position as author, she places herself in a less rigidly defined relationship to both characters, readers, and 'narrator'.

Yet even the transcendence to which Spark points only retains its potential within the fictional form; the enigmatic contradictions of the novel serve to remind the reader that no 'ideal' solution to the paradoxes which Spark explores can be extrapolated from the novel and applied to reality. As Mervyn Hogarth, one of the novel's more cynical characters, comments: 'Reality, however, refuses to accommodate the idealist.' (p.18) Therefore, although The Comforters does succeed as Spark's 'justification' of her fiction-making, it also shows that from her very first novel she was aware of, and acknowledged, a central problematic in her own fiction. In presenting a view of the potential of absolutes to free the reader from the constraints of limited and relative conceptions of 'reality', she is also externally imposing a view which cannot be expressed validly within that same limited world which conventionally accords with the reader's experience. Only by reading her fiction can the reader perceive any expansion of the boundaries of this 'reality', but this expanded perception will always be limited because it must be contained within and dependent upon the world of fiction. However, having made this

acknowledgement of a central paradox within her own aims for fiction, Spark is then free to explore the contradictions of her position and to find more extreme ways of disrupting her fiction, defying the absolutist limitations of the form, and making its contradictions a source of liberation.

In the novels which followed The Comforters Spark continued to examine, through a variety of approaches, the issues of control, foreknowledge, and predestined endings which she raises in that first novel. And as she faced up to the darker implications of her own fictional form, she became increasingly adventurous in testing the boundaries of the fictional world, disrupting it by emphasising its own inherent contradictions and, at the same time, using the fictional paradigm to explore her own moral perspective. In particular, The Driver's Seat, Not to Disturb and The Hothouse by the East River, all novels from the middle of her career, show her pushing further the paradoxical position, set out by Caroline Rose, of both accepting and transcending the power of fiction, of being both 'outside' the narrative and 'at the same time consummately inside it'.

The Driver's Seat

The central paradox examined in The Driver's Seat[9] is that of control, both divine and fictional, although the novel also focuses on the question of endings, fictional and personal. Lise, the novel's heroine, deliberately sets herself up as a murder victim, planning a holiday in a 'Southern town' in order to achieve the desired end. The novel details the day of her preparation - buying suitably loud clothes so that she will be

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9. Muriel Spark, The Driver's Seat (London, 1970). All page references are to this edition.

noticed, talking in a variety of strange accents, and generally behaving in such a way that she will be fixed in the minds of all who see her on her journey - and then describes her ultimately successful search for the man who will kill her. In her behaviour Lise is seen as abandoning all the constraints of her previously repressed character, a character which Spark describes succinctly while also implying an imminent change of personality to take place in the 'future':

> Her lips are slightly parted; she, whose lips are usually pressed together with the daily disapprovals of the accountants' office where she has worked continually, except for the months of illness, since she was eighteen, that is to say, for sixteen years and some months. Her lips, when she does not speak or eat, are normally pressed together like the ruled line of a balance sheet, marked straight with her old-fashioned lipstick, a final and a judging mouth, a precision instrument, a detail-warden of a mouth; she has five girls under her and two men.
> (p.12)

With similar objectivity and detachment we are told of Lise's efforts once abroad, as she single-mindedly devotes her attentions to finding the 'right type' who will kill her. After various false alarms, which reduce her to an anxious fear of failure, she eventually meets the 'right' man and literally leads him away to kill her. 'Lise touches him on the arm. "You're coming with me," she says.' (p.150) In so doing Lise takes control of the plot of the novel in which she is a character, and makes events comply with her own intentions. As Ruth Whittaker points out: 'Lise is reduced to making drama out of the most elemental plot of all, the knowledge that her life will end.'[10]

Lise's actions, however, have significance on a more important level than

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10. Ruth Whittaker, The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark (London, 1982), p.118.

merely providing a psychological insight to her character; by her death she gives the rest of her life a meaning outwith her own personality. As Frank Kermode argues in The Sense of an Ending: 'Men in the middest make considerable imaginative investments in coherent patterns which, by the provision of an end, make possible a satisfying consonance with the origins and with the middle.'[11] The novel, although written in the present tense, uses our awareness as readers of her end as part of our knowledge of Lise as a character. Her identity is created at a very early stage by the manner of her forthcoming death. Soon after the novel begins, we are told: 'Her nose is short and wider than it will look in the likeness constructed partly by the method of identikit, partly by actual photography, soon to be published in the newspapers of four languages.' (p.26) Our understanding of Lise is therefore always partly constituted by the fact that we know she will be a murder victim, a foreknowledge which we not only share with the author, but also with the character. Spark's technique thus moves one stage further than a conventional novelistic exposure of a work's devices. It is not uncommon for the reader to be given some indication from the novelist as to what a work's conclusion will be; most novelists are, after all, well aware of their characters' fates.[12] It is unusual, however, to have a character actually complicit in that conclusion's inevitability, and threatening to usurp the control of the novelist. Yet by such a device Spark shifts responsibility for establishing absolute control of the fictional world from the author outwith that world to someone from within it. Unlike Caroline Rose, Lise will not attempt to evade her destiny as novelist of

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11. Frank Kermode, The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction (New York, 1967), p.17.

12. Dickens in Great Expectations, Emily Brontë in Wuthering Heights, and Thackeray in Vanity Fair can all be seen as exploiting this characteristic of their fictions.

her own fate but will actively determine it for herself.

The pattern which the novel establishes, however, is a more subtle one than a simple evasion of authorial responsibility on the part of Spark for, while she allows the reader to perceive Lise as governing events, she also makes quite evident the degree of foreknowledge and control which belongs to the narrator of the novel. This she achieves by using a third person narration which continually provides comments on the future, inserted into descriptions of the past. And she emphasises the strangeness of this prefigurative capacity by her consistent use of the present tense.[13] Nevertheless, she also succeeds in maintaining the reader's awareness of the distinction between the narrator as story-teller and the novelist as external controller. The narrator, for example, appears so detached from events as to be frequently ignorant of Lise's state of mind. At one stage this narrator even comments: 'Who knows her thoughts? Who can tell?' (p.74) The narrator then, it seems, does not have complete control over, or insight into the character's every thought, whereas the novelist has control of events, even foreknowledge of them, but not control over Lise's 'necessary' part in them.

Yet Lise herself is not in complete control either, although she may aspire to that position. Despite having her 'end' in sight, she still worries that she may not achieve it. At one stage, in a taxi-cab, she almost breaks down at this thought:

> "Anything the matter, lady?" says the driver.
> "It's getting late," she says, weeping. "It's getting terribly late."

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13. 'I'm so interested in the present tense that I've redone a book I've been working on for three years, The Hothouse by the East River, and put it all in the present tense.'
George Armstrong, Interview, Guardian. 30 September 1970, p.8.

"Lady, I can't go faster. See the traffic."
"I can't find my boy-friend. I don't know where he's gone."
"You think you'll find him at the Metropole?"
"There's always a chance," she says. "I make a lot of mistakes."
(p.134)

Significantly Lise is, at this point, being driven as a passenger in a hired car; she is not in the 'driver's seat' which she will occupy, in every sense, when she takes her murderer to commit his crime. For the moment she has not only lost her 'boy-friend' but has also lost control. And Lise is dependent upon contingency in this way throughout the novel. Her victim is the very man whom she has sat next to on the plane. The old lady whom she befriends, Mrs Fiedke, unconsciously returns Lise to the very type for which she has been looking: the man on the plane, seeking to escape Lise, turns out to be the old lady's nephew. And Mrs Fiedke even provides Lise with the murder weapon, a knife bought as a present for that nephew, by asking Lise to keep it safe until she can give it to him. Irony is thus created out of events by the novelist at the expense of the characters. And because the characters, including Lise, do not have full responsibility for the situations in which they find themselves, and for the way in which apparent chance aids them, it becomes impossible - and irrelevant - to attribute blame for the act of murder to any one individual. We cannot tell, for example, whether Lise is ultimately and totally in control or whether she is merely complying with a destiny that has been externally decided for her and for her victim and murderer. Even the killer only makes feeble protestations at her demands because his inclinations tend towards murder anyway; fate appears to have provided him with a victim. Yet the reader can also recognise a certain truth in his excuses to the police that he had nothing to do with the organisation of the crime, that he was not even responsible for the location of the site, marked on the map: 'She must

have made it herself. She knew the way. She took me straight there.' (p.156) With his past history of mental problems and sexual violence, he has no means of resisting the opportunity to kill when it is presented to him; the choice of doing good or evil is no longer open to him.

The reader, however, also shares the murderer's predicament; we too have followed Lise to her death and have been left no alternative but to witness it; we are therefore, like the murderer, guilty of a certain degree of complicity. But in our compulsive pursuit of a conclusion to the novel, a conclusion of which we have been forewarned but nevertheless insist on pursuing, we adopt another role which demands an even greater degree of complicity. In our avid desire for an ending we too come to occupy the 'driver's seat', forcing the novel onwards to a conclusion that will satisfy us by ratifying all the hints about Lise's demise which we have previously been given. And by forcing us into this role Spark indicates exactly how the reader, by setting in motion the act of reading itself, by desiring an ideal solution - whether it could be applicable to our experience of reality or not - is as much part of the fictional process as the novelist, who is normally seen as being in the 'driver's seat'.

Spark herself is aware of the impetus which drives the events in the novel towards their inevitable conclusion: describing it as a 'study in self-destruction', she admits that this was a frightening book to write. Once the writer creates the original situation, it seems, she becomes responsible for forcing events through to their conclusion: 'I frightened myself by writing it, but I just had to go on.'[14] In order to avoid this

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14. Gilham, 'Keeping it Short', p.413.

fear and to bring the novel to its end, she keeps the novel on a certain level of detachment, eschewing the emotional involvement which she so much dislikes.[15] She also keeps the dialogue to a minimum, permitting very few conversations which are inessential to Lise's purpose, and she provides very few details about the lives of any of the characters except, again, those which are necessary to the bare plot. As a result the novel not only lacks the usual requisite background solidity of the realist novel but its barrenness becomes part of the novel's mythology, a reinforcement of the sterility of individual life which it portrays. Lise leads a barren existence in a bare room, discarding all but the essentials. Likewise, when faced with the absoluteness of the end, of death, humanity is reduced to an essential and bare relationship within an external context. It is only in such an absence of the circumstances and superfluous details of everyday reality that absolutes can be recognised. The novel itself makes this point when Lise, asked how she will recognise the 'right type' when she meets him, if she will feel a 'presence', replies: 'The lack of an absence, that's what it is. I know I'll find it.' (p.105) And Lise's room, as described at the beginning of the novel, indicates her earlier and less successful attempts to achieve such a recognition: 'The lines of the room are pure; space is used as a pattern in itself.' (pp.18-19) The style of the novel itself, moreover, operates according to a similar pattern. With its prose refined down to essentials, fiction is presented as a stark defence against nothingness, an attempt to define absolutes by placing them within a context of absences; but the process also becomes a form of definition,

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15. 'I think it's bad manners to inflict a lot of emotional involvement on the reader - much nicer to make them laugh and to keep it short.' Gilham, 'Keeping it Short', p.412.

as the barest of details provided delineates the boundaries of a vacuum.

In Catholic terms, the vacuum in which Lise operates is that of free will in the context of God's foreknowledge. However, Lise is also guilty of using that notion of free will to evade the blame for her own suicide. And, as Malcolm Bradbury points out, Lise's approach can be applied to the novel itself: 'The novelist's victory, happily derived at lesser cost ... is also casuistical, a kind of outwitting of the *nouveau roman* by showing that if the world is all present and disconnected there is always the claim of a future; plot can be won from a plotless world.'[16] Yet, although Lise perversely exercises free will, the novel still contains a sense of her being in thrall to some form of predestination. She must, for example, find exactly the 'right type' destined for her and this necessity leads to a totally functionary approach to her present existence. Bill, of the microbiotics, is discarded because he is almost too kind to her, wishing to establish some form of relationship, whereas all she seeks is the deliverer of her death. She dislikes it when characters attempt to become intimate, to reveal their personalities to her. And, her response to the proximity of death would seem to indicate that she is not fully master of her own destiny but is yielding to an external force: 'As the knife descends to her throat she screams, evidently perceiving how final is finality.' (p.159)

Maintaining the ambivalence about who is in control even in the conclusion, the image of the 'driver's seat' not only blurs distinctions between novelist, narrator, character and reader, attributing to each a degree

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16. Malcolm Bradbury, 'Muriel Spark's Fingernails', *Possibilities: Essays on the State of the Novel* (London, 1973), 247-255, pp.253-254.

of responsibility: the image also provides a sharp focus for Caroline Rose's contradictory wish of being both outwith and inside the narrative. Whoever is in the driver's seat has the freedom to 'drive' anywhere, to make anything happen. Yet this same liberation calls for choices on the part of the 'driver', the controlling force, as to what should be done, what direction to take. Fiction offers a parallel conflict of apparent arbitrariness and necessity. Although Lise attempts to control the fiction from inside, to achieve absolute control from within, she too becomes a 'victim of necessity', and suffers through her own absolutism, unable to defy the inevitability of the narrative she has set in motion. Yet through sacrificing Lise the novel itself becomes a means of revealing the danger of such absolutism, and in this condemnation temporarily escapes from the very boundaries which it criticises.

Not to Disturb

Despite the fact that The Driver's Seat and Not to Disturb[17] are only a year apart in publication, the latter shows a distinct advancement in the sophistication of its approach, as well as conveying a sense of greater relaxation in the writer as she moves from the intensity of the thriller format to a parody of the Gothic novel.

Having taken the concept of absolute control to one of its limits, Spark now concentrates on pushing the implications of predestination in fiction to another extreme. Although both novels favour Spark's manipulations of the present tense, Not to Disturb is even more radical in its disruptions of conventional literary chronology and sequential patterning. If The

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17. Muriel Spark, Not to Disturb (London, 1971). All page references are to this edition.

Driver's Seat exploits narrator, character, and reader's expectations of a future ending, Not to Disturb follows the logical trajectory of this position until it becomes a novel which discards even the plot of the 'future' as already being a part of the 'past'. It also moves away from attributing any activity to the central characters governing events in order to ensure that the 'future' will take place as planned. Although Lise has an end in mind, she also has an active role to perform in order to ensure its completion, as can be seen in her anxious search for Mr Right and her careful planning of details, even down to all the effort and emotion expended in trying to find a dress that will stain. Lister, the main manipulator of Not to Disturb, in contrast, has the plot of the future (and the end of the novel) so firmly fixed in his mind that he need do nothing to make it happen, only ensure that events are not too disrupted by external contingencies. Any plans that he does make are for a time when all the novel's event - and the novel - are over. The sequence of events within the novel, therefore, is, in a sense, irrelevant to the patterning of the work. The pattern, determined before the novel begins, becomes an absolute, and we can only await its inevitable fulfilment.

The situation which makes this pattern possible is the supervision of a group of servants over the murders and suicide of their two aristocratic employers and the secretary-lover of both in a locked room within their mansion. Even before events take place the servants have decided what will happen, make plans accordingly and, when their employers retire to that room, with orders 'not to be disturbed', simply wait for the conclusion of the inevitable. The servants, led and inspired by Lister, have foreseen all that will happen; they even know what will be the murder weapon, and have made preparations to exploit their own positions of

involvement to the utmost advantage. Ready to tell their stories to specially selected reporters through prepared interviews, they have also worked out all the financial arrangements for the eventual film rights. Since we are told of all this at the beginning of the novel, there is very little room left for suspense. The novel therefore is virtually deprived of any peripeteia, a literary device which Frank Kermode describes as depending 'on our confidence of the end; it is a disconfirmation followed by a consonance; the interest of having our expectations falsified is obviously related to our wish to reach the discovery or recognition by an unexpected and instructive route.' He goes on to point out: 'The more daring the peripeteia, the more we feel that the work respects our sense of reality.'[18] In Not to Disturb, however, nothing disturbs; there is no sense of disconfirmation. Indeed, it would be impossible for one to exist since any events in the 'middle' are already subsumed into those of the end. Eleanor, perhaps the one character who is less than completely certain in her assumptions of the future, is even reprimanded by Lister when she questions his use of the past tense:

> "The whole of Geneva got a great surprise."
> "Will get a surprise," Eleanor says.
> "Let us not split hairs," says Lister, "between the past, present and future tenses." (p.6)

By assuming a position of God-like omniscience in which past, present and future all become part of a continuum, Lister transcends all temporal distinctions. And ironically the readers, with the end placed before them at the beginning, are put into a similar position.

Having, through this extreme situation, established an exposure of that

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18. Kermode, The Sense of an Ending, p.18.

predestination always implicit, but more usually concealed, within fiction, Spark proceeds to illustrate the power of this absolute determination of the future over events, as even contingencies are subsumed into the overall plan. She achieves this by showing the 'fate' of events which initially appear to be 'unexpected'. One such event takes place when the servants discover that the lunatic youth upstairs is actually the direct heir of the property, but he is immediately married off to the very pregnant maid, Heloise. The extreme fortuitousness of this discovery is aided by the arrival - again 'unexpected' - of the 'Reverend', who is just in time to marry the couple. Although such events may not have been foreseen, it is still implied that the characters involved have very little choice in their participation and that all unexpected happening will nevertheless culminate in the 'expected' ending. As Lister points out: 'one foresees the unforeseen.' (p.109) Informing the clergyman that he must perform the marriage ceremony, he adds: 'You can't refuse. In fact, you may not refuse.' (p.112) As soon as anyone becomes part of this train of events all choice of action is denied them; they are incorporated in a sequence with its own internal logic, becoming victims of a predestined 'necessity'. As Lister states: 'There is a vast difference between events that arise from and those that merely follow after each other. Those that arise are preferable.' (p.111) Lister's parody of the aesthetically fulfilling processes of causality in fiction reveals the extent to which the 'real' world and the world of fiction have been merged.

The other interruption in the course of the novel is the arrival of two friends of the (about to be murdered) secretary, who are refused entry to the house since they 'don't come into the story' (p.51), and are later

referred to as 'only extras'. (p.142) Since Spark herself admits that her aim in writing the novel was, 'to pare everything away which I feel to be superfluous',[19] it is not surprising that the same rigour is applied to the two unwelcome guests by the narrator of the novel. They are killed immediately, without sympathy, and only in a subordinate clause: 'Meanwhile the lightning, which strikes the clump of elms so that the two friends huddled there are killed instantly without pain, zig-zags across the lawns, illuminating the lily-pond ....' (p.143) They depart unnoticed, in the almost religious fervor with which the inhabitants of the mansion view the progress of events: 'What is done is about to be done and the future has come to pass', marvels Lister. (p.12) Appreciation of this future is therefore seen to transcend the death of two individuals, to be on a higher level, even, than time itself. Or such, at least, is the point of view of Lister, who asks that we do not 'strain after vulgar chronology.' (p.66)

It is Lister who, throughout the novel, indicates to the servants the more philosophical implications of their roles outwith that of purely monetary gain. When counting a small part of his future income, he remarks, 'Small change, ... compared with what is to come, or has already come, according as one's philosophy is temporal or eternal.' (p.17) This distinction in chronology is an important one for the novel, and plays an important part in Spark's work in general. Writing at an early stage in her career on the particular qualities of Proust, she states:

> Proust in many ways anticipated a revised notion of Time which is still in process of formulation. He regarded Time subjectively, and realised that the whole of eternity

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19. Philip Toynbee, Interview, Observer Colour Supplement, 7 November 1971, 73-74, p.74.

> is present 'now'. Of the span of his life recollected in its eternal aspect, Proust writes "I had at every moment to keep it attached to myself ... I could not move without taking it with me." Proust fixes in our mind that when we use words like 'forever', 'eternal', phrases like 'everlasting life', 'world without end', we refer to an existence here and now, to which we cannot normally approximate. He reminds us that there is a method of apprehending eternity through our senses, analogous to our sacramental understanding of eternity by faith. 20

Spark has always acknowledged Proust as an influence on her work, and in this passage we can sense her admiration for his description of the conjunction between temporal and eternal. Capable herself of using her fiction to achieve the 'apprehension of eternity' which Proust describes, she obviously appreciates the theological implications of his use of time, especially when seen in relation to the Catholic concept of transcendence. As Henri de Lubac points out when discussing Catholic doctrine on the relationship of humanity to the eternal:

> Man is only himself, he only exists for himself here and now if he can discover within himself, in silence, some untouched region, some mysterious background which ... is not encroached upon by the cares of the present....
>
> There is in man an eternal element, a 'germ of eternity', which already 'breathes the upper air', which always hic et nunc evades the temporal society. The truth of his being evades his being itself. 21

One one level, therefore, Not to Disturb can be seen as offering an image of eternal atemporality, a transcendence of earthly chronology, a new perspective on the 'truth of being'. But the novel also exemplifies the horror which this tyrannical control, this absolute, eternal framework can impose upon the values inherent in a relative conception of earthly existence.

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20. Muriel Spark, 'The Religion of an Agnostic: A Sacramental View of the World in the Writings of Marcel Proust', Church of England Newspaper, 27 November 1953, p.1.

21. Henri de Lubac, Catholicism: A Study of Dogma in Relation to the Corporate Destiny of Mankind, translation Lancelot C. Sheppard (London, 1950), pp.198-199.

The most obvious criticism of predestinal forces is made through the portrayal of the servants. If the novel does offer transcendence of time, they would appear most likely to have access to this eternal realm. In the main, however, they are depicted as callous, grasping and unpleasant. Ruth Whittaker, seeking to provide a Catholic interpretation of the novel, is clearly disturbed both by the power of the servants and by the force of authorial authority. Commenting on the death of the two intruders, she states: 'Inevitably all authors make such a selection, but it is the gratuitous display of power, the revelling in it, which makes this incident so peculiarly disagreeable.'[22] Such callousness, also exemplified in the denial of a profitable marriage to Sister Breton, the idiot's nurse, can, however, be viewed as an extreme parody of the predestinal implications of authorial control, and a mockery of the bleak philosophy of predestination itself. If the future, past and present are all one in the eyes of an external presence - be it God or a novelist - there then seems little point in distinguishing between them. In the light of some future world, or the end of this world, they will blend together and can be defined only by their not being at the point of ending. Teleological extremes thus provide an illustration of what happens when a universe - fictional or moral - becomes totally orientated towards its own end, an end which alone can offer full understanding of that universe.

Through exaggeration of this teleological approach Spark can present an extreme mockery and implicit criticism of predestination but in so doing must also mock her own use of a fictional and predestined form to make that criticism. In Not to Disturb this ultimate mockery of fiction (and

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22. Whittaker, p.120.

condemnation of predestination) is achieved by dooming those callous servants to a life trapped within the fictional dimension.

As Ruth Whittaker points out: 'The novel is filled with jargon relating to the manufacture of fictions, the welding together of events; it sounds, collectively, like an extract from a thesaurus: 'coalesce', 'coincidence', 'connect', 'construe', 'co-ordinate', 'correspond'.'[23] Such examples, however, are only the tip of the iceberg; not only is the use of certain jargon a noticable feature in the novel, but the role of such words in the construction of sentences is of equal importance as the following exchanges indicate: '"I wouldn't have married him for choice," says Heloise. "He doesn't cognate"' (p.111); '"He had a kind of something," Pablo says. "I know," says Hadrian. "But it didn't correspond."' (p.90);'"Heloise, relate." "What do you mean, I don't relate?" she says. When you relate you don't ask what you mean. There's such a thing as a trend."' (p.89); '"Lister can adjust whatever it is. Lister never disparates, he symmetrizes," Heloise says and lights a cigarette.' (p.95); '"Lister's got equibalance," he says, "and what's more, he pertains."' (p. 95); '"You have to me be frank with those types," Heloise says. "They don't connect," says Pablo."' (p.108) In each of the examples verbs which are usually transitive are used intransitively; as a result no 'connection' is made by them, and little sense is gained from them. The objects of the statements never appear; like the novel they await completion but, again like the novel, are nevertheless complete and must be taken as they stand.

In these extremes the novel does not, however, represent a rebellion

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23. Whittaker, p.119.

against, or movement away from the fictional form; rather it shows what can happen if the conventions of the form are themselves pushed to extremes. If connections are made too completely by the patterns of fiction, by the neatness of a plot, if all can be anticipated, then the value of connectiveness itself as a means of conveying significance is lost. And yet this is what fiction usually does - although it attempts to provide an illusion of incompleteness in the process. It is therefore unsurprising that the fate of all the characters in Not to Disturb, who have so cleverly plotted and accepted the ending of their own story, is to be assimilated into their own fictions. Even before the novel ends we can hear their voices reciting 'life-stories' to various prepaid journalists. The triumph of Lister and his colleagues therefore only has any meaning within the fiction they themselves have created. As Lister himself proves, they are lost in a tangle of novelistic cliches, denying all reality - even that of geometry - through the power of words: 'To put it squarely, as I say in my memoir, the eternal triangle has come full circle.' (p.39) Likewise, by holding an ending in mind - although concealing it conventionally by suspense and delay - fiction destroys any connection it may have with a 'real' world in which endings cannot be foreseen. The characters who attempt to achieve their triumph over time are thus implicitly condemned and, rather than transcending their existence by moving into an eternal dimension, they become trapped forever within the realm of fiction; in trying to move outwith the narrative they become 'consummately' trapped within it - and thus also trapped within the temporality they have sought to transcend.

The Hothouse by the East River

The third in this group of novels written in the early 1970s, The Hothouse

by the East River,[24] is the most complex of the three novels in its theme and construction. If Lise fails either to be totally outwith the narrative or to control it completely from within, and if Lister, by moving outwith events becomes trapped within the fiction, the two central characters in The Hothouse by the East River can be seen as trapped within different dimensions of the fictional process, one trapped by his attempts to impose absolutes, the other apparently liberated by her acceptance of them. And, although the novel again examines foreknowledge and authorial control in relation to 'endings', the greater complexity of the approach is indicated in the first line of the novel: 'If it were only true that all's well that ends well, if only it were true.' Indeed, the whole question of endings takes on a more metaphysical implication in the novel for, as we eventually discover, the novel's main characters, Elsa and Paul, although appearing to lead lives of frenetic luxury in New York, are in fact already dead. Focusing on their haunted and haunting deceptions of themselves and each other, the novel also examines the confrontations with imaginary friends and family which take place in their apartment on the East River, an apartment where the faulty central heating system means that the inhabitants are permanently suffering from excesses of heat or cold. But the novel also looks back into the past of Elsa and Paul, to a more peaceful existence in England - paradoxically during the war - when both Paul and Elsa worked with an intelligence unit and where they were both killed in a bombing attack.

It is New York, however, which operates in the novel as an important indication of the work's metaphysical dimensions as well as providing a

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24. Muriel Spark, The Hothouse by the East River (London, 1973). All page references are to this edition.

social milieu. The world of the wealthy in New York may exemplify a particularly extreme aspect of modern life, but it is the attitudes governing this lifestyle, revealed in the behaviour of Paul and Elsa but also of their family, Pierre and Katerina, their friend Princess Xavier and the psychoanalyst Garven, which are of primary interest to Spark. She describes the city as:

> home of the vivisectors of the mind, and of the mentally vivisected still to be reassembled, of those who live intact, habitually wondering about their states of sanity, and home of those whose minds have been dead, bearing the scars of resurrection. (p.12)

For Paul and Elsa this is a suitable setting; not only are they ghosts, haunting New York as it haunts them, but they too wear the scars of mental and spiritual resurrection. The nebulous world of New York gives them full scope for their self-deceptions and mutual game-playing. It also provides Spark with a means of conveying to the reader just how far the boundaries of reality that we can accept in a fiction may be tested for, although we are given frequent clues to the 'unreality' of the situation with such paradoxical remarks as Paul's cry of 'How long ... will these people, this city, haunt me?' (p.104), while he is, in fact, haunting the city, and Katerina's enquiry to her mother: 'Am I on a trip or is she real?', to which Elsa replies 'Both' (p.106), we, the readers, like Paul, try to ignore the implications of such comments and to resist the world of apparent 'unreality' imposed by the fiction. To accept the situation which the character's remarks imply would be to accept the fact of Paul and Elsa's death and would destroy any recognisable solidity within the novel's world. Like Paul we wish to remain in a state of ignorance about the true dimensions of this strange world which, the novel implies, is nevertheless a dimension of reality although one ignored in a

liberal humanist perspective. To accept the dimensions of this world would reveal the limits which are conventionally ascribed to existence in order to confine it to a relative and comprehendable definition of 'reality'. Paul therefore reflects our own reactions to what seems an alien and absolutist vision.

The most obvious dimension of his and his wife's existence which Paul wishes to ignore is the very fact of their deaths; for the reader, however, the focus of the novel is not their deaths, but their existence within a modern vision of Purgatory. Modern New York, 'Manhattan the mental clinic ... New York the sedative chamber where you don't think at all and you can act as crazily as you like and talk your head off all day, all night' (pp.89-90), provides an ideal image of Purgatory, the dimension between Heaven and Hell in which sinners suffers temporarily but in a timeless, atemporal world. Like New York, Purgatory is not only a place, it is a state, a condition. And Paul, trapped within this dimension, unable to face the implications of his position, needs this world where 'we analyse and dope the savageries of existence.' (p.89) Elsa, in contrast, is much more liberated from the demands of New York, - she even leaves it to go abroad at one point - and can accept both her death and the necessity of a period in Purgatory, while recognising too the absolute dimensions of Heaven and Hell which define its boundaries.

Examining the analogies between New York and Purgatory, Ruth Whittaker complains that the allegory is not sustained: 'it is impossible to interpret the internal symbolism'.[25] Spark, however, can be seen as

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25. Whittaker, p.129.

encapsulating a condition and the feelings created by it rather than attempting any direct allegorical representation. Moreover, I would argue that she is using the idea of Purgatory itself in a symbolic way, as representing similar problems and paradoxes within metaphysics and within the nature of fiction. It is therefore worth considering more closely the definition of Purgatory itself. According to the New Catholic Encyclopaedia it is:

> the state, place or condition in the next world, which will continue until the last judgement, where the souls of those who die in the state of grace, but not yet free from all imperfection, make expiation for unforgiven venial sins or for the temporal punishment due to venial and mortal sins that have already been forgiven and, by so doing, are purified before they enter heaven. 26

As Paul and Elsa were killed unexpectedly, while enjoying a temporary reconciliation but still suspecting each other of sexual deceptions, Purgatory is their just destination for an undefined period of suffering. Although it is neither Heaven nor Hell, it is removed from the world of earthly reality and provides a dimension in which the sinner is aware of the ideal state but is also conscious of failure, for the pain suffered in Purgatory is not necessarily that of conventional hellfire but, according to Catholic doctrine, is the punishment of being deprived from the beatific vision of God.[27] Spark therefore places her subjects in a vacuum, in a world defined by the absolutes of Heaven and Hell but in itself operating as a definition of both these states by virtue of being neither of them. Within the vacuum, there exists a world

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26. New Catholic Encyclopaedia (Washington, 1967), XI, p.1034.

27. 'The temporary deprivation of the beatific vision, for which the soul would otherwise be prepared, is surely one of the keenest punishments of purgatory.'
New Catholic Encyclopaedia, XI, p.1036.

without any of the relative definitions of an earthly existence. And yet it is implied that this is, in fact, the reality of an earthly existence which the realist novel cannot convey.

The two characters within this world respond very differently to it. To Paul the most frightening aspect of his existence is exactly its lack of definition; throughout the novel he attempts to ignore the world into which he is thrown and to impose upon it his own regulations and control. Within the dimension of Purgatory the boundaries to it provide the only true definitions, are the only certainties, and within these boundaries all attempts to establish relative meaning becomes futile. Paul, attempting to avoid this realisation by attributing all distortions of his desired reality to Elsa's imagination, is nevertheless faced with statements and ideas which break down all his accepted notions of time and space logic. Elsa confidently states: 'I never do today the same as I did yesterday' (p.86), and she tells Paul: 'You think of everything my dear, when you don't think of something else' (p.42); even when Paul asks his daughter, 'Did you really date him, Katerina'? she replies 'Oh, I don't know, Pa. If it wasn't him it was someone else.' (p.85) He is thus confronted with a world in which any rearrangement of time is possible, and betrays his own subconscious participation in it by such comments as: 'Today she began a new course in analysis, or perhaps she began last week' (p.17); he even begins to doubt his own control over the present: '"Are you ready?" he says. Or perhaps he says, "Now, pull yourself together"' (p.19); and his sense of the past:

> He cannot remember exactly what day it was that on returning to the flat at seven in the evening - or six ... if he could remember the season of the year ...
>
> In the evening - he cannot exactly remember the day, the time of day, perhaps it was spring, or winter, perhaps it was five, six o'clock... (p.16)

It thus becomes extremely difficult for him to ignore the fact that in Purgatory, 'the separated soul no longer lives in the time of this world, but in aevum, where duration is not measured in days and years.'[28] He is faced with what he sees as a dangerous continuum, a force of predestination which transcends time and, like Lister's view of events in Not to Disturb, renders each individual incident within that continuum meaningless.

In this world of uncertainty Paul's attempt to define the nature of reality and unreality become focused on his efforts to establish the whereabouts and identity of Helmut Kiel, a man to whom both Paul and Elsa were attracted while in England during the war, and whom Elsa claims she has met working in a shoe shop in New York. All Paul's suspicions of Elsa, all his recriminations about the past, focus on Kiel but his obsessive search for him eventually leads not only to a reconciliation between Paul and Elsa but also to Paul's acceptance of his own death. Well aware of the nature of Paul's desperate search, Elsa comments: 'If Paul could be induced to believe this man's somebody else, then he becomes somebody else.' (p.44) Yet although Paul does eventually accept this potentiality inherent in Purgatory, brought about by the very lack of those relative meanings and definitions which he seeks, he never achieves the total liberation of Elsa. Elsa, trailing her 'faithful and lithe cloud of unknowing across the pavement' (p.168),[29] accepts that if nothing

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28. New Catholic Encyclopaedia, XI, p.1036.

29. The Cloud of Unknowing is a religious treatise written by an anonymous English mystic in the fourteenth century. As Phyllis Hodgson describes it, quoting from the original treatise, the aim of the contemplative is: 'To eliminate all distractions that play upon the mind in order to concentrate solely on the goal, this is to enter the cloud, or the darkness, of unknowing:

> When I sey darknes, I mene a lackyng of knowying; as alle that thing that thou knowest not, or elles thou hast forteyn, it is derk to thee, for thou seest it not with thi goostly ighe.

Phyllis Hodgson, Three 14th-Century English Mystics (London, 1967),p.23.

is real then one can become or can know anything. Her name clearly linked with the repeated motif of 'someone else', 'something else', she understands the potential for becoming anything within the limits of Purgatory, unlike Paul and Garven, the psychoanalyst, who both wish to establish some kind of normality that they can explain in the terms of a relative, earthly existence. Elsa, however, represents the extreme of acceptance of the unknown within an absolute framework, and in her final reconciliation offers some solution to the darker implications of the novel's vision. As Peter Kemp points out:

> The self, it demonstrates, can never hope to find security through complete and final understanding of another person. There will always be the dark shadow - the unascertained and the ambiguous. The only way to achieve peace of mind, therefore, is to become resigned to this and unselfishly make a leap of faith. 30

The 'cloud of unknowing' which Elsa carries around with her allows for this leap, indeed demands it for, as Phyllis Hodgson points out in her book on English mysticism:

> The aim of The Cloud ... was essentially psychological: to destroy the bonds which chain the individual to the world of his senses and discursive reason, thereby holding him from his eternal nature. The exercise taught must be begun in faith, and only in response to a special and unmistakeable prompting of grace. 31

By her acceptance of this cloud of unknowing Elsa can both accept the absolute dimensions to her existence and enjoy the absence of definitions within it. And her acceptance of an achronological, providential order provides an alternative to the darker side of predestination as presented in Not to Disturb.

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30. Peter Kemp, Muriel Spark (London, 1974), p.155.

31. Hodgson, p.23.

Rather than simply presenting New York as a symbol of Purgatory, the novel can therefore be seen using Purgatory itself as offering symbolic insight on several levels. Firstly it is used as a means of exploring the reading/writing process with all its advantages and disadvantages. Paul, in his attempts to impose a relative interpretation onto the world of the novel, reflects the struggles experienced by the reader accustomed to the liberal humanist conventions of the novel in attempting to relate the patterning of an unreal, fictional world, into a paradigm of significance for their own existence. Elsa, in contrast, could be described as Muriel Spark's ideal, if not actually 'implied' reader, liberated from the constraints of a rigid and secular conception of reality. As such, however, she has no place within a circumscribed 'reality' and must remain inscribed into the dimension described as 'unreal' and 'fantastic'.

In addition to reflecting the reading process, the characters and their dilemmas also offer analogies with the making of fiction itself.[32] Paul is terrified by the potential arbitrariness of his world and tortured throughout the novel by the jargon of fiction. He is told, for example, that Katerina 'is a vagary of your mind, that's all' (p.152), and events in which he believed are described as 'That was your imagination running away with itself.' (p.151) And it is this dangerous freedom of creation, in which any kind of 'reality' can be contemplated, which he attempts to evade for most of the novel while trying to impose his own rigid 'authorial' control over events to such an extent that he even protests about the 'real' existence of Elsa: 'She's a development of an idea, that's all. She's not my original conception any more. She took a life of her own.' (p.149) Elsa herself is most terrifying of all to him, in fact, because she has accepted and moves within this expanded 'reality', revelling in

32. Auberon Waugh describes the version of New York presented in the novel as a 'literary hell'. 'Spark Plug', Spectator, 17 March 1973, 331-332, p.332.

its potential for liberation. As well as the 'ideal reader' therefore she also offers a contrast to Paul in being representative of an 'ideal author', freed from all the constraints of necessary representation and thus of fixing or settling for any single vision of reality. Yet Elsa is also a dangerous force to introduce into everyday conceptions of a relative existence, since the 'something else' which she represents renders all the conventional terms and definitions useless, destroying the moral imperatives necessary for a conventional functioning within that relative existence. In the dichotomy between the two characters, therefore, Spark explores further the implications of the pressures and the potentialities of the fiction-making process, the conflict between the necessity of controlling and defining and the desire to establish a potential for escaping from definitions and control.

Even this fictional analogy is not, however, of paramount importance in the novel. As in the other works discussed in this chapter, Spark uses the processes of fiction as a means not only of examining her own moral disquiet with the novel as a form but also of assessing the novel as a paradigm in itself of the moral and ontological paradoxes which she faces. Trapped in their hothouse Paul and Elsa are brought together as representing conflicting and essentially unreconcilable attitudes to the relationship between absolute ideals and the relative morality necessary for operating within an experiential and circumscribed reality. The central irony of the novel is that Spark brings these two together in a moment of reconciliation, a reconciliation achieved by both through acceptance of the leap of faith; this leap of faith however is in itself only made possible within a 'circumscribed reality' by the existence of the fiction, the very medium that helps create the dichotomy in the first place. And

in this apparent paradox the most central conflicts of Spark's attitude to morality and to fiction are expressed. In attempting to maintain a relative moral outlook and to interpret reality within certain human boundaries which have no room for absolutes, Paul represents a logical extension of Spark's own fear of acceeding to the acceptance of Calvinist-like moral absolutes which define, but in a very negative way, everyday existence. In Elsa and her 'cloud of unknowing', however, a Catholic answer to Spark's desire for moral absolutes - which, paradoxically, derives from the same Calvinist inheritance - is presented, in which absolutes expand the dimensions of everyday existence. And yet, because such a perspective threatens conventional limitations on 'reality', and cannot be assimilated into a relative outlook, Elsa remains in her 'hothouse' and the reader must accept that it is only through the fictional process that Spark can achieve a satisfactory expression of that 'leap of faith' necessary for reconciling the ambivalences of a philosophy of moral absolutism.

In The Hothouse by the East River Spark succeeds in bringing together, through the reconciliation of Paul and Elsa, two dimensions of absolute control, with the apparently crazy world of the narrative only becoming coherent when both characters accept its boundaries from within and can thus move outwith it. As the tensions of the novel show, however, such a reconciliation can only be achieved after considerable struggle, and the resolution gained is only temporary, kept in that moment of the fiction.

Loitering with Intent

The tensions evident in The Hothouse by the East River reassert themselves

in Spark's later, and bleaker novels, The Takeover[33] and Territorial Rights.[34] However, the joy in her portrayal of Elsa also indicates her capacity for celebrating the disruptions of her fiction, for enjoying the sense of potential achieved by the recognition of absolutes. Nowhere is this made more evident than in Loitering with Intent.[35] In many ways this novel indicates a return to the basic principles examined in The Comforters but, if that early novel is an attempt to examine and justify the implications of the kind of fiction which she writes, Loitering with Intent represents an affirmation of her continued belief in the validity of her endeavours combined with a recognition that her basic suspicions of the form have never been satisfactorally alleviated.

Spark's ouevre is characterised by her experiments with fictional genres and Loitering with Intent, ostensibly falling into the category of autobiography, is no exception. Whether the novel is read as an oblique autobiography of Spark herself, or as the autobiographical memoirs of Fleur Talbot, the central character, first person narrator, and herself a writer, it gives Spark the chance to explore further the relationship between author, narrator, novelist, character and reader, in a tightly-knit context. Earlier Spark novels have dealt with various types of image-makers, but a 'writer' has not been the focus of her attention since The Comforters. In Loitering with Intent she again confronts, with increased sophistication and enjoyment, the nature of the writer's art. Many of

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33. Muriel Spark, The Takeover (London, 1976).

34. Muriel Spark, Territorial Rights (London, 1979).

35. Muriel Spark, Loitering with Intent (London, 1981). All page references are to this edition.

Fleur's remarks echo comments made by Spark herself in her infrequent interviews and, like Spark, Fleur embarks on a literary career in London during the late 1940s. The novel itself is a retrospective assessment of the events surrounding the publication of Fleur's first novel, Warrender Chase, and Fleur's awareness of her role as a writer obviously gives Spark full scope for assessing her own position. Moreover, it would seem that an increasing self-confidence allows Spark to explore in even greater depth the dichotomy between the novelist as an actual manipulator of events and experience, a source of control and foreknowledge, a force of definition and limitation, and the novelist as a potential liberator from the constraints of everyday 'reality', possessing the power to establish expanded perceptions of the moral dimension. And in its tone Loitering with Intent establishes from the start a sense of self-justification in the novelist's pursuit, expressed quite openly by Fleur herself:

> The thought came to me in a most articulate way: 'How wonderful it feels to be an artist and a woman in the twentieth century.' That I was a woman and living in the twentieth century were plain facts. That I was an artist was a conviction so strong that I never thought of doubting it then or since ... (p.25)

In spite of a greater element of personal involvement than usual, therefore, Spark can achieve detachment through a light-hearted tone yet can also examine in greater depth than in any previous novels, the function of fiction in representing unattainable absolutes in opposition to a limited view of reality while still indicating her awareness of the problematics of the form which in itself creates defining and limiting absolutes.

Awaiting the publication of her first novel Fleur Talbot finds employment

with a Sir Quentin Oliver; as secretary to his Autobiographical Association she is delighted by his description of it:

> "We have all started to write our memoirs, the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. And we are lodging them for seventy years in a safe place until all the living people mentioned therein shall be living no longer ..."
>
> The Association, as he called it, then comprised ten people. He gave me a bulky list of the members' names with supporting biographical information so selective as to tell me, in fact, more about Sir Quentin than the people he described. I remember quite clearly my wonder and my joy ...
>
> (pp.19-20)

And Fleur is soon playing an important part in the Association, being given instructions which, by their liberality, further encourage her participation:

> By the end of the first week I had been let into the secrets of the locked cabinet in Sir Quentin's study. It held ten unfinished manuscripts, the products of the members of the Autobiographical Association.
>
> "These works when completed," said Sir Quentin, "will be both valuable to the historian of the future and will set the Thames on fire. You should easily be able to rectify any lack or lapse in form, syntax, style, characterization, invention, local colour, description, dialogue, construction and other trivialities. You are to typewrite these documents under conditions of extreme secrecy, and if you succeed in giving satisfaction you may later sit in at some of our sessions and take notes.
>
> (p.23)

While working for the Association however, Fleur soon notices that Sir Quentin is beginning to resemble the central character of her own novel, the evil Warrender Chase, and shortly afterwards he begins to suspect Fleur of incorporating the memoirs of the Association into her novel. As his suspicions deepen he behaves increasingly like Warrender Chase, exerting a control, through moral blackmail, over the members of the Association. Soon he has Fleur's novel stolen and proceeds to insert passages from it into the memoirs entrusted to him. Yet his

action is only an extension of Fleur's own embellishments of the manuscripts. The boundaries between the reality of fiction in relation to the external world, and the reality within the fictional world, are thus blurred, with the only enlightenment on the process coming from remarks Fleur herself makes about her situation and her own attitude to fiction.

Indeed, most of the remarks made by Fleur and the situations in which she finds herself reflect issues raised in The Comforters; but in Loitering with Intent there is an even greater blurring of distinctions between authorial control over the world of fiction and absolute control as operating within the world of the novel. Material researched by the 'author', Fleur, directly shapes the form of the novel while the fiction begins to shape her own experiences. The novelist, for example, may note characteristics of several individuals which, once pieced together, become prophetic in their resemblance to other characters she is yet to meet. Such a prefiguration of 'reality' has its most extreme example in the figure of Sir Quentin. On being asked how well she knows him, Fleur comments: 'I almost feel I invented him.' (p.113) And she states: 'Sometimes I don't actually meet a character I have created in a novel until some time after the novel has been written and published.' (p.25) More generally, she remarks: 'I was finding it extraordinary how, throughout all the period I had been working on the novel ... characters and situations, images and phrases that I absolutely needed for the book simply appeared from nowhere into my range of perception. I was a magnet for experiences that I needed.' (p.15)

As her comments show, Fleur is allowed to share Spark's own awareness of

fiction's contradictions and throughout the novel she tunnels deeper into the paradoxes of the fictional process. The main areas in which these paradoxes are exposed are those first examined in The Comforters but discussed in greater detail in The Driver's Seat, Not to Disturb and The Hothouse by the East River. In particular Spark uses the novel to reexamine the author's power to create character, the effect of fictional and providential order, and, ultimately, the similarities between the novelist and the absolute figure of God.

Amongst her reflections on the novelist's art, Fleur comments: 'Contradictions in human character are one of its most consistent notes ... Since the story of my life is just as much constituted of the secrets of my craft as it is of other events, I might as well remark here that to make a character ring true it needs must be in some way contradictory, somewhere a paradox.' (p.41) And her observation again implies an opposition between the complete control which the author has over a character, defining and limiting it, and the same authorial freedom to be both inconsistent yet 'realistically' contradictory. The authorial power to define, to limit, is at the same time the power to create, to add potential to an apparently limited 'reality'; as Fleur admits: 'I was aware of a daemon inside me that rejoiced in seeing people as they were, and not only that, but more than ever as they were, and more, and more.' (pp.8-9) In the novel's emphasis on character in the writing both of fiction and autobiography, Spark again creates a conflict between the advantages and dangers of the novelist's position and power, with autobiography itself shown to be another fictional process whereby the author can exert control, can create absolutes, although in this case through his or her own life.

The irony of Fleur's own autobiographical position thus becomes a structural feature of the novel as Spark examines, in a more reflexive way than in previous works, the imposition of fictional absolutes. And if the concept of 'character' highlights paradoxical absolutes, an even deeper irony is revealed in the imposition of order, both chronological and providential. At one point in the novel Fleur complains:

> While I recount what happened to me and what I did in 1949, it strikes me how much easier it is with characters in a novel than in real life. In a novel the author invents characters and arranges them in convenient order. Now that I come to write biographically I have to tell of whatever actually happened and whoever naturally turns up. The story of a life is a very informal party; there are no rules of precedence and hospitality, no invitations.
>
> (p.59)

Yet in the novel all the events, both autobiographical and historical, in Fleur's experience are placed within the pattern of the work in an obviously formalised and achronological manner. And this stylisation of the novel makes quite clear the presence of a controlling force. It would therefore appear that there is no way in which fiction can actually avoid the process of establishing its own order. The 'necessity' which forces Fleur to 'tell of what actually happened' is only another variation of absolute authorial control, although in this instance it is imposed upon the 'novelist' by the nature of her experiences as both 'character' and 'narrator'.

Throughout Loitering with Intent, therefore, Spark not only disrupts the form of her fiction, but also mocks her own 'necessity' for writing it. Her most mocking condemnation, however, is reserved for those who consciously manipulate others, attempting to transform themselves

into sources of absolute power. Both Sir Quentin and the fictional character, Warrender Chase, are seen as evil because of their manipulations of a small, enclosed group of people. In their machinations however both men clearly resemble Fleur, in the role of novelist and - by implication - Spark herself. The two men can do anything with the people in their power but whatever they choose to do becomes an absolute for those individuals, defining and limiting them. Each 'authorial' persona can thus be viewed as a false god, attempting to establish their own absolute control but again becoming the victim of 'someone else's necessity', a process which can only end with God. And as each manipulator is drawn into 'someone else's' fiction they lose their own power. Even Fleur momentarily experiences this: 'For a moment I felt like a grey figment, the 'I' of a novel whose physical description the author had decided not to set forth.' (p.95) And she also has a strong sense of losing control of those events which she had thought, through her creation of Warrender Chase, were her preserve. Foreseeing the consequences of Sir Quentin's emulation of her own character creation, she worries: 'It was a frightening thought but at the same time external to me, as if I were watching a play I had no power to stop.' (p.182)

Loitering with Intent thus destroys even the notion that the controlling force of the fiction can present a single 'reality' or can achieve the absolute nature - although imitating the authority - of God. The various 'fictions' within the novel are each attempting to present a single vision, but continually come into conflict and merge with each other: incidents in memoirs of the Autobiographical Association are supplemented by passages from Warrender Chase at the same time as Fleur

is drawing material for subsequent novels from the characters within the Association; the reader learns only of Sir Quentin's death through the analogies with the fate of Warrender Chase; characters such as Beryl Tims are transplanted in personality from one novel to the other. Even Fleur begins to show concern about the interpenetrations of fictions:

> Anyone who has read Warrender Chase will know what happened to these autobiographies during my absence, in fact, the possibility was already half in my mind that I was falling into the same trap as Marjorie in my novel... But the very fact that it was half in my mind almost, to the other half of my mind, precluded the possibility that my suspicions could be valid. It seemed quite unlikely that my own novel could be entering into to my life to such an extent.
> (pp.179-180)

And even the reader, who appears to be in control of all the fictions, simply by reading the finished novel Loitering with Intent, is denied full knowledge of the relationship between the different fictional worlds - for we have not 'read Warrender Chase' or any other of the novels which Fleur claims she has written. We too therefore are unable to transcend the fiction or move outwith it.

Such disruptions within the novel may appear to preclude the novel being a valid celebration of the potential of fiction; Fleur's own awaremess of the contradictions of fiction, however, allows her to comment freely on the process as she refuses to conceal any of the paradoxes it conveys. Taking her friend Solly's advice of 'Fuck the general reader' (p.77), she admits: 'I knew I wasn't helping the readers to know whose side they were supposed to be on. I simply felt compelled to go on with my story without indicating what the reader should think.' (p.74). Her approach in itself seems to liberate Spark for, through the position which Fleur has gained, she can speculate freely on the nature of fiction in relation to life; more importantly she can also examine the moral implications of

the novelist's art.

In this respect _Loitering with Intent_ goes further than the other novels discussed in this chapter, displaying affinities with those novels - to be discussed in the subsequent chapter - which more explicitly focus on the moral implications of absolutes, on the polarities of good and evil. Sir Quentin reminds Fleur that 'Truth is stranger than Fiction' (p.17), and Fleur echoes Spark's own comments in claiming that her fictions are directed towards exploring the sense of 'absolute truth': 'I wasn't writing poetry and prose so that the reader would think me a nice person, but in order that my sets of words should convey ideas of truth and wonder, as indeed they did to myself as I was composing them.' (p.82) _Loitering with Intent_ therefore contains several claims about the nature of good and evil. Fleur states: 'I have never known an artist who at some time in his life has not come into conflict with pure evil ... I think it true that no artist has lived who has not experienced and then recognised something, at first too incredibly evil to seem real, then so undoubtedly real as to be undoubtedly true.' (p.169) Fleur not only claims that her position as an artist helps her to recognise the true nature of good and evil but also that such sharp moral dichotomies can only be conveyed through fiction. Once again the process has both advantages and disadvantages: fiction's strength is that it can convey more extreme polarities of morality than are found in relative perceptions of reality, and as such can also help the reader to recognise moral absolutes; the absolutes which are recognised, however, must remain within the fictional form and thus lose their independent validity. Georgina Hogg hints at the nature of this dilemma in _The Comforters_, but the question is examined more clearly in _Loitering with Intent_, in a discussion

between Fleur and her friend Dottie about the character of Marjorie in Warrender Chase:

> It was at this point Dottie said, "I don't know what you're getting at. Is Warrender Chase a hero or is he not?"
> "He is," I said.
> "Then Marjorie is evil."
> "How can you say that? Marjorie is fiction, she doesn't exist."
> "Marjorie is a personification of evil."
> "What is a personification?" I said. "Marjorie is only words."
> (pp.73-74)

Yet although Fleur, expressing Spark's own reluctance to claim any fixed 'truth' for her fiction, resists Dottie's accusations she also sees them as indicating the means of pointing towards that sense of 'truth and wonder'. When Dottie tells Fleur that Sir Quentin has been killed in exactly the manner of Warrender Chase and adds: 'So that it proves your Warrender Chase to be valid', Fleur denies it with 'Nothing to do with my Warrender Chase. Quite a different situation. The man was pure evil.' (p.208) After speaking to Dottie however, she concedes: 'The theme of Warrender Chase was indeed valid. Such events as I'd portrayed, even in a different way from the reality, could happen. My Warrender Chase was valid ...' (p.208) And it is this liberation of moral 'truth' in an absolute sense rather than truths directly applicable to reality, that Spark shows to be fiction's greatest potential achievement in Loitering with Intent.

Fiction's capacity for representing a non-realistic absolute dimension is at once both its strength and its danger. Nevertheless, although Loitering with Intent reveals, through Fleur's exploration of fiction's contradictions, an awareness of the dangers of the fiction-making process, it is the advantages gained by both the process and the awareness of it

that are celebrated. Fleur, for example, remarks: 'Although in reality I wasn't yet rid of Sir Quentin and his little sect, they were morally outside of myself, they were objectified. I would write about them one day' (p.199). And it is fiction's capacity for achieving a detached moral perspective that is celebrated (as well as feared) by both Fleur and Spark. Fiction is not seen as offering any fixed solution; on the contrary it is shown to be dangerous to manipulate life as fiction or fiction as life and to accept fictional impositions as absolute. Nevertheless, it can offer a temporary moral recognition which transcends our usual limited perceptions of the moral dimension.
In this transcendence it not only achieves 'an imaginative extension of the truth' but also conveys to the reader that sense of wonder which transforms the fiction into mythology, an achievement which is again celebrated by Fleur: 'Without a mythology, a novel is nothing. The true novelist, one who understands the work as a continuous poem, is a myth-maker... and the methods are mythological by nature' (p.141). And by the end of the novel Fleur, through a moment of epiphany, moves into that realm of mythology:

> Some small boys were playing football, and the ball came flying straight towards me. I kicked it with a chance grace, which, if I had studied the affair and tried hard, I never could have done. Away into the air it went, and landed in the small boy's waiting hands. The boy grinned. And so, having entered the fullness of my years, from there by the grace of God I go on my way rejoicing.
> (p.222)

(While giving a punning acknowledgement to another great modern myth-maker)[36]

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36. Rejoicing:
'The evening air was pale and chilly and after every charge and thud of the foot-ballers the greasy leather orb flew like a heavy bird through the grey light.' (p.3)
'And from here and from there came the sound of the cricket bats through the soft grey air. They said: pick, pack, pock, puck: little drops of water in a fountain slowly falling in the brimming bowl.' (p.43)
James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (New York, 1916).

Fleur is, for that brief moment, both within and outside the fiction as she sends it gracefully through the air into the waiting hands of the reader; and although the myth-maker and a part of the myth, she achieves freedom from any false sense of control through her recognition of that 'chance grace' which makes it possible.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MURIEL SPARK: A PARADOX YOU LIVE WITH

Never having followed the conventions of realism, or the humanist view of existence which it implies, Muriel Spark's fiction is liberated from the constraints of logic, temporality and causality and can thus be used to present an expanded vision of reality which transcends the limitations humanity places upon itself. And in this ability - as she herself recognises - both the strengths and weaknesses of her novels lie. Yet, just as she is always aware of, and testing, the potentialities and limitations of the fictional form she has chosen, so, too, her fictions are employed to assess the validity of the 'truth' and 'wonder' which she aims to present through them. The ease with which she can represent extreme polarities of good and evil, the 'transfiguration of the commonplace'[1] which her fictions appear to offer, is never taken for granted. Her novels therefore, in addition to re-examining their own fictional parameters, sustain a continual testing of the moral vision they express. In the novels discussed in the previous chapter the emphasis on fiction itself as an expression of the author's metaphysics was the salient feature; the novels to be considered in this chapter, however, focus more explicitly on the moral issue.

The majority of critical considerations of Spark's work take her Catholicism as the basis of her moral outlook; very few even acknowledge her upbringing in the strongly Calvinist environment of Edinburgh.[2] Those early years

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1. 'The Transfiguration of the Commonplace' is the title given by Sandy Stranger to the psychological treatise which makes her famous in The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie. It is also an apt description of the sense of 'truth and wonder' which Fleur in Loitering with Intent - and, presumably, Spark herself - wishes her fiction to evoke.

2. Only Allan Massie in Muriel Spark (Edinburgh, 1979) and in 'Calvinism and Catholicism in Muriel Spark', Muriel Spark: An Odd Capacity for Vision, ed. Alan Bold (London, 1984), 94-107, makes any real attempt to take Calvinism into account.

would nevertheless appear to have had a powerful effect on the way in which she sees the world and views her art; her ambivalent attitudes to absolutes of morality, as well as the absolutes of her fictional form, can be seen as deriving from the conjunction of this early awareness of the Calvinist consciousness with her subsequent conversion to Catholicism. To argue for this conflict of influence is not, however, to minimise her involvement with the Catholic church; a deep, although critical, involvement with that religion is apparent in all her recorded interviews and articles. It is possible, nevertheless, to view her Catholicism as partly a result of, and partly a resolution to, her own ambivalent attitude to the absolutism of the Calvinist vision. And in her novels the ambivalences of this moral outlook are expressed in a variety of ways. In some novels, of which The Ballad of Peckham Rye is an early example, she uses humour, light fantasy and metaphysical wit to consider the function of absolutes within the human consciousness. In The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, however, although elements of humour and wit remain, Spark considers more seriously the implications of moral absolutes for humanity within a personally familiar and more 'realistic' context. Moreover, because, of all her works, this is the most obviously Scottish, clearly facing up to the effects of Calvinism itself, it is an important novel for the issues considered in this thesis. Equally vital, although less characteristic of Spark's work, is The Mandelbaum Gate. Moving closer to the conventions of realism than any of Spark's novels, this novel represents another facet of her explorations of her own moral vision. Although Spark herself sees it as an ambitious failure, its juxtaposition of the direct representation of a human reality with a metaphysical awareness of the dimension in which absolutes may operate, makes it a full, if problematic, representation of the tensions and contradictions in Spark's outlook. Spark, however, is

equally capable of mocking the contradictions which obsess her and in The Abbess of Crewe, with characteristic wit and lightness of touch, she both parodies her own fiction and mocks the moral absolutism which prevails in her novels. In examining these four novels it is therefore possible to see the flexibility of her approach to both the advantages and the dangers of a consciousness of moral absolutes. Revealing Spark's awareness of the contradictions in her philosophical development, they explore the tension between the Catholic and Calvinist response to the human need and fear of moral absolutes in a variety of ways, yet still maintain the characteristic irony with which Spark views both her medium and her metaphysics.

The Ballad of Peckham Rye

The Ballad of Peckham Rye[3] ends with the hope that 'there was another world than this', indicating a potential 'transfiguration of the commonplace', but the world of the novel itself offers a fantastic environment in which moral absolutes, the extreme polarities of good and evil, are brought into conjunction with a reality so banal as to seem 'unreal'. At the same time as it creates an alternative to the conventional, circumscribed view of 'reality', therefore, the novel also functions as a witty assessment of the dangers and advantages of this alternative. By introducing a force of extremes -the novel's central character Dougal Douglas - into an exaggerated and deliberately stereotyped world of everyday existence, Spark can not only caricature humanity's adherance to such stereotypes, mocking our fear of extremes, our own minor attempts to recreate absolute determinants in order to give significance to existence, and revealing the human response when faced with absolutes over which we have no control, but she can do so

3. Muriel Spark, The Ballad of Peckham Rye (London, 1960). All page references are to this edition.

in a form which itself evades any of the constraints of such a reality. The form of the novel thus operates as an ironic reflection of the issues it examines, while also allowing Spark the freedom of fantasy in considering its deeper moral implications.

Dougal Douglas - the angel-devil, with bumps on his head where he claims his horns have been shorn - is an Arts graduate from Edinburgh who comes to Peckham as an employee of the firm of Meadows, Meade and Grindlay, an assistant and researcher for their Personnel Manager. Into the set, patterned world of banalities and stereotypes which constitutes Peckham, he brings a volatile personality, a chameleon nature, a new perspective on right and wrong, and a fascination with fictions of all kind. His external perspective on that small world highlights the absences within the 'reality' of Peckham and makes its inhabitants dissatisfied with their circumscribed existences; through his presence there he leads a young man into jilting his girlfriend, a personnel manager into a nervous breakdown, a director into murdering his mistress, and he brings about a large increase in the very absenteeism which he was employed to stop. His more positive function, however, is to encourage the same characters - and others - to reassess the nature of their existence and examine the 'truth' of their own beings.

Although the actions which Dougal precipitates may not be positive in the conventional sense, therefore, they are at least 'significant'; any sense of meaning or importance to existence previously appears to have been

absent in Peckham.[4] In spite of paltry attempts to achieve meaning and identity through their narrow-minded attitudes and their clichéd language, none of the inhabitants of Peckham have previously dared to act in contravention of the stereotypic norms; Dougal, whose motto is 'Actions more effective than words' (p.128), spurs the people of Peckham into acting out their desires for extreme definitions. And he does so, not by imposing an external influence but by entering into the 'fictions' of Peckham, into their world of jargon, cliché and double standards, and by adding to their illusions his own expanded fictions - fictions so extreme that the characters can only realise them in action, thus making their deeds into absolute statements rather than self-deceptions. For, above all, Dougal is a fiction-maker, an exploiter of language, story and myth. The 'ballad' of the title suggests not only the stylised and patterned format of the novel, but also the transformation of stereotypic fictions into mythologies through the introduction of absolutes. Rather than evaluating the moral significance of apparently empty lives within a banal 'reality' herself, Spark introduces Dougal as a novelistic force of evaluation, confronting spurious with genuine fictions, and assessing the result.

The language and 'fictions' of the inhabitants of Peckham are used to define, limit and constrict; Dougal uses his both to puzzle and to liberate. That the former can only detract from 'meaning' and significance

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4. Like Nicholas Farringdon in The Girls of Slender Means (London, 1963), Dougal may introduce the concept of 'evil' but in so doing also implies the existence of 'good'. Spark here would seem to parallel Baudelaire's belief, as described by T.S. Eliot, that: 'the sense of Evil implies the sense of good.' As Eliot points out: 'So far as we are human, what we do must be either evil or good; so far as we do evil or good, we are human; and it is better, in a paradoxical way, to do evil than to do nothing: at least, we exist.'
   T.S. Eliot, 'Baudelaire' (1930), Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot, ed. Frank Kermode (London, 1975), 231-236, pp.235-236.

is made clear by the mimicry of jargon which is such a predominant feature of the novel.[5] Filled as they are with a litany of empty phrases, the most recurring feature of Peckham conversations is the attempted creation of definition through dogmatic comments which have no connection with any reality outwith their linguistic context. At Dougal's first interview with Mr Druce, the director of Meadow, Meade and Grindlay, for example, the language of big business is used to establish identity within a certain social milieu, but always with a contradiction in meaning. Dougal is told that 'Industry and the Arts must walk hand in hand' (p.13), the firm is described as 'a small but growing concern' (p.13), and Dougal learns that he will work on his 'own level' but 'Of course you will be under Mr Weedin.' (p.14) And Humphrey Place attempts to educate Dougal into another social world by teaching him the difference between 'issues and disputes': 'Sometimes they take it to law to decide whether an issue or a dispute has arisen.' (p.30) Always quick to pick up jargon which offers an opportunity for parody, Dougal's talent for mimicry reveals just how meaningless such language is, as illustrated by his torment of the local Lothario, Trevor Lomas. Extending Trevor's initial comment to his girlfriend of 'Come and wriggle, snake' (p.76), Dougal invites her to 'Come and leap, leopard' (p.81) or 'Come and frolic, lamb' (p.82), and enquires of Trevor 'Got a pain, panda?' (p.81), and 'Feeling frail, nightingale?' (p.83), until Trevor cannot bear to hear the inflations of his own rhetoric.

This parody of language, however amusing, does not only reveal the banality of cliché; it also indicates that attempts to define through language, to give some form of limitation to existence, can be dangerous, especially when applied (as they frequently are in Peckham) to moral issues. On a

5. The text is, for example, heavily laden with the conventions of dialogue, with 'he saids' and 'she saids', which report statements made by other characters but give no proof of any actions behind such reports.

simple level the inadequacy of such linguistic definitions as a form of moral judgement is illustrated by the opinions on Dougal expressed throughout the novel, most notably those of the Crewe family, as summed up by their daughter Dixie:

> My young brother doesn't like him. My mum likes him. My dad likes him so-so. Humphrey likes him. I don't agree to that. The factory girls like him - what can you expect? I don't like him, he's got funny ideas."..." My dad doesn't mind him, but Leslie can't stand him. I tell you who else doesn't like him."
> "Who?"
> "Trevor Lomas. Trevor doesn't like him."
> "I don't like Trevor, never did," Connie said.
> (p.96)

The absurdity of this monologue is further revealed by the fact that their liking or disliking of Dougal is never explained by any motive or reason, but is simply stated as irrefutable fact. The danger for the inhabitants of Peckham lies in their inability to recognise the falsity of such attempts at imposing self-made definitions; although the jargon is devoid of any meaning its use has extended into their lives so far that they have come to believe it capable of conveying the deepest significance and sincerity. Their glib use of words like 'frankly' and 'honestly' indicates their need to see their opinions and feelings, however shallow, as being 'true'. Yet, as is indicated by a conversation between Dougal and Mrs Joyce Willis, in which her 'honest' protestations are interspersed with descriptions of her trivial actions, their 'sincerity' has little meaning:

> Joyce Willis said, "Quite frankly, the first time Richard invited you to dinner I knew we'd found the answer. Richard didn't see it at first, quite frankly, but I think he's beginning to see it now."
> She crossed the room, moving her long hips, and looked out of the bow window into the August evening. "Richard should be in at any moment," she said. She touched her throat with her fine fingers. She put to rights a cushion in the window-seat.
> Still standing, she lifted her glass, and sipped, and put it down on a low table. She crossed the room and sat

> on a chair upholstered in deep pink brocade.
> "I feel I can really talk to you now," she said. "I feel we've known each other for years."
>
> (p.165)

A similar protestation that a personal observation exists as irrefutable fact can be seen in the facile use of 'It's psychological', a catch-all phrase implying scientific validation, which Dougal also parodies. The meaninglessness of this language, which creates the illusion of depths of feeling but relies upon trivialities, is made quite clear, and the sphere to which it properly belongs is revealed, when we discover that Dougal is, in fact collecting such clichés and jargon for his task of ghost writing the autobiography of an actress friend Maria Cheeseman. And we are given an example of the resemblances between the language of Peckham and that of cheap, sentimental fiction as Dougal dictates a passage from that 'autobiography':

> "Peckham was fun exclamation mark but the day inevitably dawned when I realised that I and my beloved pals at the factory were poles apart full stop The great throbbing heart of London across the river spelt fame comma success comma glamour to me full stop I was always an incurable romantic exclamation mark New para The poignant moment arrived when I bade farewell to my first love full stop Up till now I had had eyes for no others but fate - capital F - had intervened full stop We kissed dot dot dot a shudder went through my frame dot dot dot every fibre of my being spoke of gratitude and grief but the budding genius within me cried out for expression full stop And so we parted for ever full stop New para I felt a grim satisfaction as the cab which bore me and my few poor belongings bowled across Vauxhall Bridge and into the great world - capital G capital W - ahead full stop Yes comma Peckham had been fun exclamation mark"
>
> (pp.180-181)

Again the language of deep feeling and complete 'honesty' is used to exploit sentiment and to imbue a moment with a false sense of significance; statement and description becomes a substitute for thought and action.

Facile expressions of sentiment in the novel are accompanied by equally

shallow moral judgements, although the inhabitants of Peckham frequently comment on the rights or wrongs of actions and individuals. Talking of absenteeism Humphrey states: 'Well, frankly and personally ... I think it's an immoral thing to do' (p.73), although he sees no immorality in jilting Dixie. Dixie herself complains that Dougal is 'immoral' yet is quite willing to have sex with her fiancé, never questioning the morality of the act and, since it has no effect on her finances, failing to find any significance or pleasure in it. Elaine decides that Trevor's girlfriend Beauty, 'got no morals' (p.83), but Beauty's behaviour differs very little from Elaine's own. The slickness with which they make such moral condemnations is again parodied by Dougal who emphasises that he is a 'solid steady Edinburgh boy' to his employer, assuring him that he will take a 'moral stance' and pointing out:

> "Have you observed, Mr Willis, the frequency with which your employees use the word immoral'? Have you noticed how equally often they use the word 'ignorant'? These words are significant," Dougal said, "both psychologically and sociologically."
>
> (p.116)

And the words are indeed significant since Dougal, perceiving the lack of any real meaning in them, does his best to make them become relevant terms, shattering the cosiness of Peckham, and bringing about the recognition of true moral polarities.

On Dougal's arrival in Peckham the language of its inhabitants and their morality are both equally ineffectual, with linguistic clichés simply used as a means of creating the illusion of a moral code which could define the individual self. Dougal not only reveals the ludicrous, and essentially false, nature of such attempts to create a morally absolute language for oneself without any external correlative in either action or faith, but also encourages the characters to transform their clichés into 'reality',

thus escaping the purely fictional quality of their own self-imposed constraints. He achieves this liberation in two ways, and with striking results. On the one hand he teaches the inhabitants of Peckham to recognise and utilise fictions in a variety of ways, from pointing out to Merle Coverdale a hidden advertising symbol, of a baby's pram sitting on a window ledge, to reading snippets from old newspapers about Peckham in the past, including one about a mermaid to be seen at a fair in the district, to reminding inhabitants of Peckham's ancient history by himself acting out the part of Boadicea. In so doing he helps Peckham itself to move outwith its constrained sense of its own 'reality' and into the realm of mythology. And the characters whom he educates in this way become dissatisfied with their previous 'fictions' which were simply a way of limiting their reality, perceiving how 'fictions' can equally well expand reality, imbuing it with the potential for transfiguration. On the other hand Dougal himself reinforces the potential for transfiguration, for expanding the limits of so-called 'reality', by defying them in his own person through his eccentric behaviour. Mocking stereotypes, Dougal appears capable of changing appearance and identity at will: 'Dougal sat like a monkey-puzzle tree' (p.14); 'Dougal changed his shape and became a professor' (p.14); 'Dougal leaned forward and became a television interviewer' (p.15); 'he was now a man of vision with a deformed shoulder' (p.16); 'he was a confessor in his box, leaning forward with his insidious advice through the grille' (p.86); 'he was a divorce judge suspending judgement till the whole story was heard out' (p.87); and 'He sat back like an exhausted medium of the spiritualist persuasion.' (p.91) Able to behave in any way he chooses, Dougal can thus abandon all conventional patterns of character and behaviour, liberating those around him by the sheer unexpectedness of his actions and again indicating that they are more powerful than words. He

can even change names and become Douglas Dougal to those who do not know him as Dougal Douglas. And his most extreme moment of exultant liberation from any 'fixed' identity or reality occurs at a dance when, with the aid of a dustbin lid, he again transforms the 'commonplace':

> Next, Dougal sat on his haunches and banged a message out on a tom-tom. He sprang up and with the lid on his head was a Chinese coolie eating melancholy rice. He was an ardent cyclist, crouched over handlebars and pedalling uphill with the lid between his knees. He was an old woman with an umbrella; he stood on the upturned edges of the lid and speared fish from his rocking canoe; he was the man at the wheel of a racing car; he did many things with the lid before he finally propped the dust-bin lid up on his high shoulder, beating this cymbal rhythmically with his hand while with the other hand he limply conducted an invisible band, being, with long blank face, the band-leader.
> (pp.79-80)

In this exuberant display Dougal shows how escape from the constraints of conventional 'reality' can lead to a joyous sense of freedom and to 'transfiguration' in the most literal sense.

Although such a moment of wild joy is a form of extremity, however, it is never made clear in the novel whether the laughter it evokes is that of angels or devils, and Dougal's own position in this respect is ambivalent.[6] While always drawing attention to his shorn horns, and admitting that he is a devil, Dougal appears equally capable of imitating an angel: 'Dougal posed like an angel on a grave which had only an insignificant headstone. He posed like an angel-devil, with his hump shoulder and gleaming smile, and his fingers of each hand widespread against the sky.' (p.36) And even the actions he precipitates give little

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6. He is thus part of a Scottish tradition of angel/devil figures, with Hogg's 'Gilmartin' in The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner (see Chapter One, pp.51-53) and Stevenson's mysterious figure in 'Markheim', (see Chapter Three, pp.158-161) being the most notable examples.

indication as to the right or wrong of his encouragement, although the effect of his influence is unmistakeable. In the two areas where his influence is most noticable - the jilting of Dixie by Humphrey, and the murder of Merle by Mr Druce - he does achieve a complete transformation of relationships and lives, although whether to the good or not is debatable. Both couples are shown to be caught in sterile, unsatisfying relationships, with the depiction of each couple's lovemaking on Midsummer Night operating as an ironic comment on their supposed pleasure. Dixie and Humphrey, in spite of the romantic setting, are trapped in the discussion of mundane concerns:

> Humphrey pulled her towards him, and started to unbutton her coat. She buttoned it up again. "I'm cold," she said.
>
> "Oh, come on Dixie," he said.
>
> "Connie Weedin's got an increment," she said. "I've got to wait for my increment till August... It's only because her father's Personnel. I'm going to take it up with Miss Coverdale."
>
> Humphrey pulled her down towards him again and kissed her face.
>
> "What's the matter?" he said. "There's something the matter with you."
>
> "I'm going to take Monday off," she said. "They appreciate you more if you stop away now and again."
>
> (pp.72-73)

And although Mr Druce and Merle Coverdale are having a secret affair, their liason is governed by rigid patterns of behaviour:

> Merle switched on the television and found a play far advanced. They watched the fragments of the play as they drank their coffee. Then they went into the bedroom and took off their clothes in a steady rhythm. Merle took off her cardigan and Mr Druce took off his coat. Merle went to the wardrobe and brought out a green quilted silk dressing-gown. Mr Druce went to the wardrobe and found his blue dressing-gown with white spots.
>
> (p.70)

Any action which could provide an alternative to either couples' situation would appear welcome but, in each case, the action which Dougal subtly

instigates is of an extreme kind. Encouraged by Dougal, Humphrey finally puts into practice the glib language of 'frankly' and 'honestly', replying 'No ... to be quite frank, I won't', when asked if he will take Dixie to be his bride.(p.3) In so doing he is responding to a prefiguration of this scene 'created' by Dougal when the two men discuss Humphrey's forthcoming marriage: 'Dougal read from the book: "Wilt thou take this woman," he said with a deep ecclesiastical throb, "to be thai wedded waif?" Then he put the plate aside and knelt; he was a sinister goggling bridegroom. "No," he declared to the ceiling, "I won't, quite frankly."'(pp.157-158) By imitating Dougal, Humphrey gives 'frankness' a genuine meaning outwith its phatic function, realising the words by his action - yet in so doing he moves outwith the conventions of everyday codes of communication and morality. Likewise, when Mr Druce murders Merle with a breadknife, an action brought about both symbolically, by Dougal's admiration and stroking of Merle's long neck, and, in actuality, through his rejection of Mr Druce's homosexual advances, he is realising Merle's wish for a glass of red wine because 'I feel I need something red, to buck me up.'(p.190) Again the action is an extreme one but it does imbue their relationship with a significance which it never previously attained. Rather than seeing Dougal as either angel or devil, therefore, his own description of himself as a choreographer appears most apt: 'I see the Devil in the guise of a chap from Cambridge who does motion study, and he's the choreographer ... And ... of course this choreographer is a projection of me. I was at the University of Edinburgh myself, but in the dream I'm the Devil and Cambridge.'(p.65) As angel-devil and as fiction-maker, Dougal orchestrates the movements within the novel.[7]

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7. Significantly, the one companion Dougal has in the novel who escapes his machinations is Elaine - a 'process-controller'.

The moral absolutes which are indicated by the processes of fiction are not, however, allowed to pass untested within the novel, nor is the fiction itself allowed to stand as an absolute. Dougal's fictions are an important means of expanding the perceptions of reality and as such, liberate the characters from restricting definitions, but the novel itself mocks fiction's manipulations of 'reality'. Douglas complains to the actress for whom he is ghost-writing: 'I thought it was a work of art you wanted to write ... If you only want to write a straight autobiography you should have got a straight ghost. I'm crooked.' (p.104) And in the novel's own patterning the reliability of fiction as a representation of reality is soon disputed.[8] The novel begins with Dixie's mother having 'words' with Humphrey but a few pages later we read of another version of the incident which describes it quite differently, as the mother herself recounts her actions. Similarly, at the beginning and end of the novel, people recall Humphrey's jilting of Dixie and, again, each version is different. Moreover, Spark's usual manipulations of chronological sequence throughout the novel again cast doubts on the 'reality' of events described, blurring the distinction between what is 'true' and what are only 'remembered' fictions. Just as the original fictions of the characters in Peckham were undermined by Dougal's revelation of their inadequacy, so the fiction itself is undermined by Spark's techniques ; nowhere is this made more pointed than in the account of Dougal's eventual fate:

> He was away off to Africa with the intention of selling tape-recorders to all the witch-doctors ... [9]
> Much could be said of Dougal's subsequent life. He returned from Africa and became a novice in a Franciscan

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8. Peter Kemp argues, in fact, that when Nelly, the religious street-crier, refers to the six things which the 'Lord most hateth' she is describing the attributes of the novelist.
Peter Kemp, Muriel Spark (London, 1974), p.54.

9. For a brief discussion of Spark's obsession with tape-recorders, see p.421.

> monastery. Before he was asked to leave, the Prior had endured a nervous breakdown and several of the monks had broken their vows of obedience in actuality, and their other vows by desire; Dougal pleaded his powers as an exorcist in vain. Thereafter, for economy's sake, he gathered together the scrap ends of his profligate experience - for he was a frugal man at heart - and turned them into a lot of cock-eyed books, and went far in the world.
>
> (pp.200-201)

Ironically relegated to the role of novelist, Dougal's own position within the novel is thus undermined.

It is fitting, therefore, that Dougal's last object of interest in the novel should be the discovery of a tunnel dug underneath Peckham,[10] for not only has Dougal undermined the surface reality of Peckham, indicating a potential void, which emerges as the boundaries of that safe but limited view of reality are destroyed by the recognition of absolutes, but he has also indicated the dangers in such an expanded perception of existence if the absolutes it implies are realised within the circumscribed world of our everyday 'reality'. The novelist also undermines what has been achieved by her fiction's presentation of moral absolutes, reminding her readers that the potential for transfiguration which can be expressed through the fictional form may be insufficient to sustain or to accommodate an absolutist vision within a non-fictional existence. The novel does end with a moment of transfiguration for Peckham and for Humphrey:

> But it was a sunny day for November, and, as he drove swiftly past the Rye, he saw the children playing there and the women coming home from work with their shopping-bags, the Rye for an instant looking like a cloud of green and gold, the people seeming to ride upon it, as you might say there was another world than this.
>
> (p.202)

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10. It also seems appropriate that in the struggle with Trevor Lomas which takes place in the tunnel, it is Dougal's _eye_ which is wounded.

The moment remains, however, one of hope, of potential rather than realisation. And while indicating the potential sources of a transformation of humanity's limited world views, the novel serves as an acknowledgement of the difficulties and dangers present in human attempts to accommodate an absolutist vision within the conventional boundaries of our reality.

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie

The conflict between a secular and limited view of existence and the force of an absolutist vision which The Ballad of Peckham Rye examines, is firmly contained within the context of its 'fantasy' world; neither the banal stereotypes of the Peckhamites, nor the devilry of Dougal Douglas seriously threaten the reader's own sense of 'reality' ; the moral dichotomy remains within an obviously fictional dimension. In The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie,[11] published a year later, Spark engages with the same metaphysical issues but in a context which demands a closer confrontation with the problematics of 'reality' itself. Not only does the novel reveal an element of Spark's own background but it also directly confronts the introduction of a force of absolutes into a recognisable and detailed reality. Facing up to the Calvinism which, I suggest, has not only inculcated in her a desire for moral absolutes but has also made her fear the realisation and imposition of such absolutes in the rigid and limiting manner practiced by that religion, Spark appears unable to distance herself from her own experience through her usual process of parodic fictionalisation. The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie is therefore a crucial novel for the consideration of Spark's work within the context of

11. Muriel Spark, The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie (London, 1961). All page references are to this edition.

my argument. Like The Mandelbaum Gate, another Spark novel dealing very closely with her own experience and moral conflicts, The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie shows her moving beyond her adept manipulations of fiction as a means of containing yet reflecting her moral dichotomies. In contemplating the force of absolutes when introduced into a more recognisably personal context, the problematics of a morally absolute vision appear to break through the boundaries of her own authorial control and remain as unresolved and - to a greater extent, unschematized - paradoxes. Therefore, although like Stevenson's 'Jekyll and Hyde' the novel has been popularised and simplified through film and television adaptations, the story of the Edinburgh schoolmistress and her influence on the small group of girls whom she plans to transform into the'crème de la crème', represents a serious consideration of the complex question of moral polarities and an investigation of the effect such absolutes can have when imposed upon more relative conceptions of 'reality'.

Because the novel deals with a more recognisable dimension of reality than either The Comforters, for example, or The Ballad of Peckham Rye, and thus loses some of the element of fantasy found in these novels, the author must find alternative means both of conveying her moral ideology and of creating an identity for her fictional world. In The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie Spark achieves this not only by her familiar manipulations of chronology but also by a sharpness of language which is used to reflect the novel's moral issues. Moving between the factual and the impressionistic, the specific and the abstract, the text not only tests the defining and limiting force of words and phrases, but also utilises language in destroying or re-establishing parameters of reality. Negatives are frequently used to give positive definitions through implication, comments

defy our expectations of a conventional linguistic sequence, and the repetition and rewriting of significant words and phrase alternatively creates the impression of unity or diversity. Reading the novel becomes a process of delimiting, redefining or expanding boundaries. And the linguistic manipulations of the text produce an effect very similar to that created by the novel's central character, Jean Brodie herself, who both liberates and defines her pupils.

One of the most striking features of Spark's style in the novel is the conflation of fact and impression, the bringing together of objective and subjective observations so that the distinction between them becomes blurred. The very first sentence in the novel provides an example of this approach: 'The boys, as they talked to the girls from Marcia Blaine, stood on the far side of their bicycles, holding the handlebars, which established a protective fence of bicycle between the sexes, and the impression that at any moment the boys were likely to be away.' (p.1) 'Establish' is used as a verb in connection with two very different objects, on the one hand to form something solid, a fence of bicycles, and on the other to create an impression of imminent departure. Similar, and more significant, conjunctions of the tangible and the impressionistic occur throughout the novel, generally with the effect of relating a specific present to a more nebulous and apparently uncertain future; thus 'The days passed and the wind blew from the Forth' (p.52) invokes a sense of imminent change through the image of the weather. A more unusual instance of this linking between different levels of perception can be seen in the confusion of 'nesty', a visual metaphor, with 'nasty', as used by the policewoman eliciting a description of a man who exposed himself to one of the girls during a solitary walk.(p.88) The confusion

of terms in each example indicates a blurring of the different categories of time, of appearance, and of the different levels of existence, revealing a departure from the apparent conventionality of the 'reality' described.

In similar fashion Miss Brodie serves to undermine the normative values of her girls and to question the conventions of their own 'reality'. And in her own personality she provides them with examples of contradictions which defy both convention and logic. Sandy, the most perceptive of the girls, for example, comments: 'She's not supposed to give us freedom, she's supposed to give us lessons.'(p.29) Her use of abstract and specific terms in surprising contiguity is, however, a trick of speech that she has learned from Miss Brodie herself who states categorically, while denying all that the girls have previously been taught: 'Safety does not come first. Goodness, Truth and Beauty come first.'(p.9) Miss Brodie can also state with equal dogmatism that Giotto, not Leonardo, is the greatest painter because: 'he is my favourite.'(p.10) In her language, therefore, she imposes absolutes which appear illogical in the context of mundane and accepted conventions of 'reality', but in so doing expands her girls' perceptions of the world. The Headmistress of the school, recognising the power of Miss Brodie's linguistic propaganda, attempts to combat it with some of her own but, since her terms are so obviously contradictory, they fail to establish the surprising but stimulating conjunctions of thought achieved by Miss Brodie:

> "You are very fortunate in Miss Brodie. I could wish your arithmetic papers had been better. I am always impressed by Miss Brodie's girls in one way or another. You will have to work hard at ordinary humble subjects for the qualifying examinations. Miss Brodie is giving you an excellent preparation for the Senior School. Culture cannot compensate for lack

> of hard knowledge. I am happy to see you are devoted to Miss Brodie. Your loyalty is due to the school rather than to any one individual."
>
> (pp.85-86)

Miss Mackay's linguistic tyranny is far less successful than Miss Brodie's subtle rearrangements of an apparently intractable reality because the headmistress's conjunctions confuse rather than bring enlightenment. Jean Brodie, although a tyrant, also brings, through her linguistic manipulations, insights which can have a meaning within reality. Within the mundane reality of Miss Mackay's world such absolutes cannot operate.

In Miss Brodie herself, therefore, we are presented with both an expansion and a contraction of the conventional teaching role; and through her bringing together of facts and fictions, impressions and observations, the nature of a fixed and definable reality to which the girls are accustomed is called into question. Yet, ironically, this very liberation is achieved through her apparent dogmatism and imposition of absolutes. Nowhere is this made more clear in the novel than in the question of 'identity'. Above all things Miss Brodie abhors the 'team spirit' mentality, believing that: 'Phrases like 'the team spirit' are always employed to cut across individualism, love and personal loyalties.' (p.103) She encourages the girls to be individuals, characterising them as such with labels for their own peculiar qualities, with which she endows them: Eunice is famous for gymnastics, Jenny is pretty, Mary is stupid - the group scapegoat - Sandy is initially notorious for her beautiful voice, her small piggy eyes, and, later, for her insight, which is placed in opposition to the instinct of Rose Stanley, also famous for her 'sex'. Of course, as the events of the novel prove, such tags cannot fit

consistently with the individuals concerned: Miss Brodie is shown to be, not 'wrong', but certainly limited in her categorisation. The greatest example of her fallibility, and perhaps the most significant blow to her judgement, is the fact that it is Sandy, not Rose, who becomes the surrogate lover of Teddy Lloyd, the art teacher whom Miss Brodie loves but with whom she will not permit herself a relationship because he is married. The sense of individuality which she encourages is therefore shown to be false in terms of the fixed definitions which she attempts to impose upon the girls; like the absolutes of Calvinism, by which Sandy is obsessed, their rigidity and delimiting qualities make them both destructive and dangerous to those who have to function within an everyday reality.

The dangers of Miss Brodie's attempts at imposing absolute identities upon the girls are revealed even more clearly when she tries to impose a group identity upon them. Not only does she bring together a Brodie 'set' but, inspired by her admiration for fascism in general, and Mussolini in particular, she tries to mould the group into her own private army. Sandy only appreciates the full dangers of Miss Brodie's endeavour when the teacher expresses her disapproval of the Girl Guides:

> It occurred to Sandy, there at the end of the Middle Meadow Walk, that the Brodie set was Miss Brodie's fascisti, not to the naked eye, marching along, but all knit together for her need and in another way, marching along. That was all right, but it seemed, too, that Miss Brodie's disapproval of the Girl Guides had jealousy in it, there was an inconsistency, a fault. Perhaps the Guides were too much a rival fascisti, and Miss Brodie could not bear it. Sandy thought she might see about joining the Brownies. Then the group-fright seized her again, and it was necessary to put the idea aside, because she loved Miss Brodie.
>
> (p.38)

The 'group-fright' which Sandy frequently experiences, and which has been instilled in her by Jean Brodie, prevents the girls from achieving any liberation through their supposed individuality, and ultimately leads Sandy into the need to betray her mentor.

An equally dangerous but more complex aspect of Miss Brodie's absolutism is revealed in her transformations of facts into fictions and fiction into fact. Telling the girls about her fiancé Hugh, killed in the war, she embellishes his personality with the characteristics of Teddy Lloyd and Mr Lowther, the two men currently in her life:

> This was the first time the girls had heard of Hugh's artistic leanings. Sandy puzzled over this and took counsel with Jenny, and it came to them both that Miss Brodie was making her new love story fit the old....
> Sandy was fascinated by this method of making patterns with facts, and was divided between her admiration for the technique and the pressing need to prove Miss Brodie guilty of misconduct.
>
> (p.94)

Miss Brodie thus exercises the 'economy'[12] which is seen to be necessary for the successful creation of fictions, and her ability to extract elements of reality in order to create a fantasy world not only appeals to the girls but also influences their own attitudes to an apparently solid reality. In the Senior School, for example, they soon learn to use concrete facts to create fantasies about their teacher:

> By the summer term ... Sandy and Jenny had begun to apply their new-found knowledge to Miss Brodie in a merry fashion. "If Miss Brodie was weighed in air and then in water ..." And, when Mr Lowther seemed not quite himself at the singing lesson, they would remind each other that an immersed Jean Brodie displaces its own weight of Gordon Lowther.
>
> (p.111)

12. Spark herself states: 'I have an economical mind. The theme has to be simple and the field of choice is limited - I like that, in everything.' Joyce Emerson, 'The Mental Squint of Muriel Spark', The Sunday Times Colour Section, 30 September 1962, p.14.

And Teddy Lloyd, who also comes under the influence of Jean Brodie in her prime, soon begins to exercise a similar 'economy' in the portraits he paints of the Brodie set; each picture emerges bearing a striking resemblance to Miss Brodie, a phenomenon with which she herself is delighted: 'It is because you are mine ... I mean of my stamp and cut.' (p.129) In her fiction-making Jean Brodie not only draws the girls into her fantasy, forming them as an author forms her characters, but also ensures that she becomes the dominant figure in all their fictions and fantasies, thus becoming both the creator and the God-like centre of their universe.

It is in this novelistic power, however, that Miss Brodie's most dangerous influence - and her eventual downfall - lies. Displaying all the aspects of an author which Spark herself most fears, she refuses to acknowledge that her fictions can only function on the level of spiritual enlightenment. Instead she tries to transform her fictions into fact, to realise them within the conventional boundaries of reality, thus emulating all the worst aspects of Calvinism as an imposed religious practice rather than a source of spiritual understanding. Again it is Sandy, the character closest to, yet most critical of, Miss Brodie, who first perceives the danger. Initially quite taken with the artistry of Miss Brodie's plans for her girls, reassuring herself with 'After all, it was only an idea' (p.146), Sandy suddenly perceives the extent of Miss Brodie's ambitions:

> All at once Sandy realised that this was not all theory and a kind of Brodie game, in the way that so much of life was unreal talk and game-playing ... But this was not theory, Miss Brodie meant it.... Sandy looked at her and perceived that the woman was obsessed by the need for Rose to sleep with the man she herself was in love with; there was nothing new in the idea, it was the reality that was new.
> (p.159)

When Miss Brodie attempts to rearrange reality, to impose her own politics like a providential force of predestination upon the girls, Sandy feels obliged to stop her. Rather than pointing to the potential value of a recognition of absolutes, which could stimulate alternative perceptions of reality, Miss Brodie tries to impose a different reality upon the girls but one which is even more rigid and limiting than that to which they have been accustomed.

Sandy's attitude to 'fictionalising' is very different. Indulging in her own private fantasies, seeing herself as a companion of Alan Breck, as Jane Eyre, as a helpmate to her favourite policewoman, she nevertheless does not allow these fictions to intrude into her world. We are frequently shown Sandy daydreaming, but we also always see her coming out of these daydreams, facing up to what is going on in the 'reality' around her. And although Sandy and Jenny create their own fiction, a 'novel' about Jean Brodie, they finally bury it in the sand and leave it behind them as they grow up.(p.17) Sandy's increasing attempts to distance herself from the world of Miss Brodie's fiction thus enacts the adage, 'Truth is <u>stranger</u> than fiction', and provides a context for Miss Brodie, a perspective from which the reader can view her increasing absolutism with a growing disquiet. When Miss Brodie states: 'Well, as I say, that is the whole story', we are more inclined to take an alternative point of view: 'Sandy was thinking of something else. She was thinking that it was not the whole story.' (p.77) Through Sandy, therefore, a framework is provided in which Miss Brodie's fictions are revealed to be false, and in which the dangerous implications of the author as God may be exposed.

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, however, does not only mock the author as an ordering and all-seeing force and criticise human attempts to transform themselves into figures of absolute authority as do other Spark novels - but also directly condemns the effect and practices of Calvinism. By attempting to impose absolute rules upon humanity, within the context of their muddled and imperfect existence, Calvinism imposes impossible limitations, forcing the individual into rigid, and essentially false definitions of being dammned or elect. Jean Brodie ultimately becomes a similarly restrictive and destructive force. As Sandy recognises: 'She thinks she is Providence ... she thinks she is the God of Calvin, she sees the beginning and the end.'(p.161) Paradoxically, it is Miss Brodie's sense of herself as a force of predestination which is the beginning of her ultimate betrayal and downfall for, although she may map out the future for her pupils, she is not in control of her own destiny: 'the principles governing the end of her prime would have astonished herself at the beginning of it.'(p.55) Ironically, therefore, Miss Brodie becomes a victim of a wider context than the self-centred one which she has tried to impose on those around her. While she remains sure of herself as an absolute she is convinced that she is outwith moral condemnation or approval; and so, temporarily, do her girls: 'All the time they were under her influence she and her actions were outside the context of right and wrong.'(p.113) Such a belief, however, imposes on the Brodie set a necessary adherence to their teacher for, as Sandy realises, if they were to step outwith the context which she has created for them, they would have to face up to the consequences of their own actions and confront themselves. As the girls march along, Sandy perceives them as 'all in a frightening little moment, in unified compliance to the destiny of Miss Brodie, as if God had willed them to birth for

that purpose.'(p.36) Again, as in Calvinism as a social practice, it is fear which holds the followers to the precepts of the religion, while those same religious precepts establish that fear.

Nevertheless, Spark does not settle for a simple condemnation of either Miss Brodie or the absolutes of Calvinism which she represents. Sandy betrays Miss Brodie but only when she recognises that no loyalty is due her, a recognition which Sandy can only reach when a true context for loyalty is found.[13] Departing from the system of absolutes imposed upon her mind and her existence by Miss Brodie, Sandy flees to another set of absolutes and provides herself with a framework in which Miss Brodie's power is diminished. Like Spark herself, Sandy turns to Catholicism as a world view which provides the absolutes she desires but which does so in a context where everyday human reality may be 'transfigured', expanded by spiritual insights, but is not contracted by human impositions and imitations of divine absolutes. As Sister Helena, clutching the bars of her cell when she talks to visitors, we can see Sandy as being within a rigidly defined world of absolutes, but it is one in which her absolutism need never be applied to or confronted with an external reality. And since Sandy, of all the girls, has a deeper sympathy with, while also having greater doubts about Miss Brodie's moral vision, her solution is, ironically shown to be one which might have benefited her teacher: 'she was by temperament suited only to the Roman Catholic Church; possibly it could have embraced, even while it disciplined her soaring and diving spirit, it might even have normalised her.'(p.113)

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13. 'Sandy replied like an enigmatic Pope: "If you did not betray us it is impossible that you could have been betrayed by us. The word betrayed does not apply..."' (p.169)
'"It's only possible to betray where loyalty is due," said Sandy.
"Well, wasn't it due Miss Brodie?"
"Only up to a point," said Sandy.' (p.170)

In her self-imposed confinement Sandy has found a means both of fulfilling and of containing the desire for absolutes inspired in her by Jean Brodie, which her mentor ignores.

Jean Brodie, not obtaining this solution, is betrayed and condemned by events within the novel; in spite of this, however, the image of her absolutist vision remains triumphant. Although her attempts to persuade the girls into realising her absolutes in actuality result in disaster - Joyce Emily Hammond, for example, is killed while on her way to fight for fascisim at Miss Brodie's subtle instigation - the vision of absolutes expressed through her fictions and though her ideas becomes in itself a source of liberation for the girls. All of them remember her in their later lives: Jenny recognises the influence of Miss Brodie when she is for a moment filled with a 'sense of the hidden possibilities in all things.'(p.106) It is through this sense of potential that Jean Brodie achieves her 'transfiguration of the commonplace' rather than through any practical enacting of absolutes. By setting them on a quest for absolutes, she inculcates in them an awareness of the contradictions, paradoxes and ambivalences within the boundaries of conventional concepts of 'reality', thus undermining its apparent solidity and filling them with a sense of its potential transformation. As Sandy, entitling the psychological treatise which makes her famous 'The Transfiguration of the Commonplace', and continually acknowledging the influence of 'a Miss Jean Brodie in her Prime', comes to recognise, Jean Brodie has been a force of absolutes capable of transforming reality almost in spite of herself: 'It was twenty-five years before Sandy had so far recovered from a creeping vision of disorder that she could look back and recognise that Miss Brodie's defective sense of self-criticism

had not been without its beneficient and enlarging effects.' (pp.113-114) It is only when the girls have moved outwith Jean Brodie's attempts to realise her absolute vision within actuality through them, that they can actually appreciate that vision itself without having to resist its impositions. They can then apply it to their own view of existence without being confined by it. And it is only from a certain distance that Sandy sees Miss Brodie herself in the light of transfiguration:

> Sandy felt warmly towards Miss Brodie at those times when she saw how she was misled in her idea of Rose. It was then that Miss Brodie looked beautiful and fragile, just as dark heavy Edinburgh itself could suddenly be changed into a floating city when the light was a special pearly white and fell upon one of the gracefully fashioned streets. In the same way Miss Brodie's masterful features became clear and sweet to Sandy when viewed in the curious light of the woman's folly, and she never felt more affection for her in later years than when she thought upon Miss Brodie as silly.
>
> (p.148)

Just as the dark city of John Knox can become transformed through its own light, so Miss Brodie too is transformed, in spite of herself, through her own 'folly'. And Spark would likewise appear to acknowledge through this image that in spite of, yet paradoxically because of, its dark and rigid absolutes, Calvinism contains in its moral absolutism the seeds of a vision which, although in practice confining and limiting, can, as a spiritual insight lead to a recognition of the enlarging potential of such absolutism, expanding and enlightening the human concept of 'reality'.

In the novel which followed The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie Spark continued her exploration of the positive and negative effects of moral absolutes within a relatively defined reality. And The Girls of Slender Means reinforces the point made in both The Ballad of Peckham Rye and The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie that, 'a vision of evil may be as effective to

conversion as a vision of good'.[14] In its style, however, it is much closer to the earlier novel, remaining securely located in an obviously fantastic and explicitly fictional world, and confining its witty examination of the polarities of good and evil to that context. It therefore lacks that sense of a personal interest in the confrontation between an absolutist vision and a limited and humanist concept of reality to be found in The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie. In her subsequent novel, however, Spark returns to a more direct consideration of the effect of moral absolutes within a circumscribed existence by explicitly focussing on that material reality itself.

The Mandelbaum Gate

In examining the effect which moral dichotomies created by an absolutist vision have on the functioning of humanity within the limits of our existence, Spark must necessarily move closer to the conventional view of 'reality'. The Mandelbaum Gate[15] is therefore not only on a larger scale than her other works, but also appears to bear a greater resemblance to the conventions of the realist novel than any of her other fictions. Although one of her most ambitious novels however, it cannot be described as her most successful; she herself said of it: 'I didn't like that book awfully much ... It's out of proportion.'[16] In confronting the more conventionally humanist view of 'reality', and in having to represent it with some credibility in her fiction, the problematic tension created by absolutes within that circumscribed world appears to become

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14. The Girls of Slender Means, p.180.

15. Muriel Spark, The Mandelbaum Gate (London, 1965). All page references are to this edition.

16. Ian Gilham, 'Keeping it Short', Listener, 24 September 1970, 411-413, p.412.

too great, refusing to be contained within her usually neat and spare form. While contemplating the 'hopeless complexity of motive' (p.169) which is seen as all important within that humanist view of the world, Spark herself appears at times to become a victim of that complexity. Nevertheless, although not her most artistically satisfying novel, the complex considerations of The Mandelbaum Gate makes it play a significant part in any assessment of Spark's own moral vision.

The Mandelbaum Gate gives the impression of having a greater personal relevance to Spark's moral concerns partly because, rather than examining the potentialities and limitations of moral absolutes through the patternings of fiction, it concentrates on assessing them in relation to the individual. In Barbara Vaughan and Freddy Hamilton, the characters who share in the novel's central adventure plot, two different attitudes to morality are represented: both characters, nevertheless, are seen responding to a confrontation with moral absolutes which alters their view of reality. Barbara, the child of an Anglican-Jewish marriage, and herself a convert to Catholicism, had previously been viewed by friends and family as a stereotypic spinster schoolteacher. She has, however, fallen in love with a divorced archeologist, despite the fact that, because of her Catholicism she must wait for his previous marriage to be annulled by Rome before she can marry him. Her pilgrimage to Israel, will not only both satisfy her Catholicism and perhaps help her to come to terms with her mixed origins, but will also ensure that she is near him while he is working in Jordan, as they wait for the decree to come through from Rome. Meeting Freddy Hamilton, a minor diplomat, in Jerusalem, she confides in him her desire to visit Jordan in spite of the warnings that her Jewish origins may make such a visit dangerous. Through

a series of circumstances Freddy becomes involved in an attempt to allow the visit to go forward; together they encounter adventures in which both characters, discovering new facets of their personality, find their sense of identity altered. And the setting of their adventure, the fragmented dislocated atmosphere in the Middle East 1961, with Israel and Jordan divided politically, religiously, and nationally, provides an appropriate background of confusion and contradiction for their individual search for significance within themselves.

As this description of the novel indicates, not only does The Mandelbaum Gate have a more complex plot, with a greater emphasis on the materiality of circumstance than other Spark novels, but its characters are also given fuller realisation than is generally found in her work. Barbara and Freddy are presented as credibly complex characters, caught in extreme situations which both frighten and excite them. Faced with the absolute extremes of such situations their carefully preserved senses of identity vanish and in this dislocation, with its resulting fragmentation of personality, they are led to seek - and indeed discover - new definitions of themselves which can accommodate the awareness of absolutes and which liberate them from the previously 'fixed' identities to which they had clung. In order to examine the confrontation of absolutes with a limited conception of reality, Spark has had to create characters who initially appear to conform to the conventions of the realist novel, who appear 'rounded' and securely identifiable; but, having created such characters, she can then use them not only to reflect the response of humanity when faced with absolutes, but also to reveal the effect such a confrontation may have on the concept of 'character' itself. In Freddy and Barbara, therefore, she creates two characters who appear sure of

themselves but who, even at the beginning of the novel, are shown to use their self-confidence as a means of concealing basic uncertainties. By following them through a series of improbable adventures she can trace their changing self-definitions, their developing responses to absolutes, and, because they are shown to be very different kinds of people, can offer a more complex assessment of the effect an awareness of absolutes has on human reality than is possible in her other novels where all the characters appear content to be part of the fiction's fantasy.

Freddy Hamilton is initially shown as a man intent on maintaining his own national and cultural identity. When we first see him he is desparately repeating a little English rhyme in an attempt to shut out the chants of Hebrew schoolchildren, 'pitting culture against culture.'(p.10) Needing to see himself as the 'norm', he labels everything alien to him as 'absurd': 'outside of the Embassy, and even inside it, he never really felt at ease with chaps until sooner or later they remarked that the place was quite absurd.'(p.6) He thus avoids the threat which anything strange or foreign may pose to him although, as he later realises, the 'absurd' may also provide escape from the norm as well as a threat to it. Above all, Freddy wishes to steer a middle course, to avoid any extremes which could threaten his carefully established personality. Although not religious, 'he disapproved of letting young chaps into the Foreign Service who openly professed to have no religion at all' (p.216), and he believes that strong feelings can lead to 'revulsion, heart-quickenings, murderous attachments, the sort of emotions that had always led to trouble at school and university, and they led to international incidents as well.'(p.3) It is therefore appropriate that soon after meeting Barbara, she accusingly quotes Scripture at him: 'I know of thy doings, and find thee neither

cold nor hot; cold or hot, I would thou wert one or the other. Being what thou art, lukewarm, neither cold nor hot, thou wilt make me vomit thee out of my mouth.'(p.16)

Barbara, when the novel begins, presents an antithesis of Freddy; all through her life she has been faced with extremes and imposed definitions. By both her Gentile and Jewish relations she has been categorised according to what she is not, as well as what she is. And in her relationship with the archeologist Harry Clegg she has fled from the definition of spinsterhood imposed upon her by her colleague and employer, Miss Rickward, making love with him in a site hut, as if to prove her capacity for extreme passion. On arrival in Israel she is faced with yet more imposed definitions, as the Israelis demand that she be wholly Jewish, and her Catholic pilgrimage to Jordan is forbidden because she is not wholly Gentile. The imposition of such contradictory definitions only leads her into a greater uncertainty about herself, until a Jewish taxi-driver forces her into complete confusion by demanding from her some kind of self-definition:

> Barbara thought, 'Who am I?' She felt she had known who she was till this moment.... Barbara knew then that the essential thing about herself remained unspoken, uncategorized, and unlocated. She was agitated, and felt a compelling need to find some definition that would accurately explain herself to this man.
> (pp.23-24)

At this moment she realises that all her previous attempts to assert a sense of self have been unsatisfactory. In Israel she is faced with extremes of definition which seem just as powerful as the Catholicism she has previously seen as all-accommodating. While Freddy's adventures lead him to face extremes for the first time, Barbara is led to encounter a multiplicity of extremes which threaten the definitions she thought

she had established for herself.

Through the events of the novel - the journey into Jordan, the disguising of Barbara in order that she might complete her religious pilgrimage, the discovery of a spy in the British Foreign Service, and his own affair with Suzi Ramdez - Freddy appears to become liberated from the boundaries of caution he had previously imposed upon himself. Experiencing depths of emotion for the first time he enoounters extremes of both joy and sadness. Such is the extent of this extremity, however, that when he returns to Israel and his 'normal' life he suffers from amnesia and is unable to remember any of his experiences for the past few days. Blotting out all memories of these extremes he thus avoids any contemplation of alternatives to the conventional and fixed sense of self he had previously established, although in his adventures he has discovered an unexpected potential for extremes of action within himself. Yet this sense of 'otherness' which he encountered cannot be assimilated into his carefully limited 'reality'; the memories of it remain vaguely in his mind, often creating a feeling of regret and astonishment:

> the events were to come back to Freddy in the course of time; first, like an electric shock of fatal voltage, but not fatal, and so, after that, like a cloud of unknowing,[17] heavy with the molecules of accumulated impressions and finally when he had come to consider the whole mosaic of evidence, when he had gathered the many-coloured fragments of what actually happened, and had put the missing parts in place, then he came to discern, too late for action but more and more clearly as the years sifted past, that he had been neither a monster nor a fool, but had behaved rather well, and at least with style and courage.
>
> (pp.147-148)

17. 'The Cloud of Unknowing'; see Chapter Six, page 357, footnote 29.

Although he is never fully able to ascertain the validity or even respectability of his experiences, they come to acquire a significance of their own in his life:

> So it was to be throughout the years; it was always unexpectedly, like a thief in the night, that the sweetest experiences of his madness returned; he was amazed at his irresponsibility for a space, then he marvelled that he could have been so light-hearted, and sooner or later he was overwhelmed with an image, here and there, of beauty and delight, as in occasional memories of childhood.
>
> (p.272)

That his confrontation with extremes does have a value is indicated in the way in which his own 'reality' can at times become expanded in remembering his past; here too a transfiguration of the commonplace is achieved.

There is, however, a correlative in Freddy's own experience to the absolutes which he encountered in his adventures and which, like a leap of faith, enhance his appreciation of the dimensions of existence. While he is suffering from amnesia and enjoying his dramatic experiences in Jordan, he forgets to write his usual letters to his mother and old nurse, who are living together in England but are constantly warring with each other. And it is in this distant scenario - never described in the novel except through letters - that absolute extremes are brought into reality, that polarities of morality are applied in practice with disasterous results: 'the news from Harrogate was brought to the Cartwright's house that Freddy's mother had been stabbed to death by a mad old servant, Miss Bennett.' (p.314) In this off-stage event a warning is carried about the effects of moral absolutes if realised in actuality within the limits of human existence: once again their dangerously destructive qualities are revealed. In the improbable and, in Freddy's

case, only half-remembered events of the novel's plot, however, the positive aspects of his encounter with absolutes are also revealed; it is the insight they provide which remain with Freddy in later years.

Barbara Vaughan's response to her adventures is both more complex and more fully articulated than Freddy's, partly because she is of a more academic frame of mind but also because of her conversion to Catholicism and mixed upbringing - a personal background which appears to reflect Spark's own. Yet there are structural parallels between Barbara and Freddy's experiences; not only are both characters caught up in the same adventure, both experiencing a sense of liberation from their former selves in the course of it, but Barbara, while searching for her own kind of absolute definition is, like Freddy, presented with a warning example of the realisation of absolutes in practice. This awareness comes to her when she goes to watch the trial of Eichmann. Implying that he has only responded to external laws, the man on trial evades all responsibility for his own actions. As Barbara realises: 'The man was plainly not testifying for himself, but for his pre-written destiny. He was not answering for himself or his own life at all, but for an imperative deity named Bureau IV-B-4, of whom he was the High Priest.' (p.189) Eichmann's actions, his attempts to carry out a course of absolutes action unmitigated by any consideration of its consequences, can be seen as an indictment of 'moral realism', a morality of absolutes, if imposed on humanity as practice rather than theory. His example reinforces that condemnation of Calvinism's imposition of a religious idea into humanity found in The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie. And to Barbara, Eichmann represents the darker side of the absolute definitions for which she aims.

The trial however, does perform a positive role as well, not only in the novel but for Barbara's own development, as one passage in particular indicates:

> "Well, either religious faith penetrates everything in life or it doesn't. There are some experiences that seem to make nonsense of all separations of sacred and profane - they seem childish. Either the whole of life is unified under God or everything falls apart. Sex is child's play in the argument." She was thinking of the Eichmann trial, and was aware that there were other events too, which had rolled away the stone that revealed an empty hole in the earth, that led to a bottomless pit. So that people drew back quickly and looked elsewhere for reality, and found it and made decisions in the way that she had decided to get married, anyway.
>
> (pp.307-308)

The adherence to absolutism seen in Eichmann does 'roll away the stone', and calls for a recognition of absolute dimensions to existence which render humanity's role within it meaningless. In a universe whose boundaries are established and controlled by a divine external presence, in which only moral polarities have any true significance, and only actions count, the position of humanity, as it attempts to evolve moral laws and make decisions which can accommodate all the relative considerations of everyday existence, becomes meaningless. If this 'black hole' is recognised than all the relative norms of a humanist outlook are lost; even the concept of 'reality' itself is threatened. Like the tunnel running under Peckham, the bomb in the grounds of the May of Teck club in The Girls of Slender Means, the introduction of absolutes into the confines of a conventional view of existence undermine the established concept of 'reality'. And at this moment Barbara realises that all the devices, conventions and norms of everyday existence to which she clings, are used as a means of avoiding this recognition.

Although this moment of perception terrifies Barbara, it also serves to

bring her own concern about self-definitions, by which she can operate in her own reality, into perspective. Throughout the novel's events she has been faced by contrasts which define; she sees similarities between Saul Ephraim and her own cousin Michael, she looks for resemblances between Michael and her lover, Harry Clegg, and even sees a likeness between Miss Rickward and Harry. All her attempts to make sense out of these conjunctions reflects her desire to establish a consistent identity for herself: 'Barbara understood then, that her self-image was at variance with the image she presented to the world.'(p.36) When she arrives in Israel she sees no way of resolving this problem; she feels that 'her habits of mind were inadequate to cope with the whole of her experience, and thus Barbara Vaughan was in a state of conflict, like practically everyone else, is some mode or another' (p.18), and she is described as 'displaced': 'she felt her personal identity beginning to escape, like smoke from among her bones.' (p.23) Yet on her visit to the Eichmann trial she is presented with an extreme form of adherence to absolutes which makes her fear their application within reality but also allows her to appreciate the form of absolutism to be found within her own religion. And, by the end of her adventures, she recognises that a context does exist in which apparently contradictory definitions of personality, and her own fragmented sense of self, can be securely located. As Barbara appreciates,Catholicism recognises the muddled morality by which humanity functions on an everyday basis but, while encouraging the recognition of an absolute and divine framework, does not make impossible demands upon a fallible humanity for these divine rules to be realised within the constraints of an everyday reality:

> To Barbara, one of the first attractions of her religion's moral philosophy had been its recognition of the hopeless complexity of motives that prompted

> an action, and its consequent emphasis on actual words, thoughts and deeds; there was seldom one motive only in the grown person; the main thing was that the motives should harmonize.
>
> (p.169)

Unlike Calvinism, unlike the blind obedience of Eichmann, Catholicism offers a recognition of moral absolutes as a means of expanding the human response to the reality in which it operates but does not enforce an alteration of that reality. When Barbara hears a priest also on pilgrimage preaching from Hebrew 13, v.14 - 'we have an everlasting city, but not here; our goal is the city that is one day to be' - the necessary discrepancy between the 'reality' of everyday existence and the world in which divine absolutes can be realised is reemphasised. And when the priest recalls Paul's answer to the question, 'What is faith?': 'It is that which gives substance to our hope, which convinces us of things we cannot see' (p.214), the way in which earthly reality can be transfigured - that is, through faith - is indicated.

'I've got a lot of faith. It's all I've got. I don't do good very much', admits Barbara.'(p.314) However, through the novel's events she comes to realise the value of this faith and its function in achieving a temporary transcendence. Indeed she is described as being gifted 'with the beautiful and dangerous gift of faith which, by definition of the Scriptures, is the sum of all things hoped for and the evidence of things unseen.' (p.18) By using her faith she can contemplate a reality in which a variety of human definitions are possible, yet not feel anxious about the fallibility of such definitions, assured of a wider context in which her existence has significance. And in this wider context she can find liberation from self-imposed and earthly definitions of sex, religion, nationality or politics. When Freddy hustles her away from the convent at which she is

staying, in the middle of the night she sees her escape as a liberation from 'an unidentified confinement of the soul' (p.174), and through this liberation can accept contradictions within an earthly reality. This is in marked contrast to her thoughts at the beginning of the novel: 'Barbara ... reflected wearily upon her reflections. She thought, my mind is impatient to escape from its constitution and reach its point somewhere else. But that is in eternity at the point of transfiguration.' (p.27) By the end of her adventures, however, she has learned to perceive a potential transfiguration of her 'reality' but has also been warned against imposing this vision of absolutes upon her day to day living. In so doing, she accepts the paradox that humanity cannot carry out in practice the idealism of absolutes which it nevertheless must perceive if existence is to be given any moral meaning. In this paradox lies both the positive values of moral absolutes and the terrifying aspect of them revealed in the Eichmann trial. When the stone rolls away an abyss is revealed, but a potential transcendence over earthly reality is also offered. Flying along the dusty roads of Jordan, disguised as an Arab woman, this realisation of transcendence comes to Barbara:

> She did not think, now, of unpicking knots, for there was some definite purpose in the air about her, liberated as she was under the black clothes with the landscape flying past the car. Knots were not necessarily created to be untied. Questions were things that sufficed in their still beauty, answering themselves.
> (pp.301-302)

Her perception, while providing a statement of philosophical acceptance which appears close to Spark's own, also aptly describes the author's approach to fiction - in all novels, that is, except The Mandelbaum Gate.

It is ironic that in the novel which offers the clearest expression of her own moral philosophy, which advocates the strategy of not 'unpicking

knots' followed in the majority of Spark's fictions, the author is unable to leave her questions as sufficient 'in their still beauty', but does become entangled in the hopeless complexity of human existence. The novel can however be seen as a necessary failure, a deliberate entanglement with the paradox that besets her. Rather than offering the fiction itself as a moment of transfigurative insight as she usually does, in The Mandelbaum Gate Spark considers the difficulties of living with and without such insights; she both mocks and sympathises with the situation of humanity. At the end of a novel which has continually focused in the division between Israel and Jordan which are marked by the boundary of the 'Mandelbaum Gate' between the two parts of Jerusalem, we are told that the gate itself has no inherent significance but is, 'hardly a gate at all, but a piece of street between Jerusalem and Jerusalem, flanked by two huts, and called by that name because a house at the other end once belonged to a Mr Mandelbaum.'(p.330) Like the boundaries between the vision of an absolute framework for humankind and the earthly reality in which humankind's muddled morality operates, the division has been created by humanity itself; nevertheless, this self-imposed definition has acquired a significance which can only be transcended if both the absurdity and the reality of its existence is recognised. Similarly Spark presents a paradox which appears unresolvable, but also indicates that an awareness of the existence of such a paradox in itself offers the potential for transcendence.

Although The Mandelbaum Gate may seem - to an even greater extent than The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie - uncharacteristic of Spark's work in its realism and in the complexity of its moral problematic, both novels nevertheless indicate the heart of her attempts to come to terms with the paradoxical function of moral absolutes within a human reality, which can

be traced in all her novels. And, as if these two novels, in deepening her awareness of the moral dichotomy of absolutism, also confirmed the validity of her approach to fiction, her subsequent work shows a return to the fantastical lightness of technique found in the earlier novels, even if her outlook itself appears to bleaken. In concluding, therefore, it would seem appropriate to consider one of those later novels which provides both a mocking celebration of her own desire for yet distrust of absolutes and an ironic comment on the uses to which she has put her own fiction-making.

The Abbess of Crewe

Originally inspired by the Watergate scandal, The Abbess of Crewe[18] tells the tale of a wealthy, secluded convent in which the impressive Alexandra, running for election as Abbess, isolates her nuns in archaic rituals yet teaches them electronics and supervises the convent through an elaborate bugging system in order to ensure that her rival Felicity - 'the common little thing' (p.87)-will be unable to prevent Alexandra's accession to the position of Abbess. With an obvious appreciation of the mechanics of plotting, Spark relates with relish the ways in which Alexandra attempts to impose a fiction of her own ideals upon the enclosed world of the convent. And, because the convent is so far removed from everyday reality, Alexandra's Machiavellian plans can succeed.[19] This is in sharp contrast to Watergate itself for, as the Abbess ironically comments: 'Such a scandal could never arise in the United States. They have a sense of proportion and they understand Human Nature over there.'(p.23)

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18. Muriel Spark, The Abbess of Crewe (London, 1974). All page references are to this edition.

19. Machiavelli's Discourses and The Art of War become necessary reading for Alexandra in the course of the novel.

Undeterred by any such considerations of a relative morality as a 'sense of proportion', and operating in a context where 'human' nature is not the primary concern, Alexandra believes that she can control the world which she governs and attain within it that fulfilment of absolutes which is denied to humanity in the 'real world'.

She is aided in her endeavours by the enclosed setting of the convent, by its apparent lack of contact with the outside world. And in this little universe, Spark has ample scope for an exploration of the total imposition of absolutes upon a small community untainted by considerations of 'reality' or 'normality'. Both Alexandra and her predecessor Hildegarde, who groomed her for succession, apparently worshipping, but actually playing at being God, have enforced their own archaic form of religion on the novel's inmates: 'What a piece of work is her convent, how distant in its newness from all the orthodoxies of the past, how far removed in its antiquities from those of the present!' (p.12) Alexandra is shown as aiming, therefore, for an ideal state within the convent in which the everyday constraints of reality need not apply.

There is, however, one barrier to her achieving this aim, in the person of Felicity who is not only her rival but the antithesis of all that Alexandra represents. Not only is her behaviour 'common', whereas Alexandra possesses 'an aristocratic soul' (p.97) but her approach to religion is to bring it directly into contact with all the exigencies of reality. Representing the new social orientation of the Catholic church, Felicity believes that every action must have some validity within an earthly reality, whereas Alexandra refuses to be constrained in this way; as she complains:

> Felicity wants everyone to be liberated by her vision and to acknowledge it. She wants a stamped receipt from Almighty God for every word she spends, every action, as if she can later deduct it from her income-tax returns. Felicity will never see the point of faith unless it visibly benefits mankind.
>
> (p.43)

By limiting her faith in this way Felicity is shown to be denying several of the valuable dimensions of her belief; she is unable to perceive a universal metaphysical significance which is greater than temporal usefulness. She thus remains grounded in reality herself whereas Alexandra has moved beyond that and into mythological status.

'Here, in the Abbey of Crewe, we have discarded history. We have entered the sphere, dear Sisters, of mythology. My nuns love it. Who doesn't yearn to be part of a myth at whatever the price in comfort? Here, within the ambience of mythology, we have consummate satisfaction, we have peace.'(p.20) An important concept in all her novels, in The Abbess of Crewe Spark foregrounds 'mythology'.[20] It is presented firstly as the one means by which Alexandra can transcend reality, can move beyond its contradictions and realise her own absolutes. Within the fictional world which she has created in the convent such contradictions can both be resolved and are acknowledged as the force which necessitates the fiction in the first place. When asking advice from Sister Gertrude, a parody of Kissinger, travelling from pole to pole, Alexandra is told: 'A problem you solve ... A paradox you live with.'(p.31) In establishing a world in which absolutes may be fulfilled but which in itself can never be part of an external reality, Alexandra lives within a paradox; that

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20. Her interest in the realm of the mythological again reveals similarities between Spark and Stevenson. (See Chapter Three, p.161, Footnote 27.)

God has instilled in humanity a desire for absolutes which they cannot fulfil is itself a paradox. Alexandra can therefore excuse her behaviour by seeing it as a reflection of her own religion: 'That Religion is to be founded on principles of Paradox. That Paradox is to be accepted and presents no Problem' is how she introduces her justification to the Congregation of Religion.(p.32) And her stance is supported by citation of the Church's own evidence of paradox:

> That electronic surveillance (even if a convent were one day to practice it) does not differ from any other type of watchfulness, that which is a necessity of a Religious Community; we are told in the Scriptures 'to watch and pray', which is itself a paradox since the two activities cannot be effectively practiced together except in the paradoxical sense.
> (pp.32-33)

Her perspective, inimical to humanist terms, to relative morality, and to logic, nevertheless offers a religious justification of her actions. Such a justification can, however, only be accepted within the realms of mythology because only on that level can paradox flourish and be accepted.

The realm of mythology in which the paradoxes of moral absolutes can be accepted is therefore an important element in the novel, offering both an insight and an ironic reflection of the status of Spark's own work. Writing on the difference between fiction and myth, Frank Kermode points out:

> Myth operates within the diagrams of ritual, which presupposes total and adequate explanations of things as they are and were; it is a sequence of radically unchangeable gestures. Fictions are for finding things out, and they change as the needs of sense-making change. Myths are the agents of stability, fictions the agents of change. Myths call for absolute, fictions for conditional assent. 21

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21. Kermode, The Sense of an Ending, p.39.

Within the apparently muddled morality and exigent reality of the contemporary world it would appear that there is little space for agents of stability and for absolute assent except as ideals or within those fictions which can become myths, leaving the constraints of reality behind. It is this plane to which Alexandra aspires, and in her ambitions Spark can mock the aims and functions of her own fiction-making. Alexandra states:

> Garble is what we need now, Sisters. We are leaving the sphere of history and are about to enter that of mythology. Mythology is nothing more than history garbled; likewise, history is mythology garbled and it is nothing more in all the history of man.
>
> (pp.103-104)

In abandoning the world of actual events for the world of garble, Alexandra reflects Spark's own techniques in her novels; this point is emphasised throughout the novel as Alexandra - ironically contextualised by the readers' own awareness of the work's fictionality - uses a variety of fiction and fiction-making techniques in order to maintain her ascendancy over the nuns, to sustain the absolute dimension she has imposed, and to contain herself within the world of mythology, far removed from the reality outwith the convent.

'Garble' therefore permeates the novel. The most obvious example of it is to be found in the explanations of the bugging which Alexandra offers, guaranteed to confuse those to whom they are addressed. When reporters discover what is happening at the convent she fobs them off by quoting Milton to them, and she confuses the bishops worried about the convent by reciting Marvell (a favourite poet, presumably, because of his metaphysical wit.) Instead of her daily religious chants she recites her beloved English poetry during daily worship, using it to soothe and

reassure herself. And her love of fictions, of artistry in language, is also imposed upon the nuns, as the Scripture readings during mealtimes become a strange mixture of the Bible and lectures on electronics. She embroils the community even further into her fictional creations by persuading them that the choice of Abbess is dependent upon their own good-breeding, thus exploiting their innate snobbery by a fantastic guide to etiquette which leaves them no option but to reject Felicity as a potential Abbess:

> In this Abbey a Lady places her love-letters in the casket provided for them in the main hall, to provide light entertainment for the community during the hour of recreation; but a Bourgeoise keeps her love-letters in a sewing-box.
> A Lady has style; but a Bourgeoise does things under the poplars and in the orchard.
> A Lady is cheerful and accommodating when dealing with the perpetrators of a third-rate burglary; but a Bourgeoise calls the police.
> A Lady recognises in the scientific methods of surveillance, such as electronics, a valuable and discreet auxiliary to her natural capacity for inquisitiveness; but a Bourgeoise regards such innovations in the light of demonology and considers it more refined to sit and sew.
>
> (p.89)

Felicity, her victim in this speech, is less literate; when writing a letter of complaint about the happenings at the convent she is reduced to recourse to a Thesaurus, a fact which Alexandra, with consummate linguistic skill parodies for her own satisfaction and amusement:

> High and low come the canticles and the Abbess rises from her tall chair to join the responses. How lyrically moves her lips in the tidal sway of the music! ...
>
> Taking, obtaining, benefiting, procuring, deriving, securing, collecting, reaping, coming in for, stepping into inheriting, coming by, scraping together, getting hold of, bringing grist to the mill, feathering one's nest ...
>
> Sisters, be sober, be vigilant, for the devil goeth about as a raging lion seeking whom he may devour.

<u>Gloating</u>, <u>being pleased</u>, <u>deriving pleasure</u>,
<u>etcetera</u>, <u>taking delight in</u>, <u>rejoicing in</u>, <u>relishing</u> ...
(p.115)

And so she continues, mistress of the medium. The bugging of the convent itself becomes part of her fictionalising, thus developing the fascination with tape-recordings which Spark reveals in other novels. A recording can give the illusion of truth but, as Watergate shows, can be altered, edited, misinterpreted and manipulated; thus Gertrude advises Alexandra to 'Delete the English poetry from those tapes ... It will look bad for you at Rome.' (p.125) In this respect therefore it provides a parallel with the illusions yet distortions of reality to be found in the novel form. Like the novelist herself, the justification which Alexandra offers for her fiction-making devices is aesthetic credibility - 'truth and wonder'. Asked the meaning of 'scenario' she replies: 'They are an art-form ... based on facts. A good scenario is a garble. A bad one is a bungle. They need not be plausible, only hypnotic, like all good art.' (p.106) And in her statement we can see Spark's own ironic validation of her art, emphasised by the lightness of tone in the novel, a sense of enjoyment close to that found in <u>Loitering with Intent</u>.

Alexandra, however, is not allowed to triumph totally in her imposition of absolutes and her fiction-making, like that of Spark's, is never completely vindicated. Although she does succeed in elevating both herself and the convent into the realms of mythology, she also becomes trapped in the image she has imposed upon herself, a victim of her own absolute control. Liberated from earthly constraints, she is unable to function within reality and must remain within the fictions she has

created. Happy to translate her own experiences into fiction, she must remain within the parameters she has established. Thus, when she contemplates her journey to Rome by sea, she thinks in explicitly literary terms: 'Yes, the fleecy drift of the sky across the Channel will become me.'(p.127) And this image is fulfilled at the end of the novel:

> She sails indeed on the fine day of her desire into waters exceptionally smooth, and stands on the upper deck, straight as a white ship's funnel, marvelling how the wide sea billows from shore to shore like that cornfield of sublimity which never should be reaped nor was ever sown, orient and immortal wheat.
> (p.128)

Contained within that lyric intensity Alexandra does achieve transfiguration but appears to have lost all contact with the commonplace, becoming a creature purely of mythology, as she herself recognises: 'I am become an object of art, the end of which is to give pleasure.'(p.125)

In spite of Alexandra's mythological significance, therefore, she may never be seen as a symbol which could be translated into terms of earthly reality. As for the reader, we realise that in the novel itself, we have been left with the very contents of the tapes edited by Alexandra and entitled by her, 'The Abbess of Crewe'. Even the scene which begins the novel is revealed to be a 'scenario' carefully selected for inclusion by the watchful Abbess. Thus the novel traps itself within the paradox of the fiction-making process, unable to extrapolate its own meaning and apply it to a reality outwith its parameters. The novel glories in 'garble', celebrates fiction as a means of presenting and containing the paradox of moral absolutes. Yet it also mocks its own pretensions through 'unrealistic' mediums such as fiction and theology. By the end of the novel the applicability of its epigraph, two stanzas from Yeat's 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen', becomes clear. The first verse encourages us to: 'mock at the great/That had such burdens on the mind/

And toiled so hard and late/To leave some monument behind', but the second verse adds: 'Mock mockers after that/That would not lift a hand maybe ...' If we are to mock at absolutes and their imposition it would seem that we also have to recognise their validity. The Yeats' quotation, however, ends with Spark's usual sharp reminder of both the limitations and the value of her fiction: 'for we/Traffic in mockery'. To represent the function of moral absolutes within a human reality is in itself a mockery; yet, for Muriel Spark, it is only through such mockeries that the 'paradox you live with' can be contemplated.

CONCLUSION:

AN ALTERNATIVE CONFIGURATION

> ... - Truth is not crushed;
> It crushes, gorgonises all else into itself.
> The trouble is to know it when you see it?
> You will have no trouble with it when you do.
> Do not argue with me. Argue with these stones.
> Truth has no trouble in knowing itself.
> This is it. The hard fact. The inoppugnable reality.
> Here is something for you to digest.
> Eat this and we'll see what appetite you have left
> For a world hereafter.
>
> From Hugh MacDiarmid's
> 'On a Raised Beach'.[1]

MacDiarmid's vision of humanity, alone in a universe of stones, dwarfed by the external, intransigent framework to existence, parallels the absolutist vision of extremes to be found in the work of Stevenson, Jenkins and Spark. They too have a vision of the 'hard fact', the 'inoppugnable reality', and face up to the implications of this perspective in their art. MacDiarmid, however, presents his view of 'indigestable' absolutes through the complexity of language and the imagery of 'On a Raised Beach'; the form of the long poem does not demand that his vision be reconciled with details of everyday experience but permits it simply to be expressed in a moment of condensed insight. In contrast, the form of the novel creates a different set of expectations in the reader; some relevance to everyday experience, some connection with the apparent constituents of our material reality, is anticipated. Nevertheless, in exploring the metaphysical implications of their moral outlook, Stevenson, Jenkins and Spark seek ways of confronting a potential expansion of those conventional constituents of human experience, and of transcending every-day materiality. In thus relocating moral significance to the theoretic rather than the social sphere, they come into direct conflict with the representation of 'reality' generally found in the liberal humanist

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1. Hugh MacDiarmid, 'On a Raised Beach', Complete Poems 1920-1976, ed. Michael Grieve and W.R. Aitken, 2 vols (London, 1978), 422-433, ll. 286-295, p.430.

tradition of the novel. As their moral vision demands that they establish new fictional parameters within which they can accommodate their perception of absolutes and by which they may challenge accepted boundaries of human reality, they are led necessarily into defying the conventions of the realist novel.

In moving away from the expression of a relative morality, that 'morality of reciprocity' which has characterised the novel form - in the English tradition, at least - Stevenson, Jenkins and Spark express a philosophy of 'moral realism', one which has tended to be seen as less sophisticated, less mature than that of liberal humanism. The moral concern which they express has, nevertheless, an obvious correlative within their cultural context - in the ideas of Calvinism. Although all three writers may reject the social practices of that religion as expressed in Scottish life, their moral absolutism can be viewed as both a result of their exposure to the theological tenets of Calvinism and a response to its attitudes towards human existence. As such, therefore, their philosophical outlook, as well as their manipulations of fiction, may be identified as characteristic of certain national and religious configurations. And, although they are amongst its most skilled exponents, they are not alone in Scottish literature in holding this world view.

A brief glance at other major figures in Scottish writing reveals their work as reflecting similar concerns and indicates their awareness of humankind operating within an earthly reality which is framed by, yet separate from, an external dimension in which human actions and reasoning appear insignificant. T.S. Eliot, for example, asserting Byron's Scottish heritage, claims that he projects an essentially Calvinist consciousness:

> But there is a very important part of the Byronic make-up which may appropriately be mentioned before considering his poetry, for which I think his Scottish antecedence provided the material. That is his peculiar diabolism, his delight in posing as a damned creature - and in proving evidence for his damnation in a rather horrifying way. Now, the diabolism of Byron is very different from anything that the Romantic Agony ... produced in Catholic countries. And I do not think it is easily derived from the comfortable compromise between Christianity and paganism arrived at in England and characteristically English. It could only come from the religious background of a people steeped in Calvinist theology. 2

In a recent article on Byron and Scotland, Angus Calder develops this point of view, arguing that 'underlying Byron's persistent and at times tiresome sniping at Wordsworth lay a Calvinist hunch that the world is not suffused with love and delight and pure morality - it is either a fallen world of carnal snares and delusions or, God not existing, it is mere stone and dust.'[3] Again a Calvinist outlook on existence is not necessarily precluded by a lack of specific religious faith. Thomas Carlyle, who more obviously suffered from the rigours of a Calvinist upbringing, also appears to have had his philosophy shaped by an early religious consciousness. He has been described as fascinated with the opposition between secular authority and spiritual power, experiencing a life-long conflict about the providential pattern of existence.[4] And, as discussed in Chapter One, a similar fascination with the theological implications of Calvinism has given rise to two of Scottish literatures' most vigorous works - Burns' 'Holy Willie's Prayer' and James Hogg's Confessions of a Justified Sinner.

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2. T.S. Eliot, 'Byron' (1937), On Poetry and Poets (London, 1957), 193-206, pp.194-195.

3. Angus Calder, 'Byron and Scotland', Cencrastus, 15 (New Year, 1984), 21-24, p.23.

4. Fred Kaplan provided some interesting observations on this point at a lecture given to the Carlyle Society, University of Edinburgh, 20 January, 1984, on 'Carlyle: Power and Authority'.

Nor is the Scottish fascination with a Calvinist outlook confined to those ages in which it had its most obvious social manifestations. Even today, Scottish novels frequently focus on the position of a fallible humanity within essentially deceptive boundaries of existence, seeking some form of definition which will give an absolute significance to their being. Both Neil Munro and John Buchan continue Stevenson's search for significance through the potential purity of action, emulating Stevenson's adaptations of the adventure form,[5] while John Buchan's Witch Wood focuses explicitly on the religious issue in a historical setting.[6] Willa Muir, although not advocating an absolutist perspective, nevertheless examines its implication in Imagined Corners by considering the plight of a minister torn between his own desire for a liberal theology and his recognition of a sterner face of religion. Preaching a sermon advocating the latter point of view, he is described as:

> proving to them that the existence of good connoted the existence of evil; this world was a world of both good and evil, unlike the Kingdom of God, which, when it came, would be neither good nor evil, but equally beyond both, transcending both. Meanwhile, because on earth we had intuitions of good, we must admit also intuitions of evil.[7]

He comes to realise, when balancing the two viewpoints, that the choice for him lies between accepting, 'Neither heaven nor hell. Or both heaven and hell?'[8] More recently, in A Green Tree in Gedde Alan Sharp

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5. See, for example, Neil Munro, The New Road (Edinburgh and London, 1914) and John Buchan, The Thirty-Nine Steps (Edinburgh, 1915); Greenmantle (London, 1916).

6. John Buchan, Witch Wood, (London, 1927).

7. Willa Muir, Imagined Corners (London, 1927).

8. Imagined Corners, p.185.

depicts a group of characters each seeking escape from the constraints of their everyday world, searching for some means of transcendence, and attempting to realise the Edenic vision expressed by an itinerant preacher, the great-uncle of one of the characters, Harry Gibbon.[9] It is this vision of another kind of existence which is set out in the novel's epigraph:

> A green tree there is in Gedde growing, and in the branches the hawk it perches with the dove; fruit there is for all to eat, golden and silver globes and purple plums, and all abloss with bloom is brondes. No perdifol is there nor foliomort, and hallards none, but green leaf everlasting.
>
> Know ye not this hallidrome, this greenheart axle-tree; know ye not Gedde? Its seed lies within us each.

John Moseby, the character most tied by the apparent security of his everyday existence, and the only character who remains in Greenock for the duration of the novel, is ultimately shown as also seeking his freedom, reflecting to himself: 'Had not this town urged this on him without respite, like some great metaphor of the mind, the world beyond the province of self, the true idea of transcendence.'[10] The only vision, however, with which the novel ends, is Moseby's bleak perception of his town and beyond as part of a universe of infinite and unyielding absolutes:

> He shivered, afraid, emptily afraid as night covered the land from end to end in pure dark, faintly stained by towns and cities but rising always above their yellow scars into the regions of silence and still, the high hang, the vast vault of other than earthly space, where the moon does not shine to light nor guide but in purposeless perpetuance exists, where stars no longer twinkle their blinter to yearning watchers but burn aeon-

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9. Alan Sharp, A Green Tree in Gedde (London, 1965).

10. A Green Tree in Gedde, p.378.

> old holes in time. Where no birds fly and prayers do not reach and the dawn flood rising foams against no sight but sweeps its sweep across the deserts of the endless air. 11

And his tutor at university suggests to him that such a perspective is endemic to the Scottish character, arguing that we are a race of 'Existential mystics. Passionately concerned with the world as our domain yet obsessed with the dream of transcendence.'[12] George Friel presents an equally comfortless vision in Mr Alfred M.A., a novel which traces a schoolteacher's increasing disillusionment with the banalities of his work and his life.[13] Seeking some meaning to his existence in the graffiti scrawled over the walls of Glasgow, attempting to read into it some pattern of significance, he eventually comes face to face with the perpetrator of all the slogans, a demonaic figure called Tod, who claims to be a former pupil of Mr Alfred's.[14] 'Tod' - the Scots for a man alone - represents anarchic disorder, stating: 'I believe in the dialectic. The unity of opposites. Law is anarchy. That's what I'm after ... Badness is all.'[15] Explaining to the schoolteacher that 'All I've did is to reduce human conflicts to its simplest terms',[16] he reveals his aim of reducing the printed word to meaninglessness. Thus denied all the significance he had sought in the world around him, Mr Alfred turns to graffiti writing himself, soon sinking into senility.

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11. A Green Tree in Gedde, p.378.

12. A Green Tree in Gedde, p.378.

13. George Friel, Mr Alfred M.A. (London, 1972).

14. The encounter with Tod, in fact, shows certain similarities, once again, with the meeting described by Stevenson in 'Markheim'.

15. Mr Alfred M.A., p.196.

16. Mr Alfred M.A., p.193.

And by introducing an element of fantasy into his novel through the figure of Tod, George Friel succeeds both in presenting the essential fallibility of the apparently meaningful codes and conventions of the world in which we live, yet also in warning against the search for insights which may be dangerously destructive to that reality. An even more determined effort to move away from the conventions of the realist novel and the view of reality which it implies, is made by Alasdair Gray, in Lanark.[17] In that ambitious work he places two different dimensions of existence in conjunction; one, a recognisably Scottish reality, is presented through the apparently conventional form of the 'Bildungsroman' yet the two books dealing with the hero's youth in Glasgow are contextualised by two books providing an account of events in the terrifying world of Unthank. Within this latter dimension an austere, and at times horrific, alternative to Glasgow is offered; nevertheless, within that world, because of the extreme mixture of demands made upon the central character, moral significance may be more easily discovered. A similar attempt to escape from the muddles of everyday reality in the search for an absolute vision, however terrifying its implications, is expressed in MacDiarmid's 'On a Raised Beach'. Contemplating the universal meaning of stones on a beach, he states: 'It is reality that is at stake/Being and non-being with equal weapons here/Confront each other for it';[18] and he continues:

> We must reconcile ourselves to the stones,
> Not the stones to us,
> Here a man must shed the encumbrances that muffle
> Contact with elemental things, the subtleties
> That seem inseparable from a humane life, and go apart
> Into a simpler and sterner, more beautiful and more oppressive world,
> Austerely intoxicating; the first draught is over-powering,
> Few survive it. [19]

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17. Alasdair Gray, Lanark (Edinburgh, 1981).

18. Hugh MacDiarmid, 'On a Raised Beach', ll.204-206, p.428.

19. 'On a Raised Beach', ll.219-226, p.428.

MacDiarmid's desire for contact with 'elemental things' reflects the force which drives Stevenson, Jenkins, Spark and other Scottish writers into manipulations of the fictional mode which will allow them to express and consider a philosophy of absolutes. A similar sentiment is expressed in a recent novel which initially appears wholly concerned with the mundane trivialities of daily existence. In The busconductor Hines by James Kelman, Hines is shown for most of the novel as suffering under the constraints of everyday life. By the end of the novel, however, he has declared his desire to escape from that version of reality using all the resources at his disposal: 'He doesn't regret having falsified the tale. Why should he? Lying is no concern of his. Truth is. He seeks the true. Fling the telly out the fucking window and be done with it. Not for him the lush pastures. He is in favour of the bottomless depths, however, which are good when clear.'[20] And in his statement the combination of an awareness that fiction itself is a duplicitous form, with the paradoxical recognition that lying might be a means to the truth, which characterises the work of the writers under discussion, finds further reflection.

In abandoning the 'lush pastures' for the 'bottomless depths', Stevenson, Jenkins, Spark, and other Scottish writers who share their interest in absolutes and experiment accordingly with the fictional form, do not discard all that is 'real' in human existence. Instead, they relocate the emphasis on what holds significance and meaning for human attempts to comprehend the nature and morality of their own 'reality'. In What is Literature?, Sartre states: 'The error of realism has been to believe

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20. James Kelman, The busconductor Hines (Edinburgh, 1984), p.213.

that the real reveals itself to contemplation and that consequently one could draw an impartial picture of it. How could that be, since the very perception is partial, since by itself the naming is already a modification of the object?'[21] As if sharing this recognition, although through the influence of their Calvinist heritage rather than by the workings of existentialist philosophy, Scottish writers have avoided the drawing of 'impartial pictures', unable to believe that such a representation could be achieved and reluctant to accept the constraints on existence which such a representation would imply. Yet aware also that fiction - by virtue of its being a 'modification of the object' - can create an alternative world, removed from the boundaries of a recognisable human reality, they have used it to provide temporary contemplations - momentary insights into an expanded context for human existence. In fiction which challenges the conventions of realism they have therefore found an artistic form ideal for the expression of their philosophy of moral absolutes and entirely appropriate to the presentation of a dimension outwith the conventionally accepted boundaries or 'reality'.

Given that the expression of this absolutist philosophy features in the work of a variety of Scottish writers, a reconsideration of both the role of Calvinism and the function of the novel in the reflection of Scottish consciousness would appear necessary. To see Calvinism and its ideology as the source of Scottish writers' struggles with a certain set of metaphysical assumptions, and as the inspiration for their manipulations of the realist form, is to contradict the widely held view of Calvinism as an art-denying force. John Broom expresses the conventional notion of Calvinism's role in the cultural life of Scotland when he states: 'I

21. Jean-Paul Sartre, What is Literature?, translation Bernard Frechtman (London, 1950), p.44.

think every fair-minded person must agree with MacColla that as a direct consequence of the triumph of Calvinism with its hatred of the arts, Scotland has become a cultural desert.'[22] I suggest, however, that Calvinism, and the moral philosophy of which it is an expression, may be perceived as a focus of stimulation for Scottish writers. Rather than depriving Scottish culture of richness, it has provided a fruitful tension which has encouraged writers to confront complex ontological issues. By offering a clear manifestation of both the advantages and dangers of a morally absolute perspective, by reflecting the most basic human desires and fears in the morality of self, it establishes a creative focus for contemplation of the paradoxes of existence.

In order to accept Calvinist ideology as possessing a positive function in the cultural life of Scotland, however, it is also necessary to reassess the nature of Scottish writing in general. In the fullest consideration of the Scottish novel currently available, F.R. Hart sums up his observations by discussing the tensions and problems inherent in the diversity of the novel in Scotland:

> Moreover, the novelists' intentions may reflect conflicting assumptions. The aim of local realism assumes a historian's loyalty to the transient, the passing facts and customs of a particular milieu; the generic analyst assumes a social typology, a Scottish consciousness that endures; the archetypal fabulist assumes a reality of nature and motive that transcends local and cultural configurations. There is no theoretic reason why a fiction cannot have meaning of multiple levels, so long as these levels do not contradict each other in terms of their assumptions about what is real. They sometimes do in Scottish fiction, perhaps reflecting ontological conflicts in Scottish consciousness: the nominalist historian, the social theorist, and the absolutist theologian coexist uneasily. The local antiquarian

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22. John L. Broom, 'Fionn MacColla, Albannach Mór', Essays on Fionn MacColla, ed. David Morrison (Thurso, 1973), p.53-65, p.63.

> can be compromised by the nationalist historian and both may be overwhelmed by the theological moralist, for whom history is a war of psychic polarities. 23

Because of this 'uneasy' coexistence he perceives, Hart divides the pattern of Scottish novel writing into an opposition of romance and realism, placing Gothic fantasy against social relevance. In the writers discussed, however, it is possible to describe this very opposition of fantasy and reality as in itself a creative tension, and to present its juxtaposition as an accurate representation of their moral outlook as well as the only viable fictional reflection of their perspectives. Aware of the practical advantages of existing within a limited conception of what constitutes 'reality', and recognising the necessity of a relative morality for operating within the constraints of such a definition, they nevertheless also feel the need to project a dimension of significance (whether feared or desired) which transcends the boundaries and muddled morality of everyday existence and is only defined by absolutes. Yet they paradoxically realise that to live in practice on the terms of such absolutes would destroy all the codes and assumptions necessary for functioning within human 'reality'. Only in fiction, therefore, by an opposition of the boundaries of the supposedly 'real' and 'fantastic', by a mutual testing of parameters, can they represent and explore the dichotomies of their moral vision.

Within the patterning of fiction offered by the works of Stevenson, Jenkins and Spark, amongst others, an alternative perspective on the novel's form and function to that presented by the humanism of the tradition of the English realist novel may be discerned. Their fascination with

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23. Hart, The Scottish Novel, p.406.

moral absolutes calls for a necessary manipulation of the conventions of realism and creates a challenge to its premises. If the pattern which they, and other Scottish writers, represent can be accepted as a valid alternative to the English tradition of realism, then the Scottish novel itself need no longer be viewed only as a history of failed attempts to utilise codes and conventions inappropriate to its subject matter. Instead it may be perceived as a configuration of literature in its own right: an identifiable and successful response to a particular cultural and religious context.

APPENDIX 1

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBIN JENKINS

In November 1981 I went to Dunoon to interview Robin Jenkins; the following conversation took place.

G.N. Do you see yourself as writing within a Scottish tradition, an English tradition, or just a more general tradition of the novel?

R.J. I don't think you can see writers as being within particular traditions. That's imposed by the academics and literary critics. I'm never conscious of writing within a tradition. I don't think any writer is.

G.N. In that case, who would you say were the writers who influenced you most?

R.J. I couldn't name one writer who has influenced me in the sense that I think about him or her when writing. People have said that Happy for the Child was influenced by The House with the Green Shutters, just because there is a character in it called Gourlay.

G.N. But there is a line in that book in which he is called 'black-rotten', which seems a definite echo.

R.J. Nevertheless, I couldn't portray a character like Gourlay. The House with the Green Shutters couldn't have influenced me in that way. I see life as comic and myself as essentially a comic writer. The pretensions of human beings are endlessly comic.

G.N. What about Stevenson?

R.J. Yes, I was influenced by him at the beginning of my writing career. I looked to him as someone who had worked hard to create a style, but had

sometimes put style in front of content. I have a great respect for Evelyn Waugh too, in his use of language.

G.N. What effect, if any, did the Scottish Renaissance have on you?

R.J. I think it's rubbish to call it the Scottish Renaissance, and it certainly had no influence on me. It's a pompous title and if I had ever been involved in writing then, such a name would have been an embarrassment to me.

G.N. MacDiarmid is supposed to have admired your work?

R.J. He said that he did, to my face, but I doubt if he had ever read any of my novels right through. He didn't like novels, and only extolled those of his friends with typical extravagance.

G.N. In 1958 you wrote in the Saltire Review that Scotland was a small nation which refused to recognise its smallness. Do you still see it that way?

R.J. No, I think Scotland is now a small nation which is only too willing to recognise its smallness and cringes submissively under that recognition. Scotland is unique among nations in that it rejected a small measure of Home Rule.

G.N. Do you think that there may be some cultural expansion as a reaction against that vote, as there was in Ireland, say, after the fall of Parnell?

R.J. No, the Irish had burning feelings, they had Yeats and Joyce and Synge. No one in Scotland has that kind of intensity. The Referendum set me back, it was a great shock that the Scots had so evidently lost faith in themselves, and I seriously thought of leaving Scotland for good.

G.N. Would it be fair to say that you have felt caught in the kind of trap described by Archie Hind in The Dear Green Place - because of the difficulty of writing about 'the canny Scot with his deathly stultifying safety,' there is a conflict between the desire to write about Scotland and a dissatisfaction with it as subject matter?

R.J. Novelists depend on people and today the Scots don't think themselves they are worth writing about. That's partly why I set books abroad. Important themes would just vanish in a Scottish context. When I was in Spain I saw some links between the Scots and the Catalans, but they were much more fervent. The Scots and the English have an unusual relationship, perhaps the only similar is that of Canada and America. I would be much happier with Independence. Returning to Archie Hind, yes, the Scot has no faith in himself, has lost all belief, doesn't know where he is. In California, visiting my daughter, I was considering the American Indian question, and thought the only solution for them would be to become ordinary Americans - which is what they could never do. And I thought this might be the only solution for the average Scot - to become an ordinary Englishman.

G.N. Would you be happy with that?

R.J. Of course not, but that's what most Scots secretly seem to want. Except of course, when it comes to football, when phoney patriotic fervour takes over.

G.N. And yet you wrote a football novel, The Thistle and the Grail?

R.J. Yes, but I deliberately chose a junior team so that support would be patriotic. It was a very ironic novel, contrasting the devotion given to football with the lack of devotion given to religion....

G.N. To return briefly to influences, do you see any links in your work with Stevenson and the adventure tradition?

R.J. I have written one adventure story, Some Kind of Grace, but it wasn't perceived as such - too many undercurrents. I couldn't write an adventure story like Alastair MacLean. I wouldn't be able to take it seriously. Going back to Stevenson, I think he had far more talent than he showed. His best work to my mind is 'The Beach of Falesá', an adult story. I think Weir of Hermiston is overrated.

G.N. How important then do you think the actual events of your novels are?

R.J. I'm actually more interested in character than event. For example, in Sabah, I had to watch students teaching classes and there was one little girl of mixed blood who became the centre of The Expatriates.

G.N. And do you ever see any of your novels as approaching allegory or fable?

R.J. The Missionaries was a deliberate attempt to create an allegory - a mixture of fantasy and realism. I'm a mixture of dour Presbyterian realism and another part of me which says to hell with all that. In The Missionaries I tried to create a situation in which miracles could happen - and I very nearly succeeded, despite being an atheist. Of all my novels I think The Cone-Gatherers is my favourite. It accepts its own limits.

G.N. Some of your earlier novels, those set in the west of Scotland, are more realistic in manner. Was there a greater concern with specific social conditions then?

R.J. My political views have a moral basis. If I were in the Labour

Party just now I would be a Bennite because as a voter I would want to know what my M.P. is thinking - from a moral point of view there is a need for an explanation. Maybe I'm too much of a moralist, too consciously so, in a Scots tradition.

G.N. Have you experienced the difficulty often found in writers dealing with the working class - that in writing about them they inevitably place themselves outwith the world they describe?

R.J. Look down on it, as it were?

G.N. Yes, or at least see it from a distance.

R.J. No, it hasn't been a problem, although I like to be able to move outwith the working class. A picture of the working class alone would be limited.

G.N. Is working class life unable to sustain drama then? Or unable to articulate experience?

R.J. The conditions of life are such that they make drama unlikely. Eight to five work is exhausting. Your characters could only be active at the weekends. Analysing the novel from the point of view of occupation, most characters have jobs which don't interfere too much with their leisure. Fiction falsifies in this way. Scenes in a ceramics factory, for example, might be interesting for a scene or two but not day after day. Maybe I would have been able to write a novel about the urban working classes if I'd been born in Glasgow, say, but I was born in a small Lanarkshire village.

G.N. And that's where all your earlier novels are set?

R. J. Yes.

G.N. In those earlier novels it seems much easier to point to an ethical or political stance in your work than your later novels. Are you deliberately aiming for narrative impartiality?

R.J. Ethical rather than political stances I would think. I'm surprised there hasn't been a stronger political impulse in my work, because I'm interested in politics and enjoy discussing them. Narrative impartiality arises naturally; one is not going to be didactic, but neither do I try to conceal my ideas.

G.N. There also seems to be an increasing ambivalence in your attitude to goodness and innocence.

R.J. Just wait till I tell you what I'm writing at the moment.

G.N. Is there any link then between the idea of 'good' characters and the way in which central characters seem to slip out of the endings of your novels? I'm thinking of Agnes in A Toast to the Lord and Gavin Hamilton in A Would-be Saint.

R.J. Agnes? She isn't forgotten, but by the end of the novel she is possessed by the Lord. That book was a gauntlet to Christianity. But it was misunderstood. The only reviewer who thoroughly understood what I was trying to do was Jack House - and he's not a literary critic. As to characters, well, people are never going to know everything about themselves or others, I'm impatient with that phrase, plaintively uttered, 'Who am I?', and by the American obsession with searching for identity.

G.N. In connection with these two novels in particular, however - why do you make your characters so unpleasant? Is it a general reflection on humanity?

R.J. I don't agree my characters are unpleasant. People are a mixture. You go about daily life meeting apparently nice people who wouldn't hurt a fly, and then world wars occur with the full approval of all those nice people. Yes, it's a reflection on humanity. Humanity is morally as well as spiritually lazy. Nobody wants to face the truth about themselves - we go on telling half truths about ourselves; although we are aware of a level of attainable goodness, we don't try to attain it because we come up against the barrier of human selfishness. Fiction is a method of trying to break through all the facades that people hide behind. Novelists try to reveal people as they are, and this may be why my characters emerge as unpleasant. Every Agnes you meet - you like little bits of her and dislike others. That's how people are.

G.N. What about Gavin Hamilton?

R.J. Gavin is supposed to be a good man. No novelist ever depicted a good person successfully. Wicked persons are easy. There's been no portrayal of a credible heaven. Gavin Hamilton is an attempt to portray a good person but things go wrong. The only solution is an escape into silence but that in itself is a defeat. Take even a superficial look at society. People have far more than they need, others have far less. Yet this is accepted by everybody. Goodness is impossible in such a situation.

G.N. Have you ever been particularly interested in symbolism in your work?

R.J. Once writing you don't stick in symbols. Writers often aren't aware of them until people point them out. They just arise.

G.N. It's just that you seem fascinated by certain images, such as the little boys 'crucifying' earwigs.

R.J. I saw that done when I was a small boy. It still represents for me the evil of the world.

G.N. Your constant change of narrative voice and lack of strong identification with any one character would seem to indicate that you do not believe in a single absolute truth?

R.J. I don't like to write through the perceptions of one character - it's too limiting.

G.N. Novelists often do.

R.J. But you might as well write in the first person, and that has great disadvantages. I've only used it once, in Fergus Lamont. One man's mind all the time - it's a waste of opportunity. Why not sample different points of view? A writer doesn't need to guess other people's feelings - he knows, or at least he can say he knows.

G.N. But in your novels this does seem to create a degree of shifting which can be disconcerting.

R.J. There is no absolute truth; things do keep shifting. I think there is nothing wrong with writers making the whole foundation seem unsure. In my own life foundations seem very unsure.

G.N. Fergus Lamont is, I suppose, your most radical novel yet in terms both of technique and theme?

R.J. Yes, I thought the italics was a good idea. Canongate wanted it out but I refused. Fergus is an old man writing about events forty to fifty years ago; it's sensible to show him as he was when he was writing.

G.N. Fergus isn't allowed to retain his writing as his central concern - is this symptomatic of the role of the writer in Scotland?

R.J. I think I have a prejudice against writers as characters in my books. Also I've wondered why none of my characters have been to University. Perhaps this is because my own university life was an enormous discouragement to me as a writer. I had no respect for the lecturers or professors, or the attitude to literature. I remember writing a critical essay on Charles Lamb for Professor Alexander who was a great Lamb enthusiast, and he got very angry and asked me if I knew the meaning of self-opinionated. I was supposed to agree with the conventional academic estimate of Lamb. It left me with a vast lack of respect for academic opinion.

G.N. Why then did you become a teacher?

R.J. I wanted to write and I wanted to live, so it was either teaching or journalism.

G.N. You have obviously used your own life as experience for your novels and yet you remain fairly reticent about this. It would be interesting to find out how your teaching, especially in Kabul, and other places abroad, and your role as headmaster, have affected your writings.

R.J. I don't put myself in my novels, except as a diffused personality, although I do use my experiences and my knowledge of locale. As a teacher I perhaps gained a sound understanding of children.

G.N. And use them as a symbol of innocence?

R.J. Aldous Huxley once said that no one learns anything about humanity

after the age of twelve. I agree. Only in children can you find innocence, though you also find wickedness. In Kabul I found that ideas of teaching in Scotland wouldn't work there. I had a class of forty strange faces, of all nationalities. Few people seem to understand what's happening in Afghanistan now. It isn't simply a case of Russians oppressing the poor Afghans. Any country that uses military force on another is no friend of mine but the Russians by their invasion have given the Afghans a chance for the activity they live for - fighting. Men in Kabul twenty years ago used to walk about the streets with rifles slung over their shoulders the way businessmen here carry umbrellas. Thirty miles outside of the King's palace his jurisdiction ended. The mountain tribes were a law unto themselves. My students used to announce to me in ringing tones - of shame - 'Sir, our country is the second most backward in the world.' In Dust on the Paw I write about the abolition of the shaddry. I was there when it happened. And now on the television I see the women are wearing shaddries again.

G.N. What novel is to be published next, and what are you working on now?

R.J. I've finished a novel about the Great Disruption of 1843. It's something that ought to be written about - a dramatic episode in Scotland's history. Perhaps there is no more dramatic in any church history. Dr Welsh gets up and instead of conducting business, reads out the protest, puts it down, and walks out of the church. I make a lot of that exciting moment but I also have to examine the characters of all the ministers involved, examine the basic morality of the Christianity of the Church of Scotland. The Scottish church was not represented at the Nuclear Disarmament conference in Amsterdam. It seems to me ridiculous for a church to be in favour of nuclear arms. At the moment I'm writing a

novel in which all my ideas about humanity and innocence are concentrated in a boy of sixteen, called Duffy. Very naïve, intellectually regarded as being not very bright, he thinks up ways of attacking humanity, or rather its faults. At an early age he becomes aware of the lies that are told, the deceit, the selfishness. Aware of the irony of 'love'. A mother loving her own child being cruel to other children, dog-owners throwing stones at other dogs. He buys a Woolworth's jotter and in it writes down acts of human atrocity; it was quite easy enough for me to find them. A teacher at his school tells the class that it is legal for a declaration of war to give a licence to kill. Asking who made it legal, Duffy is told by a confused teacher that it was God. Duffy sees this as imposing legality at every level, and paints a declaration of war on a wall in the town. He sees books as the enemies of truth, there not to portray life as it is, but as a means of avoiding truth. Eventually pressure of events pushed him into the horror of killing someone; he becomes evil himself. The idea's fascinating, though it wouldn't be if I used a grown man. This boy of sixteen sees the truth dimly but cannot hold on to it. Things close round him, and he is destroyed. But in the end he can retreat into silence. Allegory, yes.

G.N. How do you imagine it will be received?

R.J. It can't be popular. Duffy shows a prodigious disgust of humanity. At times he is almost paralysed with this terrible disgust. It's a feeling most of us have at one time though in a lesser degree, unless we want to take things easy from a moral point of view. A lot of us have thrown in the towel too early. We can think of good actions and of ways of living unselfish lives but prefer to stay in our safe little ruts. There are good people in the book, and I do try to bring Duffy to a realisation that he's asking too much in expecting people to act unselfishly.

G.N. Do _you_ think he's asking too much?

R.J. No, I don't. It's not too much to ask America and Russia to scrap the nuclear bomb. But it certainly won't be done. The boy discovers Swift, _Gulliver's Travels_, and finds that many of the ideas in it are his own ideas - but not on an intellectual plane. Duffy sees it on an emotional plane. That's why, in the end, he loses his head.

G.N. How do you view the attitudes of the reading public, then?

R.J. Too many are content to think 'serious books' are above them and won't make the effort. In the past this didn't harm serious books too much but it's different today. A serious young writer is going to have great difficulty in finding a publisher. It's especially difficult to get long novels published. The London publishing scene is one of great depression at the moment.

G.N. What then are your reasons for writing?

R.J. Because I enjoy it. It's a hobby, in the same way that I enjoy mending the road outside my house. You can feel oblivious in creating your characters and their situations. It's a superior form of ludo.

G.N. Surely if that's all it were, then you wouldn't publish?

R.J. Well, I'm not so keen to get things published now. I've written a novel about the teaching profession called _Charlatans_ but my agent thinks it's too long. It won't break my heart if it doesn't get published while I'm alive. As for reviews, I think if I have one review that shows someone else appreciates what I was trying to do in a book that's all that matters. I don't go out of my way to read reviews of my novels.

I see that Gunn has had a lot of his novels reprinted. He's very good, a very sensitive writer; my favourite's Morning Tide. But his mysticism puts me off. I can't take it unless it's managed through the characters and the action; otherwise it makes for heaviness. There's a heaviness about a lot of writers - the bread hasn't risen as it should have done. In Evelyn Waugh and Anthony Burgess the bread has risen, in Margaret Drabble it hasn't. I thought in my mellow old age I would write novels to reconcile myself to humanity; the sun shining, everyone laughing merrily, the gates of heaven opening, but, alas, no.

G.N. Have you then become more bitter?

R.J. Bitter? I'm not bitter except when the golf course is flooded! I'm severe on my characters and I'm severe on myself. Nobody could be more severe than Shakespeare. He portrays his characters with savageness.

G.N. But also with some grandeur, and often at a distance, whereas you come discomfitingly near at times?

R.J. Well, Duffy's anthology makes interesting reading. You wouldn't believe human beings could be so wicked. I don't like it when they condemn people by saying 'they're like animals'. No animal could be half so wicked or savage as a human being. Harvey, our white cat, is the most dignified creature under the sun, harms nothing except the odd fieldmouse. The novel may, I think, be received with some horror.

G.N. More so than A Toast to the Lord?

R.J. I was good-humoured and reasonable in A Toast to the Lord. I constructed a set of circumstances in which to watch Agnes, beloved of

the Lord, bob up undefeated because the Lord stood by her. People believe that, so do nations - we will come through because the Lord is with us. In Agnes I was doing the same thing on a personal level. Edwin Morgan wrote that the book was without a trace of irony. I was amazed. I'd been embarrassed by having so much irony in it. I'm not making the same mistake with Duffy. Edwin Morgan also complained recently that a book of Scottish short stories was lacking in contemporaneity - I think he meant topicality. A writer has to be distanced from his material. I was going to bring the Referendum into the Duffy book but I thought it would complicate matters.

G.N. Do you work on more than one novel at the same time?

R.J. Always when I've nearly finished one novel I start the first three or four chapters of the next. It avoids leaving a gulf.

G.N. You carry the idea around for a long time before writing?

R.J. Duffy in particular has been asking to be written for years. I would like to write something about Islay next, an island I'm very fond of. A comedy in which the leading character is a womanising artist who retreats to Islay from the Far East, and then has his haven invaded by three women from his past. Seeing my work in print doesn't interest me now. I recently realised that you write a novel in bits and pieces, never reading it as a whole. So now I put my novel in a drawer for six months and then read it through, as a reader not an author.

G.N. Novelists such as Gunn and Gibbon have portrayed their women characters as sources of strength. Do you share this view?

R.J. Yes, <u>Guests of War</u> is, I hope, one of my funniest novels and based

on real events, but it also shows my respect for women. I believe I have more respect for women than for men.

G.N. Quite often your male characters are rendered inactive by the nature of their moral dilemmas.

R.J. We all have moral dilemmas. I don't think there's such a thing as self-deception. We all know when we are doing wrong, unless we're mad.

G.N. But goodness, as you show it, can also be destructive. Gavin Hamilton, for instance, hurts many people.

R.J. Gavin tried to live a life of sheer goodness, so those people who didn't were hurt and annoyed. It's not playing the game to show up our moral laziness and deficiencies. We ought all to be mediocrely good together. Morality hasn't advanced a bit in the last two thousand years. The space shuttle, for example, isn't the kind of adventure I would want for humanity. Goodness sets people apart. Christ is the best example. My characters won't follow the herd. Duffy is the most serious novel I've written in this respect. I used to like writing fine phrases, but now I've erased them. In order to get some vision of reality you have to use all kinds of dodges. Fergus, for example, is not always telling the truth. Writing that novel I was often thinking about Boswell, who tries to tell the truth about himself and frequently shows himself as a booby. There are times when the writer is never sure where the character is going or whether he's lying or half-lying.

G.N. Will 'Duffy' be its title?

R.J. Yes, or maybe 'Just Duffy'.

G.N. Connotations of Just William?

R.J. All the better, because anything less like Just William would be hard to imagine.

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2. The Novel: Literary Theory

    Primary Sources

    Secondary Sources

3. Religious, Historical and Philosophical Background

4. Robert Louis Stevenson

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    Secondary Sources

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