VISIONARY REALISM: FROM GEORGE ELIOT TO DORIS LESSING

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Jane Davis **Visionary Realism: George Eliot to Doris Lessing**

SUMMARY

The thesis, though presenting a continuous argument, falls into five main parts each consisting of two or three chapters. Part One begins with a defence of didacticism in writing, and argues against that strand of modern thought which finds didactics oppressive. It is proposed that we need teachers, and that Visionary Realist novelists have taken on the task of such teaching. The question of why such work should have become the province of the novel is answered with an account of the novel as the only shareable form of private knowledge through its belief in the 'I' at the centre of the story. Comparing The Mill on the Floss with Paradise Lost it is argued that the realist novel had the power to restore lost religious insight by rediscovering through imagination the vision in the real.

Part Two discusses Middlemarch as a religious vision in terms of the morality of species. Accounts are given of habit, vocation and conversion as means by which George Eliot renders a secular reality religious. Daniel Deronda is seen as a development from Middlemarch, centering belief in potentiality in the lives of three characters: Gwendolen, Daniel and Mordecai. It is argued that the novel seeks to redefine realism by placing visionary impressions before social reality, and asking its readers to do the same.

Part Three puts together Thomas Hardy and D. H. Lawrence as a question and answer arising from George Eliot's humanism. Hardy's novels are shown as suffering the very vision celebrated by George Eliot, and as desiring some pattern (previously supplied by belief in God) which would provide a perspective for man. Lawrence, it is argued, had the vision Hardy felt as necessary. The Rainbow is discussed as a novel of transition from ordinary realism to Visionary Realism. Women in Love is seen as recreating religious vision of life directly through Lawrence's commitment to real life, reformulating the relation between the inner being of man and the external forces of the universe.

Part Four interrupts what might otherwise be a direct chronology with an account of some less well known writers who are connected by their sense of something wrong with traditional ways of writing realistically. Such writers both question the existing paradigm of reality and show the magnitude of the task of getting beyond that paradigm. The section concludes with a chapter on Olaf Stapledon whose work is presented as a serious alternative to the aestheticism of some well known modern writers, which is also shown to link the earlier sense of something wrong with Doris Lessing's contemporary novel, Shikasta.

Part Five begins with a discussion of the problems facing the contemporary novelist who might want to write about metaphysical issues, and goes on to examine the achievement in this area of Doris Lessing's Shikasta. It is argued that the process of resemblance upon which the novel is built makes it a religious work even as it describes the reality of the contemporary secular world. Similarly, The Sirian Experiments is seen as an account of religious conversion, and it is argued that such conversion is not different to an intense learning process. Thus the thesis closes with the question of didacticism with which it opened. The Diary of A Good Neighbour is used as an example of a realist novel operating without the explicit metaphor of Shikasta, which nevertheless has the power to teach its readers something beyond the apparent limits of ordinary life through its vision of such ordinary life.

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ABBREVIATIONS

I have used abbreviations of titles for ease of reference in chapters where only a few works are discussed, but where many works are mentioned (for example, in Chapter V, on Hardy) I have retained full titles at all times. It will generally be quite clear to which work an abbreviation refers, but in case of doubt arising I have compiled the following list of abbreviations used.

ABC	A Beleaguered City
BFDH	Briefing For A Descent Into Hell
DD	Daniel Deronda
DGN	The Diary of a Good Neighbour
GN	The Golden Notebook
LAFM	Last and First Men
MM	Middlemarch
MSP	Mr. Sammler's Planet
ORF	The Ordeal of Richard Feverel
PL	Paradise Lost
SB	Star Begotten
SE	The Sirian Experiments
SH	Shikasta
SM	Star Maker
The Marriages	The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five
The Mill	The Mill on the Floss
The Varieties	The Varieties of Religious Experience
TR	The Rainbow
WL	Women in Love

PREFACE

The purpose of this thesis is to outline a tradition which I have called Visionary Realism in the English novel from 1859 to the present day. It is a preliminary rather than an exhaustive study, and as such does not claim to have discovered and accounted for all works of Visionary Realism within this long period of novel-writing. What it does claim to do is to present a continuous argument for Visionary Realism as an alternative to that literary modernism which is so often thought to be the primary area of serious literary endeavour following the decline of the Victorian realist novel. This argument takes in several major and some minor authors whose work can be seen either as Visionary Realism or as expressing a need for such Visionary Realism.

Having said this, I have to add that the argument proper begins with Milton's _Paradise Lost_, our great modern epic work of Visionary Realism. For although I have centred my study in the Victorian and Modern periods, Visionary Realism has its roots in the Renaissance, an area I have not been able to include within the limited scope of this work. Nonetheless, Visionary Realism is a product of a changing cultural consciousness, which we think of as 'modern consciousness', and which is characterised by doubt of the traditions of the past and fear of a traditionless future. It centres in the Victorian and Modern periods because this is the historical area which has had to deal most explicitly with problems of secularisation: it is not by chance that my thesis takes as its starting point with regard to the novel the date of publication of Darwin's _Origin of Species_. Milton is used as an illustration of the fact that the 'modern condition' is not quite as modern as we often think it. At the same time, and in connection with this, _Paradise Lost_ provides for many Victorian writers a recognised model of this modern condition, a model often referred to by novelists

writing of a secular world existing without the old paradise of established Christian faith.

The other important figure who perhaps ought to appear alongside Milton as a forebear of this tradition is William Wordsworth. In fact the project of Visionary Realism in the novel begins with the failure of Wordsworth's project to create a lasting tradition of poetry which would also be the language of the everyday life of human beings. The question he asked of the individual life, 'Whither is fled the visionary gleam?'[1] might well be asked of the literary life of this nation after Wordsworth. And this is the question my thesis sets out to answer.

I do not believe that other choices I have made with respect to inclusion or exclusion have been quite so determined by limitations of scope as this main one between Milton and Wordsworth. For this reason I was glad to read Maurice Cowling's Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England,[2] as I was finishing writing this thesis. Mr. Cowling's second volume 'Assaults', deals with much of the same area as does my thesis, but from a completely different standpoint. For example, Mr. Cowling begins the main body of his text thus, 'In England the assault on Christianity began with the Renaissance . . .' It is my contention that Christianity has not suffered 'assaults' so much as collapsed from within, but we do agree that the thing began to happen with the Renaissance. Mr. Cowling provides an objective corroboration of choices; most of the authors I have chosen are authors he has chosen: he discusses (among many others)

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1. William Wordsworth, 'Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood' in William Wordsworth. The Poems, 2 vols, edited by J. O. Hayden (Harmondsworth, 1977), i, pp.523-529.

2. Maurice Cowling, Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England 2 vols (Cambridge, 1979, 1985).

George Eliot, F. H. Bradley, Morley's On Compromise, Winwood Reade's Martyrdom of Man, D. H. Lawrence, and H. G. Wells. I was glad to see that someone else recognised that these people were in a sense 'connected' in the same enterprise. Unfortunately I find that there is nothing other than this basic premise which I share with Mr. Cowling; his work, it seems to me is committed to defending the Christianity he sees as under attack, while mine celebrates the courage and vision of men and women who have been able to face life beyond the tatters of that collapsing view.

The chief limitation of my work is probably its inability to include a fuller analysis of the failings of modernism. Like Wordsworth, modernism is always, as it were, present in ghost form behind everything else in this work. My thesis is anti-modern in the sense that I think modernism is a dead-end, and an unnecessary dead-end at that: I have no real wish to explain it, partly because Visionary Realism by-passes it and shows it to be a wrong turning taken by disillusioned writers and by a self-regarding literary establishment. I have, when necessary, cited examples of what I think modernism is, and why it is so futile and pointless. I do think given the scale of our real problems that it does not deserve much attention; there are more serious and more invigorating matters at hand.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my supervisor, Brian Nellist, for his vital and encouraging insights, when I was in the dark, as to what my project was about, and for all the generous contributions he has made to the development of my thought during the process of completing this work. One could not wish for a less selfish or more lively teacher. I also want to thank my husband, Philip Davis, who has assisted me immeasurably in this work by his willingness to enter into discussion - at almost any time of the day or night - of any points I have needed to raise with a sympathetic voice outside my own head. My daughter, Sian, has been both patient and supportive.

Cathy Rees has acted as both typist and proof-reader; I am grateful to her not only for a well-finished typescript but also for her invaluable help in the correction of many spelling mistakes and other irritating errors. She worked beyond the call of duty at times when my own patience with such matters had clearly run out.

Mr. Clegg and Mr. Perkin of Special Collections in the Sidney Jones Library, University of Liverpool, were always helpful when I needed to consult the Olaf Stapledon Collection. I am grateful to them, and to the Stapledon family, for providing such easy access to the Stapledon papers, and for permission to copy H. G. Wells's letter to Olaf Stapledon which is presented as Appendix I in this thesis.

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

Chapter I

AUTHORITATIVE WRITING

> Which from almost the highest estimation of learning is fallen to be the laughing stock of children.[1]

Imagine that computers could write novels. Quite apart from their content, the kind of novels these were would tell us things about the type of computers that were writing them.

For example, present day computers might - if we could get the programming right - using the rules of grammar, the O.E.D. and simple plot patterns, write predictable, clichéd stories. Such stories (we couldn't call them novels) would tell us that the computer producing them was little more than a complex typewriter. It would be the human creative skills of programming which would have produced the stories.

But imagine a future computer evolved beyond measure: a computer that could of itself create a novel. To write such a novel, a computer would have to be independent of us, its creator. It would have to have a life of its own. For a real novel is a product of real life and the liveliness of the creative imagination. It is a product of the external world the author sees, and the internal world that _is_ the author. This far-future computer would have its own vision of life, of the world. It would have its own peculiar, personal understanding (the internal experience of being) and it would have the ability to combine this with a vision of life (the external world). And it would have the creative power to make of this combination some new thing, some world in small of its own, so that the computer would then take on some of the human properties of its creator; the created would become creator. For authorship is authority. It is power and ability to influence, and to

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1. Sir Philip Sidney, _An Apology for Poetry_ (London, 1965), p.96.

control and judge one's creation. To become an author is to take on the authority and responsibility of the creator.[2]

As far as we know, (and apart from any ideas we might have about God), authorship is a peculiarly human condition. But oddly, some modern writers now choose to write as if they were computers. Not the future-computer with its own life, but the present day thing, the little mechanism that can list words and make patterns. Writing produced by these authors tries to deny authorship: the writer uses certain words, in certain formations, governed only by the rules of grammar, or of aesthetics. This kind of writing plays on the fact that human readers will try to make sense of <u>anything</u> written down. It tricks us into finding meaning even when it is not put there on purpose. Perhaps more oddly, for there will always be charlatans who trick even themselves, modern readers seem to like this word-play.

I pick a few words by random glancing through the dictionary:

> Quit
> Luna moth, ground hog, emperor,
> Aged crowd interrupt
> punish structuralism
> goods notable scope.

I ask you to read this 'poem' by 'an author' and like it or not, things will begin to come into your mind as to what it might be about, what it might mean. It is both a trick and not a trick. It is not by chance that even random words mean something, suggest things to us. And it is not merely a desire for meaning that makes us find meanings to words. They are there, and they are strongly there, whatever we do with them. As in magic, when things used by a person can be used - by the

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2. Many SF writers have envisaged such futures, particularly Isaac Asimov in the 'I Robot' stories. Generally it is literal reproduction that is taken as the sign of independence in computers, rather than the literary production I suggest.

essence of being seeped into them through use and contact - as the person, so words, by our constant use, take on some of our life. We would do well to use them with caution; they have power which can be used with us or against us.

Modern writing is often duplicitous. It pretends to be open when it is not. It denies responsibility yet it affects us powerfully. It denies authority yet it is self-authorising. It claims to make no claims upon us. It is cripplingly self-conscious even as it poses as free of the conscious purpose of an author.

But because of what it is (words on a page) and because of how we respond to it (looking for meaning) all writing is authoritative. All writing, by the simple fact of being written down makes claims upon a reader. It claims our time and attention, and, whether the writer means it or not, all writing tells us things. That is its nature.

There is no writing that does not 'say' something.

As with the imagined computer novels, our real novels teach us things whether they mean to or not. The important distinction is not whether or not a novel is didactic but whether the author recognises that writing is a claim to know better. Didactic authors - those with their purposes - are simply explicit about something which is always true. All authors have a purpose; there is always a point of view in writing; there is always belief at the back of things written.

Writing is always saying - whatever else it says - 'I know this', (and the 'this' is the subject matter of the writing), 'and I'm telling you about it'.

For modern writers and readers this poses a problem. We doubt the written word. We have lost faith in the ability of authors to know or to understand any better than we do. We are anti-authoritarian. With good reason. But as usual we have gone off too far in the other direction.

And it is not simply fear of a new Hitler that is driving us. There's also the nasty egotistical feeling - which we all like, really - that we know best, and we don't want anyone to tell us anything. The idea of a teacher has fallen into disrepute amongst us. The idea of authority is discredited.

The very word has degenerated in our mouths. Those 'in authority' prove to be liars, cheats, charlatans, hypocrites, cowards. Their authority is spurious, yet its effects are real. The 'authorities' are those faceless beings who keep up the public front in which the rest of us do not believe. The 'authorities' are those anonymous idiots who make foolish decisions about town planning and airports and other things that affect us only insomuch as they irritate our lives.

Increasingly, the only 'authority' recognised is subjective, the authority of the ego, which makes all of us shout, 'You can't tell me anything, I know what I know'. Yet even as we say it, we must know that we don't know everything. It is a perverted egalitarianism that would have us all equal ignoramuses. Perverted because distorted from reality and living, where talents and abilities are distributed randomly throughout the species.

There is a genuine authority in writing but often we do not recognise it, or we refuse to believe in it. What we think, our opinions, seem to be the one place the 'authorities' can't get you. They seem to be our very selves. If we are living beings, this shell, our opinions, our thoughts, will grow and change as we live. But too often we, and the shell, the thoughts, remain stunted, stay the same. We come to think that the shell is us, our opinions harden and become us. We don't want them to change. We will fight to keep them the same size. We don't want anything to change us. 'You can't tell me anything, I know what

I know.' We like works of literature that will leave us alone.[3] We don't like being told things by novelists. Why, what makes them any better than you or I?

What we forget is that those works which leave us alone only appear to leave us alone. The 'teaching', the 'authority' is there, whether we recognise it as such or not. Writing coming from one human mind - however large it might be - is always biased, slanted, partial. It is ironic - if that is not putting it too mildly - that at a time when we are all being told what to think all the time, and in so many obvious and crude ways, that we should have taken arms against the novel-as-teacher. Unlike television which can only make us think things, or think nothing at all, literature can make us think, can teach us how and not what to think. And we need this.

However much we might distrust the 'authorities', we need to be able to distinguish real authority, that which can teach us what we need to know. We need to be able to meet such authority without fear, understanding that it does not belittle us, for the fact of recognition makes it partly our own. Such recognition may be what our egotistical individualism is partly for. As William James saw, 'the axis of reality runs solely through the egotistic places - they are strung upon it like so many beads'.[4]

When people use the charge of 'didactic' against a novelist, their real complaint is not against teaching or purpose but rather with what is being taught, and how openly that is acknowledged. Henry James was

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3. In Doris Lessing's The Good Terrorist (London, 1985), the central character does not read books for fear of having her mind changed. Her fanatical self-preservation is really a retarding process. She never grows up.

4. William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (London, 1982), p.477.

fooling himself when he tried to separate art and morality: 'questions of art are questions (in the widest sense) of execution; questions of morality are quite another matter'.[5] Execution, the making of art, the disposition of the vital elements is not quite another matter from morality, when morality, too, is seen in its 'widest sense'; that is as the human vision and understanding of the author as to what human life really is and should be. We have to move beyond the old, small conception of morality which is hardly more than that of James's Prince:

> He developed, making her laugh, his idea that the tea of the English race was somehow their morality, 'made' with boiling water, in a little pot, so that the more of it one drank the more moral one would become.[6]

Morality in the novel isn't like a pot of cold tea that ought to be taken away because we've finished with it. The morality of a novel and the novel are not separable. The manner in which the novel presents itself and the world to us is its morality. Instead of trying to ditch it, making supposedly amoral statements which always turn out to be moral (or immoral) after all, we would do better to take morality on board, recognise it, be honest about it. Lying and denying will not finally save us.

No one would think of accusing Samuel Beckett of didacticism, (which is, as D. H. Lawrence says, a thing like catarrh, which no one wants to admit to). Yet Molloy, a hero of modern literature speaks thus,

> And once again I am, I will not say alone, no, that's not like me, but, how shall I say, I don't know, restored to myself, no, I never left myself, free,

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5. Henry James, Selected Literary Criticism, edited by M. Shapira (Cambridge, 1981), p.65.

6. Henry James, The Golden Bowl (Harmondsworth, 1978), p.48.

> yes, I don't know what that means but it's the word I mean to use, free to do what, to do nothing, to know, but what, the laws of the mind perhaps, of my mind, that for example water rises in proportion as it drowns you and that you would do better, at least no worse, to obliterate texts than to blacken margins, to fill in the holes of words till all is blank and flat and the whole ghastly business looks like what it is, senseless, speechless, issueless misery. [7]

Molloy, despite all his equivocation and his disbelief in his own words - 'free, yes, I don't know what that means but it's the word I mean to use', still does have to choose words in order that Beckett may write at all. The equivocation is just like a little showing-off dance of distraction around the fact that nothing is really any different than it always has been. An author must make decisions, must say what he thinks. Molloy, despite himself, despite Beckett, is 'free' to know what is. It is 'senseless, speechless, issueless misery'. At the end of the clever, tricksy, holding off process that Beckett would like to make writing into, must come some definite statement, something said. And what the writing says is devolved from the belief of the author. Beckett would have writing show truth, so 'the whole ghastly business looks like what it is'.

Writing is no antidote to the misery of the human condition. We would 'do better, at least no worse, to obliterate texts' than to pretend there was anything other than such misery within writing and without it.

It will sound far-fetched to call such writing morally evil. But it is certainly humanly bad, because in expressing a human problem (perhaps the human problem), 'free to do what?', it promotes Beckett's own personal despair as if that too were part of the eternal existential problem. The reality of the question is reduced to a mere tick-tock

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7. Molloy, in Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable, Samuel Beckett (London, 1959), p.13.

of chant and response: chant: free to do what? response: nothing.

This vision posing as no-vision is related to, but utterly unlike the honesty of Thomas Hardy, whose _Jude the Obscure_ marks the end of undeceitful modernism-as-despair. The Preface states Hardy's aim quite clearly:

> to tell, without a mincing of words, of a deadly war waged between flesh and spirit; and to point to the tragedy of unfulfilled aims . . . [8]

The subject, human living in modern times, Hardy recognised as 'deadly' serious. That it should end with a good man's 'senseless . . . issueless' life wasted, and that a great novel should get its success by a vampiric feeding off the despair of its hero, seemed wrong to Hardy. Seemed a dead-end. Art feeding off life rather than into it. If this was the way forward for the modern novelist, Hardy did not think it worth pursuing. On the 'morality' of _Jude_ he later wrote

> the only effect of it on human conduct that I could discover being its effect on myself - the experience completely curing me of further interest in novel-writing.[9]

Hardy saw what lay ahead and stopped with the death of Jude Fawley. Others were not so far-sighted. On and on goes the downward spiral. Molloy speaks for a characteristic phase of modernism:

> the most you can hope for is to be a little less, in the end, the creature you were in the beginning, and the middle.

In our century the age-old concern about human-being, the sense of being, if not at odds then certainly ill at ease with the world and nature, has crystallized out into a hard, disappointed and lonely unease about

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8. Thomas Hardy, _Jude the Obscure_ (London, 1928), Preface, vi.

9. _ibid._, p.vii.

10. Samuel Beckett, _Molloy_, p.32.

ourselves and our relation to everything. By and large, our writings show this as clearly as if modern despair were itself always our subject matter.

When we write we become creators, and things we have written go out into the world and affect it. If writers are to take responsibility for their creations, (and the authors I shall discuss <u>do</u> take this responsibility seriously), then we as readers must be prepared to recognise a corresponding authority. We need to remember, if we have forgotten, what books, stories, tales, are for. What were our first stories for? Genesis and Exodus, Kings and the Prophets? They were to use Sir Philip Sidney's words on poetry, 'to teach and delight'. Though we have grown old and stale since those times, I do not think we have yet completely graduated from the school of living.

The writers I am looking at in this thesis all lay themselves open to charges of 'didacticism'. Indeed, they are all particularly vulnerable to such an accusation because they <u>are</u> teachers. They tell us things we don't know, or don't want to know. Their visionary realism and their status as teachers is part of the same project. The greatest teachers are not those who simply tell us things, however strongly ('speechless, senseless, issueless misery') but those who open their students' eyes wide enough that they may see for themselves.

I want now to look briefly at the state we call 'modernism', but I shall begin with a voice from outside this period, which gives prophetic utterance to this condition. Though Milton clearly has a different viewpoint ('eternal justice' and 'rebellious' determine causation for

this condition which we don't generally recognise) yet we must see how strikingly close his account of Hell is to the 'modern' condition.

> The dismal situation waste and wild,
> A dungeon horrible, on all sides round
> As one great furnace flamed, yet from those flames
> No light, but rather darkness visible
> Served only to discover sights of woe,
> Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
> And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
> That comes to all; but torture without end
> Still urges, and a fiery deluge, fed
> With ever-burning sulphur unconsumed:
> Such place eternal justice had prepared
> For these rebellious, here their prison ordained
> In utter darkness, and their portions set
> As far removed from God and light of heaven
> As from the centre thrice to the utmost pole.
>
> *Paradise Lost* I, 60-74[11]

As Milton knew and predicted for us, to be an unbeliever, to challenge God, and put oneself apart is not simply to lose contact with the divine, but to be in hell. To be without God is necessarily to be 'as far removed from God and light of heaven' as it is possible to be.

This dismal passage from *Paradise Lost* reminds me of the modern situation as described by Beckett in *Molloy*, where 'hope never comes / That comes to all'. And it is the fact that Milton uses such a subject matter in his epic ('regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace / And rest can never come . . .') that makes Milton, in this poem, seem to be 'modern'. The sense of being hemmed in on all sides by 'darkness visible', the sense of being trapped in a prison of one's own making are characteristically modern sensations. The sense of 'chaos' hovering on the very edge of nature (Book II, 1034-1040) is a modern sensation. The peculiarly interconnected nature of time, past, present, and future, seems modern. The psychic world that creates *Paradise Lost* is in essence modern, a modern man's vision.

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11. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, edited by Alastair Fowler (London, 1971).

There are of course two uses of that word 'modern'. They are related, but it is important to bear in mind the differences. Firstly, modern, in this essay can mean 'belonging to the modern world', or sharing a set of mind characteristic of this world: a mind filled with uncertainty, with doubt; a mind not at ease with itself, or the world, or its relation to the world. In this sense a 'modern' is someone who has to contend with a certain problem, which is usually found to be a problem of belief. Less general than this, the other usage of modern refers to that particular broad movement of thought of the twentieth century, which chooses aestheticism - faith in art or beauty - as a response to the modern problem. In this sense a modern would be T. S. Eliot (of The Wasteland but not of Four Quartets) or James Joyce, or Henry James, or the existentialists, Beckett, Sartre, etc. who are in a sense anti-modern (though post-modern would be a better term) since faith in art and beauty is what they deny.

Modernism, in this latter sense, is not of course the only response which has been offered to the problem of being a modern. The other obvious response has been a political response; faith has been sought particularly in the 1930s, in Marxism and Fascism.[12] The writers whom I call 'visionary realists' have offered another response, a religious response to a crisis of faith. They, like the very problem, are not necessarily confined to the space of time - the period - we like to call Modern. I shall argue, in fact, that the very naming of this problem as 'modern' (to do with us, in our time, now) is a mistake which is actually caused by the problem itself. We are so far in the dark that we cannot place ourselves.

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12. This political response will be discussed briefly in Part Four in relation to H. G. Wells and Olaf Stapledon.

A central idea of my essay is that modernism (in both senses) is a sickness (the general sense 'modern' is quite ill, in the particular 'Modern' is dangerously so). But I haven't myself chosen this as a metaphor. I think it exists as a perceived reality in the works of my chosen authors, and other authors, and in people at large. Like so much else, I first got it from Shikasta,[13] where it appears as part of human being on the planet, as the Degenerative Disease. I recognised it there as something I knew from real life, dis-ease, uncomfortableness about ourselves, what we are and what we are doing. Uneasiness. In the olden days, I suppose, it would have been a sense of sinfulness. But as modern people we are cut off from a religious tradition that might have identified and named such uneasy feelings (as, for example, they are named so explicitly in The Pilgrim's Progress). It is as if because we don't believe in the word 'sin', we think the thing signified by that word has also disappeared, belonging to another time or place but not to us. Our feelings remain vague and nameless and rather frightening. And so we feel we are unique in having them. This feeling of uniqueness is a primary symptom of our modern sickness. (The other primary symptom is that egotistical closed-mindedness I spoke of in the first half of this chapter.)

C. G. Jung offers an idea of sickness as a pathological 'phase' of a life-long process of change which we can hardly see because it happens in a matter of years or decades'. When this process of change goes wrong, or gets stuck we call it sickness.[14] Health and sickness are points on the same scale.[15]

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13. Doris Lessing, Shikasta (London, 1979).

14. C. G. Jung, 'Dream Analysis in its Practical Application' in Modern Man in Search of A Soul (London, 1933), pp.1-31.

15. This point will be more fully discussed in Chapter X when I look at the 'degenerative disease' in relation to Oliver Sacks' account of sickness and health.

I offer modernism as a sickness in the light of this observation. It is a sickness, a pathological phase, because it repeats the same thing over and over, it cannot get beyond its own boundaries, it eats into our sense of the real. Above all it tries to prevent our returning to normality and health, where real change might occur. As in the case of an individual's 'sickness', for us as a group, dreams can reveal an effort towards a possible wholeness that the sickness itself obliterates. Our 'visions' herald or at least hint at a new 'realism'.

Our 'modern' cultural neurosis makes us feel uniquely out of place. Not only as individual human creatures, separated from the world in which we live, but also as separated from all the other beings in time, who, we find it hard to believe, ever suffered such loss or fear or chaos or sickness as we do. This propounds our sick sense of uniqueness. We see it as our unique fate, as people of our time, and that is why we call it Modernism, ourselves moderns. There are some (social, technological) reasons why this should appear to be so.[16] Nonetheless, each age is to itself 'modern', the pinnacle and growing tip of progress. And each age gives birth to its own future, mirroring our individual span, then falls back, becoming that future's past. We are not different.

But while we might profess to know all this ('I know I know',) in practice, in our living and writing, we do forget it. We must have ourselves as a special, a specially difficult case. We feel our own difficulties as we can never see another's. Like Mrs. Gummidge we always believe that we 'feel it more than anybody else'. It is hard for us to realise that our own feelings of dis-ease in the world are the same

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16. These 'social, technological' reasons will reappear in later chapters as a real cause for despair in modern people. But this does not mean that they are the cause of it. See Part Five, Chapter XI particularly.

feelings that - for example - Geoffrey Chaucer might have had. Yet we must recognise some similarity with a man who wrote about our human world, 'Her is non hoom, her nis but wilderness'.[17]

Our modern way of reading a poem like this, Chaucer's 'Truth', as a specifically Christian allegory, reduces it in our minds when we do not share its Christian assumptions. If we are Christians, then it has a traditional, a fixed, meaning that we need hardly think about. If we are not Christians, then it is meaningless to us anyway. The poem itself - out of our prison - is free to range in spheres of meaning that we can barely imagine. The modern rejection of the past as either naive or simple, of tradition as worthless or fixed or now meaningless, denies modern people the chance to recognise what unites us with Chaucer; the sense of uneasiness in a world where we think we are meant to live 'naturally', while still knowing that 'here is no home'.

This is why I start with Milton. Paradise Lost is a product of an engagement with modern problems. It shares the same general project as the later writers of visionary realist novels; it shares the same centring of interest in ordinary human beings.

What marks the modernist dilemma of writers is neither a failure of subject matter,[18] nor, as T. S. Eliot would have us believe, a failure

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17. Geoffrey Chaucer, 'Truth, Balade de Bon Conseil' in The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, edited by F. N. Robinson (Oxford, 1976), p.536.

18. This point is in some way parallel to the general argument of W. Jackson Bate in The Burden of the Past and the English Poet (London, 1971). Bate speaks of

> the writer's loss of self-confidence as he compares what he feels able to do with the rich heritage of past art and literature. (p.7)

Bate rightly, I think, relates this loss of self-confidence to the crisis of modern writing. But I think this is a superficial understanding of the problem. Bate believes the authenticity of the modern plaint, 'there's nothing left to do, they've done it all before'. He thinks that a great literary achievement - King Lear, for example - marks the end of a human avenue, a final saying and summing up that

of language. It is a failure of commitment and a failure of faith at the most personal level. Visionary realists have not shrunk from retelling the old stories of human being. That is partly why they seem to go against the tide of contemporary modernism. They hark back to a past that other writers have already abandoned. I am reminded of a distinction made by Jung between modern man and the 'pseudo-moderns'. According to Jung's criteria only a Nietzsche or a Birkin might be 'modern';

> Only the man who is modern in our meaning of the term really lives in the present; he alone has a present-day consciousness, and he alone finds that the ways of life which correspond to earlier levels pall upon him. The values and strivings of those past worlds no longer interest him save from the historical standpoint. Thus he has become 'unhistorical' in the deepest sense and estranged himself from the mass of men who live entirely within the bounds of tradition. Indeed, he is completely modern only when he has come to the very edge of the world, leaving behind him all that has been discarded and outgrown, and acknowledging that he stands before a void out of which all things may grow. [19]

On the other hand, we might all easily recognise the pseudo-moderns, pale imitations of such men:

> Nothing is easier than to affect a consciousness of the present. As a matter of fact, a great horde of worthless people give themselves the air of being modern by overleaping the various stages of development and the tasks of life they represent. They appear suddenly by the side of the truly modern man as uprooted human beings . . . [20]

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can't be surpassed or reworked. I don't believe this. Each generation needs to be able to reformulate, reiterate in to its own words the essence of being a living human creature. Each generation needs its own vision of what is, and how what is is.

Perhaps because the visionary realists are novelists rather than poets, the weight of the tradition, the weight of past greatness, does not sit so heavily on them? Perhaps this is also why they are the least concerned with aesthetic considerations, which Bate himself recognises as the only area open to moderns, when subject is gone.

> the inevitable pressure on the artist will increasingly force him to grasp at innovation for its own sake unless he quits the field entirely. In the process, the artist will be led 'gradually to forget the end of his art, in his attempt to display his superiority in the art itself' . . . This is what 'decadence' is. (p.84).

19. C. G. Jung, 'The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man' in Modern Man in Search of A Soul (London, 1933), pp.227-8.

20. ibid., p.228.

In literary terms the 'pseudo-moderns' are those who have overleaped the 'various stages of development and the tasks of life they represent'. They, too, are 'uprooted human beings'. The commitment to the reworking of the old themes of human life is what makes the visionary realists true moderns: they know that such things have not been outgrown, that we must get through them, in order to be in the present, <u>rooted</u> in 'present day consciousness' through knowing and having been in all those concerns of the past. The freedom to go forward depends upon the recreation, and re-understanding of the old stories. Through them faith, belief, commitment cease to be things merely of a past age, and become our own.

Milton's poem stands in relation to the later novels in the same relation that Genesis stands to it. <u>Paradise Lost</u> is the original modern epic, retold by nineteenth and twentieth century novelists. But between <u>Paradise Lost</u> and the nineteenth century novels comes that strand of Romanticism concerned with the epic, with the attempt to envisage a new cosmology: Blake's later visionary works, for example 'Milton' or 'Jerusalem', drew from Milton as much as they do from the Bible or from the Classics. Similarly, Shelley's 'Prometheus Unbound' and Keats' 'Hyperion' retell the <u>Paradise Lost</u> story. Byron's 'Cain' and 'Heaven and Earth' draw from Genesis as Milton did. Above all, Wordsworth in his 'London 1802' acknowledges both a debt to and an increasing need for Milton's poetic achievement, both in grand style borrowed from Milton and in the genuine need expressed.

> Milton! thou should'st be living at this hour:
> England hath need of thee: she is a fen
> Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,
> Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower
> Have forfeited their ancient English dower
> Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;
> Oh! raise us up, return to us again;
> And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.
> Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart:
> Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:

> Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,
> So didst thou travel on life's common way,
> In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart
> The lowliest duties on herself did lay.[21]

What Wordsworth recognised in Milton was what he was to cultivate in his own poetry at its best: the heroic grandeur of the 'Soul . . . like a star' which yet travelled on 'life's common way,/In cheerful godliness'; majesty and lowliness inextricably connected. In the nineteenth and twentieth century novels we shall look at, these same qualities are combined; 'vision' is always in the real. Along with this desire to find majesty in common life is the attempt to envisage a new cosmology. But another characteristic of visionary works with their 'epic' nature, their cosmological size, their huge purposes, is a state, recognised and mourned, of loss. The modern epic is no tale of heroic virtue but of minute human endeavours pitched against inhuman forces. Milton has paradise in the primary union of human beings (imparadised in each others arms) and the fall signalled in human terms by their quarrel. George Eliot shows saintly vocation in a young woman's love affairs, and messianic salvation in a Zionist reformer. Hardy must ever mourn the fact that he cannot get his basic relation right, and Lawrence must celebrate it with Birkin and Ursula. As Milton must recreate the stories of flood and covenant, of fall and salvation, in terms of stories told to Adam, so Doris Lessing retells the same stories - as a novelist, in the Canopean Archives.

Milton took upon himself the task of recreating the living human reality which had once informed the Genesis stories. His 'story' in Paradise Lost is as much about how we can understand those stories as

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21. William Wordsworth, 'London 1802' in William Wordsworth, The Poems, vol. i, edited by J. O. Hayden (Harmondsworth, 1977), p.579.

the stories themselves. His story is about making the divine and non-human a real part of our mundane, human world. It is the story of what it is, and what it means, to be human in this world: why we are adrift where we should be at home. Perhaps all novels and stories and poems tell us a part of this one tale. But some particular writers are driven to attempt a whole version, or vision, of it. Such writers must swim against the tide of modernism - our lack of self-confidence and defeatism, or loss of belief, sense of insignificance, AND the tide of literary modernism, which believes everything's been said and done before, especially those old stories. The tide makes the visionary task both more imperative and more difficult, as Henry James noticed with George Eliot.

> If she had fallen upon an age of enthusiastic assent to old articles of faith . . . she would have had a more perfect, a more consistent and graceful development than she has actually had. If she had cast herself into such a current - her genius being equal - it might have carried her to splendid distances.[22]

The 'current' that James would have liked for George Eliot was not there. Or rather it was going the other way. There is not just oneself to fight against, one's own tendency to forget and float off, but also the whole tendency of contemporary life, and contemporary thought, and contemporary art. None of these novelists has a 'perfect' or a 'consistent' or a 'graceful' development. Grace was what was sought. The novel suffers great and painful changes in their hands; Daniel Deronda, Jude the Obscure, Women in Love, Shikasta, they are similar only in that they are all forced into strange, contorted shapes; expanding and contracting as and when necessary to accommodate that battle against the contemporary

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22. Henry James, 'Daniel Deronda, A Conversation' in Selected Literary Criticism, p.42.

current, while forcing on our attention all sorts of things we might otherwise forget. Milton himself must have felt that he was going against the current (of increasing secularisation and of contemporary poetry), in writing Paradise Lost. A lesser being would there and then, at that crisis point, have lost faith, become a sort of early Thomas Hardy, despairing, desiring God but not daring to believe. But Paradise Lost is an act of fighting, which becomes faith, and then certainty. In this respect too, Paradise Lost is the original of the novels. It is that very act of going against the current that marks a vision. Going against the current makes a vision stand in for an unsatisfactory reality, as more believable, more true. In the act of fighting to establish a vision it becomes true, it becomes real.

George Eliot was as aware of the 'tide' as Henry James.

> One would like one's life to be borne on the onward wave and not the receding one - the flow and not the ebb; yet somebody must live in the bad times, and there is no reason, I suppose, out of our own esteem for ourselves, why the best things in the lot of mankind should fall on us in particular.[23]

Of course it would be George Eliot who would balance 'one' against 'mankind' in this way; who would recognise the interrelation of ebb and flow; who would recognise that of course we would like to be great, to look huge, to go down in history as massive accomplishers . . . And, of course, it would be George Eliot not Henry James who would recognise that the really hard task lay in going against the tide, not riding to fame on the current. 'Somebody must live in the bad times', she writes. Self-pitying? Resigned? I don't think so; it is a recognition that the important issues are often out of our hands. 'One' does not know best, and the hard work of pulling against the ebb prepares for the full flow, the onward wave, of the future.

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23. George Eliot, 'Letter to Barbara Bodichon, 5 December 1859', The George Eliot Letters, edited by Gordon S. Haight (London, 1954-1978), iii, pp.227-28.

This hard task of living on the ebb, on the receding wave of belief is common to all the writers whom I make champions of Visionary Realism. Their awareness of this shifting tide creates a strong interest in size and in time, through both of which it is possible to look beyond one's own limited position. They share an interest in History, as the story of human beings, and they use their chosen literary forms to rewrite histories and to mark out patterns that professional historians aren't interested in: D. H. Lawrence's The Rainbow, or Doris Lessing's The Sirian Experiments - 'a history of the heart'. In this respect again we have to acknowledge Paradise Lost as perhaps the most ambitious of all: it tries to be a history of all time, from the human beginning to the human end. And it tells this story both from a human and an extra-human point of view.

Above all, the work of visionary realism is stamped as an act of translation. Paradise Lost translates the Bible just as the Bible itself once stood as a translation for the very word of God. This translation sets such works aside from modernist works, and brands them as quite other, however much they may share some modern preoccupations, in that they do not operate within limits set and defined by themselves. They are not, primarily, works of literature so much as works of life. For the translation supposes something, somewhere, else, some other way of being than merely ours, now. While Modernism is aware of this - indeed, relativism is one of the things that causes it problems - its self absorbtion won't allow it to use such exterior reference points. Modernism refers only to itself. Visionary Realism restores a referential condition to literature: visions come from outside, from beyond our condition, they are 'given', and so imagination becomes once again, as it was for the Romantics, a transcribing medium, a freedom.

Chapter II

ABOUT VISIONARY REALISM

1. Why the Novel?

This project began with my belief that Doris Lessing's Shikasta was a marvellous and hugely important novel, and that it was connected (despite obvious and superficial dissimilarities) to the novels of George Eliot, D. H. Lawrence, and, more obliquely, Thomas Hardy. What was the connection? Perhaps the most obvious connection was the one I first noticed, the sense of fallenness, of degeneration, of things falling off as being a basic condition of the human existence these authors described. Which is odd in a way, for these are all meant to be 'secular' writers. In secular humanist terms, what might it be that human life was falling away from? This question raises doubts about the nature of such words as 'secular' and 'humanism'. I began to think that in order to fully appreciate what such writers had in fact done, it might be necessary to change one's ideas about the differences between religious and secular writers, between realism and religious vision.

The novels of Visionary Realism are a means whereby writing might once more tell readers where and what God is, how God works, how we might recognise God, and what God demands from us. The central argument of this essay is that the realist novel in the hands of these authors - for all its attempt at a humanist realism which prevents us seeing this, and for all that God is often a word entirely missing from the realist vocabulary - the realist novel may be a great religious form. The enterprise these authors share is the creation of novels able to stand in place of the Bible, which lost general recognition as the book of truth when nineteenth century science began to put forward theories which seemed to 'prove' it untrue. This is not the same as saying that some

novels cunningly retell Bible stories, making of themselves a secularised scripture. Neither are these novels, as a Nietzsche might see them, the fruits of a religious insight gained through God and then retold as stories without God.

Going back over things which seem to be in the past, done with, (nineteenth century humanism, for example, or the Bible) is not a matter of finding some way to serve up ancient matter anew. It is not a question of form. The writers I have chosen to write about are all struggling with the problem of an entirely new reorientation of human perspectives. They are forging a religious revolution, in exactly the same manner that Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Darwin, and Einstein have forged scientific revolutions. And while the revolution brings you to an entirely new state of being in the end, in the beginning it has its roots and causes in the old ways, the _ancien régime_, or what T. S. Kuhn in _The Structure of Scientific Revolutions_ would call 'the existing paradigm', what we already know. It is by noticing things going wrong in what was once right and workable that we come to create new explanations.

> novelty ordinarily emerges only for the man who, knowing _with precision_ what he should expect, is able to recognize that something has gone wrong. Anomaly appears only against the background provided by the paradigm. The more precise and far-reaching that paradigm is, the more sensitive an indicator it provides of anomaly and hence of an occasion for paradigm change.[1]

As Kuhn here indicates, the problem of forcing ourselves to recognise truths and to continue to understand the infinite amount of subject matter there is for us to understand, is a constant one, a work never complete.

To put it another way: religious insight is not restricted to one religion (or _form_) but is formulated in varied ways by various peoples, depending on what they can understand, and how they understand the subject

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1. T. S. Kuhn, _The Structure of Scientific Revolutions_ (Chicago, 1970), p.65.

matter, our shared universe. This insight is usually held in place, fixed in the human world, by stories which capture the fleeting nature of truth even while preserving it. Stories are the technology of the infinite in us, the soul. That is why originally all stories were poetry, and sacred. But this status is borrowed, the stories themselves are merely humanly created forms; it is the knowledge they hold for us which lends them such stature. Stories, forms, change according to current needs. The advent of the religious thought of Jesus, for example, changed what it was possible to think about God and the nature of His Kingdom. The New Testament arose because the Old was no longer fitting, to use Kuhn's language. Jesus was the 'anomaly' which appeared 'against the background provided by the paradigm', and the paradigm was Judaic history and belief. The Old Testament was no longer fitting - though it had been once, and in a more complicated way, still could be. The old forms linger precisely because they are old, they are characterised by the weight of time and tradition and usage they offer, while the new often looks merely contemporary, weightless.

Yet the old forms also lose weight with the passing of time, as the distance between them and current needs widen. At one time the Old Testament stories were commensurate with what the people whose book it was knew. No amount of 'facts' could have shaken their authority. But by the second half of the nineteenth century - though this was a movement which had started much earlier, perhaps at the very beginning of scientific thought - Biblical truth was no longer generally accepted as absolute. And as the Bible could no longer fulfil <u>all</u> needs (this <u>all</u> is important, I shall return to it later), that is, hold our stock of religious truth in such a way as not to contradict our general knowledge, a new form began to evolve to fulfil this comprehensive function. The question we have to ask is, why should this burden of religious knowledge

fallen on to what had been seen as a low and irreligious form, why in short, the novel?

We have to begin to answer this question with an account of why the task did not become the work of nineteenth century poetry. If the Bible failed in its work of holding all religious knowledge by failing to address all human needs, so did the other traditionally recognised sacred form, Poetry. Wordsworth had of course anticipated this task and had begun work on the reclamation of religious meaning in real life. His nineteenth century successors in poetry however were unable to carry on where Wordsworth stopped. Arthur Hallam in an early review of Tennyson's poetry offers this explanation for the failure:

> With the close of the last century came an era of reaction, an era of painful struggle to being our over-civilised condition of thought into union with the fresh productive spirit that brightened the morning of our literature. But repentence is unlike innocence: the laborious endeavour to restore, had more complicated methods of action than the freedom of untainted nature. Those different powers of poetic disposition, the energies of Sensitive, of Reflective, of Passionate Emotion, which in former times were intermingled, and derived from mutual support an extensive empire over the feelings of men, were now restrained within separate spheres of agency. The whole system no longer worked harmoniously, and by intrinsic harmony acquired external freedom; but there arose a violent and unusual action in the several component functions, each for itself, all striving to reproduce the regular power which the whole had enjoyed. Hence the melancholy which so evidently characterises the spirit of modern poetry; hence that return of the mind upon itself and the habit of seeking relief in idiosyncrasies rather than community of interest. In the old times the poetic impulse went along with the general impulse of the nation; in these it is a reaction against it, a check for conservation against a propulsion towards change. [2]

The 'poetic disposition' (which if poetry is sacred, might as well be termed the religious disposition) when whole comprises 'the energies of Sensitive, of Reflective, of Passionate Emotion'. Hallam argues that the

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2. Arthur Hallam, Hallam's Remains in Prose and Verse (London, 1863), 'Extract from a review of Tennyson's Poems', p. 294 ff.

whole, that is the entire disposition, was lost when these energies separated off 'there arose a violent and unusual action in the several component functions, each for itself, all striving to reproduce the regular power which the whole had enjoyed'. The loss of shared belief, such as had fed the great poets, Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, (as Hallam argues) had meant a general and all-pervasive loss of 'community of interest' which is subsequently the loss of great poetry. Unable to visualise and work within a 'whole' - as the authors of Genesis might be said to speak for a whole people, who could in turn accept their poetic utterances as everyone's truth - nineteenth-century poets nostalgically yearned for something they knew they had lost. When the voices of nineteenth-century poets ring true they speak of loss (such as is openly honoured in Tennyson's elegy for Hallam, 'In Memoriam') or they become introspective through loss, as in Arnold's 'Dover Beach'.

> Ah, love, let us be true
> To one another! for the world, which seems
> To lie before us like a land of dreams,
> So various, so beautiful, so new,
> Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
> Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
> And we are here as on a darkling plain
> Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
> Where ignorant armies clash by night. [3]

Arnold's vision of what the world might be ('a land of dreams,/So various, so beautiful, so new'), can neither exist alongside nor overcome his sense of reality, what 'really' is, is entirely negative, entirely lost; 'neither joy, nor love, nor light,/Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain'. This loss is his real vision, what he 'really' sees and believes. In such a world there can be no 'community of interest', and that is why the individual must rely on what Hallam calls 'the habit of seeking relief in idiosyncrasies'; that is, personal salvation. 'Let

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3. Matthew Arnold, 'Dover Beach' in The Poems of Matthew Arnold, edited by Kenneth Allott (London, 1965), pp.240 ff.

us be true' Arnold writes, but only 'to one another'. He sees no true human relation beyond the initial biologically-based coupling.[4]

Such poetry could not however much it mourned create out of itself belief. Indeed, belief can not be created at all; we discover it, we find it, it is given to us, but we can not create it. Why then was the novel in a position to discover the belief that poetry had lost? In the novel, life, experience, was not split into mutually exclusive areas; the 'energies of Sensitive, of Reflective, of Passionate Emotion' would without difficulty exist alongside each other, could, under the guidance of a writer of 'poetic' or religious disposition, come together once more. The novel had access to the whole of life, and its art, the rendering of chosen elements of that life as reality, called for a belief shared by the writer and the readers. This sharing of a particular perception of wholeness in a world where everything seemed to be arbitrary and idiosyncratic was the nineteenth century novel's greatest strength. This was what made it the central form of truth.

By mid-century the representation of personal human experience of the world, sometimes using the 'I' persona, but always assuming the shared knowledge of 'I' or 'me' had become commonplace and the accepted representation of reality.[5] The personal life was the only community of interest people had. Yet in real life, the very nature of that shared interest made it impossible to realise true community; every one lived their own life. The work of realising 'community of interest' became the work of the realist novel. Such novels, assuming that one 'I' is very much like another, say all the time, 'We see things like this, don't we?'.

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4. We will later see a similar stance adopted by D. H. Lawrence, but in a quite different, as it were, tone.

5. As Katherine Tillotson argues in her Novels of the Eighteen Forties (Oxford, 1956), the novel was 'in process of becoming the dominant form. In the eighteen forties critics began to say what they continued to say more forcibly for the next forty years or so, that the novel was the form most suited to the age . . . "the ground once covered by the epic and the Drama is now occupied by the multiform and multi-

The novel made individuals recognisable to one another (hence the Victorian propensity for naming novels as people and places[6]). It shared the personal life out and gained 'extensive empire over the feelings of men'. It had room too for accounts of the public world, the public life - though these are often secondary; Bob Cratchit may be kept at his desk until the very last minute of Christmas Eve, but the real story starts at the close of business hours. But as well as access to the public and private lives of its characters (its readers?) the novel also had the individual authorial voice which could comment on the reality it described. In a Jane Austen, a social novelist, this voice is ironic, calling attention to the off-key notes in our social living. But in a George Eliot, this voice becomes the voice of a prophet and a teacher. For George Eliot, though she lived without a religious form for her belief, was nonetheless a religious being, and as a realist she had to show where (though formally missing) belief could be found in real life.

She wrote, despairingly, 'I feel that society is training men and women for hell'.[7] Such a comment is a clue to the way in which the writer made reality a religious vision. Ordinary life ('society', 'men and women') is a way of seeing God or feeling his absence ('Hell'). Of course, it is a colloquialism, to say life is hell. But for George Eliot this is more than mere colloquialism. Her feeling that ordinary social life has more in it, more behind it than we can account for socially (thus the strange juxtaposition of 'training' with 'Hell') that 'ordinary'

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tudinous novel". People were very conscious of progress and change; they were beginning to be interested in extinct forms of life, "vestiges of creation", and by analogy put the epic among them.' (p.13) I shall go on to argue that the epic in poetry was lost but the novel took on that task itself.

6. To mention but a few of these naming names: Jane Eyre, Wuthering Heights, David Copperfield, Cranford, Villette, Little Dorrit, Adam Bede, The Mill on The Floss, Wives and Daughters, Middlemarch, Under the Greenwood Tree, The Mayor of Casterbridge, Shirley, The Tennant of Wildfell Hall, Robert Ellesmere, Oliver Twist, Mary Barton, North and South, Daniel Deronda, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, Jude the Obscure, Henry Esmond, Esther Waters.

7. George Eliot, 'Letter to the Brays and Hennells, 8 June 1848', Letters I, p.267.

itself is really a metaphor of something else, is the basis of her religious vision, which we shall see she developed in her novels.

It was precisely because the realistic novel took ordinary, shared human experience as its province that it could discover and confront religious issues that to poetry were lost. To say this is, of course, to suggest that life has an essentially religious nature which remains unchanged whether or not we have a recognised form and language with which to express such a nature. The language of everyday life - 'language really used by men' as Wordsworth called it - had to stand in for the old, venerated, shared language of established belief. To do this, the novel made its story become the story of individuals living with the fact that the once shared public language could no longer express their personal religious aspirations. We will see this illustrated very clearly when we look at The Mill on the Floss in the second half of this chapter. Individuals live with problems the novel can set out but often cannot resolve. This is particularly evident in the novels of Thomas Hardy, and the accounts of his setting out of the problems of visionary realism forms the basis of my chapter on his work.

The visionary novel assumes a future which will seek the resolutions it cannot itself find. The real life work of Daniel Deronda comes from Mordecai's Old Testament vision yet it is only about to begin as the novel ends. In Shikasta the planet's future begins with its semi-destruction and the death of its saviour George Sherban, at the end of the novel. In a sense such novels are not complete in themselves; they come out of the past and they are looking for a future. This is an indication of their religious nature. John Morley here explains how religious truth has to go back in time in order to go forward.

> Whatever form may be ultimately imposed on our vague religious aspirations by some prophet to come, who shall unite sublime depth of feeling and lofty purity of life with strong intellectual grasp and the gift of a noble eloquence, we may at least be assured of this, that it will stand as closely related to Christianity, as Christianity stood closely related to the old Judaic dispensation. It is commonly assumed that the rejectors of the popular religion stand in face of it, as the Christians stood in face the pagan belief and pagan rites in the Empire. The analogy is inexact. The modern denier, if he is anything better than that, or entertains hopes of a creed to come, is nearer to the position of the Christianising Jew. Science, when she has accomplished all her triumphs in her own order, will still have to go back, when the time comes, to assist in the building up of a new creed by which men can live. The builders will have to seek material in the purified and sublimated ideas, of which the confessions and rites of the Christian churches have been the grosser expression. Just as what was once the new dispensation was preached *a Judaeis ad Judaeos apud Judaeos*, so must the new, that is to be, find a Christian teacher and Christian hearers. It can hardly be other than an expansion, a development, a re-adaptation, of all the moral and spiritual truth within our intellectual conceptions that lay hidden under the worn out forms. [8]

2. Science and Religion

As I've been writing these introductory pages, it has occurred to me that the whole issue I am writing about may be much smaller and of less consequence than I initially supposed. I hope that this essay on the preservation of religious belief in a time of faithlessness and disbelief is uncalled for. I almost believe that time will prove this matter to be a small one - no more than a momentary faltering and then the steadying of human being on this planet. It does seem to me that some notion or idea or feeling of God (how doubtfully I must use that word, even now) is slowly being readmitted to serious thinking. Readmitted in a changed

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8. John Morley, *On Compromise* (London, 1928), p.126.

form, of course, because the form always does change, always must. The image, the metaphor that is our way of seeing is always temporary, and only points to the permanent if invisible reality, of our translative power, which is our means of bridging the gap between ourselves and everything else. The truth behind our metaphors does not change, but the metaphors themselves must, or truth will rigidify and die away.

Morley is right, I think, in seeing that science cannot remain entirely self-contained. 'All her triumphs in her own order' will stand for nothing if they remain part of an 'order'. When Morley speaks of science assisting in the 'building up of a new creed by which men can live' he is anticipating a synthesis of 'moral and spiritual truth' with 'intellectual conceptions'; that is, of religious with general knowledge. The very thing that destroys the old creed (Kuhn's 'anomaly' will turn out to be not a destroyer but a creator, causing not loss but 'an expansion, a development, a re-adaptation'. Morley's nineteenth-century belief - for this is belief, coming from doubt and worry and arriving at vision, belief in a future working out of things - seems at first typically of his time; while losing God he claims that salvation will come from keeping hold of Him; while acknowledging that Christianity may be outworn he claims it still has use and purpose. Beneath this there is a truly Romantic assumption; that all is one, that (in Wordsworth's terms) science and the spirit do essentially go together and will one day may be seen to do so.[9] As Coleridge puts it, if miracles turned out to have scientific laws behind them, it would be to the greater glory of science and of God;

> But should that time arrive [when miracles can be resolved into laws], the sole difference, that could result from such an enlargement of our view, would be

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9. William Wordsworth, 'Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, 1850' in The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, edited by Owen and Worthington Smyser, 3 vols (Oxford, 1974), vol.i pp.140-41. 'If the time should ever come when what is now called Science, this familiarised to men, shall be ready to put on as it were, a form of flesh and blood, the Poet will lend this divine spirit to aid the transformation . . .'.

> this: that what we now consider as miracles in opposition to ordinary experience, we should then reverence with a yet higher devotion as harmonious parts of one great complex miracle, when the antithesis between experience and belief would itself be taken up into the unity of intuitive reason.[10]

Morley's projected synthesis of science and religion would in Coleridge's terms be 'an enlargement of our view', not a reduction of it. The 'antithesis between experience and belief' that Coleridge here speaks of is one that the visionary realists try to resolve. Hence the name: visionary (belief) realism (experience). What Coleridge calls 'intuitive reason' is perhaps the basis for authority in these authors. It is also, oddly enough, one of the mechanisms by which sceintists now understand their own great leaps of imagination to be made.[11]

'Often', Kuhn tells us, scientific discovery of new ways of seeing is like revelation:

> The new paradigm, or a sufficient hint to permit later articulation, emerges all at once, sometimes in the middle of the night, in the mind of a man deeply

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10. S. T. Coleridge, The Friend, edited by B. Rooke, 2 vols (Princeton, 1969), vvi, p.519.

11. Einstein used the concept of 'intuition' as the 'best approach to reality'. Yehuda Elkana quotes this passage from a letter to Solovine in which Einstein gives scientific voice to Coleridge's thought:

> Now I am coming to the most interesting point of your letter. You find it strange that I regard the comprehensibility of the world (in so far as we may be justified in speaking of such) as a miracle or as an eternal secret. Now, a priori, one ought to expect the world to be chaotic, in no way comprehensible through thinking. One could (even should) expect the world to be governed by law only to the extent that we intervene by introducing some order. This would be a kind of order similar to the alphabetical order of the words in a language. The kind of order created, for example, by Newton's theory of gravitation, is of an entirely different character. Even though the axioms of the theory are posited by man, yet the success of such an undertaking presupposes a high degree of orderliness of the objective world, which was not to be expected a priori. Herein lies the 'miracle' which is becoming increasingly deep with the development of our knowledge.

Albert Einstein, Historical and Cultural Perspectives, edited by Holdon and Elkana (Princeton, 1982), p.242.

> immersed in crisis. What the nature of that final stage is - how an individual invents (or finds he has invented) a new way of giving order to data now all assembled - must here remain inscrutable and may be permanently so.[12]

Kuhn argues that such intuitional understanding is largely made by men new to the field in which they work, men who 'being little committed by prior practice to the traditional rules of normal science, are particularly likely to see that those rules no longer define a playable game and to conceive another set that can replace them'.[13] One such man was Albert Einstein, a 'creative scientist', who changed the science he inherited from Newton, and then spent the rest of his life unable to go along with changes that resulted from his own revolution. Heinz R. Pagels argues that Einstein was on the 'sidelines' of physics after 1926, because his 'intuitional' sense - which Pagels sees as religious in nature, in contact with God, the 'old one', gave way to his increasing experiential understanding, his physical experience.

> My view is that after 1926, Einstein became involved in the mathematics of the unified field theory. For the rest of his life he could not resist the conceptual power and beauty of general relativity. The influence of this creation and the method of thought he used to arrive at it dominated all his subsequent thinking. He lost contact with 'the Old One' and the creative physical intuition he possessed for more than twenty years. The delicate balance between innocence and experience, prerequisite for creativity, tipped toward experience.[14]

Einstein's work in that first twenty years of scientific creativity changed the nature of physical science so that the very discipline that did away with God in the nineteenth century has turned about face. Physics now acknowledges weirdness and mystery at the heart of things, has discovered

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12. T. S. Kuhn, pp.90-91.

13. ibid., p.90.

14. Heinz R. Pagels, The Cosmic Code (London, 1983), pp.60-61.

chance _and_ infinity at the heart of matter. And soon, no doubt, we laymen will about face too, and follow them, as it seems we always must. Doris Lessing has noticed this strange reversal of the roles of Scientist and Fiction writer in the Preface to _The Sirian Experiments_ (London, 1981).

> If I were a physicist there would be no trouble at all! _They_ can talk nonchalantly about black holes swallowing stars, black holes that we might learn to use as mechanisms for acheiving time-and-space warps, sliding through them by way of mathematical legerdemain to find ourselves in realms where the laws of our universe do not apply. _They_ nonchalantly suggest parallel universes, universes that lie intermeshed with ours but are invisible to us, universes where time runs backward, or that mirror ours.
>
> . . . What _of course_ I would like to be writing is the story of the Red and White Dwarves and their remembering Mirror, their space rocket (powered by anti-gravity), their attendant entities Hadron, Gluon, Pion, Lepton, and Muon, and the Charmed Quarks and the Coloured Quarks.
>
> But we can't all be physicists.

With her space fictions Doris Lessing has entered these realms of 'universes that lie intermeshed with ours but are invisible to us'; and doing so, she has insisted that this is no more going forward in time than it is going back. '_Shikasta_ . . . has as its starting point . . . the Old Testament' ('Some Remarks', _Shikasta_). Doris Lessing says 'we can't all be physicists'; yet in a sense we must be, if that is where the reaches of knowledge are leading us. Because where the humanities were once destroyed by science, science now stands beckoning. Paul Davies, in _God and the New Physics_, writes,

> It is ironic that physics, which had led the way for all other sciences, is now moving towards a more accommodating view of the mind while the life sciences, following the path of last century's physics, are trying to abolish mind altogether. The psychologist Harold Morowitz has remarked on this curious reversal: 'What has happened is that biologists, who once postulated a priviledged role for the human mind in nature's hierarchy, have been moving relentlessly toward the hard-core materialism that characterised nineteenth century physics. at the same time, physicists, faced with compelling experimental evidence have been moving away from a strictly mechanical model of the universe to a view that sees the mind as

> playing an integral role in physical events. It is as if the two disciplines were on fast-moving trains, going in opposite directions and not noticing what is happening across the tracks.'[15]

Like the biologists Morowitz here speaks of, thinkers in literature have been following the example set by nineteenth century physics. The new physics - quantum mechanics - is largely expressed mathematically, and has remained a mystery to non-scientists. But a glance in the Quantum Mechanics section of a library will be enough to confirm that as far as modern physics is concerned 'hard core materialism' no longer exists. The distance between what we can experience and what we can know has never been greater. We cannot, literally, imagine quantum reality, as once, we could not imagine what God was like, we keep translating it down, reducing it to what we already know. Pagels writes,

> Something inside of us doesn't want to understand quantum reality. Intellectually we accept it because it is mathematically consistent and agrees brilliantly with experiment . . . Yet the mind is not able to rest . . . After you think you have grasped it and some picture of quantum reality forms in your mind, you immediately revert back to the old, classical way of thinking . . .[16]

It is for this reason that Paul Davies has argued that 'the quantum factor also audaciously intrudes into areas of human enquiry that are traditionally the province of religion and philosophy'.[17] Quantum reality is a physical reality which seems to deny all our physical experiential knowledge. Science is returning mystery to the world, making it strange to us again. So strange that even our own explanations of it are shockingly incomprehensible to us on the human, experiential level. Davies quotes Niels Bohr's famous dictum: 'anyone who is not shocked by quantum theory has not understood it'. Such a scientific voice would have delighted D. H. Lawrence

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15. Paul Davies, God and the New Physics (London, 1983), p.8.

16. Pagels, p.65.

17. Paul Davies, 'The Subatomic Anarchy Show', The Guardian, 1 May 1980.

who would have argued that no amount of understanding of the physical world can detract from God. In Lawrence's terms, knowledge doesn't do away with religion, but merely prevents us from knowing about it.

> We and the cosmos are one. The cosmos is a vast living body, of which we are still parts. The sun is a great heart whose tremors run through our smallest veins. The moon is a great gleaming nerve-centre from which we quiver forever . . .
>
> By the time of John of Patmos, men, especially educated men, had already almost lost the cosmos. The sun, the moon, the planets, instead of being the communers, the comminglers, the life-givers, the splendid ones, the awful ones, had already fallen into a sort of deadness; they were the arbitrary, almost mechanical engineers of fate and destiny. By the time of Jesus men had turned the heavens into a mechanism of fate and destiny, a prison.[18]

'We and the cosmos are one,' Lawrence says, in the present tense, we notice. For him the fact that ages ago educated men had 'lost the cosmos' doesn't mean that the cosmos is really lost. It is the educated men who are lost. Or rather they had lost something, but the cosmos was still there, always is, always will be, hence the present: 'we and the cosmos are one', we change what we think, not what is.

The mystery of what is is only now being revealed to physics. Religious people have always, in one way or another, known it. George Eliot, for example, knew it when she wrote that Darwin's Origin of Species,

> Makes an epoch . . . But to me the development theory, and all the other explanations of processes by which things came to be, produce a feeble impression compared with the mystery that lies under the processes . . .[19]

George Eliot's instinctive knowledge that is is the 'mystery' and not the 'explanation' that is important in life connects her to D. H. Lawrence as a religious thinker. For both of them, science could be an interesting

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18. D. H. Lawrence, Apocalypse (Harmondsworth, 1981), pp.29, 30.

19. George Eliot, 'Letter to Barbara Bodichon, 5 December 1859', Letters III p.226.

and useful adjunct to life. But, while both rejected formal religion, both equally rejected scientific 'explanations' which claimed to be exclusively correct. Many nineteenth century thinkers felt forced by the mutual antagonism and exclusiveness of both creeds, into a straight choice.

Albert Einstein, for example, born in 1879, suffered a characteristically nineteenth century dilemma between science and religion. Of his boyhood self he writes,

> I came - despite the fact that I was the son of entirely irreligious (Jewish) parents - to a deep religiosity, which, however, found an abrupt ending at the age of 12. Through the reading of popular scientific books I soon reached the conviction that much in the stories of the Bible could not be true . . .[20]

Being for truth, Einstein became a scientist. The old stories of the Bible had proved false. The Genesis of the Bible had been displaced by the geology of Lyell and the Evolutionary theory of Darwin.

> And God said, 'Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear'. And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. And God said, 'Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth'. And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.
>
> Genesis 1: 9-13

Until Science began to prove it otherwise, this ancient account of earthly beginnings did suffice. And while the story will 'do', then the God it describes can survive as our God. The extraordinary thing is that until

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20. Albert Einstein quoted in Pagels, p.21.

a rival theory could be proved the anomalies could flourish and contradictions be ignored; the row was not about Lyell but about Darwin. But once the story is doubted, then, it follows, so is God. So the Bishops rightly sensed that whatever Darwin professed to believe about God, his work proved him a heretic.

Without our belief in the story we are also without morality. In Genesis God's word tells us what to think. 'And God saw that it was good.' While the story, and its God, and his word survives, so does the idea that there is something outside human life, something beyond simple human being, which has non-human standards, and a right to judge. The account of the beginning offered by Victorian materialist science, most particularly by Lyell and Darwin, had to exist without all these things. Man is therefore hardly a part of the story. Such a factual, materialist view became increasingly part of the shared 'reality' of nineteenth century life, and so we see it appearing in realist fictions, such as this account of geological creation given by Thomas Hardy in A Pair of Blue Eyes. Knight, a literary intellectual, falls from a cliff edge and finds himself facing death:

> Time closed up like a fan before him. He saw himself at one extremity of the years, face to face with the beginning and all the intermediate centuries simultaneously. Fierce men, clothed in the hides of beasts, and carrying, for defence and attack, huge clubs and pointed spears, rose from the rock, like the phantoms before the doomed Macbeth. They lived in hollows, woods and mud huts - perhaps in caves of the neighbouring rocks. Behind them stood an earlier band. No man was there. Huge elephantine forms, the mastodon, the hippopotamus, the tapir, antelopes of monstrous size, the megatherium, and the myledon - all, for the moment, in juxtaposition. Further back, and overlapped by these, were perched huge-billed birds and swinish creatures as large as horses. Still more shadowy were the sinister crocodilian outlines - alligators and other uncouth shapes, culminating in the colossal lizard, the iguanodon. Folded behind were dragon forms and clouds of flying reptiles: still underneath were fishy beings of lower

> development; and so on, till the lifetime scenes of the fossil confronting him were a present and modern condition of things. These images passed before Knight's inner eye in less than half a minute, and he was again considering the actual present. Was he to die?[21]

Though I shall discuss this passage at some length in my chapter on Hardy, it is worthwhile looking at it briefly now in order to see how accepted facts, 'reality', do not for all the power they are given in this account, finally offer any satisfaction to Thomas Hardy or his protagonist. The question 'Was he to die?' which concludes the passage matches - in stature - the statement from Genesis, 'And God saw that it was good'. These are the important bits of each story and their different tenors show the real differences between their respective creation accounts.

Yet, Hardy's account here leaves the 'mystery' of life intact. He believes in this contemporary explanation - he had been among the first to read and admire Darwin's Origin. But it does not satisfy any questions which are other than factual. Knight is concerned with saving his own body; 'was he to die?'. For Hardy the mystery lay in the discrepancy between the sophisticated consciousness which could conceive such stories as evolution, and the poor animal body which was always concerned with survival. The mystery lay in having a consciousness which had evolved enough to develop a self-conscious awareness of its animality, its utter physicality. In the preface to Jude the Obscure Hardy refers to this, his obsession, as a 'deadly war waged between flesh and spirit'.

The origins of what I have called literary Modernism arise at this point, when the intellect sees it faces death alone, as a creature, not as an intelligence. Death becomes the only important matter. 'Was he to die?' Human meaning exists solely within its own terms, for there is nothing beyond human consciousness to say 'It is good'.

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21. Thomas Hardy, A Pair of Blue Eyes (London, 1970), p.242.

3. Paradise Lost and Nineteenth Century Realism

For nineteenth century realists who had given up Genesis because it no longer fitted the contemporary facts, yet who found the 'contemporary facts' did not suffice because they had no relation to the writers' intuitional perceptions - such as morality - there remained a third choice of cosmological model, which drew contemporary reality out of Christianity in exactly the way Morley had predicted for the future. But this third choice came itself from the past. Milton's account of the beginning openly professed itself as 'story' and yet laid a claim to metaphorical truth. And Paradise Lost, read by Victorians as the story of knowledge as loss, had a particularly powerful appeal to religious minds which had had Genesis taken from them.[22] People recognised their own situation in Milton's accounts of their 'frail originals'.

Paradise Lost is particularly important in relation to visionary writers because it reworked stories that had seemed destroyed by knowledge; it is a work of reclamation that anticipates the nineteenth-century destruction of Biblical authority, justifying 'the ways of God' to men of its future who did not allow themselves to believe in Him. For the nineteenth century readers Paradise Lost said things that they could no longer hear in Genesis.

Paradise Lost had this advantage over Genesis: despite its visionary nature - which is of course essential to the poem, and comes from its

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22. Paradise Lost's final image of Adam and Eve, hand in hand, leaving paradise is one that is used by Dickens at the end of Great Expectations, and by George Eliot in Middlemarch and The Mill on The Floss.

> 'I took her hand in mine and we went along out of the ruined place . . .'
>
> Great Expectations, (Harmondsworth, 1982), p.493
>
> 'She put her hand into her husband's, and they went along the broad corridor together'
>
> Middlemarch (London, 1978), p.411.
>
> 'They had gone forth together into their new life of sorrow, and they would never more see the sunshine undimmed by remembered cares. They had entered the thorny wilderness, and the golden gates of their childhood had forever closed behind them.'
>
> The Mill on the Floss (Oxford, 1981) p.191.

Biblical source - the poem could be seen as humanly realistic. At the same time, because its cosmology is esesntially imaginative, its universe was still 'believable' (metaphorically, analogically) when Genesis was not. In a sense the poem's very modernity (as opposed to the ancient authority of the Old Testament) was what allowed it to preserve Biblical truths. The poem is a work of imagination and inspiration - a medium largely unaffected by matters of scientific fact. Through this imaginative vision, Paradise Lost made religious truths real. In this sense, Paradise Lost is almost the exact opposite of a visionary realist novel such as The Mill on The Floss, though both works seem to fulfill a similar function. In the poem the vision is rendered real: in the novel the real is rendered visionary. The difference, that Milton seeks reality while the novelists seek vision, is caused by the loss of the authorising book, The Bible. For George Eliot, for example, the problem of writing realistically lay in the fact that 'realism' seemed to be cut off from any generally acknowledged sense of religiousness. At the very end of Middlemarch she tells us that 'the medium' in which the deeds of a Theresa or an Antigone took shape 'is forever gone'. There is no socially envisaged basis for the religious life. This leaves individuals struggling with an epistemological problem: Maggie Tulliver in The Mill on The Floss is faced with the problem of not knowing what she needs to know, and although this is a common problem,

> She was as lonely in her trouble as if she had been the only girl in the civilised world of that day who had come out of her school life with a soul untrained for the inevitable struggles . . . without that knowledge of the inevitable laws within and without her, which governing the habits, becomes morality, and developing the feelings of submission and dependence becomes religion.
>
> The Mill, p.288

'As if . . .' though Maggie feels alone in her ignorance and ill-preparedness, George Eliot wants to stress that she is in fact, typical. This is the problem of ignorance and loneliness arising from a lack of community of interest. Maggie is not alone, but she is 'as if' alone because there is nothing beyond Maggie 'in the civilised world' which can engage with her in the problem of a religious life. By making this problem central to the 'story' of Maggie, George Eliot creates a religious area in ordinary life, makes 'realism' a religious medium. Maggie faces an enlargement (caused by a lack of religious form) of the same problems that any religious being would have faced. Having the external structure of the Christian faith, for example, did not prevent Milton from perceiving the problem of knowledge as central, and as <u>a product of being fallen.</u> But in <u>Paradise Lost</u> the problem is, as it were, seen in reverse. Milton has to make a given body of religious knowledge real to us. He begins with the fact that there are areas of knowledge which concern us and areas which don't. To be human in the post-lapsarian world is to be unsure which is which. Because readers of the poem know that they <u>are</u> Adam and Eve, it is easy to see that what is true for them, is true for us. On the one hand the tree of knowledge is forbidden, but on the other the amount of knowledge humans can have seems determined by our own internal limits. Raphael admonished Adam,

> Think only what concerns thee and thy being:
> Dream not of other worlds, what creatures there
> Live, in what state, condition or degree . . .
>
> <u>PL</u> VIII, 174-76.

We understand that this 'rule' is meant for us as much as for the Adam of the poem. The lawful bounds which determine human knowledge are not simply God's laws, for Milton, but the actual limitations of being. In eating of the apple Adam and Eve do attempt to surpass those limits, and thus cause problems of knowledge to come to the forefront of their lives. In Book Four, Milton advises the innocent pair,

> . . . sleep on,
> Blest pair, and o yet happiest if ye seek
> No happier state and know to know no more.
>
> PL IV, 773-75

Milton is here anticipating that the fall will create, among other things, epistemology, the need to try to work out what to know, and how to know, and what not to know. In the half line 'know to know no more' there is a prophetic warning about the picking of the fruit, and a more general warning to future generations. After the fall, 'know to know no more' will become an instruction, the human task will become self-knowledge, the discovery of where to draw the bounds of 'thee and thy being'.

This problem is the problem Maggie inherits. In an 'uneducated soul' - and in George Eliot's terms we are all uneducated - there is grave difficulty in knowing when one's instinctive feelings are right and to be followed and when they are to be subjugated to other considerations. This problem is compounded by the loss of the Bible as the authority behind the story. Authority has now become entirely the author's responsibility, or rather is now found to be understanding reality subtly enough.

The apparent continuation here, of concern with knowledge and authority from Paradise Lost to The Mill on The Floss, is not, as Nietzsche might have said, the expression of the continuation of Christian morality without the Christian God.

> If the English really do believe they know, of their own accord, 'intuitively', what is good and evil; if they consequently think they no longer have need of Christianity as a guarantee of morality; that is merely the consequence of the ascendency of Christian evaluation and an expression of the strength and depth of this ascendency: so that the origin of English morality has been forgotten, so that the highly conditional nature of its right to exist is no longer felt. [23]

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23. Fredrich Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols (Harmondsworth, 1978), p.70.

Nietzsche seems to suppose that Christianity is a thing in itself, that it has a primary existence. But through Paradise Lost we can see Christianity as a form which expresses something primary to that form. The 'intuitional' feeling of morality in George Eliot (and it is George Eliot that Nietzsche refers to in this passage) is not taken from Christianity, so much as working parallel to it. What Nietzsche calls the 'forgotten' origin of English morality is not Christianity but the thing behind Christianity, the reality behind the form. This is George Eliot's achievement, that she shows the reality behind the Christian form is still there, in real human terms, even when Christianity is lost. The story of Maggie Tulliver is an illustration of the enduring reality of the essentially religious nature of life despite the loss of a recognised form for it. Like Adam and Eve, Maggie does not know what to know, but that does not mean that there is nothing to know. Maggie suffers,

> A blind, unconscious yearning for something that would link together the wonderful impressions of this mysterious life, and give her soul a sense of home in it.
>
> The Mill, p.235

Maggie's ignorance creates a sense of homelessness in her. Her soul is not at home in the world because she does not have an entire religious vision, only a series of disconnected 'impressions of this mysterious life'. But this very homelessness rather than being an indication that the real world is lacking God is a sign of religiousness.

Maggie senses that there ought to be a 'link', a real connection between things in life, an even more wonderful and mysterious order behind the 'impressions' she has of the world. Maggie is instinctively aware of the thing behind the metaphors, and so she seeks some way of realising God, of making life one whole. All this is behind that word 'link'. But if we think of Paradise Lost we will remember that there the

'link' for human beings is the 'link of nature', the bond of human relatedness. This is perhaps the 'link' that could give Maggie a sense of home in the world.

In Paradise Lost there is no real sense of home for human beings because this link is in some senses broken. Paradise and natural relation are the first human home, and the wilderness of the present is a place of banishment. We, living in the poem's future, look upon the situation of the fallen angels as remarkably similar to our own. They have lost their true home (heaven) and seek to ease the burden of what seems to them a transitory and uneasy residence in Hell. Thus Satan instructs his legions,

> Go therefore mighty powers,
> Terror of heaven, though fallen; intend at home,
> While here shall be our home, what best may ease
> The present misery, and render Hell
> More tolerable; if there be cure or charm
> To respite or deceive, or slack the pain
> Of this ill mansion . . .
>
> PL II, 456-62

Satan has, like a human being, to attempt to compromise and adjust to an unbearable situation. In Middlemarch, for example, we see Lydgate making the same necessary, painful adjustments to his life with Rosamund.

> His marriage would be a mere piece of bitter irony if they could not go on loving each other. He had long ago made up his mind to what he thought was her negative character - her want of sensibility, which showed itself in disregard both of his specific wishes and of his general aims. The first great disappointment had been borne: the tender devotion and docile adoration of the ideal wife must be renounced, and life must be taken up on a lower stage of expectation, as it is by men who have lost their limbs. But the real wife had not only her claims, she had still a hold on his heart, and it was his intense desire that the hold should remain strong. In marriage, the certainty, 'She will never love me much,' is easier to bear than the fear, 'I shall love her no more'. Hence, after that outburst, his inward effort was entirely to excuse her, and to blame the hard circumstances which were partly his fault. He tried that evening, by petting her, to heal the wound he had made in the morning, and it was not in

> Rosamond's nature to be repellent or sulky; indeed, she welcomed the signs that her husband loved her and was under control. But this was something quite distinct from loving _him_.
>
> _MM_, ch. 64, p.621

Though 'the first great disappointment had been borne', the consequence of that disappointment, the life to follow, in hell, as it were, is going to be even greater, and even more painful. A sense of 'home' for Lydgate in marriage would have been with the 'ideal' wife, but that 'ideal' is lost completely. Similarly the exiled Satan can't help seeing his present home in terms of his former home. The fact that Hell is to be his home permanently has not forced itself into his consciousness - '_while_ here shall be our home', he says, as if one day it will not be.

The longing for home produces in the fallen angels a desire to mimic the things they used to do in heaven; the reverence afforded to Satan is a pastiche of reverence as it once was in Heaven. But this, like everything fallen, is a true mirror image, an image completely back-to-front. This through the looking glass effect distorts human life as much as it does the lives of the fallen angels. In Satan we see this distorting, destroying effect attacking what ought to be the sanctuary of the self, making even 'I' twisted and wrong. At home in the fallen state, we must be uneasy in ourselves. Satan recognises that he is at home in hell because hell is at home in him. He,

> back recoils
> Upon himself; horror and doubt distract
> His troubled thoughts, and from the bottom stir
> The hell within him, for within him hell
> He brings, and round about him, nor can fly
> By change of place . . .
>
> _PL_ IV, 17-21

Satan recoils from his own evil, but only 'back . . . upon himself'. He is distracted from his 'troubled thoughts' but only by 'horror and doubt'. As in a novel, the essentially theological point about the nature of 'fallenness', the twisted and distorted state, is rendered as a

psychological fact. Yet the very name, Satan, makes it less a description of an individual's state than a generic description. This is what visionary realism aspires to; for Maggie Tulliver, everything becomes subject to the looking glass effect of the fall. Like Satan, she can not rely upon her self, because the relation of the self to everything else is out of true; she is 'untrained', 'without . . . knowledge', and has to learn through mistakes the relation between the self and selfishness.

> Life is very difficult! It seems right to me sometimes that we should follow our strongest feeling; - but such feelings continually come across the ties that all our former life has made for us - and would cut them in two. If life were quite easy and simple as it might have been in Paradise, and we could always see that one being first towards who . . . . I mean, if life did not make duties for us before love comes, love would be a sign that two people ought to belong to each other.
>
> The Mill, p.449

Maggie senses a better life in her nostalgic reference to Paradise Lost. But she recognises that she is suffering that loss, the loss of knowing right and wrong, the loss of simplicity, of 'true' love. But this very experience of difficulty (the same problem seems quite simple to Stephen Guest, after all) is a sign that there is some truth in Maggie. Her recognition of the problem is a sign of right-feeling. We will see this again - recognition as right-feeling - in a much more fallen creature, Gwendolen Härleth.

Faced with the choice between Stephen and all her other 'ties', Maggie has no guide or help, no pre-existing form or institution, Christian morality, for example, to help her. George Eliot thus brings about a situation which seems to recreate in what is a secular world, a human situation which resembles the Old Testament Abraham's in its simplicity and significance. This elevation of Maggie's sacrifice to correspond with Abraham's will probably seem an exaggeration. It is not the near murder of one's son, after all, only the bungled end of a foolish

love affair. Partly, my claim will seem too large because the past, especially the distant and sanctified past, seems much graver than our own time. Old stories take on a resonance drawn from many cultural memories. What Johnson called the 'intrinsic morality' of Paradise Lost, for example, arises from its having roots in Genesis, and therefore in all Christian culture which had used Genesis. Similarly, Abraham's story isn't just his anymore, but takes on the added weight of all those serious thinkers who have retold it.[24]

At first it might look as if George Eliot's world is a merely social or ethical one, because there is as it were no real Abraham story - no unworldly faith, no divine intervention. But characters are often put into situations where great sacrifices are required of them, as acts of faith, though it is hard for us to recognise this because - as in Maggie's case - the faith is not connected to a recognisable religious form. Perhaps such sacrifices are the greater for being small and ordinary looking. As Abraham had to risk losing his son in order to gain posterity, so George Eliot must raise the knife to the throat of God, in order to retain any human faith. The effect of transposition from the traditional notion of the divine to the human sphere is not reductive: far from it, for by this means George Eliot directly reclaims religious concepts, thought, beliefs, for realistic human life. There are reverberations from Abraham here, and there is a sense of power and importance, which seems to say, the present can be as meaningful and awesome as that 'great' past. We have 'great struggles', 'great problems' too.

> Did she lie down . . . with her will unwaveringly bent on the path of penitant sacrifice? The great struggles of life are not so easy as that; the great problems of life are not so clear. In the darkness of the night she saw Stephen's face turned towards her in passionate, reproachful misery . . .
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> The Mill, pp.479-80

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24. For example, Kierkegaard in Fear and Trembling.

The face of the innocent victim looking up at you as you stand above, holding the knife.

Maggie makes another sacrifice: her self-sacrifice at the end of the novel, which frees her brother Tom from his imprisonment within himself. Maggie's action is like God entering Tom's reality, effecting a Pauline conversion; it is

> A new revelation to his spirit, of the depths in life, that had lain beyond his vision which he had fancied so keen and clear -
>
> . . . He guessed a story of almost miraculous, divinely protected effort . . .
>
> The Mill, p.520

Are we to understand that Maggie 'saves' Tom in a non-physical sense? We can't in the end be fully satisfied with this ending to the novel. Sacrificial death - however great it is in revelatory terms - is not a real and general answer to the 'everyone' the novel assumes shares its problems. For this real and general answer we will in the coming chapters look to the mature works of George Eliot's visionary realism, Middlemarch and Daniel Deronda.

The problem of the decay of religious forms in the nineteenth century is set out by The Mill on The Floss, where what ought to be, is not. It is one thing to have this sort of knowledge as Paradise Lost does within a religious framework which has within it myths and stories to account for such a wrong state of affairs (Christianity and Genesis, for example). But to have such knowledge and to have only that fallen reality with which to explain the things which lie behind that reality, creating it, is a terrible, seemingly impossibly difficult state. This is the difference between Milton and George Eliot. And this is why Kierkegaard's remark about Abraham seems of particular significance for George Eliot.

> It is great to give up one's wish, but it is
> greater to hold fast after having given it up,
> it is great to grasp the eternal, but it is greater to
> hold fast to the temporal after having given it up. [25]

Milton's work is great because it grasps the eternal. George Eliot's while looking smaller, is perhaps the greater, for holding fast to the temporal.

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25. Soren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling (Princeton, 1945), p.22.

PART TWO: THE PROCESSES AND THE MYSTERY OF LIFE

Chapter III

LIVING IN MIDDLEMARCH

1. The Morality of Species

In this and the following chapter I shall argue that what is commonly called humanism in the work of George Eliot might be better thought of as a powerfully felt but unformulated religiousness. It may well be that humanism ought to include such a meaning, but it seems to me far too secular a word, as if its use prevented any idea of God or mystery in human life. The belief or set of beliefs that in George Eliot's work goes under this name is too complex to be easily formulated or dogmatised. George Eliot herself never did this: though we have some clues and hints in her letters and other writings, the only true expression of her belief is in the complex, relative world of the novel, and cannot simply be extracted from that world. Realism, like humanism, seems far too secular a term for this form, yet it has important and useful meanings. In this chapter I shall argue that George Eliot uses realism to describe her religiousness, rather as the drawing of a circle can also be said to describe it. For this religiousness comes from and can only be seen incarnate in ordinary living. My argument here is that the processes of living described in Middlemarch are George Eliot's account of the religious life she felt in herself and, more widely, saw in her contemporaries in England.

As Nietzsche is perhaps the strongest of opponents to any idea of George Eliot's humanism-as-religion, I want now to return to the discussion begun in chapter two, of Nietzsche's idea that you cannot have Christian morality without the Christian God. George Eliot stands between Morley's anticipation that a future religion would 'stand as closely related to

Christianity, as Christianity stood closely related to the old Judaic dispensation', and Nietzsche's condemnation that 'the origin of English morality has been forgotten, so that the highly conditional nature of its right to exist is no longer felt'. In her novels and especially in Middlemarch George Eliot brings life to Morley's belief; what we call realism in novels is a vision which does owe a great debt to Christianity, yet is not a Christian vision. This Nietzsche could not allow. When he speaks of morality he means morality grown out of Christian values. He sees Christianity and morality as a 'whole system', a 'complete view of things', from which no portion (i.e., belief in God) can be removed without causing the whole to collapse. For Nietzsche the 'condition' on which morality depends is God.

It seems to me that George Eliot had a complete view of things, and also belief in something that the word God might stand for. What she did not have was the ability to use the word 'God' with ease. She had 'faith', though it was faith without formula, faith in

> the working out of higher possibilities than the Catholic or any other Chrûch has presented. Those who have the strength to wait and endure, are bound to accept no formula which their whole souls - their intellect as well as their emotions - do not embrace with entire reverence. The highest 'calling and election' is to do without opium and live through all our pain with conscious and clear-eyed endurance.[1]

For George Eliot there was no 'formula' which she could embrace with 'entire reverence', but there was the reality that a formula might stand for, which was something which she herself, intellect as well as emotions, did accept and believe. So for her, the highest religious life, the 'calling and election' is to do without a religious formula. This lack of formula both causes the 'pain', and yet also leaves the sufferer 'clear-eyed'. The whole system, is as it were, invisible, but felt by

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1. George Eliot, 'Letter to Barbara Bodichon, 26 December 1860', Letters, III, pp.365-366.

the intellect and emotions and is not dependent upon the Christian God ('opium') because it both supersedes and in a sense precedes the Christian metaphor. It is not simply that George Eliot's morality has forgotten that it comes from Christianity (it seems to me that George Eliot does explicitly recognise that debt), but also that Christianity has itself forgotten origins in humanity. J. R. Seeley, in Ecce Homo encourages us to remember what the Christian incarnation really means to us; because Christ was a man, we ought to trust human capacity and potential.

> Of this race Christ himself was a member, and to this day is it not the best answer to all blasphemers of the species, the best consolation when our sense of degradation is the keenest, that a human brain was behind his forehead and a human heart beating in his breast . . . And if it be answered that there was in his nature something exceptional and peculiar, that humanity must not be measured by the stature of Christ, let us remember that it was precisely thus that he wished to be measured, delighting to call himself the Son of Man, delighting to call the meanest of mankind his brothers. [2]

For Seeley, Christ's incarnation makes the 'species' like God, so those who speak against the species 'blaspheme'. The authority of morality comes not from Christianity as such but from humanity, from the fact of incarnation. For Nietzsche this is completely unacceptable; he believes that the authority of Christian morality comes from its transcendental origin as command: 'Christianity presupposes that man does not know, cannot know, what is good for him and what evil: he believes in God who alone knows'.[3]

When I say I would place George Eliot between these two positions I mean this; that in her world there is as it were a transcendental law,

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2. J. R. Seeley, Ecce Homo (London, 1915), pp.131-132.

3. Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols, pp.69-70.

a command, but that this can only be known to human beings through the experience of human living. When we call George Eliot a humanist it does not mean, as Nietzsche suggests, that she is a sort of Christian without a God, but rather that she has God without Christianity, God directly present in human life without the medium of form, dogma or institution. Morality is not a grafted on bit from a dead religion but is discovered as part of human living, arising from the wholeness of the human species. Science and religion far from diverging at this point come together in a mystical-evolutionary aim (which we shall later see developed in the works of D. H. Lawrence, and, via Olaf Stapledon, in Doris Lessing), for the whole of humanity to become what it can be.

This was a thought which had been present in George Eliot's mind for a long time before she began to write *Middlemarch*, perhaps originally coming from her work translating Spinoza's *Ethics* in 1955-6.

> Nothing, I say, can be desired by men more excellent for their self-preservation than that all with all should so agree that they compose the minds of all into one mind, and the bodies of all into one body, and all endeavour at the same time as much as possible to preserve their being, and all seek at the same time what is useful to them all as a body.[4]

If *species* - or perhaps kind-ness is a better word - were to replace God as the authority behind morality, the morality ensuing would be not unlike what Nietzsche calls *Christian* morality; that is, it would be a gentle morality, a kind morality, based on mutual recognition of sameness and of relationship. Spinoza's apparent paradox, that 'self-preservation' is best guaranteed by recognition of sameness and the composition of the interests of all into one, is taken up as the aim of morality in George

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4. Spinoza, *Ethics* (London, 1977), p.155.

Eliot's work. Denied the word God, she settles for good. In the last chapter we called such a movement a translation down but in George Eliot's own terms this is a translation up, it is 'the highest election and calling'. After all good is not so ordinary and close to us as we would like to imagine. In George Eliot's terms the good is the reality behind the idol or drug, God. In Silas Marner we can recognise this thought when the miser's gold is, as it were, miraculously transformed into a better object for his love, the golden haired child.

My answer to Nietzsche's criticism of George Eliot is this; that her morality was not a broken off bit of Christianity but an integral part of a whole Nietzsche could not see, perhaps because of his insistence on individualisation. This whole is expresesd in the novels, but can be called humanity - that is the bit of the greater mysterious whole of life which it is our particular responsibility to grasp. In this vision the moral authority of God is seen in the form of the humanly intuited morality of species. As in Spinoza's account of 'self-preservation' selfishness is thus at odds with true need, 'nothing can be desired by men more excellent . . . than that . . . all seek at the same time what is useful to them all'. Those who most desire their own personal ease and self-interest are driven to act against their own true interests, and so in the marriage of Lydgate and Rosamond we can see fallen creatures suffering that twisting of desire we saw in Satan, but this time the account is entirely 'realistic', and the morality comes from recognition or denial of recognition of relationship.

Rosamond's selfishness creates her inhumanity; she is so mortified by shame and by denial of her wishes that she is unable to help her husband in any way.

> It seemed that she had no more identified herself with him than if they had been creatures of different species and opposing interests . . . To many women the look Lydgate cast at her would have been more terrible than one of anger: it had in it a despairing acceptance of the distance she was placing between them.
>
> MM, ch. 58, p.568

The question George Eliot is implicitly asking here (and which she answers elsewhere in the novel) is, how can it be that two human 'creatures' meant to be united by a holy and legal bond of matrimony, meant above all to be as 'one', appear to each other as 'creatures of different species and opposing interests ?'. The echoes of Darwin's 'struggle for existence' emphasise the mortal seriousness of what might be seen as merely a row or marital dispute. When the struggle is between 'creatures of different species and opposing interests' the loser is likely to lose all. The pair are struggling unnaturally against each other rather than against their problems because Rosamond does see herself as a different sort of creature - but Lydgate has also colluded in this idea, for all he had apparently wanted from her was her prettiness, not humanity. Rosamond can't now understand that she and Lydgate are in the same position; she feels he is letting her down, not keeping his side of their bargain. Both now suffer for the original mistake of denying a full humanity and the necessity of genuine feelings. The amity the pair find at the end of the chapter is superficial, as their amity always has been. There is a real distance between them which they cannot bridge, despite their social act, their 'appearance'.

> Lydgate, who was standing close by, put his arm round her and drew her towards him, saying,
> 'Come, darling, let us make the best of things. It will only be for a time, I hope, that we shall have to be stingy and particular. Kiss me.'
> His native warm-heartedness took a great deal of

> quenching, and it is a part of manliness for a husband to feel keenly the fact that an inexperienced girl has got into trouble by marrying him. She received his kiss and returned it faintly, and in this way an appearance of accord was recovered for the time. But Lydgate could not help looking forward with dread to the inevitable future discussions about expenditure and the necessity for a complete change in the way of living.
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> MM, ch. 58, p.569

Lydgate's 'good' qualities here are nothing spectacular, 'native warm-heartedness' and 'manliness'. But these are the human qualities that Rosamond is lacking; she is but an 'inexperienced girl'. At a less fallen time, and in a less fallen man, such qualities might be called 'grace', 'virtue' or 'courage'. Realism, in this instance translates down - courage into warm-heartedness - in order that we might have good at all. If we could not recognise the goodness of 'warm-heartedness' then like Rosamond we should be estranged from what is good in not simply our species but also ourselves. Rosamond can only act passively in the face of Lydgate's attempted 'kind-ness'. She does not actively feel it herself; 'she received his kiss and returned it faintly'.

In contrast to Rosamond's selfishness and angelic appearance, Mary Garth cannot be praised more highly than with the words 'woman' and 'human' as if they were adjectives like 'honest',

> Advancing womanhood had tempered her plainness, which was of a good human sort, such as the mothers of our race have very commonly worn.
>
> MM, ch. 12, p.110

To be fully 'human' in Middlemarch is to have a wider field of relation to the human world, it is not something that a person can be in isolation. Yet, confusingly, human beings do exist in separate parts, bodies, and so physically are not 'one'. Though we shall have to return to this issue of self and species when we look at Dorothea as an example of goodness, we shall now look at the physical nature of Middlemarch, because this is

the religious centre of the novel. At the same time humanness is also related to being, as it were, grown up: to being a 'woman' rather than a 'girl'. But as we shall see when we look at Dorothea, becoming a grown up is not easy, and certainly not an inevitable development in a life.

2. The Physical World of Middlemarch

In a letter to Frederic Harrison in August 1866 George Eliot had written,

> (I) have gone through again and again the severe effort of trying to make certain ideas thoroughly incarnate, as if they had revealed themselves to me first in the flesh and not in the spirit. I think aesthetic teaching the highest of all teaching because it deals with life in its highest complexity.[5]

George Eliot was aware that the last thing humanity needed was yet another made-up system tacked on over life. She wanted to make her ideas look as if they were primarily a part of reality, and not something that one might or might not add on, a part of life, not something separate from it. Whatever the new religion was to be, it had to be utterly necessary, actually indispensable to the contemporary mind, part of what was already there but made more of, brought out, revealed. Her overriding interest was in the real world.

The reasons for this are clear when we look at Bulstrode - a man more like most of us than most of us would care to admit. For a religious man, Bulstrode is strangely committed to the world of physical reality. When he thinks about the acquisition of Stone Court, for example, Bulstrode's dependence on physical reality leads him to confuse his own purpose with God's

> He had bought the excellent farm and fine homestead simply as a retreat which he might gradually enlarge as to the land, and beautify as to the dwelling,

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5. George Eliot, 'Letter to Frederic Harrison, 15 August 1866' Letters IV, p.300.

> until it should be conducive to the divine glory that he should enter on it as residence . . . (thus) throwing more conspicuously on the side of Gospel truth the weight of local landed proprietorship, which Providence might increase by unforeseen occasions of purchase.
>
> <u>MM</u>, ch. 53, p.498

Bulstrode is so dependent on physical reality that he feels even 'Gospel truth' needs 'the weight of local landed proprietorship' behind it. The irony that is built up in the opening paragraphs of chapter 53 by the constant play on the relation between God's will (Providence) and Bulstrode's avarice and cupidity is then turned against us; we are meant to recognise something of ourselves in Bulstrode.

> It was as genuinely his mode of explaining events as any theory of yours may be, if you happen to disagree with him. For the egoism which enters into our theories does not affect their sincerity; rather, the more our egoism is satisfied, the more robust is our belief.
>
> <u>MM</u>, ch. 53, p.499

George Eliot, who can see this as plainly a part of reality as anything else in the novel, is willing to share it with us as if we were all of us equally affected. In the first sentence we have it as if we might think of ourselves as different from Bulstrode, 'his mode/yours' 'you/him'. But the second sentence tells us these distinctions are egotistic; and George Eliot recognises herself, us and Bulstrode as one; the pronouns now are 'our/our/our'.

Bulstrode with his 'opium' feels no pain when he thinks about himself. For George Eliot this is a sign that Bulstrode is not really thinking. Conceptual thinking, matters of intellect and doctrine are not 'real',

> Mr. Bulstrode was conscious of being in a good spiritual frame and more than usually serene, under the influence of his innocent recreation. He was doctrinally convinced that there was a total absence of merit in himself; but that

> doctrinal conviction may be held without pain when the sense of demerit does not take a distinct shape in memory and revive tingling of shame or the pangs of remorse.
>
> MM, ch. 53, p.500

If a man really believed that there was a total 'absence of merit in himself' it is unlikely that he would find himself in a 'good spiritual frame'.[6] But this doctrine holds no pain for Bulstrode because it is not real to him, to be real it should have to have a recognisable physical manifestation, 'a distinct shape in memory', which would cause physical pain 'the tingling of shame - or the pangs of remorse'. And of course, it is exactly that physical manifestation which does appear to shake Bulstrode's frame. When Raffles appears, doctrine comes to life; but Bulstrode feels it as superstition - 'hideous magic':

> Five minutes before, the expanse of his life had been submerged in its evening sunshine which shone backward to its remembered morning: sin seemed to be a question of doctrine and inward penitence, humiliation an exercise of the closet, the bearing of his deeds a matter of private vision adjusted solely by spiritual relations and conceptions of divine purposes. And now, as if by some hideous magic, this loud red figure had risen before him in unmanageable solidity - an incorporate past which had not entered into his imagination of chastisements.
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> MM, ch. 53, p.502

The physical presence of another human being - 'this loud red figure' - is the only thing which could disrupt Bulstrode's comfortable state, because its 'unmanageable solidity' is the one thing that Bulstrode's thinking cannot deal with. At this point in Bulstrode's world natural and supernatural have become entwined: the 'loud red figure' appears like a devil, 'as if by some hideous magic', but is really a very ordinary man

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6. Bulstrode's serenity follows from finding no merit in himself and relying on the promise of the Gospel. Kierkegaard's notion of 'dread' was intended to combat this evangelical complacency - and indeed, as we shall see, dread is the only thing which can combat Bulstrode's self righteousness.

come from the coach road. Common and mundane as he is, Raffles seems to have a 'higher purpose', unbeknownst to himself, in personifying Bulstrode's guilt and bringing buried fears to the surface of life. Of all that Bulstrode might have imagined as a suitable 'chastisement' for himself, Mr. Farebrother's getting the living at Lowick, for example, the idea of a man appearing as an 'incorporate past' was quite inconceivable. Perhaps it is a genuine act of providence because it could not have 'entered into his imagination of chastisements'. The physical manifestation of his bad past makes the idea of sin a new reality for Bulstrode, and forces a re-evaluation of those things which had seemed painless doctrine a few moments ago. 'The bearing of his deeds' will no longer be a 'matter of private vision adjusted solely by spiritual relations and conceptions of divine purposes' but will become, terrifyingly for Bulstrode, matters to be judged by men. The hideous and magical appearance of the devilish creature is the beginning of earthly hell for Bulstrode.

The implication of this passage is that genuine feeling must have a real, physical basis, it must arise in some definite form, 'a distinct shape'. Bulstrode's initial 'good spiritual frame' and 'unusual serenity' were merely spectral illusions based on partial knowledge which Bulstrode assumed to be complete. This is why Raffles appears to have arrived 'as if by some hideous magic', because until reality physically asserts itself against him, Bulstrode assumes his own censored version is the whole and anything additional to it is an unimagined extra dimension.

> In his closest meditations the life-long habit of Mr. Bulstrode's mind clad his most egoistic terrors in doctrinal references to superhuman ends.
>
> *MM*, ch. 53, p.504

Certainly the appearance of Raffles causes Mr. Bulstrode to attempt to reassess the 'divine plan' and his role in it, but the main effect of

Raffles' appearance is that Bulstrode now <u>feels</u> the pain of 'the forcast of disgrace in the presence of his neighbours and of his own wife'. And this is hell, 'conscience wakes despair' as much as it ever can for this man. The pain of feeling is still imposed from outside, as it were, it isn't that Bulstrode himself <u>feels</u> guilt, but he does sense that that too may come:

> Even without a memory the life is bound into zones of dependence in growth and decay; but intense memory forces a man to own his blameworthy past. With memory set smarting like a reopened wound, a man's past is not simply a dead history . . . it is a still quivering part of himself, bringing shudders and bitter flavours and the tinglings of a merited shame.
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> <u>MM</u>, ch. 61, p.587

Bulstrode has not been forced 'to own his blameworthy past', but he fears that this might yet happen if his crime becomes known to others. When God was the basis of moral authority in his world, Bulstrode could keep things under control; he made his own arrangements regarding the forgiveness of sins. But in the human world he has no power to stop his fellows thinking about him and judging him and this is real 'terror'.

Our lives make one whole even 'without memory' says George Eliot, that is, whether we care to own our past or not, our present selves still depend upon it. The hurt occasioned by Bulstrode in the past is now revisited upon him; memory is 'set smarting like a reopened wound', causing a physical reaction, 'shudders, and bitter flavour, and the tinglings of a merited shame'.

Bulstrode is a human being, and his 'inner life' is entirely understandable to other humans; he dresses his thoughts in doctrine to make himself more palatable to those shreds of conscience he still retains. Again we are reminded that Bulstrode is no stranger to any of us; he suffers as we do, as Satan did, and the fallen Adam and Eve, splits in his being which cause internal contradictions, which themselves cause

distorted external actions.

> He was simply a man whose desires had been stronger than his theoretic beliefs, and who had gradually explained the gratification of his desires into satisfactory agreement with those beliefs. If this be hypocrisy, it is a process which shows itself occasionally in us all.
>
> MM, ch. 61, p.591

Whatever we think of Bulstrode he is 'simply a man' and in that respect, he is like all of us. Again we see the first sentence telling us something about a creature at some distance - 'he', and in the second sentence that distance is reduced, 'he' is like 'us'. Human beings act upon what they believe. Bulstrode believed primarily in Mr. Bulstrode, and in this he is not alone.

It doesn't seem to me that George Eliot demands the renunciation of this belief; she recognises our physical individuation is basic and enduring. Perhaps, like Lawrence, what she really wants is to see greater individualism, and less of what Bulstrode does, which is to internalize what are basically social arrangements - lies and pretences which cover his real deficiencies. If we cared for ourselves more, and recognised that the bounds of individuality were also 'zones of dependence' we would be realising a greater potential than we individually possess. Yet such a move is painful - but perhaps pain is necessary when living without opium. Truth, reality, knowledge, all hurt us.

> We do not expect people to be deeply moved by what is not unusual. That element of tragedy which lies in the very fact of frequency, has not yet wrought itself into the coarse emotion of mankind; and perhaps our frames could hardly bear much of it. If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity.
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> MM, ch. 20, p.189

When George Eliot describes the newly married Dorothea weeping our everyday conceptions seem coarse. When we think of our great cultural notions of tragedy - stories of murder and death, written in blood, screamed out at us as if nothing less could touch us or arrest us and make us understand the awful difficulty of living on earth. Art makes King Lear fine and great, but our human emotions are coarse. Because if we said, 'It is awful that most people never become what they could be at best, that people make bad marriages, that we cannot educate our children; these are tragedies', it would seem foolish and over indulgent, not tragedies but little personal problems. Instead of taking our lives seriously, we walk around 'wadded with stupidity'. Perhaps there is nothing else we can do, because if we had a 'keen vision and feeling . . . we should die'. It seems as if it is a part of our nature not to be any less coarse than we are, 'our frames could hardly bear much'. To truly understand the nature of the physical world is a terrifying prospect. But the main character in each of George Eliot's novels does break through this boundary of reality by feeling, it is an essential concern, part of George Eliot's life work, to break down the physical separation of human beings. Clearly this is related to her own work as a novelist, her own attempt to 'live' other people's lives, to be one with others. In The Lifted Veil (1859) she wrote a 'horror' story about that 'roar on the other side of silence'.

It is the only story George Eliot wrote in the first person. Its hero, Latimer, is afflicted with a capacity to participate 'in other people's consciousness'.

> It was like a preternaturally heightened sense of hearing making audible to one a roar of sound where others find perfect silence.[7]

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7. George Eliot, The Lifted Veil (Oxford, 1906), p.217.

Stripped of the 'wadding', Latimer finds reality 'hell', and what he calls his 'superadded consciousness of the actual' eventually kills him. Latimer *suffers* 'a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life', but because the story itself cannot be taken as realism we do not have to take his suffering as really connected to ourselves. In *Middlemarch* realism ensures that the roar is made more audible to us. Dorothea's participation in Casaubon's consciousness is not at all unbelievable but entirely ordinary. It is in fact a sudden illumination of her own position that allows her to glimpse Casaubon's.

> She had begun to see that she had been under a wild illusion in expecting a response to her feeling from Mr. Casaubon, and she had felt the waking of a presentiment that there might be a sad consciousness in his life which made as great a need on his side as on her own . . . it had been easier to her to imagine how she would devote herself to Mr. Casaubon, and become wise and strong in his strength and wisdom, than to conceive with that distinctness which is no longer reflection but feeling - an idea wrought back to the directness of sense, like the solidity of objects - that he had an equivalent centre of self, whence lights and shadows must always fall with a certain difference.
>
> *MM*, ch. 21, p.205

The fantastic gothic element of *The Lifted Veil* is here reduced to one word, 'presentiment', in what is otherwise a perfectly straightforward account of feeling. Dorothea realises that what was easy was wrong: it was easy to 'imagine how she would devote herself to Mr. Casaubon', but it was impossible for her to conceive 'that he had an equivalent centre of self'.

Yet if anyone had asked Dorothea before her marriage, 'Does Casaubon have a "self" as you do?', she would certainly have answered, 'Yes'. We all know that others exist independently from ourselves. But if we held such a conception 'with feeling', so that it came back 'an idea wrought back to the directness of *sense*, like the solidity of objects'

then we should really know it. Like Latimer we should then know others as we know ourselves. Coarse creatures, lacking in some subtle faculty, we have like Lear's blind Gloucester to 'see it feelingly' to see at all.

Casaubon cannot feel fellowship with others, nor allow others to see his feelings. In his case, ordinary life is more horrible than any gothic story, because it is real. Dorothea makes a kind gesture towards Casaubon, sensing his grief, but Casaubon cannot respond beyond allowing 'her pliant arm to cling with difficulty against his rigid arm'.

> There was something horrible to Dorothea in the sensation which this unresponsive hardness inflicted on her. That is a strong word, but not too strong: it is in these acts called trivialities that the seeds of joy are forever wasted, until men and women look round with haggard faces at the devastation their own waste has made, and say, the earth bears no harvest of sweetness - calling their denial knowledge.
>
> MM, ch. 42, p.409

George Eliot had written in a letter to Mrs. Bray (30 November 1868) that we could see terror 'in this life of ours - if only the dread would be directed towards the really dreadful'.[8] Here she uses the word 'horrible' and comments 'a strong word but not too strong', wanting to make her readers see not just another word but the awful meaning of it in life. This is quite different from the atmosphere of supernatural horror in The Lifted Veil - yet in that story she stresses how serious words could be:

> So much misery . . . may be compressed into a sentence! And men judge of each others lives through this summary medium . . . We learn words by rote, but not their meaning: that must be paid for with our life blood, and printed in the subtle fibres of our nerves.
>
> The Lifted Veil, p.236

If we are to use words to write novels, to 'judge of each others lives' we must learn the meanings of the words, we must know the thing in reality

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8. George Eliot, 'Letter to Mrs. Charles Bray, 30 November 1886', Letters, IV, p.490.

they stand for. We must find in our own beings a corresponding reality, a feeling, rising from our own lives.

3. The religious life in the real: habit, conversion, vocation

Because she understood that human beings had to feel a thing to be true, George Eliot wrote religious novels in the form of realism. Readers learn from Middlemarch not so much from authorial lecturing but from the reality characters suffer: meaning is paid for by 'life blood', and printed 'in the subtle fibres of our nerves'. 'God' ceases to be a noun and acts as a verb in the novel, felt through action. Thus the religious life is borne out in real life, and we can apply its terms to the real life of the characters. For example the modes of habit, vocation and conversion are some of the ways that the religious life is made part of the real in Middlemarch.

Habit

Like Paradise Lost we can see Middlemarch as a tragic epic, and like Paradise Lost, the subject matter of this novel is given beforehand, there is only so much the author can do to make it any different. Milton was rewriting Genesis, George Eliot writing of contemporary ordinariness. Though both contain tragic falls, both also have promise of regeneration and growth. Genesis moves inexorably towards the 'bow/Conspicuous with three listed colours gay,/Betokening peace from God, and Covenant new'. In George Eliot's vision the future is vouchsafed partly by what seems a meagre and uninspired thing: habit. Realising the nature of her married life, Dorothea is forced out of her naturally kind disposition into a cool appraisal of her husband. 'In such a crisis as this', writes George Eliot, 'some women begin to hate' (ch. 42, p.410). Crises are moments when habit becomes vital, because there are no other guides to action.

> Dorothea sat almost motionless in her meditative struggle, while the evening slowly deepened into night. But the struggle changed continually, as that of a man who begins with a movement towards striking and ends with conquering his desire to strike. The energy that would animate a crime is not more than is wanted to inspire a resolved submission, when the noble habit of soul reasserts itself.
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> MM, ch. 42, p.410

The language here reminds us of the language of the religious life. But at the same time as the outward, physical appearance of Dorothea conjures an image of a meditative saint, the account of Dorothea's internal state uses the language of physical violence. The violence of feeling in Dorothea is only overcome by habit - 'the noble habit of soul'. And habit is somehow elevated to a great moral strength. Terms come to mean their opposite: 'a resolved submission' at first seems passive but is in fact so strongly active that it requires as much, if not more, energy than is required to 'animate a crime'. Dorothea's habit seems passive so long as she has no 'claims from without to shape her energies', but when the claim does come, habit becomes great action which seems to be Dorothea overcoming her self; 'the resolved submission did come'.

Dorothea is compelled to act according to her marriage bond, not to the social bond but rather to her own habitual estimation of its ideal meaning. When Casaubon asks for her life after his death, she is almost compelled to promise it to him by habit become instinct, and though this instinct is against her will, she cannot go against it.

> She dreaded going to the spot where she forsaw that she must bind herself to a fellowship from which she shrank. Neither law nor the world's opinion compelled her to this - only her husband's nature and her own compassion, only the ideal and not the real yoke of marriage. She saw clearly enough the whole situation, yet she was fettered: she could not smite the stricken soul that entreated hers. If that were weakness, Dorothea was weak.
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> MM, ch. 48, p.461

In the world of reality - the world of Sir James, or even of Mr. Brooke, where Casaubon is only a dry old stick and Dorothea should never have married him, - there is no part of marriage that says a husband may demand his wife's life after his death. 'Neither the law nor the world's opinion' compelled, or could compel, Dorothea to this act. Dorothea's vision of the 'ideal' is compelling however, and so is this demand from Casaubon for a bond of 'fellowship' - perhaps the first time he has asked for something from another human creature, something that would hurt if it were denied. The fact that Dorothea can see 'clearly enough the whole situation' does not make it easier. On the contrary, the very complexity of the situation makes it more difficult, binds her to an act of intensity and greatness she could not imagine, for 'she could not smite the stricken soul that entreated hers'. The image of violence recurs to stress the intense energy required for apparent passivity, and also to bring to mind the idea of great pain. Our sympathy if it goes with Dorothea's out to Casaubon, the 'lamed creature', needs also to be reminded that this strength of spirit in Dorothea, not only comes from her increased knowledge but also costs her great pain. The images make us realise that great 'tragedy' is metaphor suited to our coarse emotions: it translates down into a woman sitting up through the night. George Eliot says with Spinoza and Ecclesiastes, 'He who increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow.' (Ethics, p.154).

Dorothea's compassion in this instance, follows directly from her vision of Casaubon as a 'lamed creature', which in turn arose from her 'noble habit of soul'. This idea that one mode of being can grow out of another, that habit can metamorphose into instinct, is expressed earlier, in one of the numerous scientific metaphors with which this novel of 'provincial life' is so lavishly illustrated.

> Doubtless a vigorous error vigorously pursued
> has kept the embryos of truth a-breathing: the
> quest for gold being at the same time a questioning
> of substances, the body of chemistry is prepared
> for its soul, and Lavoisier is born.
>
> MM, ch. 48, p.458

The metaphor refers to Mr. Casaubon's 'error', and is used to say that all error does not lead to great discoveries. But it remains true that George Eliot here recognises the mysterious way that truth is born, and vigour, a quality Mr. Casaubon is sadly lacking in, seems here to be the main cause of giving breath to truth in periods of great error. We can re-use this metaphor to illustrate the value of 'habit' in George Eliot's world.

Habit alone, as Mr. Casaubon clearly illustrates, is not only damaging to life, but works actively against it, stopping it. Mr. Casaubon has habit without vigour, and thus the products of his labour are lifeless pale things, formless and dull. Lydgate, on the other hand, has vigour without habit; in a different way, he too comes to nothing, for without habit, the patient work needed for any achievement cannot be done. But in the novel habits of goodness are used to stand in for actual goodness, or in Dorothea's case, greatness and intensity. A nineteenth-century gentlewoman is unlikely to find a cause, an external claim to give shape to her internal energies, and without such an external claim, those energies are likely to burn themselves out, or be applied to the wrong things.[9] But in cultivating, from that desire for greatness, habits of goodness, eventually, unnoticed, Dorothea creates a body of knowledge in herself that is, finally, the great soul she desired. As Lavoisier to the body of chemistry, so without those small habits of

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9. So Doris Lessing writes of her own mother's life: 'her vegetable garden could have fed a village, and she had fruit trees, chickens, rabbits. She made cheese, and the store-hut was always full of preserves. She was endlessly adaptable and inventive. She had too much energy, capacity for her situation. Her fate should have been to run a large organization, hospital or even an industry. On the farm she burned herself out.'. 'My Mother's Life (Part Two)' in Granta 17 (Harmondsworth, 1985)

goodness, no greatness could have been born in Dorothea's life.

In Lydgate, too, we see the effects of habit going beyond habit to become a great act of human goodness. When the extent of Bulstrode's inhumanity is revealed at the meeting of the town's Sanitary Committee, we see Lydgate responding in the way his profession has taught him.

> All eyes in the room were turned on Bulstrode, who, since the first mention of his name, had been going through a crisis of feeling almost too violent for his delicate frame to support. Lydgate, who himself was undergoing a shock as from the terrible practical interpretation of some faint augury, felt, nevertheless, that his own movement of resentful hatred was checked by that instinct of the healer which thinks first of bringing rescue or relief to the sufferer, when he looked at the shrunken misery of Bulstrode's livid face . . .
> . . . He could not see a man sink close to him for want of help. He rose and gave his arm to Bulstrode, and in that way led him out of the room; yet this act, which might have been one of gentle duty and pure compassion, was at this moment unspeakably bitter to him.
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> *MM*, ch. 71, pp.693-694

Lydgate's situation is in many ways analogous to Dorothea's. Habit (from his vocational training) here forces him to see Bulstrode not merely as a man, and a bad man at that, but (as Dorothea sees Casaubon), as a hurt or maimed *creature*, as he might see a patient. Lydgate's own feeling as a man, ('resentful hatred') is checked by habit, so that the fact that Bulstrode looks as though he is going 'through a crisis of feeling almost too violent for his delicate frame to support' is impressed on his, Lydgate's, mind and heart; 'by that instinct of the Healer which thinks first of bringing rescue or relief to the sufferer'. It would be easy to hate Bulstrode at this moment, and the other men in the room find it natural. But Lydgate's more humane instinct chooses for him a more difficult response. It is, in fact, as if he has no choice, and acts from compulsion or necessity, 'he could not see a man sink close to him for want of help'. Like Dorothea, Lydgate is 'morally forced' to

perform an act of kindness against his will. But the force powering the moral act is not imposed on Lydgate from outside, 'neither law nor the world's opinion' compels him to take Bulstrode's arm; it is Lydgate's own better nature, that part of him which George Eliot had earlier called his 'flesh and blood sense of fellowship', his care not only for 'cases but for John and Elizabeth' (ch. 15, p.141). We are not to hold the idea that Lydgate is 'good' to Bulstrode because it is his desire to be good, or because he owes Bulstrode any thing other than that recognition of 'flesh and blood sense of fellowship'. Neither is it easier for him because, understanding the situation, he is raised above it. Any of these possibilities would make it easy for an ordinary reader to say, Lydgate's act was a special act of personality or vocation that you couldn't expect an ordinary person to do. On the contrary, Lydgate's knowledge being the more complete, makes it more difficult for him to act. If it was a matter of will or conscious desire he could not. But that is not it; 'this act . . . might have been one of gentle duty and compassion' in which case we might reasonably say we could not emulate it. But it was not gentle to Lydgate, it was 'unspeakably bitter to him'.

It is as if goodness here were a physical part of Lydgate, something 'he' - as selfish individual - had no control over, part of him but also partly independent of him, like his liver, as if the instinct for humanity had been 'printed in the subtle fibres of [his] nerves'. While all around his contemporaries, in the name of public decency pull Bulstrode to the ground, calling it justice, enjoying 'the coarse emotion of mankind', Lydgate suffers the pain of one of those moments on the other side of reality, without his wadding of moral stupidity.

Conversion

If conscious habit is one means by which change can come about in human behaviour, conversion is another. Lydgate, for example, observes George Eliot might have made a convert of Rosamond. Following the public scandal, Lydgate feels his wife further estranged from him than ever, regarding this new trouble 'as if it were hers alone'. Lydgate sees that in order to survive 'they should be in one resolve' but Rosamond only wishes to discuss leaving Middlemarch as a solution to their problems. Lydgate cannot bear to go through 'the old round again'. With a complete loss of hope in his marriage he leaves the room. But, George Eliot comments,

> perhaps if he had been strong enough to persist in his determination to be the more because she was less, that evening might have had a better issue. If his energy could have borne down that check, he might still have wrought on Rosamond's vision and will. We cannot be sure that any natures, however inflexible or peculiar, will resist this effect from a more massive being than their own. They may be taken by storm and for the moment converted, becoming part of the soul which enwraps them in the ardour of its movement.
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> MM, ch. 75, p.721

Earlier, following the feeling that they were of different species, Lydgate had come to feel (while he was in 'an excusing mood') that Rosamond was 'an animal of another and feebler species'. 'Nevertheless', adds George Eliot, 'She had mastered him', (ch. 65, p.636). Now the tables are definitely turned. Losing his 'determination to be the more because she was the less' Lydgate gives the position of strength up to the 'feebler species'; and thus implicitly agrees that though Rosamond may be 'the less' she is 'actually' stronger than him. He does not have enough 'energy' to bear the 'check' of her passive resistance, and thus he has no strength left to alter Rosamond's 'vision and will'. Her passive inflexibility ensures that her vision and will prevail, unaffected

by her husband: there is no bond between them now, only a sort of sliding scale of power. Nothing happens to Lydgate actively, because Rosamond is not trying to get him to adapt or change to her vision; she does not mind what he thinks, so long as she has her own way. And she can have that, whatever Lydgate thinks because she lives as if their married life were 'hers alone'. Had Lydgate been stronger in this instance, Rosamond might have been 'taken by storm and for the moment converted', and so have been less strongly against him. Earlier in their marriage Lydgate's 'native warm-heartedness' had drawn Rosamond to him and kissed her and so healed their difficulty. Now, the 'ardour' with which his soul might have moved to enwrap Rosamond is non-existent; there is no conversion.

But this is not to say that conversion is not possible. On talking to Dorothea Lydgate himself experiences the effect of a 'more massive being', and feels himself reborn in her faith.

> The presence of a noble nature, generous in its wishes, ardent in its charity, changes the lights for us: we begin to see things again in their larger, quieter masses, and to believe that we too can be seen and judged in the wholeness of our character. That influence was beginning to act on Lydgate, who had for many days been seeing all life as one who is dragged struggling amid the throng. He sat down again, and felt that he was recovering his old self in the consciousness that he was with one who believed in it.
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> MM, ch. 76, p.724

Here is the 'ardour' necessary to effect conversion, 'noble . . . generous . . . ardent', Dorothea's nature changes the way Lydgate sees life, restores a perspective, and inspires faith ('to believe that we too can be seen and judged in the wholeness of our character'). The Lydgate who had felt like a decent man returns simply because Dorothea believes in him. Her faith converts Lydgate to a belief in himself.

It is the world of faithlessness that will see a fallen man as always and eternally fallen; Casaubon or Bulstrode at their worst would judge a man that harshly, out of their own failure to rise. But Dorothea is well fitted to judge Lydgate's fall. She knows what it is to be one of God's elect, to borrow Kierkegaard's phrase, she knows what it is 'to love what is great, and try to reach it, and yet to fail'.[10] The greatness of soul, the election, lies in the strength to carry on, struggling on the ground after failure; in some measure this is a gift of Dorothea to her convert. Lydgate lives on, without opium, clear-eyed.

But Dorothea's greatest conversion, though it is only for the moment, is the one she effects on Rosamond.[11] Dorothea's visit to Rosamond is 'a newer crisis in Rosamond's experience than even Dorothea could imagine': her sudden understanding of Dorothea's generosity and goodness makes her feel as if 'she had been walking in an unknown world which had just broken in on her'; it is a new level of reality suddenly widening out before Rosamond. Their mutual break-down emotionally frees them, so that 'Pride was broken down between these two', (ch. 81, p.756), and they are able to face each other as two merely human creatures, aware of each other's suffering.

In struggling to find words strong enough to express the awful seriousness of marriage, of a broken bond, Dorothea is forced back to the language of physical violence. A broken marriage is 'murdered' by disloyalty,

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10. Fear and Trembling, p.21.

11. One might object: the conversion is only temporary and only preserves the marriage which may well have been better - at least for Lydgate - dissolved. This is true, but I would still argue the conversion is important because it shows that Rosamond does not have to be the silly, selfish creature she often is; it reveals a common potential for all of us. That Rosamond and Lydgate are not able to continue to see such potential and use it is another story . . .

> . . . And then the marriage stays with us like a
> murder - and everything else is gone.
>
> MM, ch. 81, p.758

Dorothea is transformed by her emotion into what seems like an unhappy ecstasy; 'she stopped in speechless agitation, not crying, but feeling as if she were being inwardly grappled'; and Rosamond is overcome by this power of Dorothea's nature. The experience seems to be beyond the bounds of ordinary life, far beyond anything Rosamond could previously have imagined.

> Rosamond, taken hold of by an emotion stronger
> than her own - hurried along in a new movement
> which gave all things some new, awful, undefined
> aspect - could find no words, but involuntarily
> she put her lips to Dorothea's forehead which was
> very near her, and then for a minute the two women
> clasped each other as if they had been in a shipwreck.
>
> MM, ch. 81, p.758

The 'massive being' that is Dorothea's noble soul is 'stronger' than any feeling of Rosamond's - in exactly the way that tired Lydgate's was not. Rosamond is 'taken by storm' - 'hurried along in a new movement which gave all things some new, awful, undefined aspect'. And in this new and terrifying state, Rosamond cannot 'find' any suitable words, only an act which is a physical manifestation of - the sign of - her conversion, an act that indicates her being taken over by Dorothea's spirit; 'involuntarily she put her lips to Dorothea's forehead'. Sharing the same feeling, both women are stormed by the intensity and greatness of emotion; Rosamond may be taken by storm, but both parties 'clasped each other as if they had been in a shipwreck'.

Changed, though perhaps only momentarily, Rosamond feels a 'necessity' to tell the truth to Dorothea. Picking up the language of violence, the language of tragedy, Rosamond feels herself 'urged by a mysterious necessity to free herself from something that oppressed her as if it were blood-guiltiness', (ch. 81, p.758). Here again, like her husband, when a moment of

instinctive goodness comes, it comes not from will but as it were from sense, from feeling sensual reality; where Lydgate has the healing instinct written in his nerves, Rosamond feels guilt as 'blood-guiltiness'. Drama has proved along with sport that real bloodshed is not essential to our nature; pretence and harmless substitutes will do us just as well, for it is the feeling that must be released, not the blood itself. This confession from Rosamond, 'You are thinking what is not true', is as great a victory over human treachery as any more showy or stunningly dramatic conversion would be.

Fred Vincy is converted too, partly by pain he suffers as a result of his own selfishness, and partly by the greater character of Mary Garth; he is changed by recognition of the feelings people cause each other. Going to Caleb Garth for help with his debt he understands that his feelings are not so important as the pain he causes the Garths.

> His pain in the affair beforehand had consisted almost entirely in the sense that he must seem dishonourable, and sink in the opinion of the Garths; he had not occupied himself with the inconvenience and possible injury that his breach might occasion them, for this exercise of the imagination on other people's needs is not common with hopeful young gentlemen.
>
> _MM_, ch. 24, p.239

Fred is dishonourable in this case, and is right to feel 'pain' on that account. But it is as if the pain he feels at first is because he is dishonourable; it hurts his self esteem to think that others might see him as a rascal. Suddenly, seeing Mrs. Garth giving up the ninety two pounds she has saved for Alfred's education, he understands that his status is not the centre of pain in the affair; his act has repercussions which he could not before imagine. Fred also has to realise that his 'feeling sorry' for what he has done doesn't make any difference to the fact of it. His deed cannot be altered by feeling, however strong,

unless it takes a physical form. Going to tell Mary what he has done, he says, pathetically, 'You can never forgive me.'.

> 'What does it matter whether I forgive you?' said Mary, passionately. 'Would that make it any better for my mother to lose the money she has been earning by lessons for four years, that she might send Alfred to Mr. Hanmer's? Should you think all that pleasant enough if I forgave you?'
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> MM, ch. 25, p.244

Fred is weak, undisciplined, and cannot save himself. He is lucky, though, in that he knows this, at some deep level. That is why it is important to him that Mary does forgive him, even though he knows that it doesn't make anything else 'pleasant enough'. His feeling for Mary is transformed into action, and thus made a part of reality. Fred tells Mary, 'When you have any power over [a man], I think you might try and use it to make him better,' (ch. 25, p.245), that is what Mary does, converting Fred to her own vision, as Lydgate might have converted Rosamond.

Vocation

Human beings can thus act as the physical manifestation of good in each other's lives, and their feelings can take on enough strength so as to seem like physical sensations. This relation between the physical and the non-physical is very important. Over and over again we see examples of how, despite apparent sophistication, human creatures can hardly believe in anything that does not manifest itself physically on earth as a sensual object. Even Dorothea, while being the most unworldly of characters, needs some external object or objective to give form to her greatness. Vocation plays an important part in the lives of characters in *Middlemarch* because it provides a channel, in an incoherent social order, through which people may act for good.

Caleb Garth is the most physical character in the book; like Adam Bede he believes good carpentry to be God's will, and can hardly recognise anything that does not take a physical form as existent at all. Like Dorothea, he knows for certain that 'good' on this earth is best seen in the form of decent cottages. When Brooke's offer of his old job comes to him he tells Mrs. Garth 'It's a great gift of God, Susan'. Partly, Caleb Garth means, having a job, but more than that it is the chance to act that he sees as bounty;

> It's a fine thing to come to a man when he's seen into the nature of business; to have the chance of getting a bit of the country into good fettle, as they say, and putting men into the right way with their farming, and getting a good bit of contriving and solid building done - that those who are living and those who come after will be the better for. I'd sooner have it than a fortune. I hold it the most honourable work that is.
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> MM, ch. 40, p.387

The adjectives here, ('fine', 'good', 'right', 'solid') fit as well with the activities that Caleb now has 'the chance' (with all those connotations of fortune for him in that) to do; 'putting men into their right way', and 'contriving' and 'building' as they do with the religious language in the last bit of the sentence, where 'fine', 'good', 'right' and 'solid' work makes the lives of 'those who are living and those who will come after', better. And, magnificently here, George Eliot uses this most down-to-earth man to make incarnate those religious ideas with which the novel is most concerned. For Caleb's 'chance' here, a 'great gift of God', addresses those adjectives to the non-material world, because the 'chance' is most high, 'I'd sooner have it than a fortune', says Caleb. While 'good' building makes life 'better', the end purpose remains entirely on earth, in those lives, the superlative is not on high, but actually in that meliorating work, for 'best' is replaced by 'most honourable,

good, better, 'I hold it the most honourable work that is', says Caleb, God's agent, for it is a vocation, akin almost to discipleship. 'A man without a family would be glad to do it for nothing' (ch.40, p.387).

Now Caleb Garth is lucky, to have a thing to do, that he can do and that he knows is right. Mr. Farebrother, Vicar of St. Botolph's, is in Lydgate's opinion, 'a remarkable fellow', who 'ought to have done more than he has done'. Lydgate is just beginning to understand how difficult it is to do, rather than merely desire to do, well.

> I find myself that it's uncommonly difficult to make the right thing work: there are so many strings pulling at once. Farebrother often hints that he has got into the wrong profession; he wants a wider range than that of a poor clergy man
>
> MM, ch. 50, p.474

Though he plays cards for money, Lydgate still feels Farebrother to be 'one of the most blameless men I ever knew'. Farebrother is a decent clergyman, but he is not what he might have been. Yet Farebrother is good beyond the call of his profession, again, his goodness takes the form of acts, visible to the world. Asked by Fred to ascertain Mary's feeling, Farebrother is obliged to face with equanimity the loss of his potential future with Mary, 'a duty much harder than the renunciation of whist, or even the writing of penitential meditations'. This 'duty' is more real than his clergyman's duty, or perhaps is his real duty as a clergyman, it is at any event an act as immediately beneficient as Dorothea's 'sunshine or rain'. And, significantly, it is almost as unnoticeable in the world as those two things.

Later, however, circumstances require that Farebrother be even more explicit, using his goodness to overcome desire. He informs Fred Vincy that he has considered standing by and watching as Fred throws away his chance of securing Mary's affection, because then he can marry her himself.

'If there's a chance of his going to the dogs, let him - perhaps you could nohow hinder it - and do you take the benefit'. But the Vicar overcomes his desire, telling Fred,

> But I had once meant to be better than that, and am come back to my old intention. I thought that I could hardly secure myself in it better, Fred, than by telling you just what had been going on in me. And now, do you understand me? I want you to make the happiness of her life and your own, and if there is any chance that a word of warning from me may turn aside any risk to the contrary - well I have uttered it.
>
> MM, ch. 66, p.644

Farebrother 'had meant to be better' and had, momentarily slipped below his own estimation of what he might be. But, without help, he comes back to his 'old intention'. This contrasts quite sharply with Lydgate's estimation of Farebrother in which 'he ought to have done more than he has done'. Lydgate is speaking in terms of vocational work, but it is here, in the personal sphere, that Farebrother does his best, in effect saving Fred's life. These things seem to be metaphors 'saving his life', 'making a man of him', etc. - but they are not - they are phrases from the language of tragedy. Caleb and Mary Garth together 'make a man' of Fred Vincy: without the pair of them, there is no telling what might have happened to him. For Farebrother not to speak up to Fred at this moment would be like Bulstrode's passive murder of Raffles. Here, Farebrother does as he 'ought'. But it is not easy for him, hence his need to 'secure' himself in his own resolve. The intention is there and it is good, but without making a place for it in the world external to him, it might as well not exist at all. But speaking to Fred, Farebrother ensures that his higher motive is 'secure', despite his passion. For he is no longer guarding the purity of his thought alone; his good intention is given a form - speech - without which it probably would cease to exist. We remember how difficult it was for Dorothea to

keep her sense of 'higher' or 'better' when it was merely 'an inward vision'. Always, in Middlemarch 'claims from without' give shape to belief in good.

Farebrother is in a good position to understand Lydgate, as indeed Lydgate can understand him. This fellow feeling between the men makes Farebrother 'mournful' when he hears of Lydgate's suspected fall, as if the goodness or potential for doing some good thing, which he recognised in Lydgate, having seen it in himself, has failed to survive, has lost its potential for life. Farebrother mourns the loss of the better Lydgate, who might have done the best thing.

> Mr. Farebrother said little: he was deeply mournful: with a keen perception of human weakness, he could not be confident that under the pressure of humiliating needs Lydgate had not fallen below himself.
>
> MM, ch. 71, p.696

Farebrother knows from himself what 'human weakness' is; he has only just managed to bring his own conduct up to the level he wanted it to be at; it is not because he thinks little of Lydgate that he suspects he may have 'fallen below himself' but because he, Farebrother, knows the immense difficulty he had in 'securing himself' against falling. Here the usual, common word 'fallen' takes on its old religious significance. Our selves get trapped by worldly needs and desires, ruining our future and potential, our weakness weakening, our failings making us fail more; here, in Farebrother's mind it is as if without even desiring 'higher things' it is hard enough for a man merely to stay at the level of being 'himself' - in this world, where society trains men and women for hell, not to fall below oneself is a major achievement.

St. Theresa, the Prelude to Middlemarch tells us, had a 'passionate, ideal nature' which demanded 'an epic life', (p.7). St. Theresa had a 'rapturous consciousness of life beyond self', and this it was that

demanded the epic purpose. 'She found her epos in the reform of a religious order'. Later-born Theresas 'were helped by no coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul' and so 'their struggles seemed mere inconsistency and formless less'. Dorothea Brooke, a latter born Theresa, 'foundress of nothing' cannot centre her desires in 'some long-recognisable deed' because an epic is not merely the story of one life (that might be a novel) but of a whole system of life; without a 'coherent social faith and order' to function as 'knowledge' there can be no epics, no great deeds, only what Wordsworth calls 'unremembered acts/Of kindness and of love'. George Eliot would have written an epic, but it seemed the tide was turned against her; instead she did the best she could with what was available, and created Middlemarch, an attempt at faith and knowledge. When she had finished writing it she wrote to Alexander Main,

> I have finished my book and am thoroughly at peace about it - not because I am convinced of its perfection, but because I have lived to give out what it was in me to give and have not been hindered by illness or death from making my work whole, such as it is. When a subject has begun to grow in me, I suffer terribly until it has wrought itself out - become a complete organism; and then it seems to take wing and go away from me. That thing is not to be done again - that life has been lived. [12]

The 'giving out' of Middlemarch was a life's work for George Eliot. This letter is related to a much earlier letter, written in 1857, just as the publication of the first Scenes of Clerical Life saw the beginning of George Eliot's writing career, which indicates George Eliot's sense of an 'epic' task ahead.

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12. George Eliot, 'Letter to Alexander Main, 4 November 1872', Letters IV, p.323.

> I am very happy - happy in the highest blessing life can give us, the perfect love and sympathy of a nature that stimulates my own to healthful activity. I feel too that all the terrible pain I have gone through in past years, partly from the defects of my own nature, partly from outward things, has probably been a preparation for some special work I may do before I die. [13]

The 'special work' that awaited George Eliot was the transformation of experience ('all the terrible pain I have gone through') into knowledge unprovided by the incoherent and faithless society into which she was born. While St. Theresa found her epos in the reform of a religious order, George Eliot was to find hers in the reformation of human consciousness. It was indeed a 'special work' and a great one, and how typical of the morality she sought to reform that such a work would not be recognised as 'great' but would look so very ordinary, as if anyone might do it.

It is an achievement made by Dorothea Brooke: typically, it looks like nothing, 'Foundress of nothing', 'dispersed among hindrances', (p.8). Dorothea's Life does not read so immediately magnificently as St. Theresa's. For hers is eventually a vision of the world 'without opium', and it is therefore belittling and painful, reductive of great ambition. Or, is it?

At the beginning of adult life, an uninspiring gentlewoman's life, it had seemed to Dorothea that

> the sense of connection with a manifold pregnant existence had to be kept up painfully as an inward vision, instead of coming from without in claims that would have shaped her energies.
>
> <u>MM</u>, ch. 28, p.265

but by the end of the novel, or rather, towards the end, Dorothea must fight a battle within herself in order to become part of that existence.

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13. George Eliot, 'Letter to Mrs. J. Cash, 6 June 1857', <u>Letters</u> I, p.343.

> In that hour she repeated what the merciful eyes of solitude have looked on for ages in the spiritual struggles of man - she besought hardness and coldness and aching weariness to bring her relief from the mysterious incorporeal might of her anguish: she lay on the bare floor and let the night grow cold around her; while her grand woman's frame was shaken by sobs as if she had been a despairing child.
>
> MM, ch. 80, p.748

This spiritual struggle ends with a decision to make her 'own irredeemable grief' useful in the world of others; to move out of her self. By the time Dorothea reaches this decision, it is morning; the long night of her soul is over.

> She opened her curtains, and looked out towards the bit of road that lay in view, with fields beyond, outside the entrance gates. On the road there was a man with a bundle on his back and a woman carrying her baby; in the field she could see figures moving - perhaps the shepherd with his dog. Far off in the bending sky was the pearly light; and she felt the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance. She was a part of that involuntary, palpitating life, and she could neither look on it from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator, not hide her eyes in selfish complaining.
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> MM, ch. 80, p.750

'The sense of connection with a manifold pregnant existence' does not now have to be 'kept up painfully as an inward vision' for the vision now has become reality; Dorothea merely has to look out of the window and look out 'towards the bit of road that lay in view' in order to feel both 'the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance' and that 'she was a part of that 'involuntary, palpitating life' which has claimed Dorothea and 'shaped her energies' in ways that she could not have expected, and in ways that are hardly recognisable as 'great'. Yet this struggle is a great one, placed unhesitatingly by George Eliot in a great tradition of the 'spiritual struggles of man'. Human emotion, stirred up by human acts, has raised up in Dorothea 'the mysterious, incorporeal power of her anguish', as

if it is a thing beyond human comprehension, beyond the self and yet now possessing it; lying on the bare floor, Dorothea is racked by this mighty power, and yet that very act of pressing herself to the floor, she seems to be almost trying to make herself feel what reality is. Putting her body next to earth, she is in contact physically with a larger reality than that of her own mind. In this state, Dorothea's adulthood is once again brought into question: 'her grand woman's frame' reduced by the 'mysterious, incorporeal power of her anguish' so that she is as if no more than a 'despairing child'.

There are no 'adults' in Dorothea's world to whom, as a despairing child, she can turn for help. It is in fact the power of emotion that brings Dorothea out, into daylight. Her own grief being 'irredeemable' , finally the greatness in Dorothea's soul must somehow make up that loss, not in herself, but by once more moving outward. Before she opens the curtains and sees 'the world all before her' as it were, she must already have known that connection; that is what must get her up from the floor, willing to act in the human world once again. In this archetypal, yet ordinary, real world, in which she has come around Dorothea's feeling suddenly coalesces with knowledge. It is a religious vision that she has; she sees the 'bit of road that lay in view' as if it were the 'bit' of time she had on earth, the 'bit' of earth she lives on; in this 'bit' yet the whole human world is, held by a few figures, a 'man, with a bundle on his back', 'a woman' and her 'baby' representatives of humanity on the road, coming from? Who knows? Going to? Who could say? but there they are nonetheless, and they and their presence in this 'bit' are what counts. Beyond this essential group is 'the field' where she can see figures, 'perhaps the shepherd with his dog'; not even confined now to human beings, this field is essential as the people, signifying labour, but 'perhaps the shepherd' makes that labour seem a careful labour, a labour of love and conservation. Part of this world, but 'far off'

are the heavens, 'the bending sky and the pearly light'; all this, Dorothea looks upon when she opens her curtains. This is a vision of the world, she knows it. But she feels it, not simply seeing, not simply knowing; something in Dorothea now responds as if at a physical level, knowledge coming from experience as feeling; she feels and in feeling commits herself intellectually and emotionally to her knowledge of 'the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance'.

It is as if there is a connection made between the 'largeness of the world' as a physical object, a task for humanity, and the smallness of the few figures Dorothea can see yet they are committed to going about their business, and so as the world is large, and men small then their wakings must be 'manifold' as must their labour and endurance. In this sentence which so painfully connects with the earlier use of the world 'manifold' lies a wealth of knowledge gained by Dorothea. The 'manifold' pregnant existence' is no longer something to be held 'painfully' as an inward vision', it is what she sees when she looks out of the window. This change must have come about because the nature of the way she sees those human figures in the landscape has changed. She is one of them, cannot separate herself off from the rest of humanity, is herself a figure in the vision. She is an aspect of the 'manifold waking' of men to labour and endurance'. In thevision, where all inessentials are stripped away, Dorothea's house is called a 'luxurious shelter'; the grand dwelling put in a more human perspective suddenly, when its function as shelter is revealed; human life made clearer and more directly open. The 'irredeemable grief' that Dorothea has suffered is changed into an attempt to 'save' Rosamond; grief at loss is transformed into an effort to save. It is in this landscape of essentials that language of life and death is used, for them the smallest human action is revealed in its true value.

And the value of human acts, equally, is not visible in general, because ordinarily life is operated by human beings at the level where they are wadded with stupidity rather than in states of clear eyed and painful clarity. Dorothea is left with the feeling that 'there was something better which she might have done, if only she had been better and known better'. Better makes better makes better: but really the movement is most like Caleb Garth's: good, better, best. But because there is no coherent body of moral or religious knowledge in society it would have been very difficult for Dorothea to have 'known better'; how could she learn? Only by living through her life and transforming the pain of experience into knowledge to be diffused among her immediate people.

> Many who knew her, thought it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another, and be only known in a certain circle as a wife and mother. But no one stated exactly what else that was in her power she ought rather to have done.
>
> MM, Finale, p.793

I don't think this passage is a reference to the difficulty of finding suitable work for women; nor is it against marriage as a vocation. On the contrary: it seems to conclude that about the only satisfactory vocation for a 'substantive and rare creature' like Dorothea is marriage. This is not a point of sexual equality so much as of human quality, not of particular individual life but of general social order. For what work might any creature like Dorothea have done? Not even her strongest admirer would offer a positive suggestion, because there is no vocation, recognised in the social world that would make full use of such power. Indeed, no one seems to really know what 'her power' was, for it is not a quality recognised in our world, well wadded as it is. Our social world can hardly recognise good when it sees it; for an incoherent world makes 'good' itself look incoherent. And perhaps good has no distinct vocation.

> Certainly those determining acts of her life were not ideally beautiful. They were the mixed result of young and noble impulse struggling amidst the conditions of an imperfect social state, in which great feelings will often take the aspect of error, and great faith the aspect of illusion.
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> MM, Finale, p.794

The 'imperfect social state' to which George Eliot here refers, seems to act something like a distorting mirror, through it, 'young and noble impulse' produces acts at best 'not ideally beautiful', 'great feelings' look like 'error', 'great faith' merely 'illusion'. Presumably, the mirror works both ways; what the imperfect state regards as great feeling or faith may in fact be petty or small or illusion. But how are we to know? The imperfection of the world affects the inner being of the person. And so it is that the great and tragic must be very different in the modern world; the deeds or lives of a St. Theresa or an Antigone cannot be repeated, for 'the medium in which their ardent deeds took shape is forever gone'. That medium is the social order, which is yet affected by Dorothea's and other foundresses of nothing. There is nothing to found, and nowhere to found it; instead of energy being channelled into some monumental historic achievement it seems what we must hope for is to make diffuse that spirit of greatness, that which was in Dorothea 'substantive and rare'. 'The effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive'. How can we, in the middle of it, measure the worth of that diffusion? Who are we to measure a life's worth and what can we measure it against? We have no scale on which to fit these acts; we have no tools to measure their effect. Because our ability to perceive human life in total is still coarse, we are not able to see . . .' the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts'; it is not that the acts are not great, the lives valuable, sending all to some glorious

end in themselves a glorious and tragic 'means', it is that we have such coarse notions, of history, of acts, that we cannot value life, because true worth is too difficult for us to decipher. Slowly, in generations, Dorothea and other obscure saints are changing the nature of human beings; reforming not merely 'conventual life'; a religious order; but the life of the world, our social order.

Chapter IV

DANIEL DERONDA AND THE FUTURE

1. The Subject of Daniel Deronda

There are enormous differences between Daniel Deronda and Middlemarch, but there is also a continuity between them. Daniel Deronda is, as it were, an act of faith in the doctrines of fellowship and community which had been developed in Middlemarch, and in this sense the later novel comes out of the earlier. But in Daniel Deronda these beliefs become world-shaping forces, and they set about creating the possibility of the 'social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge'[1] which we have seen Dorothea struggling without. Daniel Deronda is also an act of faith in George Eliot's own sense of religious necessity:

> I was happily independent in material things and felt no temptation to accommodate my writing to any standard except that of trying to do my best in what seemed to me most needful to be done, and I sum up with the writer of the Book of Maccabees - 'If I have done well, and as befitted the subject, it is what I desired, but if I have done ill, it is what I could attain unto'.[2]

The necessity she recognises here is given authority by her own recognition - 'what seemed to me most needful to be done' - yet this phrase 'most needful' seems to indicate some other external necessity which calls up the act of faith from her, a claim from without, shown in the form of need in the world. It is important to realise the nature and strength of this belief which caused George Eliot to work for two years, at the very height of her mature powers as a novelist, at a project which she believed would be met with 'resistance . . . repulsion . . . aversion'.[3] The significance

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1. Prelude, Middlemarch, p.7.

2. George Eliot, 'Letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe, 29 October 1876' Letters, VI, p.301.

3. ibid.

of this belief - 'most needful to be done' - is that it creates out of itself something other than itself: it creates the novel Daniel Deronda despite the writer's sense that the reading public would not like it, and would not want it. This kind of extra-social belief is at the very heart of the novel: it is the subject of Daniel Deronda.

I do not want to go into the critical heritage of the novel, which is the only means I have of explaining what its failures and flaws are (for I myself, as will become obvious, do not see them), but an obvious account of these failings is Henry James' 'Daniel Deronda, A Conversation'.[4] There are one or two central points which James makes about the novel which I want to take up in order to defend the novel against his charges.

Firstly, many misconceptions about the novel arise from a mistaken belief that it is 'about' the Jewish race; this is wrong. As I have already said, the novel is about belief, though because this is a novel dealing with and addressed to an essentially agnostic world, 'belief' is not easy to recognise when it comes, as it does, in an incarnate form, rather than (as we, along with our nineteenth century counterparts, tend to expect it) in an intellectual or (narrowly) spiritual form. I will have more to say of this later. For the moment it is enough to say that the Jewish race is at the centre of the book as a matter of historical necessity, but this also means that given changing conditions, their role might also be seen as purely arbitrary.[5]

As the letter to Harriet Beecher-Stowe indicates, the Jews are a means of breaking English insularity and prejudice, and their cause is not an end in itself.

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4. Henry James, 'Daniel Deronda, A Conversation' in Selected Literary Criticism, edited by Morris Shapira (Cambridge, 1981). Also the first six pages of 'Daniel Deronda and The Portrait of a Lady' in F. R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (Harmondsworth, 1967) give a thorough account of what both Leavis and James see as Daniel Deronda's failings as a novel.

5. In Doris Lessing's Shikasta, for example, changed historical and social conditions make it inevitable that the hero of the novel should be of mixed race origin: George Sherban is thus part Indian, part Celt. But the reasons for such a choice are the same as George Eliot's choice of the Jews - what is necessary and available at a particular time.

> Moreover, not only towards Jews, but towards all oriental peoples with whom we English come in contact, a spirit of arrogance and contemptuous dictatorialness is observable which has become a national disgrace to us. There is nothing I should care more to do, if it were possible, than to rouse the imagination of men and women to a vision of human claims in those races of their fellow men who most differ from them in customs and beliefs. But towards Hebrews we western people who have been reared in Christianity, have a peculiar debt and, whether we acknowledge it or not, a peculiar thoroughness of fellowship in religion and moral sentiment. Can anything be more disgusting than to hear people called 'educated' making small jokes about eating ham, and showing themselves empty of any real knowledge as to the relation of their own social and religious life to the history of the people they think themselves witty in insulting? They hardly know that Christ was a Jew. And I find men educated at Rugby supposing that Christ spoke Greek. To my feeling, this deadness to the history which has prepared half our world for us, this inability to find interest in any form of life that is not our own lies very close to the worst kind of irreligion. The best that can be said of it is, that it is a sign of the intellectual narrowness - in plain English the stupidity, which is still the average mark of our culture.[6]

The purpose behind the writing of Daniel Deronda is clear: 'to rouse the imagination of men and women to a vision of human claims'. We notice this word 'human' is not 'Jewish', although it remains true that 'towards Hebrews we western people who have been reared in Christianity, have a particular debt'. It is this debt which George Eliot believes ought to make us more aware of the extra-racial claims of other peoples; the claims of species. Such 'human claims' are thus connecting the Jewish element of the novel with its wider purpose, to show belief at work in contemporary society.

Yet the 'Jewish element' of the novel is the part which has been most consistently damned by critics from James onwards: both James and Leavis believed that the entire Jewish art of the novel, including most of Deronda himself, could be cut away to leave 'Gwendolen Harleth', a great

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6. George Eliot, 'Letter to Harriet Beecher-Stowe, 29 October 1876', Letters, VI, p.301.

psychological novel (and indeed, this is what Leavis claims James has done in The Portrait of A Lady). George Eliot herself protested against

> Readers who cut the book into scraps and talk of nothing in it but Gwendolen. I meant everything in the book to be related to everything else there. [7]

But for Henry James the novel was a mere series of fragments:

> I once read of a group of little uneven ponds resembling, from a bird's eye view, a looking glass which had fallen upon the floor and broken, and was lying in fragments. That is what Daniel Deronda would look like, on a bird's eye view. [8]

To see the novel as fragmented or split is, I think, to misunderstand its intention. But it is clear from James's criticism that he does understand the intention behind Daniel Deronda: he understands but he does not approve, as we shall see later.

This novel could not possibly be as finished and perfect as Middlemarch, for it is the beginning and not the end of a train of a thought which is itself a new thought, both for George Eliot and the novel more generally. And in working out this thought, which is also a feeling for George Eliot, art is pushed firmly into second place to life, because in this new and experimental area there are not yet rules or conventions with which to replace those of the realism of Middlemarch. Daniel Deronda's achievement and weakness both rest on its status as experiment.

> My writing is simply a set of experiments in life - an endeavour to see what our thought and emotion may be capable of - what stores of motive, actual or hinted as possible, give promise of a better after which we may strive - what gain from past revelations and discipline we must strive to keep hold of as something more sure than shifting theory. [9]

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7. George Eliot, 'Letter to Barbara Bodichon, 2 October 1876', Letters, VI, p.290.

8. Daniel Deronda. A Conversation, p.33.

9. George Eliot, 'Letter to Joseph Payne, 25 January 1876', Letters, VI, p.216.

We notice that George Eliot's experiment was not personal - it was not her own thought and emotion she was concerned with so much as that of the species, 'our thought and emotion'. But this is related to a specifically religious inheritance, the 'gain from past revelations and discipline'. The two together, human potential and human past are the reality on which this novel is based, and so the intention behind it is necessarily larger, 'to see what our thought and emotion may be capable of', and, also necessarily, tentative. James's belittlement of the 'spirit' of the work attempts to pre-empt any serious discussion of the spirit in which novels like this are written. This spirit demands a different kind of attention from us than that which we are wont to give to art. I am reminded of an excellent account of 'importance' in John Berger's novel A Painter of Our Time 'when a man stands in front of a painting and realizes that up to now he has forgotten something - that is what is important. Everything else is better called technique'.[10] I think James's criticisms are all as it were technical criticisms, forced on him by his real dislike of the serious endeavour he sensed in the novel. The real achievement of Daniel Deronda is that it reminds us of something we have forgotten.

James criticises the form of the novel, yet, at the same time he confesses he thinks it has no subject. That he could not see the one is a direct result of his not seeing the other. For the formal justification of the relation between the 'Daniel' and the 'Gwendolen' parts of the book is the relationship of influence and potential between these two characters. The letter to Payne shows that writing as an experiment in life is writing concerned with possibilities, not simply what plainly already is: 'what our thought and emotion may be capable of'. The language of potential

10. John Berger, A Painter of Our Time (London, 1976), p.105.

('may be capable of', 'stores of motive', 'hinted as possible', 'promise', 'a better after which we may strive'), is linked to the language of disciplined endeavour ('a set of experiments', 'may strive', 'discipline', 'must strive', 'something more sure than shifting theory'), to produce a humanly visible result, 'some human figure and individual experience'. The novel thus makes the future real by clothing potentiality in human figures: mainly Deronda and Gwendolen.

The potential George Eliot sensed in human beings, and which is the motivation for the novel, is the potential for 'community'. She had written in her notebook,

> Community of interest is the root of justice.
> Community of suffering, the root of pity
> Community of joy, the root of love. Enveloped in a common mist, we seem to walk in clearness ourselves, and behold only the mist that enshrouds others. [11]

As I said in chapter II, novelistic realism depends on 'community of interest', yet the very nature of our community (that we are all individuals) makes it impossible to realise true community; the common life we share in our physical bodies holds us apart. I said in chapter II that realistic novels assume one 'I' is very much like another and use this as a basis for representing reality. In Daniel Deronda, George Eliot is specifically applying herself to the problem of community, as if saying, if one 'I' is like another, why don't we see that more easily, more really. She is working against the twisted and fallen nature of this fact of life: that individuality makes us 'seem to walk in clearness ourselves' and prevents us seeing others, in fact, it makes them dead to us - the mist 'enshrouds'. We should recall how Bulstrode's past was dead to him, until the unbearably close physical proximity of Raffles brought it to life. In Daniel Deronda the most important relations depend upon perception of some sort of community, and the capacity for recognition is vital. This is a change from Middlemarch I think, perhaps a change in

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11. George Eliot, 'Leaves from a Notebook' in Essays of George Eliot, edited by Thomas Pinney (London, 1963), pp.437-51.

the basis of 'realism'. Daniel Deronda wishes that one 'I' might recognise another but believes that most commonly there is little recognition. Thus the opening of the novel powerfully stresses Daniel's capacity for recognition; this is vital both to his character, and to the novel generally.

> Was she beautiful or not beautiful? and what was the secret form or expression which gave her the dynamic quality to her glance? Was the good or evil genius dominant in those beams? Probably the evil; why else was the effect that of unrest rather than undisturbed charm? Why was the wish to look again felt as coercion and not as a longing in which the whole being consents?
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> DD, ch. 1, p.7 [12]

How oddly these questions and this language of intense morality ('good or evil') stands in relation to the luxury and decadence of the surroundings that are gradually revealed to us. 'Good' and 'evil' are not embedded in the syntax of this world (as they are in the Middlemarch of Caleb Garth) but are imposed from the outside by a character consciously not part of it. When we look at Shikasta we will see the same thing happening when Canopus uses words about the planet that its inhabitants can no longer remember or use. Daniel's consciousness marks him off from the drugged world he surveys.

> While every single player differed markedly from every other, there was a certain uniform negativeness of expression which had the effect of a mask - as if they had all eaten of some root that for the time compelled the brains of each to the same narrow monotony of action.
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> DD, ch. 1, p.9

It is this drugged, masked society that Deronda is sent to prophesy against. His question about Gwendolen, 'was she beautiful or not beautiful?' is in this setting a question not of aesthetics but of belief. Only Daniel,

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12. George Eliot, Daniel Deronda (London, 1978).

outside the corrupt world he watches, can even formulate the question. The novel Daniel Deronda performs exactly the same function with respect to reality for us, its readers, as Daniel does for the internal world of the novel. In this equation we are of course Gwendolen. I will say more about this later.

Paradoxically, Gwendolen responds to this detached part of Deronda. Such recognition sets up an idea of relationship which is not merely social but is based on intimation of something beyond the social; another reality which makes much of the existing human world seem false, 'dross'.

> Her eyes met Deronda's, and instead of averting them as she would have desired to do, she was unpleasantly conscious that they were arrested - how long? The darting sense that he was measuring her and looking down on her as an inferior, that he was of a different quality from the human dross around her, that he felt himself in a region outside and above her, and was examining her as a specimen of a lower order, roused a tingling resentment which stretched the moment with conflict.
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> DD, ch. 1, p.10

It is the sense that Deronda was of 'a different quality' that draws Gwendolen to him, despite the resentment she feels towards him for making her feel like a 'specimen of a lower order'. It is an indication of the very different nature of Daniel Deronda that such a phrase as 'human dross' can be used at all; it is impossible to imagine such harsh, judgemental words being used in Middlemarch. Yet it is precisely this kind of severe judgement which allows George Eliot to see through the social present, for the novel is set in the present unlike Middlemarch, and which calls up a character like Deronda.

The mutual recognition of connection is the relation which holds Deronda and Gwendolen, yet it is recognition of an odd sort of community - not so much a coming together as a recognition of a state of already being held together. For the lives of Gwendolen and Deronda really are quite separate yet it remains true that the common mist (common to us

all) does clear between them briefly. This recognition of community makes up another area of the novel's subject. When the mist clears, we are not so separate after all.

I want now to go on to look at Daniel Deronda himself as another way of finding out what the novel's subject is. Perhaps this is the time to return to the criticism of James, who writes of Daniel that he is 'hardly more than a shadow'.

> There are in Daniel Deronda the figures based upon observation and the figures based upon invention. This distinction, I know, is rather a rough one. There are no figures in any novel that are pure observation, and none that are pure invention. But either element may preponderate, and in those cases in which invention has preponderated, George Eliot seems to me to have achieved at the best but so many brilliant failures. [13]

> Deronda . . . is a very liberal creation. He is, I think, a failure - a brilliant failure: if he had been a success I should call him a splendid creation. The author meant to do things very handsomely for him; she meant apparently to make a faultless human being. [14]

Daniel has two problems to contend with: he is meant to be an ideal character, virtually a faultless human being - 'an endeavour to see what our thought and emotion may be capable of' - and he is meant to be a teacher to other, lesser, creatures, including us, and not merely Gwendolen Harleth. He suffers a problem inherent in visionary realism, the problem of dressing the vision in human reality, of making the ideal incarnate yet still recognisably ideal. This is a great problem of great art.

Answering this problem the visionary novel brings forth its hero, Deronda (in Lawrence, Birkin; in Lessing, Sherban). But this character seems bound by the very laws that call him into being to be unlike us,

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13. Daniel Deronda. A Conversation, p.36.

14. ibid., p.38.

we don't like him and we don't understand him. For example, readers of Paradise Lost have often found Milton's artistic vision at odds with his moral purpose in the portrayal of Satan. This type of criticism goes like this: despite Milton's efforts to 'justify the ways of God to men' the reader finds it easier to sympathise with Satan because he is more human, he is like us but greater, failing hugely where mankind is merely miserable; Satan is our tragic hero. And God, justified or not by Milton's argument, remains at a huge distance from us; we cannot understand him as we can Satan.

The representation of the ideal - the non-human - in literature must always be an artistic problem. When we solve it we shall no longer need art; the split between our reality and our potential will be closed and we will no longer be human. The bounty gained in the enterprise of pushing back the limits of human being lies not in narrowly artistic success but in the nature of the effort; in striving towards the impossible we enlarge the area of the possible.

We have, and of course this is exactly what James would not do, to create different critical standards for a novel like Daniel Deronda. The value of a character like Daniel lies in the fact that he is an incarnation of what a great writer believed 'our thought and emotion may be capable of'. If such human beings commonly existed there would be no need for writers to envisage them. Perhaps this was too difficult an idea for some of George Eliot's contemporaries, who if they lacked, as she herself did, an external order coming from religion, found it impossible to give up the idea of aesthetic realism as the highest and truest art. Henry James lacked George Eliot's faith in human life, and when in Daniel Deronda she gave life priority over art, he could see no order, a fragmented and formless mess. But this is his lack, not George Eliot's. Why does he find, for example, the fate of Deronda mere 'improvisation',

which does not 'succeed'? It isn't simply that Deronda seems improbable but also that in terms of the novel's own workings, he seems to James unjustified. I shall give an example of what James might have meant: the meeting of Daniel and Mordecai on the bridge. Mordecai, longing for a spiritual successor, seeing Deronda, suddenly 'knows' it is him.

> Mordecai lifted his cap and waved it - feeling in that moment that his inward prophecy was fulfilled. Obstacles, incongruities, all melted into the sense of completion with which his soul was flooded by this outward satisfaction of his longing.
>
> DD, ch. 40, p.430

In this scene there are two levels of reality - the 'inward' reality that Mordecai recognises as being satisfied by the meeting, and the 'outward' reality that is the meeting. For Mordecai, the 'outward' reality merely confirms the 'inward' fulfilment. His belief is stronger than any external reality, as we already know from the account of his life up to now: he has lived according to what he believed. But as George Eliot knew all too well, belief cannot be proved in the world, at least not beforehand. For belief and proof exist in different levels of reality, as William James here explains:

> [Rationalism] will fail to convince or convert you all the same, if your dumb intuitions are opposed to its conclusions. If you have intuitions at all, they come from a deeper level of your nature than the loquacious level which rationalism inhabits . . . The truth is that in the metaphysical and religious sphere articulate reasons are cogent for us only when our inarticulate feelings of reality have been impressed in favor of the same conclusion . . . The unreasoned and immediate assurance is the deep thing in us, the reasoned argument is but a surface exhibition. Instinct leads, intelligence does but follow. [15]

The problem of relating the convictions of this deeper level - which James is at pains to stress is 'inarticulate' - to the level of external

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15. William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p.88.

reality, is both a problem of belief in real life and the problem George Eliot faces here. Both Mordecai and eventually Daniel are aware of what William James calls 'the deep thing in us,' . . . 'the unreasoned and immediate assurance', but only time and the unfolding of the future can make this 'assurance' real to those whose own 'dumb intuitions are opposed' to the idea of such deep instinctive belief. George Eliot's problem then was this: she had to make her reader believe in something which had no recognised part in secular realism, belief, even while the only grounds for her own belief were embedded in the very reality, ordinary everyday life, which normally, apparently denied such instinctive belief. She knew what an immense and thankless task she had taken on.

> The fervour of sympathy with which we contemplate a grandiose martyrdom is feeble compared with the enthusiasm that keeps unslacked where there is no danger, no challenge - nothing but impartial mid-day falling on commonplace, perhaps half-repulsive objects which are really the beloved ideas made flesh. Here, undoubtedly lies the chief poetic energy: - in the force of imagination that pierces or exalts the solid fact, instead of floating among cloud pictures. To glory in a prophetic vision of knowledge covering the earth, is an easier exercise of believing imagination than to see its beginning in newspaper placards.
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> <u>DD</u>, ch. 33, p.332

This 'force of imagination' which can 'pierce' or 'exalt' real life, 'the solid fact', is not strongly cultivated by secular realist fiction. The very nature of 'realism' seems to be grounded in the 'solid fact' and to deny any possibility, let alone necessity, of piercing such fact. This is why George Eliot is right to point out what a ridiculously unreal role vision has normally been given - 'floating among cloud pictures' - and why she stresses that such a concept of vision prevents us having to imagine more real and more difficult vision, which is, she says, the task of 'the chief poetic energy'. It is exactly because she wants the

novel to become a vehicle for that 'poetic energy' that she wants to invest ordinary experience with more significance than we normally ascribe to it.

Connected to this is the prominent place given in the novel to premonition, second sight, foreboding and intimation. These are the bases for belief from which the leap is made to a vision strong enough, real enough upon which to base action. They stand for 'the deep thing in us', which is really no more than a recognition of the thing we can't normally see. Such things are a reduction of what in a religious society would be the word of God. Because we have no God, they seem the more frightening because they come, as it were, out of nowhere. Premonition, intimation thus raise more dread in Gwendolen than in Deronda, in exact proportion as she has less religious understanding.[16]

In the meeting on the bridge, Daniel and Mordecai each make their own separate leap to vision. When Mordecai says 'I have been waiting for you these five years', it is true that he has been waiting for five years, but until this moment he has not known that it was Daniel he was waiting for - his 'you' is an act of faith quite as large as the one it calls up in Daniel, who responds seriously to Mordecai's serious claim, even though he does not yet understand it.

> It will be a satisfaction to me if I can be of any real use to you,' he answered very earnestly.
>
> DD, ch. 40, p.432

But what is the basis from which the visionary leap is made? Deronda bows to a private recognition that Mordecai stands for something, just as to Mirah, Deronda himself stands for the presence of God; she always retains her 'original, visionary impression that Deronda was a divinely sent messenger' (DD, p.406). Such visionary impressions are in this novel given

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16. See the discussion of Gwendolen's sense of dread, in section two of this chapter.

precedence over the reality of the social world, where, for example, Mordecai would appear to have an insane exaggeration of his own value . Even Deronda at first suspects that Mordecai's interest in him 'was founded on an illusion' (DD, p.431), and his response is hardly more than polite; it is not founded in a belief in Mordecai, simply in a desire not to offend or hurt. But this changes as Mordecai speaks, so that Deronda 'felt himself strangely wrought upon'. Now this is perhaps the point at which Henry James might raise his objections; that it is not convincing that Deronda should begin to believe in Mordecai, that his fate seems 'improvisation' undemanded by the novel or the internal necessity of the character. Similarly, one might say Mordecai's 'you' is improvisation and this would be a charge levelled by an agnostic. George Eliot is aware of such a charge, I think, and so lest we are suspicious of 'vision' and 'second sight' we are given this account of ordinary and real virtues in Deronda which lead him to acceptance of difference in Mordecai. Like Dorothea, Deronda has the benefit of long habit to prepare him for this testing moment.

> The first-prompted suspicion that Mordecai might be liable to hallucinations of thought - might have become a monomaniac on some subject which had given too severe a strain to his diseased organism - gave way to a more submissive expectancy. His nature was too large, too ready to conceive regions beyond his own experience, to rest at once in the easy explanation, 'madness', whenever a consciousness showed some fulness of conviction where his own was blank. It accorded with his habitual disposition that he should meet rather than resist any claim on him in the shape of another's need; and this claim brought with it a sense of solemnity which seemed a radiation from Mordecai, as utterly nullifying his outward poverty and lifting him into authority as if he had been that preternatural guide guide seen in the universal legend, who suddenly drops his mean disguise and stands a manifest Power.
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> DD, ch. 40, p.432

We have seen Deronda's tendency to 'meet rather than resist any claim on him in the shape of another's need': we have seen this is his relation with Hugo Mallinger, in his relation with Hans Meyrick, in his saving of

Mirah, in his attitude towards Gwendolen. James's belief that Deronda has no inner necessity is false, but it comes from Deronda's being so absolutely conditioned by this necessity for faith. But we cannot see this necessity externally, and therefore if we can not lend ourselves to belief then we must deny it - as William James says 'in the metaphysical and religious sphere articulate reasons are cogent for us only when our inarticulate feelings of reality have been impressed in favor of the same conclusion'. For example when Daniel first sees Mordecai his need and imagination pierce the 'solid fact' of Mordecai's appearance and render him visible as a man of God, the figure of the 'prophet' transposed to the London of the 1860s.

> It was an unaccountable conjunction - the presence among these common, prosperous, shopkeeping types of a man who, in an emaciated threadbare condition, imposed a certain awe on Deronda, and an embarrassment at not meeting his expectations.
>
> DD, ch. 34, p.349

But how are we to know, Henry James might say, - if it wasn't for George Eliot pulling the verbal strings all the time - that this is so that despite his 'threadbare' condition Mordecai imposes 'awe'? How are we to believe in the 'sense of solemnity which seemed a radiation from Mordecai . . . lifting his into authority'? The problem isn't whether we believe in authority as such, but in its naturalistic conception within the novel. This is what James found lacking: George Eliot's idealisations made incarnate remained, to him, unconvincing. It is as I have illustrated with the example of Paradise Lost an impossibly difficult problem. The proof in the novel - as it is for unbelievers in life - comes later, is always after the fact. The authority of Mordecai and of Deronda is evidenced not so much in their initial meetings but in the future of

possibility that they create in the novel. The end as it were justifies the story. Mordecai's authority as prophet is represented in the novel not by anything George Eliot says to us, but by the form of the novel itself: by the future which is created for Daniel. Similarly, Mordecai's faith in Daniel is justified not by anything that has happened to Daniel before he meets Mordecai, but by how he behaves after they have met. The internal necessity of the characters is created by the demands made for belief upon them.

This strange relation, whereby the future justifies past belief shapes the entire novel, both in the large formal sense I have described and also in terms of the characters' own consciousness. Daniel needs Mordecai as a representative of 'past revelations and discipline' just as Mordecai needs Deronda as the 'promise of a better', and Daniel begins to understand this:

> It was conceivable that as Mordecai needed and believed that he had found an active replenishment of himself, so Deronda might receive from Mordecai's mind the complete ideal shape of that personal duty and citizenship which lay in his own thought like sculptured fragments certifying some beauty yearned after but not traceable by divination.
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> DD, ch. 41, p.446

I said earlier that the novel performs the same function for its readers as Daniel does for Gwendolen. There are perhaps 'fragments' in us as there are in Daniel; certainly without some consciousness of such fragments the novel cannot work - just as Mordecai cannot work for the Cohens, who see him simply as mad. And as the Cohens could not see Mordecai's real function as prophet, so Henry James saw this novel as like 'a looking glass which had fallen upon the floor and broken, and was lying in fragments'. The Cohens could not see the real greatness of Mordecai, though it was there, and Henry James could not see the real greatness of Daniel Deronda, but that too is there. The fragments we need to read

(and to complete) Daniel Deronda are the fragments of need and desire for the religious life which were George Eliot. In us as in Daniel, such fragments have potential for becoming 'complete', and perhaps the novel aspires to complete us, even as it demands that we complete it, as it reminds us of the thing we have forgotten. Deronda, with his tendency 'to meet rather than resist claims' would be the novel's ideal reader. If we refuse to lend ourselves in this way, we will become Gwendolen, denying what vague and fragmented memory we do have, and we will find ourselves, in a true modern condition, subject to terrible fits of nameless and inexplicable dread.

2. 'The Spoiled Child'

Gwendolen is a modern in this sense: she has no access to any religious belief or metaphysic which could connect her own innermost feelings with the exterior universe. Her only real belief is in herself, for though she only has access to the exterior and social world, she feels herself separate and above this. For such a social creature she is peculiarly lonely, and subject to 'fits of spiritual dread' and to - unrecognised - premonition. Such is her hysterical reaction to the secret picture of the dead man 'from which an obscure figure seemed to be fleeing with outstretched arms' (DD, p.24).

Unlike Dorothea, there is no inward desire for intensity or greatness in Gwendolen (from the first she is quite satisfied with herself), and she is not 'one of the exceptional persons who have a parching thirst for a perfection undemanded by their neighbours (DD p.47). But the meeting with Deronda does bring her into contact with a neighbour who has considerably higher standards than she does; and Gwendolen does begin to want Deronda's approval. Without such a meeting Gwendolen would never realise her own

human potential, for although there is something in her which recognises life beyond her own desires, this is something of which she wishes to remain as unaware as possible; the sense of life beyond self frightens her.

> What she unwillingly recognised, and would have been glad for others to be unaware of, was that liability of hers to fits of spiritual dread, though this fountain of awe within her had not found its way into connection with religion taught her or with any human relations . . . Solitude in any wide scene impressed her with an undefined feeling of immeasurable existence aloof from her, in the midst of which she was helplessly incapable of asserting herself. The little astronomy taught her at school used sometimes to set her imagination at work in a way that made her tremble: but always when someone joined her she recovered her indifference to the vastness in which she seemed an exile; she found again her usual world in which her will was of some avail, and the religious nomenclature belonging to this world was no more identified for her with those uneasy impressions of awe than her uncles surplices seen out of use at the rectory. With human ears and eyes about her, she had always recovered her confidence, and felt the possibility of winning empire.
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> DD, ch. 6, p.57

Gwendolen suffers from a lack of religious education, though she has been taught religion. Because she has no idea of what her real relation to it is, the universe becomes for her 'a vastness in which she seemed an exile'. In human company she is safe because she can exert her will and is confident of 'the possibility of winning empire'; this is not community with others so much as power over them. But she has no 'empire' over the stars or any wide expanse of nature. The 'fountain of awe' within her indicates the potential for a religious impulse, but becomes 'dread' because the sense of 'immeasurable existence aloof from her' leaves her feeling 'helplessly incapable of exerting herself'. As assertion and will are her only means of contact with anything beyond her self the possibility of being without them renders her incapable and helpless. Her fits of dread are perhaps due to the fact that deprived of these means she is literally stuck in her self.

Middlemarch has shown that survival is dependent on the personal life and the ability to extend sympathy beyond the limits of one's own body. For Gwendolen, being 'spoiled' means that, with no social frame to support her she is thrown upon her own inadequate inner resources. Being spoiled means that she has no morality because she has no community of feeling, she lacks the very qualities she needs for life: sympathy, kindness, fellowship, love.

> Gwendolen was perfectly aware that her cousin was in love with her; but she had no idea that the matter was of any consequence, having never had the slightest visitation of painful love herself . . . Besides, she objected, with a sort of physical repulsion, to being directly made love to. With all her imaginative delight in being adored, there was a certain fierceness of maidenhood in her.
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> DD, ch. 7, p.63

The words 'in love' have no meaning in reality for Gwendolen, for though she can take 'imaginative delight in being adored' she cannot imagine what it is to be the adorer. She cannot bear to be 'directly made love to' because this would demand some response from her, a response she is not prepared to make. In this sense, and only in this sense, Gwendolen is uncommitted to the world. Gwendolen seems quite happy to be in the mist: her sense of self is strong, her need of others slight. The 'fierceness of maidenhood' is not the protection of virtue so much as the witholding of the whole of her emotional self - a matter of will. It is a delusion of self-preservation that prevents Gwendolen from loving. Yet this delusion occasionally breaks down, allowing real self knowledge to come to the surface in a typically modern form: despair. After rebuking Rex, Gwendolen is found by her mother sobbing.

> Sitting down by her with circling arms, she pressed her cheek against Gwendolen's head, and then tried to draw it upward. Gwendolen gave way, and letting her head rest against her mother, cried out sobbingly, 'Oh mamma, what can become of my life? there is nothing worth living for!'

'Why, dear?' said Mrs. Davilow. Usually she herself had been rebuked by her daughter for involuntary signs of despair.

'I shall never love anybody. I can't love people. I hate them.'

'The time will come, dear, the time will come.'

Gwendolen was more and more convulsed with sobbing; but putting her arms around her mother's neck with an almost painful clinging, she said brokenly, 'I can't bear anyone to be very near me but you.'

Then the mother began to sob, for this spoiled child had never shown so much dependence on her before: and so they clung to each other.

DD, ch. 7, p.74

It is typical of Gwendolen that she has to be found by her mother; that she wouldn't seek out Mrs. Davilow's sympathy herself. But her cry, 'There is nothing worth living for!' is an unusual admission for her to make, a cry, as it were from outside the self contained boundaries in which she normally lives. It is a recognition of an aspect of life about which Gwendolen does not usually like to think, a part of life ordered not by will, but by willingness to make life fulfil its potential through human relationship. Her despair is a sign that she understands the magnitude of her spoiling; her question, 'What can become of my life?' is painfully real to her. She understands that relation to other human beings is vital - would make life 'worth living', and this seems to be denied her. To be able to understand this, and yet unable to change it, would itself be killing knowledge to live with. So though Gwendolen fears being rushed by being unable to love, yet she has to bury her fears and her knowledge again in order that she may live on. But such a thing cannot be permanently hidden. This deep unhappiness comes to the surface again at the dinner following the archery tournament. Talking of Miss Arrowpoint, Gwendolen says, 'I wish I were like her,'

'Why? Are you getting discontented with yourself, Gwen?'
'No, but I am discontented with things. She seems contented.'

> 'I am sure you ought to be satisfied today. You must have enjoyed the shooting. I saw you did.'
> 'Oh, that is over now, and I don't know what will come next,' said Gwendolen, stretching herself with a sort of moan, and throwing up her arms.
>
> *DD*, ch. 11, p.102.

Gwendolen treats as a physical reality what she actually apprehends as metaphorical. Seeing Miss Arrowpoint is 'contented' she wishes she were like her. But she doesn't see this as meaning she is discontented with herself, but only with 'things' exterior to herself. As her mother points out, 'things' in that sense leave nothing wanting, and Gwendolen 'ought to be satisfied today'. Miss Arrowpoint's contentment is based on her inner resources, but Gwendolen cannot quite know this; she only sees the end product. She can only afford to see the end product, for to see anything else would be to admit her own failure to recognise or give any significance to her own inner life.

The senses in which Gwendolen Harleth is 'spoiled' are many, yet, by making Deronda wonder 'was she beautiful or not beautiful?' George Eliot removes the possibility of easy or dismissive judgement of the girl. Though she is spoiled she is not irredeemably lost. In chapter four, looking back to the difficulty of seeing Gwendolen's 'true' nature, George Eliot refers to the 'iridescence of her character - the play of various, nay, contrary tendencies'.

> For Macbeth's rhetoric about the impossibility of being many opposite things in the same moment referred to the clumsy necessities of action and not to the subtler possibilities of feeling. We cannot speak a loyal word and be meanly silent, we cannot kill and not kill in the same moment; but a moment is room wide enough for the loyal and mean desire, for the outlash of a murderous thought and the sharp backward stroke of repentence.
>
> *DD*, ch. 4, p.38

Whatever course of action we choose is definite, and such definitions of ourselves are constantly forced upon us: Gwendolen tries to escape her decision about marrying Grandcourt by running off to the continent,

but she has to come back and act in the end, despite contradictory feelings. Such 'clumsy necessities' affect everyone, but they are further related to everyone in that they are informed by the 'coarse emotion' of our lives. Gwendolen is unusual and lucky in that in the area of 'subtler possibilities of feeling' she is subject to 'various - nay, contrary tendencies'. The fact of her being 'spoiled' makes her capable of the 'outlash of a murderous thought' but her subjection to swift reversals of feeling saves her from being completely spoiled, and makes her capable of the 'sharp backward stroke of repentence'. Thus, the possibility of education is open to her. Her moral education begins with the exchanged glance with Deronda. He makes a claim on her attention by seeming to 'look down on her as an inferior'. This is what sets Gwendolen thinking that there might be a superior way of being, and that Deronda might be for her the key to it.

The marriage of Gwendolen and Deronda might have provided a 'realist' solution to the formal problem of the novel apparently being split into two halves. But for George Eliot marriage is often not the 'happy ending' of a story so much as the real beginning of moral education, as it brings bonds and claims of the most serious sort on the individual self. Thus it is Gwendolen's proposed marriage to Grandcourt that begins to introduce practical claims on Gwendolen's latent sense of community, in the form of Mrs. Glasher, who appears to her as both claim and terrifying premonition. Hearing her story, Gwendolen

> felt a sort of terror: it was as if some ghastly vision had come to her in a dream and said, 'I am a woman's life'.
>
> DD, ch. 14, p.134

As in Bulstrode's experience with Raffles, the unimaginable here takes on human form in order to affect human feeling. Yet even with this terrible vision before her Gwendolen cannot refuse Grandcourt's offer of 'the dream

of a life'. In the social world there is no moral code that Gwendolen can discover which would advise her to take any account of Mrs. Glasher: 'the verdict of "anybody" seemed to be that she had no reason to concern herself greatly on behalf of Mrs. Glasher and her children' (DD, p.260). Yet she does feel 'repugnance, dread, scruples' against marrying this man, and she has to overcome these feelings in order to go through with the marriage. Self-preservation, in the shape of release from the necessity to work for a living, and to live in Sawyers Cottage, is in another sense self-destruction: terror is no longer supernatural but something connected to her own being.

> She was appalled by the idea that she was going to do what she had once started away from with repugnance. It was new to her that a question of right and wrong in her conduct should rouse her terror; she had known no compunction that atoning caresses and presents could not lay to rest. But here had come a moment when something like a new consciousness was awakened. She seemed on the edge of adopting, deliberately, as a notion for all the rest of her life, what she had rashly said in her bitterness, when her discovery had driven her away to Leubronn: - that it did not signify what she did; she had only to amuse herself as best as she could. That lawlessness, that casting away of all care for justification, suddenly frightened her; it came to her with the shadowy array of possible calamity behind it - calamity which had ceased to be a mere name for her; and all the infiltrated influences of disregarded religious teaching, as well as the deeper impressions of something awful and inexorable enveloping her, seemed to concentrate themselves in the vague conception of an avenging power.
>
> DD, ch. 28, p.269

Terror has now become a part of Gwendolen's inner life, instead of something forced on her by the universe. She has again to acknowledge that her life does not seem to be worth living, and again for the same reason, because she can acknowledge no community of feeling with others. She has to think that it does not 'signify' what she does, in order to be able to continue to do it, and yet her new consciousness insists that it does signify. Lawlessness, lack of significance, living without justification, being wrong, all suddenly frighten Gwendolen as she becomes

increasingly aware of what her lack of religion and morality really means to her. But there is no reason why this new consciousness should hold sway over the old; habit and the morality of the world are against it. When morning comes, her night-fears do not frighten her enough to make her revoke the decision to marry Grandcourt. She has heard Mrs. Glasher's claims but she has not fully recognised them as claims on herself. Acting against her own instincts and fears, against Mrs. Glasher's claims and her own sense of Mrs. Glasher as a premonition, she thus betrays a terrible truth about herself: she does not believe in her self. Her 'real' belief - the belief she acts on - is that 'it did not signify what she did'. The phrase has two meanings: because she does not take life seriously it does not matter what she does in it, and more terribly, when she tries to take it seriously it is so awful that nothing she does makes any difference. So comes her self-destructive decision. Self-destructive because, despite Mrs. Glasher and her children and the repugnance they stir in Gwendolen's mind, she is drawn to the marriage by the lack of real significance she can attach to her own life. Content will come, she thinks, with the accumulation of things. But at a deeper level the marriage is perhaps prompted by her recognition in Grandcourt, of the thing she fears most in herself. But in Grandcourt aloofness and contempt don't seem to be things to cause fear in the self; he has turned them into a comfortable way of life.

By the time of her marriage the iridescence which had initially seemed to mark Gwendolen out from others has become a real disability to her. She is constantly moved by opposing feelings and cannot act whole-heartedly either for good or evil. Gwendolen simply hasn't the moral apparatus to give value to the feelings she has. What Daniel Deronda's presence does is to put conscience inside her - his exterior support eventually becomes inner strength. The primary relation between them is one of simple

recognition, but Gwendolen, though she can sense this, cannot yet allow herself to know it. Although she is affected by him because she sees something in him that matches something in herself, the feelings she keeps hiding, she simply thinks that

> His face had that disturbing kind of form and expression which threatened to affect opinion - as if one's standards were somehow wrong.
>
> DD, ch. 29, p.286

But it is only because she knows that her own standards are 'somehow wrong' that she can see Deronda's face in this light. As we have seen, initially this recognition produces resentment in Gwendolen who doesn't like to be thought wrong, but after her marriage, this becomes a desire to be thought right, and she has

> an uneasy longing to be judged by Deronda with unmixed admiration - a longing which had its seed in her first resentment at his critical glance.
>
> DD, ch. 29, p.286

Gwendolen is not morally practised or secure enough to judge herself, and besides she wants his 'unmixed admiration' - so she makes him her judge and conscience, rather than be it herself. It isn't as if Deronda miraculously transforms Gwendolen, as the language here wants to point out. The first critical glance was but a 'seed', which has lain in the darkness of Gwendolen's interior self and which will only become conscience by the cultivation of habit and action. Yet it remains true that the potential for goodness in Gwendolen is drawn out by her apprehension of greatness in another.

Deronda himself recognises that something has changed since that first meeting. He finds Gwendolen 'more decidedly attractive' (the good rather than the evil genius now being predominant?) and George Eliot comments,

> The struggle of a mind attending a conscious error had awakened something like a new soul, which had better, but also worse, possibilities than her former poise of crude self-confidence: among the forces she had come to dread was something within her that troubled satisfaction.
>
> DD, ch. 29, p.287

'Dread' is now occasioned by moral fear rather than by external forces. The thing that Gwendolen had seen and recognised in Deronda's glance has now become part of herself, 'something within her that troubled satisfaction'. There is more to Gwendolen now, and the possibilities of life are magnified for the better, 'but also worse'. There is more at stake, for she is now putting forward her self - her most prized and valuable possession.

Yet, her confusion and moral sickness will not take account of that 'something'. Her vices, vanity and self indulgence have the upper hand, and put her in a position where she must gamble with her very life by marrying Grandcourt. On the day of her wedding we see that

> she had wrought herself up to much the same condition as that in which she stood at the gambling table when Deronda was looking at her, and she began to lose. There was enjoyment in it: whatever uneasiness a growing conscience had created, was disregarded as an ailment might have been, amidst the gratification of that ambitious vanity and desire for luxury within her which it would take a great deal of slow poisoning to kill.
>
> DD, ch. 31, p.307

Her fears are merely sensations to be

> surmounted and thrust down with a sort of exulting defiance as she felt herself standing at the game of life with many eyes upon her, daring everything to win much - or if to lose, still with éclat and a sense of importance.
>
> DD, ch. 31, p.307

Gwendolen had the first dose of 'slow poisoning' in her meeting with Mrs. Glasher, and in the subsequent decision to marry Grandcourt despite her promise to Mrs. Glasher. Her inability to remain true to that promise

has begun to torment her, and conscience has already begun to dissolve her present happiness. The 'uneasiness' she consequently feels, must be ignored, thus recreating in a more terrible form the opening incident of the novel; she now forces herself to continue to gamble with her own life even though she knows she will lose.

The language George Eliot uses to describe Gwendolen on her wedding morning shows her view of such gambling as 'sickness'. Conscience is disregarded as an 'ailment' in order to gratify ambition and vanity and an urge to self destruction. But only sickness could make one disregard an ailment. Gwendolen's egotism, the motivating force of this degeneracy, is described as if it were a drug addiction, as the gambling at Leubronn was at the opening of the novel. The drug brings some temporary release from reality, 'an intoxication . . . returned upon her under the newly-fed strength of old fumes'. But nothing blots her real consciousness.

> She was walking amid illusions, and yet, too, there was an under consciousness in her that she was a little intoxicated.
>
> DD, ch. 31, p.308

Though it is only an 'under consciousness' it is under everything else in her, it is the very root of her self. And this reality will increasingly assert itself.

Superficially married for 'things' to make her more content, Gwendolen soon finds her appetite for them has 'sickened'. The growing conscience, like an ailment, cannot be ignored, and it is in direct contradiction with that self-destructive part of Gwendolen that married Grandcourt because he was like her. As the conscience grows, that sick part of her loses strength. Only Deronda holds interest for Gwendolen, for she knows he has her cure, and it is to him she turns for help.

> 'But you were right - I am selfish. I have never thought much of anyone's feelings, except my mother's. I have not been fond of people. But what can I do?'

> she went on more quickly. 'I must get up in the morning and do what everyone else does. It is all like a dance set beforehand. I seem to see all that can be - and I am sick and tired of it. And the world is all in confusion to me' - she made a gesture of disgust. 'You say I am ignorant. But what is the good of trying to know more, unless life were worth more?'
>
> 'This good,' said Deronda, promptly, with a touch of indignant severity, which he was inclined to encourage as his own safeguard; 'Life would be worth more to you: some real knowledge would give you an interest in the world beyond the small drama of personal desires. It is the curse of your life - forgive me - of so many lives, that all passion is spent in the narrow round, for want of ideas and sympathies to make a larger home for it. Is there any single occupation of mind that you care about with passionate delight, or even independent interest?' Deronda paused, but Gwendolen, looking startled and thrilled as by an electric shock, said nothing, and he went on more insistently - 'I take what you said of music for a small example - it answers for all larger things - you will not cultivate it for the sake of a private joy in it. What sort of earth or heaven would hold any spiritual wealth in it for souls pauperised by inaction? If one firmament has no stimulus for our attention and awe, I don't see how four would have it. We should stamp every possible world with the flatness of our own inanity - which is necessarily impious, without faith or fellowship. The refuge you are needing from personal trouble is the higher, the religious life, which holds an enthusiasm for something more than our own appetites and vanities. The few may find themselves in it simply by elevation of feeling; but for us who have to struggle for our wisdom, the higher life must be a region in which the affections are clad with knowledge.'
>
> DD, ch. 36, pp.393-94

'The few' might be people like Dorothea, but this novel is written as it were for the rest of the world. It is as if a Rosamond has been put at the centre of this new and more difficult novel, as a way of universalising what had been necessarily élite in Middlemarch.

Gwendolen's complaint that she is selfish because she is in the world - 'I must get up in the morning and do what everyone else does' - is both the whine of a spoiled child who doesn't want to be self-responsible, and the acknowledgement of a woman of the world. If, like Gwendolen, one has decided to accept the social world as reality, then it is true that life

can seem 'all like a dance set beforehand'. With such limited vision she must cry 'I seem to see all that can be'. But, as Deronda points out, it is partly from lack of knowledge of all there might be besides that social life that Gwendolen thinks she knows everything and so finds nothing worthwhile. It is this social life - not life itself - which is sickening. Knowing this, Deronda, like Birkin after him, has to get out in order to be healthy.

Gwendolen's question, 'what is the good of trying to know more, unless life were worth more?' is a question that makes this novel a novel of the future, for this is a modern question, rising from unbelief. Deronda's answer has the appearance of circularity; life would be worth more, he says, if you invested more in it. Deronda asks for an act of faith but before Gwendolen can make that she needs a basis for faith in his words. Clearly she does have a basis of belief for her own faithlessness, yet this belief seems almost petulant - later George Eliot refers to it as 'indolent rebellion of complaint' (DD, p.394). Deronda knows that this faith in a value for life is a necessary precondition to discovering value in it; when he asks 'is there any single occupation of mind that you care about with passionate delight, or even independent interest?', he is looking for a basis of belief, a love or longing in the soul, an 'enthusiasm for something more than our own appetites and vanities'. The only thing Gwendolen has that approaches this is her feeling for Deronda himself, or for what he represents to her. He is the only centre of enthusiasm she has. Yet even this enthusiasm is, naturally, somehow twisted and wrong in Gwendolen

> Without the aid of sacred ceremony or costume, her feelings had turned this man, only a few years older than herself, into a priest.
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> DD, ch. 35, p.375

This is a movement in the searching soul that we shall see again in The Sirian Experiments, where Sirius makes Canopus stand for knowledge as Gwendolen here does Deronda. Such investment is based partly on inward recognition of outwardly invisible authority, partly in not wanting to have responsibility for oneself. This authority is the basis of Gwendolen's faith in Deronda, but as in the initial recognition, it is really as much a part of herself as it is Deronda, though she can not yet know this. He may have cast the first disapproving glance at the gaming table, but it was she who recognised the authority in him to cast it. I said in Chapter I that recognition of authority makes authority partly our own; we recognise by matching something known within to something seen without. In Gwendolen's case recognition of the moral authority of Deronda also has repercussions on Deronda himself; her recognition is one of a long series of events that convince him that he has a mission on earth. But it is not his job to guide Gwendolen. Searching for some advice to offer her he replaces that moral authority directly back in herself as he tells her 'try to take hold of your sensibility and use it as if it were a faculty, like vision'. It is her own self, after all, that must be guide and priest. Gwendolen cannot believe that Deronda cannot do this for her, or that he has a larger vocation. Yet it is the fact that Deronda has something else in his life that gives him the capacity to help Gwendolen. Alone she couldn't imagine 'something else' or where or how to get it, and indeed, she can't become a Jew and join in the founding of Zion, so she is left without this 'something else' after all. Help finally has to come from within her own self.

> It was as far from Gwendolen's conception that Deronda's life could be determined by the historical destiny of the Jews, as that he could rise into the air on a brazen horse, and so vanish from her horizon in the form of a twinkling star.

> With all the sense of inferiority that had been forced upon her, it was inevitable that she should imagine a larger place for herself in his thoughts than she actually possessed.
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> DD, ch. 44, p.476

Like Dorothea, her lot is harder than she could have imagined. 'She did not imagine him otherwise than always within reach, her supreme need of him blinding her to the separateness of his life,' (DD, p.695), 'this passionate egoism of the imagination' (DD, p.695) prevents her realising that Deronda is not hers, that she must find something in herself to replace him. Though she finds herself 'the victim of his happiness' she parts from him as a pupil, not a victim. 'I will try,' she tells him, 'try to live'. After he has gone, she repeats as if it were a prayer or incantation, 'I am going to live . . . I shall live . . . I mean to live' (DD pp.704-705). She has now to stress 'I' and 'live' as if they had become quite unreal to her. This massive determination to live without her priest, her opium, in pain, is Gwendolen's achievement. She no longer has aspirations to anything more - or less - than real life itself. Deronda told her that she needed 'the higher, the religious life', but for Gwendolen that life was Daniel. In living with faith but without him, Gwendolen, like George Eliot herself, will live the religious life without a God. In a typically religious transformation the spoiled child has become a sort of saint.

3. 'The blasphemy of this time': Mordecai and choice

If Gwendolen Harleth, through her initial ignorance and despair, represents a typically modern life in the novel, Mordecai represents an influence from the past - 'past revelations and discipline' - which can be of use to such a modern life. For Mordecai's vision of 'a new Judea', (DD, p.468), is, nevertheless, a vision for the present of the future

for all it is rooted in his cultural, religious and racial heritage. The 'new Judea' is the form his particular partiality takes but it looks forward like Klesmer's 'fusion of races' to a larger partiality, a cosmopolitanism beyond nationality: modern humanism. And Mordecai's words point a way for all believers, whatever the particularities of belief: 'the strongest principle of growth lies in human choice'. Is there any relation here between a Darwinist principle of selection, natural choice, and the Judaic concept of chosenness? When Mordecai says 'the sons of Judah have to choose that God may again choose them' it is a resurrection of the ancient Hebrew tradition of prophecy which calls for a new Covenant, a choice made by the people and God reciprocally. For God can only choose his people if they choose him first. At the same time, George Eliot must have been aware of the 'development' argument implicit in Mordecai's thought. She herself had owned that she believed a conscious development of new religion necessary.

How well the old and new theories fit together is not, I think, an accident. For the same motive lies behind the creation of both concepts of choice.

Dan Jacobson, in The Story of the Stories, discusses in his chapter 'The Choice' the implications of feeling 'chosen'; the fear of being rejected as implicit in a choice and this fear, he goes on, perhaps prompting the formation of the Covenant; 'in lashing themselves down within the covenant, and all its accompanying laws, they hoped to lash down Yahweh too'.

> What is more predictable than a contract or code of law? Laws are codified precisely so that people can know where they stand; they are firm, settled, 'objective', public: they are there to be referred to; predictability is of their essence. That is what distinguishes them from the ever-fluctuating whims of rulers - in effect, the only other form of government known to human societies. And could any people have feared this ruler's whim more than

> the Israelites, who having been its beneficiaries could only be the sufferers should it be reversed? Because he has been arbitrary - partial, or unjust, it might be said - in choosing one people above all others, every effort had to be made to ensure that henceforth his rule would be strictly 'according to the book'.
>
> All this - if I am right - seems to illustrate wonderfully the dynamic interchange which constantly takes place within us between desire, fantasy, and moral impulse; it is striking evidence of how our loftiest moral impulses can spring from that within ourselves which is most greedily self-preserving - or to put it even more strongly, how these impulses *have* to spring in part from such sources if they are to have any strength at all; if they are to find true nourishment in our innermost natures.[17]

The Israelites 'chose' a God that 'chose them'; the favour implicit in choice - which doesn't seem to have any reason; why should they have been chosen among the nations? - has its counter, the fear of rejection. Thus is born the Law, 'so that people can know where they stand'. But this law is not only what distinguishes the Israelites from other people, ruled by the 'whim of rulers'; it gives them a decided advantage. Jacobson goes on to argue that the fact that 'they did literally believe the Assyrians and Babylonians were nothing more than Yahweh's instruments for the chastisement of Israel' is the 'very source and heart' of the Israelites 'poetic and moral vision' as we find it in the Old Testament. A powerfully held belief is a means of creating order out of experience, recreating experience, as we would have it. The Israelites were the first people to have a history; and out of that history they created a future.

> They had the imaginative audacity to mean everything they said; they embraced *à outrance* the historical facts as they perceived them; hence the unparalleled power of their poetry. The ruthlessness and consistency with which the prophets extended the myth of God's choice, his gift to his chosen people, and his anger at them for their disobedience and immorality, together with the amazing promises for the future they managed to wring out of this story, enabled it to generate new religions, new moral codes, and new types or models of human behaviour.[18]

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17. Dan Jacobson, *The Story of the Stories: the chosen people and its God* (London, 1982), pp.67-68.

18. *ibid.* p.126.

The will to survive in the people created the belief in Yahweh; the will to survive made him a God of promise, of the future, not simply of the present. He is also a God of Judgement; the two seem to go together as they do in Daniel Deronda, particularly in Daniel's relation to Gwendolen. What Jacobson calls this 'imaginative audacity' of acting on belief has saved Israel for though the Kingdom did collapse, the Israelite story survived. Indeed Israel itself survives through its Law, and through its literature. The specific details may be wrong, but the principle of survival through belief, through vision, remains as valid and useful today as it was then. George Eliot, through Mordecai, reminds us of our own power to shape the human future.

> Shall man, whose soul is set in the royalty of discernment and resolve, deny his rank and say, I am an onlooker, ask no choice or purpose of me? That is the blasphemy of this time.
>
> DD, ch. 42, p.468

Here humanism drawn from Feuerbach,[19] and religion drawn from the Old Testament are pulled together by language of 'development'. First we have the subject of the thought, the basis of it all; man. And in case we do not think too highly of that creature, we are given a rich Old Testament setting in 'soul' and 'royalty' and 'rank': all meant to put 'man' in a context of the Highest. Then to make contemporary sense of this now apparently fragmented and useless thought, scientific terms are introduced. Are we to be 'objective' observers of ourselves merely 'onlookers'? Do we refuse a 'choice or purpose'? This refusal to accept responsibility for what we are , says George Eliot, triumphantly returning religious terminology to a world of unbelief, 'is the blasphemy of our time'. When we think of Gwendolen's acknowledgement of reality 'I must get up in the morning and do what everyone else does', we can see the necessity of having a character like Deronda in the 'Gwendolen Harleth' novel: he restores a possibility of choice.

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19. The influence of Feuerbach on George Eliot's thinking is of course well documented. See in particular Bernard J. Paris, Experiments in Life (Detroit, 1965), and U. C. Knoepflmacher, Religious Humanism

Now Jacobson attributes the Israelite creation of a 'choosing' God to the springing of moral impulse from 'that within ourselves which is most greedily self-preserving'. Similarly, I would argue, that George Eliot's morality springs from the most greedily self-preserving instincts: 'chosenness' and 'development theory' amount to much the same thing: a thought that tries to ensure survival; as gills might if our situation became watery. Morality is a part of the given nature of our beings; we make it suit ourselves. This does not make it merely a fashion or mode, changing according to the mores of society; there are unchanging and eternal laws; but we do not know them. What happens is that we change our moral consciousness to fit with the needs of survival at any particular time. That changeability is the law that remains constant. The limits of morality are determined by the limits of the imagination. Fighting for racial survival, the Israelites could only extend their imagination to the concept of nationhood, of race. Because the Israelites could recognise nationhood in others they were forced - often reluctantly - to recognise a fellowship between themselves and other peoples, despite the fact that God had chosen them and set them apart. Jacobson argues that this recognition took the form of the Laws of Reciprocity;

> They are moral . . . they are a precipitate of profound conflicts of desire and anxiety on the part of the writers. They are born out of a conviction - often a reluctant or angered conviction - of an ineluctable similarity of sentiment between all men; of their common vulnerability to misfortune, and of the likelihood that they will feel their misfortunes in an identical way. The iron laws of reciprocity and reversibility have their origin not in the nature of things, but in the moral and emotional misgivings of the man who wishes his group to prosper above all others.[20]

Paradoxically, by seeing themselves as set apart, the Israelites were forced to recognise their relation to the rest of the world. For Mordecai, operating in different historical circumstances, yet still fired by a

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and the Victorian Novel (Princeton, N.J., 1965).

20. ibid., p.159.

belief in choice, it is in seeing the Jews as part of the world that the future of the race lies.

> The divine principle of our race is action, choice, resolved memory. Let us contradict the blasphemy, and help to will our own better future and the better future of the world - not renounce our higher gift and say, 'Let us be as if we were not among the populations;' but choose our full heritage, claim the brotherhood of our nation, and carry it into a new brotherhood with the nations of the Gentiles. The vision is there; it will be fulfilled.
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> DD, ch. 42, p.468

Mordecai's original 'conception' is now wrought by the presence of Deronda into an 'impassioned conviction'. And it is his 'imaginative audacity', his absolute belief, that serves, as we have seen, to ensure that Deronda does respond to him. Old patterns of behaviour, ways of being, are now transformed by their infusion into contemporary society and thought. Instead of a morality giving birth to 'iron laws' we see kind-ness given a new meaning: the unwilling fellowship recognised implicitly by Old Testament reciprocity is restored in the new form of humanist sympathy: it was an idea that had been born with Jesus, who made all human beings members of one family, but it was an idea more acceptable in England only after scientific humanism had begun to break down the hierarchy of the Chain of Being. Once the common denominator of humanity had become commonplace, the idea of sympathy, of love not law, was bound to be on the way up. So Johnson's Dictionary lists this entry under the word SYMPATHY, taken from one of South's sermons,

> . . . There never was any heart truly great and generous, that was not also tender and compassionate: it is this noble quality that makes all men to be of one kind; for every man would be a distinct species to himself, were there no sympathy among individuals.

Reading this definition we remember Rosamond and Lydgate, who seemed separate species because they could not fully sympathise with each other. To feel sympathy is to feel kind; we are unable to be sympathetic only when we do not feel any real or imaginative likeness. Mordecai's vision is the sense of fellowship, of kindness which the Jews have preserved by keeping themselves apart, be now enlarged, multiplied, by making themselves be of one kind with the Gentiles, a 'new brotherhood' to go with the 'new covenant'.

Though Mordecai uses Spinoza in his argument as proof that Israel may again be chosen, he is, oddly enough, using Spinoza as if he were an enemy, when in many respects, they think the same thing.

> Will any say 'It cannot be?' Baruch Spinoza had not a faithful Jewish heart, though he had sucked the life of his intellect at the breasts of Jewish tradition. He laid bare his father's nakedness and said, 'They who scorn him have the higher wisdom.' Yet Baruch Spinoza confessed he saw not why Israel should not again be a chosen nation.
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> <u>DD</u>, ch. 42, p.467

But Spinoza seems not to think that chosenness is simply for the Israelite nation, and not a thing to be sought;

> Man's true happiness and blessedness lies solely in the enjoyment of good. Not feeling elated because such enjoyment is his alone and others are excluded from it; for he who thinks that his blessedness is increased by the fact that he is better off, or happier and more fortunate, than the rest of mankind, knows nothing of true happiness and blessedness, and the pleasure he derives from such thoughts, unless merely childish, arises only from spite or malice. [21]

It is not the choice, the chosenness that ought to bring happiness, for that is based on exclusion; no, it is the state of blessedness itself that ought to be valued. Now in a sense the joy the ancient Israelites had in

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21. Benedictus de Spinoza, <u>Tractatus Theologico-Politicus</u> (Oxford, 1958), edited by A. G. Werham, p.51.

their chosenness was, as Spinoza postulates, childish; it was the joy of a fearful, weak, young nation; without a land and so, as it were, orphaned on earth. Spinoza concedes that the Jews may 'if occasion offers, so changeable are human affairs, raise up their empire afresh', but he ends his chapter on 'The Vocation of the Hebrews', by insisting that such an empire would be one of 'dominion and physical advantages'; not of spirit or virtue.

> In conclusion, if anyone wishes to defend the view that the Jews were chosen by God forever, either because of the mark of circumcision or for some other reason, I shall not oppose him, as long as he admits that in so far as this election -whether temporary or everlasting - is peculiar to the Jews alone it is concerned only with their political organization and worldly property (since this alone can distinguish one people from another); and agrees that in respect of understanding and true virtue no people is distinguished from another, and, consequently, that in these respects no one people is chosen by God in preference to another.[22]

This is exactly what Mordecai wants, a sense of nationality with a physical root, rather than a speciality of virtue or understanding. For nationalism - like any other form of chosenness - was for George Eliot only a means, never an end in itself. In Mordecai, nationhood is only a means by which the 'new covenant' will be established amongst <u>all</u> men.

> 'I justify the choice as all other choice is justified,' said Mordecai. 'I cherish nothing for the Jewish nation, I seek nothing for them, but the good which promises good to all the nations.'
>
> <u>DD</u>, ch. 42, p.467

The choice which both Feuerbach and Spinoza ask humanity to take is the choice of consciousness of species. Based on past memories and the 'full vision of a better', morality in an age of species must be based on 'the good which promises good to all the nations'. This commitment to a wider sense of human good than the merely individual or national, is the choice this novel asks us to make.

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22. <u>ibid</u>., p.65.

But, reading Daniel Deronda now, a hundred or so years into its future, we have to admit that these grand ideas don't seem to have made much difference; the fact is that we cannot obey the command of love on any large scale, for as individuals we are still trapped in separate bodies, greedy, seeking dominion; our bodies forcing apart whatever the very best parts of our thought and spirit tack together.

But this is exactly why in this work with such a huge conception at its centre, George Eliot has continually had to remind herself and us that the place where real sentimental evolution is conducted is in our immediate and personal life. We can hardly see the effects, so small are they, indeed the two parts, the large and magnificent movement of meaning and hope, the small and senseless human lives, hardly seem to hold together at all, yet Mordecai is described as having:

> the chief elements of greatness: a mind consciously, energetically moving with the larger march of human destinies, but not the less full of conscience and tender heart for the footsteps that tread near and need a leaning place; capable of conceiving and choosing a life's task with far-off issues, yet capable of the unapplauded heroism which turns off the road of achievement at the call of the nearer duty whose effect lies within the beatings of the hearts that are close to us, as the hunger of the unfledged bird to the breast of its parent.
>
> DD, ch. 43, p.474

A mind conscious but also full of conscience. In this matter Matthew Arnold's distinction between Hebraism and Hellenism comes to mind. In a way Arnold substituted culture for religion as George Eliot did sympathy. The end products of their thought look very different, but the effort to place man in a scale which could be matched by the evolutionary time scale is the same magnificent achievement of both. 'The governing idea of Hellenism is spontaneity of consciousness;' writes Arnold, 'that of Hebraism, strictness of conscience', and he gives an account of world history as a see-sawing between these two tendencies of being, 'from Plato

to St. Paul' which makes one ask

> whether man is indeed a gentle and simple being, showing the traces of a noble and divine nature; or an unhappy chained creature, labouring with groanings that cannot be uttered to free himself from the body of this death.[23]

Hellenism was unsound, he concludes, 'for the world could not live by it'. He goes on, echoing Spinoza, in his emphasis on <u>ends</u> not <u>exclusivity</u>;

> Absolutely to call it unsound, however, is to fall into the common error of its Hebraising enemies; but it was unsound at that particular moment of man's development, it was premature. The indispensable basis of conduct and self-control, the platform upon which alone the perfection aimed at by Greece can come into bloom, was not to be reached by our race so easily; centuries of probation and discipline were needed to bring us to it. Therefore the bright promise of Hellenism faded, and Hebraism ruled the world. Then was seen that astonishing spectacle so well marked by the often quoted words of the prophet Zechariah, when men of all languages and nations took hold of the skirt of him that was a Jew saying:- 'We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you'.[24]

Consciousness, it seems, depends on conscience, freedom on rules. But is it not that the scope, the province of morality becomes larger the larger we are? In George Eliot, consciousness always comes first, and I think this is so in life; it is not possible to have conscience about something, without already holding that something to be real and true; as Gwendolen's world prevents her having conscience by limiting her consciousness. But Matthew Arnold is talking about something more than awareness; the Hellenistic consciousness he refers to is remarkably similar to that ascribed by George Eliot to Deronda; it is large, free-ranging, spontaneous, world-embracing. Though we can conceive of this - and this is Arnold's point, I think - we cannot naturally live this way.

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23. Matthew Arnold, <u>Culture and Anarchy</u>, edited by J. Dover Wilson (Cambridge, 1971), chapter 4, p.136.

24. <u>ibid</u>., p.136

We are tied to the flesh which limits and corrupts consciousness even as we live. This kind of consciousness, living in living human beings, free from the tyranny of greed, is George Eliot's vision. Like Arnold, she believes 'probation and discipline' are needed to achieve such freedom. Thus it is that from desire can spring conscience.

Hebraism was a necessity for European man; duty, obedience, habit, fear. Without them we could not perhaps even have dreamed of a consciousness ranging beyond these limits. Matthew Arnold's belief was that in the form of Culture, Hellenism might again raise Empire in human beings; perhaps we were now ready, perhaps we had been disciplined and trained enough. George Eliot seemed to think that we were just beginning. Still, in Mordecai's vision, she too postulates the idea of revival; men of all nations, under Mordecai's 'new covenant' would again take hold of 'the skirt of a Jew saying:- 'We will go with you . . .'. Human needs having changed, this time the Jews' 'God' would be not a set of laws, but a wide sympathy. Consciousness necessary to conceive of such a large task, conscience in order to carry it out; it seems George Eliot does believe that in turning away from 'achievement' at 'the call of the nearer duty', forsaking Man for men, greatness is, finally achieved. Daniel, taking over from Mordecai the heritage of the past must alter its emphasis.

This is stressed in the very form of the novel itself; the apparent putting into two halves, the difference between the stories of Gwendolen and Daniel. It's important to remember how heavily George Eliot stressed that these parts made a whole, that 'everything in the book is related to everything else there'. This is largely Daniel's story; the novel takes his name. If it weren't a novel but a piece of history it is unlikely that Gwendolen would appear at all. It is difficult to believe that Gwendolen has much importance, when we compare her with the founding

of a new world state. A point George Eliot is very ready to concede;

> Could there be a slenderer, more insignificant thread in human history than this consciousness of a girl, busy with her small inferences of the way in which she could make her life pleasant? - in a time, too, when ideas were with fresh vigour making armies of themselves, and the universal kinship was declaring itself fiercely: when women on the other side of the world would not mourn for the husbands and sons who died bravely in a common cause, and men stinted of bread on our side of the world heard of that willing loss and were patient: a time when the soul of man was waking to pulses which had for centuries been beating in him unheard, until their full sum made a new life of terror or of joy.
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> DD, ch. 11, p.109

In the novel, Daniel Deronda represents this background of world change, universal kinship, causes, and 'the soul of man'; these are the pulses to which he awakes. But this vast panorama of human life is only a larger view of small lives, the only difference between Man and men is the perspective we hold in relation to each. This grand, international soul stirring, says George Eliot, is as much a part of Gwendolen's life as it is of those distant and marvellous 'women on the other side of the world'. It is on the ordinary that the extraordinary rests.

> What in the midst of that mighty drama are girls and their blind visions? They are the Yea or Nay of that good for which men are enduring and fighting. In these delicate vessels is borne onward through the ages the treasure of human affections.
>
> DD, ch. 11, p.109

The grand causes 'for which men are enduring and fighting' may indeed be ideally beautiful in themselves; but their purpose is much the same as Gwendolen's 'small inferences'. The 'mighty drama' is dependent on its cast of thousands; the grand ideals, the 'delicate vessels', ordinary girls. The 'treasure of human affections' that such ordinary girls save for the species are in part, what men fight to save. And indeed Gwendolen herself must fight to preserve this - or create it in herself.

Because the novel is to a certain extent about this relation between the great and the insignificant, the ordinary and the extra-ordinary, its hero, unlike poor Gwendolen, does not seek the unusual for excitement, but rather recognises the extra-ordinary potential in ordinary life. This is one of the qualities of sentiment that fit him for his vocation as one of the leading actors in the 'mighty drama'. For

> How should all the apparatus of heaven and earth, from the farthest firmament to the tender bosom of the mother who nourishes us, make poetry for a mind that has no movements of awe and tenderness, no sense of fellowship which thrills from the near to the distant, and back again from the distant to the near?
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> DD, ch. 19, p.178

To make these connections, to discover the fellowship between the near and the distant is to find, as Deronda does, 'poetry and romance among the events of everyday life'. In making 'realism' carry the burden of philosophy, George Eliot used the novel to fulfil the function of poetry that her age could not write; here among the sordid facts of ordinary life, among pettiness and selfishness and failing, flailing human beings in life is its own value, not a theological theory tacked on above, not a philosophy thought out in an armchair: meaning depends on how much we believe in life. Magnificently, here, is the hope and the glory; making even 'poetry' a part of life, an attitude, a way of being that any of us might learn, thrilling 'from the near to the distant and back again from the distant to the near'. It is as in the Old Testament, where the function of poet and politician come together under the heading prophet.

The movement, from small to large, 'from the near to the distant' and back, the recognition that these movements of comprehension make a whole of experience and the thing experienced, is reflected by other characters than the three I have discussed. Catherine Arrowpoint, for example, acts out with Klesmer a scene that is at once utterly minor, and yet in the very strength of meaning they give it, is heroic. Klesmer

is about to leave Catherine after declaring his love for her, and the socially imposed impossibility of their ever marrying, commonplace of life, fiction, drama.

> ' . . . I shall go now and pack. I shall make my excuses to Mrs. Arrowpoint.' Klesmer rose as he ended, and walked quickly towards the door.
>
> 'You must take this heap of manuscript then,' said Catherine, suddenly making a desperate effort. She had risen to fetch the heap from another table. Klesmer came back and they had the length of the sheets between them.
>
> 'Why should I not marry the man who loves me, if I love him?' said Catherine. To her the effort was something like the leap of a woman from the deck into the lifeboat.
>
> 'It would be too hard - impossible - you could not carry it through. I am not worth what you would have to encounter. I will not accept the sacrifice. It would be thought a mèsalliance for you, and I should be liable to the worst accusations.'
>
> 'Is it the accusations you are afraid of? I am afraid of nothing but that we should miss the passing of our lives together.'
>
> DD, ch. 22, p.213

The language of this scene is not simply the language of commonplace life; indeed in the lives of Catherine and Klesmer the scene patently can't be commonplace or ordinary; it is a scene which changes their two lives completely. So much is at stake here; Catherine's effort to stop Klesmer leaving the room has to be 'desperate', her declaration of love of life-saving importance; if she doesn't leap, like 'a woman from the deck into a lifeboat', they will miss spending their lives together. Catherine acts heroically, and yet; isn't this just the sort of thing that happens everyday? It's not at all unusual.

The novel tries to teach us what Deronda tells Gwendolen explicitly; because of this strange relation between large and small; because our sensibilities are coarse and we find everyday tragedies hard to perceive; because we don't really ever know what is important, grand, worthwhile, we must not rely on our own choice on our intellect, merely, or feelings

which may equally be mistaken, we must be chosen. And to be chosen without a God - a chooser - is difficult. But George Eliot is not Godless: merely, she will not be limited by a name or a dogma. There is a mystery in living that she insists we must respect, but she will not give it a big name, for fear of reducing or distorting it. 'We must find our duties in what comes to us, not in what we imagine we might have been' (DD p.611), Deronda tells Gwendolen, and this easy, rather commonplace statement of belief immediately veers up and out, assuming enormous size and power of meaning for Gwendolen. She might have imagined a life for herself with Deronda, but her duty lies somewhere else, smaller and more difficult than that pleasant dream.

> When he had left her she sank on her knees, in hysterical crying. The distance between them was too great. She was a banished soul - beholding a possible life which she had sinned herself away from.
>
> She was found in this way, crushed on the floor. Such grief seemed natural in a poor lady whose husband had been drowned in her presence.
>
> DD, ch. 57, p.611

When we see Gwendolen, who has always been proud if she has been nothing else, reduced to this position, crushed on the floor (as we have already seen Dorothea Brooke), we are reminded that tragedy is more often known to us in the form of reduction - the tragedy of the usual - and our immunity to its pain is often the result of its frequency. Gwendolen's grief is of course for herself, not Grandcourt; she must live on in the world, a 'banished soul'. Duty is now in finding duty in what comes to her. But without the help of Daniel's extra-ordinary sensibility, Gwendolen's life appears impossible. Daniel has told her she needs 'the religious life' but without Christianity, where is the religious life to be found? Deronda has the new Judea to found, Gwendolen, it seems, has nothing. But in some ways, her life will be as great and as important as Deronda's, for she has perhaps a more difficult task; she must make

connection between the 'personal life' and the 'religious life', between the near and the distant. She is left squarely facing that problem which she could not face at the beginning of the novel; the question of the relation of her personal self to the wider world.

In rejecting the easy explanations of life she might have had in a Christian faith, George Eliot made human life more difficult. Hence the complexity of 'realistic' life in this novel. Her apparent Godlessness, as we have seen, is not reductive of life or religious meaning, for by bringing whatever it is we mean by 'God' closer to home, she has made real life more meaningful. But 'Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind/ cannot bear very much reality'.[25] This achievement won't be fully recognised until we can bear to know a great deal more about ourselves.

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25. T. S. Eliot, 'Four Quartets' in Collected Poems 1909-1962 (London, 1977), p.190.

PART THREE: CURES FOR DESPAIR

My argument about George Eliot was this: her vision was grounded in the recognition of truth by each individual, and her task as a visionary realist was not merely to hold such a vision, but also to locate an authoritative source for it. She found that authority in her sense of human fellowship, in our common life as humanity. Because this authority is less recognisable than, let us say, the authority of the Bible, it is more difficult for us to see George Eliot as religious writer than it is John Milton. I hope to have shown that despite dissimilarities, both writers have reformulated religious knowledge as 'new' insight into human life.

Part Three will put together Thomas Hardy and D. H. Lawrence as a question (Hardy) and answer (Lawrence) which seem to arise out of George Eliot's 'humanism'. Many of the issues I have discussed in relation to George Eliot - human individuation set against fellowship or species, the relation of the physical to the spiritual world, the question of size and proportion, the human individual and the universe, time - arise as _problems_ for Hardy, as if he surveys her vision and can only see the gaps and problems in it. But this doubt, this pessimism, is Hardy's own contribution to the recreation of faith, and many of the problems he gave voice to are solved by Lawrence, who seems in many respects to be Hardy's heir, graced with the vision Hardy longed for but could not achieve. To Hardy the old religious faith was _the_ religious faith, whether tenable or not. Lawrence was freed from this limitation: he did feel the problems Hardy knew, but he overcame them with the intensity of his own vision of reality, his gifted apprehension of the nature of life, which allowed him to realise a religious potential which moves far beyond the realm of George Eliot's humanism.

Chapter V

THE MELIORIST AS PESSIMIST

1. A World in Fragments

> And the whole body of the Man did seem
> Like one whom I had met with in a dream;
> Or like a man from some far region sent,
> To give me human strength, by apt admonishment.[1]

Wordsworth's 'Resolution and Independence' was listed by Hardy among his 'cures for despair'.[2] Looking at the poem we can see Hardy himself in it: a man raised in our sight beyond his own pain and difficulty seeming 'like a man from some far region sent' with an admonishing, strengthening message. In Hardy's novels, as in Wordsworth's vision of the leech-gatherer, the ordinary is transformed by its own enduring and realistic properties into something close to - though never explicitly - revelation. For Wordsworth the vision which at first seems liable to diminish the scope and meaning of human life actually enlarges and enriches; the old man is no mere sign of human poverty, but Man, rich in endurance and dignity. This transformation can only come about because of the 'dejection . . . fears and fancies . . . dim sadness and blind thoughts' which Wordsworth had earlier suffered, only come about because of the imagination of 'Solitude, pain of heart, distress, and poverty'. A similar movement from blind despair to resolution and independence along with a similar admonishing strengthening process, can be discovered in a reading of Hardy's novels.

Coming to Hardy from the humanism of George Eliot, his work can seem the very antithesis of faith. George Eliot's hard-worked-for harmony, discovered in 'the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of

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1. William Wordsworth, 'Resolution and Independence' in William Wordsworth. The Poems, vol. 1, p.551 ff.

2. F. E. Hardy, The Life of Thomas Hardy (London, 1972), p.58. Other cures are Mill's 'Individuality' and Carlyle's 'John Paul Richter'.

men to labour and endurance'[3] is immediately and painfully lost, and gradually replaced by an unbearable 'modern' consciousness finally epitomised by little Father Time who marks 'the beginnings of a universal wish not to live'.[4] Yet Thomas Hardy himself refused to accept the name 'pessimist', and aligned himself with George Eliot by choosing rather to call himself a meliorist.[5] His vision - not light but darkness visible - is a pessimistic one in itself, but it takes us through a necessary hell. The illumination he provides enlarges the context in which we see him, and this, in turn, alters the perspective by which we judge him. In Hardy's world, pessimism _is_ meliorism.

> We are a company of ignorant beings, feeling our way through mists and darkness, learning only by incessantly repeated blunders, obtaining a glimmering of truth by falling into every conceivable error, dimly discerning light enough for our daily needs, but hopelessly differing whenever we attempt to describe the ultimate origin or end of our paths.[6]

Hardy's friend and sometime editor, Leslie Stephen, here describes the hell that Hardy takes us into; a post-Darwinian, Godless and confused life, where there is only just enough light for 'our daily needs'. The darkness we live in obscures our 'ultimate origin' and 'end', and this darkness is what makes our differences hopeless. In the illumination of this chaos, Hardy has done us a service which can look merely depressing; he finds nothing that looks like a solution, no vision of order that can be sustained with integrity. But in knowing this chaos we are relieved

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3. _Middlemarch_, ch. 80, p.750.

4. _Jude the Obscure_, p.402.

5. _Life_, p.387. 'As a meliorist (not a pessimist as they say) I think better of the world.' Though here Hardy can not be confined to one simple view. Earlier he had noted 'A Pessimist's apology. Pessimism (or rather what is called such) is, in brief, playing the sure game. You cannot lose at it; you may gain. It is the only view of life in which you can never be disappointed.' _Life_, p. 311.

6. Leslie Stephen, _An Agnostic's Apology and other essays_ (London, 1893), pp.39-40.

of one area of our blinding ignorance: need always implicitly stated in Hardy's novels becomes explicit when we look at the novels as a whole. Hardy's pessimism is an expression of fragmentation and discord, a truth-telling whose end is our benefit. It is vision based in lack, in something missing, but it is not simply a cry of grief; it becomes the movement to something better than itself.

> The presence of pessimism in modern thought is the demand for the reconstruction of modern life. Its function is to set forth the manifold elements of which the modern world is composed, in all the isolation which individualistic principles have conferred upon them, and by a truthful statement of the consequent conflict in all its misery and hopelessness, to give utterance to the ultimate need of the age, the need of a principle which shall deliver these elements from the discord of their isolation, and bring them into a harmony of working which shall secure a triumphant issue. The world which pessimism describes to us is a world in fragments. Its evil is its fragmentary character. [7]

This account of the nature of nineteenth century pessimism, by T. B. Kilpatrick, seems to me also an account of Hardy's pessimism: a whole vision yet not an end unto itself, a vision of despair in reality necessary to faith. 'A world in fragments'; 'a world', by definition a whole, is 'in fragments'. This coming together, and clashing, of apparently opposed and irreconcilable elements, thoughts, or objects, marks the governing pattern of Hardy's novel-world.

> Owing to the accident of his being an architect's pupil in a country town of assizes and aldermen, which had advanced to railways and telegraphs and daily London papers; yet not living there, but walking in every day from a world of shepherds and ploughmen in a hamlet three miles off, where modern improvements were still regarded as wonders, he saw rustic and borough doings in a juxtaposition particularly close. [8]

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7. T. B. Kilpatrick, 'Pessimism and the Religious Consciousness' in Essays in Philosophical Criticism, edited by Seth and Haldane (London, 1883), pp.247-277.

8. Life, p.32.

Hardy, a provincial novelist, writes from a small corner not of England, but of the universe; he walks every day the three miles that divide worlds. In this extract from the Life, probably written by Hardy himself,[9] the 'juxtaposition' Hardy sees is apparently the result of an 'accident'. Progress does not 'progress' smoothly; transition is harsh. In town what are no more than the conveniences of modern life (railways, telegraphs and London papers) are regarded, three miles away, as 'wonders'. This kind of juxtaposition isn't simply related to industrialisation; for Hardy it is almost the principle of organisation in the universe. In his novels he characteristically brings together worlds, persons, feelings, ideas, and objects into uncomfortably close, antagonistic, opposition. Pain is almost always a product of such a closing together, of accidental conjunction. The thing that ought to be there, separating contraries, a universal order, is missing. What Leslie Stephen would have seen as 'light' - revelation of the 'ultimate origin or end of our paths' is missing. In the dark, Hardy sees himself, among other men, making up stories to account for this strange and terrifying state of affairs. Giving names to, or accounts of, things quells our awe of them. A telegraph is no 'wonder' to those who use it everyday, or understand its principles. But in a state of universal flux names and absolutes become difficult to use, as Hardy here notes.

> If it be possible to compress into a sentence all that a man learns between twenty and forty, it is that all things merge into one another - good into evil, generosity into justice, religion into politics, the year into the ages, the world into the universe.[10]

Yet Hardy is conscious of a basic separation - a split between human

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9. 'Florence Hardy's Life is one of the more curious literary deceptions of modern literary history since Hardy himself wrote, in the third person, all but the last two chapters.' Introduction to Appendix, The Personal Notebooks of Thomas Hardy, edited by R. H. Taylor (London, 1978), p.189.

10. Life, p.111.

consciousness and its surrounding universe.

> To persons standing alone on a hill during a clear midnight, the roll of the world eastward is almost a palpable movement. The sensation may be caused by the panoramic glide of the stars past earthly objects, which is perceptable in a few minutes of stillness, or by the better outlook upon space that a hill affords, or by the wind, or by the solitude, but whatever be its origin, the impression of riding along is vivid and abiding. The poetry of motion is a phrase much in use, and to enjoy the epic form of that gratification it is necessary to stand on a hill at a small hour of the night, and, having first expanded with a sense of difference from the mass of civilised mankind, who are all dreamwrapt and disregardful of such proceedings all at this time, long and quietly watch your stately progress through the stars. After such a nocturnal recconoitre it is hard to get back to earth, and to believe that the consciousness of such majestic speeding is derived from a tiny human frame.[11]

'All things merge into one another', including 'the world into the universe'. But Hardy makes an exception, excluding that percipient consciousness which notes the merging; we may view the universe as one, but we have to 'get back to earth'; that is to say, we have to acknowledge that for our earthly purposes, there is a division, a marking off. The heavens are up there, but I am here, on earth, watching. 'It is hard' to give up that sense of grand unity, but it is bound to be lost when we consider that 'the consciousness of such majestic speeding is derived from a tiny human frame'. The disproportion between what we see and what we are is chastening, and Hardy means it to be so; to him it is a source of irony that this 'tiny human frame' can be the percipient consciousness. What can it mean?

The question leaves Hardy balanced hopelessly between the chaotic, inhuman universe, and insignificant human lives. This clashing of the large and the small, inhuman and human, the chaos of a universe without any God who could justify man, fascinated Hardy. Within the chaos, he

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11. Thomas Hardy, Far From the Madding Crowd (London, 1981), pp.16-17.

he found human explanations increasingly unsatisfactory. In the above passage from Far From the Madding Crowd, Hardy's final twist is to make us wonder whether the 'tiny human frame' is not supporting something as large as the universe it perceives; 'the consciousness . . . is derived from a tiny human frame'. It seems behind the apparent meaninglessness of a speck of a man standing alone on a hillside watching stars whose magnitude he can hardly comprehend, is another meaning, concerned with that consciousness, a hidden human meaning. The 'epic' form owes as much to man as it does to the Universe; Man depends on men, Life on lives. The gap between these two things (the hugeness of the universe and the 'tiny human frame') seems so enormous that we can't believe the two are meant to lock together meaningfully; it is one of those uncomfortable juxtapositions, where something that ought to make it make sense is missing.

Hardy likes to pretend that he is not interested in metaphysical subjects; he likes to pretend he is just writing ordinary little provincial stories that aren't even real novels.[12] A metaphysical language - as we have seen George Eliot use in Middlemarch and Daniel Deronda - is often lacking in Hardy's novels. But it is not even explicitly lacking. It is not like a modernist, T. S. Eliot, for example, explicitly bemoaning the fact that the available language won't work for his metaphysical purposes. Hardy talks around the subject, the core, and uses various languages to avoid saying the thing that most perplexes and fascinates him. He will, for example, use the language of science - in much the same way that George Eliot would - as a thing known to the characters in the novels,

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12. When Hardy gave up novel writing he wrote in the Life, 'It was not as if he had been a writer of novels proper . . . stories of modern artificial life and manners showing a certain smartness of treatment. He had mostly aimed at keeping his narratives close to natural life . . .' (p.291).

and to the readers, yet not able to account for everyday life. Hardy brings the worlds of the telescope and the worlds of the microscope together, and he measures them in relation to some human figure in Wessex. What appears to be interest in 'provincial' life becomes a means of accounting for Life.

For example, in A Pair of Blue Eyes, Knight, a literary intellectual, falls from a cliff, and hanging by his fingertips on its edge finds himself face to face with that Law he has previously known only as a theory: Evolution.

> He reclined hand in hand with the world in its infancy. Not a blade, nor an insect, which spoke of the present, was between him and the past . . . By one of those familiar conjunctions with which the inanimate world baits the mind of man when he pauses in moments of suspense, opposite Knight's eyes was an embedded fossil, standing forth in low relief from the rock. It was a creature with eyes. The eyes, dead and turned to stone, were even now regarding him. It was one of the early crustaceans called Trilobites. Separated by millions of years in their lives, Knight and this underling seemed to have met in the place of their death. It was the single instance within reach of his vision of anything that had ever been alive and had had a body to save, as he himself had now.
>
> The creature represented but a low type of animal existence, for never in their vernal years had the plains indicated by those numberless slatey layers been traversed by an intelligence worthy of the name. Zoophytes, Mollusca, shellfish, were the highest developments of those ancient dates. The immense lapses of time each formation represented had known nothing of the dignity of man. They were grand times, but they were mean times too, and mean were their relics. He was to be with the small in his death.
>
> Knight was a fair geologist; and such is the supremacy of habit over occasion, as a pioneer of the thoughts of men, that at this dreadful juncture his mind found time to take in, by a momentary sweep, the varied scenes that had had their day between this creature's epoch and his own . . .
>
> Time closed up before him like a fan. He saw himself at one extremity of the years, face to face with the beginning and all the intermediary centuries simultaneously. Fierce men, clothed in the hides of beasts, and carrying, for defence and attack, huge clubs and pointed spears, rose

> from the rock. like the phantoms before the doomed Macbeth . . . Behind them stood an earlier band. No man was there. Huge elephantine forms, the mastodon, the hippopotamus, the tapir, antelopes of monstrous size, the megatherium, and the myledon - all, for the moment, in juxtaposition. Further back, and overlapped by these, were perched huge-billed birds and swinish creatures as large as horses. Still more shadowy were the sinister crocodilian outlines - alligators and other uncouth shapes, culminating in the colossal lizard, the iguanodon. Folded behind were dragon forms and clouds of flying reptiles: still underneath were fishy beings of lower development; and so on, till the lifetime scenes of the fossil confronting him were a present and modern condition of things. These images passed before Knight's inner eye in less than half a minute, and he was again considering the actual present. Was he to die?[13]

It is a cultural convention that men about to die see their lives flash before them in a split second; a convention rising from a sort of common-sense of the way time behaves under unusual conditions. Whether it is true or not does not matter, the convention says something about our cultural expectations of death, and its relation to life; it supposes some meaning or purpose in life, this sort of retrospect. Here, Knight sees not his life, but Life. In death he is not to be divided from all the other uncountable and varied creatures that have walked the earth. And his flashback too supposes some purpose, shape or meaning. His death is put in relation to all Life, and also, consequently, to all death. In one sense this last-minute vision takes away Knight's importance; 'at one extremity of the years, face to face with the beginning, and all the intermediate centuries' a single human life pales to insignificance. Knight's all-consuming question, which appears, breathless and unavoidable at the end of the piece quoted, appears ludicrous in face of all that we have seen - time closing up like a fan . . . men, beasts, dinosaurs . . . the whole of life. The vision that Knight has rises from his recognition

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13. <u>A Pair of Blue Eyes</u>, pp.240-242.

of the little creature he comes face to face with, a Trilobite. In a sense, the creature mirrors him; he looks at it and sees 'a creature with eyes'. And it looks at him, 'the eyes, dead and turned to stone, were even now regarding him'. And they mirror each other further, for each is a creature 'with a body to save'. And faced with death, Knight seems to be no more than Trilobites; they are both there on the cliff face, face to face, eye to eye. Any largeness or dignity that Knight has as the representative of Homo Sapiens is lost when Time is measured against him, 'the immense lapses of time each formation represented had known nothing of the dignity of man'. The placing of this recently evolved creature, man, against such a panoramic background immediately reduces our sense of 'dignity'. Knight, our representative in the panorama 'was to be with the small in his death', just another creature with a 'body to save'. This is quite at odds with a comparable vision at the end of Darwin's Origin of Species.

> When I view all beings not as special creations, but as the lineal descendants of some few beings which lived long before the first bed of the Silurian system was deposited, they seem to me to become ennobled . . .
> From the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely the production of the higher animals, directly follows. There is grandeur in this view of life . . . from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.[14]

Darwin and Knight have almost the same vision of life, but ironically, Knight's habits of thought and study - which might have made him feel life something more than another 'creature' - rebound upon him now as he faces death. Unlike Darwin, who seems to feel a certain elation im the face of the facts, Knight, forced to contemplate the passing of the giants of the past, feels only his own small stature in relation to them;

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14. Charles Darwin, On the Origin of Species By Means of Natural Selection (Harmondsworth, 1975), pp.458-460.

what use is his intellectual knowledge to him now? It is not simply time that shrinks, closing up like a fan, but also Knight's knowledge of time, of history, of geology, of evolution. A lifetime's accumulation of knowledge passes before his eyes in less than half a minute, apparently worthless. It is no use saying here, consolingly, that the percipient consciousness is derived from a 'tiny human frame', because the only question of any real import here must concern the salvation of the body; consciousness seems a weak, ineffectual, torturing thing. The question, 'was he to die', in the face of the certain death of the species evidenced by Trilobites, implies the death of Man himself as an inevitability, let alone the mere death of one individual. And this frightens the individual, Knight. Individuality is the one fact that Darwin leaves out of his happy vision.

> Judging from the past, we may safely infer that not not one living species will transmit its unaltered likeness to a distant futurity. And of the species now living very few will transmit progeny of any kind to a far-distant futurity; for the manner in which all organic beings are grouped shows the greater number of species of each genus, and all the species of many genera, have left no descendants, but have become utterly extinct.[15]

Despite this enlarged, cosmic-scale vision (which Knight at less dread moments also shares) the vital question is one of individuality, however small and laughable it seems in this evolutionary perspective; 'was he to die?' we must ask it, because finally, like Knight, our reality is in 'considering the actual present'. If the answer is 'yes' then it does not matter at all what Knight thinks or imagines about life for whatever size of thought his consciousness can sustain it cannot sustain him. If he is to die, his knowledge, his thought, is no more than 'imaginings . . . images'. In this instance Knight is saved. He will die however,

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15. ibid., pp.458-459.

later if not sooner; once we have recognised the importance of the question 'was he to die?' it doesn't really matter where in time the answer comes, it is bound to be, sometime, 'Yes'. In this context of certain death Knight's life is necessarily reappraised. If he is saved in this instance the question still needs an answer; if he is saved, what difference does it make? What is his life worth, in face of certain death? What is the value of his being 'a fair geologist', his knowing the big names in evolutionary history? To Knight as an individual his own consciousness is vital, but to the species it is entirely expendable. Did the death of that little Trilobite make any difference to anything? Apparently not. And Hardy wants us to ask, will the death of Knight make any difference to anything?

The evolutional spectrum that is revealed to Knight as he faces death is clearly meant to be a measure against which this man can see himself; probably it won't make any difference if Knight dies. Yet the incident also works in such a way as to ensure that this evolution-view is not enough, is not in itself meaningful. It is not that Hardy did not 'believe' in Evolution theory. On the contrary, he was an early admirer of Darwin,[16] and, when he wrote of the merging of one thing into another over the course of a life he added 'with this in view, the evolution of species seems a minute and obvious movement in the same movement'.[17] The evolutionary, geological account of life that Knight has here may be true, may be 'an obvious movement', but it is patently not enough to make his life - or rather, his death - meaningful. As an account, it will work, on a day to day basis, it provides 'light enough for our daily needs', but it would be wrong to confuse it with a true knowledge of 'the ultimate origin

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16. Life, p.153. 'During his stay in London he attended, on April 26, the funeral of Darwin in Westminster Abbey. As a young man he had been among the earliest acclaimers of The Origin of Species.'

17. Life, p.111.

or end of our paths'. It makes no difference to us, despite the Mastodon and the Megatherium, we are concerned with Knight. All that Big Knowledge doesn't affect us vitally; Knight is a small creature 'with a body to save' and we are small creatures, too. To us,

> There are certain questions which are made unimportant by their very magnitude. For example, the question whether we are moving in space this way or that; the existence of a God, etc.[18]

Hardy seems to believe that to creatures who know so little as ourselves, answers to these 'big' questions simply beg thousands more questions. Evolutionary theory shows up great gaps, prompts more questions. Darwin writes,

> As natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection. [19]

but for Hardy this is far too generalised, like saying, 'everything is grist to the evolutionary mill'. It prompts the question of why human beings should have consciousness and emotion in a world that seems set against them, and it's no use to Hardy to be told, as Darwin here seems to say, 'it's all for the good . . .'. No explanation, no answer to questions of great magnitude can be satisfactory unless they include what Hardy always sees at the centre of things; an insignificant little man who feels himself of prime importance. Hardy sees nothing which satisfies or resolves this central contradiction. When we watch the night sky 'it is hard' to return to an earthly perspective and know that we will be with the small in our deaths. Would it make any difference, in the following extract, to have an account of the cause of electrical storms? The point is really that Oak and Bathsheba are brought face to face with an incomprehensible universe.

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18. Life, p.282.

19. Origin of Species, p.459

> Heaven opened then, indeed. The flash was almost too novel for its inexpressibly dangerous nature to be at once realised, and they could only comprehend the magnificence of its beauty. It sprang from east, west, north, south, and was a perfect dance of death. The forms of skeletons appeared in the air, shaped with blue fire for bones - dancing, leaping, striding, racing around, and mingling altogether in unparalleled confusion. With these were intertwined undulating snakes of green, and behind these was a broad mass of lesser light. Simultaneously came from every part of the tumbling sky what may be called a shout, since no shout ever came near it, it was more of the nature of a shout than anything else earthly. In the meantime one of the grisly forms had alighted upon the point of Gabriel's rod, to run invisibly down it, down the chain, and into the earth. Gabriel was almost blinded, and he could feel Bathsheba's warm arm tremble in his hand - a sensation novel and thrilling enough; but love, life, everything human, seemed small and trifling in such close juxtaposition with an infuriated universe.[20]

Here is the same universe we witnessed at the beginning of this novel, now presented under a different aspect; no longer regally indifferent to its human observers, this universe is 'infuriated', 'inexpressibly dangerous'. It is a power so large that Bathsheba and Gabriel seem like children in relation to it, unable to understand its danger, they can 'only comprehend the magnificence of its beauty'. The scene is unearthly, supernatural; hard to associate with the 'rational' nineteenth century; the sky putting on theatricals and 'tumbling' with 'skeletons . . . with blue fires for bones' and 'undulating snakes of green'. Yet, this ghastly spectacle is attacking the 'tiny human frame'; the contest seems ludicrously uneven. When 'one of the grisly forms' strikes his rod, Gabriel is 'almost blinded' and he is certainly blinded to human meaning; 'love, life, everything human, seemed small and trifling in such close juxtaposition with an infuriated universe'.

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20. Far From the Madding Crowd, p.280.

Again it is the unbelievable 'juxtapositiom' of apparently disconnected things that causes horror, pain. Hardy is right to stress 'close juxtaposition' as the reason for the telescoping down of human meaning here. Were the pair safely indoors, watching the scene through a window, it would appear fantastic, magnificent, awesome, but it would not be 'inexpressibly dangerous' to their persons. As in Knight's case, it is the direct and close exposure to the vastness beyond it which threatens human life, and human meaning - it is the juxtaposition face to face that reduces human life. It is not so much a dwarfing of human stature, as that the two orders do not seem to be able to exist side by side. The possibility of death, indifference, so dreadfully close, wipes out life's importance. Once the inhuman forces are perceived, then rise questions of value; if the universe wiped out another single life, to whom would it matter? Is that not the principle of the thing anyhow? This is what the Trilobite fossil forces Knight to see, what the sky lets Gabriel and Bathsheba know: human life is too small, the universe too large; we cannot make sense of them both together.

However infuriated the universe becomes, Hardy does not want to present it as turned particularly against human beings. What frightens Hardy is not a sense that things are set against human beings but rather a sense of complete indifference; things change regardless of human lives or living. And as creatures with bodies to save, we necessarily pit ourselves against this constant flux. Bathsheba and Gabriel Oak are exposed to the storm in their effort to preserve foodstuffs, a basic necessity of human life. Facing the storm is only a part of their 'work' as human beings, their task of self-preservation. If they were to die at the hands of this infuriated universe it would be, oddly enough, in their attempt to preserve life. More terrifying, finally, is the understanding

that comes to Gabriel when he realises that it is not only Bathsheba's crop which is threatened. Human neglect of purpose seems infinitely more terrible than a disconnected universal fury because, I suppose, it is more understandable and therefore more easily connected to us. In Jude the Obscure, Sue's choice to return to Phillotson might then be a belief that it is better for her to believe in such a universal fury - perhaps because human life has become almost incomprehensible to her? Gabriel Oak is horrified to learn that Boldwood has 'overlooked' the covering of his ricks.

> 'Then not a tenth of your corn will come to measure, sir.'
> 'Possibly not.'
> 'Overlooked them,' repeated Gabriel slowly to himself. It is difficult to describe the intensely dramatic effect that announcement had upon Oak at such a moment. All the night he had been feeling that the neglect he was labouring to repair was abnormal and isolated - the only instance of the kind within the circuit of the county. Yet at this very time, within the same parish, a greater waste had been going on, uncomplained of and disregarded. [21]

To Oak, the storm is part of nature, a terrible thing, terrifying, but a part of life. But the neglect of the corn, first by Bathsheba and Troy, and then by Boldwood, shakes the foundation of Gabriel's life. He can stand the 'neglect' only if it is 'abnormal and isolated' because as a farmer, his life's work is to cultivate, protect, grow. Feeling the neglect to be unconfined, chaos ceases to be an outside factor, part of the inexplicable universe, and homes in on him, down through 'the county', to his own 'parish'. And the place this chaos emanates from is not the electric atmosphere, out there, beyond us, but the human heart. The universe itself is reduced in relation to the devastation that is caused here by human emotion. The storm finally serves human ends as a sort of backdrop for life, another marking by which human beings can measure themselves out.

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21. Far From the Madding Crowd, pp.286-287.

Similarly, in The Woodlanders landscape acts as a background for human life. Grace watches Fitzpiers ride away from her to Felice Charmond, across an earth that is vast, gorgeous, munificent, 'prodigally bountiful'. Initially, the produce of earth seems to make fun of Grace and her fruitless union. Even 'the poorest spots' are 'bowed with haws and blackberries'. But Grace knows that nature's appearance is deceptive, that 'some kernels were as unsound as her own situation'. She is not set at odds with nature, but simply another aspect of it, a victim of the nature of our earth; 'she wondered if there were one world in the universe where the fruit had no worm, and marriage no sorrow'.[22]

But the very size of the landscape acts as minimaliser to Grace's pain. Distance means she does not have to hear her husband's mutterings, he remains 'a silent spectacle' to her. Fitzpiers, while remaining the focus of our attention, is miniaturised, until he becomes a 'mere speck' which gradually disappears. But this does not make Fitzpiers unimportant; we are made to watch him disappear so slowly because he is the centre of the scene. Geography may appear to dominate the language here,

> Soon he rose out of the valley, and skirted a high plateau of the chalk formation on his right, which rested abruptly on the fruity district of deep loam, the character and herbage of the two formations being so distinct that the calcareous upland appeared but as a deposit of a few years' antiquity upon the level vale.[23]

as geology dominates in Knight's experience on the cliff. But in fact, this clear vision of the formation of the land - and it is a huge, encompassing vision - serves to bring home to us the importance of the 'microscopic' creature who moves across it. Balanced against him is the other 'tiny human frame', Grace.

These vast backgrounds of time and space have the effect of focusing our attention sharply upon the plight of the human individuals Hardy places

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22. Thomas Hardy, The Woodlanders (London, 1967), p.212.

23. ibid., p.212.

in the foreground. We see people anew, with clarity because they are unimpeded by smaller, smarter, social considerations. We see human beings performing essential functions, rather than contemporary acts merely; the language of science available to Hardy as a well-read layman help him create an authenticated mythology for 'natural' characters - he makes his self-consciously little stories have a certain authority by introducing scientific terms, yet the real authority for these stories is in the characters themselves. At the same time the continually shifting perspective between large and small makes us aware that there ought to be some relation somewhere between man and the universe; after all we are in it, it begins on the outside of our skin.

In some manner of speaking this is a kind of Science Fiction; Hardy is bringing together the public and private worlds without writing novels of social life. The language of scientific explanation acts as an authoritative public voice, while ensuring that we understand what this voice says in the way that is most useful to us as private individuals. Hardy's setting of these different languages together matches the way he sees things thrown haphazardly together, sometimes merely confusing, but also sometimes mutually enlightening. Walking the three miles between his shepherds and the London papers, feeling them to have no connection, except perhaps where they crashed in his own consciousness, Hardy learnt to see both worlds in a light particular to his own double-vision. He revises the Victorian sense of historical perspective and uses it in his novels: not then and now but now and now, seeing different time perspectives as contemporary. The juxtaposition not only creates oddness, nonsense, but also new sense.

The sense of something missing, the sense-making bit that ought to lie between the fragments making them into a sensible pattern - revelation,

light, order, God - is replaced by various ill-matched accounts. In putting these various accounts together, we get the story of the age, 'a world in fragments' alongside 'the need of a principle'. This story is told, with ever increasing urgency, in Thomas Hardy's novels.

2. The Link, the Bond

> He tried also to avoid being touched by his playmates. One lad, with more insight than the rest, discovered the fact: 'Hardy, how is it that you do not like us to touch you?' This peculiarity never left him, and to the end of his life he disliked even the most friendly hand being laid on his arm or his shoulder.[24]

Hardy's dislike of being touched is not a dislike of human contact so much as an oversensitivity of feeling; his responses so often are those of a creature too thin-skinned, a creature born uncomfortably into the wrong medium. The medium is flesh, matter: he feels as if he ought to live some other way. In 1889, Hardy noted that

> The human race is too extremely developed for its corporeal conditions, the nerves being evolved to an activity abnormal in such an environment. Even the higher animals are in excess in this respect. It may be questioned if nature, or what we call nature, so far back as when she crossed the line from invertebrates to vertebrates, did not exceed her mission. This planet does not supply the materials for happiness to higher existences. Other planets may, though one can hardly see how.[25]

The account of highly evolved 'nerves' here suggests Hardy's emphasis is on an extreme consciousness of sensation, not a not wanting to feel, but feeling too much. Where George Eliot finds humanity 'coarse', able

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24. *Life*, p.25.

25. *Life*, p.218. According to the OED, neurasthenia was first diagnosed as a condition in 1856; the dictionary goes on to quote Dowse in 1884, 'no class of people are more anxious about the future than neurasthenics'. Whether on medical evidence or not, Hardy was certainly quite aware of the link between highly sensitive nerves and concern for, if not fear of, the future.

only to feel tragedy in blood and gore, Hardy is too finely aware of it. On a planet based on matter, on flesh, this consciousness, 'spirit', is painful. It is another example of things coming wrongly together, a forced, unnatural conjunction. The philosopher, J. M. E. McTaggart, a personal friend of Hardy's, notes this strange conjunction thus:

> Spirit we know only in the form of separate individuals set in the midst of matter, only by means of which they are able to communicate with one another. No human spirit has ever, as far as we know, been open to observation for much more than a hundred years, and the lower animals only slightly exceed this limit. Matter forms one vast system, which history informs us has existed for thousands of years, while science extends the period to millions. [26]

McTaggart notes that this apparent unity of matter as compared to disunity of spirit places spirit in a weaker position, dependent on matter. This sense of dependency frightened Hardy. And at the same time as he could recognise such a dependency, he could also see that it was closely related to individualism. As McTaggart says 'spirit we know only in the form of separate individuals, set in the midst of matter'. That which we share, also divides us. That by which we communicate also holds us apart, makes us separate individuals. Partly, Hardy's sensitivity to touch must have come from the fact that being touched reminded him of this separateness, brought it home to him more clearly, because held in a physical sensation. The 'something missing' in the universe is also missing in human life; the link or bond that would connect all those disjointed bits of 'spirit' as flesh, or earth or other mediums bind matter. Hardy cannot raise himself to any metaphysical view of this problem. In a letter to Roden Noel, 3 April, 1892, he wrote:

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26. J. M. E. McTaggart, Some Dogmas of Religion (London, 1906), p.82.

> You may call the whole human race a single ego if you like; and in that view a man's consciousness may be said to pervade the world; but nothing is gained. Each is, to all knowledge, limited to his own frame. Or with Spinoza, and the late W. K. Clifford, you may call all matter mind-stuff (a very attractive idea this, to me) but you cannot find the link (at least I can't) of one form of consciousness with another.[27]

In George Eliot's novels this problem of the essential individuality of being is ameliorated by small acts of human kindness and recognition. Such acts make strong bonds between human beings, however small, provincial and insignificant they may appear in the public world. In Hardy's work, such instances of kind-ness are rare, and rarely work as they are intended. Kindness is broken up, or otherwise interfered with, by forces beyond the individual's control.[28] Social life, which might have been a means of preserving a sense of community is not available to Hardy - for much the same reason it had been rejected by George Eliot, (though in his early works - as in hers - it had been present, particularly in Under the Greenwood Tree and Adam Bede). Like George Eliot, Hardy can't believe in the continuing vitality of social life, of village community, when there is no longer a communal root for it (in the past this root would have been religion and/or shared work). Where social life plainly once offered a sense of real community it appears more often in Hardy's novels as a force which individuals have to contend with; exactly as Maggie Tulliver had to contend with social morality instead of gaining support from it on her return to St. Oggs. One senses in Hardy's early fiction, and in some of his short stories, and in the 'past' as it appears throughout

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27. Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, edited by Purdy and Millgate (Oxford, 1978), vol. I, p.262.

28. Such acts are usually either sexually or family motivated, and hence biologically conditioned - indicating, perhaps, Hardy's feeling that everything could be reduced to scientific explanation; and the human sense of special individuality would then be recognised as a mistake, a misconception.

his work, a regretful sense of social life now lost. This sense of loss, of an ideal disappointed, seems to outrage Hardy more than any sense of disappointment with nature. It is because he has some expectation of human social life that he does not have of nature and this creates constant pain in him. McTaggart writes,

> Enthusiasm for any worthy ideal, whether fulfilled or unfulfilled, is doubtless good. But unless the ideal is fulfilled, or we believe it is going to be fulfilled, it does not bring peace but a sword. The more we long for an ideal, the less in harmony shall we be with a universe which refuses to realise it.[29]

Hardy had no great expectations of the natural world: he expected it to be 'red in tooth and claw'; consequently, he is never disappointed by it, and this accounts for the sense we have that he is at peace with nature. It isn't that he admires nature, or wishes mankind would emulate it (on the contrary, he thinks that a bad idea[30]), simply, he acknowledges it as it is. With human life he feels something else. It is because he feels that society ought to improve on the natural order that he finds himself so much against it. He has an ideal, and it is constantly disappointed; consequently, he is unable to feel any harmony with 'a universe which refuses to realize' his ideal. A sense of things gone wrong depends upon an idea - however vague - of them going right. Hardy has an ideal of a social machinery more fitted to individual needs and to the nature of the universe. We can see this, for example, in Tess Durbeyfield, who feels herself at odds both with society and nature. Hardy believes that Tess is wrong to wish to conform to her idea of social decency.

> Walking among the sleeping birds in the hedges, watching the skipping rabbits on a moonlit warren, or standing under a pheasant laden bough, she looked upon herself as a figure of Guilt intruding into the

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29. Some Dogmas of Religion, p.9.

30. See Hardy's remark on Nietzsche, quoted here on p. 165.

> haunts of Innocence. But all the while she was making a distinction where there was no difference. Feeling herself in antagonism, she was quite in accord. She had been made to break an accepted social law, but no law known to the environment in which she fancied herself such an anomaly.[31]

Tess mistakenly assumed that the laws of society and nature are unified; if she is 'guilty' in relation to society, then she is even more guilty in relation to these 'innocent' creatures. But it is a false notion of social progress and the cultivation which has made Tess feel guilty, 'unnatural'. She has broken no natural law. Society does not really care about the girl's condition at all; she is condemned only in her own mind, society actually pays no attention to her at all. At least nature, being indifferent, is truly so. Tess 'might have seen that what had bowed her head so profoundly - the thought of the world's concern at her situation - was founded on an illusion' (p.110). She is trapped between two illusions; one that nature is run according to social laws, and the other that society cares for her. Between these two false assumptions of community, of kindness, Tess is rendered first immobile, and finally killed.

Character seems to be tricked by a misplaced sense of duty, of community, which is assumed, but is not real. It is a sense of duty that works in only one direction. In Desperate Remedies the heroine Cytherea Grey, is subjected by circumstance to a test similar to the one Maggie Tulliver undergoes when she runs away with Stephen Guest. Cytherea is called upon to balance her love for one man against her love for her brother, and her duty to society.

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31. Thomas Hardy, Tess of the D'Urbervilles (London, 1972), p.104.

> 'Yes, my duty to society,' she murmered, 'But, ah, Owen, it is difficult to adjust our outer and inner life with perfect honesty to all! Though it may be right to care more for the benefit of the many than for the indulgence of your own single self, when you consider that the many, and your duty to them, only exist to you through your own existence, what can be said? . . . But they will never never realise that it was my single opportunity of existence, as well as of doing my duty, which they are regarding; they will not feel that what to them was a thought, easily held in those two words of pity, 'Poor girl!' was a whole life to me; . . . that it was my world, what is to them their world . . . Nobody can enter into another's nature truly, that's what is so grievous.[32]

Duty to oneself can often run directly counter to one's duty to society, as Cytherea here points out. 'It is difficult to adjust our outer and inner life' because they can demand different things of us. Why should Cytherea's own life not hold prime importance for her? She is the only person who can know what it is like to be living that life: a life others can dismiss with the words 'Poor girl!'. That 'nobody can enter into another's nature' can be felt as grievous, but what is most painful about Cytherea's situation is that no one even tries to enter into her nature. Cytherea feels she is being asked to give up her 'life' in order that the superficial order of social life may not be disturbed. In The Mill on The Floss, Maggie was prepared to sacrifice her self in order to achieve a greater sense of self in kind with others. But Cytherea, Tess, and others are to be sacrificed to an unkind society which doesn't really exist anyway. Tess, Hardy tells us would have been happier without any sense of society at all.

> If she could have been but just created, to discover herself as a spouseless mother, with no experience of life except as the parent of a nameless child, would the position have caused her to despair? No, she would have taken it calmly, and found her pleasures therein. Most of the misery had been generated by her conventional aspect, not by her innate sensations.[33]

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32. Thomas Hardy, Desperate Remedies (London, 1978), pp.272-273.

33. Tess of the D'Urbervilles, pp.110-111.

Her 'misery' is created less by society (after all her village does not condemn her) than by her own interiorised sense of her own social image. If Tess had been Maggie, she would gladly have returned to St. Oggs as Mrs. Stephen Guest, but here the conventional girl suffers for her conventionality and desire to progress in the world; her misfortune is felt as misfortune partly because of her education at the Board School, partly because she does not want to be a betrayed village girl.

As with Maggie's experience of Dr. Kenn, Tess finds that the social orthodoxy of the Christian Church renders it incapable of providing her with love, forgiveness or charity. But Tess is lucky in meeting a churchman in whom some sort of faith reigns. In what orthodoxy both social and religious would regard as a lie, this man does Tess an act of kindness. Tess tells him she had baptized her baby herself, and asks him if it will be 'just the same?'.

> The dignity of the girl, the strange tenderness in her voice, combined to affect his nobler impulses - or rather, those he had left in him after ten years of endeavour to graft technical belief on actual scepticism. The man and the ecclesiastic fought within him, and the victory fell to the man.
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> 'My dear girl,' he said, 'it will be just the same'.[34]

The vicar confesses he cannot give the child a Christian burial;

> 'Well - I would willingly do so if only we two were concerned. But I must not - for certain reasons'. . . .
>
> 'Perhaps it will be just the same to him if you don't? . . . Will it be just the same? Don't for God's sake speak as saint to sinner, but as yourself to me myself - poor me!'
> How the vicar reconciled his answer with the strict notions he supposed himself to hold on these subjects is beyond a layman's power to tell, though not to excuse. Somewhat moved, he said in this case also -
> 'It will be just the same.'[35]

The dignity and 'tenderness' of Tess affect the Vicar's 'nobler impulses', which are seen to be at odds with his role in society as churchman. It

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34. Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p.116.

35. Tess of the D'Urbervilles, pp.116-117.

is as if 'dignity', 'tenderness' and 'nobler impulses' are human attributes quite set aside from social life. The vicar's religious views seem things laboriously and painfully constructed, as if he were working in wood or metal, a sceptic who has spent ten years grafting onto himself a 'technical belief'. What happens is that Tess calls upon his true belief, which Hardy calls his 'scepticism', or his humanity; 'the man and the ecclesiastic fought within him'. Tess calls on him to speak in his own voice 'as yourself' and not as the saintly representative of an inhuman body; she wants him to recognise her as a self, like himself, as a human individual life, something he can imagine; she stresses 'as yourself to me myself'. The vicar is 'somewhat moved' by Tess's plea. In Christian terms, a man is 'moved' by grace, the spirit of God. When the victory here falls to the 'man', rather than the representative of established morality, we feel that the unhappy vicar has at last felt a real grace working in him.

This is an unusual instance of grace or 'kindness'. More often, a kind intention is twisted, distorted or broken up by circumstance, time, accident. Such accidents can come about because, to use McTaggart's terminology, 'spirit' 'set in the midst of matter' is dependent upon it. Matter, in the form of individuality, makes all 'spirit' separate. It does not make any difference how close those individuals come, how hard they try to work together, individuality cannot be overcome. In *The Trumpet Major*, as we see the troops drilling *en masse*, Hardy asks who would think of 'every point in the line as an isolated man, each dwelling in the hermitage of his own mind'[36] Hardy says the idea of making spirit and flesh one, as Spinoza does, is attractive to him; in *Jude the Obscure* this is made explicit as the hub of the problem that eventually came to dominate Hardy's novels. Cytherea expresses the problem with her chicken

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36. Thomas Hardy, *The Trumpet Major* (London, 1959), p.105.

and egg account, 'when you consider that the many and your duty to them, can only exist to you through your own existence, what can be said?'. Hardy persistently cries 'you cannot find the link . . . of one form of consciousness with another'. The link, of course, ought to be physical, needs to be, because it is only through matter that spirit can have its being. Thus, as in Milton, the bond ought to be physical generation; the link is the umbilical cord that ties one generation to another.[37] In Hardy's universe this physical link is constantly threatened by an over developed sensitivity of feeling, of 'modern nerves'. But the primary relation is also threatened by a twisted social frame, working alongside an indifferent and imperfect universe. Nonetheless the primary relation is recognised as sexual, and there is recognition that the only hope for future life is in this fragile relation.

At the beginning of his novel-writing career, Hardy could imagine some passionate and strong relations, but as time goes on, increasingly, circumstance and human stupidity conspire to prevent such a thing. At the end of Far From the Madding Crowd Bathsheba and Oak are rewarded for their tireless attempts at living, with the growth of a substantial affection between them. It is the kind of affection which arises,

> (if any arises at all) when the two who are thrown together begin first by knowing the rougher sides of each other's character, and not the best till further on, the romance growing up in the interstices of a mass of hard, prosaic reality. This good fellowship - camaraderie - usually occurring through

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37. Adam speaks of such a link and bond in Paradise Lost, IX

> I feel
> The link of nature draw me: flesh of flesh,
> Bone of my bone thou art
> 913-915

and

> So forcible within my heart I feel
> The bond of nature draw me to my own
> 955-956.

> similarity of pursuits, is unfortunately seldom superadded to love between the sexes, because men and women associate, not in their labours, but in their pleasures merely. Where, however, happy circumstance permits its development, the compounded feeling proves itself to be the only love which is as strong as death.[38]

'Romance' is not a word we generally associate with a 'mass of hard, prosaic reality'. 'Romance' implies, as Hardy goes on to state, a rather one dimensional relation, a thing that occurs when men and women 'associate in their pleasures merely'. 'Romance' is not associated with 'good fellowship' - a much more ordinary, prosaic type of relation, 'usually occurring through similarity of pursuits'. Hardy is reaching towards a more full relation between men and women, less dominated by social romantic stereotypes, a more realistic relation. Bathsheba fell in love with the figure cut by Troy but could not live happily in his gambling, lying, thoughtless prosaic reality; these sides of his character only became clear to her after their marriage. If she had known all sides of Troy - if she had witnessed Fanny Robin outside the barracks in the snow, her 'romance' with Troy might never have arisen at all. Similarly, Boldwood, misunderstanding the nature of the Valentine he received, allowed himself to develop a 'romance' with Bathsheba; would it have happened if he had seen her laughingly addressing it? It is as if 'romance' arises in a certain state of blindness; it is a trick that the flesh plays upon the spirit, making it feel there is some other, reciprocating spirit waiting for its love. Hardy is fascinated by this trick, this sore juxtaposition of flesh and spirit. This is quite different to the 'substantial affection' between Bathsheba and Oak; their love, a romance of good fellowship and reality, proves itself 'as strong as death'. Spirit, needing material expression, asserts its nature 'in the interstices of a mass of hard prosaic reality' in the course of innumerable daily actions, of repeated significant relation to objects,

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38. Far From the Madding Crowd, p.439.

which shows itself finally, as faithfulness, fidelity, honesty, trustworthiness, goodness, love. It is no accident that Hardy compares this strong, real, love to death; death is the one physical state of being which he knows unites unequivocally all human beings.

Oak and Bathsheba are, unlike most of Hardy's characters, lucky. Generally the trick of flesh on spirit conspires with misplaced notions of desire or progress to deny links and bonds of a sexual nature forcing individual men and women ever more painfully apart. The Woodlanders uses a cut-off, apparently idyllic, pastoral, pre-industrial landscape as a setting for an account of unworkable links and bonds, an inhuman social order and morality. 'Circumstance' here conspires with society to crush bonds which might grow up between men and women. Nature and the unnatural seem to defeat spirit and matter; flesh only separates beings.

In a letter to the Academy and Literature, 17 May 1902, Hardy wrote,

> To model our conduct on Nature's apparent conduct, as Nietzsche would have taught, can only bring disaster to humanity.[39]

But in some respects, I think, Hardy does believe that human beings do, necessarily, if unconsciously, model themselves on Nature. Thus, he describes the woods at Little Hintock:

> Here, as everywhere, the Unfulfilled Intention, which makes life what it is, was as obvious as it could be among the depraved crowds of a city slum. The leaf was deformed, the curve was crippled, the taper was interrupted; the lichen ate the vigour of the stalk, and the ivy slowly strangled to death the promising sapling.[40]

Human relations are as much a product of the 'unfulfilled intention' as anything in nature; crippled, interrupted, deformed, parasitic, murderous. The 'unfulfilled intention' seems to be life itself, which as Marty South says, trees and people alike 'sigh to begin in earnest'. 'The Woodlanders'

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39. Life, p.314.

40. The Woodlanders, p.56.

live in a series of unworkable links and bonds. In the earlier generation there were bonds, as so often in Hardy's work, but these have broken down in the present. Thus the obvious marriage, between Grace and Giles cannot take place; Mr. Melbury's social ambitions for his daughter come in the way. The actual marriage between Grace and Fitzpiers, while acceptable both to the world at large and to Mr. Melbury, is based on a superficial attraction, yet becomes a bond that Grace cannot snap: what ought to be moral language becomes a language of power. Grace, seeking a divorce finds that 'Fitzpiers conduct had not been sufficiently cruel . . . to enable her to snap the bond' (p.298). The conjunction of the words 'sufficiently' and 'cruel' is a measure of the social proprieties which bind these two together. The legal, measured indifference of 'sufficiently' jars against the blatant fact of 'cruel'. A bond which naturally ought never have come about is sanctioned by this judgement, sanctioned and pronounced relatively decent, not cruel enough to attract social sympathy. Yet, socially sanctioned, the bond remains personally unworkable.

Fitzpiers's relations with his other women, Suke Damson and Felice Charmond, though perfectly acceptable to him are impractical socially. Fitzpiers's ambition declares that he needs the appearance of a lovely wife, therefore he must have one, as Grace needs a husband better than Giles. The relation between Marty South and Giles Winterborne ought to flourish, they work together and know the 'rough side' of each other's characters. But Marty's love simply isn't reciprocated by Giles. Finally, the renewed relation between Giles and Grace is interrupted by Grace's notion of social convention. In her legal trap Grace, running to Winterborne, seems to be the victim of Fitzpiers and the society he represents; 'if ever Winterborne's heart chafed his bosom it was at the sight of a perfectly defenceless creature conditioned by such harsh circumstance' (p.312). Yet her own suffering at the hands of social law cannot prevent

Grace from saving her own standing in society at the risk of Winterborne's life. When she finally understands that Winterborne is in a fever, the adjective 'cruel' is at last applied to her own sense of decency.

> A dreadful enlightenment spread through the mind of Grace. 'O,' she cried in her anguish as she hastily prepared herself to go out; 'how selfishly correct I am always - too, too correct! Can it be that cruel propriety is killing the dearest heart that woman ever clasped to her own!'[41]

'Cruel propriety' is Grace's own sense of propriety, just as it is for Tess. It is as if characters invent their own social pressures within themselves as a means of overcoming lonely individuality - then, ironically, it is impossible for either the primary natural self, or the secondary social self to survive. In its desire for relation to others the self is divided and broken up. Laws thought up by men and women, as if they meant to improve on nature, seem to reproduce its patterns of waste, deformity, crippling. Grace has learnt, when first accepting Giles' protection - that appearance is not always right, is often separate from reality 'appearance is no matter, when the reality is right' (p.310). Giles and Grace remain, nonetheless, victims of propriety. Hardy writes of Grace, 'her timid morality had, indeed, underrated his chivalry till now, though she knew him so well'. (p.323). This 'timid morality' is in direct relation to 'cruel propriety'; it results finally in Giles 'strange self-sacrifice in lonely juxtaposition to her own person'. The tragedy arises from not wanting badly enough or wanting divided ends; like Tess, both Giles and Grace feel bound to behave in a certain way, whether that behaviour has any <u>real</u> relation to them or not.

But this final scene of the 'lonely juxtaposition' of Grace and Giles seems emblematic of Hardy's world. He would bring two human beings close,

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41. <u>The Woodlanders</u>, p.322.

cut-off from the world, yet bound by its restrictions. He would envisage two human beings unable to know the state each was in, he - who could not bear to be touched - would find the 'juxtaposition' of one body with another 'lonely'. And how can it be any other way, when Grace is herself a creature bearing an uncomfortable internal juxtaposition? She is

> an impressionable creature, who combined modern nerves with primitive feelings, and was doomed by such co-existence to be numbered among the distressed, and to take her scourgings to their exquisite extremity.[42]

In her suffering, Grace is linked to other human beings. She represents the species at a point of change, and carries within herself changes which are of no benefit to her; her 'modern nerves' and 'primitive feelings' can only cause her pain. Grace is a creature of strong feelings, yet over refined sensitivities. She cannot stand the way her feelings lead her; thus finally she will settle for an unhappy marriage with a (probably) unfaithful husband; a sort of refuge, finally, of no-feeling.

The cruelty suffered by Grace does not satisfy Hardy, he will make Giles die in order to press home the point; we are all in separate bodies, each man living 'in the hermitage of his own mind'; and death does divide us, the living from the dead.

The relation that lasts is Marty's to Giles. Cruelly, for her, most faithful lover in the novel, death is union; Giles is no longer there to refuse her love. In some respects Marty's love matches the 'substantial affection' of Bathsheba and Gabriel in Far From the Madding Crowd; her love 'grown in the interstices of a mass of hard, prosaic reality . . . is as strong as death'. Giles remains present to Marty in his deeds.

> Whenever I get up I'll think of 'ee, and whenever I lie down I'll think of 'ee again. Whenever I plant the young larches I'll think that none can plant as you planted; and whenever I split a gad, and whenever I turn the cider wring, I'll say none could do it like you. If ever I forget your name, let me forget home and heaven! . . . But no, no, my love, I never can forget 'ee; for you was a good man, and did good things! [43]

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42. The Woodlanders, p.306.

It is as if, to Marty, who worked with Giles, his essential self is still alive, partly in memory, and partly in the objects he worked with; he was what he did. She has him more fully in death than she ever could in life.

Also, she has him now, because Grace has given him up. 'You are mine, and only mine: for she has forgot 'ee at last, although for her you died!' Death, which has taken Giles away from Grace has given him to Marty. But we don't forget, while reading, that while he was alive Giles never did think of Marty South as anything more than a workmate, his helper. In life he did not reciprocate her love, and in death he cannot. Marty has her love at last, but at what price? Has she not settled for the least painful course, as Grace has done? It is easy for Marty to dedicate herself to Giles' memory now, and perhaps an act of self-comfort as much as of self-denying love.

That each is 'limited to his own frame' is the constant factor in Hardy's novel-world. We know that 'the link' if there is one, must be a physical link; yet in modern times this physical bond is increasingly threatened by over-sensitivity, the pain of modern 'nerves'. 'This earth does not supply the materials for happiness to higher existences';[44] nature is ruthless, human ideas of society even more so. The spirit, 'set in the midst of matter' has to live in a world not suited to it, and to live alone, separated by matter. The links of kindness rarely work, the bonds of community seem not to exist, the link of physical generation is threatened. In some respects the society that Hardy describes is already, disastrously modelled on nature; what he demands, in giving us this account, is some new way of being, some new link. His novels give accounts of the 'manifold elements of which the modern world is composed in all the isolation which individualistic principles have conferred upon them'. It is an account of

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44. See p.155 for full quotation.

utter misery and hopelessness but it is also a demand 'for the reconstruction of modern life' by the discovery of a new principle. Gradually, all is taken away, the old social world stripped of its certainties, patterns, ways, until all we are left with is the end product of this principle of individualism; a solitary, hopeless individual, in 'lonely juxtaposition' with another, solitary, hopeless individual. Hardy's pessimism is a descending progression which leads directly, and inescapably to the nadir of individualism, the hell we discover in Jude the Obscure.

3. Reconciliation

> These venerable philosophers seem to start wrong; they cannot get away from a prepossession that the world must somehow have been made to be a comfortable place for man. If I remember it was Comte who said that metaphysics was a mere sorry attempt to reconcile theology and physics.[45]

According to Hardy, as D. H. Lawrence says, 'there is no reconciliation'.[46] The clashing juxtapositions of the universe exist painfully jostling each other, and they are never reconciled. In his hands the novel is pushed into strange shapes (execrabrable form, says Lawrence) in order to accommodate these natural distortions. 'Realism', in Hardy's novels has to expand in order to take in both his pessimism and his idea of natural life. In the Life of Thomas Hardy we gradually receive an account of his changing views of realism; a path which leads, eventually to his abandoning the novel altogether.

Hardy is an individualist;

> Style - consider the Wordsworthian dictum (the more perfectly the natural object is reproduced, the more truly poetic the picture). This reproduction is

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45. Life, p.179.

46. D. H. Lawrence, 'The Study of Thomas Hardy' in On Hardy and Painting, edited by J. V. Davies (London, 1973), p.92.

> achieved by seeing into the heart of a thing . . . and is realism, in fact, though through being pursued by means of the imagination, it is confounded with invention, which is pursued by the same means. It is, in short, reached by what M. Arnold calls 'the imaginative reason'. [47]

In this account of 1881, 'realism' is achieved not objectively but through subjective vision, 'seeing into the heart of a thing'. In June of the same year, Hardy noted another thought which developed this idea further;

> As, in looking at a carpet, by following one colour a certain pattern is suggested, by following another colour, another; so in life the seer should watch that pattern among general things which his idiosyncrasy moves him to observe, and describe that alone. This is, quite accurately, a going to nature; yet the result is no mere photograph, but purely the product of a writer's own mind. [48]

In this account, the 'heart of a thing' is seen to depend entirely upon 'the seer'; realism relies on the 'idiosyncrasy' of one person. The realism resulting must be both 'a going to nature' AND 'purely the product of the writer's own mind'. That is to say, in the production of art called 'realism' inside and out are unified; the juxtaposition of apparently unconnected things - the objective and the subjective - is no longer merely a painful clash. Art, ought then to be a means whereby the individual is connected to all that is on the other side of his skin; a link, a bond.

By January 1888, Hardy had further refined his notion of realist art;

> A sensation novel is possible in which the sensationalism is not casuality but evolution; not physical but psychical . . . The difference between the latter kind of novel and the novel of physical sensationalism i.e. personal adventure, etc., - is this: that whereas, in the physical the adventure itself is the subject of interest, the psychical being passed over as commonplace, in the psychical the casualty or adventure is held to be of no intrinsic interest, but the effect upon the faculties is the important matter to be depicted. [49]

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47. Life, p.147.

48. Life, p.153.

49. Life, p.204.

The idea of the psychical novel is taken up later by D. H. Lawrence, when he writes his x-ray novel, his novel to show not the diamond but the carbon, Women in Love. In Hardy's hands, however, this idea is an attempt to make the novel do metaphysical work; the reconciliation between flesh and spirit, love and the law, will be connected to the understanding of new sensations. In a comment on Henry James, Hardy shows how his idea of the novel would necessarily be concerned with large issues - the reconciliation of theology and metaphysics, for example:

> After reading this kind of work one feels inclined to be deliberately careless in detail. The great novels of the future will certainly not concern themselves with minutiae of manners . . . James's subjects are those one could be interested in at moments when there is nothing larger to think of. [50]

Hardy sees the Jamesian novel, concerned with 'minutiae of manners', as unimportant, his subject miniscule. Hardy felt he had to get away from writing about 'social'' life because such life made things unimportant; it is a sort of side-effect of modern life. Hardy kept to what he thought of as 'natural life', that is unsophisticated, provincial life, in order to be able to write about important things. It is as if he thought modern life itself to be degenerated to a stage where nothing in it could retain any importance. Certainly, he saw this happening in literature. In October of the same year, he writes;

> The besetting sin of modern literature is its insincerity. Half its utterances are qualified, even contradicted by an aside, and this particularly in morals and religion. [51]

To Hardy, it seemed that modern literature was unable to look into the heart of a thing; the modern author was unable - or unwilling - to trust his own idiosyncrasy in following the pattern in life he chooses to tell of.

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50. Life, p.211.

51. Life, p.215.

This plea for sincerity is also a plea for a stronger individuality, a stronger sense of individual vision, not merely the utterance of collectively formed qualifications and contradictions concerning the weakening old forms. Hardy conceived of something new, grown out of the old.

> What has been written cannot be blotted. Each new style must be the old with added ideas, not an ignorance and avoidance of the old. And so in religion and a good many other things.[52]

But finally Hardy did not think this was possible in the novel. The reception of Jude the Obscure led Hardy to this observation, on 17 October 1896):

> Perhaps I can express more fully in verse ideas which run counter to the inert crystallised opinion - hard as a rock - which the vast bdy of men have vested interests in supporting. To cry out in a passionate poem that (for instance) the Supreme Mover or Movers, the Prime Force or Forces, must be either limited in power, unknowing or cruel which is obvious enough and has been for centuries - will cause them merely a shake of the head; but to put it in argumentative prose will make them sneer or foam, and set all the literary contortionists jumping upon me, a harmless agnostic, as if I were a clamorous atheist . . . If Galileo had said in verse that the world moved, the Inquisition might have let him alone. [53]

Stories depend on some authority; we cannot simply 'make things up'. If there were no truth in a story, why should we believe it, or want to hear it? Poems clearly are an individual vision, but stories by and large pretend not to be. Stories are to tell us things, they are a sort of information about real life, a kind of information we don't often have in real life: stories make us think about what things are, what things mean.

Hardy's 'stories', being dependent upon 'the seer', have only the authority of the writer to support them. There is no appeal to a higher being, as in the Bible, stories made by God. There is not even that appeal made by George Eliot to our kind-ness and fellowship; her Godlike power

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52. Life, p.218.

53. Life, pp.284-285.

comes from connecting us humanly to the characters about whom she writes. Hardy rests on himself, his vision. He tells us that what he writes is (unlike Henry James's work) important. He speaks sincerely, and he doesn't favour qualifications, contradictions. It is not an 'avoidance' of the old, indeed his vision is based on 'the old'. But the kernel of truth he offered was unacceptable; his ideas run 'counter to the inert crystallised opinion - hard as a rock - which the vast body of men have vested interests in supporting'. He calls himself 'a harmless agnostic' knowing full well that to his society he is not at all 'harmless'; his analogy with Galileo is telling; both men challenge the prevalent vision of the universe: they want to change the paradigm.

Hardy's 'perhaps I can express more fully in verse . . .' does not mean, I think, simply that he could get away with his ideas if he wrote poetry rather than prose, though this is clearly also part of his thought. But it seemed as if the novel was itself changing in a way that made it more difficult to express a philosophy of life in it. He felt that the novel was 'gradually losing artistic form, with a beginning, middle and end, and becoming a spasmodic inventory of items, which has nothing at all to do with art' (Life, p.219). It is as if he didn't believe that the novel could hold his ideas and still remain artistic. Yet he could not not make his attempt at something new. A note he wrote concerning The Dynasts shows the direction his thought was taking:

> The old theologies may or may not have worked for good in their time. But they will not bear stretching further in epic or dramatic art. The Greeks have used up theirs; the Jews used up theirs; the Christians have used up theirs. So that one must make an independent plunge, embodying the real, if only temporary, thought of the age. [54]

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54. Life, p.319.

In a sense, Jude the Obscure was Hardy's attempt to make 'an independent plunge', an attempt to 'embody the real . . . thought of the age'. At the same time his view of what was meant by 'realism' had changed.

> Art is a disproportioning . . . of realities, to show more clearly the features that matter in those realities, which if merely copied or reported inventorially, might possibly be observed, but which would more probably be overlooked. Hence 'realism' is not art. [55]

Hardy has moved to an increasingly moral view of Art; the 'features that matter' having now taken the place of the 'heart of a thing'. The features that matter to whom? Why to the seer, who else! The novelist has a responsibility as an artist and as a human being to discern 'the features that matter'; he has to decide what does matter; it is a sort of isolationism; almost anti-social, 'one must make an independent plunge'.

'Realism', which increasingly looks like 'a spasmodic inventory of items' is not enough. 'Realities . . . reported inventorially . . . would more probably be overlooked'. It is as if the modern sense of reality, where there is no beginning, middle and end, but only a constant, senseless present, makes life more immoral or amoral, by classing everything in the same way, items on a list, and refusing - or simply being unable - to make a choice about what is important; what matters. Great art, for Hardy, became, because of the nature of the modern society in which he lived, a necessary 'disproportioning'. Thus, Jude the Obscure:

> Of course the book is all contrasts - or was meant to be in its original conception. Alas what a miserable accomplishment it is, when I compare it with what I meant to make it! - e.g. Sue and her heathen Gods set against Jude's reading the Greek testament; Christminster academical, Christminster in the slums; Jude the saint, Jude the sinner; Sue the Pagan, Sue the saint; marriage, no marriage, etc., etc., [56]

Of course the book is meant to be all contrasts! It was meant to show the coming together of unresolvable, irreconcilable opposites in one; the

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55. Life, p.229.

56. Life, p.272.

'real thought' of the age; the not being able to synthesize a whole, unified universe. Of course, it was meant to describe the sense of clashing, starkly juxtaposed explanations, theories, sensibilities. In the least traditionally 'realistic' novel, made by many conscious arrangements of things weighing against each other, Hardy writes his most visionary and most realistic novel. In the preface to the novel, he refers to this 'realism' as 'a series of seemings'. Something in the indefinite nature of this phrase calls to mind George Eliot's 'experiments in life'. This novel, then, Jude the Obscure, meant to be all contrasts, is Hardy's 'independent plunge'. Jude himself, in a way *is* Hardy; within him unbearable and irreconcilable contrasts come painfully, antagonistically, together. Jude seeks reconciliation between 'theology and physics'; is a metaphysical seeker 'a species of Dick Whittington whose spirit was touched to finer issues than a mere material gain . . .'.[57] Yet, 'the human was more powerful in him than the divine'.[58] The victim of an 'internal warfare between flesh and spirit' Jude is also conscious of a painful exterior warfare, the universe, as it were, grating against his thin skin.

> As you got older, and felt yourself to be at the centre of your time, and not at a point in its circumference, as you had felt when you were little, you were seized with a sort of shuddering, he perceived. All around you there seemed to be something glaring, garish, rattling, and the noises and glares hit upon the little cell called your life, and shook it, and warped it.[59]

Jude, like Hardy the little boy who did not let his playmates touch him, is a creature born into the wrong medium, almost unable to breathe this earthly atmosphere, living life constantly pained, and yet unable to account for his discomfort. For what other life is there if it is not

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57. Jude the Obscure, p.93.

58. Jude the Obscure, p.246.

59. Jude the Obscure, p.15.

this earthly existence? Yet how can one deny all that out there, 'glaring, garish, rattling': touching you, shaking you, warping your life? What is it? Unable to form any believable account of the universe on his own, Jude relies on the forms of the past for support, turning first to academic life, and then to the church. But when he finds these supports denied him, unable to create a frame which can bear his life, Jude has to question its social basis. The apparently malignant universe comes down to the basic social unit.

> Strange that his first aspiration - towards academical proficiency - had been checked by a woman, and that his second aspiration - towards apostleship - had also been checked by a woman. 'Is it,' he said, 'that the women are to blame; or is it the artificial system of things, under which the normal sex-impulses are turned into devilish domestic gins and springes to noose and hold back progress?' [60]

Jude does not question his own role in his disappointment. As a child he feels himself the victim of a powerful universe, he is seized, shaken, warped by the thing all around him. His aspirations as a young man are checked - he asks if it is 'the women' or 'society' that has prevented him reaching his goal. But he does not dare question his goals; they are things sanctioned by the fact that they are outside him; he does not seem able to see them in any perspective. His mind is one that fixes rigidly on an idea, grips it tenaciously; out of fear, I suppose. Thus he blinds himself to other views that might help him. He wanders in the city of his dreams, Christminster, as he wanders through life, blinded by an unreal vision: 'when he passed objects out of harmony with his general expression he allowed his eyes to slip over them as if he did not see them'.[61] 'Christminster academical, Christminster in the slums', wrote Hardy, seeing a contrast that Jude cannot, will not see; he wants Christminster

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60. Jude the Obscure, p.259.

61. Jude the Obscure, p.93.

only to be 'academical' and he refuses to see 'the slums': 'he did not see them'. Yet though Jude seems determined by his adherence to forms from the past, he is in fact a victim of the present, he suffers 'the vice of unrest'. Jude has one moment when he understands that his labouring work is 'worthy', a moment when he makes a judgement for himself;

> For a moment there fell upon Jude a true illumination; that here in the stone yard was a centre of effort as worthy as that dignified by the name of scholarly study within the noblest of colleges. But he lost it under stress of his old idea. He would accept any employment which he might be offered on the strength of his late employer's recommendation; but he would accept it as a provisional thing only. This was his form of the modern vice of unrest. [62]

This is a moment when Jude sees things without the veil of his mystic reverence for medievalism, or for education. Yet because he _is_ a modern in one sense (his suffering of 'unrest'), he is prevented from holding a thought which might have saved him from another blindness. As it is, under the 'stress of his old idea', 'the deadly animosity of contemporary logic and vision towards so much of what he held in reverence was not yet revealed to him'.[63]

Jude and, more, Sue, are put in juxtaposition to the historical past which has bred them; they are modernists, face to face also with a present which has not yet envisaged them. As always the clashing is painful, grating. But it is Sue Bridehead, rather than Jude, who is the true spirit of modernism. She gives an account of the discordance Jude feels;

> The social moulds civilisation fits us into have no more relation to our actual shapes than the conventional shapes of the constellations have to the real star-patterns. I am called Mrs. Richard Phillotson, living a calm wedded life with counterpart of that name. But I am not really Mrs. Richard Phillotson, but a woman tossed about, all alone, with aberrant passions, and unaccountable antipathies . . . [64]

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62. _Jude the Obscure_, p.100.

63. _Jude the Obscure_, p.101.

64. _Jude the Obscure_, p.245.

Jude is struggling to find himself a 'social mould' within civilisation while Sue has learned that these moulds do not fit the essential human being. The conventional shapes are roughly sketched outlines, representations which only vaguely suggest a partial truth. It is because of this that Jude could feel that the stone yard was 'a centre of effort as worthy as that dignified by the name of scholarly study'. The conventional mould, 'work' or 'labour' or 'effort', sketches a reality behind those appearances that makes the building of colleges as important as the learning that goes on in them. Jude, pledged to spiritual gain, cannot afford to let himself believe this.

Sue Bridehead recognises that she needs to see herself completely separately from these social moulds, in order to see herself at all; she must constantly define herself by throwing away her relation to modern society, to her family, her role as woman. She defines herself against it, negatively, in terms of something missing. Thus she is 'more ancient than mediaevalism, if only you knew',[65] 'outside all laws . . . The Ishmaelite '.[66] This negative definition comes closest to an explicit definition of the 'need of the age'; by her very speechlessness and inability to make the next necessary leap, by her inability to find words to describe what she is, or what she needs, Sue becomes the spokesperson of her time.

> I only meant - I don't know what I meant -
> except that it was what you don't understand.[67]

In this respect, Sue is also Hardy, just as Jude is, because this is Hardy's voice, speaking to the people around him, the readers of Jude who called his book immoral, who would not see beyond its concern with subjects considered immoral, who would not see the mirror it held to themselves.

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65. Jude the Obscure, p.160.

66. Jude the Obscure, p.165.

67. Jude the Obscure, p.128.

Jude and Sue are both alone in the universe, and in the past the social moulds that Sue now turns against would have provided means of both shaping and containing human lives in some unity. There was a time, it seems, when social institutions did not chafe and constrict. Widow Edlin tells Jude and Sue:

> Nobody thought o' being afeard o' matrimony in my time, nor of much else but a cannon ball or an empty cupboard! Why, when I and my poor old man were married we thought no more o't than of a game o' dibs![68]

In the widow's more primitive time, fear was based on threats to the physical body; war or starvation. But matrimony 'as easy as a game o' dibs' has vanished - like that game - into the long distant past. In these modern times, people are made unhappy by the 'spirit of mental and social restlessness',[69] rather than the fleshly discomfort of earlier times. This may sound an attractive state, when we hear of it from the Widow; a breath of fresh common sense against Jude and Sue's embattled sensitivity. But when we see marriage 'as easy as a game o' dibs' in its modern form - Arabella - the prospect does not seem so enticing. A thoughtless marriage is possible, as Arabella proves, but not a carefree one. For Arabella suffers as much as any of the young people from the spirit of mental and social restlessness: thus she must rush to marry Jude in the first place, thus she must leave him. In such a society, what can be the meaning of 'marriage'? Like parenthood, marriage can seem no more than what it is 'at bottom'; ' a mean exclusiveness'. It seems as if human beings cannot have an altruistic feeling, only self-concern. This seems the exact reversal of kind-ness envisaged by George Eliot.

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68. Jude the Obscure, p.342.

69. Jude the Obscure, p.389.

> All the little ones of our time are collectively the children of us adults of the time, and entitled to our general care. That excessive regard of parents for their own children and disregard of other peoples, is, like class feeling, patriotism, save your own soulism and other virtues, a mean exclusiveness at bottom. [70]

'A mean exclusiveness at bottom' seems to be the bass note which orders the whole of society; and it is because of the dominance of this note that there is so little collectivity, so little room for 'general care'. Allied to this perceived failing in the society and organisation of man, Hardy sees the universe as uncaring, indifferent, loveless. Men can change themselves, and the universe cannot. Yet the breaking up of old forms of human life is not liberating to Hardy, so much as simply leaving a void; Sue cannot speak, Jude cannot live, children are hopeless.

> There are such boys springing up amongst us - boys of a sort unknown in the last generation - the outcome of new views of life. They seem to see all its terrors before they are old enough to have staying power to resist them . . . It is the beginning of the universal wish not to live. [71]

No one survives; Jude and the children dead, Sue lives on only in name, as the Widow says, 'weddings be funerals . . . nowadays'. [72]

Something in this atmosphere of terror is reminiscent of a primitive religion: a terrified belief grounded in fear of unknowable forces. And, in this way, I think, Thomas Hardy marks as well as an end of belief, also a beginning. It is a beginning that does not know what it begins, only what it is not. Jude the Obscure marking the end of the Victorian novel, ushers in modernism, makes its readers experience terror, pain, hopelessness, disgust. Novels could not, in Hardy's view, continue beyond this point and remain novels; he wanted them, as he wanted God and religion, with a set form, a 'beginning, middle and end'. But the world, he increasingly

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70. Jude the Obscure, p.326.

71. Jude the Obscure, p.402.

72. Jude the Obscure, p.477.

saw, did not provide fixed starting points, definite ends. All there seemed to be was the ever-present present. Without some notion of what 'order' in the world should look like, you could not create 'order' in art. So Hardy was quite right to note the breaking down of form in the novel as a specifically modernist disease, un-ease. What was the point in writing novels in a world where you could never have any authority, where no explanation was ever going to be anything more than an explanation made up by little human creatures on the face of the earth? In this sense, Hardy marks the end of humanist faith, as well as of religious belief. In clearing this ground however, Hardy also sets out the terms within which new visions would arise.

> Altruism, or the Golden Rule or whatever 'love thy neighbour as thyself' may be called, will ultimately be brought about I think by the pain we see in others reacting in ourselves, as if we and they were part of one body. Mankind, in fact, may be and possibly will be, viewed as members of one corporeal frame.[73]

Fellow feeling, as George Eliot knew, was the missing 'link' - that flesh that Hardy himself found so hard to live with; he knew it all along. But before men could become sensible of 'pain' in others, they would have to become really themselves, would have to feel themselves before they could feel someone else's pain. Hardy is pushing individualism to its limits; he does not aim to transcend this earthly frame but to enlarge its bounds. He did not get beyond human explanations, but he indicated that revelation would be discovered by individuals - like Sue, straining after, what? Ultimately, Hardy is not in any sense progressive, but religious. Leslie Stephen writes, of Newman's Theory of Belief:

> The 'foundation of all true doctrine as to the way of salvation' is the 'great truth' of the corruption of man. His present nature is evil, not good, and produces

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73. Life, p.224.

> evil things, not good things. His improvement, then, if he improves, must be supernatural and miraculous, not the spontaneous working of his natural tendencies. The very basis of rational hope of progress is therefore struck away. [74]

Hardy would here be allied both with Newman and with Stephen, where Stephen quotes Newman finally to disagree with him. I think Hardy would believe that 'improvement' would be dependent on the 'miraculous and supernatural'. His very rationality would dispute the idea of 'progress' being an outcome of 'natural tendencies' in man. Yet, I think, he would finally agree with Stephen's comment that 'the very basis of rational hope of progress is . . . struck away'. He sees no evidence of the miraculous. Unlike Newman, Hardy had had no faith to sustain a belief in the miraculous or supernatural; he had looked for God and not found him.

> I have been looking for God for fifty years, and I think that if he had existed I should have discovered him. As an external personality of course - the only true meaning of the word. [75]

So wrote Hardy in January 1890. This lack, this something missing, of which Hardy was so conscious, did not mean that, like Stephen, he could rest assured of faith in progress through man. Hardy's belief in the 'unknown', (and in a sense, this is the 'supernatural', that which we cannot perceive as part of the order of nature) is always unshakeable. It is as if the lack of a personal God leaves not a positive space in Hardy's universe but a negative, an enigma, an unexplained thing: a black hole. For the rest of the world, it seems, by 1915, 'realism' had been narrowed down so as to exclude such enigmas. Hardy writes in a letter to Dr. C. W. Saleeby:

> By the way, how do you explain the following from the Cambridge Magazine, by a writer whom I imagine to be of a school of thinkers akin to your own, concerning Herbert Spencer's doctrine of the Unknowable?

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74. Leslie Stephen, 'Newman's Theory of Belief' in <u>An Agnostic's Apology and other essays</u>, p.173.

75. <u>Life</u>, p.224.

> 'We doubt if there is a single philosopher alive today who would subscribe to it. Even men of science are gradually discarding it in favour of Realism and Pragmatism.'
>
> I am utterly bewildered to understand how the doctrine that, beyond the knowable, there must always be an unknown, can be displaced.[76]

For Hardy 'realism and pragmatism' could not do away with the fact that there was no God. 'A mind balanced between two necessary and contradictory thoughts must be in a hopeless state of doubt' wrote Leslie Stephen.[77] Hardy's seems such a mind; he could not rid himself of the sense of the 'unknowable' - yet he could not make this into a 'God'. Neither could he agree with Leslie Stephen that the 'spontaneous working' of man's 'natural tendencies' was 'the very basis of rational hope of progress'. He lived in 'a hopeless state of doubt'.

> It appears to me utterly incredible that any system or theory which is upon the face of it a mere human speculation about this present world should ever take command of men or be to them as a revelation.[78]

Here James Fitzjames Stephen writes against the 'doctrine of the unknowable'; he claims that religion capable of 'uniting and governing men' must be founded 'on a supernatural basis believed to be true'. Hardy, conscious of the 'unknowable' in terms of the supernatural, needed a religion founded 'on a supernatural basis': the 'unknowable' itself, alone, merely a human speculation, was not enough. Earlier I quoted Hardy's comment on Comte 'metaphysics was a mere sorry attempt to reconcile theology and metaphysics'. A 'mere sorry attempt' seems to go with Fitzjames Stephen's 'mere human speculation'. It is as if Hardy, being hopelessly in doubt, could not bring himself to accept any mere human answers; anything that was a story made up by human beings to put an end to their fear and bewilderment

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76. Life, p.370.

77. An Agnostic's Apology, p.19.

78. James Fitzjames Stephen, 'The Unknowable and the unknown' in The Nineteenth Century, edited by Michael Goodwin (Westport, Conn., 1979), p.915.

would never become more than that. Thus Hardy seems to be left almost where he started, in the dark, in chaos, afraid. He does not make the necessary synthesis that ought to come at the end of pessimism, as the expression of the need; he can only say with Sue Bridehead 'I only meant - I don't know what I meant - except that it was what you don't understand'. Yet, without words, indirectly, Hardy has expresed the need, in this very failure of the need to come into words. We have no name for it because we don't know what it will be; it will be something not that we have thought up, for we cannot name it. It will come from elsewhere - 'like a man from some far region sent' - and not our little consciousnesses. It is the need for revelation that Hardy expresses, wordlessly. All the misery and hopelessness of Hardy's world cries for revelation, soundlessly, dumbly.

According to Newman, the nineteenth century was 'the paradise of little men, and the purgatory of great ones'.[79] Though I have said Hardy's world was a hell, 'purgatory' seems a better word, a condition almost worse than hell because of its indefinite nature, its place in time. 'A man is as big as his real desires', writes D. H. Lawrence, in his study of Hardy.[80] Because his 'desires' were so great - his desire was for God and revelation and peace and heaven on earth - Hardy was a great writer. Because he was great in the nineteenth century, he was condemned to 'purgatory'. In some respects, Lawrence, with his principle of being and his visions, his carbon, and his obvious debt to Hardy, had the revelation Hardy desired but could not imagine.

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79. Quoted in W. C. Dowling, The Boswellean Hero (Athens, Georgia, 1979), p.8.

80. 'The Study of Thomas Hardy', p.101.

Chapter VI

FROM THE DEATH OF JUDE TO THE CREATION OF BIRKIN

1. A Transition stage

It is in The Rainbow that D. H. Lawrence begins to take on some of Hardy's most fearful problems: this novel takes us from the death of Jude Fawley to the creation of Rupert Birkin and Women in Love. The response to Hardy's bleak vision comes through a huge change in the way reality is perceived and presented in the novel, which we can see most clearly in the revolutionary, revelatory nature of Lawrence's vision in Women in Love. The Rainbow stands somewhere between the old realism of Hardy - and of Lawrence's own early works, including Sons and Lovers, - and the new realism of Women in Love. It does not merely stand between two styles but is actually a means of changing the vision of reality. The Rainbow is a transition, as Lawrence himself understood.

> I am going through a transition stage myself. I am a slow writer, really - I only have great outbursts of work. So that I do not much mind if I put all this in the fire, because it is the vaguer result of transition. [1]

The transition of which Lawrence speaks here was the change from the social realism of Sons and Lovers which Lawrence had called a 'hard, violent style full of sensation and presentation'[2] to the new world which would eventually become Women in Love 'another world, in which I can live apart from this foul world which I will not accept or acknowledge or even enter'.[3] The Rainbow was written as it were, in progress, before Lawrence had fully envisaged his own new world; and it is the means by which such a vision was brought close. We can trace in it the beginning of the 'physical'

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1. D. H. Lawrence, 'Letter to Edward Garnett, 29 January 1919' in The Collected Letters of D. H. Lawrence, edited by Harry T. Moore (London, 1970), 2 vols, I, p.263.
2. D. H. Lawrence, 'Letter to Edward Garnett, 30 December 1913' in Collected Letters, I, p.259.
3. D. H. Lawrence, 'Letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell, 3 October 1916' in Collected Letters, I, p.477.

novel Hardy had anticipated, the novel that could see through real life to another deeper reality.

> (Like as diamond and coal are the same pure single element of carbon. The ordinary novel would trace the history of the diamond - but I say, 'Diamond, what! This is carbon.' And my diamond might be coal or soot, and my theme is carbon.) You must not say my novel is shaky - it is not perfect because I am not an expert in what I want to do.[4]

The Rainbow moves towards the vision of essentials, as if the novel had become a means of x-raying reality and seeing what lay beneath it, causing it, forming it. The conventional novel, Lawrence says, is written as history: he intends to change the novelistic paradigm by replacing history with chemistry, so that instead of the 'history of the diamond' we have the 'theme' of 'carbon'. In this novel of transition, Lawrence was reaching towards a sense of what might lie beneath the surfaces of things, particularly beneath personality and social life, the 'terms' which he found given. If you start within certain modes of characterisation, for example, then you have already granted certain points of view and conclusions. Lawrence did not want to do this. But, writing The Rainbow, he did not know, either, what it was he did want to do. Thus he can expect his novel to be 'shaky' - he cannot know how to do it properly until he has done it. If Women in Love is 'another world', The Rainbow is both the old world, the existing paradigm, and the foundation of the new, the failure of that paradigm which calls another way of seeing to life.

Though I have called it a chemistry, we can also see the novel as an anthropological work: the 'theme' of 'carbon' might as well be called the life of the Brangwens, the story of a people, moving through time towards an unseen but looked for future. In this respect, the novel bears comparison

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4. D. H. Lawrence, 'Letter to Edward Garnett, 5 June 1914' in Collected Letters, I, p.282.

with and has a certain debt to the Old Testament.[5] The story of the life of a people in the Old Testament creates a pattern of covenant and redemption which is later magnified and exemplified in the New Testament, through the life of Jesus. The New Testament brings to fulfilment the promise and prophecy of the Old. The Rainbow then is Lawrence's Old Testament; the story of the life of a people, and its movement towards a future, which is Women in Love. It is an individual vision, because the man writing is an individual, but it is concerned with a larger life than that of the individual: it is the story of a collective fate. As the Old Testament prophets concern themselves with national peripeteia, Lawrence concerns himself with a life peripeteia, the flux of life. People in the novel seem to interest him as if they were meshes through which more or less life might flow. But it is the movement, the life passing through which is important, the 'carbon' the novel searches out.

> Again I say, don't look for the development of the novel to follow the lines of certain characters: the characters fall into the form of some other rhythmic form, as when one draws a fiddle bow across a fine tray delicately sanded, and the sand takes lines unknown.[6]

The Rainbow is neither a novel of character nor of family. Something 'unknown' is at its centre, shaping it, holding it in its pattern. This is life flowing through human lives.

The novel is prophetic in that it has a certain relation to the past which governs its vision of reality in its own present. Upon this the future waits. As we saw when we looked at Mordecai in Daniel Deronda,

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5. Frank Kermode has used the same metaphor to describe Lawrence's work in his book Lawrence (London, 1973), where he speaks of the rainbow at the end of the novel The Rainbow as 'the Old Testament type of epoch-making covenant' (p.43). Later he goes on to describe Women in Love as 'an apocalypse' (p.54).

6. D. H. Lawrence, 'Letter to Edward Garnett, 5 June 1914', in Collected Letters, I, p.282.

prophecy is connected to desire, or to need, as we saw it in the works of Thomas Hardy. In that it rises from desire, answers a felt need, the novel is religious.

> The religious effort is to conceive, to symbolize that which the human soul, or the soul of the race, lacks, that which it is not, and which it requires, yearns for. It is the portrayal of that complement to the race-life which is known only as a desire: it is the symbolizing of a great desire, the statement of the desire in terms which have no meaning apart from the desire.[7]

In the terms Lawrence here gives us, a religious work would contain - or be - a symbol of the desire of the human soul. What is difficult here is the last sentence; 'the statement of the desire in terms which have no meaning apart from the desire'. I don't mean that this is difficult to 'understand' (although I do think it is) so much as that it is a difficult thing to know experientially, because if the 'desire' in us is lost, or degenerate, or buried, or simply forgotten or under-used (and this is one of Lawrence's premises), then the statement of the desire, in any terms, has no meaning or at best some vague echo of significance which we can't understand or believe in. Because 'the terms have no meaning apart from the desire' only a similar desire in us can give meaning to the terms Lawrence finds. We have to fight through our own unbelief to even hear what he says. But it is partly because he understands that this process is going on in us that he turns to symbol - because for him it by-passes the need for mental 'understanding' and causes us to experience its meaning; symbol 'moves the deep emotional centres'.[8] For Lawrence the symbol has no separate intellectual identity in itself; there is no need for us to go about finding out what his symbols stand for, to attempt to

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7. D. H. Lawrence, 'The Study of Thomas Hardy', p.59.

8. D. H. Lawrence, Apocalypse, p.115.

do so would reduce the symbol and prevent it working. For example, one of the main things Lawrence achieves is the creation of symbols which will contain all our old, lost ideas and feelings about God, without letting us realise that these are about 'God', for Lawrence writes for a people to whom the idea of God is dead. Though the Christian God appears in the novel, the real God is found in the sense of largeness, of infinity, in the descriptions of the stars and heavens and the earth and seasons, even, cumulatively, in people. God is beyond individual consciousness and is the whole thing, as it were. The very same sense, that is, that gives rise to fear and eventually hopelessness about human living in Hardy. But Lawrence celebrates what Hardy had to force himself to admit.

> Thomas Hardy, a last big one, rings the knell of our oneness . . . Virtually, he says: Once you achieve the great identification with the one . . . you find that this God, this One, this Cosmic Spirit isn't human at all, hasn't any human feelings, doesn't concern itself for a second with the individual, and is, all told, a gigantic cold monster. It is a machine. The moment you attain that sense of oneness and Wholeness, you become cold, dehumanized, mechanical and monstrous.[9]

So Lawrence accounts for Hardy's pessimism. But Lawrence himself finds the non-human sphere exhilarating: Ursula's terrible dark vision of the world beyond the human camp becomes something she breaks through to, rather than turns fearfully away from. It's as if Lawrence cries, 'There's more! There's more! It's bigger than this, thank God!'. He doesn't see man as separated from the universe because he has faith in a belief that connects human life to everything else, 'we and the cosmos are one'.[10]

The opening pages of the novel show the original covenant between man and the extra-human, and show that this covenant lies in the human body, in physical being. When Jude Fawley thinks he has to choose between love

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9. D. H. Lawrence, 'Climbing Down Pisgah' in Phoenix, edited by Edward D. McDonald (London, 1970), 2 vols, I, p.740.

10. D. H. Lawrence, Apocalypse, p.29.

(Arabella) and knowledge, Hardy deliberately makes it a choice between baseness and a higher life. But Lawrence would have none of this, and so The Rainbow sets out to show humanity as creatures with souls who are tied to the life on earth and the life of God, through marriage.

The first primal relation between man and God exists in the human body, in its physical being on the earth, in its relation to other bodies, human or cosmic. So it is that in The Rainbow, the 'first men', the early, almost pre-historic Brangwens, are above all else farmers, men and women living as creatures with bellies and mouths on the face of the earth. These creatures are not thinkers, but they have a peculiar, innocent consciousness, like Adam and Eve before the fall 'they came and went without fear of necessity, working hard because of the life that was in them, not for want of money'.[11] Like Milton's Adam and Eve, 'the world was all before them'[12] - they had 'the look of an inheritor' (TR, p.41).

The inheritance is partly physical, connecting them to the land and the future of the land, 'their' land, which is what binds generations together in time. But the inheritance is also religious, a sort of faithful expectancy, based on trust in the past, in the given forms of things staying the same. Thus to the early Brangwens the church *is* God.

> Whenever one of the Brangwens in the fields lifted his head from his work, he saw the church tower at Ilkeston in the empty sky. So that as he turned again to the horizontal land, he was aware of something standing above him and beyond him in the distance.
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> TR, p.41

The 'horizontal' line of vision here is the workday life, the everyday life of work. The church tower at Ilkeston physically and symbolically bisects the horizontal life drawing a vertical that runs straight from

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11. D. H. Lawrence, The Rainbow (Harmondsworth, 1981), p.41.

12. John Milton, Paradise Lost, xii, 646.

earth to heaven, making the Brangwen in the fields 'aware of something above and beyond him in the distance'.

This spiritual inheritance, that direct line to heaven via the Church is part of the landscape, so that when 'they felt the rush of the sap in spring', and 'knew the wave which cannot halt' and the 'intercourse between heaven and earth' (TR, p.42) all these land-based, pagan sensations are connected to the church, the Christian year. And they are connected in a subtle and unspoken way, through rhythm, and the season and pulse of life: at the end of a day the brains of the men were 'inert' but 'their blood flowed heavy with the accumulation from the living day'.

'The living day' is part of the men, in their blood. The world, the universe, is not beyond these men, but in them, as they are in it.

> There is an eternal vital correspondence between our blood and the sun: there is an eternal vital correspondence between our nerves and the moon. If we get out of contact and harmony with the sun and moon, then both turn into great dragons of destruction against us. The sun is a great source of blood-vitality, it streams strength to us. But once we resist the sun, and say: It is a mere ball of gas! - then the very streaming vitality of sunshine turns into subtle disintegrative force in us, and undoes us. The same with the moon, the planets, the great stars. They are either our makers or our unmakers. There is no escape.
>
> We and the cosmos are one. The cosmos is a vast living body, of which we are still parts. The sun is a great heart whose tremors run through our smallest veins. The moon is a great gleaming nerve-centre from which we quiver forever.[13]

In this account, taken from Apocalypse, of the universe and man, the word 'vital' connects all the parts of life; the sun gives us 'blood-vitality'. The very relations of the universe are themselves vital: that is to say, life depends on them; 'we and the cosmos are one' and if we are cut from it we die. The Brangwen men live at the centre of such a

13. D. H. Lawrence, Apocalypse, p.29.

cosmos, and for them the church at Ilkeston is a vital part of the universe; it is of them just as the land or the sun is, and they do not need to think about it, they simply see it and know it. It is in the fullest sense a Lawrentian religious symbol. But because the novel moves towards the present time, this happy state is gradually threatened, by the Brangwen women, who have worldly ambitions.

The 'women were different' (TR, p.42). They are more conscious than the men, are aware of an outside and social world; 'they were aware of the lips and the mind of the world speaking and giving utterance, they heard the sound in the distance and they strained to listen' (TR, p.42). The woman does not see the church as a line in the landscape but she hears the Vicar 'who spoke the other, magic language' (TR, p.43). To the women, the church is already fallen from a religious symbol to a social thing, a social world set apart from her. But it is not merely social: the woman perceives that the Vicar has power over her husband because he has a 'higher being' (TR, p.44).

> His soul was the master of the other man's. And why? Why? She decided it was a question of knowledge.
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> TR, p.44

For although the men working the land feel its vitality in their blood, the woman knows there is another kind of vitality, and she craves this: it is the best life, the largest.

> It was this, this education, this higher form of being, that the mother wished to give to her children, so that they too could live the supreme life on earth. For her children, at least the children of her heart, had the complete nature that should take place in equality with the living, vital people in the land, not be left behind obscure among the labourers. Why must they remain obscured and stifled all their lives, why should they suffer from lack of freedom to move? How should they learn entry into the firmer, more vivid circle of life?
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> TR, p.44

The woman here knows, as Jude Fawley found out, that once you have

envisaged a better, a higher life, to remain where you are is death. The woman knows, as Jude believes, that the 'living, vital people in the land' are the educated classes: those who do not get themselves an education will, like Jude, be 'left behind obscure among the labourers'. The woman here revolts against the fate of Jude the Obscure, and questions that novel's (and Hardy's) tragic logic; 'why must they remain obscured and stifled all their lives?'. The question is not about 'obscured and stifled' but about that Hardyesque word, 'must'. 'Why should they suffer from lack of freedom to move?' Here the question centre on 'should', which is repeated, transformed, in the next question; not 'why' is it so, but 'how' can it be made other, 'how should they learn entry into the finer, more vivid circle of life?'.

The novel makes Ursula the final successor to Jude Fawley, giving her the education he wanted, yet showing her still struggling with the problem of the 'finer, more vivid circle of life', which is not as the Brangwen women originally thought, a matter of class and education. Not finally, at least. For Lawrence is never in this novel a social novelist. He has left behind his tag 'working class genius' and is moving himself towards a much broader vision.

> As a novelist, I feel it is the change inside the individual which is my real concern. The great social change interests and troubles me, but it is not my field . . . My field is to know the feelings inside a man, and to make new feelings conscious.[14]

The two concerns which Lawrence details here are his two main concerns in the novel: he has to know existing feelings, 'the feelings inside a man', and he has to make 'new feelings conscious', that is to make his readers aware of new feelings they may have but not yet consciously know. In the last third of the novel, through Ursula we find these 'new feelings', for Ursula brings us into the present and we face our own situation through

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14. D. H. Lawrence, 'The State of Funk' in Phoenix, II, p.567.

her. But before he can arrive at the point of being able to attempt this, Lawrence has first to create a way of writing which can carry feelings without consciousness. For a large part of the novel Lawrence works towards this by setting his people in the past, in the pre-modern world, a sort of Eden, where knowledge, consciousness, thought, have little to do with life; the early Brangwens do not _know_, they _live_.

2. The visionary landscapes of _The Rainbow_

For Lawrence there is both a distinct difference and a vital connection between 'knowing' and 'being'. In 'The Study of Thomas Hardy', he writes, 'man is given up to his dual business, of being . . . and of knowing' (p42). At the same time it is quite clear to Lawrence that 'knowing' can inhibit 'being' and squeeze it down into a nasty self consciousness. Knowing in the scientific, empirical, logical sense takes away wonder and mystery which are vital to the religious apprehension of life. If 'desire' can only be for what is missing from the soul, then religious effort and mystery are almost synonymous: because self knowledge or scientific knowledge is often empirical, it tends to keep us secular: it works by proof. Knowledge and wonder do not have to be separate but Lawrence saw that they often were.

> The one universal element in consciousness which is fundamental to life is the element of wonder. You cannot help feeling it in a bean as it starts to grow and pulls itself out of its jacket. You cannot help feeling it in the glisten of the nucleus of the amoeba. You recognize it, willy-nilly, in an ant busily tugging at a straw; in a rook as it walks the frosty grass. [15]

Knowledge, Lawrence believed, should add to the store of wonder - as indeed he makes natural history and biology do here - rather than explain it away. Explanation often seems like mere resistance, and such resistance works back on us, like acid.

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15. D. H. Lawrence, 'Hymns in a Man's Life' in _Phoenix_, II, p.598.

> Once we resist the sun, and say: It is a mere ball of gas! - then the very streaming vitality of the sunshine turns into a subtle disintegrative force in us, and undoes us.[16]

Such resistance is Lawrence's equivalent of Adam's scientific questioning in Paradise Lost.

> When I behold this godly frame, this world
> Of heaven and earth consisting, and compute
> Their magnitudes, this earth a spot, a grain,
> An atom, with the firmament compared
> And all her numbered stars, that seem to roll
> Spaces incomprehensible (For such
> Their distance argues and their swift return
> Diurnal) merely to officiate light
> Round this spacious earth . . .

Scientific reasoning causes Adam to forget the glorification of God and the whole creation and to call into question the idea of providence, proving that this area of knowledge really is beyond him.[17] Like Milton, Lawrence believes that knowledge which displaced awe was worthless. But Lawrence also believes that the very _idea_ of God detracts from natural wonder and is a form of damaging consciousness because it is an _idea_. The Brangwen men who see the church in the distance do not see it as an idea, an institution, but rather experience it as a sign of God. Consciousness tarnishes religious apprehension, which Lawrence discovers in being. Thus the Brangwens are created as _un_conscious beliefs. The first named Brangwen, Alfred Brangwen, and his wife are

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16. D. H. Lawrence, Apocalypse, p.29.

17. John Milton, Paradise Lost, viii, 15-23. Alastair Fowler writes in a footnote to this passage,

> Burden comments that Adam is here almost a sceptical astronomer reasoning falsely about final causes. Far from concentrating on the glorification of God, Adam in effect indicts providence; showing that this sphere of knowledge is beyond his capacity. It seems that at least part of astronomy (or a certain kind of astronomical speculation) may come within the category of forbidden knowledge; not because M. is against science, but because some knowledge is of 'no avail' for man. (p.396).

> Two very separate beings, vitally connected, knowing nothing of each other, yet living in their separate ways from one root.
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> TR, p.48

Later, when Tom courts Lydia, one of his senses of recognition comes from a similar sense of strangeness, as if this separateness is an essential part of marriage; Lawrence writes exultantly, 'he did not even know her' (TR, p.82). The vitality of marriage in strangeness is central to the earlier parts of the novel, but with increasing and increasingly modern consciousness it becomes more difficult to achieve: Ursula is left at the end of the novel unmarried and uncertain of her future. This is the real state of the modern world which the novel progresses inexorably towards. But the past that Lawrence envisages during the course of the novel alters that reality and insists that it could be put right. The novel functions prophetically by uniting what has been, what is, and what will be in one story. In this story, vision draws heavily on imagination.

In the essay 'Hymns in a Man's Life' Lawrence writes of his non-conformist childhood,

> I should have missed bitterly a direct knowledge of the Bible, and a direct relation to Canaan, Moab and Kedron, those places that never existed on earth.[18]

The historical fact of these places is of no use or interest to Lawrence: fact does not necessarily represent truth. No, the truth of these Biblical place names lay in their capacity to set him dreaming - of heaven and wonders, not of geographical locations. These are names which would work on him, listening, like spells or incantations which set a tone, in the mind and imagination, which Lawrence would call on for the rest of his life. He could not have done without these visionary landscapes, 'places that never existed on earth'. In the opening pages of The Rainbow, with the

18. D. H. Lawrence, 'Hymns in a Man's Life', Phoenix, II, p.600.

Marsh Farm, Lawrence creates for us just such an imaginary, and yet vital landscape. In the 'Introduction' to the Penguin edition of The Rainbow, John Worthen writes,

> Written hard on the heels of the earlier novel - Lawrence was correcting the proofs of Sons and Lovers while simultaneously writing The Sisters in April 1913 - it is quite remarkable that The Rainbow should cover so long a period of time in an almost identical region of the English Midlands without for one moment covering the same ground, goegraphically or metaphorically. Only a few miles from The Rainbow's real life Ilkeston, and from the fictionalised Marsh Farm and Cossethay, lies the fictional Bestwood of Sons and Lovers, the real life Eastwood, where Lawrence was born and grew up. Eastwood, in one form or another, appears in The White Peacock, Sons and Lovers, Women in Love, The Lost Girl, Aaron's Rod, and Lady Chatterley's Lover. Yet, almost as if it had been wiped off the map, the landscape of The Rainbow is as empty of Eastwood or of any place like it, and the life and work of the mining community of the Erewash valley is either distanced or totally ignored until the last third of the book.
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> TR, p.15

By ignoring 'real life Eastwood' in the opening sections of this novel, Lawrence is able to create a modern representation of Canaan and Moab and Kedron, one of those 'places that never existed on earth' and yet add a new dimension to our idea of life on earth. This 'visionary' landscape is presented to us as 'real', and we mustn't, I think, think of this as some sort of literary trick with mirrors: Lawrence wants not to pull a narrative stunt but to alter our conception of real, to enlarge it. For Lawrence as for Anna later, the real is the wondrous. Anna finds Baron Skrebensky both wonderful and real:

> Something in her responded to his extravagance and his exuberant manner. She thought him a very wonderful person . . . He, at any rate, represented to the child the real world, where kings and lords and princes moved and fulfilled their shining lives, whilst queens and ladies and princesses upheld the noble order.
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> She had recognised the Baron Skrebensky as a real person, he had had some regard for her. But when she did not see him anymore, he faded and became a memory. But as memory he was always alive to her.
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> TR, p.137.

This sort of transformation of one reality into another is, if we compare it to earlier work, reminiscent of Mrs. Morel's vision in the cornfield and the visionary landscape at the very end of Sons and Lovers, rather than the 'realism' of Morel cobbling boots, or George in The White Peacock, catching rabbits. It is a reality changed by the religious sense which drenches it. This is partly to do with its long past, its distance: Cossethay is not an ideal or visionary landscape in the sense of having become an ideal place for human life to exist. Rather it is ideal in its long standing, in the fact that Brangwens go back not in years but in countless generations, its sense of vast ages and even eternal being make it like Heaven or Kedron, an 'instinctive dream': it is a real home, in the sense that no Eastwood or Bestwood could ever be, in exactly the sense Chaucer meant when he wrote of Earth 'her is non hoom'. The opening pages of the novel create a sort of sliding time scale which puts our lives in a particular perspective. Such a scale gives us a sense of the past that is made explicit in the novel when Ursula stands at the door of her old grandmother's room,

> Here, from her grandmother's peaceful room, the door opened on to the greater space, the past, which was so big, that all it contained seemed tiny; loves and births and deaths, tiny units and features within a vast horizon. That was a great relief, to know the tiny importance of the individual, within the great past.
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> TR, p.304.

Against such a background in the novel, Lawrence writes of a slow process of life and decay which ends with Ursula unable to find a Son of God to marry. The novel details the married lives of two sets of couples, Tom and Lydia, Anna and Will, along with accounts of the places in which these lives are set, the Marsh Farm, then the little house at Cossethay, and then Beldover. The higher and finer thing which the woman had originally wanted for her children - and felt they were equal to - comes and goes, gradually changing, and shrinking into something more social, a matter of

class. Education for Will, for example, lifts him in the world; he is first a night school teacher, then teacher for the County. But it does not bring him entry into a 'higher' state of being. For Will, much like Tom Brangwen before him, finds that the real centre of living is the married life.

> As they lay close together, complete and beyond the touch of time or change, it was as if they were at the very centre of all the slow wheeling of space and the rapid agitation of life.
>
> TR, p.185

In a sense this is a correction of the plot of Jude the Obscure, the higher and finer thing which Jude assumes is education is proved to be in fact, the sexual relation. For Will and Anna here at the beginning of their married life, heaven is where they are, the universe changes around to centre on them, infinite and eternal, they are 'complete beyond the touch of time or change', at the 'centre' of 'space' and 'life'.

This is a vision which matches in some way the manner in which Tom Brangwen thinks about life at Anna's wedding. He, too, senses himself in the universe, with his wife. But his vision is more frightening, more knowledgeable.

> How did one grow old - how could one become confident? He wished he felt older. Why, what difference was there, as far as he felt matured or completed, between him now and him at his own wedding? He might be getting married over again - he and his wife. He felt himself tiny, a little, upright figure on a plain circled round with the immense, roaring sky: he and his wife, two little, upright figures walking across this plain, whilst the heavens shimmered and roared about them. When did one come to an end? In which direction was it finished? There was no end, no finish, only this roaring vast space. Did one never get old, never die? That was the clue. He exulted strangely, with torture. He would go on with his wife, he and she like two children camping in the plains. What was sure but the endless sky? But that was so sure, so boundless.
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> TR, p.174.

An account such as this alters the way in which character is presented by the novel. We see the vision through the figure, as indeed we do with

Mordecai, but the x-ray vision of this novel allows us to see a level far below that of articulated ideas. Tom 'felt', not thought.

Both George Eliot and Thomas Hardy have described this same little figure, upright 'on a plain, circled round with the immense, roaring sky'. For Dinah, in Adam Bede, the sky is a tent, a covering, shelter provided by, a sign of, God. Clym, in Return of the Native, sees the heath as 'the arena of life':

> There was something in its oppressive horizontality which too much reminded him of the arena of life; it gave him sense of bare equality with, and no superiority to, a single living thing under the sun.[19]

For Dinah, God makes of the plain a home for humans, a shelter. For Hardy and Lawrence the vision is more exposed, more painful. But Lawrence makes much of that which Hardy fears. For Hardy the best such a vision can give is the 'sense of bare equality'. The bareness which Hardy insists on, ('bare equality') is not a statement of fact, though Hardy means us to take it as one. 'Bare' consciously strips something away: it is man's sense of being something more than a living organism crawling on the face of the earth: it is, I suppose, the soul which Hardy's vision here denies. For Hardy, as for George Eliot in her Christian guise, the vision is in a sense diminishing - for George Eliot because Dinah has to have God interceded between herself and the universe, for Hardy because, stripped and placed under a spotlight, man is equal to 'every single living thing under the sun'. Clym's thought is reminiscent of Lear's 'unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art'[20] but it is not so sympathetic: Lear is relieved to find a man who goes naked, like an animal, without pretending sophistication to hide cruel animality.

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19. Thomas Hardy, The Return of the Native (London, 1970), p.245.

20. William Shakespeare, King Lear (Harmondsworth, 1978), 3.iv.104.

Hardy is afraid to see man as an animal, because once down, he has no way of translating such a thought back up: for Lear there is the immensity of tragedy, the grandeur of great opposing forces of good and evil. But for Hardy, if he allows the thought of animality, there is nothing else. 'Bare' for him is also 'barren'. It does not have the release of truth that Lear's usage finds.

Lawrence celebrates the vision of man on the plains. Where littleness in Hardy is diminishing (the 'standing on a hill at night' passage at the opening of Far From the Madding Crowd, for example) for Lawrence it becomes part of a sort of pluckiness, marvellously ordinary and real: 'he felt himself tiny, a little, upright figure on a plain'. 'Tiny' does not seem to be a diminishing word - not in the sense that Hardy's grand 'equality' is; it has less pained, ironic consciousness behind it, it is more straight, unashamed, factual. And it enables Lawrence to continue; Tom is not only 'tiny' but also 'a little, upright figure'. 'Little' and 'upright' are here put together as if they were part of the same thing. They are part of a change of perspective within the sentence. 'Tiny' is what Tom feels, how it seems to him as he thinks/feels about his life. But what follows looks at him from a different perspective; he feels it from within but it is described as if from without, by someone (God?) looking down on him from a great height. He seems almost like a little doll. It is the conjunction of 'little' and 'upright' that makes this happen. For only a higher vision could see a great strapping farm man as both 'little', which refers to his size relative to the vastness of the universe around him, and also 'upright' referring to both his stance in that universe, his physical set against the cosmos, and his morality, his being. Only a higher vision could see 'littleness' and 'uprightness' as equally obvious traits. Hardy - in Giles Winterborne, for example, would have to create an upright man who by reason of his 'littleness' against the force of things would be crushed.

Lawrence is not afraid of the 'vast roaring space', though he knows it is terrible. So Tom 'exulted strangely, with torture': it is the very terrible nature of it all that makes him exult, he could not exult unless it was also torture to him. This is a recognition that breaks through fear, because it faces it, lives fully in it. Later we will see Tom's granddaughter, Ursula, make the same discovery. It is like Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling, where endurance and not resolution of contradiction is the higher life.[21] We are not to escape from life, Hardy knew that, but he did not know how to live. Lawrence said 'the business is to live, really alive. And this needs wonder'.[22] So living, enduring, exulting in the terrible vastness, Tom's vision breaks through to a new innocence, and a religious certainty: 'He would go on with his wife, he and she like two children camping in the plains. What was sure but the endless sky? But that was so sure, so boundless.' The 'tiny, little' man has been transformed from a diminished, dwarved figure, crushed by the weight of eternity into a more original, undefiled 'tiny' man who will remain 'tiny': 'did one never get old, never die?'. The man and woman become 'like two children camping in the plains', but even as children they have a future.

For Tom and Lydia this 'future' rests in fact with their children. Their marriage had established a covenant which freed the child Anna from responsibility.

> She was no longer called upon to uphold with her childish might the broken end of the arch. Her father and her mother now met to the span of the heavens, and she, the child, was free to play in the space beneath, between.
>
> TR, p.134.

As she grows up, Anna has to find some room to build on her life, to move her own life away from Tom and Lydia, and this comes as a desire

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21. S. Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling:

    It is great to grasp the eternal, but it is greater to hold fast to the temporal after having given it up. (p.22).

22. D. H. Lawrence, 'Hymns in A Man's Life', Phoenix, II, p.599.

to 'escape' (TR, p.143) from the covenant they have created. Their sexuality disturbs her 'She felt even her father against her. He had a strong, dark bond with her mother, a potent intimacy that existed inarticulate and wild, following its own course, and savage if interrupted, uncovered.' (TR, p.143).

When Will appears, Anna finds her escape.

> Without knowing it, Anna was wanting him to come. In him she had escaped. In him the bounds of her experience were transgressed: he was the hole in the wall, beyond which the sunshine blazed on an outside world.
>
> TR, p.151

In this second courtship we see traces of the first. The release of sexual energy brings more life into being: the couple kiss, and the stars appear. It is just like Tom and Lydia. Leaving Lydia after she has agreed to marry him, Tom 'went out into the wind',

> Big holes were blown into the sky, the moonlight blew it about. Sometimes a high moon, liquid-brilliant, scudded across a hollow space and took cover under electric, brown-iridescent cloud-edges. Then there was a blot of cloud, and shadow. Then somewhere in the night a radiance again, like a vapour. And all the sky was teeming and tearing along, a vast disorder of flying shapes and darkness and ragged fumes of light and a great brown circling halo, then the terror of a moon running liquid-brilliant into the open for a moment, hurting the eyes before she plunged under cover of cloud again.
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> TR, p.85

Similarly, while Lydia is giving birth, the universe appears to Tom, as if it were something revealed,

> He went downstairs, and to the door, outside, lifted his face to the rain, and felt the darkness striking unseen and steadily upon him.
>
> The swift unseen threshing of the night upon him silenced him and he was overcome. He turned away indoors, humbly. There was the infinite world, eternal, unchanging, as well as the world of life.
>
> TR, p.118

It is when the 'world of life' is experienced most strongly that the other world, 'infinite . . . eternal, unchanging' appears and matches up with

human being, as the play of wind and moon and cloud match the play of Tom and Lydia's emotions. Such language is developed over the course of the novel to express the feelings of people without words, without consciousness, as if the exterior universe were the natural expression of human emotion. When Will kisses Anna and then goes home 'with the stars in heaven whirling about the blackness of his head' (TR, p.153), we take the stars almost as a refrain, a chorus. Visionary landscapes thus become part of the novel's rhythmic movement, and take on an import beyond their immediate presence. Later, Ursula's breakdown will be expressed by similar landscape language, as if Lawrence believes that the hidden and silent reality of human being has a mirror in the equally wordless workings of the physical universe.

Marriage, or at least the conjunction of man and woman, is discovered to be one of the doors to the perception of the infinite in life, another means of expressing the thing that can not be said in words. For Will, marriage to Anna is devastating, opening a whole area of experience to him which he has not imagined.

> A man wasn't born before he was married. What a change indeed!
>
> He surveyed the rind of the world: houses, factories, trams, the discarded rind; people scurrying about, work going on, all on the discarded surface. An earthquake had burst it all from inside. It was as if the surface of the world had been broken away entire: Ilkeston, streets, church, people, work, rule-of-the-day, all intact; and yet peeled away into unreality, leaving here exposed the inside, the reality: one's own being, strange feelings and passions and yearnings and beliefs and aspirations, suddenly become present, revealed, the permanent bedrock, knitted one rock with the woman one loved. It was confounding. Things are not what they seem! When he was a child, he had thought a woman was a woman merely by virtue of her skirts and petticoats. And now, lo, the whole world could be divested of its garment, the garment could lie there shed away intact, and one could stand in a new world, a new earth, naked in a new, naked universe. It was too astounding and miraculous.
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> TR, p.190

Will has discovered a new world inside the old one; his marriage has stripped away 'the rind' of life and left him with another reality, which Lawrence describes in terms of religious experience, although for Will - a town man - religion is more confined to the institution of Church than it has been for earlier Brangwens. Lawrence sees it as a religious experience, but Will, too confined by ideas, does not. 'Reality! one's own being, strange feelings and passions and yearnings and beliefs and aspirations' is 'revealed' to Will as 'the permanent bedrock', the true basis of life. In a state which requires the language of mysticism, Will sees 'things are not what they seem' and is reborn 'in a new world, a new earth, naked, in a new, naked universe'. It is 'miraculous'.

But Will feels the miracle is betrayed when Anna wants to return to the world and have a tea party. Perhaps it is Will's self-consciousness that prevents him moving easily between the two levels, the 'rind' and the centre? It is as if, like Hardy, he can not bear that both levels should exist together at the same time. There is always something permanent and fixed which he wants. So although with the birth of the baby Ursula he feels that 'the whole of the man's world was exterior and extraneous to his own real life with Anna' (TR, p.235), yet he is always aware of something beyond him, 'a sense of something more, something further, which gave him absolute being' (TR, p.236) but he never finds a satisfactory expression for this sense, for his symbols are always, finally, too small, too limited. Lawrence tells us that 'something in him was unready, unable, unwilling to be ripe' (TR, p.252). Beside Anna, and compared to Lydia and Tom, Will seems a diminished figure; he sees the Cathedral and adores it, but he is not in direct touch with the heavens. And when Anna destroys his belief in the symbol, the Cathedral, then he feels as if the truth of his feeling too is gone.

> Before, he had thought them absolute. But now he saw them crouching under the sky, with still the dark, mysterious world of reality inside, but as a world within a world, a sort of side-show, whereas before they had been as a world to him within a chaos: a reality, an absolute, within a meaningless confusion.
>
> TR, pp.247-248

It is because the universe without the symbol seems a 'meaningless confusion' that Will turns to the paintings of the early Italians,

> The great compositions cast a spell over him . . . It had to do with the establishment of a whole mystical, architectural conception which used the human figure as a unit.
>
> TR, pp.32-33

What Will needs is the kind of continuity and order that a novel like The Rainbow provides, an order and continuity that he can not himself see in every day life. He longs for a sense of place in the cosmos, a sense of order for the 'human figure', and this need, which is really a religious need, is passed on, transformed, to his daughter Ursula.

3. Ursula, the modern

Through the character of Ursula, Lawrence takes on directly the problems of modern life which had seemed to defeat Hardy. Ursula's world is the world of the modern, where marriage seems impossible, where the old land-based life is a thing of the past, where the decay of urban life eats its way into the human soul. Ursula's problems are both sexual and religious. She believes, in a passionate rebellion against the formalised religion of her father, and the church, that only real daily life is true: 'that which one cannot experience in daily life is not true for oneself' (TR, p.328). Yet she is also attracted to and in need of the visionary world of Sundays, and so rightly assumes that she has to find some means of transforming real life into the religious passion of the Sunday world, for 'all her life was

a weekday life' (TR, p.331). Essentially what she has to do is to recreate the life that the original Brangwens had, to find a way back to that Eden, or to create it anew. But this is an impossible task for one individual, because it is a task that seems to depend on the way of life of a whole people. Thus Ursula, in desperate need, has nothing in which she can believe, and so she is 'soulless, uncreated, unformed' (TR, p.333). There are two possibilities open to Ursula: love and education, and both of them fail her.

When Skrebensky enters Ursula's life he brings with him a 'strong sense of the other world' (TR, p.355), the wider world of life which Ursula craves. It does seem that relation to him might be the answer, the door, for her. The old patterns of Brangwen life reassert themselves as they begin their courtship. Lawrence echoes Paradise Lost when he says that 'between them was the compact of his flesh with hers, in the hand-clasp' (TR, p.343).[23] And the Eden past of the novel is glanced at too.

> They continued to walk on, quivering like shadows under the ash-trees of the hill, where her grandfather had walked with his daffodils to make his proposal, and where her mother had gone with her young husband, walking close upon him as Ursula was now walking upon Skrebensky.
>
> TR, p.345

Skrebensky is no mate for Ursula though. He does not believe in the personal or individual life, he has no interest in or need for any religion, for that part of him is dead.

> He went about his duties, giving himself up to them. At the bottom of his heart his self, the soul that aspired and had true hope of self-effectuation lay

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23. 'Thus talking hand in hand alone they passed . . .' PL, vii, 689, and 'They hand in hand with wandering steps and slow . . .' PL, xii, 648.

> as dead, still-born, a dead weight in his womb. Who was he to hold important his personal connection? What did a man matter personally? He was just a brick in the whole great social fabric . . . So Skrebensky left the girl out and went his way, serving what he had to serve, and enduring what he had to endure, without remark. To his own intrinsic life, he was dead. And he could not rise again from the dead. His soul lay in the tomb. His life lay in the established order of things.
>
> TR, pp.374-375

In Ursula, the soul though hidden, uncreated, is yet potentially there, a seed which cannot be denied. She has a real possibility of life which Skrebensky lacks, for 'his life lay in the established order of things', but Ursula doubts the established order, and finds it a mere confusion. When Skrebensky is glad to be called away to war she feels 'an agony of helplessness' (TR, p.374), and the world seems to her as it did to Matthew Arnold in 'Dover Beach'.

> Vaguely she knew the huge powers of the world rolling and crashing together, darkly, clumsily, stupidly, yet colossal, so that one was brushed almost as dust. Helpless, helpless, swirling like dust.
>
> TR, p.374

'Where ignorant armies clash by night' - this is the exact place Ursula finds herself as she grows up and away from her parents. Everything Ursula sees or involves herself in seems to be wrong, broken, fallen, lost. Skrebensky, Winifred Inger, Wiggiston, the College, the world of work, the final affair with Skrebensky; all these are both realistic descriptions of the modern world, yet Lawrence also translates them into his own visionary language as deathly fallen worlds which last only so long as Ursula's idea of them, rather like Eustacia Vye's mistaken idea of Paris in The Return of the Native. Lawrence writes,

> If Paris real had been Paris as she imagined it, no doubt she was right and her instinct was soundly expressed. But Paris real was not Eustacia's imagined Paris. Where

> was her imagined Paris, the place where her powerful nature could come to blossom? Beside some strong-passioned, unconfined man, her mate.[24]

For example, when Ursula starts College, she sees in the architecture 'a reminiscence of the wondrous, cloistral origin of education' (TR, p.480), which matches the desire in her for some ideal education, a real learning about life, a genuine, passionate inquiry, with real teachers, devoted to the care of the souls of the young.

> Her soul flew straight back to the mediaeval times, when the monks of God held the learning of man and imparted it within the shadow of religion. In this spirit she entered college.
>
> TR, p.480

If college real had been college as she imagined it, 'no doubt she was right and her instinct was soundly expressed'. But of course, as Jude Fawley was made to understand at Christminster, in real life, education as institution is no more connected to education as an ideal than any other thing in the social world. So although Ursula has access to the thing which she and her foremothers imagined would lead to the higher and finer life, in fact as the first year passes she realises that it is just another part of drab reality, no different than Wiggiston or Army life.

> The professors were not priests initiated into the deep mysteries of life and knowledge. After all, they were only middle-men handling wares they had become so accustomed to that they were oblivious to them . . . It was a second hand dealer's shop, and one bought an equipment for an examination. This was only a little side-show to the factories of the town. Gradually the perception stole into her. This was no religious retreat of pure learning. It was a little apprentice-shop where one was further equipped for making money. The college itself was a little, slovenly laboratory for the factory.
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> TR, p.485

Is everything then to be reduced like this? Every idealisation to be reduced to the realism of 'a little side-show to the factories of the town'? Because

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24. D. H. Lawrence, 'The Study of Thomas Hardy', p.28.

Ursula can find nothing, and no person, to match the inner reality of her self which is striving to be born, she is able only to know negatives; what she will not be, what she does not want. There is nothing to feed her potential, and bring her inner reality out into positive being, 'that which she was, positively, was dark and unrevealed; it could not come forth. It was like a seed buried in dry ash' (TR, p.487). And yet it is a further negative, or set of negatives, which force her to know what she is. Dr. Frankstone, a science teacher, puts forward the bare, mechanistic view of life, which seems to force Ursula to know something else, something other.

> I don't see why we should attribute some special mystery to life - do you? We don't understand it as we understand electricity, even, but that doesn't warrant our saying it is something special, something different in kind and distinct from everything else in the universe - do you think it does? May it not be that life consists in a complexity of physical and chemical activities, of the same order as the activities we already know in science? I don't see, really, why we should imagine there is a special order of life, and life alone -
>
> The conversation had ended on a note of uncertainty, indefinite, wistful. But the purpose, what was the purpose? Electricity had no soul, light and heat had no soul. Was she herself an impersonal force, or conjunction of forces, like one of these? She looked still at the unicellular shadow that lay within the field of light, under her microscope. It was alive. She saw it move - she saw the bright mist of its ciliary activity, she saw the gleam of nucleus, as it slid across the plane of light. What then was its will? If it was a conjunction of forces, physical and chemical, what held these forces unified, and for what purpose were they unified?
>
> . . . Suddenly in her mind the world gleamed strangely, with an intense light, like the nucleus of the creature under the microscope. Suddenly she had passed away into an intensely-gleaming light of knowledge. She could not understand what it all was. She only knew that it was not limited mechanical energy, nor mere purpose of self-preservation and self-assertion. It was a consummation, a being infinite. Self was a oneness with the infinite. To be oneself was a supreme, gleaming triumph of infinity.
>
> TR, pp.491-492

Like Lawrence himself, Ursula here is forced into a position of awe and recognition by the very forces which want to deny awe. The reduction of life to nothing 'special', a mere 'complexity of physical and chemical activities' pushes Ursula in the direction of religion, because the attitude of 'mere' seems ridiculous compared with the reality, about which one can always ask more and more questions. 'If it was a conjunction of forces, physical and chemical, what held these forces unified, and for what purpose were they unified?' What was the purpose of life, of being, what was the point of having a soul? Ursula, questioning herself, not only refutes Dr. Frankstone and science, but also Skrebensky, with his 'brick in the social fabric' and impersonality. It is not an irony so much as a triumph of life that Ursula's religious vision should come to her, after all, in the science laboratory. The light of her vision is quite different from the light of the camp fire around which she had previously seen human living conducted. This is not a safe spot but an entire world transformed, 'in her mind the world gleamed strangely, with an intense light', by the very thing she had wanted from the college: knowledge. 'Suddenly she had passed away into an intensely-gleaming light of knowledge', but this knowledge has come from herself, rather than from the educational establishment; it is a hidden part of herself coming to light, bringing light with it. The knowledge of her vision goes against Dr. Frankstone and her 'I don't see why we should attribute some special mystery to life - do you?' and Skrebensky's 'what did a man matter personally?'. Ursula suddenly understands that 'Self was a oneness with the infinite. To be oneself was a surpreme, gleaming triumph of infinity'.

In this new level of understanding, Ursula can see quite clearly that she and Skrebensky are 'enemies come together in a truce' (<u>TR</u>, p.493). This is a major change in her, for at last there is some positive thing she knows now, something to which she can hold herself in true relation.

She has been gifted with her vision and now she must begin to live by it. The nature of her problem is changed; she is no longer a modern soul in search of itself, wandering, lost, and aimless because faithless. But the really hard part of her task must now be faced. For while she is still connected to Skrebensky she is still connected to the old deathly life. And indeed, now that she has recognised their enmity, Skrebensky becomes absolutely dangerous to her, 'every movement and word of his was alien to her being' (TR, p.493). Rather like Rosamond and Lydgate, these two have become absolutely at war becauae they cannot love each other fully. But this is not frightening to Lawrence in the way it would be to George Eliot or to Hardy: to Lawrence it is only a sign that things are not yet right, and by the strength of the enmity we can envisage what a true love would be. Lawrence would have Ursula fight off the enemy, overcome him, in order to have a truer life of her own. Skrebensky, unable to acknowledge Ursula's reality, tries to force her to stick with the old, dead, ways; to marry him, to settle for less than she now knows could be. Waking at the Italian hotel Skrebensky's arms around her make him seem to her like 'an incubus upon her' (TR, p.523): she can no longer feel him as a human man, but only as an oppressive and weakening devil. But this is unconscious knowledge, and it is quite at odds with Ursula's conscious mind. From this living nightmare it seems there is no escape, and Ursula lapses hopelessly into inaction.

> Her examination was finished, her college career was over. There remained for her now to marry or to work again. She applied for no post. It was concluded she would marry.
>
> TR, p.526

Though Ursula does not positively want to work as a teacher or to marry Skrebensky, she has nothing else that she can put forward as an alternative. At this point it would perhaps be best simply to wait, wait and hope, for

the right thing to happen. When she believes herself to be carrying his child it suddenly appears things are decided for her, but then we realise that this marriage would be absolutely bad, for Ursula begins to prepare for it as for death.

> She thought only of preparing her garments and of living quietly, peacefully, till the time when she should join him again and her history would be concluded for ever.
>
> TR, p.538

The x-ray vision of the novel, clear in this passage, sees through what in an ordinary realistic novel would be a long period of dithering and inactivity to Ursula's underlying state. A part of her, and this is the part Lawrence is most interested in, knows that Skrebensky means death for her, especially for this new and tender part of herself which has come to being since the vision in the science laboratory. But Ursula does not know this at the level of conscious knowledge. She knows it in the Italian hotel by the sense of peace and freedom she has before he wakes, when she is psychically alone. But she can not bear to know it openly, because another part of her wants to believe that she loves Skrebensky. Here the novel can show a suicidal part of Ursula, a part of her that is only tired, and wants an end to it all, and again we realise that Ursula can't consciously know what her feeling about Skrebensky is; it is Lawrence, not Ursula who tells us that 'her history would be concluded forever', the feeling hidden in Ursula's quiet preparation of garments.

It is from an equally hidden source that Ursula's own salvation comes. The real future of this modern soul, is, as Hardy might have predicted, nervous breakdown. This is the way through to the future. Lawrence makes Ursula face the very worst so that she can emerge into new life. From deep within her, something moves her to go out, out of the house and apparent calm, to release her madness and strangeness. She feels 'the

seething rising to madness within her' (TR, p.538). Outside she sees her inner self reflected by the landscape, by the earth.

> She saw the pale gleam of Willey Water through the cloud below, she walked the open space where hawthorn trees streamed like hair on the wind and round bushes were presences showing through the atmosphere. It was very splendid, free and chaotic . . . She turned under the shelter of the common, seeing the great veils of rain swinging with slow, floating waves across the landscape. She was very wet and a long way from home, far enveloped in the rain and the waving landscape. She must beat her way back through all this fluctuation, back to stability and security.
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> TR, p.539

The 'chaotic fluctuation' of the outside world matches Ursula's state perfectly, and allows it, by matching it, to come out to the surface instead of smouldering away under a calm exterior. When she realises that she is 'a long way from home' it is also a psychic realisation about the state of her self, for what is outside her is also inside. When Lawrence writes 'she must beat her way back through all this fluctuation, back to stability and security' we understand that Ursula has to do more than get back to the house. She must also beat her way back through her own fluctuation to her own inner stability and security. But to do this she has to see herself as she really is.

So it is as 'a solitary thing' crossing a 'wilderness', her heart beating like a 'small living seed of fear' (TR, p.539), that Ursula faces the terror of the outer darkness, and lets herself or makes herself, stumble into it. Earlier we have seen her suffering because of having seen or sensed an outer darkness denied by the world.

> She could see the glimmer of dark movement just out of range, she saw the eyes of the wild beast gleaming from the darkness, watching the vanity of the camp fire and the sleepers; she felt the strange, foolish vanity of the camp, which said 'Beyond our light and

> our order there is nothing', turning their faces always inwards towards the sinking fire of illuminating consciousness, which comprised sun and stars, and the Creator, and the system of Righteousness, ignoring always the vast darkness that wheeled round about, with half-revealed shapes lurking on the edge.
>
> TR, p.488

This is the outer darkness of the unknown, and, in modern times, the unadmitted. It is all beyond consciousness. Ursula has felt its existence for some years, but only now will she turn and walk into it. The wild beasts, the 'wolf and the hyaena' (TR, p.488) she has imagined are played now by the massive horses in the field; she cannot get past them 'into the smaller, cultivated field, and so out to the high road and the ordered world of man' (TR, p.541) to which she must return. Her escape from the horses leaves her exhausted, pained, disshevelled, but with an idea of her true fate.

> She had an idea that she must walk for the rest of her life, wearily, wearily. Step after step, step after step . . .
>
> TR, p.543

Now that she has faced the outer darkness, which is a condition or state of her own being, though she may return to the camp, the world of human life, she will never settle in it again, because she knows the camp is unreal and insignificant compared to that vast blackness beyond. Later, still fighting out the battle to return home, though she is in bed at her father's house, she has to try to make the outward social reality match the true reality of her own being, her new self. And so she insists,

> I have no father nor mother nor lover, I have no allocated place in the world of things, I do not belong to Beldover nor to Nottingham nor to England nor to this world, they none of them exist, I am trammelled and entangled in them but they are all unreal. I must break out of it, like a nut from its shell which is an unreality.
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> TR, p.546

This is the kernel of truth that Ursula has needed: she is enmeshed in the world, but not of it; it means nothing to her, and she must, will, now break free. She understands also that she cannot create the man she wants, she must discover him, 'recognise a man created by God', (TR, p.547), as her people have done before her, in the past.

This new Ursula who appears in the final page or two of the novel, is the being whom Lawrence has striven to bring into life, a creature as fully religious and also human, as himself. Ursula is not a great repudiating triumph, but a small, vigilant confirmation: she is so small, and the world is still the old world, and going bad.

> In everything she saw she grasped and groped to find the creation of the living God, instead of the old, hard, barren form of bygone living. Sometimes great terror possessed her. Sometimes she lost touch, lost her feeling, she could only know the old horror of the husk which bound in her and all mankind. They were all in prison, they were all going mad.
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> TR, p.547

The transition from the old, hard world to the new, visionary world is now complete, or perhaps not complete so much as set out, set up: for Ursula is still grasping and groping, because the new creation is not static and fixed, unlike the 'old, hard, barren form of bygone living'. The new vision is difficult, hard to keep hold of, easy to forget, it is only a 'feeling' not a whole great cosmology or a total set of ideas, as the vision of life in the early part of the novel was. Finally, Lawrence's account of Ursula's salvation can be no more than a vision of moving light, something perceived even as it fades. Lawrence's vision comes in the form of a rainbow, a symbol. It would be no use making Ursula's vision something more concrete, something more human: to be all it is, is has to be a symbol. Such a thing could not have been said in Sons and Lovers - because it was too much grounded in the real and ordinary.

> Allegory can always be explained away. The true symbol defies all explanation, so does the true myth. You can give meanings to either - you will never explain them away. Because symbol and myth do not affect us only mentally, they move the deep emotional centres every time. The great quality of the mind is finality. The mind 'understands' and there's an end of it.[25]

Lawrence knew that his transition period had led him away from finality, 'finality' of the mind, that sort of understanding that puts an end to it. The kind of religious consciousness he is trying to invoke with this symbol is not finite and explainable but infinite and mysterious. Lawrence then, chooses a symbol which will get the 'deep emotional centres', and makes this symbol not merely the end of his transition novel, but the thing which shapes it all through. And it is significant that this great symbol is not something Lawrence has 'made up', not a piece of fantasy. It is one of the old symbols of our thought, taken from out of our past and reinvested with new force for us, for 'the old meanings control our actions, even when our minds have gone inert'.[26]

> Steadily the colour gathered, mysteriously, from nowhere, it took presence upon itself, there was a faint, vast rainbow. The arc bended and strengthened itself till it arched indomitable, making great architecture of light and colour and the space of heaven, its pedestals luminous in the corruption of new houses on the low hill, its arch the top of heaven.
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> TR, p.548

A painterly vision, of 'light and colour and the space of heaven' Ursula's vision is grounded in earthly 'corruption', stands on it, grows out of it. And this earth-heaven bridge is made real by the fact that it is not merely something seen by the eye, but also something felt, something based on, in, physical life, the rainbow is a symbol written into the human life, like DNA, something _in_ people,

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25. D. H. Lawrence, _Apocalypse_, p.115.

26. _ibid._, p.62.

> the rainbow was arched in their blood and would quiver to life in their spirit, that they would cast off their horny covering of disintegration, that new, clean, naked bodies would issue . . .
>
> TR, p.548

A new covenant made. As if the covenant were always there, only needing a certain conjunction of forces to bring about a new vision, as if it only needed a human being desperately to desire it, and then it would reveal itself once more. Only we do have to desire it, and the corruption of our life, Lawrence believes, has killed off for many, for most, the faculty of desire, of passion. Ursula's vision at the end of this novel is an achievement, but it is not enough: she will become trammelled and enmeshed in the unreal, old world again, her 'Paris' will fade away from her or derange her if it remains a vision only in her mind. As Lawrence says of Eustacia Vye, 'where was her imagined Paris, the place where her powerful nature could come to blossom? Beside some strong passioned, unconfined man, her mate'.[27]

The rainbow 'arched in their blood' is the God of the novel. Elsewhere Lawrence wrote of this God,

> We are only the actors, we are never wholly the authors of our own deeds or works. IT is the author, the unknown inside us or outside us.[28]

The transition novel, The Rainbow brings Lawrence to the point where he knows that it is this 'IT' that he must write of: he did not know it when he started out on this way, but that is why he had the feeling that the 'characters' weren't the most important thing in his new kind of novel. Women in Love uses 'real' life as a thing to sketch scenes, in which the 'actors' let 'IT' work through them, more or less, as they are able. Women in Love does what Ursula and the old world of The Rainbow could not

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27. D. H. Lawrence, 'The Study of Thomas Hardy', p.28.

28. D. H. Lawrence, 'Benjamin Franklin', in Studies in Classic American Literature (Harmondsworth, 1971), p.26.

do, it creates for Ursula a 'Son of God', a 'strong passioned unconfined man, her mate': he is a man who is as aware of 'IT' as she is. Women in Love is Lawrence's autobiography, in a different way, as much as Sons and Lovers is, and in some ways, the Lawrence who wrote it might agree, more so, for it is entirely his own story, his own world 'another world, in which I can live apart from this foul world, which I will not accept, or acknowledge, or even enter'.[29]

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29. D. H. Lawrence, 'Letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell, 3 October 1916' in Collected Letters, I, p.477.

Chapter VII

A GRAIN OF FAITH

1. The Disinherited

In Women in Love there is no distinction between Lawrence's religious vision and his vision of reality. The old reality, the reality of corruption from which Ursula turned away at the end of The Rainbow is still present, a large part of the new world, but it no longer defines or orders it. This integration of a view of the real world and a religious vision is an indirect statement of something Lawrence had known for some time. The world of corruption had to be lived through, taken on board. For example, at the end of Sons and Lovers Paul Morel faces the city of his future, yet he does not face it easily.

> 'Mother!' he whispered - 'mother!'
> She was the only thing that held him up, himself, amid all this, And she was gone, intermingling herself. He wanted her to touch him, have him alongside with her.
>
> But no, he would not give in. Turning sharply, he walked towards the city's gold phosphorescence. His fists were shut, his mouth set fast. He would not take that direction, to the darkness, to follow her. He walked towards the faintly humming, glowing town, quickly. [1]

The city is an alternative form of death. Paul does not want death, thus he turns 'sharply' from it, and towards the light. But the light of the city is the glow of phosphorescence, the glimmer of decay. It is as if there is no alternative to death, there is no real life even if he tried to find it. Lawrence himself said of this ending that Paul was not left 'stripped of everything' but 'he had his courage left'.[2] It took courage

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1. D. H. Lawrence, Sons and Lovers (Harmondsworth, 1982), p.511.

2. D. H. Lawrence, quoted by Henry James Forman in Edward Nehls's A Composite Biography of D. H. Lawrence, 3 vols. (Madison, Wisconsin, 1958), II, p.109.

to make the effort of turning sharply because as for Lawrence himself, and as for the hero of Women in Love, Birkin, to try to live was a doomed effort - 'damned and doomed to the old effort at serious living'.[3] The core of this effort is the need for faith, though faith in such dire predicament is necessarily small and meagre, looking hardly any different from doubt. Yet there is a difference. Looking out over Nottingham from the Castle, Paul and Mrs. Dawes have seen the city for what each thinks it is.

> 'It is comforting,' said Mrs. Dawes, 'to think the town goes no farther, it is only a little sore upon the country yet.'
> 'A little scab,' Paul said.[4]

For Paul, there is an end in sight, the 'sore' is to him a 'scab' - a sore beginning to harden over and heal. This ability to believe in an ending, a healing, is faith.

At the end of The Rainbow the sore has spread so that the town Ursula surveys has become 'a dry, brittle terrible corruption spreading over the face of the land', making Ursula correspondingly sick - 'sick with nausea so deep she perished as she sat'. (TR, p.548). The physical reality of the 'sore' is translated up into a metaphysical reality of 'sickness' in the human beings that live in the town. This continues into the opening of Women in Love, where Gudrun and Ursula experience the town as evil, deathly, and affecting them.

> Everything is a ghoulish replica of the real world, a replica, a ghoul, all soiled, everything sordid. It's like being mad . . .
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> WL, p.58.

The dead thing is spreading into the province of the living and destroying it. The sickness is no longer recognised but thought of as normal, as

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3. D. H. Lawrence, Women in Love (Harmondsworth, 1982), p.383.

4. D. H. Lawrence, Sons and Lovers, p.331.

health. The mad are seen as sane, and to see the reality of this, is to feel mad. With this transition (by contamination) from one reality to another, Lawrence is setting up his own standards of 'health' and 'sanity'. The weekday world of the earlier novels is shown to be sick and therefore loses all claim to be reality. And Lawrence, by such vision and judgement claims his own reality, his sanity.

Entering London in the train with Gerald, Birkin, Lawrence's representative of health, sees the capital not merely as sick but as deathly.

> The two men went together in a taxi-cab.
> 'Don't you feel like one of the damned?' asked Birkin, as they sat inside the little, swiftly running enclosure, and watched the hideous great street.
> 'No,' laughed Gerald.
> 'It is real death,' said Birkin.
>
> WL, p.113

This seems an extravagant claim on Lawrence's part, and almost self-indulgent. They are only two men entering London, yet Birkin must make much of it: 'Don't you feel like one of the damned?' How is it that Lawrence makes this claim of sanity for Birkin, and not for Gerald with his laughing shrug, 'No.'? Yet this is almost the same as a claim made by T. S. Eliot.

> Unreal city,
> Under the brown fog of a winter dawn
> A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
> I had not thought death had undone so many.[5]

But there are important differences between Lawrence's vision and Eliot's - as we have seen, T. S. Eliot would be among the first to stress them. But the difference may also be simply one of form: perhaps it is as Hardy thought when he gave up novel-writing, that you can say in poetry what you can't say in novels? Lawrence's vision can seem melodramatic, obsessive, even mad, because of the seriousness with which he treats ordinary living,

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5. T. S. Eliot, 'The Wasteland' in Collected Poems, p.65.

and the intensity of his desire for 'real' life, a desire often lacking in modern poetry, let alone novels. Later in the novel, in the attitudes of Gudrun and Loerke, Lawrence shows us his contemporaries, Modernists, looking at the future.

> As for the future, that they never mentioned except one laughed some mocking dream of the destruction of the world by a ridiculous catastrophe of man's invention . . .
>
> WL, p.551

The future is not real to them; the terror Lawrence himself feels is not real to them, they 'dream' but they do not envisage, they 'mock' but they do not change. This very real seriousness on Lawrence's part is partly what makes him - here in Birkin's words, 'Don't you feel like one of the damned?' - so very hard to take. Lawrence's seriousness was of a different order to that of his contemporaries. Talking of the 'serious modern novel' - and he may as well have been talking of the serious modern poetry - Lawrence describes the unreal, inward turning nature of modernism as different from his own sense of the vital importance of individuality and of real life.

> Self consciousness picked into such fine bits that most of them are invisible, and you have to go by smell . . . (They) strip their smallest emotions to the finest threads, till you feel that you are sewed inside a wool mattress that is being slowly shaken up, and are turning to wool along with the rest of the wooliness . . . [6]

While modernist ways of thought seemed to Lawrence to reduce sense, to create wooliness, yet they are totally concerned with 'knowing', with the consciousness we have seen Lawrence so strongly against in The Rainbow. To Lawrence this was the wrong tack, part of the sickness. So Birkin feels a madness surrounding Hermione and her set, a madness connected to the unreality of living, to the worn out pattern of 'civilised life'. And

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6. D. H. Lawrence, 'Surgery For The Novel - or a Bomb' in Phoenix, I, p.518.

this worn pattern includes the self-consciousness of modernism, the stripping down of the emotions, the pursuit of self-knowledge. Indeed this modernism is the full and final expression of disease.

> He knew her so statically, so finally, that it was almost like a madness . . . how known it all was, like a game of chess, the knights, the pawns, the same now as they were hundreds of years ago, the same figures moving round in one of the innumerable permutations that make up the game. But the game is known, its going on is like a madness, it is so exhausted.
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> WL, p.156

Though I have said that Birkin is Lawrence's representative of health, he is still sick. In such a general and all-pervasive sickness, the fact of realising that he is sick makes him closer to health. But Birkin is also made physically ill by his sick self, and his unhealthy relation to Hermione. As he recovers, he explicitly connects the living, the manner in which life is conducted, to the sickness bred in it.

> 'One knows all the time one's life isn't really right, at the source. That's the humiliation. I don't see that the illness counts so much, after that. One is ill because one doesn't live properly - can't. It's the failure to live that makes one ill, and humiliates one.'
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> WL, p.185

The 'failure to live' - as Lawrence has known since Sons and Lovers - isn't an entirely personal matter, though it is 'at source' a personal problem and has a personal solution. The new visionary realism of Women in Love is a prescription for the sickness it diagnoses. Especially through Birkin, who begins to learn how to live, we are offered cures for despair for our modern life. Through Birkin, Lawrence shows that the race or species is in part failing us, and the survivors, the sane, must disassociate themselves from the past and their forebears, in order, paradoxically to safeguard that past, and its inheritance. Before anything can be put right, the wrong must be rejected. So while in The Rainbow

the early Brangwens were - and were glad to be - inheritors, Birkin comes out of nowhere, seems to have no history, and insists on disinheritance. Nothing that comes through the medium of the present can be trusted; Ursula and Birkin have to reject everything in order to safeguard a sense of continuity with the past, an attempt to preserve the human best.

> 'I don't want to inherit the earth,' she said. 'I don't want to inherit anything.'
> He closed his hand over hers.
> 'Neither do I, I want to be disinherited.'
>
> WL, p.451

Lawrence, too, gives up his 'inheritance' in order that there may be something still to go on; he gives up the literary, moralistic, religious, humanist inheritance of the novel, so that the novel itself may be fit to carry on as a vehicle for human meaning, may remain a working model of human living. In giving up, he recreated, so that when asked why write, he can reply 'you . . . write from a deep moral sense - for the race as it were'.[7] Lawrence's visionary realism is an attempt to save the world, and at the same time to give voice to his own deepest feeling for truth; the point where vision and reality meet. In creating his own new world, Lawrence was also in the thick of real life, trying to get it 'right', as Birkin says, 'at the source' (WL, p.185).

Yet this renunciation is not total, can not be so. The new must always come out of the old, as Lawrence's phoenix shows. The self-disinheriting action is connected only to the modern industrialised world.

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7. D. H. Lawrence's words are quoted twice by F. R. Leavis in his review of Nehls's Composite Biography, reprinted in D. H. Lawrence A Critical Anthology edited by H. Coombes, (Harmondsworth, 1973), pp.394 and 404.

It is the immediate past that Lawrence despises, the last two or three hundred years.[8] In giving up modernity, Lawrence is arranging possibilities for a rebirth of much older ideas and beliefs in new form, and so, hence, in this novel, the rebirth of high Tragedy, and the reformation of the relation between the exterior universe and the life of man.

Gerald and Birkin represent two opposed forces in this vision of the universe, and these two characters, representatives, move Lawrence himself into a category he had reserved for the great, the 'big' authors.

> The sense of wholeness! Does one write books in order to give one's fellow-men a sense of wholeness: first, a oneness with all men, then a oneness with all things, then a oneness with our cosmos, and finally, a oneness with the vast invisible universe? Is that it? Is that our achievement and our peace?
>
> Anyhow it would be a great achievement. And this has been the aim of the great ones. It was the aim of Whitman, for example.
>
> Now it is the aim of the little ones, since the big ones are all gone. Thomas Hardy, a last big one, rings the knell of our Oneness. Virtually, he says; Once you achieve the great identification with the One, . . . you find that this God, this One, this Cosmic Spirit isn't human at all, hasn't any human feelings, doesn't concern itself for a second with the individual, and is, all told, a gigantic cold monster.[9]

The aim of the 'big' authors has always been the cultivation of the 'sense of wholeness'; but Thomas Hardy saw the end of that enterprise, because of his inability to make any connection between the human and the non-human orders; and for Hardy, without some connection to the human sphere, the greater whole did not make sense, and became mere phenomena like

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8. In 'A Chair' Birkin thus tells Ursula,

> When I see that clear, beautiful chair, and I think of England, even Jane Austen's England - it had living thoughts to unfold even then, and pure happiness in unfolding them. And now, we can only fish among the rubbish heaps for the remnants of their old expression. There is no production in us now, only sordid and foul mechanicalness.
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> WL, p.443.

9. D. H. Lawrence, 'Climbing Down Pisgah', in Phoenix, I, p.740.

weather or the Heath. It is a natural follow-on from the humanism of George Eliot, in a sense. Lawrence overcomes the dilemma of Hardy's pessimism by climbing out of and transcending 'humanism'.

> Are you human, and do you want me to sympathize with you for that? Let me hand you a roll of toilet paper . . .
>
> The creature that crawls out of the whirlpool feels that most things human are foreign to him. Homo sum! means a vastly different thing to him, from what it meant to his father . . .
>
> Homo sum! a man who knows that all creation lives like some great demon inhabiting space, and pulsing with a dual desire, a desire to give himself forth into creation and a desire to take himself back in death.[10]

The whirlpool at the bottom of Pisgah is the modern equivalent to the Slough of Despond. Falling in is loss of faith, resulting from a strenuous look at George Eliot's 'fellowship' or 'sympathy'. Climbing out is a renewal of faith, but faith of a different sort 'most things human are foreign to him'. The faith (Homo sum!) is quite different 'from what it meant to his father' - we think of Birkin's infuriating 'Why?' to Will (WL, p.335). Homo sum for Lawrence is a vastly different thing from what it was for, say, George Eliot; Homo sum at the end of the long dark tunnel that Leslie Stephen and the agnostics found themselves in, must mean something very different from the apparent necessity for Homo sum that drove them in there. And the man that Lawrence describes, climbing out of the whirlpool sounds like Lawrence himself, none other, the sum of Birkin and Gerald:

> A man who knows that all creation lives like some great demon inhabiting space, and pulsing with a dual desire, a desire to give himself forth into creation, and a desire to take himself back, in death.

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10. D. H. Lawrence, 'Climbing Down Pisgah', in Phoenix, I, pp.742, 743.

For Lawrence there is nothing static, there is always movement forced by the tension between these two opposing desires, pulls. But in making Birkin represent one of these forces, and Gerald the other, Lawrence is solving the problem that has had him, and others before him, frozen solid. The battle between the two forces is constant, almost to the point of prohibiting movement, of forcing stillness. But in Gerald and Birkin, it happens that one man or the other must learn to break through this stalemate, must learn to use the split, the difference, the tension, as a sort of fuel. And this is what Birkin does. It is a question of getting through character and personality to this thing, this demon, this 'it', that is in them, that moves them in one direction or the other. The thing that they are, is also the thing that is 'beyond' them; this is Eliot's humanism transformed, via Hardy's fear, into a new belief: a universe where humanity must act upon itself to bring itself most fully into being. And yet, where there is always and ever, something greater, something incomprehensible, mystery not in the heavens, mirrored in cosmology, but in the human heart, which we see in a man like Gerald who cannot finally bring himself to life, as much as in Birkin and Ursula who do.

> We are only the actors, we are never wholly the authors of our own deeds and works. IT is the author, the unknown inside us or outside us.[11]

'It' in us is both something we have to discover, and something which can only be revealed to us. In making this mystery at the heart of man, Lawrence moves himself out of the realm of the 'social' writer, and finds himself returned to tragedy and epic: those forms generally too big for the poor Modern, in reduced circumstances. For great Art, there has to be greatness of life.

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11. D. H. Lawrence, 'Benjamin Franklin' in Studies in Classic American Literature, p.26.

> Had Oedipus, Hamlet, Macbeth been weaker, less full of real, potent life, they would have made no tragedy; they would have comprehended and contrived some arrangement of their affairs, sheltering in the human morality from the great stress and attack of the unknown morality. But being as they are, men to the fullest capacity, when they find themselves, daggers drawn, with the very forces of life itself, they can only fight till they themselves are killed, since the morality of life, the greater morality, is eternally unalterable and invincible.[12]

Though there is undoubtedly tragedy in this novel, it is not essentially tragic in its vision. It is a novel which concerns itself with the 'greater morality, eternally unalterable and invincible', but this does not have to mean tragedy. In Gerald, the battle with 'the greater morality' does end in death, is tragic. In Birkin the story becomes epic, rather than tragic; he is a man 'to the fullest capacity' and he is fighting for his life, but, over a long period, in episodes, his life itself becoming the medium for the battle, the confrontation, rather than a personal violent confrontation; the epic as persistency as much as battle, as in Milton's Samson Agonistes and Wordsworth's Prelude. Birkin learns to live in the same ebb and flow movement of the greater morality. Hence, he survives.

Somers in Kangaroo remarks 'I suppose following one's deepest instinct *is* one's fate'.[13] This is one of the central beliefs of Lawrence in Women in Love, and it ties in with his idea of the greater morality. In 'The Study of Thomas Hardy', Lawrence says that the 'greater uncomprended morality' *is* fate (p.31) or rather is interchangeable in our conception: 'The greater . . . morality, or fate . . .'. Fate, the greater, inhuman morality, is the morality which cannot be avoided, 'unalterable and invincible'. Putting the greater morality and fate together in this way

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12. D. H. Lawrence, 'The Study of Thomas Hardy', pp.31-32.

13. D. H. Lawrence, Kangaroo (Harmondsworth, 1981), p.63.

helps to explain something about the characters in the novel. If the non-human morality is fate, and if character is fate, then the greater, the non-human morality is also written in our characters. In the novel, characters act, or do not act, according to themselves, to truth, to their own essential being, and being so, seal their own fate, or, as in the case of Gerald and Gudrun, fate, destroyed by character, becomes 'doom'. This equation is the foundation of Lawrence's religious feeling, and is balanced by his other major feeling or intuition 'we must balance as we go':[14] it is a belief which, had we to fix it down, could only go under a name like absolute relativism. This absolute relativism is used to aid the search, acted out in this novel, for a new basis for human living.

There are two alternatives, both rising from the mysterious source in all creation; and Lawrence encourages this duality, amplifies it. So he makes Birkin a man with 'a desire to give himself forth into creation,' and Gerald a man with 'a desire to take himself back, in death'. But neither man is wholly confined by his half of desire: Gerald wills himself to live, just as Birkin knows the possibility of death. But Birkin has the edge because he can feel more than Gerald: when he asks Gerald if he feels like one of the damned, Gerald laughs 'No.'. It is a refusal to face up to reality. Birkin feels the utter reality of the deathliness of Gerald, where Gerald cannot admit the possibility of Birkin's life. Birkin thinks of Gerald as 'a messenger, an omen of the universal dissolution into whiteness and snow' (<u>WL</u>, p.331), and

> Birkin was frightened . . . There was another way, the way of freedom. There was the paradisal entry into pure, single being, the individual soul taking precedence over love and desire for union, stronger than any pangs of emotion, a lovely state of free-proud singleness, which accepted the

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14. D. H. Lawrence, 'Morality and the Novel' in <u>Phoenix</u>, I, p.529.

> obligation of the permanent connection with others, and with the others, submits to the yoke and leash of love, but never forfeits its own proud individual singleness, even while it loves and yields.
>
> WL, pp.331-332

It is out of his fear and contemplation of Gerald that Birkin's 'other way' arises; the birth of a new self, in relation to other human beings. For there is no means by which the 'free-proud singleness' could come about on its own for it is the 'obligation' of 'permanent connection' and submission to the 'yoke and leash of love' that define it as a free and single being.

This is Birkin's choice. And yet, at the same time, it is not choice so much as fate: he could not choose this future all those years ago when he set up with Hermione and her set. He had to live through the sickness just as Ursula did in The Rainbow. No, it is only now, a possibility to him, because he has met Ursula, 'his future'. This is the primary basis for the new life, this relationship with the women. But Lawrence feels that there has to be a secondary relation, the relation of community, the relation to the man. Birkin thinks of 'others', not the other or an other: it is the thought of a social man.

> The great relationship, for humanity, will always be the relation between man and woman.[15]

This is always true in Lawrence's novels - even in Sons and Lovers the great, determining relation is between the man and the woman, Mr. and Mrs. Morel - and it is so because of the non-social, and unconscious relation between man and woman, the sexual, the biological relation. It is the one human relation that is regulated by 'it' rather than by 'us'; in this sense it is a religious relation, as expression of the thing beyond us, which is why it was shown to be primary in The Rainbow. If the creation of the

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15. D. H. Lawrence, 'Morality and the Novel', in Phoenix, I, p.531.

two male heroes, Birkin and Gerald is a philosophic triumph for Lawrence, the portrayal of this great, and primary, relation is his religious triumph.

Speaking of class and words, in Kangaroo, Lawrence noted,

> What is not said is not supposed to exist: that is almost code of honour with the other classes. With the true common people, only that which is not said is of any vital significance. [16]

Birkin and Ursula bring this 'vitality' from the 'common people' into the middle class; they make an oddly unclassifiable pair anyway, but the most startling difference between them and their special superiors (in the greater morality, their inferiors) is that they exist beyond words: they know the centre and source of things is beyond 'the sound of words'.

Of course they start by talking, they have to use words but the relation between Birkin and Ursula is really non-verbal; it is a sign of 'vitality' in them that they do not have to talk, their reality is elsewhere. When they do, it is always something behind the words that they are trying to understand about each other. This puts them outside the deathly social world. Like Mrs. Crich, they do not need the mind to understand; the 'fierce' heart does the understanding. But unlike Mrs. Crich they are not mad; they are not at variance with everything because they do not, once together, believe in anything except themselves. Poor Birkin, trying to struggle out of his endless stream of words.

> But what was the good of telling her he wanted this company in proud indifference. What was the good of talking, anyway? It must happen beyond the sound of words. It was merely ruinous to try to work her by conviction.
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> WL, p.327

While Birkin is thinking this, 'it' has, of course, already happened 'beyond

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16. D. H. Lawrence, Kangaroo, p.43.

the sound of words'. He knew from the very start that 'she was his future' (WL, p.148). And Ursula has already got behind his words. In 'Mino' Birkin speaks,

> 'I want to find you, where you don't know your own existence, the you that your common self denies utterly. But I don't want your good looks, and I don't want your womanly feelings, and I don't want your thoughts nor opinions, nor your ideas - they are all bagatelles to me'
>
> WL, p.210

And Ursula responds to what she senses behind the words, translating:

> She interpreted it, that he had made a deep confession of love to her. But he was so absurd in his words.
>
> WL, p.210

And again, in 'Water-Party',

> She listened, making out what he said. She knew, as well as he knew, that words themselves do not convey meaning, that they are but a gesture we make, a dumb show, like any other. And she seemed to feel his gesture through her blood, and she drew back, even though her desire sent her forward.
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> WL, p.254

When they finally come together in 'Excurse' it is not surprising that their union is beyond words, but Lawrence, writing of this experience, has to translate it down for us into something we can understand in words. So there comes into being his own new created 'language' which uses old words in a new manner, to get us around them, as it were, away from them. So that we can rethink old thoughts and feel old feelings anew.

The very novel itself then joins the ranks of the disinherited, in order both to preserve remnants of the old and to clear a way for the future. It is important to see that Lawrence does here question the ability of words to do their job. In fact he increases the size of the task they have to perform. But at the same time, he will not stress words, will not concentrate on them as if they were the problem. We think of T. S. Eliot and his words decaying with imprecision. For words - and art itself - are only a tool

humanity has to use; they are not our life, or even vitally connected to our life. Reality is as it were silent, in itself, not in being spoken of. Though I'm now going to go on and speak of the way in which Lawrence forces language to work for him, it is vital to understand that this is secondary to the work it actually does, which is to show the rightness of life between Ursula and Birkin, at source.

2. Knowledge and wonder, mystic and real

It is worth remembering Lawrence's account in 'The Study of Thomas Hardy', of the division between man's religious effort and his artistic effort. The religious effort, he says, is the 'symbolizing of a great desire in terms which have no meaning apart from the desire'. The artistic effort, however, is the 'effort of expressing knowledge'.[17] In 'Excurse' we can see Lawrence fusing these two forms of expression, expressing knowledge of a great human desire in terms which have no meaning apart from the desire. To see such an expression as 'art', one would, in Lawrence's terms, have to understand the 'knowledge' it expressed. Again, to see it as religious, you would have to have some understanding or feeling of the desire it symbolized. I shall argue that the language of this chapter holds both these types of meaning for us, but we have to work to understand this meaning, because it is, still, new to us, and strange, so that it can seem almost unknown.

When Ursula takes the rings which Birkin offers her we learn that,

> She knew that in accepting the rings, she was accepting a pledge. Yet fate seemed more than herself.
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> WL, p.385

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17. D. H. Lawrence, 'The Study of Thomas Hardy', p.59.

'Fate' and 'character' do not seem to be the same thing here, but the chapter will show us that the 'fate' that awaits Ursula _is_ her self. But at this point she does not know this, because it had not yet happened to her and so it is not part of her: her future and her present self seem separate. When the row is over and she and Birkin are together again, her sense of fate returns.

> She went very still, as if under a fate which had taken her. Yes, she acquiesced - but it was accomplished without her acquiescence.
>
> _WL_, p.392

This is the inevitability of the 'greater morality', this is the 'fate' which has 'taken her'. Ursula allows it, lets it happen, and yet, Lawrence stresses, 'it was accomplished without her acquiescence': it, this fate, is larger than her conscious knowledge of her self and what she wants. It would 'take' her whether or not she agreed to it. Nonetheless, acquiescing, Ursula is revealed as her self, in a way that she had (herself) not envisaged or imagined. 'It' working through her, in and outside of her, is greater than she is.

> She hid her face on his shoulder, hiding before him, because he could see her so completely. She knew he loved her, and she was afraid, she was in a strange new element, a new heaven round about her. She wished he were passionate, because in passion she was at home. But this was so still and frail, as space is more frightening than force.
>
> _WL_, p.393

Though she has been the one calling for 'emotional intimacy' (_WL_, p.391), this new thing is too naked for her, she must hide 'because he could see her so completely'. It is as if the emotional intimacies that she has craved are not _real_ intimacy at all, but this love is more than she could have imagined, she is revealed, a human being, no more 'he could see her so completely'. It is as if Ursula is born out of her skin, into some terrifying heavenly space, where she is isolate, individual, but regarded

by him, Birkin, floating beside her in a 'strange new element . . . still and frail'.

Ursula is transformed, and the world is transformed for Ursula, a new reality is called into being by the strength of the inner life between her and Birkin. The new reality, based on their relation replaces the old outside and past worlds, but brings back the wonderful realism of childhood. In small, this is the same effect as Lawrence himself sought, in disinheriting himself to get back to the old magic and wonder.

> It was all so far off. She stood in the old yard of the inn, smelling of straw and stables and petrol. Above, she could see the first stars. What was it all? This was no actual world, it was the dream world of one's childhood - a great circumscribed reminiscence. The world has become unreal. She herself was a strange, transcendent reality. . . . She looked at him, he seemed still so separate. New eyes were opened in her soul. She saw a strange creature from another world, in him. It was as if she were enchanted, and everything were metamorphosed.
>
> WL, pp.394-395

Ursula sees 'the first stars' but the world has become 'unreal'. She feels as if she had gone back, away from her everyday adult self in a 'great circumscribed reminiscence' to the 'dream world' of her childhood. It is a mystical experience, this shifting of perspectives, worlds revealed behind, or within, the ordinary 'world'. Ursula has found a place, a way, beyond herself, which puts her directly in touch with the non-human force; the magic of old has her 'as if she were enchanted' and this enchantment in her affects everything around her, putting the universe under the same spell as if 'everything were metamorphosed'.

We can see Lawrence applying the same backward-glancing movement to Birkin, in a different way. It is not the mystery and magic of the child he recalls, but the mystery of the ancient world, the race-childhood.

> He sat still like an Egyptian Pharoah, driving the car. He felt as if he were seated in immemorial potency, like the great carven statues of real Egypt, as real and as fulfilled with subtle strength, as these are, with a vague inscrutable smile in the lips.
> . . . But with a second consciousness he steered the car . . . For he had the free intelligence to direct his own ends. His arms and his breast and his head were rounded and living like those of the Greek . He had not the unawakened straight arms of the Egyptian, nor the sealed, slumbering head. A lambent intelligence played secondarily above his pure Egyptian concentration in darkness.
>
> WL, pp.400-401

Here Lawrence brings together two models from the ancient past and offers them together; the mysterious, 'subtle' power of being of the Egyptian, and the 'lambent intelligence' of the Greek both find expression in Birkin. So the past reborn in Birkin is not simply 'primitive' - as in the African art at Halliday's flat: the Pharoah statue expresses more than what is apparent on the surface, a mystery in its being. It is like Ursula's 'world', a layer upon another layer, both shifting, not still or held. Just as you think it is an image of magical power, then Lawrence will add more, because it is not just an image, but more like a moving picture, the Egyptian Pharoah has elements of Greek classicism flickering about him, equally real, equally him.

What happens to them moves them out of the 'real world' and into a new world; but what is the experience? In the old social realism it might be that they had had a row and made up. But Lawrence thinks it is more than that, even while it is that: it is that the confrontation between them has broken through something, so that now they can be together, themselves. This union of the free beings is the centre of the chapter.

> Smilingly, they delighted in each other's presence, pure presence, not to be thought of, even known.
>
> WL, p.395

A sentence like this contains clues, in its language, to what is happening, to the nature of the experience. 'Pure', for example is one of the special

vocabulary words of this chapter. Reading, it might cause us some difficulty because it seems odd, 'pure presence'. But 'pure' is there as a pointer to the word which follows it, 'presence', an amplifier. This amplification of 'presence' is reinforced by the repetition of 'presence' - 'presence, pure presence'. Still, we don't quite know what it is about 'presence' that is being brought to our notice, not until we come to 'not to be thought of', which gives an indication of the kind of verb that ought to go with the noun 'presence', some verb of action like thought, but quite emphatically not thought. And not even consciousness, 'even known'. So that 'presence' must be felt in some way: it is not something they knew, or were aware of; it was what they were. The combined, cumulative effect of the sentence makes the noun 'presence' take on the qualities of a verb; it is something they are 'presence, pure presence'. 'Presence' is as it has been in the past, a religious word, that halts analysis and allows only awe.

This sense of a quality becomes real, incarnate, is made more explicit when Ursula touches Birkin, and again we must notice that usual ways of knowing, understanding, thought, are quite definitely denied here. It is a question of physical apprehension.

> Unconsciously, with her sensitive finger-tips, she was tracing the back of his thighs, following some mysterious life-flow there. She had discovered something, something more than wonderful, more wonderful than life itself. It was the strange mystery of his life-motion, there, at the back of the thighs, down the flanks. It was a strange reality of his being, the very stuff of being, there in the straight downflow of the thighs. It was here she discovered him one of the sons of God such as were in the beginning of the world, not a man, something other, something more.
>
> WL, p.395

Here 'unconsciously' is the key word, starting the paragraph, echoing 'not to be thought of, even known'. 'Unconsciously' still speaks of a

kind of knowledge - perception, apprehension, intuition - and divorces such knowing awareness from consciousness, from the mind and will. This is achieved through sense, touch; 'her sensitive fingertips'. It is this physical knowledge, feeling, which discovers 'the mysterious life-flow'. By this thought-less contact, where the actual physical contact itself is the medium of transition between the two, Ursula discovers the 'reality' of Birkin, and 'the very stuff of being'. This is an account of incarnation, and of Ursula's discovery of incarnation as a living reality: so it is both commonplace (before the fire in the Saracen's Head') and lit with significance: 'mysterious', 'wonderful', 'strange', 'mystery'. By use of these words, Lawrence prepares us for the final sentence,

> It was here she discovered him one of the sons of God such as were in the beginning of the world, not a man, something other, something more.

Touch now has become a kind of vision: through touch both Ursula and Birkin transcend the ordinary 'weekday' world, and reinterpret the 'common round' of experience,[18] as if seeing the world anew, for the first time. And when Ursula perceives Birkin as moved into the impersonal realm, away from the mundane, her vision (feeling) moves her too. They remain individual, there is no ecstatic merging, indeed, that very individuality that creates her sense of wonder and strangeness and mystery is what puts them into the 'impersonal' realm, where both are as if true, themselves, unfallen, incarnate, 'something other, something more'.

This discovery is, for Ursula, freedom from the prison of old reality, 'this was release at last' (WL, p.359). It is, Lawrence insists, neither

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18. The phrase 'common round' is taken from Jessie Chambers's D. H. Lawrence, A Personal Record (London, 1965), where she writes,

> It was his power to transmute the common experiences into significance that I always felt to be Lawrence 's greatest gift. He did not distinguish between small and great happenings; the common round was full of mystery, awaiting interpretation.
>
> p.198

'love nor passion' (<u>WL</u>, p.395). It is movement beyond the human sphere, a momentary confrontation with the infinite, the non-human. Necessarily, this 'fate' means that both Ursula and Birkin are most fully themselves now. And at this point, when it seems you have at last broken through to something, Lawrence brings in relativity: they are not 'one': Birkin doesn't feel quite the same.

> Something was tight and unfree in him. He did not like this crouching, this radiance - not altogether.
>
> <u>WL</u>, p.396

The touch has first to bring something else into being, some bond that will hold them together: passion, a current between them, in both at once, felt by both at once, separately 'it was a dark fire of electricity that rushed from him to her, and flooded them both with rich peace, satisfaction'.

> She seemed to touch the quick of the mystery of darkness that was bodily in him.
>
> <u>WL</u>, p.396

The touch now seems to have taken a significance out of all proportion to its basis in physical or objective reality. The language is working hard against that sort of reality, against weekday realism. It is deliberately religious vocabulary: 'the quick', 'mystery', 'darkness', 'bodily in him'. The main verb, 'touch' is changed, modified by the 'seemed' that comes before it, which makes us read 'touch' in a different way. She did touch him, but the important thing is what it seemed to be like; it is that in touching she actually seemed to touch the 'mystery', touch life itself, 'the quick'. The experience indicated by this little word 'seemed' changed Ursula, transforms her; 'she was left quite free' (<u>WL</u>, p.396), where before (at the end of <u>The Rainbow</u>) she had felt caught and trammelled in a world that was not real to her.

Now Birkin is 'awfully real' (WL, p.396), filling her with wonder, awe. She sees his 'strange, whole body' (WL, p.397), strange to her because of the wholeness, which she now 'knows' in a way that she has never known anything before. And this strangeness, wholeness is 'mystically-physically satisfying' (WL, p.397).

The union of the mystical and the physical here is a triumph which glances back to the argument they had earlier in the road, when Ursula accused Birkin of looking for mystical satisfaction with Hermione, and physical satisfaction with her, or other women. The real and true satisfaction for both of them is this conjunction of body and spirit, this incarnate being in both of them.

The most astonishing thing about their experience is how, on one level it is so strong and intense, and yet, on another it is perfectly ordinary - if Lawrence wasn't there to put it into words it might happen without anyone knowing about it at all. And Lawrence knows this, for he adds 'Yet she was only sitting still in the chair, with her hands pressed upon him, and lost' (WL, p.399). So at this point where this novel seems so extremely different to Lawrence's earlier mode of realism, in fact, he is only doing the same thing, but better, more intensely, more seriously. It is the same power that Jessie Chambers saw, the power of interpreting the 'common round' and investing it with vital significance, making you see things you had not noticed or thought to bother with before.

This is getting through to an interior, hidden, undisclosed reality of life, which is connected to Lawrence's idea of fate, fate being the action which must take place in that interior reality. Now that Ursula is revealed to herself, her self, untrammelled, free, her 'fate' comes most forcefully into operation.

> She knew there was no leaving him . . . She had a full mystic knowledge of his suave loins of darkness, dark-clad and suave, and in this knowledge there was some of the inevitability of fate, fate which one asks for, which one accepts in full.
>
> WL, p.400

Again the mystic-knowledge is through touch, his 'suave loins' contain 'it' incarnate in his flesh. She has felt it there, not seen, not known, therefore 'dark-clad' not lit, revealed, but felt. And this knowledge, which is something she has always desired, though she didn't know what it was until she met with it, she had only known negatively, what she didn't want, and is something both given and found, 'discovered'. She found it, but it was already there, waiting for her, she called it into being, but it was always there before that, 'fate which one asks for', there whether or not she asks, but brought out because she does ask. Similarly, the intimacy she has craved has now come to her, when she stopped craving, and in a different form, as if the thing, the state of being, that she desired had been there, somewhere, all along; only it had to come right. It is all taking and giving at once, the common movement behind all the experience in this chapter.

> Strange, he was. Even as he want into the lighted, public place, he remained dark and magic, the living silence seemed the body of reality in him, subtle, potent, indiscoverable. There he was! In a strange uplift of emotion she saw him, the being never to be revealed, awful in its potency, mystic and real. This dark, subtle reality of him, never to be translated, liberated her into perfection, her own perfected being. She too was dark and fulfilled in silence.
>
> WL, p.402

She can only think 'strange, he was' because now she knows the strangeness of him, the sight of him reminds her that the thing about him is his strangeness to her. Even now, in the 'weekday' world he stays as he really is to her, 'dark and magic'. His reality doesn't come into contact with the reality of the 'lighted' post office; his reality doesn't show up in

light, it is essentially 'dark' and 'indiscoverable'. So this very dark mystery, the thing she knows of him, is the thing which prompts her jubilant cry of recognition, 'there he was!' - 'the being never to be revealed'. There is nothing to be said, there is nothing she can think; she sees the body of him, she recognises the reality of him, and knows that it is 'never to be translated'. What she knows about him cannot be put into words', the thing she has discovered has 'no meaning apart from the desire'. So it is a religous discovery, untranslatable. And yet, it is also and simultaneously, knowledge: 'There he was'; her exultation is expression of desire and knowledge of the thing desired at once. And this desire and knowledge move Ursula herself up into the same state of being, 'She too was dark and fulfilled in silence'.

The only means of translation from the everyday sphere to the mystic sphere is that of touch.

> She would have to touch him. To speak, to see, was nothing. It was a travesty to look and to comprehend the man there. Darkness and silence must fall perfectly on her, then she could know mystically, in unrevealed touch. She must lightly mindlessly connect with him, have the knowledge which is death of knowledge, the reality of surety in not-knowing.
>
> WL, p.402

'It was a travesty to look and comprehend' . . . because looking and comprehending were the old ways of knowing, a travesty of the new, real thing; knowledge through touch: she must know him without light, without words (without intellectual consciousness); in physical knowledge, 'unrevealed touch'. The religious experience is not one of constant and deepening revelation, peeling the layers of the onion, but one complete experience that opens Ursula to 'unrevealed knowledge', that is to mystery, to wonder. It is not understanding but wonder, the rebirth of wonder, for wonder is a way of knowing, and it is the 'knowledge which is the death of knowledge', the 'surety of not-knowing'.

This rebirth of wonder brings the cosmology down, to them. The heavens are no longer above and beyond them, but in their being: 'she was next to him, and hung in a pure rest, as a star is hung, balanced unthinkably', in 'star-equilibrium' (WL, p.402).

So it is that they go into the forest, into the dark, to the centre of the mystery: their love-making is the consummation of their new way of being, of wonder; a celebration of the 'mystery' 'never to be seen with the eye, or known with the mind, only known as a palpable revelation of mystic otherness' (WL, p.403). This is their real and true inheritance , the inheritance they gain when they renounce the other inheritance of the world, and the cities and men. It is an inheritance so rich that it makes them afraid:

> Then they kissed and remembered the magnificence of the night. It was so magnificent, such an inheritance of a universe of dark reality, that they were afraid to seem to remember. They hid away the remembrance and the knowledge.
>
> WL, p.403

The disinherited are, at the end of this chapter, like people who have been given some wonderful, and awe-inspiring revelation which changes the world for them. Their inheritance, come directly from rejection of the old world and its corruption and sickness of too much knowledge, is 'a universe of dark reality', a pure, religious apprehension: the achievement of these characters in this chapter is Lawrence's own achievement; religious knowledge made into art: visionary realism.

3. Gerald: one of the damned

> 'Surely there can never be anything as strong between man and man as sex love is between man and woman. Nature doesn't provide the basis.'
> ' . . . I think she does.'
>
> WL, p.439

This disagreement between Gerald and Birkin illustrates the profound difference between them. Gerald believes that the only link between individuals in nature is the biological, procreational bond. He cannot believe in anything beyond crude biology. I use the word crude in the sense of limited, basic, undeveloped. Gerald's view, claiming a pseudo-scientific backing from biology, is an entirely material view, as if life were merely a question of Matter, as if it could all be reduced down to that, and made little, and understandable in the process. It is the same mistake that nineteenth-century science made, and which is being corrected now by contemporary physics; matter and energy are not finally separable, and the living organism cannot finally be broken down into component parts. Birkin and Lawrence seem to intuitively understand this; biological knowledge of processes ought to add wonder to life not finish things off. If life comes down to biology, what a wonderful thing biology must be. Birkin can find a basis in nature for other relationships apart from the biological relation between male and female. There is the bond of sameness, of species, of kind. This is the bond that Birkin would like to see established as as real as the more obvious sexual basis. And it is the bond that Gerald, profoundly unbelieving, cannot trust, because he cannot 'know' - know in the physical sense established in 'Excurse' rather than in the intellectual sense. Yet, at some instinctive and deeply hidden level of being, Gerald does know how to live but he cannot quite align his conscious self with such knowledge. This indeed is his tragedy. Character, fate and morality come together in a tragic and deathly process

because he cannot get himself right 'at source'; his life consists of doing, not being.

Afraid, and not understanding why, Gerald's thoughts echo the language that was to become The Wasteland.[19]

> He had done all he wanted to do - and now there was nothing. He could go out in the car, he could run to town. But he did not want to go out in the car, he did not want to run to town, he did not want to call on the Thirlbys. He was suspended motionless, in an agony of inertia, like a machine that is without power.
>
> WL, p.334

Because his life consists of doing, he is faced with the problem of what to do when he has done everything. 'He's got to go' Ursula says of Gerald, 'he'll have to die soon, when he's made every possible improvement and there will be nothing more to improve,' (WL, p.99). Doing is not being, for to be is to live, but doing is just rushing about like a machine. For however many improvements Gerald makes, he still is always left with himself, the 'source' of his own life, and facing this self or source, Gerald feels damned.

> Once or twice lately, when he was alone in the evening and had nothing to do, he had suddenly stood up in terror, not knowing what he was. And he went to the mirror and looked long and closely at his own face, at his own eyes, seeking for something. He was afraid, in mortal dry fear, but he knew not what of . . . In a strange indifferent, sterile way, he was frightened. It was as if his centres of feeling were drying up. He remained calm, calculative and healthy, even whilst he felt, with faint, small but final sterile horror, that his mystic reason was breaking, giving way now, at this crisis.
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> WL, p.306

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19. T. S. Eliot, 'The Wasteland' in Collected Poems, specifically

> What shall I do now? What shall I ever do?
> I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street
> With my hair down, so. What shall we do tomorrow?
> What shall we ever do?
> The hot water at ten.
> And if it rains, a closed car at four.
> And we shall play a game of chess,
> Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door.
>
> pp. 67-68

Gerald is indeed 'one of the damned' for, pushed to the extreme of himself, he must die. This is connected to the fact that Birkin can go on living. In 'Excurse' we have seen that the unconscious in Birkin and Ursula is lived out, but for Gerald unconsciousness is a release from life, as when he has sex with Gudrun, 'he lay suffused out and she lay fully conscious' (WL, p.431). What Gerald represents in the novel 'has got to go' (WL, p.99) before any new thing, the thing that Birkin might become, can come about. Gerald and Birkin are most connected through their vital opposition: if they call each other up into being it is only so that they can fight it out. When Birkin assumes that there could be a living duality he is thinking in terms of if Gerald could give himself to life. But finally this is not possible, and so the pair do not represent a duality so much as a terrible and fierce opposition of forces.

Gerald is a real man - quite distinct from the 'Bohemian set' including Birkin. He is a man of the world: 'a soldier, and an explorer, and a Napoleon of Industry' (WL, p.116). He is only superficially a man of action though, for all the action he undertakes is finally, deathly. When his quickness of action takes him into the water in 'Water-party' for example, he becomes alive to the fact of, the world of death. And Gudrun, watching him, sees that 'he belonged naturally to dread and catastrophe'; amidst chaos and death he is 'himself again' (WL, p.246).

> 'If you once die,' he said, 'then when it's over, it's finished. Why come to life again? There's room under that water there for thousands.'
>
> 'Two is enough.' she said murmering.
>
> He dragged on his second shoe. He was shivering violently, and his jaw shook as he spoke.
>
> 'That's true,' he said, 'maybe. But it's curious how much room there seems, a whole universe under there; and as cold as hell, you're as helpless as if your head was cut off.'
>
> WL, p.251

'Why come to life again?' For Gerald there seems no very strong reason - one ought to carry on, and so he will carry on for the time being. None-theless, he is fascinated by this other 'universe', the space of it, the helplessness in the face of it. This contact with death, this drawing near of possibility seems to affect Gerald in a way that life itself cannot. Death takes possession of him, ordering his being, shutting him off from life, in a mirror image of the way life usually reproduces and proliferates; 'nothing will come of nothing'.[20] So although he is afraid of losing himself, yet he 'could not even react to the fear'. For Gerald life has twisted itself about so that he is, as it were, inside out, laughing 'no' when he ought seriously to answer 'yes', so that madness seems to be sanity, so that the movement of liveliness is brought about by death, so that living frightens him, while death stimulates and attracts him.

The 'faint', small but sterile horror' is the only feeling Lawrence ascribes to Gerald in the last pages of 'The Industrial Magnate'. It is a feeling so reduced as to be of little use to Gerald, who can not allow himself to take serious notice of it. So although he knows that his salvation lies with Birkin who,

> Kept the fear definitely off him, saved him his quick sufficiency of life, by the odd mobility and changeableness which seemed to contain the quintessence of faith . . .
>
> WL, p.306

yet he must always come away from Birkin because he does not feel him to be a part of 'real' life, the life of 'the outside world of work and life'. Reality, for Gerald, the reality by which he lives, is the dead world of the machine, the superhuman system 'beyond reason and feeling'. It is the exact opposite of the world discovered by Ursula and Birkin.

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20. William Shakespeare, King Lear, I.i.90.

Gerald is as much, if not more, an 'actor' as Ursula or Birkin, though his willfulness might make us think that he controls himself more, it nonetheless remains true that 'It' is the author inside and outside of his life; despite his will, he is as much a part of, and subject to, the 'unknown' as anyone else. And it is the nature of his connection with the unknown that creates Gerald's fate, prevents it from being anything other: in this sense Gerald _is_ a tragic hero. Driven by fate or something unknown inside or outside, but above all by something inhumanly beyond him, Gerald escapes the damningly narrow realm of social existence through his death. In death, he achieves a greatness, a stature, the greatness belonging not to death itself but to Tragedy. That is why Gerald's death is so different in kind to the death of a Hardy man; Giles Winterborne, for example, or even Jude. Through Gerald's great, non-social, transgression, Lawrence brings tragedy back, making 'unfathomed nature' more than something in the background scenery: it is the recreation of God, in a sense, this activation of the 'greater morality'.

> And this is the quality Hardy shares with the great writers, Shakespeare or Sophocles or Tolstoi, this setting behind the small action of his protagonists the terrific action of unfathomed nature; setting a smaller system of morality, the one grasped and formulated by the human consciousness within the vast, uncomprehended and incomprehensible morality of nature or of life itself, surpassing human consciousness. The difference is, that whereas in Shakespeare or Sophocles the greater, uncomprehended morality, or fate, is actively transgressed and gives active punishment, in Hardy and Tolstoi the lesser, human morality, the mechanical system, is actively transgressed, and holds, and punishes the protagonist, whilst the greater morality is only passively, negatively transgressed, it is represented merely as being present in background, in scenery, not taking any active part, having no direct connexion with the protagonist. Oedipus, Hamlet, Macbeth set themselves up against or find themselves set up against the unfathomed moral forces of nature, and out of this unfathomed force comes their death.[21]

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21. D. H. Lawrence, 'The Study of Thomas Hardy', pp.31-32.

For Lawrence 'human morality' is so small, and of so little note, as to be more or less nonexistent; perhaps it would not be going too far to say that the human morality is in fact immorality, a system of immorality, breeding disease and degeneration. So Birkin feels the 'morality' of Hermione. Whatever old standards or truths the human system has been based on have withered away into meaninglessness. So when Birkin goes to ask Ursula to marry him, he and Will Brangwen seem to live in different worlds, speaking in different tongues.

> 'I suppose,' said Brangwen, 'you know what sort of people we are? What sort of a bringing-up she's had?'
> '"She",' thought Birkin to himself, remembering his childhood's corrections, 'is the cat's mother.'
> 'Do I know what sort of a bringing-up she's had?' he said aloud.
> He seemed to annoy Brangwen intentionally.
> 'Well,' he said, 'she's had everything that's right for a girl to have - as far as possible, as far as we could give it her.'
> 'I'm sure she has,' said Birkin, which caused a perilous full-stop. The father was becoming exasperated. There was something naturally irritant to him in Birkin's mere presence.
> 'And I don't want to see her going back on it all,' he said, in a clanging voice.
> 'Why?' said Birkin.
> This monosyllable exploded in Brangwen's brain like a shot.
>
> WL, pp.334-335

Will Brangwen might have brought his daughters up according to certain standards and principles, and morality has guided Will, 'she's had everything that's right for a girl to have', including Will's Church of England Christianity. But to Birkin, all this is meaningless, pointless, nothing to do with him and Ursula. His 'why', so exasperatingly rude to Will, is a genuine question. He cannot see why Ursula should not turn her back on it all; it is all past, unconnected to anything. 'Her father was not a coherent human being. He was a roomful of old echoes.' (WL, p.335). It might have all meant something once, but the reality of it has fallen away, leaving Will as a husk, a shell, an echo.

In Birkin, the 'human morality' - so powerful in Hardy - is transgressed not by the doomed deathly hero, but by the survivor; and transgression of human morality puts him in line with the greater, unknown morality. So Gerald is not so much a tragic hero, as a tragic anti-hero: he transgresses the greater 'uncomprehended morality' and is punished. He is a classic tragic hero, according to Lawrence's account of Shakespeare, Sophocles and so on, but not within Lawrence's own terms as set up by the novel. Birkin is a new kind of hero; the man who does not transgress, or only a little, in the beginning, in his relation to Hermione and her set, and who is saved, putting himself in harmony with the greater morality. Gerald, by his inability to free himself from the strictures of social morality, also - at the same time - finds himself 'set up against the unfathomed moral forces of nature, and out of this unfathomed force comes his death'. Like Oedipus, Hamlet, Macbeth, Gerald is a man 'to the fullest capacity' and so, finding himself finally 'daggers drawn, with the very forces of life itself' he must die, he must fight until he is killed. The 'morality' is unalterable and invincible; Gerald _must_ die, because he cannot live. He cannot live because he has placed his belief in a false God, the mechanic system of men.

> 'I didn't want it, really,' was the last confession of disgust in his soul, as he drifted up the slope, weak, finished, only sheering off unconsciously from any further contact.
>
> _WL_, p.573

Death was the only thing that could move him, but in the end, he could not even fully want that; he cannot kill Gudrun, he does not 'want' that, only rest for himself, only sleep. His 'I didn't want it, really' might be a summation of his feeling for his own life. And that is his crime, his transgression.

Gerald acts against the 'uncomprehended morality' - i.e. against fate, against his own character - that he is, like Oedipus and Hamlet, 'full of potent life'. The tragedy, for Gerald, arises out of the fact that he cannot live out his potent life, cannot fully become himself, cannot be. In not being he acts against his 'self' and the greater morality.

But all this can look as if Gerald is merely acting against Birkin. As Ursula notes, Birkin tries to force people into friendship and closeness they cannot stand. Ursula feels the 'gesture' behind Birkin 'in her blood', and so she can go with him, be with him. Why can't we (or Lawrence) simply accept that Gerald doesn't feel the same? Gerald feels 'attracted' by Birkin's offers of friendship, but 'so deeply bondaged in fascinated attraction, that he was mistrustful, resenting the bondage, hating the attraction' (WL, p.278). It is not that Gerald doesn't feel the 'gesture' in his blood but rather that he cannot bear to admit it; the bond becomes 'bondage'. It is a pressure on him, a pull, and he feels it as such, something oppressive to him, his self. It is the old, sick, hanging on mindlessly out of fear, mechanical repetition of habit that is killing Gerald. He knows that Birkin contains 'the quintessence of faith', in his liveliness, in his 'quick sufficiency', his 'odd mobility'. But lacking 'faith' he is unable to have a go, - the only means of getting it - and so he cannot become the explorer he ought to be; he will not, cannot, enter the uncharted regions of human being, opened by Birkin and his offer of true friendship - an updated version of George Eliot's 'fellowship'. And the difficulty of bringing such humanism to life, even at a one to one level was something that Lawrence knew all too realistically.

> I should like to have friends, I confess. I do not suppose I ever shall. But there have been moments when I have realised what friendship might be. Rare moments - but never forgotten. I remember once talking it over with Lawrence and he said 'We must swear a solemn pact of friendship. Friendship is as binding, as solemn as marriage, we take each other

> for life, through everything - forever. But it's not enough to say we will do it. We must swear.' At the time I was impatient with him. I thought it extravagant - fanatic. But when one considers what this world is like I understand perfectly why L. (especially being L) made such claims . . . I think, myself, it is pride which makes friendship most difficult. To submit, to bow down to the other is not easy but it must be done if one is to really understand the being of the other. Friendship isn't merging. One doesn't thereupon become a shadow and one remain a substance. Yes, it is terribly solemn - frightening even.[22]

'It's not enough to say we will do it. We must swear.' Lawrence knew that these were easy noises to make; 'sympathy', 'fellowship', 'friendship'. He felt - hopelessly - that there had to be something else, beyond the words, professions of feeling, some act which would make the 'claims' of friendship 'as binding, as solemn as marriage'. 'At the time' says Katherine Mansfield, 'I thought it was extravagant - fanatic'. Just as Gerald does, when Birkin other offers him 'Blutbruderschaft'.

> Of course this was necessary . . . to love a man purely and fully . . .
>
> ' . . . That is what we ought to do. No wounds, that is obsolete. - But we ought to swear to love each other, you and I, implicitly and perfectly, finally, without any possibility of going back on it.'
>
> He looked at Gerald with clear, happy eyes of discovery. Gerald looked down at him, attracted, so deeply bondaged in fascinated attraction, that he was mistrustful, resenting the bondage, hating the attraction.
>
> 'We will swear to each other, one day, shall we?' pleaded Birkin. 'We will swear to stand by each other - be true to each other - ultimately - infallibly - given to each other, organically - without the possibility of taking back.'
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> WL, p.278

'Of course this was necessary' writes Lawrence. Oneness, humanism, love; they are all just words. Let us see, Lawrence says, what happens when we try to live, 'to love, purely and fully'. But Gerald, though attracted, finds his fascination 'bondage'; 'To submit, to bow down to the other is

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22. Katherine Mansfield,'Letter to Sydney Schiff, in The Letters and Journals of Katherine Mansfield, edited by C. K. Stead (London, 1977), p.250.

not easy, but it must be done if one is to really understand the other'. If Gerald feels as Katherine Mansfield did when faced with Lawrence's offer of (or demand for) friendship, then his primary concern would be the necessity to submit, to bow down, and not - what Katherine Mansfield only understood with hindsight - the understanding, the being.

Birkin knows the difficulty of what he asks of Gerald, and recognises that the distance between any two individuals is great:

> He was looking at the handsome figure of the other man, blond and comely in the new robe, and he was half thinking of the difference between it and himself - so different; as far, perhaps, apart as man and woman. Yet in another direction.
>
> WL, p.352

It is not Birkin, but what he represents, contains, that Gerald needs and ought to submit to. As Katherine Mansfield says, it was because of what 'this world is like' that Lawrence himself made such 'claims' - not because of what Lawrence wanted for himself. 'So different' so 'far apart' these two men, and yet, they are two men, the same creatures, living on the earth. But they do not feel the same, their individuality, and will, coming between them, holding them apart. To get beyond this wilful separation, Lawrence engages the men in a fight; like love a contact which gets below the willed and mentally determined surface of things, so that they become their essential selves; and, so revealed, are able to become as 'one', while most truly being each his own self. They are 'mindless at last, two essential white figures working into a tighter, closer, oneness of struggle' (WL, p.349). But this 'oneness' cannot be sustained. 'I don't know why one should have to justify oneself' (WL, p.351), Birkin complains, but the social difficulty of closeness of men is too problematic; they do feel they have to justify themselves. And Gerald cannot be at odds with the social order. So it is that what is 'fate' for Birkin and Ursula becomes a 'doom' for Gerald. He turns

to marriage not as the right and inevitable step, but as there's no alternative;

> Marriage was like a doom to him . . . Marriage was not the committing of himself into a relationship with Gudrun. It was a committing of himself in acceptance of the established world, he would accept the established order, in which he did not livingly believe, and then he would retreat to the underworld for his life.
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> WL, p.440

The alternative is the living belief or Birkin, but this Gerald 'could not accept' - like Will Brangwen, there is something blocked up, unripe, in Gerald - 'a numbness either of unborn, absent volition, or of atrophy' (WL, pp.440-441). So, rejecting Birkin, Gerald rejects the chance of life itself. He must die, quite finally and absolutely, because he cannot love:

> Those who die, and dying still can love, still believe do not die. They live on still in the beloved.
>
> WL, pp.581-582

Gerald, in death, becomes what he has been; 'cold, mute, material' (WL, p.581); as if he has to become what he believes in; the creative mystery of the universe has been completely put out in him, and he is no more than matter, the mystery the 'non-human' is itself reduced to something not very interesting, and somehow completely known, because there is nothing, no mystery to it; 'cold, mute, Matter' (WL, p.582).

Gerald's 'no' to Birkin means, always, 'no, I do not, can not see your vision'; and this 'no' is part of the madness, the disease he suffers. He laughs from inside the asylum, thinking that denial makes him free. If we find Birkin hard to take, it is because we understand Gerald all too well.

4. A conclusion to Part Three

> Lawrence was incapable, in his full length novels at least, of creating living characters - only heroes, all of them ludicriously Narcissistic self-portraits several times life size, surrounded by miserable, abject little caricatures of his friends, many times less than life-size, in order to provide foils and contrasts to the dazzling nobility and transcendent greatness of the central figure, himself.[23]

> Have you read Women in Love? because that is Lawrence - his word.[24]

Always, with Lawrence these pulsing opposites. If someone saw Women in Love as Lawrence, someone else would be bound to say that he could not 'create'. If the novel is him, incarnate, positively, then it must be him narcissistically, negatively. It is always like that, as he well knew. His triumph, in Women in Love, is that he wrote a novel which was himself, and which went beyond himself into that area that knew his own limitation. He made the absolute relative. He believed that was the essence of reality, of living.

> There is no absolute good, there is nothing absolutely right. All things flow and change, and even change is not absolute. The whole is a strange assembly of apparently incongruous parts, slipping past one another.[25]

Birkin is not absolutely right. Lawrence knows that; he creates Ursula to get him righter. He makes Ursula and Gudrun discuss his failings:

> 'There are so many things in life that he simply doesn't know. Either he is not aware of their existence at all, or he simply dismisses them as merely negligible - things which are vital to the other person. In a way, he is not clever enough, he is too intense in spots.'
>
> 'Yes' cried Ursula, 'too much of a preacher. He really is a priest.'
>
> 'Exactly! He can't hear what anybody else has to say - he simply cannot hear. His own voice is so loud.

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23. Cecil Gray, quoted in Nehls's A Composite Biography, I, p.436.

24. Anonymous friend of D. H. Lawrence, quoted in Nehls's A Composite Biography, I, p.416.

25. D. H. Lawrence, 'Why the Novel Matters' in Phoenix, I, p.536.

> 'Yes. He cries you down.'
>
> . . . 'And then the real clumsiness of his mind, is its lack of self-criticism'
>
> WL, p.341

This last is amusing. Lawrence knew that this 'lack of self-criticism' as Gudrun calls it, is the most galling of all. He knew it - but what was he supposed to do with it? He takes it as meaning 'lack of self doubt' and that he will not have. The most essential task for him was to have some belief: to be for something, or against or any strong way of being at all. And as soon as he accomplishes this miracle, his contemporaries, still wallowing in self-analytic Sloughs of Despond, cry him down for being lacking in self-criticism. As if their very souls were in revolt against belief. Because it is, as Ursula thinks, finally true that whatever his failings are they are not that important, small by-products of a great achievement 'Even if it were as Gudrun said, about Birkin, other things were true as well' (WL, p.342). Exactly; one truth does not cancel out another. There is nothing absolutely right yet, to get anywhere at all, we must have some absolutes, we must be whole-hearted, when we think we are right. Birkin, like Lawrence, shouts a lot and makes a lot of noise. He has to make a little instinctive knowledge go a very long way: he has not all the answers - he has no answers, that is partly why he must combine with Ursula:

> He gloried in her, because in his one grain of faith he was as young as she, he was her proper mate. This marriage with her was his resurrection and his life.
>
> WL, p.458

The man of faith, it turns out, was not so faithful; he had 'one grain of faith'. On the basis of this one grain, he builds a world. Out of this one grain comes the 'new testament' of Lawrence, the 'resurrection and life' of Rupert Birkin, and the salvation of this book, in which the 'characters can do nothing but live',[26] and which we must first learn to

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26. D. H. Lawrence, 'Why the Novel Matters' in Phoenix, I, p.537.

read, and then learn from.

> One has to speak with thunder and heavenly fireworks to feeble and dormant senses [27]

If The Rainbow was a novel of transition, Women in Love is the place Lawrence arrived at. The novel is, to use his own image, the flower of his life and career, when he, briefly, became most fully and most brilliantly himself, complete with the 'thunder and heavenly fireworks'. But the man brought into being was not any different to the man who wrote Sons and Lovers, there was simply more of him out, expressed. A friend of Lawrence writes,

> When he went away from his native town (1908), he knew where he stood, but could not give it a name. He had no formula for it and never found one as far as I could make out.[28]

'He knew where he stood, but could not give it a name'; this sentence tells of the pull between Lawrence's definiteness, and his ability to remain indefinite; never a man with more strong beliefs that you could not nail down; 'he had no formula'. In part this is his greatness; Lawrence is not reducible. That is why 'he' (the man, his beliefs, his vision) is most accessible to us in his novels, particularly this novel, his own created world.

In disinheriting himself, one of the things that Lawrence had to give up was humanism - he makes himself not care for people in exactly the way that Ursula discovers Birkin does not care in 'Mino'. This in Lawrence perhaps testifies to his having learnt from and taken to heart the teachings of Nietzsche, and thus understands the problems of apparent Godlessness in a more radical way than George Eliot ever could. Now Thomas Hardy also understood the problems of Godlessness, but Hardy could not quite drop

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27. F. Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra (Harmondsworth, 1978), p.117

28. W. E. Hopkin, quoted in Nehls's A Composite Biography, I, p.75.

huamnism. By dropping the concern with human life that had so plagued Hardy, Lawrence cleared a way to new belief. Gerald's death, as I have said, is of quite a different order to that of a Hardy victim/hero like Jude. If Hardy's pessimism was as I have said in effect a demand for the reconstruction of a world he saw in fragments, then Lawrence answers the call of that pessimism. He created a new world out of fragments - rather than merely shoring himself up on them. We see this transformation of doubt into belief on many levels; for example, the change of attitude towards science. For Hardy, science is one of the most powerfully painful fragments in his modern world. He both believes in it and yet he knows it doesn't help human beings - its knowledge merely complicates the universe we have to contend with. Lawrence on the other hand, refused to take science seriously unless it could be somehow translated into his own terms. Birkin as the school inspector doesn't care so much for the detailed analysis of the catkins as for the fact of their vibrant colours; for him that is the main fact about them, and what he wants the children to grow up remembering. It can exhilarate Lawrence to feel that Life is bigger than living human beings, and if he finds science piling up evidence of that, he is glad of it; but he will not have a science that reduces the impact of the universe upon us. He gives up all sense of 'dignity' (the dignity that Knight lost on the cliff face, seeing himself more or less the same as Trilobites, and which Hardy would perhaps have liked to see preserved) in order that such a thing as dignity might remain in the universe at all.

Again, for Hardy, Nature is a sort of bewilderingly unconnected backdrop to human life. The storm in Far From the Madding Crowd or the heath in Return of the Native are hard to recognise as the same sort of elements as the land or the whirling skies or the rainbow itself of Lawrence's The Rainbow.

But the most telling difference between these two writers is their relation to touch or feeling. It is not that Hardy could not feel, but rather that he felt too much and consequently suffered the sense that the human physical body and its mental or spiritual capacities were almost incompatible. Lawrence, perhaps because of his origins in the working class - where what is not said is most important, and where passion and feeling were strongly felt - creates his own peculiar language of feeling, of knowledge expressed as feeling. Such a language - which allows Lawrence to explain to us the relation between Birkin and Ursula - is simply not present in or available to Hardy's imagination. Hardy's imagination is often extremely visual; he will express emotions by showing scenes, such as Fitzpiers riding away from Grace into the huge and apparently ever widening landscape. This lack of a language of closeness and fulfilment is a characteristic loss on Hardy's part. And indeed what we must value Hardy for is his sense of loss, of need, his great unspoken desire for something other than what is. Lawrence of course recognised this desire as the essence of religious effort, and in his own work continued to express such desire. But he also transcended the need Hardy stands for, by his religious art; through his revelation, his visionary realism.

PART FOUR: A SENSE OF SOMETHING WRONG

With the exception of Olaf Stapledon, this section is concerned with writers who are peripheral to Visionary Realism. For example, Mrs. Oliphant's A Beleaguered City is not in itself a major work of Visionary Realism, as is Daniel Deronda say, or Women in Love. But it is useful because it helps to make clear the kind of problems visionary realists are contending with, problems that are hard to appreciate when reading a highly accomplished, successful and sophisticated work.

In general, my thesis describes the same thing happening over and over again, involving different people, using different forms. I do think that this is what happens in our world. Judaic or Marxist ideas of history as a linear process in time demand destination - Frank Kermode's 'sense of an ending'.[1] I think that life has to seem like this to us because our bodies do die in time, and our lives do pass, minute by minute, day by day. Yet, in many respects progress in time is an illusion. Things happen (events like the fall of Rome or the Industrial Revolution) which seem to change the tone and sometimes the content of what people think and are. But whether such 'events' really change human living is another matter . We remain disintegrating bodies in time. But forms of being do change, and perhaps that is important. The forms are all we have to remind us of the reality behind our bodies in time, and they change so as to keep reminding us. These minor writers contribute to changing the form of vision and reality, and they do it largely by questioning the existing paradigm, the sense of things they are born into. They share a sense of something wrong: their responses are their own.

They also share, as the way I have sectionalised chapter eight will show, a concern with the implications of the modern scientific

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1. See Frank Kermode's The Sense of An Ending (Oxford, 1970).

temperament in religious and in humanist terms, and a concern with history. In Mrs. Oliphant we shall see the novel used as a way of trying to re-establish the necessity of religion; in Meredith the need to combat a sense of anti-humanist force in science. In Reade and Wells we shall see the use of 'universal history' as an effort to make sense of the perspectives opened up by the physical sciences, particularly geology. These new histories attempt to fix a place for man and the human spirit in the cosmic order and in some sense to synthesise the projects of religion with the theory of evolution. In chapters nine and ten we shall see these areas of fiction and history, science and religion come together in the works of Wells and more particularly of Olaf Stapledon, eventually to emerge as shaping forces in Doris Lessing's Canopus series. But it is important to remember that all these are reclaimed ways of seeing not new ones. Even the futuristic histories really look back to the Biblical past and a justification of man in time.

In chapter nine my argument against modernism will re-emerge, and I shall claim that it is the shortsightedness of modernism which has led modern literary efforts into a cul-de-sac from which there can be no escape other than an abrupt about-turn. But I shall argue that Stapledon - and other science fiction writers - have avoided this dead end, and continued the difficult but necessary work of hopeful endeavour which attempts to align different forms of knowledge into one clear vision; literature of belief, visionary realism.

Because of the nature of the material covered in it, this will seem to be something of an historical survey, beginning in the middle of the last century and ending in the middle of this one. Within this hundred years, I have picked Darwin's publication of the <u>Origin</u> (1859) and the end of the First World War (1918) as two major events which have shaped

human thought and feeling. People do live in a sense of their own time - 'the age' - and with a sense of the issues of their time. Reaction to the age and its particular concerns takes particular form, the specifics of vision. Yet, a writer might seem unaffected by his time and its issues in this specific way. Lawrence might seem almost unaffected by Darwinism, and - with the exception of Kangaroo - unaffected in his novels by the Great War. That is to say, he does not talk about these things as 'issues'. But this is not to say he is unaffected by them, for there is a sense in which we have to view Lawrence as a response to the post-Darwinist religious problems of the late nineteenth century. He is also more than just a response, his reaction is larger than the issues which force it, and the problems he sees are widespread, tainting everything, his entire 'vision' of life governed by it. This is particularly evident in relation to the War, which becomes part of his whole and terrible vision of English life, rather than an isolated 'event'.

Others are simply not so gifted with vision. We see in part; we discover painful and anomalous fragments of truth, all the more painful because they are fragments. The writers in this section try to make sense out of the fragments they find themselves stuck with.

I don't think of these authors as a standing army file, facing the future in a line stretching from 1859, but rather as variously dotted around or radiating from a central point - the sense of something wrong - more or less connected, not to each other but by their shared relation to that centre. So this may look like history, but it is really no more than a means of organising the material, a form.

I also hope to show that although I do in a sense believe in a 'great tradition'[2] of major writers, I do believe that individual greatness depends

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2. I respectfully borrow Dr. Leavis's phrase, while adapting it for my own purposes. My own great tradition is at a slight tangent to the one Dr. Leavis describes, though it is I feel as much of a tradition of influence as his. See F. R. Leavis, The Great Tradition.

on collective need and aspiration. George Eliot was one of many thinkers and writers contending with the problem of the loss of faith in the Christian religion, with the effect of the new scientific knowledge. The need which called up her efforts was not hers alone, otherwise her work would have been much more idiosyncratic and much less committed to kindness. Similarly in the case of D. H. Lawrence, need and desire were not his alone, as he well knew, but were a part of the world in which he lived, though that world did not always wish to recognise itself in him. An analogy from biology occurs to me: the fertilization of the human egg can only be achieved by one spermatozoa, yet millions, it seems, are also required to help.

> While only one sperm is capable of actually fertilizing an ovum, it is probable that many sperms have to be present in order for fertilization to occur. The ovum is surrounded by a gelatinous material which can be liquified by hyaluronidase, an enzyme carried by the sperms. No single sperm can carry sufficient hyaluronidase to liquefy enough of the gelatinous material to penetrate the ovum.[3]

It seems to me likely that no single human being could alone create from out of her or himself a great work of vision; that this may well be a cumulative human process in which the minor elements are collectively as important as the major, for they create a climate of thought, opinion, hope, fear, doubt, and need. In the chapter on Thomas Hardy, we saw him making the remark that

> You may call the whole human race a single ego if you like; and in that view a man's consciousness may be said to pervade the world; but nothing is gained. Each is, to all knowledge, limited to his own frame.[4]

and later in the same chapter, the apparently contradictory statement

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3. Gordon Bourne, Pregnancy (London, 1975), p.60.

4. Thomas Hardy, Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy, I, p.262.

> Altruism, or the Golden Rule, or whatever 'love thy neighbour as thyself' may be called, will ultimately be brought about I think, by the pain we see in others reacting in ourselves, as if we and they were part of one body. Mankind, in fact, may be and possibly will be, viewed as members of one corporeal frame.[5]

It is true that 'each is limited to his own frame' but Hardy is perhaps right to change his mind and begin to think that 'mankind may be and possibly will be, viewed as members of one corporeal frame'. It may well be that human intelligence is an evolutionary development of life in the world, that thought may be a cumulative, collective process.[6]

In the light of such thoughts as these, I have written this section about tenuous links between writers, thoughts and events. Though they _are_ tenuous, they do add up to something important for Part Four brings us to the point where Doris Lessing is able to make the same kind of novelistic break-through of vision for our time as George Eliot did for hers.

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5. _Life of Thomas Hardy_, p.224.

6. For a discussion of this idea, see J. E. Lovelock's _Gaia: A New Look At Life on Earth_ (Oxford, 1979). Also, this is one of the major visual ideas of Thomas Hardy's _The Dynasts_.

Chapter VIII

ENLARGING FICTION AND HISTORY

1. The Fiction of Science and Religion

The Ordeal of Richard Feverel

An account of the plot of The Ordeal of Richard Feverel will show its relevance to this discussion:

> Sir Austin Feverel brings up Richard, his only son, under his scientific 'System', with the intention of producing a perfect human specimen. But Richard marries against his father's will, and Sir Austin will only forgive him if the newly wed husband and wife are separated for an unspecified length of time. Richard agrees, but Sir Austin withholds his forgiveness for so long that, meanwhile, Richard is seduced by a temptress set up by another man who loves Richard's wife. Richard's guilt sends him to the continent. His father then takes in the abandoned wife and grandchild. Richard learns he has a son and returns to England determined to fight a duel with the man who arranged for his seduction. Richard is injured, and his wife forbidden to see him lest her presence harm his recovery. Under great emotional strain she contracts a brain fever and dies. Richard survives, a broken man. Sir Austin never understands that the tragedy is the result of his flawed System, but prefers to blame the human beings on whom he had practised, as not strong enough to live up to his Scientific Humanism.

Meredith's sense of something wrong is largely contained in his laughter at the idea of a 'System' of scientific humanism, a humanly created set of beliefs and principles for the perfection of life. The comedy becomes tragedy because Meredith's novel shows human mistakes which have mortally damaging consequences. Yet I don't wish to argue that Meredith is whole-heartedly anti-Science, or anti-Humanism; rather, that the villain of the piece, Sir Austin Feverel, suffers too greatly from human vices - pride and vanity - to make a reality of the System he envisages.

It is interesting that The Ordeal of Richard Feverel shares its year of publication with Darwin's Origin of Species and George Eliot's

Adam Bede, for this novel does place itself squarely in the centre of the science/religion/humanism dilemma that was later to be in some sense resolved by George Eliot's synthesis of the doctrines of evolution with kind-ness and fellowship. That synthesis seems to be what Meredith's novel calls for, for Meredith's sense of something wrong is almost the same sense that George Eliot dealt with. For example, he bids his readers to prepare for a new kind of novel, which will deal in small and trivial incidents and make of them the greatness they might have (Dorothea crying at Rome?)

> Now surely there will come an age when the presentation of science at war with Fortune and the Fates, will be deemed the true epic of modern life; and the aspect of a scientific humanist who, by dint of incessant watchfulness, has maintained a system against those active forces, cannot be reckoned less than sublime, even though at the moment he but sit upon his horse, on a fine March morning such as this, and smile wistfully to behold the son of his heart, his System incarnate, wave a serene adieu to tutelage, neither too eager nor morbidly unwilling to try his luck alone for a term of two weeks. At present, I am aware, an audience impatient for blood and glory scorns the stress I am putting on incidents so minute, a picture so little imposing. An audience will come to whom it will be given to see the elementary machinery at work: who, as it were, from some slight hint of the straws, will feel the winds of March when they do not blow. To them will nothing be trivial, seeing that they will have in their eyes the invisible conflict going on around us, whose features a nod, a smile, a laugh of ours perpetually changes. And they will perceive, moreover, that in real life all hangs together: the train is laid in the lifting of an eyebrow, that bursts upon the field of thousands. They will see the links of things as they pass, and wonder not, as foolish people do now, that this great matter came out of that small one.[7]

In anticipating a time when the slightest details of life will be recognised as part of the whole - 'in real life all hangs together' - Meredith is anticipating George Eliot's work in Middlemarch. At the same time, he is giving the scientific evidence for such a claim, drawn no doubt from the

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7. George Meredith, The Ordeal of Richard Feverel (Oxford, 1984), p.226.

the new theories of Lyell's geology and Darwin's evolution, where the fact that 'this great matter came out of that small one' was being proven.[8] And these indeed were the laws which George Eliot was to recognise at pertaining not only to rocks and creatures over millenia, but also to us, now.

> It is in these acts called trivialities that the seeds of joy are forever wasted, until men and women look around with haggard faces at the devastation their own waste has made, and say, the earth bears no harvest of sweetness - calling their denial knowledge.[9]

In a sense, Meredith already knows the thing that George Eliot was to write - 'in real life all hangs together'. But though he can write that in a sentence, he can not make the whole novel say it, as, for example, Middlemarch does. Yet Meredith does envisage a future audience with fine vision, an audience 'to whom it will be given to see the elementary machinery at work', and, in Sir Austin, he does show the consequences of ignorance and blindness to reality. Sir Austin seems wilfully to misunderstand the laws of relationship and consequence, even while quoting their necessity. When Lady Blandish asks Sir Austin to save his son from the 'consequences' of his rash marriage, she means the consequence of losing contact with the father, a thing entirely within Sir Austin's control, yet he sees the 'consequence' as nothing personally to do with himself - it is part of 'the order of things'.

> Sir Austin smiled an admirable smile of pity. 'That I should save him, or anyone, from consequences, is asking more than the order of things will allow to you Emmeline, and is not in the disposition of this world. I cannot. Consequences are the natural offspring of acts. My child, you are talking sentiment, which is

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8. T. H. Huxley's lecture 'On a Piece of Chalk' (which we shall look at in the next section of this chapter) comes to mind here. Huxley calls up vast tracts of time in his meditation of a piece of chalk.

9. George Eliot, Middlemarch, ch. 42, p.409.

> the distraction of our modern age in everything - a phantasmal vapour distorting the image of the life we live. You ask me to give him a golden age in spite of himself. All that could be done, by keeping him in the paths of virtue and truth I did. He is become a man, and as a man he must reap his own sowing'.
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> ORF, p.339

Though this is attributed to the spokesman of scientific humanism, we note that in Adam Bede George Eliot was herself at that time writing much more generously and complicatedly

> The evil consequences that may lie folded in a single act of selfish indulgence, is a thought so awful that it ought surely to awaken some feeling less presumptuous than a rash desire to punish.[10]

Sir Austin is right when he says that 'consequences are the natural offspring of acts', but he neglects to apply the dictum to his own act of casting out his son. It is pride, not duty, that turns him away from Richard at this point when he is perhaps most in need of his father's guidance.

Sir Austin's terrifically narrow vision stands only superficially for Science in this novel. He is really a most unscientific man, holding tenaciously to his beliefs even when his 'experiment' has proved a disaster. Evil in the form of our own vices is seen to be the real fault. It is anti-religious, not pro-scientic, objectives that have caused Sir Austin to act badly.

> As he sat alone in the forlorn dead-hush of his library, he saw the devil.
>
> How are we to know when we are at the head and fountain of the fates of them we love?
>
> There by the springs of Richard's future, his father sat: and the devil said to him: 'Only be quiet, do nothing: resolutely do nothing: your object now is to keep a brave face to the world, so that all may know you superior to this human nature that has deceived you.
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> ORF, p.333

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10. George Eliot, Adam Bede (London, 1967), p.400. In the Oxford 1984 edition of The Ordeal of Richard Feverel, John Halperin, in his Introduction, notes this and other similarities between Adam Bede and The Ordeal.

This father who has controlled and determined his son's life in order to bring to the world a perfect specimen of humanity, succumbs to the devil and gives up care at the one point where it would be of immense good to his son. But as Meredith says, with some sympathy for the ignorance of Sir Austin, 'how are we to know when we are at the head and fountain of the fates of them we love?' How? If pure knowledge is no use to us, then how? This is a question the novel poses, and answers, indirectly, through the female characters, Mrs. Berry, Lady Blandish, Lucy, with the word 'love', and with Richard himself, later, with 'instinct'. Lady Blandish begs Sir Austin 'Do not shut your heart' (ORF, p.332), knowing that it is only the heart which could save the son in the face of his father's disappointment.

While Sir Austin is shown to be foolish because he does not recognise the limits of his own ignorance, and because of his dogmatism and egotism, the tragedy is also a nemesis for his naive optimism - perhaps the real basis of his System - in believing that his interior reality is the same as the exterior reality. Sir Austin projects his feelings onto the outside world, as if there were an easy and direct relation between the two.

> The solemn gladness of his heart gave nature a tongue. Through the desolation flying overhead - the wailing of the Mother of Plenty across the bare-swept land - he caught intelligible signs of the beneficent order of the universe, from a heart newly confirmed in its grasp if the principle of human goodness, as manifested in the dear child who had just left him; confirmed in its belief in the ultimate victory of good within us, without which nature had neither music nor meaning and is rock, stone, tree, and nothing more.
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> ORF, p.80

But the 'ultimate victory of good within us' is never vouchsafed, and so it seems here that perhaps Meredith's true belief is rather more like Hardy's than Wordsworth's, where 'nature' is 'rock, stone, tree, and nothing more'.

Yet, in Chapter XLII, 'Nature Speaks', Meredith presents nature in quite a different aspect. Instead of projecting his own beliefs or feelings onto an inanimate exterior world, Sir Austin's son Richard Feverel finds, on learning that he has a son, nature itself imposing thought and feelings on him. There is some relation between man and the natural world, but it is not a relation governed by human will, but rather instinct.

> 'A father!' he kept repeating to himself: 'a child!' And though he knew it not he was striking the key-notes of Nature.
>
> ORF, p.504

Richard wanders alone into the forest, and a storm breaks. Now he seems to stand for humanity as part of nature, not as in Hardy's storm scene, attacked by it.

> Up started the whole forest in violet fire. He saw the country at the foot of the hills to the bounding Rhine gleam, quiver, extinguished. Then there were pauses; and the lightning seemed as the eye of heaven, and the thunder as the tongue of heaven, each alternately addressing him; filling him with awful rapture. Alone there - sole human creature among the grandeurs and mysteries of storm - he felt the representative of his kind, and his spirits rose, and marched, and exulted, let it be glory, let it be ruin!
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> ORF, p.506

God and nature do seem as one here; the lightning is 'the eye of heaven' the thunder 'the tongue of heaven' and addressed thus by heaven, Richard cannot help but think of himself as representative and therefore valuable, nature here is certainly more than 'rock, stone, tree' but it is speaking to Richard, not confirming his belief.[11] Richard finds a leveret and

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11. This view of the relation of Man and Universe is confirmed in Meredith's Sonnet, 'Lucifer in Starlight', from which I quote,

    He reached a middle height, and at the stars,
    Which are the brain of heaven, he looked, and sank.
    Around the ancient track marched, rank on rank,
    The army of unalterable law.

    The Poetical Works of George Meredith (London, 1912), p.182.

carries it in his coat, and this little creature also 'speaks' to him.

> He was next musing on a strange sensation he experienced. It ran up one arm with an indescribable thrill, but communicated nothing to his heart. It was purely physical, ceased for a time, and recommenced, till he had it all through his blood, wonderfully thrilling. He grew aware that the little thing he carried in his breast was licking his hand there, the small rough tongue going over and over the palm of his hand produced the strange sensation he felt. Now that he knew the cause, the marvel ended; but now that he knew the cause, his heart was touched and made more of it. The gentle scraping continued on as he walked. What did it say to him? Human tongue could not have said so much then.
>
> ORF, p.508

The whole experience becomes like a revelation to Richard; that is to say, it shows him something new to him, makes clear to him the feelings of fatherhood and relationship. 'A father! A child! . . . The key-notes of nature.' Where Sir Austin's heart 'gave nature a tongue', his son is given the speech of nature direct, without thought or feeling, 'it was purely physical'. Yet, what Richard has revealed is as much inside him as out, it is the revelation of instinct, though this has to come to him as instruction from outside.

> Impelled as a man who feels a revelation mounting obscurely to his brain, Richard was passing one of those little forest-chapels, hung with votive wreaths, where the peasant halts to kneel and pray. Cold, still, in the twilight it stood, rain-drops pattering round it. He looked within, and saw the Virgin holding her Child. He moved by. But not many steps had gone ere his strength went out of him, and he shuddered. What was it? He asked not. He was in other hands. Vivid as lightning the Spirit of Life illuminated him. He felt in his heart the cry of his child, his darling's touch. With shut eyes he saw them both. They drew him from the depths; they led him a blind and tottering man. And as they led him he had a sense of purification so sweet he shuddered again and again.
>
> ORF, p.508

Richard is 'illuminated' by 'the Spirit of Life', where his father imposes his own ideas upon Life, and when they do not fit together is irritated, not with himself but with Life.

In this sense, Sir Austin, while representing some aspects of the Scientific temper, is profoundly unscientific; he holds on to his System despite the evidence life piles up against it, evidence which he simply does not wish to see. Meredith wants to stress rigidity and dogmatism as the perils attendant on <u>any</u> system.[12] There are other systems which come between Richard and Lucy even after the revelation when nature spoke; the system of Honour demands that Richard fights a duel with Mountfalcon, and the system of medicine practised by the doctor who attends him after the duel. This system decrees that it would be harmful for Lucy to see Richard, and the consequence is the eventual death of Lucy. Lady Blandish, once an admirer of Sir Austin's System, writes at the close of the novel;

> I remember you said that Richard had done wrong. Yes; well, that may be. But his father eclipsed his wrong - a crime, or quite as bad; for if he deceived himself in the belief that he was acting righteously in separating husband and wife, and exposing his son as he did, I can only say that there are some who are worse than people who deliberately commit crimes. No doubt Science will benefit by it. They kill little animals for the sake of Science.
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> <u>ORF</u>, p.539

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12. In his 'An Essay on Comedy', Meredith sees laughter as a life-force breaking through such rigidity of mind.

> Whenever [men] wax out of proportion, overblown, affected, pretentious, bombastical, hypocritical, pedantic, fantastically delicate; whenever it sees them self-deceived or hoodwinked, given to run riot in idolatries, drifting into vanities, congregating into absurdities, planning shortsightedly, plotting dementedly; whenever they are at variance with their professions, and violate the unwritten but perceptible laws binding them in consideration one to another; whenever they offend sound reason, fair justice; are false in humility or mined with conceit, individually, or in the bulk; the Spirit overhead will look humanely malign, and cast an oblique light on them, followed by volleys of silvery laughter. That is the Comic Spirit.

Meredith's 'An Essay on Comedy' in <u>Comedy</u> introduction and appendix by Wylie Sypher (New York, 1956), p.48.

Belief that eclipses truth, is, Lady Blandish believes, as bad or worse than deliberate evil, which we can usually recognise and avoid. In Sir Austin self-deception has had too high a cost, and yet stems from minor, and common, human vices - pride and vanity.

> He had almost forgiven his son. His deep love for him had well-nigh shaken loose from wounded pride and more tenacious vanity. Stirrings of a remote sympathy for the creature who had robbed him of his son and hewed at his System, were in his heart of hearts. This he knew, and in his own mind he took credit for his softness. But the world must not suppose him soft; the world must think he was still acting on his System. Otherwise what would his long absence signify? - Something highly unphilosophical. So, though love was strong, the last tug of vanity drew him still aslant.
>
> The Aphorist read himself so well, that to juggle with himself was a necessity. As he wished the world to see him, he beheld himself: one who entirely put aside mere personal feelings: one in whom parental duty, based on the science of life, was paramount: a Scientific Humanist, in short.
>
> ORF, p.465

Yet this account of the Scientific Humanist is really an account of Meredith's disappointment that there is no science of life for human beings to learn and practice. The failings of the Scientific Humanist are human failings, not scientific ones. In envisaging such a wrong form of synthesis of science and humanism, Meredith does intimate that there might be a right one. No one more obviously rights the wrongs Meredith sees here than George Eliot, the scientific humanism that was based on some of the patterns that Victorian science was bringing to light, patterns of linkage between apparently separate and divergent forms. We remember Hardy's recognition of relationship between Knight and the Trilobite - who would have thought these creatures related? Such knowledge can only be of value if it can find some way into our prosaic daily life, for that is where - and Meredith knew this as well as George Eliot - our real tragedies are made. The 'poetry of mortals is their daily prose' (ORF, p.343) he writes elsewhere of the young lovers, Richard and

Lucy, anticipating the need increasingly felt in the years to come, to ground human meaning in ordinary life, in that area everyone knew. Meredith's novel is not anti-science, in fact, it is favourably disposed to the doctrines of causation, determinism, and relation; he has accepted the change of paradigm posited by Lyell and Darwin. What it objects to is any erroneous system of belief which puts aside 'mere personal feelings' of 'sympathy' while allowing 'wounded pride and tenacious vanity' to control human action.[13]

A Beleagured City

As Mrs. Oliphant's A Beleaguered City is not a well-known work, and as it is currently out of print, let me offer here, for the sake of clarity a brief synopsis of the novel's action.

> The men of Semur, a provincial French town, have no faith in God, and bow to religious forms merely for the sake of their wives; their real belief is in money. On this account the city's dead return and cast out the inhabitants, who are not allowed to return until they have regained their faith. The novel is written in a documentary form, with various narratives from different perspectives given by the town's inhabitants, most notably its mayor.

The documentary form of the novel is important, in that it anticipates Doris Lessing's 'novel-report', and is a sort of forerunner to the Canopean Archives, though its narratives are entirely human and mortal. Various townspeople provide 'narratives' and 'supplements' under the mayor's editorship, in order to provide a fuller account of the whole episode than any one person could give. While Mrs. Oliphant's 'story of the Seen and Unseen' is in one sense unbelievable, her knowledge that it must strike readers used to classic realism as so forces her to create a form which will counteract scepticism as much as possible. This story told from

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13. Again we can see the view of the novel upheld in a later sonnet. 'The World's Advance' warns us

> . . . not one instinct to efface
> Ere Reason ripens for the vacant place.

Poetical Works, p.186

outside - as it were - by an independent narrator would seem no more than a slightly over sophisticated fairy story. But with this documentary form, realistic conventions are upheld, even while the subject matter of the story defies realistic belief. The maire, his wife, Paul Lecamus, M. de Bois-Sombre, Mme. Veuve Dupin are in fact so straightforwardly described that they are perfectly acceptable. Mrs. Oliphant thus succeeds in bringing the dead back to life without disturbing the realist expectations of her audience. It is the same method that Doris Lessing was to use to bring back religious issues to the modern novel in Shikasta.

In Semur the Church has largely fallen into disrespect, it is a place for women, and the maire himself though not an actively bad man, cannot tell the difference between superstition and belief; to him the 'unseen' is all superstition. When the women of the town claim the exile is a punishment for the suspension of prayers at the hospital, he thinks they speak of a 'magic', 'no better than witchcraft'.[14] The people of the town are told that they have to give up their lives in the town because they do not understand the meaning of life.

> To yield their places, which they had not filled aright, to those who knew the meaning of life, being dead. NOUS AUTRES MORTS - these were the words which blazed out oftenest of all, so that everyone saw them. And 'Go!' this terrible placard said - 'Go!' leave this place to us who know the true signification of life.'
>
> ABC, pp.54-55

It is the dead, who in their afterlife have learned 'the true signification of life' who return to teach the living that signification; that the world of the seen, the material world, is not the centre of human life, that there are forces more powerful than the merely physical. The dead force this knowledge upon the living by making them relearn lost religious truths

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14. Mrs. Oliphant, A Beleagured City (London, 1880), pp.49-50.

and by casting doubt on the truths of their own time. Thus reading the 'Sommation' written in letters of fire upon the Cathedral door, the mayor has to overcome his instinctive awe in order to appear as a man of his own time - a modern man.

> At this moment it struck me that there was no explanation, nothing but this vraie signification de la vie. I felt like one in a dream: the light coming and going before me; one word, then another, appearing - sometimes a phrase like that I have quoted, blazing out, then dropping into darkness. For the moment I was struck dumb; but they it came back to my mind that I had an example to give, and that for me, eminently a man of my century, to yield credence to a miracle was something not to be thought of. Also I knew the necessity of doing something to break the impression of awe and terror on the mind of the people. 'This is a trick,' I cried loudly, that all might hear.
>
> ABC, p.55

'Reality' is broken by the appearance of the words of fire, the mayor 'felt like one in a dream' - his senses tell him that this can not be real, cannot be daily life, and the sense of dislocation this causes is perhaps what strikes him dumb. But because the mayor is devoted to being a modern man, despite his own apprehension of the miracle, he cannot allow himself to believe in it, because he does not believe in miracles, and when confronted with one, rather like Sir Austin, he prefers his own erroneous belief to the evidence of something other. 'To yield credence to a miracle was something not to be thought of,'. It is as if a devotion to science leads to error, because it is a theoretical science, not a practical one. Also, the mayor says he 'knew the necessity of doing something to break the impression of awe and terror on the mind of the people', and again in normal circumstances this would perhaps be the right and sensible thing to do. But the dead intend to strike the people with 'awe and terror'; that is increasingly their obvious intent, because, as in the Old Testament relation of the children of Israel to their God, awe and terror

seem to be the only things that work. The people of Semur have to become 'children' again in religious terms, and give up modern sophistication. Thus, when God does return to the thoughts of the mayor, it is in the form of the Father. When the people have been ejected from the city by the mysterious force which compels them to walk away from their homes, the mayor finds himself praying.

> 'O God, ' I cried, 'whom I know not, am not I to Thee as my little Jean is to me, a child and less than a child? Do not abandon me in this darkness. Would I abandon him were he ever so disobedient? And God, if thou art God, Thou art a better father than I.' When I had said this, my heart was a little relieved. It seemed to me that I had spoken to some one who knew all of us, whether we were dead or whether we were living. That is a wonderful thing to think of, when it appears to one not as a thing to believe, but as something that is real.
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> ABC, p.96

The difference between theoretical belief and real belief is now clear to the mayor. Before, religion had seemed a thing that he could not bring himself to believe, because it was unreal to him. Now, God seems not a matter of belief but a matter of reality 'something that is real'. This process, of changing belief into reality has to be undergone by all the townspeople as a whole, before the dead will allow them back to their homes. The mayor is forced to try and remember information of the Bible; he has a vague recollection of Jericho, but not strong enough to be of any use to him. He sends men on patrols around the walls of the town each day.

> This was a duty which I never allowed to be neglected, not because I put much very much faith in it, but because it gave us a sort of employment. There is a story which I recollect dimly of an ancient city which its assailants did not touch, but only marched round and round till the walls fell, and they could enter. Whether this was a story of classic times or out of our own remote history, I could not recollect. But I thought of it many times while we made our way like a procession of ghosts, round and round, straining out ears to hear what those voices

> were which sounded above us, in tones that were familiar, yet so strange. This story got so much into my head (and after a time all our heads seemed to get confused and full of wild and bewildering expedients) that I found myself suggesting - I, a man known for sense and reason - that we should blow trumpets at some time to be fixed, which was a thing the ancients had done in the strange tale which had taken possession of me. M. le Cure looked at me with disapproval. He said, 'I did not expect from M. le Maire anything that was disrespectful to religion!' Heaven forbid that I should be disrespectful to religion at any time of life, but then it was impossible to me. I remembered after that the tale of which I speak, which had so seized upon me, was in the sacred writings; but those who know me well will understand that to sneer at these writings or intention of wounding the feelings of M. le Cure was in my mind.
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> ABC, pp.103-105

M. le Maire is correct in saying that he is never 'disrespectful to religion'. But his respect is usually polite and dutiful rather than truly felt. The very fact that he cannot remember where he knows the story from is evidence of his real lack of respect; he has not read the Bible as a valuable and useful aid to living for many years. The story of Jericho has taken on in his mind the nature of a myth, so that he can't discriminate between it and stories of the 'ancients' of 'remote history'. It is all 'the past' to him. Later, re-entering the City alone with M. le Cure, the mayor explains the state of his belief.

> I have not made up my mind on these subjects. When one can believe frankly in all the Church says, many things become simple, which otherwise cause great difficulty in the mind. The mysterious and wonderful then find their natural place in the course of affairs; but when a man thinks for himself, and has to take everything on his own responsibility, and make all the necessary explanations, there is often great difficulty. So many things will not fit into their places, they dtraggle like weary men on a march. One cannot put them together, or satisfy one's self.
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> ABC, p.156

It seems to me that this is the direct voice of Mrs. Oliphant, addressing non-believers. I think she believes it is probably better to have 'many things become simple' than 'great difficulty in the mind'.

I wonder if allowing M. le Maire this voice, he is not, nevertheless, the very man she would wish to convert to the Church? The mayor, contending with these difficulties on his own, has had, damagingly to himself, to shut out the 'mysterious and wonderful' from any chain of nature and natural causes. The miracle of the letters of fire had to be called 'a trick' because such wonder had no place in his conception of nature. And no man alone is capable of 'making all the necessary explanations'. Because 'one cannot put them together' and create a unified whole sense of meaning from life and the world, then one cannot 'satisfy one's self'.

Certainly the mayor himself is glad to be able to attend Church at least once after the inhabitants have been allowed back into the city. The women are grateful to see their men in Church,

> 'It will bring a blessing,' cried another. 'It is not like our little voices, that perhaps only reach half-way.'
>
> This was figurative language, yet it was impossible to doubt there was much truth in it. Such a submission of our intellects, as I felt in determining to make it, must have been pleasing to heaven. The women, they are always praying; but when we thus presented ourselves to give thanks, it meant something, a real homage; and with a feeling of solemnity we separated, aware that we had contented both earth and heaven.
>
> ABC, p.253

It is 'intellect' which normally prevents the men from attending Church, whereas the women go more by feeling and intuition. Because a man like the mayor prizes intellect - 'I have not made up my mind on these subjects' he says, as if it were a matter for the mind to decide - he can not believe. It was only at that time when intellect bowed to fear that he was able to feel the reality of God. It is the meek (the mayor calls them the weak) who inherit here, the vision not granted to intellect. Leaving the city, some of the inhabitants 'see' who has expelled them.

> And then there arose a great cry and clamour of others, both men and women pressing round. 'I saw my mother,' said one, 'who is dead twenty years come the St. Jean'. 'And I my little Rene,' said another. 'And I my Camille, who was killed in Africa.' . . . Those who were transported by a knowledge beyond ours were the weakest among us; most of them were women, the men old or feeble, and some children.
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> ABC, pp.78-79

The weakest of all, Paul Lecamus, is kept inside the city to live among the dead. His life has to some extent prepared him for this honour. Of him, the mayor writes,

> Paul Lecamus, a man whom I have always considered as something of a visionary, though his conduct is irreproachable, and his life honourable and industrious. He entertains religious convictions of a curious kind; but, as the man is quite free from revolutionary sentiments, I have never considered it to be my duty to interfere with him, or to investigate his creed. Indeed, he has been treated generally in Semur as a dreamer of dreams . . .
>
> ABC, p.25

When Paul Lecamus emerges from City, M. le Cure shows a rather different attitude, 'they teach us not by angels, - by the fools and offscourings of the earth'. (p.123). Paul Lecamus brings a message from the dead.

> 'They are not the dead. They are the immortal. They are those who dwell - elsewhere. They have other work, which has been interrupted because of this trial. They ask, "Do you know now - do you know now?" This is what I am bidden to say.'
>
> 'What' - I said (I tried to say it, but my lips too were dry), 'What would they have us know?'
>
> But a clamour interrupted me. 'Ah! yes, yes, yes!' the people cried, men and women; some wept aloud, some signed themselves, some held up their hands to the skies. 'Never more will we deny religion'.
>
> ABC, p.126

The people are of course willing to 'promise everything' (p.128) because they long to return to normal. When Paul Lecamus begins his narrative, we can't help thinking that 'normal' life can hardly fit with recognition of the 'unseen'. That is why Paul 'fool and offscouring' has been chosen as the messenger; an ordinary person, such as the mayor or the priest,

would not see the unseen reality. Lecamus writes,

> The 'Sommation' on the Cathedral doors did not surprise me. Why should it be a matter of wonder that the dead should come back? the wonder is that they do not. Ah! that is the wonder. How can one go away who loves you, and never return, nor speak, nor send any message that is the miracle: not that the heavens should bend down and the gates of Paradise roll back, and those who have left us return. All my life it has been a marvel to me how they could be kept away.
>
> ABC, p.132

Paul Lecamus appears to be almost the exact opposite, in terms of belief, to the mayor. In Lecamus 'the mysterious and wonderful' have found 'their natural place in the course of affairs'; what appears an unbelievable miracle to the mayor is not 'a matter of wonder' to Lecamus. He is already more a part of the unseen world than he is the seen. To him the 'wonder' is the ordinary world, where the dead do not return. What seems miraculous to Paul is that there can be an end to love, and here, as for the mayor, the use of the word miracle implies 'unbelievable'. What Paul shares with the women is a greater sense of the power of love between humans This is what provides the link.

What happens to Paul inside the city is that his vision of reality is confirmed. Left alone as the other inhabitants leave, he feels 'a change in the air . . . like the movement of someone unseen' (p.134). But again this does not frighten or astonish him. 'I have felt such a sensation in the night, when all was still, before now'. His experience is entirely centred around 'feeling' - 'I neither heard nor saw, but felt.' His dead wife returns to him;

> Her presence wrapped me round and round. It was beyond speech. Neither did I need to see her face, nor to touch her hand. She was more near to me, more near, than when I held her in my arms. How long it was so, I cannot tell; it was long as love, yet short as the drawing of a breath. I knew nothing, felt nothing, but Her, alone; all my wonder and desire to know departed from me. We said to each other everything without words - heart overflowing into heart. It was beyond knowledge or speech.
>
> ABC, p.136

This 'feeling' is not physical feeling, but rather a sensitive emotional apprehension; it is the presence of the dead wife that Lecamus feels. At the same time, this felt apprehension is entirely enough and satisfactory, there is no other knowledge that could add to it; 'all my wonder and desire to know departed from me'.

Paul Lecamus confesses that there was much he could not understand, in this, speaks in part for Mrs. Oliphant and her difficulties in writing this tale. In the midst of the unseen he could only recognise what he already knew.

> For a time I laboured after their meaning, trying hard and vainly to understand; but afterwards I perceived that only when they spoke of Semur, of you who were gone forth, and of what was being done, could I make it out. At first this made me only more eager to hear; but when thought came then I perceived that of all my longing nothing was satisfied. Though I was alone with the unseen, I comprehended it not; only when it touched upon what I knew, then I understood.

ABC, p.143

When 'they' speak of their own things, purposes beyond human comprehension, Lecamus can not, however hard he tries, understand. It is literally beyond him. Of course, this is a paradox of religious knowledge, that we can only know what we already know; that knowledge cannot be taught us, but that we learn it, sometimes, as we live it. But this expresses a real problem for the visionary novelist, who is confined to the bounds of reality, and yet wishes to expand our consciousness of those bounds. Mrs. Oliphant has to write her 'tale of the seen and unseen' entirely in terms of the seen; only through the medium of Lecamus can the unseen have a voice. We shall see later how Doris Lessing solves this problem by using the idea of incarnation, so that the unseen speaks as it were directly through its own representative on earth.

We learn through Lecamus that the immortal residents have not been sent by a higher power, but have rather been allowed to come. Like St. Paul

they speak not by commandment but by permission. They are driven by their love for their living relatives and desire to save them. It is the same emotion which fires 'belief' in Paul and the religious women.

> Some said it was enough - that they had no commission from on high, that they were but permitted - that it was their own will to do it - and that the time had come to forbear.
>
> ABC, p.149

and the immortals have to relearn the lesson of Christ which God himself comes to tell them, that nothing will make the living learn; 'Neither will they believe - though one rose from the dead' (p.152).

This then is the message Lecamus really brings to the people of Semur, the message of Christ. And though the people are at first willing to agree to anything, and although they attend mass on their first evening in the town, finally, as M. le Maire sadly narrates, raturned to their normal state, the inhabitants soon return to their previous indifference

> Everything is as it was; and I cannot persuade myself that, for a time, I and mine were shut out, and our places taken by those who neither eat nor drink, and whose life is invisible to our eyes. Everything, I say, is as it was - everything goes on as if it would endure forever. We know this cannot be, yet it does not move us. Why, then, should the other move us? A little time, we are aware, and we, too, shall be as they are - as shadows, and unseen. But neither has the one changed us, and neither has the other. There was, for some time, a greater respect shown to religion in Semur, and a more devout attendance at the sacred functions; but I regret to say this did not continue. Even in my own case - I say it with sorrow - itdid not continue.
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> ABC, pp.255-256

Mrs. Oliphant's story is a sort of parable for the modern age. It draws on a tradition of magic-story, fairy story for religious purposes. The truth the tale illustrates is this: that times of personal crisis can reveal things to us that we are not usually aware of, yet, however important such revelations are, it is almost impossible to sustain their impact when life returns to normal. Almost impossible, and yet, necessary. If

the women of Semur manage to sustain belief by accepting simplified accounts from the Church, well, says Mrs. Oliphant, that is better than the men refusing belief because of intellectual principles.

Mrs. Oliphant's vision is neither new nor invested in reality; to reclaim importance for religious life, she has to *go back* - if not in time, then in spirit, to a time when a simpler belief was possible. She tries to make what was once important important once again, she brings, literally, the dead back to life. But the novel cannot hope to achieve what Christianity itself has not achieved. Because the novel is trying to bring old belief back to life it suffers a failure of vision; it cannot see life and the religious nature of life anew; it presents old truths which in real life have already failed to convince. Thus, M. le Maire has to confide his own failure to be 'convinced' by the recent events, despite the fact that he recognises the need for conviction: 'even in my own case - I say it with sorrow - it did not continue' (*ABC*, p.256).

Indeed the very form - which we might say was that of the fairy tale - was rejected by Victorian writers as unadult, and was relegated to use for children. This says something about what Victorian realism was prepared to allow as 'real'. We might compare *A Beleaguered City* with George Eliot's *The Lifted Veil*, which though not entirely realistic, by virtue of the very story it tells, tries in the same way to present the unbelievable to a people increasingly damaged by secularisation. However different they may seem, it remains true that *A Beleaguered City* is impelled by many of the same concerns that brought about *Daniel Deronda*. *A Beleaguered City* stands outside the world it hopes to convince and recognises that modern men of science and culture will not find it easy to believe in myths and stories which appear to be at odds with their experience of reality, yet it nonetheless attempts to perform that difficult and thankless work.

2. Universal Histories and the Future of Man

The works I shall look at in this section attempt to make sense of the perspectives of evolution and geology. Before we look at these works, let us glance at some of these perspectives. T. H. Huxley's lecture 'On A Piece of Chalk' sets out to show 'how solid is the foundation upon which some of the most startling conclusions of physical science rest', and goes on to assert that

> A great chapter in the history of the world is written in chalk. . . few chapters of human history have a more profound significance for ourselves. I weigh my words well when I assert, that the man who should know the true history of the bit of chalk which every carpenter carries about in his breeches-pocket, though ignorant of all other history, is likely, if he will think his knowledge out to its ultimate results, to have a truer, and therefore a better, conception of this wonderful universe, and of man's relation to it, than the most learned student who is deep-read in the records of humanity and ignorant of those of Nature.[15]

The 'biological and geological' discourse here clearly steps into the area generally preserved for 'history'. Geology is seen almost as a part of history, a very large history. In this history, human history pales to the slightest significance when compared to even a minor and common bit of the physical world; chalk. Huxley's argument, that the history of a bit of chalk is more useful and more true (more real?) in terms of understanding man's relation to the universe than all the 'records of humanity', is both liberating and terrible. At least it is a beginning of the great task of understanding man's relation to the universe, yet, how awful that it should be so small a beginning; how ignorant it makes humanity seem, when our history - the records of our own understanding of our own being - is of less significance than the history of a bit of chalk. And it is not simply human history that Huxley reduces to insignificance.

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15. T. H. Huxley, 'On a Piece of Chalk', Discourses Biological and Geological, Collected Essays VIII (London, 1908), p.4.

> Chalk can justly claim a very much greater antiquity than even the oldest physical traces of mankind. But we may go even further and demonstrate, by evidence of the same authority as that which testifies to the existence of the father of men, that the chalk is vastly older than Adam himself. The Book of Genesis informs us that Adam, immediately upon his creation, and before the appearance of Eve, was placed in the Garden of Eden. The problem of the geographical position of Eden has greatly vexed the spirits of the learned in such matters, but there is one point respecting which, so far as I know, no commentator has ever raised a doubt. That is, that of the four rivers which are said to run out of it, Euphrates and Hiddekel are identical with the rivers now known by the names of Euphrates and Tigris. But the whole country in which these mighty rivers take their origin, and through which they run, is composed of rocks which are either of the same age of the chalk, or of later date, So that the chalk must not only have been formed, but, after its formation, the time required for the deposit of these later rocks, and for their upheaval into dry land, must have elapsed, before the smallest brook which feeds the swift stream of 'the great river, the river of Babylon', began to flow. [16]

In these new perspectives - the life-cycle of chalk, as it were - human life fades to insignificance. Not only are there no traces of human life in the early days of chalk, but even our oldest knowledge of human life is much later than the early formation of chalk. The life of earth is suddenly and rapidly expanded to almost beyond the comprehension of a human creature, as if a mayfly tried to imagine a hundred thousand years. Such lengths of time as the deposits of chalk under the Atlantic tell us of are literally beyond us. The consequences of this knowledge are all too clear, and Huxley presses them upon his reader. Pressed to their 'ultimate' such thoughts will lead, he says to a 'truer, and therefore a better, conception of this wonderful universe'. And again, at the end of his lecture he argues that in picturing such size, such scale, 'we have observed nothing but the natural product of the forces originally possessed by the substance of the universe' (p.36). If science is getting to - even a basic and simple - knowledge of the 'substance of the universe' it must be approaching central truths previously untouched by human endeavour. This is Huxley's assumption. To see ourselves as minute, specks of dust, flashes

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16. T. H. Huxley, 'On a Piece of Chalk', p.28.

in time, is nearer 'truth'. Yet Genesis had us created out of dust, made us from it but more than it, and that is a state of being which is naturally more easy for us to rest in. Huxley and Darwin unsettled the human psyche which had been in tune with Genesis, loss of belief was a damning loss.

F. H. Bradley, in his essay 'The Vulgar Notion of Responsibility' gives an account, in personal and psychological terms, of the effect of 'explaining' a man's life,

> If from given date and universal rules, another man can work out the generation [of a man] like a sum in arithmetic, where is his self gone to? It is invaded by another, broken up into selfless elements, put together again, mastered and handled, just as a poor dead thing is mastered by man. And this being so, our man feels dimly that, if another can thus unmake and remake him, he himself might just as well have been anybody else from the first, since nothing remains which is specially his. The sanctum of his individuality is outraged and profaned; and with that profanation ends the existence that once seemed impenetrably sure. To explain the origin of a man is utterly to annihilate him. [17]

This account of the devastating effect of an apparently total explanation of the self is useful for thinking about the effects of evolutionary theories. Those explanations of man's origins - worked 'like a sum in arithmetic' from 'given data and universal rules' - outraged and profaned for many the sanctum of human dignity, and the human relation to God the father (primarily the father, and then 'creator of heaven and earth'). And there were those, like George Eliot and Thomas Hardy who accepted the Darwinian theory of origination without believing it accounted for everything. For Hardy, after all it caused more serious problems; individuation, the most precious element of life, is still there but it only unfits humanity for survival. Bradley describes the explained self as being like 'a poor dead thing', and this is so in two senses. Firstly, it is a metaphor of feeling; so summed up and dealt with one feels like a mere laboratory specimen; secondly it is an account of how men come to understand things; they reduce

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17. F. H. Bradley, Ethical Studies (Oxford, 1927), p.20.

them to things, not living but dead, for the living, life, is beyond our explanations. If we are explained it is as if we were explained away, our essential self is no longer there. It is not really possible to work out a man 'like a sum in arithmetic' because there are mysterious factors which the sum cannot include. This brings into question the relevance of evolutionary knowledge to individual human life, to the real facts of our existence, and raises the subject/object problem that Romantics like Wordsworth, for example, had attempted to resolve.

We have already seen this questioning at work in a man who is favourably disposed towards Geological and Evolutionary theories in the account of the academic Knight in Hardy's A Pair of Blue Eyes. There, evolution put Knight's life on a par with the insignificant Trilobite which stared back at him from the rock. Evolution was proved to be mere knowledge in the head, as Lawrence would have called it, knowledge that could not make any vital difference to Knight.

For Hardy, the theory of Evolution served only to emphasise the problem of 'consciousness' being derived from the 'tiny human frame'.[18] 'As a young man (Hardy) had been among the earliest acclaimers of The Origin of Species',[19] yet he could only use it to confirm his worst fears: the new theory could neither make sense of human life on earth, nor could it really be doubted; it left things uneven as they were. 'Was he to live'[20] is finally more real to Knight than his vision of all the ages and the relative insignificance of Man. The mysterious importance of 'self' and of individual consciousness is not part of the evolutionary sum, and so its conclusion, true or false, is certainly only partial.

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18. Thomas Hardy, Far From the Madding Crowd, p.17.

19. The Life of Thomas Hardy, p.153.

20. Thomas Hardy, A Pair of Blue Eyes, p.242.

So it was seen also by George Eliot, 'Men can do nothing without the make-believe of a beginning' she warns at the opening of Daniel Deronda, and 'no retrospect will take us to the true beginning'. Yet she recognised that the Origin 'makes an epoch',[21] while simultaneously seeing beyond it,

> to me the development theory and all the other explanations of processes by which things came to be, produce a feeble impression compared with the mystery that lies under the processes.[22]

The evolution theory was a fragment of knowledge large enough to shatter faith in the old (Biblical) vision of the world; that is the sense in which it 'makes an epoch'. But it was only a fragment, not in itself a whole vision to replace the old, it did not touch 'the mystery that lies under the processes'. Like Thomas Hardy, George Eliot was a 'realist' that is to say, she believed that the 'mystery' was most evident, and most available to us in ordinary life, where we are in medias res. There could be no simple, absolute, explanations.

The writers of histories and stories of history I look at in the following sections are not realists, in this sense. They are working with fragments, and with the desire for an all-encompassing picture or explanation which will provide a greater pattern of meaning into which new theoretic knowledge like evolution theory can fit without reducing human life down to a thing merely explained away. History is no longer a matter of lists of kings or the various achievements of civilisation, but rather a huge picture of man and the world which shows 'mystery' at the heart of things, because the truth, as in Huxley's aaccount, is also mysterious. It is a new perspective for human life.

Winwood Reade's Martyrdom of Man does not find explanation annihilating; Reade builds religious belief into the explanation. His analysis of the

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21. George Eliot, 'Letter to Barbara Bodichon, 5 December, 1859', Letters, III, p.226.

22. ibid.

life of Man has little pockets of unhistorical, unscientific belief and faith, which seem to guarantee him meaning and future. Though his language is grandiloquent, his logic is simple:

> In order to form some conception of the future it is necessary to understand the present and the past. I shall therefore endeavour to ascertain what we have been and what we are . . . I shall search out the origin of man, determine his actual condition, speculate on his future destiny, and discuss the nature of his relations towards that Unknown Power of whom he is the offspring and the slave. I shall examine this planet and its contents . . .[23]

The apparent complacency of Reade's claim here - it is rather as if he is telling us that he will reveal everything about life, God and the universe - is in fact a register of his need. For the opposition of apparently contradictory accounts of the creation and the history of the world and man coming from the Bible and Victorian science respectively left open a gap, of which the Christian believer was as aware as any deist, atheist, or agnostic. Newman, for example, writes of the problem of modern knowledge as 'a bewilderment'.

> We live in a wonderful age; the enlargement of the circle of secular knowledge just now is simply a bewilderment, and the more so, because it has the promise of continuing, and that with greater rapidity, and more signal results. Now these discoveries, certain or probable, have in matter of fact an indirect bearing upon religious opinions, and the question arises how are the respective claims of revelation and of natural science to be adjusted. Few minds can remain at ease without some sort of rational grounds for their religious belief; to reconcile theory and fact is almost an instinct of the mind. When the flood of facts, ascertained or suspected, comes pouring in upon us, with a multitude of others in prospect, all believers in revelation, be they catholic or not, are roused to consider their bearing upon themselves.[24]

But Newman goes on to argue that science cannot fundamentally threaten religious faith, since it is a changing and developing form of consciousness, whereas religious knowledge is concerned with a finality and certainty to which science can never aspire.

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23. Winwood Reade, The Martyrdom of Man (London, 1924), p.318.

24. Cardinal Newman, Apologia Pro Vita Sua (London, 1966), p.232.

> I am far from denying that scientific knowledge is really growing, but it is by fits and starts; hypotheses rise and fall; it is difficult to anticipate which will keep their ground, and what the state of knowledge in relation to them will be from year to year . . . It seemed to be a time of all others, in which Christians had a call to be patient, in which they had no other way of helping those who were alarmed than that of exhorting them to have a little faith and fortitude.[25]

And in the Grammar of Assent Newman makes a further distinction between belief and inference. Science does not even reach the point of inference, and so hardly enters the area where religious life is conducted. Science gives us 'facts' but we have to give them 'meaning':

> Science gives us the grounds or promises from which religious truths are to be inferred; but it does not set about inferring them, much less does it reach the inference - that is not its province. It brings before us phenomena, and it leaves us, if we will, to call them works of design, wisdom, benevolence; and further still, if we will, to proceed to confess an Intelligent Creator. We have to take its facts, and to give them a meaning, and to draw our own conclusions from them. First comes knowledge, then a view, then reasoning, and then belief. This is why science has so little of a religious tendency; deductions have no power of persuasion. The heart is commonly reached, not through the reason, but through the imagination, by means of direct impressions, by the testimony of facts and events, by history, by description.[26]

In Newman's eyes the bewilderment about science and religion, though understandable, is superficial. But his account depends quite strongly on a limited definition of science. For science, as we have seen in the Huxley lecture is not merely a matter of 'reason'. Huxley's lecture deliberately sets out to touch the imagination of his audience, and he appeals to his listeners to look at their countryside for 'direct impressions'[27] and the 'testimony of facts'. Science would not stay put in the laboratory

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25. Cardinal Newman, Apologia Pro Vita Sua, p.234.

26. Cardinal Newman, An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent (Westminster, Md., 1973), p.92.

27. Huxley, p.25 'You need go no further than your own sea-board for evidence of this fact. At one of the most charming spots on the coast of Norfolk, Cromer, you will see boulder clay forming a vast mass, which lies upon the chalk, and must consequently have come into existence after it'.

its knowledge and thought began to seep out into general consciousness and reach the hearts of men. In those hearts it put doubt of the reality of the Biblical myths. The reality of Biblical history which such science undermined - as Huxley undermines Genesis - had to be replaced.

The past had to be reformulated in order to secure a future. Reade does not feel the knowledge of 'origin' as annihilating because he is intent on the future that might be constructed with such knowledge. 'What we have been and what we are' are for him clues to the greater mystery of the 'future destiny' of mankind. The marvel and dignity of human being comes, for Reade, from a sense of what once was: he has faith in 'progress'. Thus he relates the 'history of the individual man'.

> Coiled within the dark womb he sits, the image of an ape; a caricature and a prophecy of the man that is to be.[28]

The caricature and the prophecy are not separable, they are both contained in the growing man, he rests at mid point between them, future and past, in medias res. From this given mid point, Reade ranges back and forward. 'All that is elevated, all that is lively in human nature has its origin in the lower kingdom' (p.322). In 1871, Darwin's Descent of Man had claimed precisely this, that those distinctively human attributes - social living, compassion, sympathy - might have had their roots not merely in the 'lower kingdom' but in weakness in that lower kingdom.[29]

> We cannot say whether man has become larger and stronger, or smaller and weaker, than his ancestors. We should, however, bear in mind that an animal possessing great size, strength and ferocity, and which, like the gorilla, could defend itself from all enemies, would not perhaps have become social: and this would most effectively have checked the acquirement of the higher mental qualities, such as sympathy and love of his fellows. Hence it might have been an immense advantage to man to have sprung from some comparatively weak creature.[30]

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28. Winwood Reade, The Martyrdom of Man, p.321.

29. Darwin's knowledge of animals seems limited here: gorillas, we now know, are intensely social animals - as are other fierce creatures such as lions and wolves.

30. Charles Darwin, The Descent of Man (London, 1901), p.96.

Like Darwin, Reade cultivates a kind of species humility in order to reclaim the sense of dignity lost in the initial explanation: because we were that, we have become this, therefore we may become something else.

> When it is fully realised and understood that the genius of man has been developed along a line of unbroken descent from the simple tendencies which inhabited the primeval cell, and that in its later stages this development has been assisted by the efforts of man himself, what a glorious future will open to the human race! It may well be that our minds have not done growing, and that we may rise as high above out present state as that is removed from the insect and the worm. For when we examine the human mind we do not find it perfect and mature; but in a transitional and amphibious condition. We live between two worlds; we soar in the atmosphere; we creep upon the soil.[31]

So Reade's vision is in the end profoundly traditional; man is a being somewhere between the angels and the worms. This is the same perception of affairs that drove Hardy to despair, this being stuck 'between two worlds', this being human in a 'transitional and amphibious condition' is Hardy's deadly war between the spirit and the flesh. Why should one man feel it a painfilled disaster and another find it a reason to glory? In Hardy there is a desperation, as we have seen, to escape this condition, caused by the feeling that there was something else, something possible, something less trammelled in the physical mesh of the world. So the great 'sensitives' die, flayed alive: Boldwood, Winterborne, Tess, Jude. And the survivors are those who can live fully in, and make themselves one with the world of matter. Hardy suffered in the sense of possibility that Reade here joys in. There is no doubt that Reade misses the agony that Hardy felt because he is writing a theoretical, non-fiction, non-realist story. His history does not have to show or to dwell among the details of ordinary life, 'poor struggling men and women'[32] as George Eliot calls us. Perhaps Reade's history is useful as a way of rising above these conditions, in order to

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31. Winwood Reade, The Martyrdom of Man, p.323.

32. George Eliot, 'Letter to Mrs. Robert Evans, 12 February 1864', Letters III, p.133.

see beyond them to some other, more hopeful state. For certainly Hardy's pain often comes from the inaccessibility of a future; in Jude the Obscure, for example, the death of the children (loss of future) is what is most unbearable.

But this isn't a matter of choice for either man; each believes it a necessary perspective. Reade believes we have to raise ourselves from the ground in order to see ourselves:

> The earth resembles a picture, of which we, like insects which crawl upon its surface, can form but a faint and incoherent idea. We see here and there a glorious flash of colour; we have a dim conception that there is union in all its parts; yet to us, because we are so near, the tints appear to be blurred and confused. But let us expand our wings and flutter off into the air; let us fly some distance backwards into Space until we have reached the right point of view. And now the colours blend and harmonise together, and we see the picture represents One Man.
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> The body of a human individual is composed of cell-like bodies . . . As the atoms are to the human unit, so the human units are to the human whole. There is only one man upon the earth, what we call men are not individuals but components.[33]

It is as if Reade believes humanity needs a conscious effort at vision to bring itself fully into being. From the perspective of ordinary life we cannot clearly see, for being in the middle of things is yet another distortion of the whole vision. Though we live like insects we do not have to confine our vision to that of insects. Indeed, Reade thinks it a duty to find a distance, the 'right' point of view. Reade argues that this is a debt we owe to the past, to our past selves, to our species. Thus Man is not only seen as 'one' in physical terms, a living being on the planet, but also in temporal terms, one Man in time:

> You blessed ones who shall inherit that future age of which we can only dream . . . When you turn back your eyes on us poor savages, grubbing in the ground for our

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33. Winwood Reade, The Martyrdom of Man, pp.428-429. It is interesting to compare Reade's view here with that of astronaut Michael Collins whose account of earth seen from space is given on p.340 of this thesis.

> daily bread, eating flesh and blood, dwelling in vile bodies . . . remember that it is to us you owe the foundation of your happiness . . . And as for ourselves, if we are sometimes inclined to regret that our lot is cast in these unhappy days, let us remember how much more fortunate we are than those who lived a few centuries ago . . . Let us pay to the future the debt which we owe to the past.[34]

The horror of being human now, when the imagination can, however vaguely, picture some other way of life, is not lost on Reade: 'Could our minds be made visible we should find them tailed',[35] we are no more than 'poor savages', grubbing in the ground for our daily bread, eating flesh and blood, dwelling in vile bodies'. But that horror is redeemed by the future, for Reade, and also by the past, from which we and the future come. Evolution changes in his hands from a matter of adaptation, as it was for Darwin, to a matter of improvement. But perhaps 'improvement' is only a sophisticated form of adaptation?

The past labour, and the present labour of man, brought on us by necessity produces a god-like being, for 'all men can join in that gigantic and god-like work, the progress of creation';[36] not only the end of progress (perfection) but participation in its stream (our effort) confers 'god-like' status. The reward for effort is partly in effort, but always in result too.

> Not only will Man subdue the forces of evil that are without; he will also subdue those that are within . . . The whole world will be united by the same sentiment which united the primeval clan, and which made its members think, feel, and act as one . . . The earth being small, mankind will migrate into space . . . finally men will master the forces of Nature; they will become themselves architects of systems, manufacturers of worlds. Man then will be perfect, he will then be a creator . . .[37]

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34. Winwood Reade, The Martyrdom of Man, p.443.

35. ibid., p.322. Again, Reade is here peculiarly anticipatory, this time of Freud's theory of civilization, where the primitive continues to exist, though we can't see it.

36. ibid., p.443.

37. ibid., pp.422-423.

Reade's vision is both startling and naive. 'Man will then be perfect' - it sounds too easy, too grand. We are learning, at a cost, that technological prowess means little in human terms, that perfection is as far removed from space exploration as the ideals of the Pilgrim Fathers are from the America of today.[38] And yet . . . Reade is startlingly perceptive in his realisation that the sense of 'one world' leads almost inevitably to 'Space', and other worlds. This is one of the positive benefits of the space-perspective: our world is one seen against that background. Thus the mild humanism of George Eliot is transformed into the most radical Feuerbachianism with the help of progressive evolution:

> [Man] was not sent upon earth to prepare himself for existence in another world, he was sent upon earth that he might beautify it as a dwelling and subdue it to his use; that he might exalt his intellectual and moral powers until he had attained perfection, and had raised himself to that ideal which he now expresses by the name of God, but which, however sublime it may appear to our weak and imperfect minds, is far below the splendour and majesty of that Power by whom the universe was made.[39]

We attain perfection by overcoming weakness; in the process we suffer. Reade wants to justify suffering by creating an 'end' which is far greater than the pain of the means ('martyrdom'). It is a time-honoured device, this one of making suffering part of the divine plan. It is a line of thought which Hardy found repulsive: he found no evidence that any good came of suffering. Suffering arose from these very attempts Reade offered as the path to enlightenment. How, Hardy might ask, are we to exalt our intellectual and moral powers, in the face of the fact that we are 'poor savages'? The 'deadly war' of flesh and spirit is both in us, and in our world. We can not escape it.

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38. See Michael Collins, Carrying the Fire (London, 1975), a story of technological prowess which Collins himself relates to the spirit of Columbus. Yet the men of Apollo 11 were in some sense broken by the success of their mission, and the fact of Buzz Aldrin's requiring hospitalization for treatment of depression seems of little import to the technocrats who created and used the mission as a technological experiment.

39. Winwood Reade, The Martyrdom of Man, p.383.

Reade's is not an entirely naive optimism, however. The title of his book indicates that he sees suffering as the main task of mankind.

> That Unknown God has ordained that mankind should be elevated by misfortune, and that happiness should grow out of misery and pain. I give to universal history a strange but true title - The Martyrdom of Man. In each generation the human race has been tortured that their children might profit by their woes. Our own prosperity is founded on the agonies of the past. Is it therefore unjust that we also should suffer for the benefit of those who are to come? Famine, pestilence, and war are no longer essential for the advancement of the human race. But a season of mental anguish is at hand, and through this we must pass in order that our prosperity may rise.[40]

In Hardy's 'deadly war' between the flesh and the spirit, suffering does not lead to prosperity. The children themselves can not live; they are the 'outcome of new views on life', they are the first signs of 'the beginning of the universal wish not to live'.[41] Is this a modified account of that wish, this 'season of mental anguish' that Reade forsees written large, because Hardy was so close to it? Is such a season necessitated by the fact that though 'famine, pestilence, and war are no longer essential for the advancement of the human race' yet they will continue, necessarily, because it is not in our power to prevent them, whatever we might imagine? We have not overcome ourselves yet; the war still rages.

The relation between histories and stories of histories - either personal or larger than personal is worth looking at here, where we have been comparing the view of Reade - humanity's historian, with Hardy, a provincial novelist. Increasingly in the twentieth century - as we shall see in the final section of this chapter - history becomes almost a necessity for modern consciousness. It therefore becomes a necessary part of realistic fiction. The novel has an advantage over the history, in that it can do what history does - raise us up to a massive and far-sighted

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40. Winwood Reade, The Martyrdom of Man, p.447.

41. Thomas Hardy, Jude the Obscure, p.326.

overview - while still making asides and qualifications and demuring from that overview by its ability to include personal narrative voices which operate on a different time and value scale to the historical view. It manages to bring together subjective and objective views, subject and object in one changeable relation. It makes absolute statements, and then goes on to modify them and make them relative.

H. G. Wells wrote both a universal history The Outline of History and also a novel about time, The Time Machine, and a novel which I shall look at in Chapter IX, about a man who wrote about history, Star Begotten. Of his universal history, he writes,

> It is one experimental contribution to a great and urgently necessary educational reformation, which must ultimately restore universal history, revised, corrected, and brought up to date, to its proper place and use as the backbone of a general education. We say 'restore' because all the great cultures of the world hitherto, Judaism and Christianity in the Bible, Islam in the Koran, have used some sort of cosmogony and world history as a basis. It may indeed be argued that without such a basis any time binding culture of men is inconceivable. Without it we are a chaos.[42]

It is interesting to note here that Wells makes no distinction between culture and religion; he is talking about religion - Judaism, Christianity and Islam, but he calls them 'cultures'. I think this implies less that Wells thinks you cannot have culture without religion but rather that culture is dependent on a body of shared belief. Part of that belief in the past has always been 'universal history' and that is one of the things now lacking from modern culture. There is no shared basis of belief on

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42. H. G. Wells, The Outline of History (London, 1919-1920) Book One, introduction, p.2.

Wells goes on to acknowledge his debt to Winwood Reade:

> Remarkably few sketches of universal history by one single writer have been written. One book that has influenced the writer very strongly is Winwood Reade's Martyrdom of Man.

which to base such a history or cosmogony. Without such a binding influence, Wells believes, 'we are a chaos'. Wells begins by basing his account on science, opening with an account of space and then narrows down to the thin film of air and water within which life can be supported. He does the same thing with time, as if he wants to stress that we fit into these small areas of possibility.

> There was a time when the day was not a half and not a third of what it is today; when a blazing hot sun, much greater than it is now, must have moved visibly - had there been an eye to mark it - from its rise to its setting across the skies. There will be a time when the day will be as long as a year is now, and the cooling sun, shorn of its beams, will hang motionless in the heavens.[43]

Yet within this small range of time and possibility, life flourishes.

> That is perhaps the most general statement we can make about the geological record; it is a story of widening range. Classes, genera, and species of animals appear and disappear, but the range widens. It widens always. Life has never had so great a range as it has today.[44]

And when the area under discussion moves away from scientific fact, Wells uses his novelist's knowledge of human life to make history come alive. He writes of Neolithic man:

> Men were becoming aware that personally they needed protection and direction, cleansing from impurity, power beyond their own strength. Confusedly in response to that demand, bold men, wise men, shrewd and cunning men were arising to become magicians, priests, chiefs and kings. They are not to be thought of as cheats or usurpers of power, not the rest of mankind as their dupes. All men are mixed in their motives; a hundred things move men to seek ascendency over other men, but not all such motives are base or bad. The magicians usually believed more or less in their own magic, the priests in their ceremonies, the chiefs in their right. The history of mankind henceforth is a history of more or less blind endeavours to conceive a common purpose in relation to which all men may live happily, and to create and develop a common consciousness and a common stock of knowledge which may serve and illuminate that purpose.[45]

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43. H. G. Wells, Outline of History, Book One, p.5.

44. ibid., Book One, p.32.

45. ibid., Book Three, p.77.

This is the central belief of Wells's 'universal history': that mankind has a common purpose which is the discovery of common consciousness. He sees a logic in history, a story or progression which is really derived from his ideas about the present, the world in which he lives. Thus in the final volume of his Outline he summarizes his belief about the end to which history tends. He sees a world state with 'a common world religion', a 'universal education' which would continue throughout life, 'no armies, no navies, and no classes of unemployed people, wealthy or poor', there will be a more evolved science, and 'a vast free literature', there will be true and world-wide democracy, and economics will be organised for the common good of all mankind. But Wells admits that imagining this future is the hardest part of his task;

> One of the hardest, most impossible tasks a writer can set himself, is to picture the life of a people better educated, happier in their circumstances, more free and more healthy than he is himself. We know enough to-day to know that there is infinite room for betterment in every human concern . . . Yet a time when all such good things will be for all men may be coming more nearly than we think. Each one who believes that brings the good time nearer; each heart that fails delays it. [45]

Later he says 'history is and always must be no more than an account of beginnings' (Book 24, p.758). This universal history is no more and no less than the beginning of the future Wells envisages and hopes for. He has written history as the story of a human development. But in his novel of 1895, The Time Machine he works out the story to a different end. The novel clearly allows him to move into the area that history cannot reach though it implies and almost seems to depend on its existence. Yet in another sense the novel is much more limited; it is based on selection, not inclusiveness. Much has to be left out, and this is mirrored by the speed at which the time traveller himself has to travel; we cannot go all the way to the future at our normal pace, seeing every detail as we go.

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45. H. G. Wells, Outline of History, Book 24, p.758.

Wells's time traveller does not believe in a final conclusion and working out of history. Where Reade believed that suffering is necessary for human advancement but will end, Wells's traveller believes that if suffering is necessary for advancement then it will always be necessary, there is no natural end. A time of perfection cannot in the nature of such an idea of progress come to be. Thus the time-traveller who sees the future of the species degenerated by 'ease' reflects on the necessity of - what we might call - evil.

> I grieved to think how brief the dream of human intellect had been. It had committed suicide. It had set itself steadfastly towards comfort and ease . . .
>
> It is a law of nature we overlook, that intellectual versatility is the compensation for change, danger and trouble. An animal perfectly in harmony with its environment is a perfect mechanism. Nature never appeals to intelligence until habit and instinct are useless. There is no intelligence where there is no change and no need of change. Only those animals partake of intelligence that have to meet a huge variety of needs and dangers.[46]

Wells, who had studied under Huxley, held the achievement of Darwin and Huxley in formulating the theory of 'Evolution' as among the highest. In his Experiment in Autobiography Wells writes,

> They put the fact of organic evolution upon an impregnable base of proof and demonstration . . . Darwin and Huxley, in their place and measure, belong to the same aristocracy as Plato and Aristotle and Galileo.[47]

In his novels, Wells realised that 'progress' was not an inevitable concomitant of 'evolution'. And that comfort and security were not the inevitable product of time. In a sense, he believed, progress in one generation made life harder for the next, because greatness in life consists of overcoming obstacles; so he forsaw that 'progress' could well mean

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46. H. G. Wells, The Time Machine in Three Prophetic Science Fiction Novels (New York, 1960), p.65.

47. H. G. Wells, Experiment in Autobiography (London, 1969), I, p.203.

degeneration. The beneficial connection between present and future is thus challended by the time-traveller, rather than confirmed. Oddly enough, in the Autobiography, this earliest among science-fiction writers challenges another of Reade's assumptions, in a way that cannot but remind us of Hardy and his 'tiny human frame' at the opening of Far From the Madding Crowd.

> I realise that Being is surrounded east, south, north and west, above and below, by wonder. Within that frame, like a little house in strange, cold, vast and beautiful scenery, is life upon this planet, of which life I am a temporary speck and impression. There is interest beyond measure within that house; use for my utmost. Nevertheless at times one finds an urgency to go out and gaze at those enigmatical immensities. But for such a thing as I am, there is nothing conceivable to be done out there. Ultimately those remote metaphysical appearances may mean everything, but so far as my present will and activities go they mean nothing.[48]

What Wells does not answer, and Hardy neither, is why it is then felt as a necessity to go outside and gaze at those 'immensities', if, for the moment at least, they 'mean nothing' to us.

We cannot make much of them, but they do mean something to us: otherwise we would not be able to see them.[49] In the following two chapters I shall look at the way modern writers have or have not faced

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48. H. G. Wells, Experiment in Autobiography, I, pp.226-227.

49. The best 'fiction' account of this peculiar relation of humanity to stars I have come across is in Saul Bellow's The Dean's December (London, 1982). Dean Corde, a humanist and a writer, visiting the Mount Palomar observatory thinks,

> Here the living heavens looked as if they would take you in. Another sort of rehearsal, thought Corde. The sky was tense with stars, but not so tense as he was, in his breast. Everything overhead was in equilibrium, kept in place by mutual tensions. What was it that his tensions kept in place?
>
> And what he saw with his eyes was not even the real heavens. No, only white marks, bright vibrations, clouds of sky roe, tokens of the real thing, only as much as could be taken in through the distortions of the atmosphere. Through these distortions you saw objects, forms, partial realities. The rest was to be felt. And it wasn't only

these 'immensities', during a period of time when science has most actively called human attention to them. And we shall see how a refusal to face these 'immensities' goes with a characteristically modern unbelief in religious and human terms.

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that you felt, but that you were being drawn to feel and to penetrate further, as if you were being informed that what was spread over you had to do with your existence, down to the very blood and the crystal forms inside your bones. Rocks, trees, animals, men and women, these also drew you to penetrate further, under the distortions (comparable to the atmosphereic ones, shadows within shadows), to find their real being with your own. This was the sense in which you were drawn.

p.311

Chapter IX

THE VISION IN SPIRIT TRUE

A couple of notes by Thomas Hardy give me the starting point for this chapter which will look at the achievements of Olaf Stapledon in relation to some of his contemporaries. Hardy's remarks give some indication of why it might be more useful for us to look at this relatively little known writer, rather than some of the more widely acknowledged 'successes' of the Modern period. Hardy writes,

> My weakness has always been to prefer the large intention of an unskilful artist to the trivial intention of an accomplished one: in other words, I am more interested in the high ideals of a feeble executant than in the high execution of a feeble thinker.[1]

A little later he continues the thought,

> Critics can never be made to understand that the failure may be greater than the success. It is their particular duty to point this out . . . To have strength to roll a stone weighing a hundredweight to the top of the mount is a success, and to have the strength to roll a stone of ten hundredweight only halfway up that mount is a failure. But the latter is two or three times as strong a deed.[2]

It is fitting that it is Thomas Hardy who makes these observations, for as we shall see, Stapledon's vision can in many ways be considered as a continuation of Hardy's. Stapledon considers the 'human insignificance'[3] in relation to the cosmos of which Hardy was all too aware. But before we look at Stapledon's own writing I should like briefly to make some remarks about the writing of the world into which Stapledon emerged as a young man after the First World War.

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1. The Life of Thomas Hardy, p.310.

2. ibid., pp.333-334.

3. Thomas Hardy, Two on a Tower (London, 1976), p.55.

1. 'Oppressed by unbelief'

> The First Men helplessly continued in their ritualistic behaviour; but unlike the lemmings, they were human enough to be at the same time oppressed by unbelief, an unbelief which, moreover, they dared not recognize.[4]

The 'First Men' Stapledon speaks of here are the men of our own time, industrialised Homo Sapiens. The condition of 'unbelief' of which he speaks is related to our modern condition of despair (such as we have seen illustrated by Gerald Crich in Women in Love) which is aggravated, Stapledon here claims, by an unwillingness or inability to even recognize the very nature of our being.

But at the point where I begin to look at modernism, the First World War had perhaps begun to change this state of non-recognition. Indeed, Stapledon's own writing is clear indication that some men could see the state of unbelief, and its dire consequences. The First World War marks a sort of boundary in the development of visionary realism, because it did for many people put an end to liberal ideas of progress or progressive evolution such as George Eliot had believed in. The primary reaction to the war was despair. Thomas Hardy's 'meliorism' was 'shattered':

> As long before as 1901 he composed a poem called 'The Sick Battle God', which assumed that zest for slaughter was dying out. It was seldom he had felt so heavy at heart as in seeing his old view of the gradual bettering of human nature, as expressed in these verses of 1901, completely shattered by the events of 1914 and onwards.[5]

Hardy was not alone in this shattered state; many suffered the loss of the 'old view' of 'the gradual betterment of human nature'. And at worst, the war confirmed the very worst feelings of doom people had about human social life. D. H. Lawrence, for example, seemed destroyed by the war, and certainly felt its power of destruction lingering after it had finished, as we learn in this account by David Garnett of a meeting with Lawrence on Armistice Day.

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4. Olaf Stapledon, Last and First Men (Harmondsworth, 1972), p.95.

5. The Life of Thomas Hardy, p.365.

> What he said was something like this, though I do not suppose that a single phrase reproduces his actual words.
>
> 'I suppose you think the war is over and that we shall go back to the old kind of world you lived in before it. But the war isn't over. The hate and evil is greater now than ever. Very soon war will break out again and overwhelm you. It makes me sick to see you rejoicing like a butterfly in the last rays of the sun before the winter. The crowd outside thinks that Germany is crushed forever. But the Germans will soon rise again. Europe is done for; England most of all the countries. This war isn't over. Even if the fighting should stop, the evil will be worse because the hate will be dammed up in men's hearts and will show itself in all sorts of ways which will be worse than war. Whatever happens there can be no Peace on Earth.'
>
> There was a sombre joy in the tone in which he made these fierce prophecies of evil, and I could see that he was enjoying being the only man in the room who was not rejoicing because the fighting was over. [6]

'The hate and evil is greater now than ever' Lawrence felt that something had been permanently damaged or broken by the War, which was itself merely a symptom of a deeper ill. Hence he writes in Kangaroo, 'It is the end of England. It is the end of the old England. It is finished.'[7] Mind is anterior to act for Lawrence, and he couldn't see that the mind had been changed at all; 'this war isn't over . . . Whatever happens there can be no Peace on Earth'. Lawrence had no faith in men to will peace. According to Stapledon, they had none in themselves. Echoing Lawrence's feeling, he writes,

> Suddenly the nations, long terrified by one another's lust of power, blundered into the first scientific war. Millions were killed or wounded, but a greater damage was done to the minds of those who survived, and to the following generations. For now, when some had begun to see clearly the outlines of a new world, a close-knit and awakened world-society, this aim was made to seem utterly 'idealistic', unrecognizable. Men could no longer trust one another even so far as they had done before the War.[8]

Science, in the form of the 'first scientific war' seems at this point to have achieved what it had so long been threatening, the destruction of human imagination and vision. In fact, in Stapledon's case, this threat

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6. David Garnett, quoted in Nehls's A Composite Biography, ii, p.479.
7. D. H. Lawrence, Kangaroo, p.250.
8. Olaf Stapledon, Waking World (London, 1934), p.161.

posed by the war seems to strengthen imagination and vision - perhaps because he felt it all the more pressingly necessary. But in general the war marks an end of a distinctive phase of visionary realism. Modernism, by and large, seems to trade belief or vision for unbelief or aestheticism, both products of the modern wasteland in which people found themselves during the nineteen twenties and thirties. At this point visionary realism can no longer be seen as part of the main thrust of thought in literature as it had been in the hands of George Eliot and Thomas Hardy. It is true that Lawrence offers an alternative, and as I have said, visionary modernism, but even though his work can be valued in this way, it has found no real successor. The modernism, on the other hand, of T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf has spawned a tradition which continues to have widespread influence in literature today. Lawrence stands as alone as ever. In general, we laugh, like Gerald Crich, oppressed by an unbelief we dare not recognize though it squeezes the life out of us. In this sense, while undisputably coming out of the late Victorian existential problem, Modernism has not been able to deal with it at all. It is a product of that problem, not a response to it.

At best modernists have offered 'art' as a solution to the existential problem. But this very devotion to art is one of the things which has created the dead-end modern literature often now suffers. Writing must come from life, must be for it; so must any art. Too often Modernism has found a cosy place in 'art' and settled happily into it. Art has thus turned inward, viewing itself and its creators rather than the world. Thus Doris Lessing's comments about 'the artist' in her 'preface' to the <u>Golden Notebook</u>:

> The theme of the artist has been dominant in art for some time - the painter, writer, musician, as exemplar.

> Every major writer has used it, and most minor ones. These archetypes, the artist and his mirror image, the business man, have straddled our culture, one shown as a boorish inesnsitive, the other as a creator with all the excesses of sensibility and suffering and a towering egotism which has to be forgiven because of his products.[9]

In James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man the hero, Stephen Daedelus, tells us that 'art . . . is the human disposition of sensible or intelligible matter for an aesthetic end';[10] that is, the purpose of art is aesthetic, not moral or human. Stephen expresses his aim in life as being

> To discover the mode of life or art whereby your spirit could express itself in unfettered freedom.[11]

Here life and art seem to be either interchangeable or alternatives; Stephen does not tell us what the relation between them is. But in a wider sense the novel does tell us; it is called A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. In Joyce's hands, the man's life is governed by his work as 'artist'.

Joyce is making a response to the situation in which he finds himself but it is a response of human withdrawal, of denial.

> I will tell you what I will do and what I will not do. I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can.[12]

Stephen no longer believes in home, country and church. He is therefore alone, without human relation or situation. His only course of action - having abandoned belief - is thus concerned with himself, he is 'I', he can only try to 'express' himself. But the self is not independent of the human world. Self expression can only go so far before 'self'

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9. Doris Lessing, 'Preface to The Golden Notebook' in A Small Personal Voice, edited by P. Schlueter (New York, 1974), pp.29-30.
10. James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (Harmondsworth, 1975), p.207.
11. ibid., p.246.
12. ibid., p.247.

begins to run out. We are not isolate, independent creatures. For Stephen the life of art comes to stand in for a human life, with all those human claims.

Similarly, in Virginia Woolf's To The Lighthouse, giving up on real effort at human life leads only to further meaninglessness in life, as the artist, Lily Briscoe, shows us. Lily, smarting under Tansley's attack on women ('can't paint, can't write'[13]) is nevertheless expected to help Tansley 'expose and relive the thigh bones, the ribs, of his vanity'.[14] Such social duties are untouched by his attack on her as an artist. Indeed, he has a duty towards her.

> Indeed it is their duty, she reflected, in her old maidenly fairness, to help us, suppose the tube were to burst into flames, then, she thought, I should certainly expect Mr. Tansley to get me out.[15]

Lily wonders 'how would it be . . . if neither of us did either of these things'[16] but she renounces this experiment out of kindness to Mrs. Ramsey, and leaves herself both faithless to the old code of social behaviour and to any new potential relationships.

> She had done the usual trick - been nice. She would never know him. He would never know her. Human relations were all like that, she thought, and the worst (if it had not been for Mr. Banks) were between men and women. Inevitably these were extremely insincere.[17]

Lily is making excuses. Her calm and mature appraisal, 'inevitably these were extremely insincere', is a distortion of the truth, which is her own failure to make relations anything other than extremely insincere. 'She had done the usual trick' is the real truth, and the cause of her despair.

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13. Virginia Woolf, To The Lighthouse (Harmondsworth, 1976), p.105.

14. ibid., p.105.

15. ibid., p.105.

16. ibid., p.105.

17. ibid., p.107.

The cost of such failure is the eventual loss of human meaning, of belief; 'human relations were all like that'. Which is followed by a retreat into Art:

> Inevitably these were extremely insincere. Then her eye caught the salt cellar, which she had placed there to remind her, and she remembered that next morning she would move the tree further towards the middle, and her spirits rose so high at the thought of painting tomorrow that she laughed out loud at what Mr. Tansley was saying. Let him talk all night if he liked it.[18]

Anticipation of 'painting tomorrow' effectively eliminates Lily's dissatisfaction with living today, and her laughter makes life (the problem of Mr. Tansley, the insincere nature of human relations . . .) seem insignificant when viewed from the distance of Art. Taking comfort in the fact that she can get it right in art when she can't get it right in life is like a repetition of the first retreat into insincerity - it is 'the usual trick'.

Mr. Banks is an exception to Lily's dismissal of human relations, not through a sense of kind-ness between the two, but because he is willing to listen to Lily's theory of painting. Coming from and delineated by art, their relation, though not insincere, never can become the marriage for which Mrs. Ramsey hopes. But there is still a sense of achievement at the end of the novel, when Lily celebrates her 'vision'. We have to recognize though that the vision is all she has - there is no sense of a matching glory in reality. The painting it is true is 'an attempt at something' but

> It would be hung in the attics, she thought, it would be destroyed. But what did that matter? she asked herself . . . It was done, it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision.[19]

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18. _ibid._, p.107.

19. _ibid._, p.237.

Lily's achievement of vision here seems entirely therapeutic, and confined to herself alone. Her achievement is that 'it was done, it was finished' and the failure of an audience - for her art will not become part of a shared human world - is not important for Lily. Her vision is finally a sign of human defeat, for she is more trapped in her separate existence now than she was when she began the painting. At least then Mrs. Ramsey and James were sitting on the steps, but now 'she looked at the steps; they were empty; she looked at her canvas; it was blurred'.[20] This blurred record of the past will not even be seen - 'but what did that matter?'. In this reduced world where human relations are 'inevitably insincere' art too is insincere, or at best a highly individual therapy; '_I_ have had _my_ vision' is the outcome, as it were, of Joyce's statement of intent, '_I_ will try to express _myself_'. Human failure masquerades here as artistic integrity.[21]

When a writer did try to write realistically and humanistically about the human world brought to being by the First War, the reality of that war made realism seem a nightmare like Conrad's vision, where the truth is 'horror'. Frederic Manning wrote his novel of that war _Her Privates We_ in 1930, still affected by his experience, and aware that by and large, the world was pretending not to be so affected. In his Prefatory Note he writes,

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20. _ibid._, p.237.

21. Doris Lessing's choice of the artist as hero in _The Golden Notebook_ is radically different from the kind of art-writing I have discussed. Her intention was to destroy that cliche - 'the artist', and the novel does indeed show that art comes from life. Anna Wulf's block is caused by her inability to live properly. When her life begins to come right, she begins to write again. In the 'preface', Doris Lessing writes,

> But to use this theme of our time, 'the artist', 'the writer', I decided it would have to be developed by giving the creature a block and discussing the reasons for the block. These would have to be linked with the disparity between the overwhelming problems of war, famine, poverty, and the tiny individual who was trying to mirror them. But what was intolerable, what really could not be borne any longer, was this monstrously isolated, monstrously narcissistic, pedestalled paragon.

(Preface to The Golden Notebook, p.30).

> War is waged by men; not by beasts, or by gods. It is a peculiarly human activity. To call it a crime against mankind is to miss at least half its significance; it is also the punishment of a crime. That raises a moral question, the kind of problem with which the present age is disinclined to deal. Perhaps some future attempt to provide a solution for it may prove to be even more astonishing than the last.[22]

Manning feels here that the lesson of the war had not been understood, or only partially; if the war was a crime, it was 'also the punishment of a crime'; perhaps a punishment for the way human life was conducted, for the inability to live in kind-ness. Awaiting death, waiting for their turn to go over the top, three men find the human world completely void about them;

> Occasionally Martlew would look up at Shem or Bourne as though he were about to speak, and then turn away in silence.
>
> 'We three had better try and keep together,' said Shem evenly.
>
> 'Yes,' answered the other two, as though they engaged themselves quietly.
>
> And then, one by one, they realized that each must go alone, and that each of them already was alone with himself, helping the others perhaps, but looking at them with strange eyes, while the world became unreal and empty, and they moved in a mystery, where no help was.[23]

The real is 'unreal and empty' and 'a mystery' - Conrad's 'the horror!'.[24] It is as if even at this point where the men know that they need to be together, to have each other, they fail themsleves and this is both the crime and the punishment; they cannot be what they would be. This sense of aloneness was perhaps the most terrible and damaging of the things men learned in that war, as Stapledon says, 'men could no longer trust one another even so far as they had done before'. The resources of comradeship called up by life in the trenches were matched, blow for blow, by the depth of loneliness and separateness felt by each man, in the weakness of his own mortality. Thus Manning's novel ends,

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22. Frederic Manning ('Private 19022'), Her Privates We (London, 1930), 'Prefatory Note'.

23. ibid., p.385.

24. Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness (Harmondsworth, 1982), p.101.

> Tozer moved away, with a quiet acceptance of the fact. It was finished. He was sorry about Bourne, he thought, more sorry than he could say. He was a queer chap, he said to himself, as he felt for the dug-out steps. There was a bit of a mystery about him; but then, when you come to think about it, there's a bit of a mystery about all of us. He pushed aside the blanket screening the entrance, and in the murky light he saw all the men lift their faces, and look at him with patient, almost animal eyes.
>
> Then they all bowed over their own thoughts again, listening to the shells bumping heavily outside, as Fritz began to send a lot of stuff over in retaliation for the raid. They sat there silently: each man keeping his own secret. [25]

Though Bourne was odd, Tozer has to acknowledge that all men are a 'mystery', and when he enters the dug-out, the men, apparently one unit, mysteriously share their suffering yet remain separate; they all look up with 'patient, almost animal eyes' yet they all have their 'own thought', their 'own secret'. This human knowledge, which all the men in some sense share, contrasts strongly with their leadership and social organisation which increasingly seems stupid and meaningless, devaluing their lives by constant repetition of deaths like Bourne's.

This was the problem; the new scientific knowledge, taken to extremes in its most inhuman form - 'scientific war' - had destroyed contexts of value for human life. The war seemed to further that destruction by showing that **social** organisation - and particularly nationalism and patriotism, had no human value. Men did not merely not trust the universe, they did not trust themselves. Thus human life was truly in fragments, and life <u>was</u> a wasteland. It is in this wide context that we must eventually place Doris Lessing's <u>Shikasta</u> and the rest of the <u>Canopus</u> series. For it is this problem which she takes on and revives, over half a century later; a problem we have learned to live with and even to forget.

Stapledon is thus of great importance to visionary realism, for he almost singlehandedly holds open, during the post 1919 years, an area of thought that many writers deemed closed, finished with, or impossible.

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25. <u>ibid.</u>, p.453.

This is the area of human purpose and of religion: the area of belief and faith. It was Stapledon's life work to tackle these problems in a way suited to modern life. Like others of his generation he recognised that Humanism as much as the old Christianity was finished: he believed that the post-War depression and cynicism had proved that the merely human had ceased to be a self-sustaining source of value. He felt there had to be something else, and his work was to discover what that something else was. In this, as we shall see, I do not claim for him outright success. But I do claim the greatness which Hardy recognized as implicit in a large attempt partially successful. Though he too was 'oppressed by unbelief', unlike his more successful counterparts, Stapledon did not reduce life to Art. His intention was always large, and in this sense we shall look at Stapledon as a failure who was greater than any of the small, artistic, successes of the Lily Briscoes of this world. In an unpublished essay,[26] Stapledon sets out his purpose.

> Today it is specially urgent to face the issue between Theism and Humanism, for we live in a period when pure scientific materialism is beginning to seem less plausible than it was, and there is an increasingly felt need for religion in some form. Humanism was an attempt at a scientific religion; and Humanism itself is beginning to seem inadequate . . . Over and over again we see not only simple minds but highly sophisticated minds, such as T. S. Eliot, abandon Humanism and fly headlong into the old Christian faith . . . I believe that today we are in a position to discover a more satisfactory position than either.[27]

Stapledon's commitment was to the forging of a new vision, 'a more satisfactory position' than either Theism or Humanism. In attempting to find this position, he constantly falls between the two camps. Indeed this is a constant state of being for him in almost every sphere: his work takes on both the cosmic and the individual scale, is both religious and rationalist,

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26. This, and any further references given for unpublished writings of Olaf Stapledon, is part of the Olaf Stapledon Special Collection housed in the Sydney Jones Library at the University of Liverpool. References refer to the original, temporary catalogue which is at present being revised and completed.

27. Stapledon Collection. D. Part One, unpublished prose writings

is philosophy (of a sort unlikely to satisfy any academic philosopher) and fiction (again unlikely to satisfy a conventional literary taste), is reporting a great and universal vision yet is the product of one mind. Falling between two camps and satisfying neither, Olaf Stapledon does, all the same, seem to have achieved a highly original and true enunciation of a modern problem of being. At the same time he imaginatively prepares the way for a great novel which he never could quite write himself. It is as if two lives were needed to complete the task: his was spent preparing the ground, Doris Lessing's completed the work.

2. Beyond Humanism

The briefest glance into Stapledon's first novel, Last and First Men, will more than likely bring protest to the lips of a reader used to reading realistic novels. The contents page reads as if it were a history; the pages are interspersed with diagrams of time scales, and a random glance at the page shows up sentences like these, which seem out of place in what we think of as realism, as the novel.

> We must now pass rapidly over the second Dark Age, observing merely those influences which were to affect the future of humanity . . . (p.129)
>
> But another hundred thousand years were to pass before the Second Men could reach their zenith . . . (p.145)
>
> Toward the close of this millenium of order a schism occurred among the devout. (p.199)
>
> In tracing man's final advance to full humanity we can observe only the broadest features of a whole astronomical era. (p.281)[28]

Yet, Stapledon's Preface begins with the words 'This is a work of fiction'.[29] What is happening here, as in Daniel Deronda, and Women in Love, is that the nature of the novel is being changed, its scope enlarged, in order to

(3) Humanism and Beyond.

28. Olaf Stapledon, Last and First Men (Harmondsworth, 1972), pp.129 145, 199, 281.

29. ibid., p.11.

make it more able to truly reflect real life. But though this might seem a believable argument in relation to Daniel Deronda and Women in Love, surely in this case, we would have to admit that the bounds of 'realism' had been stretched too far? Isn't Last and First Men, if it is a novel at all, a fantasy novel? Wouldn't it be better to leave it in the Science Fiction genre? I quite see that at this point the reader may well feel that my argument about Visionary Realism is leading me to the point of saying that anything with vision is also real. I do in fact believe that fantasy writing is often dangerous to real life, that escapist literature is often no more than that, and that we might as well watch television or plug into loud music on headphones, if what we want is to blank out reality. But I do not believe that fantasy writing or what is often called escapism in literature always is fantasy or escapism. In an essay entitled 'Escapism in Literature', Stapledon writes,

> [The] need to clarify and develop experience, then, seems to me the essential motive and the essential import of all that is genuine literature. By 'clarification' I mean the detailed clarification of familiar modes of experience. By 'development' I mean the development of new and more subtle modes . . . Out of this need for clarification and development of experience springs the need for accuracy or efficiency of expression [which], though at first instrumental, comes to be valued intrinsically and is, indeed, one of the main sources of literary delight. But to regard literature as solely concerned with efficiency of expression, no matter what experiences are expressed, is surely mistaken . . . There are then two criteria by which literature is to be judged . . . the primary criterion is the significance of the subject matter in relation to the demand for the intensifying, clarifying, broadening, deepening, and unifying of experience, and the development of new modes of expression. The other criterion is the efficiency of expression by which this end is pursued.[30]

Stapledon's belief here connects him both to Hardy and to Lawrence. His interest in the 'clarification of familiar modes of experience' and the 'development of new and more subtle modes' connects him to D. H. Lawrence and his statement 'My field is to know the feelings inside a man, and to

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30. Olaf Stapledon, 'Escapism in Literature' in Scrutiny 8 (1939-1940) pp.299-300.

make new feelings conscious'.[31] Both men view this development of human knowing as the primary function of literature. At the same time, Stapledon aligns himself with Thomas Hardy's view that 'the large intention of an unskilful artist' may be more valuable than the 'trivial intention of an accomplished one'.[32] This is clearly what Stapledon means when he says that 'to regard literature as solely concerned with efficiency of expression, no matter what experiences are expressed, is surely mistaken'.

Stapledon argues that 'to say that anyone is an "escapist" is to charge him with shunning unpleasant reality'.[33] It is not possible to align such a belief with the writing of escapist literature while also believing that the task of literature is to clarify and develop experience. We have to understand that what may <u>appear</u> to be escapism, or fantasy, may in its <u>effect</u> be highly involved with the clarification and development of our sense of reality. Stapledon sees neurosis as being behind the desire for escapism, but goes on to argue that 'trouble in the unconscious' may lead to two different reactions,

> One course is to acquiesce in the repression, to avoid recognizing that <u>something</u> or other is amiss, and to allow the hidden conflict to work upon consciousness without criticism, in fact to give rein to fantasy and spin sweet dreams of wish-fulfillment . . . The other course is to try, however vainly, to probe the self so as to lay bare and solve the hidden conflict, and to see this in its true relation to the rest of the universe.[34]

In these terms we might call the art-literature of modernism 'escapism', because though feeling '<u>something</u>' wrong, its reduction of life to art does allow the problem to remain 'hidden'. I can think of no better example of this than T. S. Eliot's <u>The Wasteland</u>, which though dealing with real problems of brokenness and fragmentation and loss of coherence turns them

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31. D. H. Lawrence, 'The State of Funk', in <u>Phoenix</u>, ii, p.567.

32. <u>Life of Thomas Hardy</u>, p.310.

33. 'Escapism in Literature', p.304.

34. <u>ibid.</u>, p.307.

into aesthetic problems of poetry, and thus refuses to address its own assumptions about life directly. On the other hand, a work which took on the task of trying 'to probe the self so as to lay bare and solve the hidden conflict, and to see this in its true relation to the rest of the universe' would, whatever the manner, or style, or form in which it did this, be a work of true realism, facing directly the 'unpleasant reality' shunned by the escapist.

This sense of moral duty to face reality is not only behind but actually prompts Stapledon's fiction. That this should seem so _unreal_ is a measure of the disparity Stapledon senses between reality as it generally is perceived (and thus presented in conventional or art-novels) and as he sees it himself. He is consciously trying to make the novel become something else, for the same reason that Lawrence created a new world in _Women in Love_; contemporary ideas of reality no longer matched what he distinctly felt to be real.

At the same time, Stapledon was undertaking another, though related, duty. In the Preface to _Possible Worlds_, J. B. S. Haldane writes,

> In scientific work the imagination must work in harness. But there is no reason why it should not play with the fruits of such work, and it is perhaps only by doing so that one can realize the possibilities which research is opening up. In the past these results have always taken the public and the politicians by surprise. The present disturbed condition of humanity is largely the result of this unpreparedness.[35]

Stapledon undertook to 'play with the fruits' of scientific work in his fiction as part of his concerted attempt to think realistically and truthfully about the world. In some notes entitled 'Science and Fiction' he jots beside a sub-heading 'Science Fiction',

> Haldane, _Possible Worlds_, Priestly, Berkeley Sq. Ouspenky. Orthodox novel standards not applicable - no people, no heroine, no love, no talk. Wells

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35. J. B. S. Haldane, _Possible Worlds_ (London, 1928), p.vi.

> early stories - mind stretching.[36] Give concrete life to abstract poss. "Myths for a scientific age".[37]

On the same page he lists as among his own aims 'to relate science to religion . . . potentialities of man as a vessel of spirit'.

In the Preface to Last and First Men, Stapledon both defends this apparent work of fantasy as a clarification and development of reality, and sets out an ideal of science fiction which combines playing with science for a social and moral purpose along with his own attempt to 'relate science to religion'. By writing a (fictional) universal history, Stapledon aligns himself with Winwood Reade's attempt to provide a cosmic setting for man, and by making religious belief part of modern life he also aligns himself with Mrs. Oliphant's attempt to bring religion back to life in A Beleaguered City. Yet though he is firmly rooted in tradition, Stapledon's first novel is most extraordinarily original and pertinent to problems of modern life.

> To romance of the future may seem to be indulgence in ungoverned speculation for the sake of the marvellous. Yet controlled imagination in this sphere can be a very valuable exercise to minds bewildered about the present and its potentialities. Today we should welcome, and even study, every serious attempt to envisage the future of our race; not merely in order to grasp the very diverse and often tragic possibilities that confront us, but also that we may familiarize ourselves with the certainty that many of our most cherished ideals would seem puerile to more developed minds. To romance of the far future, then, is to attempt to see the human race in its cosmic setting, and to mould our hearts to entertain new values.[38]

There are two main purposes for such apparently escapist science fiction: firstly it is an exercise intended to overcome bewilderment about the present

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36. Obviously among Wells' early stories The Time Machine would be 'mind stretching', but to Stapledon others playing with a wider scientific field would also go under this heading. The Island of Dr. Moreaux, is a 'mind stretching' biological science fiction of a type Stapledon himself wrote in Sirius (London, 1944), where he experiments fictionally with a real scientific interest, by creating a dog with a human-style consciousness.

37. Stapledon Collection, F.25.1 'Science and Fiction'.

38. Olaf Stapledon, Last and First Men, p.11.

(including present science); and secondly, it is to aid humility, to make us see 'the human race in its cosmic setting', which in turn will lead to new human 'values'. Thus the new fiction, this absolutely novel novel, is both practically helpful and moral. It is a response to the loss of old values, a response which takes the form of fantastic attempts to picture futures which in their turn create new values for the present: 'to romance of the far future, then, is to attempt . . . to mould our hearts to entertain new values'.

Stapledon wasn't alone in writing Science Fiction, of course, but the grandeur of his vision is I think unique. For example H. G. Wells's novel Star Begotten tries to reinvent a religious metaphor, as does Stapledon's First and Last Men. Both are novels of 'ideas', and very similar ideas at that. Yet Stapledon's huge conception, which is only partially a success, is a much greater effort than Wells's, which despite its idea remains a remarkably traditional and finally uninspired novel. The difference lies in the fact that Stapledon does get beyond humanism, though his efforts force some odd contortions upon the novel, while Wells's remains encapsulated within the old humanist view even as he tries to escape it, because the rigid novelistic form forces a rationalist unbelief or objectivity on him and on his reader.

Wells's novel is essentially finite in that it is human centred. It operates entirely within the bounds that Stapledon decided had to be done away with ('Orthodox standards not applicable - no people, no heroine, no love, no talk'), and because it does operate within 'orthodox standards' the extra-human belief it has is carefully obscured to make it look as if it might be merely human in origin. That is to say, belief in the novel suffers the same fate it had suffered outside it: human beings cannot tell whether their belief is real or imaginary. Stapledon's novel, on the other hand, compels belief in the extra-human, because it operates entirely

beyond the human. Let me give an example: both novels use the idea of 'Martians' affecting human consciousness, yet in Wells's novel we are never sure whether this is just an idea, while in Stapledon's, we absolutely believe it.

The 'last Men' who write the history of Man which is Stapledon's novel, give an account of Martian invasions of Earth. The authority given to the Last Men by the structure of the novel (of which I shall speak shortly) makes their account of the Martians and their effect on the planet indisputable and objective. We learn as if it were a fact of history (as indeed it is for the Last Men) that the Martian invasion eventually produces an improvement in Man. Though the Martian invaders are eventually destroyed, they leave behind a virus which retains and passes on to humanity some Martian properties, notably telepathy. The Great Brains built by the Third Men improve themselves by

> incorporating in each brain-tissue a specially bred strain of Martian parasites. These henceforth were to live in the great brain as integral members of each one of its cells. Each brain was also equipped with a powerful wireless transmitting apparatus. Thus should the widely scattered sessile population maintain direct 'telepathic' contact with one onother.
>
> LAFM, p.214.

The Fourth Men in turn pass this ability on to their successors, the Fifth Men, where

> 'Telepathy' combined with longevity and the extremely subtle brain-structure of the species to afford each individual an immense number of intimate friendships, and some slight acquaintance actually with the whole race . . . With the Martians 'telepathic' union took place chiefly by elimination of the differences between individuals; with the Fifth Men 'telepathic' communication was, as it were, a kind of spiritual multiplication of mental diversity, by which each mind was enriched with the wealth of ten thousand million. Consequently each individual was, in a very real sense, the cultured mind of the species; but there were as many such minds as there were individuals.
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> LAFM, pp.299-230.

The form of the novel, the very manner in which we are told the story, presses upon us the belief that adversity can be more than adversity, that in time's unfolding there are movements of fact which are beyond our ability to comprehend. The account of the Martian invasion is an illustration of an aspect of evolution, which gains meaning from the immense time-scale, even while the force of evolution is shown to create fear, or lack of meaning in the human short term. The point here, however, is not what we learn from the Martian invasion, but rather the way in which we believe in it and therefore in the conclusions we later draw from it. Stapledon's novel allows no room for doubt that there was an invasion within the novel. It is presented as a matter of _fact_, from which much action in the novel stems.

H. G. Wells's _Star Begotten_ centres around a human character, Joseph Davis, despite the fact that its opening words tell us something different.

> This is the story of an idea and how it played about in the minds of a number of intelligent people.[39]

Though it is true that there is a central idea, all the same, the novel is actually the story of people. The idea is related through people who are just as limited and doubting as any of the novel's readership, and because of this, we are always in doubt as to the reality of this idea. Olaf Stapledon, who reviewed the novel, correctly understood that despite its modern guise, this was an old, old subject.

> The intriguing and plausible idea that the Martians may be doctoring human germ cells with cosmic rays so as to produce a superior, Martianised kind of man, is of course, the spice, not the nutritive matter of the dish. The main theme is the improvement of human nature itself which this or some other influence might conceivably produce . . . An earlier writer might have secured much the same effect on us with guardian angels, divine grace, and the souls faculties. We of today are more easily impressed by the physical, of which we think we know something, than by the spiritual, of which we think there is nothing to be known.[40]

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39. H. G. Wells, _Star Begotten_ (London, 1937), p.1.

40. Olaf Stapledon, review of Star Begotten in _The London Mercury_, July, 1937,

Stapledon is right to see that it is a matter of contemporary fashion which demands the 'spiritual' be disguised as 'physical'. But this goes much deeper than simply changing the word 'God' to the word 'Martians'. For although the opening sentence of the novel implies that the 'idea' has a life of its own (after all 'it played about'), yet Wells's always allows a doubt to creep in; the fact that 'it played about' in people's minds makes us wonder whether or not this idea was simply a human invention. The verb is active, but we generally understand it as passive, we think it is we who control ideas, not them us.

This dilemma forms the major interest of the novel, which is the story of how Joseph Davis came to believe in this idea, 'without a shadow of a doubt' (SB, p.1) but it is not the novel's task, as Wells sees it, to make the reader believe in it.

> Whether there was any reality behind this idea it is not the business of the storyteller to say. The reader must judge for himself.
>
> SB, p.1.

Wells's story is simply this; what if those intuitional feelings that everyone has from time to time, which suggest vague ideas to us, and which can go against the whole of our 'real' selves' wishes and inclinations and plans, were in fact hints from higher beings (in this case, Martians) who for reasons of their own, and at which we can only guess, are trying to change our human nature into something else, something it might become. What would this be like as a real experience, what would it be to experience this idea as a belief? It is the story of what twentieth century 'belief' might look like. It is an attempt at a religious attitude without dogma.

Yet for all it is the story of an idea, this is still recognisably a novel, with a plot of sorts, and characters, and things happening. It is entirely grounded in Wells's apprehension of human life. In fact, it is not so much the idea that organizes and dominates the novel as the way

'it played about in minds of a number of intelligent people'. In a profoundly traditional religious manner, Wells tells the story of a conversion, and tells it in doubting and human terms. The novel ends with its hero, Davis, returning home, trying to bring the 'idea' with him. He speaks as a man who has suffered a religious conversion:

> You do not realize how close it comes to us, how nearly it touches us. It means something new in the world, a dreadful and terrifying newness. The world is being born again . . . The world has swung round with a sort of smooth swiftness into a new course. How can I tell you? I was deaf and blind . . . Now I see . . .
>
> SB, pp.192-193

Davis does not understand that this very consciousness, coming from doubt and unbelief, is a sign that he, too, is star-begotten. Davis's wife suggests this to him, and he finds it like 'a miracle' (SB, p.197). The world is new again, born again, because Davis is himself reborn, into a different kind of life.

> A great light seemed to irradiate and in a moment to tranquillize the troubled ocean of his disordered mind. The final phase of his pacification was very swift indeed. At a stroke everything became coherent and plain to him. Everything fell into place . . . His mind had gone all round the world indeed, but only to discover himself and his home in a new orientation.
>
> SB, p.198

This ending leaves us only with Davis's belief - Wells himself offers no conclusion, either directly or through the form of the novel, as to whether this is real faith or mere delusion. It is as if there is no way of telling. The question that arises is whether belief is an internal creation or whether it is a response to an external demand or cause. True, Davis seems to see 'a great light' but we have no evidence within the novel that this is anything more than the product of an individual mind; we can always finally say, 'I don't believe it'. There is nothing in the experience of reading the novel which might convince us. And the acts which rest upon

the belief in the novel are individual acts, not the acts of the novel's own order.

What is happening in this novel is similar to what we saw in A Beleaguered City; the old experience of religious experience is related with a slight gloss, but nothing really new happens. The novel has no strongly felt vision of its own, but simply expresses a strongly felt need for vision, a vision great enough to change those who see it. When Winwood Reade wrote that we need to be able to step off the earth to see ourselves in a new perspective, to see the One Man men really were, he enunciated a truth that was to become an integral part of visionary realism. We have to get beyond humanism, beyond the merely human perspective, to change the way in which we see ourselves. And this has to be achieved as vision, rather than as idea.

On the face of it, Stapledon's Last and First Men seems a series of ideas strung together in a historical story, while Wells's Star Begotten seems a genuine novel. Yet it is Stapledon's novel which rises to the point of vision and creates of itself belief, while Wells's remains merely unconvinced speculation. Interestingly, Wells's hero, Joseph Davis, is a writer who gives up on the idea of universal history because he is plagued by doubts as to human purpose. During the writing of the Grand Parade of Humanity, a problem concerning the Black Death begins to keep him awake at night: he then thinks of 'the horror pictures of Goya', and Wiertz Museum, and then of 'the underside of Napoleon's career' (SB, p.17), and suddenly his confident account of mankind seems foolish, even deceitful.

> Why write a Grand Parade of Humanity, asked doubt, when Winwood Reade has already written The Martyrdom of Man?
>
> SB, p.17

In a sense Stapledon's Last and First Men is a Grand Parade of Humanity, but it takes in, as a matter of course, calamity and destruction as part of the grandeur. Indeed part of the purpose of the cosmic scale upon which Stapledon operates is to find a way of accommodating the black side of existence with a religious nature to life, to show human purpose even alongside cosmic senselessness. This, as well as other things the novel succeeds in, is achieved by the imaginative form Stapledon gives his story. We saw earlier that he opens his Preface with the statement 'This is a work of fiction', but the Introduction tells us something different.

> This book has two authors, one contemporary with its readers, the other an inhabitant of an age they would call the distant future . . . The actual writer thinks he is merely contriving a work of fiction. Though he seeks to tell a plausible story, he neither believes it himself, nor expects others to believe it. Yet the story is true. A being whom you would call a future man has seized the docile but scarcely adequate brain of your contemporary, and is trying to direct its familiar processes for an alien purpose. . . Do not perplex yourselves about this truth, so difficult to you, so familiar to us of a later aeon. Do but entertain, merely as a fiction, the idea that the thought and will of individuals future to you may intrude, rarely and with difficulty, into the mental processes of some of your contemporaries. Pretend that you believe this, and that the following chronicle is an authentic message from the Last Men. Imagine the consequences of such a belief. Otherwise I cannot give life to the great history which it is my task to tell.
>
> LAFM, p.15

The central fiction of Stapledon's novel is this; that it is really the product of the Last Men, that the supposed author, Olaf Stapledon, is no more than a vehicle for something he cannot understand. Stapledon recognises that this device of a future author may be objectionable to readers used to realism. But this apparent extravagance, he tells us, was a necessity of sorts.

> I might, of course, easily have omitted it without more than a superficial alteration of the theme. But its introduction was more than a convenience. Only by some such radical and bewildering device could I embody the possibility that there may be more in time's nature

> than is revealed to us. Indeed, only by some such trick could I do justice to the conviction that our whole mentality is but a confused and halting first experiment.
>
> LAFM, p.12

As well as telling us how the novel works, this explanation is also a hint as to the nature of its subject. This 'character', the Neptunian Last Man, represents Stapledon's attempt to make incarnate the scientific issues of time and relativity, and the religious issues of God, intuition and consciousness; 'only by some such radical and bewildering device could I embody the possibility . . .'. Through the Neptunian man, Stapledon found a voice for all those sensibilities of his which were uncomfortably unheeded in contemporary life. By inventing someone to speak through us, in our own crude language, of matters we can hardly understand, Stapledon manages to show his readers how it is that we may reflect or intuit things beyond our selves and our present capacities. Our doubt is directly opposed by the form of the novel: the Neptunian states bluntly 'the story is true'. And it is thus made part of the novel's structure that being doubting humans we can't believe it, and that we must take it, if we take it at all, as a 'fiction'.

But as we read on in this history of the future, we are oppressively aware that it is a history, as the Neptunian man says of 'change, grief, hope, and unforeseen catastrophe' (LAFM, p.16), which rather than strengthening our belief in futurity often tends to horrify and depress us. Through this horror, Stapledon takes on and expands some of the thoughts which had troubled Thomas Hardy, and in particular the relation of the mind which can conceive of the vastness and yet, conceiving, feel belittled. During the Patagonian Civilisation, the Divine Boy thus has a vision of life from both the individual and the cosmic points of view.

> It was as though a play-actor were to see the whole play, with his own part in it, through the author's eyes, from the auditorium. Here was I, acting the part of a rather

> fine man who had come to grief through his own carelessness before his work was done. For me, a character in the play, the situation was hideous; yet for me, the spectator, it had become excellent within a wider excellence. I saw that it was equally so with all of us, and with all worlds. For I seemed to see a thousand worlds taking part with us in the great show. And I saw everything through the calm eyes, the exultant, almost derisive, yet not unkindly eyes of the playwright.
>
> LAFM, p.110

The very same reality is different from different views, and to different viewers: to the 'character' the suffering is appalling, the situation 'hideous'; yet to the author the 'play' might be a delight. This is the central issue and thought in Stapledon's work, and his novels attempt to hold together these opposing and mutually destructive views. It is in a sense a legacy from Hardy's tragic vision, as Stapledon himself recognised. In Last Men in London, he writes that the early days of the twentieth century saw

> the writings of Thomas Hardy, formerly neglected, gradually compel men's attention more by their gloomy verisimilitude, than by their obscure conviction of cosmical beauty. [41]

It is important to note that Stapledon saw both the gloom and the conviction in Hardy's work.[42] But that which Stapledon calls 'the obscure conviction of cosmical beauty' is always overcome, in Hardy's novels in general, and in Jude the Obscure in particular, by a harsher human centred reality. Stapledon wanted some way of moving forward from Hardy's position. He sought a way of seeing that would be at once both cosmic and personal: thus it is that his universal history is told, as it were, by the mind of one

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41. Olaf Stapledon, Last Men in London (Harmondsworth, 1972), p.478.

42. In Stapledon's copy of Jude the Obscure the following passages are among those marked with pencil lines in the margin: (London, 1917 edition). (Stapledon Collection).

> And then he again saw, as he had latterly seen with more and more frequency, the scorn of Nature for man's finer emotions, and her lack of interest in his aspirations. (pp.220-221)
>
> 'There's more for us to think about in that one little hungry

man, and yet told in such a way as to leave no doubt but that this is absolutely believed by that one mind. In Last and First Men, as I have said the tale derives authority from the fictional character of the Last Man. In Star Maker, Stapledon tries to come even closer to the bare facts of reality by removing this device, and presenting us simply with the 'infinitely great, the stellar universe' and the 'infinitely little, the mind of the beholder'.[43]

3. 'A Formula for the Whole'

Star Maker was published in 1937, the same year as Wells's Star Begotten. In a letter to Stapledon, Wells briefly compares the vision of the two novels, and says of Stapledon's work, 'You are still trying to get a formula for the whole universe'.[44] This is indeed the impression we have of Stapledon's intent in writing this novel, which takes the time scales of Last and First Men and dwarfs them, making that first novel seem but a brief glance at Time. Star Maker attempts to fit 'the whole' into a novel in a further attempt to envisage a truth usually seen as religious, and so barely seen at all in an unreligious time. This novel shows more clearly than the earlier works Stapledon's attitude to the universe, and in his own terms, this very attitude shows that this is a religious work.

> heart than in all the stars of the sky . . . (pp.350-351)
> 'Nothing can be done . . . Things are as they are, and will be brought to their destined issue.' (p.428).

43. Thomas Hardy, Two on a Tower, p.83.

44. H. G. Wells letter to Olaf Stapledon, Stapledon Collection H II A, 31 (3). A facsimile of this letter is reproduced in Appendix I.

> What is fundamental to religion is not a theory about the origin and nature of the universe but an attitude of the individual mind _to_ the universe.[45]

This distinction between 'about' and 'to' the universe is an important one, for in a sense it abandons scientific explanation; 'the origin and nature of the universe' and humanly made explanations thereof are not fundamental to religion. Yet, as we have seen earlier, the kind of stories and explanations humanity has of the origin and nature of things does indicate something about their religion. We saw, however, in Huxley's account of the piece of chalk, that the explanation did not necessarily do away with an attitude of wonder and awe. Where Hardy would always be minimising scientific explanation by overcoming it with dread of the universe, Stapledon here seems to want to allow _any_ explanation, so long as there remains a particular state of being in relation to the thing explained. In his stress on 'to' the universe he attempts to defuse the potential danger of speculation or theorising which had always troubled Hardy. The possibility of thought, speculation, wonder, is vital to Stapledon for it leads, or can lead, to the imaginative vision which he sees as the essence of religious experience. It is because of this that he had to press on from the point at which Hardy gave up. The 'human insignificance'[46] which Hardy felt in relation to any vision of the cosmos had to be lived through and understood, for this was, at bottom, the root and cause of the modern problem of unbelief and despair. The vision, however terrible, had to be seen as clearly as possible.

> What is it, then, that seizes, possessed, kills and remakes the mundane self? The Christian says it is the presence of God . . . But what actually happens in the

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45. Olaf Stapledon, 'Humanism and Beyond', _Stapledon Collection_ D Part One, (3).

46. Thomas Hardy, _Two on a Tower_, p.35. Lady Constantine says to Swithin, 'I think astronomy is a bad study for you. It makes you feel human insignificance too plainly'.

> actual experience is simply that the mundane self is seized and possessed by a vision. It is a vision, not of God, the omnipotent and benevolent person, but of the spirit, of an ideal form of behaviour implicit in the actual behaviour of persons, an ideal attitude of temper, which is revealed to the possessed, the bewildered, the tormented mundane self as utterly alien from all its own self-centred or society-centred values, and yet as overwhelmingly right, intrinsically good, and _what personal beings are for_, what, indeed, the human race itself is for.[47]

To refuse vision, in Stapledon's eyes was to refuse the purpose of being human, to refuse the value of personal being in the cosmos. What is startling here is not so much Stapledon's thought as the confidence with which he answers his own questions. 'What is it that . . . remakes the mundane self?' he asks, and the response comes without hesitation, 'It is a vision . . . of an ideal'. And from this confidence comes another, shown in his sense of design or purpose, when he writes of 'what personal beings are for'. The loss of confidence which in part _is_ modernism may well have been caused by this loss of a sense of purposive individual being. Stapledon's view seems to cut directly across the path of his contemporaries, who were so often caught in the downward spiral of lack of vision.[48]

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47. Olaf Stapledon, 'Humanism and Beyond', _Stapledon Collection_, D.I.

48. Much of Stapledon's thought in this area may well have stemmed from his reading of William James. In Stapledon's copy of William James's _Varieties of Religious Experience_ (London, 1912 edition), James's definition of religion, for example, is marked out by Stapledon.

> Religion, therefore, as I now ask you arbitrarily to take it, shall mean for us the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider divine (p.30).

This is of course similar to Stapledon's definition: it is the standing in relation 'to' that is important, not the nature of the thing considered divine. Stress is on the attitude and not the object of worship.

Again, Stapledon marks this passage.

> Were one asked to characterize the life of religion in the broadest and most general terms possible, one might say that it consists of the belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto. (p.53)

Here, James's 'unseen order' corresponds to Stapledon's 'ideal form' or 'spirit'. Similarly, 'our supreme good' corresponds with Stapledon's 'what personal beings are for'

In Star Maker, as in Last and First Men, Stapledon's vision of the huge centres on one character, one man. In Star Maker this is not an 'alien' creature, but an ordinary contemporary mortal. The religious experience was not to be seen as a separate thing from ordinary life as Stapledon's Preface, trying hard to reclaim the right to use a religious language, indicates.

> Perhaps the attempt to see our turbulent world against a background of stars may, after all, increase, not lessen, the significance of the present human crisis. It may also strengthen our charity towards one another. In this belief I have tried to construct an imaginative sketch of the dread but vital whole of things . . . I have occasionally used certain ideas and words derived from religion, and I have tried to interpret them in relation to modern needs. The valuable, though much damaged words 'spiritual' and 'worship' which have become almost as obscene to the Left as the good old sexual words are to the Right, are here intended to suggest an experience which the Right is apt to pervert and the Left to misconceive . . . The 'spiritual life' seems to be in essence the attempt to discover and adopt the attitude which is in fact appropriate to our experience as a whole . . . if this supremely humanizing experience does not produce, along with a kind of piety towards fate, the resolute will to serve our waking humanity, it is a mere sham and a snare.[49]

As in Wells's Star Begotten, we see a recognition of a general bias against religious language in modern life. Stapledon recognises that 'belief' in his time is much more likely to be a political belief than anything else, and yet he sees that such belief is limited and partial; thus religious words are as 'obscene to the Left as the good old sexual words are to the Right'. And being limited and partial neither Left nor Right can experience the whole without distortion, thus, the 'Right is apt to pervert and the Left misconceive' the religious experience. Stapledon realises that religion can do what politics cannot, which is 'to discover and adopt the attitude which is in fact appropriate to our experience as a whole' but he sees this as also a practical matter, that religion may be successful where

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49. Olaf Stapledon, Star Maker (Harmondsworth, 1972), pp.8-9.

politics is not; such experience can change human beings (in exactly the way that we saw Lawrence believing that the Great War had not changed anyone) and produce a new 'will to serve' in humanity. Stapledon's Preface is here as in Last and First Men a defence of extravagant seeming fiction as a necessary extension of reality.

Stapledon's vision of the 'dread but vital whole' rests, as Winwood Reade's did, on a matter of perspective. The novel puts eternity between two human moments; the universe between two pictures of domestic life. Stapledon tries to hold the two extremes together, preventing them remaining the uncomfortable alternatives Hardy saw. The narrator of Star Maker experiences both the limitations of the human life and the unlimited space of the universe as he travels in his mind's eye through the cosmos. He visits many different worlds and meets and joins with other intelligences in a search for what comes to be referred to as the Star Maker, the cause behind all things.

The novel opens with the narrator leaving his house, walking up a hill to look down upon it in a different perspective. He is driven by 'horror at our futility, at our own unreality, and not only at the world's delirium' (SM, p.11). The whole fabric of quiet, ordinary life seems to have broken apart for him.

> We were always hurrying from one little urgent task to another, but the upshot was insubstantial. Had we, perhaps, misconceived our whole existence? Were we, as it were, living from false premises? . . . Had we perhaps after all deceived ourselves? Behind those rapt windows did we, like so many others, indeed live only a dream? In a sick world even the hale are sick. And we two, spinning our little life mostly by rote, seldom with clear cognizance, seldom with firm intent, were products of a sick world.
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> SM, p.12

The doubt the narrator suffers seems to be rising in connection with the relation of his married life to the wider world, and the fact that the business of day to day living is always more important and real than its insubstantial end, which is, after all, that things simply continue as

they are. Thus, 'we were always hurrying from one little urgent task to another'. The conjunction of 'little' and 'urgent' here, side by side undermines the details of such a life. We might treat it as 'urgent', and indeed on our scale it may well be, but in fact, all these matters are 'little' and 'the upshot was insubstantial'. It is as if nothing comes of these hurried ant-like movements. Yet, such a life, lived day by day, can during its course seem alright. The narrator is clearly pushed into doubting that seeming, for if the world is sick, how can these tiny units of being remain healthy? 'In a sick world, even the hale are sick.'

On the other hand, there is another way of seeing and the narrator presents this to us immediately as if following his own train of thought, arguing it out to himself. Though he can feel this sickness, though he can feel doubt, all the same, he is not convinced.

> Yet this life of ours was not all sheer and barren fantasy. Was it not spun from the actual fibres of reality, which we gathered in with all the comings and goings through our door, all our traffic with the suburb and the city and with remoter cities, and with the ends of the earth? And were we not spinning together an authentic expression of our own nature? Did not our life issue daily as more or less firm threads of active living, and mesh itself into the growing web, the intricate, ever-proliferating pattern of mankind?
>
> I considered 'us' with quiet interest and a kind of amused awe. . . For this our delicate balance of dependence and independence, this coolly critical, shrewdly ridiculing, but loving mutual contact, was surely a microcosm of true community, was after all in its simple style an actual and living example of that high goal which the world seeks.
>
> SM, p.12

At first it seems as if the narrator is consoling himself with thoughts of social life, as if that proved the reality of his own small life, for the 'fibres of reality' of which he speaks are to do with people coming and going 'through our door' and with relation to 'the suburb and the city and with remoter cities'. But this apparent social life is challenged when he adds 'and with the ends of the earth'. We do suddenly see that

this web of relation is much greater than a human social life, though it might begin there. The 'fibres of reality' seem much more to do with the entire life of the planet, the whole life of mankind which Winwood Reade saw when he imaginatively stepped back from human life. And the narrator understands that there is a relation between the small lives and the greater life of the planet, for he and his wife make a model, a pattern, which the world can copy; they are 'a microcosm of true community', 'a living example of that high goal which the world seeks'. In the vision of the marriage, lie seeds of a vision of universal community such as George Eliot sought. From such an opening we might expect a novel of married life, a sequel to Women in Love perhaps, which certainly believes in marriage as model in exactly this way. But a glance at the sky takes away such certainty, for the stars seem to indicate that men and women live in a universe which denies them sense and makes a mockery of such cosy notions as that of 'community'.

> Overhead, obscurity unveiled a star. One tremulous arrow of light, projected how many thousands of years ago, now stung my nerves with vision, and my heart with fear. For in such a universe as this what significance could there be in our fortuitous, our frail, our evanescent community?
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> SM, p.12

It is interesting that it is the 'nerves' here which suffer the 'vision': those organs which Hardy felt over-developed for our life on earth, and which according to Dowse caused particular anxiety about the future. The nerves are our finest source of sensory perception, our means of knowing contact with the world external to us, and here the narrator sees with his nerves, as if he had unwittingly recognized a physical relation to the universe. Yet his vision of the star, and his relation to it, can only frighten him, the physical sensation setting off an emotional reaction, 'my heart [stung] with fear'. Though some connection is clearly indicated this bears much more relation to a scene from Hardy than one from, for example, The Rainbow, where the appearance of the stars signals a

universe accompanying human life. Here, 'it makes you feel human insignificance too plainly':[50] 'what significance could there be in our fortuitous, our frail, our evanescent community?'. Compared to the light emitted by the star, the human lives seem already almost finished: 'how many thousands of years' wipes out 'evanescent'.

But the narrator is not content to be overcome by this insignificance. Beginning from a Hardyesque premise,

> I determined to examine more coldly this remarkable 'us', this surprisingly impressive datum, which to ourselves remained basic to the universe, though in relation to the stars it appeared so slight a thing.
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> SM, p.13

Stapledon changes course radically, saying, as it were, his 'tiny human frame',[51] 'I will not return to my "human frame", but I will let my consciousness of this "majestic speeding" take over. I will see where it leads me'. Instead of looking for significance in human life on earth, Stapledon discovers a new perspective on the universe. No longer the heaven of our fathers, of the Old Testament, of the classical world, nor even of the more modern astronomers, the universe he envisages is a three dimensional place, in which it is possible to move about. And yet even as he moves into it, this three dimensional picture suddenly appears to be even more than three dimensional.

> Gazing at the faintest and remotest of all the swarm of universes, I seemed by hypertelescopic imagination, to see it as a population of suns; and near one of those suns was a planet, and on that planet's dark side a hill, and on that hill myself. For our astronomers assure us that in this boundless finitude which we call the cosmos the straight lines of light lead not to infinity but to their source. Then I remembered that, had my vision depended on physical light, and not on the light of imagination, the rays coming thus to me 'round' the cosmos would have revealed not myself, but events that had ceased long before the Earth, or perhaps even the Sun, was formed.
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> SM, p.16

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50. Thomas Hardy, Two on a Tower, p.55.

51. This and the following small quotation are from Thomas Hardy's Far from the Madding Crowd, p.17.

The laws of Einstein's physics which Stapledon here acts out in imagination, as it were, add a more than human perspective to his imaginative vision, so it becomes like a scientific instrument 'hypertelescopic'. He sees himself, at the 'end' of the universe, and also sees that time is dependent on matter and space. Scientific knowledge allows Stapledon to escape the human limitations which had trapped Hardy, for the non-human vantage point it provides allows the narrator to see the world afresh, untrammelled by its own limitations and his own smallness: it is Winwood Reade's vision of the whole:

> The spectacle before me was strangely moving. Personal anxiety was blotted out by wonder and admiration; for the sheer beauty of our planet surprised me. It was a huge pearl, set in spangled ebony. It was nacrous, it was an opal. No, it was far more lovely than any jewel. Its patterned colouring was more subtle, more ethereal. It displayed the delicacy and brilliance, the intricacy and harmony of a live thing. Strange that in my remoteness I seemed to feel, as never before, the vital presence of Earth as of a creature alive but tranced and obscurely yearning to wake.
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> SM, p.18

It is a non-human vision[52] which sees the planet as a living whole, as the narrator indicates when he puts together two 'forms' from different times, the 'angel' and the 'explorer from another planet' (SM, p.19), as examples of possible observers. Yet he also refers to man as 'incipiently angelic' beasts' (SM, p.19) as if we ourselves might be or become either those

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52. At least, this was a non-human vision until the N.A.S.A. astronauts began to experience it as reality. Michael Collins in Carrying The Fire: An Astronaut's Autobiography (London, 1975) writes,

> Anyone who has viewed our planet from afar can only cry out in pain at the knowledge that the pristine blue and whiteness he can still close his eyes and see is an illusion masking an ever more senseless ugliness below. The beauty of the planet from 100,000 miles should be a goal for all of us, to help in our struggle to make it as it appears to be.
>
> (p.472)

It is odd that the vision seen as reality, 'the pristine blue and whiteness', should, after all turn out to be 'an illusion masking ever more senseless ugliness below'. Collins' real belief is in

explorers or those angels. Perhaps the 'yearning to wake' he detects in the planet is connected to the yearning to wake he himself feels humanity suffers, the 'waking humanity' referred to in the Preface? As the narrator begins to move through the cosmos these and other related questions begin to occur to him, disquieting the reader.

> Was man indeed as he sometimes desired to be, the growing point of the cosmical spirit, in its temporal aspect at least? Or was he one of many million growing points? Or was mankind of no more importance in the universal view than rats in a cathedral? And again, was man's true function power, or wisdom, or love, or worship, or all of these? Or was the idea of function, of purpose, meaningless in relation to the cosmos? These grave questions I would answer.
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> SM, p.24

In allowing questions like these into his novel, Stapledon is giving voice to problems of human meaning which had been implicit in Hardy's vision of the universe. But Stapledon goes far beyond Hardy here, because he allows the questions to surface as a problem in the mind of his protagonist, which is in itself a result of his radical reordering of the form we call 'the novel'. Rather than appearing and putting a stop to speculation as they do in Hardy, here Stapledon, through his narrator, is willing to take them on: 'these grave questions I would answer'. And although these questions are, in life as much as in this novel, provoked by consciousness of the wider cosmos, they are answered by a quite different means. For, as the explorer travels from world to world, he realises - as he had realised the planet as whole when distanced from it - that the microcosm of community, his marriage, is of vital importance to him. 'It was not until I found myself thus exiled that I came to realize fully the little jewel of personal union that I had left behind' (SM, p.73). It is not merely nostalgia that makes him appreciate his marriage. In a universe where everything appears to be relative, it is the one absolute reality:

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the ugliness human life makes on earth, but he echoes both Reade and Stapledon in believing that this vision 'from afar' should change the reality of 'ugliness below'.

> I had to comprehend each world as best I could by reference to the remote world where my own life had happened, and above all by the touchstone of that common life that she and I had made together.
>
> SM, p.73

All experience must be made sense of in relation to whatever knowledge one already has; the explorer makes sense of the remotest of worlds by reference to 'his' world in the sense of the planet, and his world in the sense of his family life the 'touchstone of that common life', this is what is most real to him. Yet, alongside this, he has to make huge jumps of imagination, in order to comprehend what he is seeing and experiencing. Yet Stapledon is careful to ensure that all differences are finally resolved, for he wants to ensure the presentation of an 'ideal' at the back of all reality, of all form.

This is partly achieved simply by the travelogue form of the novel, which by forcing a succession of comparisons of form upon both the narrator and the reader also hints at the forces behind form, the needs of various worlds which pull matter into its multitudinous shapes. Stapledon shows that material or formal difference may not be real difference at all, and to this end he introduces the human Echinoderms, a man developed 'from a sort of five-pronged marine animal, rather like a starfish' (SM, pp.81-82).

> The appearance of these 'human Echinoderms' belied their nature, for though their faces were inhuman, the basic pattern of their minds was not unlike our own.
>
> SM, p.82

The religions of Homo Sapiens and the Echinoderms are also compared, and seem at first to be almost exactly opposites, but as in physics where the principle of complementary unites opposites, this very opposition is taken by Stapledon as a clue to an ideal similarity.

> In its purest and most developed form, of course, the religion of self is almost identical with the religion of love at its best. To love is to will the self-fulfilment of the beloved, and to find, in the very activity of loving, an incidental but vitalizing increase of oneself. On the other hand, to be true to oneself, to

> the full potentiality of the self, involves the activity of love. It demands the discipline of the private self in service of a greater self which embraces the community and the fulfillment of the spirit of the race.
>
> SM, p.85

Various forms are but expressions of the ideal, which Stapledon believes it is the task of personal beings to envisage. But the fact of discovery of this wholeness behind the forms, the implicit ideal world, does not solve the problems of horror and fear, for example, which Hardy had been aware of. In Two on a Tower, Hardy has Swithin St. Cleeve speak of the universe as a place of horror, in terms which echo throughout Stapledon's Star Maker

> There is a size at which dignity begins . . . further on there is a size at which grandeur begins; further on there is a size at which solemnity begins; further on, a size at which awfulness begins; further on, a size at which ghastliness begins. That size faintly approaches the stellar universe. So am I not right in saying that those minds who exert their imaginative powers to bury themselves in the depths of that universe merely strain their faculties to gain a new horror? . . . And to add a new weirdness to what the sky possesses in its size and formlessness, there is involved the quality of decay. For all the wonder of these everlasting stars, eternal spheres, and what not, they are not everlasting, they are not eternal; they burn out like candles . . . The senses may become terrified by plunging among them as they are, but there is a pitifulness even in their glory. Imagine them all extinguished, and your mind feeling its way through a heaven of total darkness, occasionally striking against the black, invisible cinders of those stars . . . If you are cheerful, and wish to remain so, leave the study of astronomy alone. Of all the sciences, it alone deserves the character of the terrible.[53]

The fear Hardy expresses here through Swithin St. Cleeve, that some knowledge may be of no value to us, that the essence of the cosmos is meaningless and terrible,[54] is fully taken aboard by Olaf Stapledon. The same universe Swithin describes is experienced by Stapledon's hero, and in the manner Hardy predicted, exploration by mind.

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53. Thomas Hardy, Two on a Tower, pp.56-57.

54. This is very similar, of course, to the point made in Chapter VI where I quote Fowler saying that Milton believed 'some knowledge is of "no avail" for man'. (p.196 of this thesis)

> The sustaining motive of our pilgrimage had been the hunger which formerly drove men on Earth in search of God. Yes, we had one and all left our native planets in order to discover whether, regarding the cosmos as a whole, the spirit which we all in our hearts obscurely and haltingly prized, the spirit which on Earth we sometimes call humane, was Lord of the Universe, or outlaw; almighty, or crucified. And now it was becoming clear to us that if the cosmos had any lord at all, he was not that spirit but some other, whose purpose in creating the endless fountain of worlds was not fatherly towards the being that he had made, but alien, inhuman, dark.
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> SM, p.99

All the greater perspective has done is to increase the scope of the vision of suffering and chaos in the universe. This is the observation of real fact in the true Hardy tradition. There is the peculiar sense of something greater and magnificent, and there is the terrible realisation that this has nothing to do with human life or even human comprehension. 'Again and again we were torn between horror and fascination, between moral rage against the universe (or the Star Maker) and unreasonable worship.' (SM, p.99) 'Worship', one of the words that Stapledon introduced in the Preface, is seen by the 'humane' explorer as 'unreasonable'. But as their journeys continue, the exploring mind seems to doubt that his sense of the 'unreasonable' is right; the impulse towards worship does not after all diminish, and the desires of the explorer change with his increasingly large experience; 'we desired merely to pass on, opening our hearts to accept fearlessly whatever of the truth might fall within our comprehension' (SM, p.102). The gradual realisation of the cosmos is both the dawning of greater consciousness in the narrator, and the realisation of consciousness by the cosmos itself. The cosmos has striven, through its production of all forms (creatures, world, stars, galaxies) towards self-realisation. So that when revelation comes to the narrator, it is in part self-revelation,

> The source and goal of all, the Star Maker, was obscurely revealed to me as a being indeed other than my conscious self, objective to my vision, yet as in the depth of my own nature; as, indeed, myself, though infinitely more than myself.
>
> SM, p.224.

Though this experience of the 'whole' is therefore shown partially to be human life, yet the narrator, or rather Stapledon - as any religious or visionary writer - is left with the problem of translating this into human language. The translation is both impossible and terribly necessary. Stapledon has thus made the problems of vision a real part of his novel, made the novel itself take it on and deal with it, by giving the problem to his one character. Perhaps the reason the novel has had to be stripped bare of all essentials ('no people, no heroine, no love, no talk'), left with but one character and his experience is that this experience is so large and strange to us, so important and difficult to keep hold of, that Stapledon could not manage anything else than it: he writes a novel of 'essentials' to surpass even Lawrence. And this novel affirms the power and usefulness of stories, novels, fictions. For the narrator realises that it is only by some such means, however removed from the difficult reality, that an intimation of that reality can be communicated. And this seems anyway to be a natural reflex of the mind, this mirroring.

> For in my blindness the vision did evoke from my stricken mind a fantastic reflex of itself, an echo, a symbol, a myth, a crazy dream, contemptibly crude and falsifying, yet, as I believe, not wholly without significance.
>
> SM, p.232

Finally, though, the Star Maker is 'ineffable', 'nothing whatever could truly be said about it' (SM, p.256), yet Stapledon, by the very act of writing this novel, does insist that human beings must try to name it, to say something, make up some fiction or myth which approximates, or hold a belief of some sort, for the 'dread mystery' (SM, p.156) has got to be returned in some form to language, even as only a reminder of the thing we cannot name. To Stapledon it did seem that the world of men had forgotten such mystery, had turned away from any vision of the 'dread but vital whole' and thus lost a sense of adoration and awe. It is to press this realisation upon us that when the sleeper awakes he brings with him the

knowledge that it is the spirit and not the actual matter of the dream, the vision, that is its reality.

> However false the vision in detail of structure, even perhaps in its whole form, in temper surely it was relevant; in temper perhaps it was even true. The real itself, surely, had impelled me to conceive that image, false in every theme and facet, yet in spirit true.
>
> SM, p.257

Impelled by 'the real itself', Stapledon's novel has broken out of its own time and place in order to re-enter that time and place with new meaning. In form this novel aligns itself with some of our oldest works of religious dream literature, with The Vision of Piers Ploughman, or The Pilgrim's Progress; 'So I awoke, and behold it was a dream'.[55] The language of science is only incidental - in a way as the agricultural images are incidental to Piers - to a reality which is quite beyond science, or any other human invention. And the authority of the novel comes not from phrases like 'hypertelescopic imagination' but from the actual performance of that imaginative faculty, as it moves between two points, his marriage and the star. So, fittingly the novel ends, as it began, with the duality of two lights; 'our little glowing atom of community' and 'the cold light of the stars' (SM, p.262).

In the works which follow Star Maker, Olaf Stapledon increasingly interweaves these two realities. It seems he never again felt the necessity to reach out to such immensities as he has done in this novel. I think this is a sign that something has been achieved here; the 'formula for the whole', though never actually formulated is no longer a compelling necessity, for he has managed to speak of the thing about which nothing can be said; he has managed to stare long and hard at the tiny and magnificent, he has managed to hold struggling opposites together: he has envisaged,

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55. John Bunyan, The Pilgrim's Progress (Oxford, 1966), p.271.

however falteringly, the 'whole'. Much of his later work is concerned with making this achievement more 'human', with the problem of relating his newly secured vision to the daily life his narrator had walked away from at the opening of the novel and back into at its end. But the task of making this non-human knowledge fully human in a novel was as large a task again as the one Stapledon had undertaken in _Last and First Men_, _Last Men in London_, and _Star Maker_, and it fell to another to complete the work. She is Doris Lessing, and in conclusion to this essay, it is to her we must now look.

PART FIVE: VISION AND REALITY

Chapter X

THE MARVEL OF SHIKASTA

1. The Future of the Past

Perhaps it is always true, as I said in Chapter I, that one's own time always does seem the worst and the most difficult. I find the years between Olaf Stapledon and the writer with whom I shall end this essay, Doris Lessing, seem among the fullest and most terrible years I can imagine. These years correspond to the years of my own life, more or less: Olaf Stapledon died a few years before I was born. Though there clearly are many areas where Wells, Stapledon and myself meet on points of thought or fascination, sharing ideas and hopes, all the same they were both older than my own now dead grandfather and, like him, they come from a really different world: my past. What interest I have in the effects of the Great War come largely from the fact that my grandfather fought in it, and lived to tell me stories of it. I realise now that nothing in his life or the life of anyone he knew could have matched it as an experience. He wanted desperately to pass on the strange knowledge he had from this experience to his children, and then when they were grown up and bored with the stories, to his grandchildren, to me.

I live in - or am - the future that such men as Olaf Stapledon, and my grandfather fought for, dreaded, dreamed of. Everything seems to have turned out much more complicated than anyone could have imagined. And in this strange world, aren't the Wells and Stapledons - to say nothing of those more ancient authors in _their_ past - rather obsolete? Naive? Old fashioned? Optimistic? How can there be any real connection between these men and the world _Shikasta_ describes?

Asking myself some of these questions as I wrote this last section, I was amazed and delighted to find Saul Bellow taking on, in a novel, many

of these questions. The novel is *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, and it poses these questions by putting a man who knew Wells and Stapledon when he was a young man in contemporary New York as a very old one. Sammler was

> A Polish Jew so well acquainted, so handsomely acknowledged by the nobs, by H. G. Wells. Included, for instance, with Gerald Heard and Olaf Stapledon in the *Cosmopolis* project for a World State, Sammler had written articles for *News of Progress*, for the other publication, *The World Citizen*.[1]

Like the immortals in Mrs. Oliphant's *A Beleaguered City*, Sammler has also, as it were, come back from the dead, and this gives him a power lost to most of the modern world, the power to affirm 'the human bond'. He has survived the Europe of 1939, lived through some of the worst of our modern history.

> What had he done to generate this belief? How had he included it? By coming back from the dead, probably. . . . By coming back, by preoccupation with the subject, the dying, the mystery of dying, the state of death. Also by having been inside death. By having been given the shovel and told to dig. By digging beside his digging wife. When she faltered he tried to help her. By this digging, not speaking, he tried to convey something to her and fortify her. But as it had turned out, he had prepared her for death without sharing it. She was killed, not he. She had passed the course, and he had not. The hole deepened, the sand, clay and stones of Poland, their birthplace, opened up. He had just been blinded, he had a stunned face, and he was unaware that the blood was coming from him till they stripped and he saw it on his clothes. When they were as naked as children from the womb, and the hole was supposedly deep enough, the guns began to blast, and then came a different sound of soil. The thick fall of soil. A ton, two tons, thrown in. A sound of shovel-metal, gritting. Strangely exceptional, Mr. Sammler had come through the top of this. It seldom occured to him to consider it an achievement. Where was the achievement? He had clawed his way out. If he had been at the bottom, he would have suffocated. If there had been another foot of dirt.
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> *MSP*, p.273

Like those who come back from the dead in Semur, Mr. Sammler, surviving this mass grave execution and burial, comes back to life with a closer relation to God and things to do with God. Yet, what is interesting for

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1. Saul Bellow, *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (London, 1970), p.41.

us, reading Mr. Sammler's Planet in the light of these novels of Stapledon's future fiction, or fiction for the future, is Mr. Sammler's relation to the world in which he lives. He has, after all, experienced brutal murder (has himself murdered) has known the worst there is to be known about humanity, and this, the world of 1939, comes after, all after his 'marvellous years' in Bloomsbury, talking to Wells, planning the World State. Stapledon and Wells are in the past by the years 1939-1945. Living through, getting beyond those years, makes Mr. Sammler part of my own world. But, asked to lecture at Columbia University on Britain in the thirties, Mr. Sammler is heckled off the stage by a young man in the (clearly largely bored) audience.

> Turning to the audience, extending violent arms and raising his palms like a Greek dancer, he said 'Why do you listen to this effete old shit? What has he got to tell you? His balls are dry. He's dead. He can't come.'
>
> Sammler later thought that voices had been raised on his side. Someone had said, 'Shame. Exhibitionist.'
>
> But no one really tried to defend him. Most of the young people seemed to be against him.
>
> MSP, p.42

For 'the young people' of America in 1969, Sammler has nothing to offer mostly because he *is* old. Whatever he thinks, they can't see him as part of their world. Sammler of course has to live with a wry understanding of the difference between this (effete?) class of young people and his own youthful hopes for the future. He thinks of H. G. Wells, an old man, a mentor of sorts to him, and notes the difference between the hope and the reality of 'the future'.

> Utopian, he [Wells] didn't even imagine that the hoped-for future would bring excess, pornography, sexual abnormality. Rather, as the old filth and gloomy sickness were cleared away, there would emerge a larger, stronger, older, brainier, better-nourished, better-oxygenated, more vital human type, able to eat and drink sanely, perfectly autonomous and well

> regulated in desires, going nude while attending tranquilly to duties, performing his fascinating and useful mental work.
>
> <u>MSP</u>, p.72

The Columbia student whose criticism of Sammler is all in terms of sexual potency and excrement is the sad reality of the sexual freedom of which Wells dreamed. Yet, despite the clear disparity between the dreams of the past and the reality of the present, Sammler recognises that such imaginative endeavour, however doomed, is necessary, even vital, to human life. And Sammler in old age is as much a part of a world of hope, of imagination as Wells and Stapledon were in the thirties. For in the late sixties, man was about to step off earth to the moon. Space seemed to offer that room for expansion which might prevent the species exterminating itself. People were optimistic - Sammler's young nephew informs him that airlines are accepting bookings for journeys at some unspecified date to the moon and to Venus and Mars. The nephew has already, like thousands of other Americans, booked. Reading a book about the moon, Sammler finds, 'the imagination is innately a biological power seeking to overcome impossible conditions,'

> Small wonder . . . that human beings stress so fiercely the next realizable possibilities and are so eager to bound from the surface of the earth.
>
> <u>MSP</u>, p.107

Mr. Sammler can only partially agree with this; for him, the earth is the place we have to be in.

> Perhaps, <u>perhaps</u>! colonies on the moon would reduce the fever and swelling here, and the passion for boundlessness <u>and</u> wholeness might find more material appeasement. Human-<u>kind</u>, drunk with terror, calm itself, sober up.
>
> Drunk with terror? Yes, and fragments (a fragment like Mr. Sammler) understood: this earth was a grave: our life was lent to it by its elements and had to be returned: a time came when the simple elements seemed to long for release from the complicated forms of life, when every element of every cell said, 'Enough!' The planet was our mother and our burial ground. No wonder the human spirit wished to leave.
>
> <u>MSP</u>, p.182.

It is as if the human spirit has gone mad - 'drunk with terror', and men now believe that they could be different if they were somewhere else. If we feel we have to escape this madness then it is also ourselves we have to escape from; from our own elements. Perhaps to be of earth is necessarily to be earthly. Sammler himself finds that having returned to the living with his knowledge of death, his disinterestedness, he does gradually become a human living creature again; life comes back to him.

> For quite a long time he had felt that he was not necessarily human. Had no great use, during that time, for most creatures. Very little interest in himself. Cold even to the thought of recovery. What was there to recover? Little regard for earlier forms of himself. Disaffected. His judgement almost blank. But then, ten or twelve years after the war, he became aware that this too was changing. In the human setting, along with everyone else, among particulars of ordinary life he was human - and, in short, creatureliness crept in again . . . . So that now really, Sammler didn't know how to take himself. He wanted, with God, to be free from the bondage of the ordinary and the finite. A soul released from Nature, from impressions, and from everyday life. For this to happen God Himself must be waiting, surely. And a man who has been killed and buried should have no other interest. He should be perfectly disinterested. . . . However, and mysteriously enough, it happened, as Sammler observed, that one was always, and so powerfully, so persuasively, drawn back to human conditions.
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> MSP, p.118

Sammler's relation to death, to the war, has changed the way in which he can believe. In the thirties he had been flattered to be chosen to listen to Wells discoursing on 'Scientific humanism, faith in an emancipated future, in reason, in evolution' (MSP, p.210). These he finds are 'not popular ideas at the moment' (MSP, p.210), partly because things have simply turned out different. He finds that 'of course, since Poland, since 1939, my judgements are different' (MSP, p.211), and though he is not a typical man, he does stand in some way as a representative: our judgements must be different since 1939: extermination is a phenomenon of our world, wherever we come from, and is no longer confined to the trenches.

Though one might like to withdraw from such a world, whether to the moon or to the monastic life, Sammler believes it is not quite possible - we are human, and we are always 'drawn back to human conditions'. This very fact of recurring humanity and recurring patterns of human claims and debts leads Sammler to imagine Stapledon's vast tracts of future time.

> And all this will continue. It will simply continue. Another six billion years before the sun explodes. Six billion years of human life! It lames the heart to contemplate such a figure. Six billion years! What will become of us? Of the other species, yes, and of us? How will we ever make it? And when we have to abandon the earth, and leave this solar system for another, what a moving-day that will be. But by then humankind will have become very different. Evolution continues. Olaf Stapledon reckoned that each individual in future ages would be living thousands of years . . . Each mind belonging to a marvellous analytical collective, thinking out its physics as part of a sublime whole . . . The scientific revolution was only three hundred years old. Give it a million, give it a billion more. And God? Still hidden, even from this powerful mental brotherhood, still out of reach?
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> MSP, pp.190-191

Such large amounts of time, 'six billion years!', in which human life might be lived seem frightening rather than exhilarating. 'What will become of us?' seems a question more based in fear, in real knowledge of what we are negatively capable of becoming than in positive sense of human potential. 'How will we ever make it?' - make what? To the end of time? To the end of what we might become? Either way, the time available as future seems to dwarf human potential, as if Sammler thinks 'anything could happen'. By contrast Stapledon's vision seems optimistic; a vision that evolved human creatures of great power, evolved as much from science as from human capacity. But God would still be 'out of reach' of our temporal selves. No evolution is going to take us that far, as Stapledon had understood in Star Maker.

In a sense Sammler thinks this, and in another he doesn't. God is already within reach. He has, like Stapledon's narrator, a sense of God an intuition, despite everything.

> During the war I had no belief, and I had always
> disliked the ways of the Orthodox. I saw that God
> was not impressed by death. Hell was his indifference.
> But inability to explain is no ground for disbelief.
> Not as long as the sense of God persists.
>
> MSP, p.236

This is something Thomas Hardy should have known; he lived in a constant sense of the hell of God's 'indifference'. Yet the sense of God did persist, as it has done for Sammler, perhaps because of, not despite, Poland and 1939. Poland and 1939 taught Sammler the terms of his contract; his job was to survive, to last, and to last humanly. This contract between each individual and God is what Saul Bellow affirms with Sammler's last words in the novel, something each of us knows, he believes without having to be told. Sammler's nephew Gruner dies, and over his body, Sammler commends him to God, as a man who, in looking after his relatives and doing his duty as a doctor,

> Did meet the terms of his contract. The terms which,
> in his inmost heart, each man knows. As I know mine.
> As all know. For that is the truth of it - that we all
> know, God, that we know, that we know, we know, we know.
>
> MSP, p.313

The truth: a modern novel claims to know 'the truth'. And what an old truth it turns out to be, truth that Stapledon knew when he talked with God, truth that Wells's Davis knew when he looked into his own heart, truth that Mrs. Oliphant wanted to remind us of, truth that Lawrence lived by, truth that Daniel Deronda acknowledged meeting Mordecai. And of course, much older than any of this. In Mr. Sammler, Saul Bellow has created a character who could have such truth, and live in our world. But Mr. Sammler is also a very old man, and he brings his truth from elsewhere, from the past, from Europe, from the grave. He does not find it in his new world, New York, which seems a city in the throes of madness, crazy, drugged, obscene, stupid, degenerate: not unlike some of England, now.

Saul Bellow mourns the loss of humanism and belief in the future and all those things Wells discoursed to Mr. Sammler about. And he finds the future Olaf Stapledon described too big, too distant, to be of use to the present.

But we have to recognise that by looking back to these two authors, by calling our attention to their imaginative visions, Bellow is also pointing up - and attempting to answer - a contemporary need. When Dr. Lal writes that imagination 'is innately a biological power seeking to overcome impossible conditions' we have to relate such a statement both to the past - the works of imagination called up by the past - and to our own 'impossible' present. It is in works of imagination that reality might most usefully be dealt with. For the apparent realism of attitude in the works of modernism, of existentialism, of formlessness and senselessness is, must be, superficial emotionalism. If it is the feeling of our time, it is still not the truth. At best it is a partiality. Saul Bellow has described this modern state of being, our world, as

> A chaotic state in which no one had sufficient internal organisation to resist, and in which one is overwhelmed by all kinds of powers - political, technological, military, economic and so on - which carry everything before them with a kind of heathen disorder in which we're supposed to survive with all our human qualities . . . [2]

Along with this problem in reality, Bellow notes this, in literature,

> The transcendent had been kicked out of modern literature on all sorts of grounds, and I think we presume too much when we do that. It's not right. And we're not being faithful to our own intuitions when we take it upon ourselves to say 'It's finished'. It's only finished in textbooks.[3]

And he goes on to say of metaphysics,

> As long as it's in a separate category of discourse, there's no point in talking about it. The words for it were used up a long time ago. So the only foundation

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2. 'Saul Bellow and Martin Amis in Conversation with Michael Ignatieff' in The Listener, 13 March 1986, pp.18-19.

3. ibid.

> for it is in actual experience, in one's own felt life. And if that isn't there, then there is really no point in sounding off about it in an abstract sense. That's exactly the difference between literature and other kinds of discourse. And that's why it's very hard for me to read books in which there's no personal sense of what really happens within the human being.[4]

The reason it is difficult for human qualities to survive in the modern world is precisely because 'metaphysics' has become an embarrassing afterthought to most of our way of thinking. When Saul Bellow says that the transcendent 'is only finished in textbooks' he means that it is an intellectual fashion to say it is finished.[5] This is because our words for it 'were used up a long time ago'. We saw that Stapledon felt awkward about using the word 'soul' in his preface to Star Maker, and knew his audience would be more at home with the contemporary favourites 'Right' and 'Left'. What Bellow goes on to say, that the only foundation for metaphysics, for the transcendent, 'is in actual experience, in one's own felt life' is of vital importance for the contemporary novel, and more widely for all of life. Literature has a duty to find the metaphysical and transcendent in life and to report it, in order that the reality of the things once called God or the soul may not be lost or thrown away, even if the words for the things are worn out. This of course was the very task that Doris Lessing took on when she began to write Shikasta, and the rest of the Canopus series. This reclamation of the metaphysical reality for the novel is an immense task. Maurice Cowling, having written of Mill, Lewes, George Eliot, Spencer, Huxley, Stephen, Reade, of Wells, Shaw and Lawrence, writes that

> No anti-Christian thinker with the authority and suggestiveness of the above named thinkers . . .

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4. The Listener, pp.18-19.

5. Bellow goes on to list some fashions: 'I used to feel that intellectuals knew what they were talking about. It took me a long time to find out that some small number of them did know what they were talking about but most of them were terribly misleading. In the meantime I had gone

> has begun writing about religion in England since 1930.[6]

Of course, this disregards Stapledon as a serious thinker. But even if it had included him, it would be more or less true. Since the Second World War, by and large, England hasn't been concerned with religion. This is partly simply because religion has no longer been a major issue, it has disappeared from our consciousness, and especially from the consciousness of those who have felt they were carrying the torch of thought into the future. The best of anti-Christian thought has been channelled into Marxism or other political doctrines. Religion has simply not been a serious issue. In a sense the pessimism of Hardy has won.

For a novelist to bring religion, metaphysics, and the transcendent back into the mainstream of literature at this time when such issues have seemed finished, is a marvellous achievement. But it hasn't, as I hope the rest of this essay will by now have shown, come completely out of the blue. It has a history, it has forerunners, it has had the ground cleared. The history of how Doris Lessing came to a point where she could write Shikasta is easily traceable (though I know she would herself hate such an idea) in her writing life. Like George Eliot's, her works tell a story of personal development and change. Unsurprisingly, Doris Lessing's story mirrors the world of which she writes; it is an account of a consciousness changed over the course of a life from a childlike religious intuition, to an adult politicised consciousness, and finally becoming religious once again. Though I shall not trace the whole of this story, I will trace the latter part, which stems from The Golden Notebook (1962). Let me say however that the childish intuition is quite clear in Martha Quest, and in

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through behaviourism, and I had gone through Marxism, and I had gone through structuralism, and all of them evaporated.' The Listener, p.19.

6. Maurice Cowling, Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England, ii (Cambridge, 1985), p.288.

many of the early Africa stories. By beginning in this way, I hope to show how the future in literature as well as in real life, connects to the past, and to show a sense, which I have taken from Doris Lessing that to be the future of our past is not a terrible thing; that oddly, in a world which often seems obsessed by history we have forgotten our past. Perhaps history ought to be something different; more personal? Mr. Sammler wonders what would happen if there were to occur an Einstein of the novel;

> What is 'common' about 'the common life'? What if some genius were to do with 'common life' what Einstein did with 'matter'? Finding its energetics, uncovering its radiance. But at the present level of crude vision, agitated spirits fled from the oppressiveness of 'the common life' separating themselves from the rest of their species, from the life of their species, hoping perhaps to get away (in some peculiar sense) from the death of their species. To perform higher actions, to serve the imagination with special distinction, it seems essential to be histrionic, This, too, is a brand of madness.
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> MSP, p.147

I don't claim that Doris Lessing is the Einstein of the novel. But I do say that she, like other writers I have discussed, is one of many involved in the gargantuan task of finding the 'energetics' and uncovering the 'radiance' of 'the common life'.

2. Prospecting in the Desert

The phrase is again one of Saul Bellow's; 'the old forms of existence have worn out, so to speak, and the new ones have not yet appeared - people are prospecting, as it were, in the desert for new forms.'[7] I use this phrase to introduce Doris Lessing's mid-career. This isn't easily separable from her early career, of course, because if a decisive change seems to have taken place with the writing of The Golden Notebook (and we shall

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7. Saul Bellow in The Listener, p.19.

come to that shortly) then that change seems to have had its roots in an essay written in 1957, when Doris Lessing was still writing 'realistic' novels, largely influenced by her life in Africa.[8] The essay looks forward to the moral realism she was to spend the next thirty years creating.

> There's one thing you can't say to anyone anymore, so it seems: You know in your heart of hearts you shouldn't be living like this.[9]

Saul Green, writer, says this to Anna Wulf, writer, in that section of The Golden Notebook called 'The Golden Notebook' where the two writers overcome their respective blocks by learning to say 'You shouldn't be living like this'. Saul and Anna are representatives of contemporary writing, hemmed in by life's and literature's uncertainties. These uncertainties Doris Lessing had noted in the essay 'The Small Personal Voice'.

> Words have become so inadequate to express the richness of our experience that the simplest sentence overheard on a bus reverberates like words shouted against a cliff. One certainty we all accept is the condition of being uncertain.[10]

It seemed to Doris Lessing that nineteenth century novelists had not found language inadequate, though they too lived in uncertain times. The difference was not one of language but of vision. The essay argues the necessity for an imaginative leap which would allow twentieth century writers to establish a contemporary realism equal to that provided by the 'giants' of the nineteenth century. The Golden Notebook, I shall argue, produced a 'blueprint' (GN, p.546) for a new approach to writing: Shikasta, and the novels which follow it are developed from this blueprint. The task was to cope with an increasingly strange and difficult reality:

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8. Though I say she would hate such an account of her development as I am about to give, it is also true that Doris Lessing hates rigidly separating accounts, too. She writes

> Mind you, the labels change. Mine have been - starting with The Grass is Singing: she is a writer about the colour bar . . . - about communism-feminism-mysticism; she writes space fiction, science fiction. Each label has served for a few years.
>
> The Diaries of Jane Somers (London, 1984) Preface

9. Doris Lessing, The Golden Notebook (London, 1962), p.534.

10. Doris Lessing, 'The Small Personal Voice' in The Small Personal Voice p.5.

> It is by now commonplace to say that novelists everywhere are breaking the bonds of the realistic novel because what we all see around us becomes daily wilder, more fantastic, incredible.[11]

This had been recognised, too, in 1957.

> We are living at a time which is so dangerous, violent, explosive, and precarious that it is in question whether soon there will be people left alive to write books and to read them. It is a question of life and death for all of us; and we are haunted, all of us, by the threat that even if some madman does not destroy us all, our children may be born deformed or mad.[12]

But the developments in science which contribute to the immobilising despair so evident in Doris Lessing's prose here had also begun to provide a key which would open up new areas of human understanding. She understood that the physical sciences were not merely to be feared; what they held for us was potential, and we should decide what sort of potential that would be.

> Yesterday we split the atom. We assaulted the colossal citadel of power, the tiny unit of the substance of the universe . . . I am convinced that we all stand at an open door, and that there is a new man about to be born . . .[13]

The new man that Doris Lessing here envisages is not unlike Nietzsche's Superman, a creature not us, yet born of us. But unlike Nietzsche, Doris Lessing does not require a transformation of morality but rather a regeneration of the morality of a George Eliot: indeed Lessing's future seems to demand such a morality as the connecting point between the old and the new. The splitting of the atom intimates the opening of the universe for Lessing, and also a rebirth of a religious nature for man. This is perhaps possible for Doris Lessing because she eventually was able

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11. Doris Lessing, _Shikasta_, 'Some Remarks', p.ix.

12. Doris Lessing, 'The Small Personal Voice', p.7.

13. _ibid._, pp.7-8.

to combine modern scientific knowledge with ancient moral and religious thought in a way that was simply not possible in the nineteenth century, perhaps partly because of the tremendous fear of the physical sciences in the religious community.

The new man - and the new realism of science fiction - are brought to being by Quantum physics, where a view of the universe is offered where it is not possible to step outside for an 'objective' point of view. Modern physics offers a world which is both always relative and absolute. It also works alongside classical Newtonian physics as if both systems were not only possible but necessary.[14]

Moving both inward through modern physics and outwards through the exploration of space, the physical sciences of this century have radically enlarged the area in which human affairs must be placed. But in 1957, Lessing saw the developments in science and the pressure of history converging on and affecting human lives and thoughts.

> Everyone in the world now, has moments when he throws down a newspaper, turns off the radio, shuts his ears to the man on the platform, and holds out his hand and looks at it, shaken with terror.[15]

She argues that the end result of refusal to acknowledge what such moments mean (they are a way of telling ourselves 'You shouldn't be living like this') is that 'we shall blow ourselves up'.

But how could things be different? How could anything be written in a language which had lost its power to use the 'great words'? In 1957

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14. See F. Capra's account of the relation of modern physics to the Eastern basis of transcendentalism, The Tao of Physics (London, 1976).

> Quantum Theory shows that we cannot decompose the world into independently existing smallest units. As we penetrate into matter, nature does not show us any 'basic building blocks' but rather appears as a complicated web of relations between the various parts of the whole. These relations always include the observer in an essential way. The human observer provides the final link in the chain of observational processes. (p.71)

15. Doris Lessing, 'The Small Personal Voice', p.9.

English writers were using a medium in which few had faith; the reduction of vocabulary perhaps contributed to the creation of the 'parochial' novel of which Lessing thought so little.

> The hero of Room at the Top, whose values are similar to Stendhal's heroes, who understands, as clearly as Julien Sorel when he is allowing himself to be corrupted, does not see himself in relation to any larger vision. Therefore he remains petty.[16]

A writer has to be responsible for the influence of his work, and 'must feel himself an instrument of change for good or bad',[17] and she goes further,

> If a writer accepts this responsibility, he must see himself, to use the socialist phrase, as an architect of the soul, and it is a phrase none of the old nineteenth century novelists would have shied away from.[18]

Accepting such responsibility, Lessing tried to write a new kind of novel in The Golden Notebook, where attempts at 'realism' become part of a madness caused by the fact that reality is too complicated to fit into the old realist form. The Golden Notebook was intended to reform the novel by examining the forces which made it impossible for Doris Lessing to write a conventional novel. In the preface to this novel, Lessing explains that Anna Wulf's block

> would have to be linked with the disparity between the overwhelming problems of war, famine, poverty, and the tiny individual who was trying to mirror them.[19]

Faced with this 'disparity' Anna finds herself increasingly unable to use words because they 'lose their meaning suddenly' (GN, p.258) and because of the 'gap between what they are supposed to mean, and what in fact, they say' (GN, p.258). Because language is not the same form in which experience comes Anna thinks that form might itself be able to resolve

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16. Doris Lessing, 'The Small Personal Voice', pp.16-17.

17. ibid., p.6.

18. ibid., p.7.

19. Doris Lessing, 'Preface to The Golden Notebook', p.32.

the problem of language.

> Words. Words. I play with words, hoping that some combination, even a chance combination, will say what I want.
>
> GN, p.542

This indeed was the aim of the novel as a whole. In the Preface, Doris Lessing explains 'my major aim was to shape a book which would make its own comment, a wordless statement: to talk through the way it was shaped'.[20] Doris Lessing has said that the novel was a failure, because the importance of form as a theme was not widely understood.[21] But as an attempt to get away from the conventional novel, she has said, 'It's more truthful because it's more complex'.[22]

It is through Anna's block that Doris Lessing is able to question the role of the novel in the twentieth century, and to examine its function and potential. Traditionally, literature has provided its readership with a means of knowing itself, but the literature of the twentieth century, as Lessing saw it could not mirror, because it, like the human beings it was about, was broken, fragmented. In the 'Black Notebook' Anna writes of the modern novel, which has itself become a 'function of the fragmented society, the fragmented consciousness' (GN, p.59)

> . . . the interest with which I read these books had nothing to do with what I feel when I read - let's say - Thomas Mann, the last of the writers in the old sense, who used the novel for philosophical statements about life. The point is, the function of the novel seems to be changing; it has become an outpost of journalism; we read novels for information about areas of life we don't know.
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> GN, p.59

Anna desires more than this 'information' - 'a book with an intellectual

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20. Doris Lessing, 'Preface to The Golden Notebook', p.28.

21. In 'A Talk with Doris Lessing by Florence Howe' in A Small Personal Voice, Lessing said that The Golden Notebook was misread because

> The Golden Notebook was an extremely carefully constructed book. And the way it is constructed says what the book is about - which very few people have understood (p.79)

22. ibid., p.82

or moral passion strong enough to create order' (GN, p.59).

The Golden Notebook did not resolve what Lessing saw as the problems of the contemporary novel; it stated them. It made them explicit, but it did not make the effort of imagination on which, Doris Lessing felt, the future depended. The effort, when it came, came from an unexpectedly fitting quarter.

> The old realistic novel is being changed, too, because of influences from that genre loosely described as Space Fiction . . . What a phenomenon it has been - science fiction, space fiction - exploding out of nowhere, unexpectedly, of course, as always happens when the mind is being forced to expand.[23]

I wrote earlier that the physical sciences have radically enlarged the human arena in our century. Yet, oddly enough, the very same physical sciences had in the nineteenth century seemingly limited that arena by making physical matter and not God, the basis and centre of the universe.

> Though the scientist may individually nourish a religion and be a theist in his irresponsible hours, the days are over when it could be said that for science herself the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork.[24]

It is important here to remember George Eliot's impatience with Darwinism and other 'explanations' which she felt produced a 'feeble impression, compared with the mystery that lies under the processes'. Similarly D. H. Lawrence would, while being drawn to the most 'natural' of sciences, biology, find himself irritated by attempts to explain away reality. Despite these reservations, it is still true, as William James points out that - whatever laymen might think of it - 'the days are over when it could be said that for science herself the heavens declareth the glory of God'. The religious mind or soul will always recognise such a fact, let Science say what it will. Nonetheless such a scientific temper has spread from

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23. Doris Lessing, Shikasta, 'Some Remarks', p.x.

24. William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p.469.

the scientific community into the world at large.[25] We believe 'facts' not feel mysteries. And it is because of this, with the facts increasingly strange (the universe expanding in both directions, both bigger and smaller than we can imagine) that fantasy has become so important: we increasingly can't tell the difference between fact and fiction. The Defence Initiative is called Star Wars, as if it were a children's computer game like Space Invaders. The technology which gives rise to them both is utterly beyond comprehension for most people; fantastic, there but not understood. We perceive ourselves as without God, without guidance, without purpose or sense: life is unbearable if we look at it direct, through the scientific imagination, as William James here explains,

> It is impossible, in the present temper of the scientific imagination, to find in the driftings of the cosmic atoms, whether they work on the universal or on the particular scale, anything but a kind of aimless weather, doing and undoing, achieving no proper history, and leaving no result. Nature has no one distinguishable ultimate tendency with which it is possible to feel a sympathy. In the vast rhythm of her processes, as the scientific mind now follows them, she appears to cancel herself.[26]

This was indeed the realisation or vision that almost crushed Olaf Stapledon, this vision of cosmic/atomic 'weather', doing and undoing, purposelessness. Doris Lessing saw the same fearful vision appearing in personal moments of individual life, as if such a vision of the universe were spreading like a disease even into our most personal and thought-less moments.

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25. In Shikasta Doris Lessing describes Science as 'the most recent of the religions', for it is held in faith by our civilisation. Foolishly, Lessing believes.

> Science, the most recent of the religions, as bigoted and as inflexible as any, has created a way of life, a technology, attitudes of mind, increasingly loathed and distrusted. Not so long ago, a 'scientist' knew he was the great culminator and crown of all human thinking, knowledge, progress - and behaved with according arrogance. But now they begin to know their own smallness, and the fouled and spoiled earth itself rises up against them in witness.
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> SH, p.197

26. William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p.469.

> Everyone in the world now, has moments when he throws down a newspaper, turns off the radio, shuts his ears to the man on the platform, and holds out his hand and looks at it, shaken with terror.[27]

Where modernism has perceived such moments they have often been taken or understood as a personal failing signalling a wider human failing, an internal sickness of my psyche which signals a sickness of all psyches, not a genuine response to a world which, causing sickness, demands something better of its victims: 'Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season'.[28] It is certain that D. H. Lawrence felt such moments, the post-war depression I have earlier described for example, and equally certain that he sensed corresponding sources of liveliness in himself which could combat such feeling. Hence the creation of Birkin and Gerald, together. Later in Shikasta, Doris Lessing was to write again of that moment of fear and terror and to connect it not with existential despair but with a renewal of hope or faith in life itself.

> Forced back and back upon herself, himself, bereft of comfort, security, knowing perhaps only hunger and cold; denuded of belief in 'country', 'religion', 'progress' - stripped of certainties, there is no Shikastan who will not let his eyes rest on a patch of littered and soured ground between buildings in a slum, and think: Yes, but that will come to life, there is enough power there to tear down this dreadfulness and heal all our ugliness - a couple of seasons and it would all be alive again . . .[29]

It is necessary to acknowledge, to experience the very real ground of terror in order to get through to 'life'.

Oddly enough, then, in dealing with the fear and despair that came from living in a technologically dangerous and morally retarded world, Doris Lessing turned to science fiction as the form which might allow new thoughts in. Briefing For A Descent Into Hell was the first of her novels to experiment both with new forms and an imaginative world, and it is an account of human breakdown as a symptom of unrecognised higher purpose in

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27. Doris Lessing, 'The Small Personal Voice', p.9.
28. T. S. Eliot, 'Gerontion' in Collected Poems, p.4.
29. Doris Lessing, Shikasta, p.198.

life. It acknowledges and experiences 'terror' and 'uncertainty' and tries to break through to a new vision of life. It is in a sense a forerunner to Shikasta, and it certainly holds many of the religious and philosophical beliefs that Shikasta displays. It borrows from the Science Fiction genre in order to translate Doris Lessing's humanist concerns into issues affecting contemporary life. Thus, Merk Ury, for example, speaks of Humanity at the Conference prior to the Descent:

> Each individual of this species is locked up inside his own skull, his own personal experience - or believes that he is - and while a great part of their ethical systems, religious systems, etc., state the Unity of Life, even the most recent religion, which being the most recent, is the most powerful, called Science, has only very fitful and inadequate gleams of insight into the fact that Life is One.[30]

The SF genre gives Lessing scope to create characters who are not human, who, like Merk Ury have the god-like qualities of an all-embracing vision, a moral or intellectual certainty. As a god, or an extra terrestrial, Merk can see humanity in a historical perspective that is denied to humanity itself. By looking down from above, by means of this fictional character, Lessing has found a way of speaking in the way that George Eliot did: the author, rising above 'us' can make large statements about our lives, 'each individual of this species is locked up inside his own skull', just as Stapledon did with his Neptunian Last Man.

Thus by using a twentieth century genre, Doris Lessing brings back to literature the humanist concerns of the nineteenth century, and through the new form, the 'novel-report', she is able to comment on the real world through an imaginary one. The novel-report, while making certain concessions to the 'conventional' novel, also denies many of our literary expectations, so that form once again may overcome the limitations of language by becoming 'a wordless statement'.

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30. Doris Lessing, Briefing For A Descent Into Hell (London, 1971), p.120.

> The world was spinning like the most delicately tinted of bubbles, all light. It was the mind of humanity that I saw, but this was not at all to be separated from the animal mind which married and fused with it everywhere . . . I watched a pulsing swirl of all being, continually changing, moving, dancing, a controlled impelled dance, held within its limits by its nature, and part of this necessity was the locking together of the inner pattern in light with the outer world of stone, leaf, flesh and ordinary light.
>
> BFDH, p.92

While it explores the 'inner patterns' of the worlds of 'inner space', Briefing is as firmly grounded in reality as any of Doris Lessing's earlier novels have been. Charles Watkins may be on a transcendental voyage through myth and legend, but he is also very much a patient at Central Intake Hospital. Through the fiction of the novel, Charles Watkins's breakdown, Lessing disrupts the unities of time, place and person in order to gain entry into an area of life we don't know. When Watkins's persona cracks, his soul is set free to envisage 'the mind of humanity' and to relate the Unity of Life, inner and outer, to his personal fragmentation. This report of Watkins's breakdown is a way of saying 'you shouldn't be living like this'. It is a step forward from The Golden Notebook in that formal structure is not here discovered by the novelist's resolution of the problems of fragmentation from above, as if it were a matter of art (as Lessing arranged the form of The Golden Notebook) but from within the novel's own imaginative scheme of life. It is the tension which arises from the disparity between Watkins's self knowledge and that of his world, represented by the hospital authorities, which is the means by which Lessing here makes form speak. This tension can be seen in the time scales of the novel. Watkins realised that

> We are wrong when we divide the mind's machinery from time: they are the same.
>
> BFDH, p.48

and so is shown to have intuitively understood what science calls relativity. But science, in the shape of Dr. Y has no way of relating relativity to life;

> But the fact is, and I'm telling you again so you don't forget it, that you have been in hospital for a month.
>
> BFDH, p.140

In what Dr. Y calls 'a month', Watkins has experienced life beyond time, seeing the world with 'the eye that would measure the pace of sand horses' (BFDH, p.10).

The opening page of the novel shows form both honouring and denying the reader's desire for facts which can tell us where we are;

> CENTRAL INTAKE HOSPITAL
>
> Admittance Sheet   Friday, August 15th 1969
>
> Name . . .   Unknown
>
> Sex . . .   Male
>
> Age . . .   Unknown
>
> Address . . .   Unknown
>
> BFDH, p.9

These 'facts' actually offer very little. What is the Hospital 'central' to? Can the desire to place events in chronological sequence really be satisfied by a date? Both Time and Place are relative to other times and places, to the position of the person observing. Of these relations, Lessing gives little or no indication. While the Admittance Sheet tells us only what may be deduced from exterior appearances, the monologue of Watkins which follows is rambling and confused. By placing the objective fact alongside the subjective experience Lessing constructs a literary form which 'speaks' of the limitations imposed by such a division.

One very real concession to the forms of the conventional novel made in Briefing For A Descent Into Hell however, is the the creation of a central character. Charles Watkins's role in the novel is not dissimilar to that of Anna Wulf in The Golden Notebook. He has to create order from the chaos of his own mind.

> The important thing is this - to remember that some things reach out to us from that level of living, to here. Anxiety is one. The sense of urgency. Oh, they make an illness of it, they charm it away with their magic drugs. But it isn't for nothing. It isn't

> unconnected. They say, 'an anxiety state', as they say, paranoia, but all these things, they have a meaning, they are reflections from that other part of ourselves, and that part of ourselves knows things we don't know.
>
> BFDH, p.246

Like Anna, Watkins has to see the reasons for his 'anxiety' and 'sense of urgency', has to learn to see himself not as suffering an 'illness' but as reacting to a real state of affairs. In her letter to Watkins, Rosemary Baines refers to the 'prison shades' (BFDH, p.152) of adult consciousness, an oblique reference to Wordsworth's Ode, 'Intimations of Immortality'.[31] Watkins's function in the novel is to provide Lessing with an opportunity to make 'statements about life' on the same scale as that of Wordsworth, but using a language acceptable to the twentieth century. 'The soul that rises with us, our life's star' becomes through Watkins, a map of 'inner space'. The 'split personality' of Watkins allows Lessing both to present a detailed description of the personal acts of a human life, and to comment from a higher level, on that action; the synthesis of the novel-report with imaginative fiction creates a form in which she can 'reach out to us from that level of living, to here'.

That the imaginative world of Briefing For A Descent Into Hell depends on one central character places certain limitations on the effectiveness of Lessing's vision in this novel, just as the same novelistic form limited H. G. Wells in Star Begotten. Although the novel does demand belief in the 'reality' of Charles Watkins's odyssey, it does not make the 'effort of imagination' necessary to place such a journey in an external world. When Merk Ury says, 'Each individual of this species is locked inside his own skull', he makes, as I have said, a comment from above. But Merk is a product of Watkins's imagination, a form created by Watkins to express

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31. William Wordsworth, 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood', in William Wordsworth. The Poems, i, pp.523-529.

his own understanding. Recognising the 'prison shades', Watkins creates, from within the prison, a fictional world which reflects his reality.

> To imagine free man, leisured man, is to step outside what we are . . . Slaves suddenly set free are marked by the habits of submission; and slaves imagining freedom see it through the eyes of slaves.[32]

Watkins chooses an adaptation of the Classical conception of the universe because he is, in real life, a Professor of Classics. It is because there is no external world or authority to sanction Watkins's discoveries that they are ultimately lost. The individual consciousness cannot sustain the transcendence of itself alone, because it is in a mutually dependent relationship with the social world; to 'step outside what we are' as individuals is necessarily a social act and for validity, must find a social context: so the problem of stepping 'outside what we are' still remained if Doris Lessing was to write a novel equal to those produced by the nineteenth century;

> a book powered with an intellectual or moral passion strong enough to create order, to create a new way of looking at things.[33]

The concern with individuality was one of the things which defined humanity; and the importance of the individual, the 'small personal voice', was not be be underestimated. But Lessing increasingly saw that this interest in individuality was becoming an obsession, and one which was limiting the human potential for becoming the 'new man'.

> We see ourselves as autonomous creatures, our minds our own, our beliefs freely chosen, our ideas individual and unique . . . with billions and billions and billions of us on this planet, we are still prepared to believe that each of us is unique, or that if all the others are mere dots in a swarm, then at least I am this self determined thing, my mind my own.[34]

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32. Doris Lessing, 'The Small Personal Voice', p.8.

33. Doris Lessing, The Golden Notebook, p.59.

34. Doris Lessing, The Sirian Experiments (London, 1981), 'Preface' p.xi.

Shikasta resolved the problem of individuality by abandoning the final concession to the conventional novel, the central human character. The fiction of this novel allows Lessing to 'step outside what we are' by choosing as its centre the Canopean Archivists, celestial historians of Earth. The marvel of *Shikasta*, its simple, clear, vision of how we came to see ourselves as we do, comes largely from this achievement of formal imagination, which owes a great deal to Stapledon's vision of the Last Men.

3. Incarnation and Sickness: central metaphors of *Shikasta*

The novels that lead to *Shikasta* give an account of Doris Lessing's own personal struggle with the existential problems of modern writing. Her 'social realism' of *The Children of Violence* series had led, in its culminating novel, *The Four Gated City*, to madness and destruction on a world-wide scale. Similarly, *The Golden Notebook*, widely (and in Lessing's eyes wrongly) acclaimed as a triumph of feminism, had done no more than take her to the brink of madness and breakdown, living in fragments, but not really emerging from them. Her 'dream autobiography' exists alongside those novels of the late sixties and early seventies, aptly titled *The Memoirs of A Survivor*, yet the 'survival' it tells of is distressingly limited by the allegorical terms it must use. We have to note through all this that her experimentation with form was not prompted by an intellectual interest in form as such, but rather that she was provoked into experimentation as a means of finding a way of recording an ampler life experience than conventional novel writing could express.

Shikasta is the result of this long experiment. A means by which the two worlds of inner and outer reality are related, it contains within itself a massive variety of forms (reportage, myth, diary, history, imagined past, story) which together make the metaphorical form which connects the

'real' world with the transcendent reality of which Doris Lessing was increasingly certain. The novel makes 'reality' dependent upon metaphysical truth, by placing human and individual living in a metaphysical structure, part of the Canopean 'purpose'. Moving between one world and another, inner and outer space, the novel depends on a series of translations, and therefore a language of translation and analogy, which we shall call metaphor. In this sense it can be called a 'religious' novel, a visionary realism. In her novel History, Elsa Morante has one of her characters, the morphine addict Davide, explain why metaphor is essential to religious vision.

> Then throwing back his head on the pillow, he seriously began explaining his personal opinion: 'All your poems,' he said thoughtfully, rationally, 'centre about a LIKE . . . And these LIKES, taken all together, in chorus, mean to say: GOD! The only true God is recognised through the resemblances of all things. Wherever you look, you discover a single, common imprint. And so, from one resemblance to another, step by step, you climb up to one alone. For a religious mind, the universe represents a process, where, from one testimony to another, all in agreement, you arrive at the point of truth . . . [35]

One might add to this account that no single resemblance, or metaphor, can tell the whole truth. It is the fact that there are many testimonies, 'all in agreement' that makes the truth clear. In a similar sense, William James in the conclusion to The Varieties of Religious Experience argues for a multiplicity of belief grounded in each personal individual experience. He sees the same 'process where, from one testimony to another, all in agreement, you arrive at the point of truth'.

> Each, from his peculiar angle of observation, takes in a certain sphere of fact and trouble, which each must deal with in a unique manner. One of us must soften himself, another must harden himself; one must yield a point, another must stand firm - in order the better to defend the position assigned him. If an Emerson were forced to be a Wesley, or a Moody forced to be a Whitman, the total human consciousness of the divine would suffer.

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35. Elsa Morante, History, a novel, trans. from the Italian by William Weaver (Harmondsworth, 1981), pp.578-579.

> The divine can mean no single quality, it must mean a group of qualities, by being champions of which in alternation, different men may all find worthy missions. Each attitude being a syllable in human nature's total message, it takes the whole of us to spell the meaning out completely.[36]

As for Davide there is no single 'like' that can itself express the sum of all those 'likes', so for James the single 'life' cannot hope to express godliness but many lives put together spell out the 'total message' of human nature. This is why Christ, representing God to men simultaneously represented all men when he claimed the name 'Son of Man'.

In this sense of resemblances, likes, multiplicity, Shikasta is a religious novel. Taken all together these resemblances, spell out something which individually they do not have the power to express. The novel expresses reality anew, a reality neither stuck in the physical, secular world (yet undoubtedly of it) nor a reality overtly religious in the way we have come to understand it. This multiplicity is reality for Doris Lessing, the very same reality she sensed but could not quite elucidate in The Golden Notebook. Elsewhere Doris Lessing has written that 'everything man is capable of imagining has its counterpart somewhere else, in a different level of reality'.[37]

Doris Lessing has herself called attention to the idea or process of resemblance in the novel: drawing attention also to other literary works which themselves have many 'likes' in common. As Davide says, 'wherever you look you discover a single, common imprint'.

> Shikasta has as its starting point, like many others of the genre, the Old Testament . . . The sacred literatures of all races and nations have many things in common. Almost as if they can be regarded as the products of a single mind. It is possible we make a mistake when we dismiss them as quaint fossils from a dead past . . . sticking to our local tradition and

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36. William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p.466.

37. Doris Lessing, The Sirian Experiments, 'Preface', p.x.

> heritage, it is an exercise not without interest to read the Old Testament - which of course includes the Torah of the Jews - and the Apocrypha, together with any other works of the kind you may come on which have at various times and places been cursed or pronounced non-books; and after that the New Testament, and then the Koran. There are even those who have come to believe that there never has been more than one Book in the Middle East.
>
> SH, 'Some Remarks', pp.x-xi

The minds behind the sacred literatures 'of all races and nations' seem to add up to 'a single mind'; the various books add up to one Book. The implication here is that behind all the varieties of thought and imagination there is another reality which contains all those varieties, an Ur-mind. ('Yes, I do believe that it is possible, and not only for novelists, to "plug in" to an overmind, or Ur-mind, or unconscious, or what you will . . .' 'Some Remarks', Shikasta, p.ix). It is undoubtedly from this source that the various levels that make up Shikasta emanate. In this sense I believe that the novel is a work of 'inspiration'.

The rediscovery of the idea of incarnation is the novel's greatest and most important metaphor. Incarnation allows individual lives a chance to champion various ways of being, and brings to humanity a sense of mission and purpose. We have seen this in Seeley's account of Christ (Chapter III) and in George Eliot's use of incarnation in both Middlemarch and Daniel Deronda (Chapters III and IV), and we have seen in both H. G. Wells's idea of the 'star-begotten' and in Olaf Stapledon's idea of future minds interfering with the past, (prophecy reformulated by relativity?) so that the greatness of Christ is the being of a Last man inside a First man. The creation of a cosmology and imaginative universe which allows incarnation back into modern life as a useful, reminding metaphor, is the primary achievement of Shikasta. Struggling all the time against incarnation is the metaphor of sickness or disease, Milton's fallenness, which undermines the achievements or hope of incarnation, and reduces the transcendent nature of reality to the merely human or sickly Shikastan. The 'degenerative

disease' of the later Shikastans is as much a part of our real condition as anything Canopean. And this is the second achievement of Shikasta, that the human plight which necessitates its creation - our modern state - should be so intimately built in to the imaginative vision which also transcends that plight. It is almost as if telling the truth about life on earth frees Doris Lessing from the human and earthly limitations which have stopped writers getting to the truth in much modern writing. For this reason, because these two metaphors, incarnation and sickness, are not only central to the novel, but also to our real life, I shall discuss most of the novel in their terms.

The fact of incarnation does not simplify life for those Canopeans chosen for duty on Shikasta. Often, it simply means that the struggle to live morally, in alignment with the laws of Canopus, is felt more painfully; not necessarily achieved more successfully. Johor thus reports on John Brent-Oxford, a failing Canopean agent.

> In this corrupt and ghastly age the young man could not avoid having put on him many pressures to leave the path of duty, and it was very early - he was not more than twenty-five years old - that he succumbed. Furthermore, he knew that he was doing something wrong. The young often have moments of clear thinking, which as they grow older become fewer, and muddied.
>
> SH, p.75

Here the cosmology - the notion that there is an intelligence called Canopus which watches over, cares for, and interferes with the Earth - gives Lessing a structure in which she may use those old words of nineteenth-century realism. Resonant, yet out of place or time, they seem to us now: 'This corrupt and ghastly age', 'the path of duty', 'he knew that he was doing something wrong'.

Though the novel's form allows these words back it does not solve the problems of living without them; the Canopean agent born as John Brent-Oxford will, like many others, spend his entire lifetime struggling

with his Canopean memory, the remnant of that absolute perspective that allows Johor to use such morally judgemental words. And it is a fact of our reality that those vague and ideal notions we long for - good and right and truth - can hardly be known to us so long as we live these individual human lives. John Brent-Oxford 'knew that he was doing something wrong' but he cannot, for a variety of reasons to do with his time and his place the particular shape of his individual life, recognize what is wrong, save in brief and fragmented visions. In 'this corrupt and ghastly age' the very word 'wrong' while it jars some chord in our memory, seems out of place. Not knowing what 'wrong' feelings are means also that Brent-Oxford cannot know what 'right' is; thus while the Shikastan-nature in him is satisfied by 'limelight' (SH, p.80) he can only feel joy in dreams of Canopus.

> When at last he did fall asleep, because he could not keep himself awake, I made him dream of us, a band of his fellows, his real companions. He smiled as he slept. He wept, tears soaking his face, as he walked and talked in his dream with us, with himself.
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> SH, p.83

Deeply sensible of his loss, the separation from 'himself', John Brent-Oxford is unable to make any sense of his feeling. Johor's picture of his sleep makes him seem as small and fragile as he really is. Child-like 'he smiled as he slept'; freed against his own will from the prison house of 'his own skull', 'he wept, tears soaking his face', with a joy he will never feel in waking life. By escaping self-conscious individuality, which dwarfs him, Brent-Oxford becomes, for a sleeping moment, what he is capable of being. In this image of the dreaming man, Doris Lessing gives us through Canopus and the metaphor of such costly incarnation, a vision of our real selves; man as great as a god, as vulnerable as a child. At the same time she restores dreams to importance in literature (as Lawrence

does, or as The Lifted Veil does, or as Stapledon's Star Maker does), in a way that many 'realistic' novels could not.[38]

But Oxford also suffers flashes of Canopean truth 'in moments of remorse and panic' (SH, p.83). In Briefing For A Descent Into Hell there were similar feelings for the protagonist Watkins, who felt that 'anxiety' had some 'function'. There is no danger in Oxford's case of the reader questioning the validity of such moments, for we can no longer see such situations as it was possible to do in Briefing For A Descent Into Hell, as merely, finally, individual. The fiction of Shikasta tells us that the issue is much greater than that and concerns us all.

> For long periods of the history of Shikasta we can sum up the real situation thus: that in such and such a place, a few hundred, or even a handful, of individuals were able with immense difficulty to adapt their lives to Canopean requirements, and thus saved the future of Shikasta.
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> SH, p.111

Herself acting as an agent of Canopus, Doris Lessing is attempting to preserve memory by adapting the novel to our 'requirements' while also facing the 'real' situation. This attempt, Shikasta, has much in common with a classic nineteenth-century novel; its imaginative universe creates a structure which gives value and meaning to our real individual and collective lives; it attempts to create a framework in which we may live and act with moral certainty, with a sense of purpose; it dares to make judgements and preserves a language of faith. Without being a nostalgic return to an outmoded form, Shikasta seems to me to be, in many ways, a novelistic return to humanism; the novel offers to us what Middlemarch

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38. In fact, dreams have always been a concern of Doris Lessing's fiction, especially in The Four Gated City, where Martha Quest goes through Jungian analysis. Similarly, they are of value in The Golden Notebook, and Memoirs of A Survivor.

offered the nineteenth century, an act of faith in literature and in life. But where for George Eliot literature of humanist realism was forced to its peak by the fact that there was no God, here, in Lessing's twentieth-century version, God is given back to us. For incarnation, in the novel, of the Canopean agents as Shikastans combines memory and forgetfulness, the present moment and the historical perspective, and makes the word flesh.

The Canopean agents are born on Shikasta as flesh and blood men, as Shikastans. The primary like-ness here is of course that of the life of Christ, but unlike Christ - who always seemed to know why he had come - many of these rebirths carry a high cost. As we have seen in the case of Brent-Oxford, as Shikastan history progresses, and the falling away continues in an accelerating spiral, Canopean memory, self, purpose, is all but forgotten in the taking on of human flesh. The Canopeans are born as more or less ordinary mortals, and their task is correspondingly more difficult, even as it increasingly looks more ordinary. As we watch these Canopeans-as-Shikastans struggling to reclaim lost memories and through such reclamation to understand reality despite the 'mists' of Shikasta, the likenesses they strive to match, match likenesses in ourselves. The story activates lost or forgotten bits of ourselves, acts almost as 'conscience' to the way we have lived. Who does not know that struggle between decency and ambition that John Brent-Oxford suffers for us? We see the same reverberating levels of like-ness in Johor's final account of taking on flesh.

> At that moment it was necessary to collect oneself as at no other time. We had nothing to sustain us but the imprint of the Signature, which would emerge, like a brand on flesh that could show itself only in heat or under pressure. It was as if we had chosen deliberately to obliterate ourselves, trusting to an intangible we had no alternative but to trust.

> We were like those brave souls on Shikasta who, believing that they stand for what is right and just, choose to defy wicked and criminal rulers, in the full knowledge that the penalty will be a deliberate destruction by corrupted doctors of their minds, their familiar understanding of themselves, through drugs, psychological torture, brain damage, physical deprivation. But they trust, within their deepest selves, that they have resources which will sustain them through everything. We were like people jumping from a height into a pit of poisonous shadows, trusting that we would be caught . . .
>
> In a thundering dark we saw lying side by side two clots of fermenting substance, and I slid into one half, giving up my identity for the time, and Ben slid into the other, and lay, two souls throbbing quietly inside rapidly burgeoning flesh. Our minds, our beings, were alert and knowing, but our memories had already slid away, dissolved.
>
> I have to acknowledge - I can do no other - that this is a moment of fearful dismay. Even of panic. The terrible miasmas of Shikasta close around me and I send this report with my last conscious impulse.
>
> <u>SH</u>, p.210

This is a like-ness of the world of the Old Testament; the very beginning of the Judeo-Christian world, the world of Abraham and Isaac. 'It was as if we had chosen to obliterate ourselves, trusting to an intangible we had no alternative but to trust.' Sacrificing the tangible on the altar of 'trust' in the intangible is one of the most ancient of Western religious ideas; here it is the first and essential action of the Canopean 'belief' in Shikasta. The Abraham-action is one clause of the metaphor ('it was as if . . .'). But now the account turns earth-ward, points to a more easily comprehended or remembered, human, action. 'We were like . . .' all the dissidents of the twentieth century, who are connected to Abraham and Canopus not only through the metaphorical listing, (the 'like' and 'as') but also through 'trust': 'they trust, within their deepest selves, that they have resources which will sustain them through everything'. And again the thought is extended, the resemblance continues 'We were like' . . . Once again we were reminded of the world of the Old Testament, 'pit' bringing images of Daniel's trial in the lion's den, and medieval images

of hell. Once again the image begins with a 'like' - a pointing - and the thing pointed at is revealed at the end of the sentence, 'trusting we would be caught'. These 'likes' add up to, perhaps, 'faith' or 'trust'. Johor's account goes on to explain in almost Wordsworthian terms how such a Canopean thing as 'trust' finds echoes in Shikastan living.

> Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting . . .[39]

What for Wordsworth came as 'intimation' is here the imprint of the Signature, the mark of authority and truth which is welded into the very beings or souls of Canopeans. The Signature (an 'intangible') is at least as real, if not more so, than the physical sacrifice incarnation calls for. It is this same Signature in ordinary human souls (the ordinary, clichéd ring of 'those brave souls' - as if we were talking about old age pensioners or something, is quite deliberate) that creates the possibility of endurance of ordinary, terrible, living. It is the same 'trust' on a different level of being.

When the Canopeans have entered the physical bodies of their human existence there is a repetition of this vital word, 'soul'. Johor tells us that he gives up his 'identity' and that 'memories' are also lost or dissolved. But the essence of the beings, the souls, minds, beings remain 'alert and knowing'. And as the 'shades of the prison house begin to close'[40] around the unborn children, that knowledge is of dismay and even 'panic'. At the opening of the novel, and of his account of his involvement with Shikasta, Johor wrote

> dismay has its degrees and qualities. I suggest not all are without uses.
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> SH, p.3.

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39. William Wordsworth, 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood' in William Wordsworth. The Poems, i, p.525.

40. ibid., p.525.

Though there may be use in it - and there is, for it is his dismay that makes Johor fight for the retention of Shikasta by Canopus, even at such a high cost - yet he must still suffer (as in reverse, John Brent-Oxford suffered Canopus) that dismay, live through it, literally, panic with it. Knowing its use does not erase its negative qualities. It is as if at first thought 'dismay', in all its degrees and qualities, is necessarily an empty thing, a minus on the life scale, merely negative, a loss from the optimum of possibility, an unfulfilled potential. But use, function seem, at second thought to in some way redeem that loss. On an immediate (human? individual?) level the word is 'dismay', but on another higher (godlike? planetary?) level the translation is 'use'. Doris Lessing is looking at the problem elucidated by Stapledon's portrait of vast spatial and temporal perspectives, but she goes beyond merely stating the problem of movement between the two extremes. The ability to move between levels or extremes is brought about by this incarnation of metaphor into human reality, the rebirth of the Canopean agents as human beings. For Stapledon it was difficult to come back to earth - almost as hard for Thomas Hardy, because the human seems almost completely removed from those vast perspectives once we are in it.

In a fallen world, the problem of these creatures is to remind themselves, and their fellow creatures of what reality really is, and the problem of fallenness provides ever-increasing problems of communication. Thus, the second central metaphor is that of dis-ease or sickness on earth. The 'sick' Shikastans cannot translate metaphor into reality, Canopus into Shikasta, they have, as part of their sickness, lost the ability to recognise the elusive quality of metaphor, they have become thickly earth-bound, heavy, dogmatic, not human but almost robot-like, unable to catch essences of truth, confined to 'believing' great chunks of dogmatic thought. An

example of the working of the degenerative disease among Shikastans comes, significantly, from Oliver Sacks's book Awakenings: in the search for 'health', Dr. Sacks writes, the patient,

> Ingenuously, and his apothecary and doctor, perhaps disingenuously, together depart from reality, and the basic metaphorical truth is suddenly twisted (and replaced by a fantastic, mechanical corruption or falsehood). The chimerical concept which now takes its place is one of the delusions of vitalism or materialism, the notion that 'health', 'well-being', 'happiness', etc. can be reduced to certain 'factors' or 'elements' - principles, fluids, humours, commodities - things which can be measured and weighed, bought and sold. Health, thus conceived, is reduced to a level, something to be titrated or topped up in a mechanical way. Metaphysics in itself makes no such reductions: its terms are those of organisation or design.[41]

For Canopus the matter is one of 'organisation or design' even when that 'organisation or design' is too complex or subtle for our understanding. There is recognition of this in Johor's opening statements: 'development dreamed of, planned for' . . ., 'the Workforce', 'joy never anything but the song of substance forced under pressure into new forms and shapes' (SH, p.3). And from the following Notes for Guidance of Colonial Servants: 'This planet is above all one of contrasts and contradictions, because of its in-built stresses. Tension is its essential nature. This is its strength. This is its weakness.' (SH, p.5). Johor reports 'The balances of Canopus and her System were suddenly not right . . .' (SH, p.23). Rohanda is Shikasta before the Fall:

> It was Rohanda. She was out of phase, and rapidly worsening. The Lock was weakening. There were shifts in the balances of the forces from inside the body of Rohanda. These answered a shift - and now we had to look outwards, away from Rohanda - in the balances of powers elsewhere, among the stars who were holding us, Canopus, in a web of interacting currents with our colonised planets. Rohanda had felt the wrong alignment first, because it is her nature to be sensitive.
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> SH, p.23

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41. Oliver Sacks, Awakenings (Harmondsworth, 1976), p.49.

Oliver Sacks argues that 'health' cannot be thought of - as modern medicine does think of it - in numerical or merely materialistic terms , we must, he says, 'go to Leibniz, not Bentham, for appropriate terms'.

> The Leibnizian 'optimum' - health - is not a numerical quotient, but an allusion to the greatest fullness of relationship possible in a total world-manifold, the organization with the greatest richness and reality. Diseases, in this sense, depart from the optimum, for their organization or design is impoverished and rigid (although they have frightening strengths of their own). Health is infinite and expansive in mode, and reaches out to be filled with the fullness of the world; whereas disease is finite and reductive in mode, and endeavours to reduce the world to itself. [42]

So it is that the enemies of Canopus - Shammat, Shikastans suffering badly the degenerative disease, the rival empire Sirius, all think of Canopean 'power' in reductive materialist terms; they do not understand or comprehend what health is, for their concept of 'organization or design is impoverished and rigid' and they cannot perceive an organization or design that is anything other. Thus in the time after the fall of the great Cities, Canopus discovers the Shammatan transmitter which is sucking the life from the planet,

> But while I had been unconscious, I had had a dream or vision, and I knew now the secret of the Shammat column. I saw the old Rohanda glowing and lovely, emitting its harmonies, rather as one does in the Planets-to-Scale Room. Between it and Canopus swung the silvery cord of our love. But over it fell a shadow, and this was a hideous face, pock-marked and pallid, with staring glaucous eyes. Hands like mouths went out to grasp and grab, and at their touch the planet shivered and its note changed. The hands tore out pieces of the planet and crammed the mouth which sucked and gobbled and never had enough. Then this eating thing faded into the half-visible jet of the transmitter, which drew off the goodness

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42. Oliver Sacks, Awakenings, p.272. Another example of this can be seen in William Morris's News From Nowhere (London, 1979), where Morris describes a similar downward spiral; the production of marvellous machines to produce rubbish,

> There was one class of goods which they did make thoroughly well, and that was the class of machines which were used for making things. These were usually quite perfect pieces of workmanship, admirably adapted to the end in view. So that it may be fairly said that the great achievement of the nineteenth century was the making of machines which were wonders of invention, skill, and patience, and which were used for the production of measureless quantities of worthless make-shifts. (p.82)

> and the strength, and then, as this column in its turn dissolved, I leaned forward in my dream, frantic to learn what it all meant, could mean . . . I saw that the inhabitants of Shikasta had changed, had become of the same nature as the hungry jetting column: Shammat had fixed itself into the nature of the Shikastan breed and it was they who were now the transmitter, feeding Shammat.
>
> SH, pp.67-68

Trying to explain this metaphysical reality to the 'sick' Shikastans, trying to tell them the very nature of their diseased selves, Canopus has to tell by analogy, by story, making the metaphysical into an almost physical reality:

> What I told these Shikastans was this . . .
>
> . . . Canopus was able to feed Shikasta with a rich and vigorous air, which kept everyone safe and healthy, and above all made them love each other. But because of an accident, this substance-of-life could not reach here as it had, could reach this place only in pitifully small quantities. This supply of finer air had a name. It was called SOWF - the substance-of-we-feeling - I had of course spent time and effort on working out an easily memorable syllable. The little trickle of SOWF that reached this place was the most precious thing they had, and would keep them from falling back to animal level. I said there was a gulf between them and the other animals of Shikasta, and what made them higher was their knowledge of SOWF. SOWF would protect and preserve them. They must reverence SOWF.
>
> SH, p.73

What is 'told' or understood in the Canopean dream has to become 'story' for the Shikastans. But in their degenerate state they cannot simply receive the 'truth' as Johor understands it, for this is too terrible, unacceptable: 'Shammat had fixed itself into the nature of the Shikastan breed and it was they who were now the transmitter, feeding Shammat'. And in telling the 'story', Johor has to turn this truth around. Instead of being the source of something now lost, Shikastans are the receivers of something that Canopus can no longer 'give' them; instead of being the now lost 'good' in their own 'nature', the problem is with the 'finer air' sent by Canopus now in 'pitifully small quantities'. These fallen creatures are so sick that they would not even recognise that the 'finer

air' originally lay with themselves, that their relation with Canopus was a bond which had two sides, not simply a receiving one. Inability to understand their own potential and power is a symptom of the sickness which does not go away: the invalid increasingly thinks of himself as invalid as a humanly self-responsible creature.

Thus, discussing the 'major religions of the last days' the Canopean archivists note,

> The early stages of attraction to Canopean influences were always seen as everything _was_ seen on Shikasta by then: something given, bestowed.
>
> For Duty, in that last time, was all but forgotten. What duty was, was not known. That something was Due, by them, was strange, inconceivable news they could not take in, absorb. They were set only for taking. Or being given. They were all open mouths and hands held out for gifts - Shammat! All grab and grasp - Shammat! Shammat!
>
> _SH_, p.112

This weakening of the already existing strengths of character is a part of the sickness, the wearing away of the real (or potentially real) self is seen by Sacks as a part of the entire and whole structure of disease. So that,

> return-to-oneself, resipiscence, 'rebirth', is an infinitely dramatic and moving event, especially in a patient with a rich and full self, who has been _dispossessed_ by disease for years or decades . . . Furthermore, it shows us, with wonderful clarity, the dynamic relation of sickness to health, of a 'false self' to the real self, of a disease world to an optimum-world. The automatic return of real being and health, _pari passu_ with the drainage of disease, shows that disease is not a thing-in-itself, but parasitic on health and life and reality: an ontological ghoul, living on and consuming the grounds of the real self . . . it shows the dynamic and implacable nature of our 'internal militia'; how opposed forms of being fight to possess us, to dispossess each other, and to perpetuate themselves.[43]

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43. Oliver Sacks, _Awakenings_, p.276. He continues:

> That a return to health or resipiscence is _possible_, in these patients with half a century of the profoundest illness, must fill one with a sense of amazement - that the potential for health and self can _survive_, after so much of the life and structure of the person has been lost, and after so long and exclusive an immersion in sickness. This also is of major importance, not only therapeutically, but theoretically as well

Similarly on Shikasta, the Degenerative Disease, the effect of Shammat, of evil, does not exist as a 'thing in itself' but as a parasite 'parasitic on health, and life and reality'. It is to this eating away of 'reality' that I now wish to turn.

3. The Realism of Shikasta

In what sense is Shikasta a realist novel? It seems the question must be asked. Behind it, of course, is a bigger question: what is realism? Two sorts of things, I suppose come to mind when the word is mentioned. The realism of the Victorian period, commonly best recognised in George Eliot, Mrs. Gaskell, the Brontes, but not in Dickens, is one sort of realism. And the social realism of, let's say, Alan Sillitoe or Stan Barstow is another. But to speak like this is to speak of genre, and when I speak of realism, that is not the sense in which I understand the word, as I hope to have begun to show in the discussion of fantasy and reality in Chapter IX. Under conventional guidelines it is simply not possible to call Shikasta a realist novel. But the central argument of my thesis has been that there is a deeper realism - overriding genre - which is not dependent on style. It rests on a belief that there are real truths about life which are not immediately apparent in real life. I have argued that at the very height of the success of Victorian realism, George Eliot's Middlemarch, authors began to be aware that there were truths which could not be told simply by realism; something else had to be added to life, and that something was vision. We have seen how this desire to be more truthful, more realistic about life led Mrs. Oliphant, for one to leave 'realism' altogether, in A Beleaguered City, and return to an older genre, myth, which seemed to hold more possibility. True or untrue, for example, the Old Testament stories portray a reality for us, which realistic accounts of

the history of the Judaic peoples simply could not. It would not be possible to tell the whole story and leave God out of it, for that God, and the Jewish attitude to God shapes the entire story. The case is still the same today. Just as Saul Bellow has said that there's no point in talking about the transcendent in terms other than those of life experience, so it also follows that to talk of life without that extra dimension is to talk of a truncated bit of human experience. This issue has been clouded by the fact that we have _lived_ in this truncated manner for at least a hundred years, and so no longer recognise it as truncated; to us, by and large, it is reality, because it is what we are used to.

To me, this also is the marvel of _Shikasta_, an immense achievement, hardly conceivable; it changes the way we must view 'reality'. There is a moment in Lawrence's _Women in Love_ after their quarrel in 'Excurse' when for Birkin and Ursula 'everything had become simple again, quite simple, the complexity had gone into nowhere'.[44] This is often how _Shikasta_ strikes me, making everything simple again, by remembering why we see 'things' as they are, why we have certain traditions, what lies behind everything. In the modern world we have become over-committed to complexity, out of a sense of duty to truth. But truth often is simple; it is the conditions and disclaimers which surround it which make things difficult. Mrs. Oliphant wrote that many things could be simple if we would accept the church's word for it, as if it were the modern refusal of faith which caused complications, not life itself. In a sense, _Shikasta_, follows Mrs. Oliphant's lead, making things simple and clear by insisting on the transcendent nature of reality as the ground of human life. We are no longer responsible for making up stories to account for everything. There is something beyond us, of which Shikasta shows us to be a small part. Modern writing had lost sight of, precisely because they have been, by

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44. D. H. Lawrence, _Women in Love_, p.392.

and large, secular writings, portraits of ordinary human life, as if there were no other. Lawrence is of course the great exception to this realist tradition, in that his vision did recreate a new and saving reality. A discovery of Sacks in his treatment and research into post-encephalitic patients underlines Lawrence's instinctive knowledge:

> 'Deep' accommodation, rest, care, ingenuity - all of these are essential for the patient on L-DOPA. But more important than all of them, and perhaps a prerequisite for all of them, is the establishment of proper relations with the world, and - in particular - with other human beings, or one other human being, for it is human relations which carry the possibilities of proper being-in-the-world. Feeling the fullness of another person, as a person; reality is given to us by the reality of people; reality is taken from us by the unreality of unpeople; our sense of reality, of trust, of security, is critically dependent on a human relation. A single good relation is a life-line in trouble, a pole-star and compass in the ocean of trouble: and we see, again and again, in the histories of these patients how a single relation can extricate them from trouble. Kinship is healing; we are physicians to each other - 'A faithful friend is the physic of life' (Browne).[45]

At another point, Sachs quotes Lawrence (in fact several times) 'Awakening . . . the patient ceases to feel the presence of illness and the absence of the world, and comes to feel the absence of his illness and the full presence of the world. He becomes (in D. H. Lawrence's words) 'a man in his wholeness wholly attending'.[46]

Since Lawrence understood more clearly than other realist writers that 'it is human relations which carry the possibilities of proper being-in-the-world', he found a clear way through to 'visionary realism', a realism capable of expressing unspoken and often unrecognised or previously unknown truths.

Doris Lessing, herself actively looking for new truths, saw a similar process (if not effect) going on in the world of Science Fiction.

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45. Oliver Sacks, Awakenings, p.325.

46. ibid., p.282. Lawrence's poem 'Thought' can be found in The Complete Poems of D. H. Lawrence (2 vols, London, 1964), ii, p.673.

> What a phenomenon it has been - science fiction, space fiction - exploding out of nowhere, unexpectedly of course, as always happens when the human mind is forced to expand: this time starwards, galaxy-wise, and who knows where next. These dazzlers have mapped our world, or worlds, for us, have told us what is going on and in ways no one else has done, have described our nasty present long ago, when it was still in the future and the official scientific spokesmen were saying that all manner of things now happening were impossible - who have played the indispensible and (at least at the start) thankless role of the despised illegitimate son who can afford to tell truths the respectable siblings either do not dare, or more likely, do not notice because of their respectability.
>
> SH, 'Some Remarks', p.x.

Realism becomes a form which may enlarge reality by making us see things we didn't see before: this service Thomas Hardy performs for a George Eliot, Lawrence for Hardy. So Stapledon's great vision of size and time adds to the diminished post-war perspective of despair. So Doris Lessing has brought back the stories that social realism could not tell, stories of the human relation to the greater world and to the universe; stories of wrong and right, the fall, grace and salvation.

In a review of Notebooks/Memoirs/Archives, a critical work on Doris Lessing, edited by Jenny Taylor,[47] Valerie Shaw, writing in the TLS of 7 January, 1983, remarks that,

> Collectively, as well as individually, these essays leave a strong impression of the constraints within Lessing's career has developed, and also of something oppressive about her didacticism, which is shown to be at odds with her increasing experimentation with open forms like science fiction.

I want to look for a moment at what this criticism implies. We have on the one hand 'oppressive . . . didacticism' and on the other, at 'odds', 'increasing experimentation' and 'open forms like science fiction'. Doris Lessing and Valerie Shaw have one point in common: they both believe that SF is an 'open form', if 'open' is taken to mean 'open' to new ideas - or even to old ones for that matter. Dr. Shaw recognises that Doris Lessing

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47. Notebooks/Memoirs/Archives, edited by Jenny Taylor (London, 1983).

has tended to an 'increasing experimentation' with 'open forms', yet she senses 'at odds' with this openness, 'didacticism'; moral instruction, to which all other considerations (aesthetic) are subjugated.

Now it seems to me that Doris Lessing's achievement here is the ability to make 'moral' statements. For what is the point of an 'open form' which has nothing to say? J. G. Ballard's Empire of the Sun (London, 1985) is a realist novel which has come after Ballard's long service with 'open forms' in his Science Fiction novels. It seems to me a splendid novel, which Ballard was simply not writer enough to do properly, precisely because of his abdication of moral responsibility as the writer of the novel. In the hands of a greater writer such a story would become something like, something on the scale of, War and Peace. But perhaps the very experience the story tells is the one that cripplingly prevented Ballard from being able to become that sort of writer? Perhaps this is like the problems of Modernism writ large, as it were, in one man's writing life?

In realism it is too hard on human beings to talk of evil, badness, sin; in modern terms these terms from other times leave us speechless, we have no translations. And having no way to speak of or think of these realities, we forget them. Iris Murdoch takes on this problem in The Nice and The Good, where a sort of 'modern' people attempt to live without those old words in a world which still does contain the reality of 'evil'; yet it is smaller, meaner evil always than the word seems to imply; Radeechy's dabbling with black magic seems stupid and childish, yet 'Radeechy was dead, and were not the powers of evil genuine enough which had led him to two acts of violence?'.[48] Ducane, who comes as close to being 'good' as seems possible, understands that real evil is both greater and yet apparently smaller than any black art or evil spirit.

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48. Iris Murdoch, The Nice and The Good (London, 1985), p.322.

> The great evil, the dreadful evil, that which made war and slavery and all man's inhumanity to man lay in the cool self justifying ruthless selfishness of quite ordinary people, such as Biranne, and himself.[49]

Ducane comes to understand this, but it is an entirely private knowledge, and there is nothing external to human beings, no other order, which Iris Murdoch can see as backing up such a view, which might be - and is seen to be, by say Kate and Octavian, idiosyncracy. There is no means of talking about or sharing such knowledge. And this is why belief in evil - as belief in good? - falls away. Rachel Sherban writes in her diary in Shikasta 'I read that the cleverest trick of the Devil is that nobody believes in him. It. Her. Well, we have been very stupid.' (SH, p.290). Because we cease to believe, or because we lose faith in the words or metaphors, it does not mean that the nature of reality also changes. But in the closed, forgetting world, the sense of something 'due' becomes ridiculous - 'didactic'.

> What Duty was, was not known. That something was Due, by them, was strange, inconceivable news they could not take in, absorb.
>
> SH, p.112.

To a readership increasingly wanting not only open forms but also open meanings (the infinite meanings of any given text) which can really only have one meaning: no meaning, certainty, and recognition of certainty, will seem 'oppressive' (cruel, harsh, tyrannical, heavy, constricting or depressing), a typically degenerate response:

> Again, it was David I decided to take with me. To say that he understood what went on was true. To say that he did not understand - was true. I would sit and explain, over and over again. He listened, his eyes fixed on my face, his lips moving as he repeated to himself what I was saying. He would nod; yes, he had grasped it! But a few minutes later, when I

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49. Iris Murdoch, The Nice and The Good, p.323.

> might be saying something of the same kind, he was uncomfortable, threatened. Why was I saying that? and that? his troubled eyes asked of my face: what did I mean? His questions at such moments were as if I had never taught him anything at all. He was like one drugged or in shock. Yet it seemed he did absorb information, for sometimes he would talk as if from a basis of shared knowledge: it was if a part of him knew and remembered all I told him, but other parts had not heard a word.
>
> SH, p.57

And this typically human response - we remember and then we forget - makes us, in the face of one who is constant (true) 'uncomfortable, threatened'. Thus John Brent-Oxford is made uncomfortable to the point of madness by his real self, his 'Canopean' memory. Thus George Sherban provokes emotions of jealousy and rage in his sister Rachel, who writes,

> Meanwhile he is a star figure in the local youth movements. And it makes me sick. Benjamin says George needs to show off. Well, that is of course what I cannot help thinking. But in my experience what Benjamin thinks is nearly always wrong. It comes out his being jealous. Like me. At least I know that I am jealous and Benjamin doesn't seem to.
>
> SH, p.255

Rachel has an advantage in recognising her jealousy, though she never conquers it, and in the end it kills her. Her recognition of the state she is in is no substitute for getting out of it, which would mean a gaining of lost memory, a knowledge and certainty about what George was doing, what the purpose and task was.

Doris Lessing knows that we have at least half forgotten the realities, that they disturb us when they come back, and that they threaten us, and make us threatening and angry. A reminder of morality, of natural authority, of reality, becomes for many readers and reviewers 'oppressive' and 'didactic'. This is why so many people find Lawrence similarly oppressive, similarly didactic. Too strong a medicine for our partially working selves. This is the same self-destructive, weakening partiality discussed by Alisdair MacIntyre when he asks us to suppose, in his 'Disquieting Suggestion' that

public opinion turns against the natural sciences, so that

> widespread riots occur, laboratories are burnt down, physicists are lynched, books and instruments are destroyed. Finally a know-nothing political movement takes power and successfully abolishes science teaching in schools and universities . . . Later still there is a reaction against this destructive movement and enlightened people seek to revive science, although they have largely forgotten what it was.[50]

MacIntyre postulates a world where a body of knowledge is constructed out of 'instruments whose use has been forgotten: half chapters from books, single pages from articles . . .' where 'children learn by heart the surviving portions of the periodic table and recite as incantations some of the theorems of Euclid'.[51]

> This imaginary world is very like one that some science fiction writers have constructed. We may describe it as a world in which the language of natural science, or parts of it at least, continues to be used but is in a grave state of disorder . . . The hypothesis which I wish to advance is that in the actual world which we inhabit the language of morality is in the same state of grave disorder as the language of natural science in the imaginary world which I described.[52]

So Canopus hears its own words told back to it by Shikasta, partial, deformed, reduced, but the best that our world can manage.

> David had that look on him which was so familiar by now, a sullenness, as if he were being asked for too much. Then he turned his eyes away and pretended to be watching a bird on a branch.
>
> Sais was looking at me attentively.
>
> 'What do you know of Canopus?' I asked.
>
> She said that Canopus was an angry man, and he did not want anyone to dance where there were stones. He did not want hunting bands to kill more than they needed for meat. He did not want . . .

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50. Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue, a study of moral theory (London, 1981), p.1.

51. ibid., p.1.

52. ibid., p.2. Such a world may be found in Christopher Priest's Inverted World (London, 1975), where what at first appears to be a complete - if strange - world is gradually understood by the reader to be no more than a rather large, self-sufficient porta-cabin, travelling aimlessly in a post-Holocaust Europe. The inhabitants finally realise their own limitations when they came up against the Atlantic ocean, a 'river' they can find no means of crossing. They are forced to stay still and join in the rest of the world's life.

> Well, she got through it, and I decided to concentrate on her. As we walked, I drilled her and I drilled her, and David her father ambled on, sometimes singing to amuse himself, for we bored him in our intensity, or sometimes listening, and chiming in with a phrase or two: 'Canopus doesn't want . . .'
>
> SH, p.63

What seems to be 'didacticism' ('I drilled her and I drilled her . . . we bored him in our intensity') might, from another perspective be an attempt to reclaim a very buried, an almost lost, forgotten truth. But more necessary is the attempt to reach back to find the whole that the fragments ('Canopus doesn't want . . .') come from, refer back to. For these partialities in themselves, are not the 'truth'. This is Lessing's task, attempted in this novel by means of cultural echoes. Without the whole picture, no prescription will cure.

Before Shikasta, in Doris Lessing's fiction, form had been conditioned by the ordering of events into patterns of meaning, either by the author herself (as in the earliest novels and stories) or by a character (such as Anna in The Golden Notebook, Watkins in Briefing For A Descent Into Hell, or the nameless narrator in Memoirs of A Survivor). Order is now created by the absolute Canopean historical perspective, made relative by that which it seeks to order, the complexity of the Shikastan experience. The novel-report of the Archivists has the scope to describe human life both as it is experienced and as it can be seen from above (in Johor's earlier incarnations and in the notes of the archivists themselves). The use of the Science Fiction mode provides the imaginative framework in which such a form may operate, the 'cosmology . . . for literary purposes'.[53]

The form of the novel creates a moral structure; the Canopeans, unlike modern human writers, are not afraid to use the great old words, like good and bad and duty. At the same time we benefit from Doris Lessing's

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53. Doris Lessing, The Sirian Experiments, 'Preface', p.ix.

ability to use the detail of realistic human life as a modifier for such a stern morality. From on high humanity may look like a 'totally crazed species' (SH, p.90) but from ground level Shikasta presents a clear view of the equally real limitations within which we operate. The novel insists on human responsibility for actions, and so, as the astronaut Collins hoped, the trip into space is really a means of making earth more real to us. As Shikastans ourselves, living in our 'twilight of grief' (SH, p.7), we might well welcome an expedition out, off-planet, simply as relief. But it is no accident that the Science Fiction genre has been able to 'tell truths' (SH, 'Some Remarks', p.x) about life; it is the imagination which transforms what might otherwise be didacticism into art, and in the twentieth century, Space has become the province of our imaginations. From out there human affairs fall into a very clear historical perspective, which Doris Lessing then directs back to us, to use in real life on earth.

In Shikasta, form and the author's didactic purpose are as one: Doris Lessing's 'experiment' leads her to create a character, Johor, whose purpose in the scheme of the novel is to teach, to instruct. At the beginning of his relation to the planet he teaches simple rules, Canopus's commandments, and 'practical arts':

> I taught them - or retaught them - gardening and husbandry. I taught them to tame a goatlike creature, which could give them milk, and I demonstrated butter and cheese-making. I taught them how to choose plants for their fibres, and to prepare the fibres and weave them, and to dye them. I showed them how to make bricks from the earth and fire them . . .
>
> . . . I laid the Signature on the earth between us and I got them used to the idea of listening to instruction. After some days of this, while others had seen us, and some had stood listening a little way off, wondering, and even interested, I asked that all of the people of the settlement, who were not actually hunting or on guard, or in some way attending to the maintenance of the tribe - for now one had to call them that - should sit with us, every day, for an hour or so and listen. They must learn to listen again, to understand that in this way they could gain information . . .
>
> SH, pp.70-72.

Later, in the time of the Last Days, Canopus floods Shikasta with a whole series of Envoys and Emissaries, Warners, Public Cautioners, as this teaching becomes increasingly difficult.

> Whereas, the early days of the post-disaster time, it had sometimes been enough for one of us to enter a village, a settlement, and sit down and talk to them of their past, of what they had been, of what they would one day become, but only through their own efforts and diligence - that they had dues to pay to Canopus who had bred them, would sustain them through their long dark time, was protecting them against Shammat, that they had in them a substance not Shikastan, and which would one day redeem them - told this, it was often enough, and they would set themsleves to adapt to the current necessities.
>
> But this became less and less what we could expect. Towards the end one of our agents would begin work knowing that it might take not a day, or a month, or a year, but perhaps all his life to stabilise a few individuals, so that they could listen.
>
> SH, pp.112-113.

Johor born as George Sherban thus has to give his life 'to stabilise a few individuals', and so 'teaching' and a life as vocation are given new meaning. At the end of the novel, George's adopted child, Kassim Sherban writes;

> George says he is going into Europe with a team.
> He says that you knew he would be going, but not that he would be going now, and that I should tell you that when his task in Europe is finished, his work will be finished. I did not understand until he had left that it meant he would die then and we would not see him again.
>
> SH, pp.363-364

Thus in the Last Days, the life and the work become as one - it is through living that one's individual purpose, function, use emerges. Through the example of George Sherban's life (given in the second half of the novel, beginning with Rachel Sherban's Diary) we learn of Johor's purpose and task. I am reminded of the importance of Lives, thinking of Troyat's Tolstoi, or this extract from Lionel Trilling's introduction to Ernest Jones's Life and Work of Sigmund Freud;

> The basic history of psycho-analysis is the account of how it grew in Freud's own mind, for Freud developed its concepts all by himself . . . the narrative of Freud's life, of the intellectual difficulties he met and overcame, gives us a more intimate sense of the actuality of the psycho-analytical concepts than we can derive from the study of them as systematic doctrine . . . the appeal of Freud's life is to an older preference, to an aesthetic of biography which is best satisfied when the life and work are in accord with each other . . . [54]

Perhaps this ability to remind us of the importance and value and use of personal being is the greatest of the marvels of Shikasta, for it returns value to our lives, as part of life not as an added (or lost) extreme.

In The Sirian Experiments this project begun with the creation of Johor, the examination of the teacher and the teaching process, is given prime importance; it is a novel of education, of intellectual, moral, and spiritual journey. The Sirian Experiments is in one sense less realistic than Shikasta; it does not deal with human beings, with earth life as Shikasta does. But in the sense in which I have used the word realism it is more realistic, since we discover the metaphor at work in the life of Ambien. If Shikasta could be accused of using lives as examples, as case-histories, The Sirian Experiments goes on to show why such a use is both necessary and justified.

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54. Ernest Jones, The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud, edited and abridged by Lionel Trilling and Steven Marcus (Harmondsworth, 1974), pp.12-13.

Chapter XI

LEARNING FROM THE SIRIAN EXPERIMENTS

1. Knowledge which comes through experience

The Sirian Experiments is a modern novel of education, which teaches its readers as its protagonist learns. It has two well-established religious teaching forms behind it; the Christian form of the 'life', the exemplary biography of the soul (as Dorothea's story in Middlemarch might be said to be a latter-day saint's life), which includes in this case an account of the experience of conversion; and the Sufi 'teaching story', which often involves the necessity to solve a riddle or conundrum. The fusion of these two influences takes place in Ambien II's experience, which is both the 'life' and also the riddle she has to understand in a new manner.

Doris Lessing's interest in the life-story has been apparent since the earliest days of her writing, and most noticeable in the Martha Quest 'life' - the novel sequence The Children of Violence, which over the course of five novels details the entire life of Martha Quest. Again, in Memoirs of a Survivor and Briefing For A Descent Into Hell there is a strong inclination to try to see a human life as a whole thing in itself, which says something beyond the mere sum of its parts, as if a life added up to something beyond the separate experiences that made it. It is as if life stood for something beyond itself, a metaphor for something else. Perhaps this is connected to F. H. Bradley's thought that to account for a man, adding him up like a sum, destroyed him. This is because a man would want to be more than the sum of the parts, more than could be explained away. We all might want to think 'There's more to me than that'. In Shikasta this kind of belief in the metaphysical importance of individual life

stories was made explicit by the extended metaphor of Canopean incarnation: The Sirian Experiments continues to amplify this interest in the function of the individual life, while trying to place it in a larger context. In Shikasta human lives were often taken as examples of the state of affairs of the planet; all those 'case histories' concerning human types, for example, would be used by Canopus as evidence of the Degenerative Disease. But this isn't a very useful way for us to think about our own lives most of the time however useful it is to be reminded that our overwhelming sense of individuality can be a self-deception. The Sirian Experiments does what Shikasta does not, it takes an individual life and examines it minutely; and this life is not the life - as George Sherban's is - of the Canopean, but rather the person upon whom the Canopean influence is working.

I said at the end of the last chapter that while superficially less realistic, The Sirian Experiments was in fact more realistic than Shikasta; that the deeper realism I have been interested in in this essay rests on a belief that there are real truths about life which are not immediately apparent in real life; that bringing metaphysical vision to real life recreates the religious nature of life and prevents it seeming a merely secular, merely human, merely physical existence. The reason that The Sirian Experiments is more realistic, in this sense, is that it teaches more straightforwardly these unapparent realities. The story of Ambien II's conversion is the story of an increase in real vision. And while Ambien II learns from experience, so does the reader. Thus Doris Lessing makes use of (or finds the function of) the things her protagonist experiences as problems, things that for us, living, can seem to add to life's strange confusion.

> It has always seemed to me that this question of 'hindsight' is not to be solved!

> What I see now, looking back, is not what I experienced then, but are we to cancel out former, and more immature, ways of viewing things? As if they did not matter, <u>had no effect</u>? - but of course not.
>
> <u>SE</u>, p.57

In life, such consciousness is puzzling, because we have always to live with what currently seems to be the best knowledge which in reality is as partial and makeshift in its way as those earlier, 'more immature, ways of viewing things'. Such thoughts as these would often be put to one side, too difficult or useless for us to make much of. But here, in this retrospective 'life' we can experience the 'then' and the 'now' together; the formative experience is given, and the formed Ambien's comment on it. This is particularly evident at the opening of the novel, when for example, describing a conference, she tells us,

> It was considered a success. Remarkably so . . . everybody taking part in it felt that it marked a new level in co-operation . . .
>
> <u>SE</u>, p.7

But she goes on, speaking as the person in part formed by this very experience,

> I am now going to say, with equal emphasis and confidence, that the conference was a failure.
>
> <u>SE</u>, p.8

Of course it is only the 'now' part of the mind, the part that has - in the meanwhile - been formed by experience, that can see the experience as 'a failure'. It is intrinsically part of the learning process that the mind, in a sense, should be changed. This, the disparity between now and then, time bringing change of mind and ideas, is one of the main concerns of the novel. Why is it that simple experience alone is not enough to teach us? For the initial experience is neither the truth, nor totally false: 'what I see now, looking back, is not what I experienced then'. A means of reconciling these apparently opposed thoughts comes

from the Sufi tradition, and it is from this tradition or way of thought that Doris Lessing draws as the experience or life of Ambien II is unfolded.

Earlier in her writing career Doris Lessing had explicitly drawn attention to her connection with this way of thought, particularly by the use of quotations from Sufi texts as epigraphs in the latter novels of the Children of Violence series. She quotes, for example, a story of Mulla Nasrudin at the opening of the fourth novel, Landlocked (London, 1967)[1] and the Sage Mahmoud Shabistari of the fourteenth century at the opening of Briefing For A Descent Into Hell.[2] At the time of writing the Canopus series, the Sufi influence while still strong, was much less publicly acknowledged. This too is Sufi 'policy'.[3] Yet the story 'Nothing For Man' which explains how Sufi teaching works, also gives us insight into the way Ambien II learns from her experience.

> The superior experience and knowledge will be made available to a man or woman in exact accordance with his worth, capacity and earning of it. Hence, if a donkey sees a melon he will eat its rind; ants will eat whatever they can get hold of; man will consume without knowing that he has consumed.

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1. The Mulla walked into a shop one day. The owner came forward to serve him. 'First things first,' said Nasrudin; 'did you see me walk into your shop?' 'Of course.' 'Have you ever seen me before?' 'Never in my life.' 'Then how do you know it's me?'

2. If yonder raindrop should its heart disclose,
Behold therein a hundred seas displayed.
In every atom, if thou gaze aright,
Thousands of reasoning beings are contained.
The gnat in limbs doth match the elephant.
In name is yonder drop as Nile's broad flood,
In every grain a thousand harvests dwell.
The world within a grain of millet's heart.
The universe in the mosquito's wing contained.
Within that point in space the heavens roll.
Upon one little spot within the heart.
Resteth the Lord and Master of the Worlds.
Therein two worlds commingled may be seen (The Secret Garden)

3. I think this is because to speak about Sufism is to detract from the reality that Sufism is about. You could get caught up in discussion

> Our objective is to achieve, by the understanding of the Origin, the Knowledge which comes through experience.
>
> This is done, as with a journey, only with those who already know the Way.
>
> The justice of this state is the greatest justice of all: because, while this knowledge cannot be withheld from him who deserves it, it cannot be given to him who does not deserve it.
>
> It is the only substance with a discriminating faculty of its own, inherent justice.[4]

The story suggests that the teaching teaches itself, and has its own laws: 'while this knowledge cannot be withheld from him who deserves it, it cannot be given to him who does not deserve it.' The story also suggests that humanity does not necessarily learn from experience just because experience is had, thus 'man will consume without knowing that he has consumed'. Though Sufi teaching is by and large experiential[5] yet experience by itself, without, as the tale says, 'knowledge of the Origin', is of no use. Though what is understood in Sufi circles by 'the Origin' remains mysterious, I think, in this context, it must be to do with where human souls belong; where they come from and why, and what they are for. Without such knowledge, experience cannot be interpreted.

Ambien II certainly has to learn about the purposes, uses, functions, necessities of life in the universe before she can begin to understand her own experience in terms anything other than the very mundane terms of that experience. That it to say, before she can begin to see things as Canopus sees them, she has to begin to learn what Canopus is. One of the ways Ambien learns is by observing other creatures in their

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that would sidetrack you from the reality. When I met Doris Lessing in 1984 she specifically said she would not talk about or answer questions on Sufism in public, though she was perfectly happy to talk about anything else. Her view was that if you call it 'religious' people automatically stop listening: if you say it's Science Fiction or a novel, people can and do take it in.

4. Idries Shah, Wisdom of the Idiots (London, 1969), p.27.

5. For an account of experiential teaching see Idries Shah, Learning How to Learn (London, 1978).

relation to Canopus, and one of the first things she undersatnds is that 'tales' are one of the means of bearing knowledge which isn't available in ordinary life. Ambien observes this phenomena when she sees the Lombis:

> None of them remembered, as individuals, their capture from their home planet and subsequent events. But they remembered as a race: this was the most important change: their speech had evolved. Not over the business of the day-to-day maintenance of life, but in this one direction; they had songs, and tales, that instructed them in all their history.
>
> SE, p.29

Tales and songs - as in Shikasta - seem to exist in order to retain some truths or memories that individual memory might have forgotten. Certainly this is how the Sufi teaching stories (and the Old Testament bible stories? And fairy tales?) work, by reminding the individual reader or listener of cult-knowledge, of racial memory. The understanding of the 'origin' is the key to translating present day experience, one's own individual life-time, into something greater than it. We see this very process in the life of Ambien II.

Ambien II writes a retrospective account of a process only clearly visible when completed. The learning process conditions the form of the novel - the life shapes the work - so that various encounters and episodes teach Ambien, and as she recounts her experience we learn from it. Experience uninformed by knowledge ('what I experienced then') is not always reliable as 'truth' but it is or can be useful, because as Ambien says, it has an 'effect'. 'Former and more immature ways of viewing things' do matter, because we learn by putting 'then' and 'now' together. Ambien tells stories of what she did, thought, understood, 'then' in the light of what she believes 'now'. Hindsight changes her view of the past, thus she finds herself at odds with her people, who still have the same view.

> In my view the duty of a historian is to tell the truth as far as possible . . . For far too long our historians refused to accept the simple truth . . .
>
> SE, p.5

> I have learned that there are different ways of looking at things . . .
>
> SE, p.6

> . . . This report of mine is an attempt at a re-interpretation of history, from a certain point of view.
>
> SE, p.8

Ambien's movement towards knowledge begins as a vague inclination towards the whole of Canopus, and partly particularly to Klorathy, a Canopean administrator.

> There was something about Canopus itself that . . . is the word attracted me? No. Obsessed? No, there was too much else in my life to allow a one-sided preoccupation. I felt about Canopus that inward, brooding questioning, wondering, that one may sometimes feel about a person whose sources of action, of being, seem distant and other - as if understanding this being may open doors in oneself whose existence one does not do more than suspect. Yet they are there . . . one knows it . . . one cannot - may not - open them . . . but other people have opened similar doors in themselves . . . they operate on altogether different - higher - levels of themselves . . . if one understood how, one could come close not only to them but to that area of oneself that matches their higher otherness . . . so one broods, ponders, questions, sometimes for long ages, about some individual who - one is convinced - is only part-glimpsed, certainly only part-understood.
>
> SE, p.66

It is indeed 'that area of oneself that matches their higher otherness' that inclines Ambien towards Canopus, her 'Canopean' self, as she will later come to think of it. But the inclination is not simply in one direction. For all that is 'Sirian' in Ambien is fighting against the inclination to attraction.

> I had not really, before actually meeting Klorathy, stopped to consider the effect if would have on our being together, that I could not say anything about what was so strongly in my mind then - the horrible new race, or stock of beast-men on isolated S.C.II. We had not told Canopus that we had had visits from

> Shammat, or that we had stolen without telling them some of 'their' Natives, or that C.P 22 technicians had escaped with some Lombis and had settled not far from here, or that we had so often and so thoroughly conducted espionage in their territories, or that Shammat had done the same . . . it seemed to me, sitting there in that delightful picnic spot, as if instead of being open and generously available to this new friend, as one has to be in friendship, my mind had bars around it: keep off, keep off . . . and there were moments when I could hardly bear to look into that open and unsuspicious countenance. And yet I have to record that I was also feeling something like: you think you are so clever, you Canopeans, but you have no idea what's in my mind, for all that!
>
> SE, p.69

The terrible list of Sirian 'mistakes' and mismanagements and accidents reads like an indictment of their stupidity and their crudity. Stealing, lying, spying, deceiving: Ambien cannot open her self to Canopus to reveal all this; and this, Sirian nature, is preventing her from coming into close contact with Canopus. Only if she were to give up her allegiance to Sirius could she be 'open' - in confession, as it were, of sin. So it is that she must remain closed, and then, on account of those bars and the 'keep off!' signs, she must also lose her chance, at this point, of finding the very means of saving herself. That is why she can 'hardly bear to look into that open and unsuspicious countenance'. She is ashamed. Her later self is bound to record another, less flattering emotion, pride. Though her mind seems almost like a cess-pool at this moment, with its shameful and unshareable thoughts, still she must console herself with the idea that it is her own, unpenetrated by the superior Canopean 'You think you are so clever, you Canopeans, but you have no idea what's in mind, for all that!'.

In the light of this 'confession' it is possible to see that part of the reason why the person conceived of as 'other', 'altogether different - higher -' seems so far away. Their 'higher otherness' is not merely a quality of their own, but caused in part by the reader's state; as Ambien's shame makes it hard for her to look at Klorathy, so the 'part-glimpsed,

certainly part-understood' being is so because the creature perceiving can hardly see, has not the equipment necessary, yet, to see. The way through this barrier of the existing and limiting self, Ambien learns is through questioning. Looking back, she is able to see that Sirius's backwardness and misunderstanding was caused by the inability to ask questions, by pride.

> We might have asked questions: Canopus was always ready to answer them. We might have asked _ourselves_ questions, since we believed our technology was as advanced as that of Canopus. But we did not. The reason was the same: various forms of pride.
>
> _SE_, p.43

What happened in between these two positions, the first when 'we' would not ask questions either of ourselves or of Canopus, and the second when Ambien knows that that was the problem, that lack, that inability, that pride? She learns by seeing how Klorathy 'teaches' lower creatures. After the 'events' that destroy Adlantaland, Ambien I explains to Ambien II what has been happening while she was away.

> What was happening, Ambien I said, was that Klorathy did not make any attempt to communicate what he thought _until he was asked a direct question_ - or until something was said that was in fact a question though it was masked as a comment. And Ambien I then went to Klorathy and enquired if this was indeed a practice of Canopus: and whether Klorathy expected to stay there, living on as he did, with these savages, _until they asked the right questions_ . . . and if this was Klorathy's expectation, then _why_ did he expect the savages to ask the right questions?
>
> To which Klorathy replied that they would come and ask the necessary questions in their own good time.
>
> And _why_?
>
> 'Because I am here . . . ' was Klorathy's reply.
>
> _SE_, p.91

'It cannot be given' as the Sufi story tells us, 'to him who does not deserve it'. The pupils have to be deserving of 'knowledge' which will be made available to them in 'exact accordance with . . . worth, capacity, and earning of it'. Ambien herself almost realises this, when, in a fury

of angry desire she waits for instruction from Klorathy, who - to her it seems instead, and wilfully - speaks with some 'lower creatures, the Lelannians.

> For this was what I had wanted to know. He was talking about the Necessity, even if in this guarded and indirect way. That much I did recognise. But as usual I was being disadvantaged by my emotional reactions. How was it that this precious information, the real secrets of Canopus, of the Canopean superiority, was being given to these debased Lelannians. How was it, that when I had wanted, and for so long, to hear him talk in this way, it was not I who was addressed . . . it took me a long time, not until after we separated on this occasion, to see the simple fact that after all he had been speaking to me, since I was there. To Sirius . . . And he had not been talking to the Lelannians, that is, if one was to judge by results: for they could make no use of what they had heard. They did not hear. They could not hear. I have never before seen so clearly and so simply illustrated that law of development that makes a certain stage of growth impossible to an individual, a people, a planet: first, they have to hear. They have to be able to take in what they are being offered.
>
> SE, pp.226-227

Though it sounds like some trick or sophism to claim that 'It cannot be given to him who does not deserve it', and although it seems fanciful and overblown to suggest that there is some mechanism which determines knowledge given out in 'exact accordance . . . with worth, capacity, and earning of it' - as if there were some metaphysical examining or means-testing board - Ambien's story here illustrates this truth in simple terms this effect, called by her a 'law of development'. We understand, as Klorathy speaks, that it is not that knowledge is withheld by Canopus; on the contrary, here it is given out freely, almost randomly. Rather it is the 'worth, capacity and earning of it' which makes it available or not to Klorathy's listeners, 'if one was to judge by results': what seems to start out as a typically cryptic eastern sophism, becomes a matter of practicalities, 'results'.

When Klorathy answers Ambien I's 'Why?', with 'Because I am here . . .' he indicates that this natural law of self-selection operates within a

larger law or context. If the knowledge is made available, eventually it will come to light, the right questions will be asked, people will by-pass the limiting and limited stage observed by Ambien II in the 'debased Lalannians', so long as they are not too far attacked by the Degenerative Disease and loss of memory. Because part of the achievement of 'worth, capacity and earning' is dependant on memory and recognition. All creatures have 'the memory . . . somewhere deep in them, of Canopean truth'[6] and learning in Canopean terms depends largely on the rediscovery of such half-glimpsed truths. In the grey and terrible city of Grakconkranpatl, the Canopean Rhodia had 'saved' some slaves because they could 'listen' to her. 'These are the slaves I was able to talk to, and who I was able to trust' (SE, p.184)

> Slaves who - some of them - could remember nothing else, having been born there, had been able to respond to some quality that they - recognised? remembered? - in a fellow slave who was better than they only in as much as she was able, so it must often have seemed to them, to torment them, stand in authority over them . . . . But they had seen, felt something in her, listened; and because of some - chance - qualities in themselves, had been found reliable. Trustworthy. And so it was they who now kissed the earth on the free mountainside, and lifted their pale faces to the sun.
>
> SE, pp.184-185

What the slaves 'remember' or 'recognise' is not something they have seen or understood in their life in Grakconkranpatl. The corresponding qualities in themselves, which Rhodia chimes in with and matches, causing inner resonances which signify they can 'hear' her, are their own Canopean qualities, their own right and goodness. The slaves get what they have earned in accordance with 'worth and capacity'; they are 'trustworthy'. This is what makes the difference to their lives and futures; they are in the light and air, the heaven of freedom, while their less able (less trustworthy?) fellows are left, by no efforts than their own, in the 'dim

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6. Doris Lessing, Shikasta, p.104.

prisons under the priest's city (SE, p.184). Ambien recognises the 'inexorableness of the laws that govern us all' (SE, p.184), in the fact that those who could listen, could hear, were able to escape. But she wonders about what makes the difference, why they could hear, see, feel while others could not. 'Some-chance-qualities?' she asks. The fact that this is put as a question is almost a suggestion that she cannot really believe that it is chance. Indeed, it would seem to be in opposition to the laws of earning and duty and necessity that 'qualities' might be in us by 'chance'. Yet of course, scientifically, it seems a fact (the fact that Einstein could not accept) that chance is at the heart of the ways of the universe. But perhaps this is really another way of saying that we can't understand? For at another point it does seem that the idea of chance might really be a shorthand for something else, something we do not understand and have to scale down and reduce to that easy thing 'chance', as if calling it that got rid of it as a problem for us. Discussing the planned experiments in biological and genetic engineering, Ambien notes that,

> It seems as if - I do not see how we can conclude anything else - when such deliberate, controlled experiments take place, to produce definitely envisaged stocks or strains, it is felt - most deeply and profoundly, and by the most responsible and evolved of our peoples - that some other possibility may have been lost.
>
> As if randomness and chance in themselves are a good and a blessing and even a means of acquiring something not yet defined.
>
> SE, p.42

Are 'randomness and chance' a metaphor then for grace? Our partial understanding of a whole process which is quite beyond our grasp, and the benefits of which therefore come to us as if they were little miracles, God-given favours? Ambien is careful here to note that this response is not a merely emotional complaint: it is both 'responsible' and 'highly evolved'. Randomness and chance thus seem to be instinctively felt as

a central part of the natural order of the universe, or the religious order of the universe, being 'a good and a blessing', and the work perhaps of a higher power than anything Sirian, a 'means of acquiring something not yet defined'. Thus chance seems a means of surpassing oneself or one's apparent limits. The chance that creates 'qualities' in the slaves is the same force which allows Ambien II to become attracted to Canopus while so many of her own people feel revulsion towoards Canopeans; for both, chance offers 'a way of acquiring something not yet defined', something they cannot imagine until those qualities latent in themselves are matched by something outside them; the appearance of the same or similar qualities in the Canopeans.

Lessing is here suggesting, like George Eliot, that there are instinctive movements of the heart and soul, which operate almost in spite of our human consciousness, and that these instinctive qualities know better than us. So it is that both women believe in the real possibility of moral education - that there is something innately there, waiting to be brought out in human beings. At the same time, like Milton, Lessing believes in a constant and ever-recurring fall from such grace, a balancing evil which Ambien II learns to recognise first as Shammat, as evil, and then as part of herself.

2. 'What do our ideas of 'good' and 'bad' reflect?

> It has been said that everything man is capable of imagining has its counterpart somewhere else, in a different level of reality. All our literatures, the sacred books, myths, legends - the records of the human race - tell of great struggles between good and evil. This struggle is reflected down to the level of the detective story, the Western, the romantic novel. It would be hard to find a tale or a song or a play that does not reflect this battle.
>
> But, what battle? Where? When? Between what forces?

> No, no, I do not 'believe' that there is a planet called Shammat full of low grade space pirates, and that it sucks substance from this poor planet of ours; nor that we are the scene of conflicts between those great empires Canopus and Sirius.
>
> But could it not be an indication of something or other that Canopus and Sirius have played such a part in ancient cosmologies?
>
> What do our ideas of 'good' and 'bad' reflect?
>
> <u>SE</u> 'Preface', p.ii.

This question of good and bad is central to the novel, and in trying to understand it Ambien II comes ever closer to understanding herself. The novel suggests that good and bad are essential parts of the soul's nature, the basic components of the uneducated, unlearned creature. And it shows that the 'great struggles', which Doris Lessing believes we see everywhere, are reflections of similar struggles inside ourselves. Yet good and bad are also forces beyond us, separate from us, bigger than us. Through the metaphor of Ambien II and the Sirian Empire, Doris Lessing finds a language for discussing our present confused relation to such issues, and, as I hope to show, thus finds a means of bringing to consciousness much of our latent but often prematurely defeated moral and religious knowledge. As in <u>Middlemarch</u>, where we looked at habit, vocation, and conversion as religious forms still present in ordinary life, so we shall see here various stages in a religious life-story represented in such a way as to reflect our real lives as well as the metaphysical reality behind them.

Ambien's first reaction to Canopus is, as we have seen, a 'brooding attraction'; she has a sense that

> Understanding this being may open doors in oneself whose existence one does not do more than suspect. . . If one understood how, one could come close not only to them but to that area of oneself that matches their higher otherness . . .
>
> <u>SE</u>, p.66

But this attraction is not whole-hearted. For Sirius in general is highly suspicious of Canopus, and Sirian pride prevents any real understanding

of the tutelary nature of their relationship, or that Canopus is in fact a higher power.

> Our tone was one of indifference at best, but usually derision . . . At the same time, and while apparently having little respect for their prescriptions, for we mocked them when we thought this would earn us admiration, we nevertheless followed them, and to the point where the practices became second nature, and we were in danger of forgetting where they originated. Then we did forget - or most of us - and 'the Rohandan Adjustment Technique' was talked of as if it were a discovery of our own.
>
> SE, p.60

It is easy to see that the Sirian 'derision' of Canopus is partly occasioned by insecurity: they cannot bear that Canopus should be seen to have done something they cannot do. We might call this pride. Which ever way we choose to think of it, it remains the case that it is the external seeing of Canopus as something other, something else which activates the hatred. For as Ambien learns from Canopus, so she increasingly becomes Canopean; the more she understands, the more she loses her Sirian nature. Because the Sirians in general see Canopus as their rival or enemy, they lose sight of the truth; Canopus invents something and gives it to them; they grudgingly take it and then come to think of it as their own. Of course this is what happens when people no longer 'believe' in God; 'our tone was one of indifference at best, but usually derision'; yet, mocking religion, modern society still lives by many of its laws. Indeed it is only the remnants of the religious laws of Christianity which, translated down into morality, save us from complete lawlessness. In this sense there is truth in Nietzsche's belief[7] that we have forgotten the origin of morality is Christianity. The argument would claim that if we wish to be moral, or religious, we still do not have to be Christians; Christianity is only a form. What has to be recalled is the spirit of religion.

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7. Which we saw in Chapter III.

The Sirians do indeed reflect us, and seem a godless society; good to them is their good, their own good. They have no conception of a good beyond their own selfish desire. In part this is what Ambien has to learn from Canopus; that there is good other than that demanded by the self, and that actions are right or wrong according to standards other than that of immediate (or even long term) personal gratification. She learns that there are Laws, in other words, not made by the creatures who have to live by them.

> When they were asked how they adjusted their population levels, the reply always was: 'according to need' or 'according to necessity', and it was a very long time - only recently - that we were able to hear 'according to the Need. According to the Necessity.'
>
> SE, p.64

The good that is in Ambien is strengthened when she meets with Canopus - just as the chance qualities in the slaves are strengthened when they meet with the same qualities in Rhodia - so that when she is with Canopus, directly in the presence of Canopus, she does believe in it; 'when with Klorathy, one had to know he did not lie' (SE, p.68). But when she is on her own, or apart from the influence and direct experience of Canopus, then doubt sets in; 'when away from him, it was a different matter, and I had been wondering why he had lied' (SE, p.68). This is not a matter of the strength or believability of Canopus, but rather the weakness of Sirius; Ambien II cannot believe Klorathy tells the truth because unless she is there, with him, she does not believe in truth. This sort of forgetfulness is typical of the fallen creature Ambien comes to recognise as herself. But for modern readers it is also an indication of why 'Canopus' would have to be invented; to remind a weakened and godless readership what 'good' looks like. As in real life, seeing it here, it is easy to recognise when we are faced with it, as we can similarly see badness. Like Ambien, our difficulty lies in remembering the very real existence of good and bad when

we are not directly faced with clear examples. Doris Lessing seems to want to argue that we need strong ideas of good and bad, despite the complexity of life which makes us want to see shades of grey all the time. Ambien, like us, relates badness to mere ignorance, and finds it hard to see it as a thing existing quite separately from stages of development. But this may well be because she cannot afford to recognise goodness or badness directly in herself. Accompanying Klorathy on a trip to the Isolated Northern Continent of Shikasta, Ambien visits the dwarves, whom she thinks of as 'squalid little half-animals' (SE, p.70), yet these creatures do understand more of the nature of Canopus than Ambien can, for the dwarves believe in Canopus, and that 'what Canopus had promised . . . Canopus would perform' (SE, p.74). Klorathy detects in this people traces of evil, of 'Shammat-nature', and this Ambien cannot understand.

> 'What do you mean, Klorathy? - when you talk of Shammat-nature?' and as I asked the question I thought of those avid greedy faces, those glittering avaricious eyes. 'A savage is a savage. A civilised race behaves like one.' At which he smiled, sadly, and in a way that did not encourage me to press him.
>
> SE, p.75

Canopus here makes a distinction between real evil and lack of development which Ambien cannot afford to understand, because such a distinction would undermine her own certainty that Sirius was advanced. 'Shammat-nature' can and does exist on all levels, as does goodness, which is why Canopus does not need the trapping of advancement, and can give up the appearance of 'civilisation' when necessary.

> So it was as honorary Canopeans that we were welcomed into the camp, and then as guests at a festival that lasted thirty R-days and nights, which Klorathy obviously much enjoyed. I cannot say that I did. But I recognised even then that the ability to become part of - I was going to say 'to sink oneself into', but refrained, because of the invisible moral pressure of Canopus - an unfamiliar scene, a foreign race, even one considered (perhaps our of ignorance) inferior, is one to be admired, commended, and even emulated, if

> possible. I _did_ try to behave as Klorathy did . . .
> Klorathy feasted and even danced with them, told stories,
> in their tongue - and yet was able never to be less than
> Canopus.
>
> _SE_, p.76

Klorathy loses nothing by changing his outward behaviour or circumstances - by living in a tent, in dirt, eating meat. This is because Canopean qualities are dependant on inner abilities. Nothing can reduce his Canopean nature which is innate. But Ambien is dependant on external recognition of her 'higher qualities' - fine clothes, technology and so on, which she cannot do without without a sense of loss.

However the idea that Canopus is innately good and stands for all that is good has to be modified. To say Canopus equals good is to reduce the Canopean achievement, and to endanger it. For good is only itself, and does not belong, innately, to any form. It is itself an ideal which we can only more or less approach, more or less often. Canopus is not God. Both the reader and Ambien have to be made to understand this. And this is difficult to take, for like Olaf Stapledon, we want a 'formula for the whole'; and we are disappointed when we are told there cannot be one. But this is what Ambien has to learn. Her deepest understanding of Canopus, Sirius, and Shammat comes when these terms are broken down and made meaningless, leaving her faced with reality itself, and the knowledge that her conception of the good is smaller than the reality it approximates to.

The good and bad which the novel wants to make its readers recognise is an ideal good and bad which can appear in many, or any, forms. Ambien's single most significant learning episode thus takes place in the city of Koshi where she is sent to learn that even Canopus can go bad, and that Sirius can be better, truer, than the name it has come to see as synonymous with goodness. At the confrontational meeting with Shammat at Elyle's house, we learn, with Ambien, that the difference between good and bad can seem minute, and yet in fact, be absolute.

> . . . nearly everyone there, male and female, wore bracelets, earrings, anklets, or an association of colours that were almost accurate, for in each place I observed them, a pattern on a hem, or a design on a skirt, they had, as it were, slipped out of true - and now I understood why Nasar could not easily meet my eyes.
>
> SE, p.128

The inhabitants of Koshi wear the Canopean artefacts given them by Nasar as ornaments and as symbols of power, but they do not understand them, or their real uses. They are the exact opposite of the slaves of Grakconkranpatl, these beings unable to be 'true' to Canopus; everything they have has 'slipped out of true', things are 'almost' right in appearance, but that 'almost' really means they are quite wrong. 'Almost accurate' is really inaccurate, and this applies as much to the being of Nasar as it does to the 'pattern on a hem'.

While the 'phrase' 'slipped out of true' takes on a new strength of meaning here, relating itself back to true and truth, and strength and purity yet it also rightly indicates that 'evil' need only be a small difference from good, not an unrecognisably different thing. Evil is the right thing, with something gone from it, something lost, not something extra.[8]

Learning to use the terms of morality, Ambien is over-emphatic, and so speaks in terms of wrongness and criminality where Canopus sees only a shading, a falling away.

> You have criminals . . . With us, we merely fall by the wayside.
>
> SE, p.141.

> We know that if we build a city, or make a jewel, or a song, or a thought, then it will at once start to slide away, fall away . . .
>
> SE, p.143

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8. Thus Oliver Sacks writes,

> Disease is finite and reductive in mode and endeavours to reduce the world to itself.
>
> Awakenings, p.272

> Shammat is this - if you build a city - perfectly, and exactly, so that every feeling and thought in it is of Canopus - then slowly, the chords start to sound false - at first just slightly, then more and more until soon the Canopus-nature has gone, it has slipped, it has fallen away, like me.
>
> SE, p.145

Though we need fixed and definite concepts of good and bad, yet it seems we must also recognise that they exist on a sliding scale. To illustrate this, it is in relation to Nasar, the fallen one, that Ambien realises her own Canopean-nature. In the room with Elyle and the others with their out-of true ornaments, she is called, by Nasar 'fair Canopean' (SE, p.129). And, though he speaks half mockingly, part ironically, it is true, in that room, in that time and place, that Ambien is Canopus, represents Canopus, the truth, and the true. She acknowledges irony in her relation with Nasar.

> I turned now and faced him fully. I was conscious of every sort of irony, and sorrow in this situation: I, in my garb of the top administration, but still of Sirius, and Canopus, our magnanimous superior, but in the shape of this criminal official.
>
> SE, p.141

They face each other as in a twisted mirror, Ambien seeing Canopus as not-Canopus, Nasar seeing Sirius as not-Sirius. It is from this point on that Ambien, often called simply 'Sirius' now, is aware that Canopus-nature is becoming part of her self. She senses 'the steady, unstoppable growth in me of that person or individual who was not 'Sirius'. Who was - who? Or what? Canopus?' (SE, p.158).

Another vital moment in the learning process which is also the gaining of Canopus-nature occurs when Ambien can reveal that unpleasant part of herself that is 'Sirius' to Canopus, a replaying of her first encounter with Klorathy when she could not let her mind open to him, this time put right.

> Again I found myself in the position of hoping a Canopean was not able to read my thought, yet knew he did.

> I made myself say: 'Did you know that some of our experiments in the south were not always entirely within the terms of our agreement?'
> 'Yes, of course we know that.'
>
> SE, p.148

In practical terms the distance between Sirius and Canopus is greatly reduced as soon as Ambien can afford to recognise it. When she speaks of

> The strain that the inferior must feel in coming into contact with the superior,
>
> SE, p.237

her openness means that she can now speak freely to Canopus and hear what Canopus says to her. Thus it is by emulating goodness that we achieve it. And the achievement of even the smallest good increases the possibility of more good. It is easy to learn when one can acknowledge that one wants to learn, as it is easier for Ambien as soon as she can ask direct questions.

> 'Who is it above you, then, that makes laws?'
> And he laughed at this. 'Laws are not made - they are inherent in the nature of the Galaxy, of the universe.'
>
> SE, p.240

But is she has to learn to recognise and emulate good in order to become it, so she also has to learn to recognise and get rid of badness in herself which she never wants to acknowledge. Thus the soul which glimpses God recognises ever more strongly and with ever more repulsion the evils in itself.

> ' . . . I had such a vision of us, of Sirius, of our greatness, and it seems to me suddenly that all it is - is a mirage. A shadow of greatness. And not very different from what I see when I . . . no, I am not going to equate us with Shammat. I can't bear it. I cannot stand . . . what we are,' I concluded with difficulty.
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> SE, p.242

Of course this is all too often our human reason for not wanting to become involved in processes of moral change. We are retarded by our own desire to be better than we are: pride and desire mingled to prevent us ever admitting that we need to be different. It is a horrible and yet apparently

inevitable logic which can make our hatred of badness - 'I am not going to equate us with Shammat' - prevent us from acknowledging its existence in ourselves. But the recognition that such a logic does operate in our real lives must make us also recognise the greatness of Ambien's achievement even at this point where she seems broken, 'I cannot stand . . . what we are'. It is only from this point of breakdown - the same point which Charles Watkins reached and turned away from in Briefing For A Descent Into Hell, which is also recognition that we can move out of our terrible predicament. Thus Canopus reminds Sirius,

> But it is not what you will be.'
>
> SE, p.242

Having come to the point where she can openly admit 'I cannot stand . . . what we are,' Sirius has also reached the point where she could be something else. We can relate this back to The Golden Notebook, where we saw Saul Green, a writer, summing up one of the problems of modern writing.

> There's one thing you can't say to anyone anymore, so it seems: You know in your heart of hearts you shouldn't be living like this.[9]

As Mr. Sammler said at the end of Mr. Sammler's Planet, we do know; 'we know, we know, we know'[10] in our hearts when things are wrong. The Sirian Experiments illustrates this knowledge coming to the surface of a being and thus changing it, making it right. The very first 'brooding attraction' (SE, p.66) towards Canopus is itself a sign of this wrongness and Ambien's hidden knowledge of it. In a sense, what Canopus stands for in this novel is the hidden self-knowledge, or access to this knowledge. By inventing the imaginative cosmology which brings Canopus to being, Doris Lessing has found a way of saying 'You shouldn't be living like this', which at the

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9. Doris Lessing, The Golden Notebook, p.534.

10. Saul Bellow, Mr. Sammler's Planet, p.313.

same time indicates to us that we do already 'know'. The learning process is still a difficult one, both for Ambien, who in process of learning to understand Canopus loses her Sirian self, so that she must cry in loneliness 'only Canopus can understand me now' (SE, p.254), and so must go on to write this 'history of the heart' (SE, p.286) to explain her change to her Sirian friends. But it is also a difficult process for the reader, who sensing resonant echoes of reality throughout the novel, will want to ascribe names to things and experiences in the novel as if it were merely a religious allegory. The problem that Ambien II faces in writing her history is much the same problem that Doris Lessing herself has faced in writing this novel. But the very creation of the character of Ambien II has in a sense provided a solution for Doris Lessing's problem; for through Ambien's life, the form of real experience is shown us. Only the life could show it, only the life could have the knowing that comes from the life in it. Perhaps this account of the progress of a soul could only come to us in a highly imaginative form, without explicitly religious vocabulary, because in this way, bypassing the words we no longer believe in, we can get at a reality we have almost lost. Vision here restores a portion of the real to us.

3. The Existential Problem

Another lesson which Ambien has to face in the course of her education is the Sirian Existential Problem. Because this has some relation to other issues which have arisen in the course of this essay, I think it worth looking at as an issue on its own. The Sirian Existential Problem is a problem that to Doris Lessing our own world is heading inexorably toward.

> There was nothing for billions upon billions of individuals to do. They had no purpose but to exist and then die. That this would be a problem had not been forseen . . . We had not understood that there is inherent in every creature of this Galaxy a need, an

> imperative, towards a continual striving, or self-transcendence, or purpose . . . The hapless millions, offered by their triumphantly successful leaders plenty, leisure, freedom from want, from fear, from effort, showed every symptom of mass psychosis, ranging from random and purposeless violence to apparently causeless epidemics and widespread neurosis . . . . We had to take account of what is, so we know now, a law. This is that where the technology exists to accomplish a service or task to supply a need, then if this is not used, because of humanitarian or other social reasons, there is no real or lasting satisfaction for the people involved in that sector . . . numbers of populations and their ways of living, had always been governed by economic factors: all that had happened was that famines, floods, diseases, had been replaced by the consequences of technical development. Nothing had changed.
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> SE, pp.13, 14, 16

The 'existential problem' is in a sense caused by 'progress'; is implicit in a conception of progress. This is evidently offered to the modern world as a clue about the metaphysical nature of life, that part of life which we often choose to ignore or pretend to have gone away with the loss of our ability to use a religious language. Our problem, like the Sirians, is this: technological 'progress' necessarily assumes the basis of existence to be physical, mechanical, belonging to a Newtonian universe. As if there are problems which can be described as purely physical. In this view, 'toil' can be 'unnecessary' if it might be done with less effort by some machine or other, as if 'toil' were only a physical matter, as if work were only the physical manipulation of matter. But it might be argued that the human propensity for creating 'work' is an expression of that 'need' or 'imperative towards a continual striving'. Work satisfies that desire to be more than we are, more than we would be if we did nothing. Work satisfies something that almost is our essential nature. J. C. Powys, for example, finds that there are not simply various 'urges' but that we 'urge' as if the verb could be used as a generic.

> It is not only the love-necessity in us that drives us forward. It is everything in us; it is our whole nature; it is the urge of our whole personality, including our

> worst as well as our best instincts. It is not an ideal striving or a moral striving or a spiritual striving: it is the natural urge of all organic sap, like the thrust both up and down, of a growing plant.[11]

Work and sex have been the two purposes we have harnessed this basic urge to; to produce what we need to live, and to reproduce ourselves. But now that we could replace much human labour with machines, and now that the world is grossly over-populated, these purposes begin to seem rather futile. This has been one of the arguments for space exploration (it is the argument put forward by Dr. Lal for colonisation of the moon, in _Mr. Sammler's Planet_) but the Sirian Empire has expanded all over space, and the problem remains the same. It is as if the natural or basic urge or striving is set against an equally powerful set of natural limits, and that these limits, like the urge itself, might take any form; 'economic' or natural - 'famines, floods, diseases'.

Without work, and without the possibility of large families, modern people wonder what they are for, what they might do. Similarly, 'billions upon billions' of Sirians cannot find any purpose for their lives without necessary and valid work. Reproduction is rarely necessary, even at the highest bearable limits of population because Sirians rarely die. Because they live in a Newtonian and spiritless universe, once technological progress has eliminated the necessity of physical labour, they are stranded.

It is at this point that it becomes, to use a Canopean word, 'necessary' that they meet with and learn from Canopus. 'We all see truths when we can,' says Ambien II (_SE_, p.8). It may well be that the appearance of this existential problem is exactly the signal - if it could but be understood - that Sirius is now in a position to understand certain truths which it could not see before. Until they had achieved everything they possibly could, all their energies had been directed in this area, and

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11. J. C. Powys, _In Defence of Sensuality_ (London, 1930), p.27.

they could not be aware of anything else, such as a lack in technological progress, for only when it was complete could it be seen to be insufficient. What is most distressing for Sirian officialdom is that 'nothing had changed' when so much had been accomplished. The consequences of such development are not freedom from toil ('unnecessary toil', Ambien II calls it,) but 'mass psychosis . . . causeless epidemics and widespread neurosis'.

Thus one of the things Ambien has to learn from Canopus is that perhaps 'toil' is not 'unnecessary'. This is rather like a lesson in humility, learning that our animal, physical natures will not be overcome by progress but rather, at best, more harmonised to our way of living. The most personal and basic of tasks may be exactly those we need to continue doing for ourselves. Ambien is surprised to notice that the Canopean administrators do not use their 'natives' as servants.

> The next fact was not believed by us, although Hoppe insisted on it.
> . . . The colonists did not stay near the natives, but visited them for short spells while they imparted their information; then retreated to their own places, and only returned after an interval to see how their instruction has taken. No attempt was made by them to use the natives as servants. So said Hoppe. So he swore.
>
> <u>SE</u>, p.37

Here again, as when Ambien watched Klorathy 'joining in' with the natives way of life, feasting and dancing with them, Canopus is seen to be utterly independent of outward symbols of power - even to insist on its own humility. We are reminded of Jesus's increased moral stature which came so often from not raising himself above others; mixing with beggars, prostitutes and money lenders, washing his disciples' feet. Such behaviour bears the same relation to the Jewish expectations of the messiah who was to be an earthly king, a new David, as Canopean behaviour does to Sirian expectations of a higher power Sirius does not understand that the very nature of the 'higher' will change it completely.

The Sirian Empire operates as empires traditionally have: in bringing its beneficence to the natives in exchange for their willing or unwilling labour. Its primary task or purpose is not - whatever rhetoric might occasionally be used - educational. It is rather, economic-exploitative, looking for products (minerals, for example in the case of planets 13 and 14) (SE, p.107), or creatures to do certain tasks, such as the Lombis. For Sirius to see Canopus merely instructing, and in such a manner, 'they imparted information; then retreated to their own places', must bring up questions of the purpose of function of 'Empire'. And indeed it changes the conception of 'power' within the colonies. For power in Sirian terms is the power of might, physical and technical, while the power of Canopus seems to be the power of right. 'No attempt was made by them to use the natives as servants'. What then is the nature of the relationship between Canopus and its colonies? Ambien understands that this question is becoming vital to the understanding of Sirian problems.

> We had discovered that no matter how forcefully we swept out into space, gathering in suitable planets as we found them, incorporating them into our general plan, we took our problems - or rather, our problem - with us. What did we need all these new colonies for? What was their purpose? . . . suppose we went on acquiring colonies and reached the number of a hundred . . . a thousand . . . what then?
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> SE, p.64

Sirius's problem is our problem: if we moved into space, would it really make any difference? Perhaps surprisingly, for someone writing science fiction, space fiction, Doris Lessing is answering 'No'. Everything will stay the same, space will change nothing. For eventually, limits will be reached, and then the old questions will surface. Either the need for colonies is economic or political - as the nineteenth century European desire for colonies was - or like Canopus it is disinterestedly for good. Sirius seems to be neither; she takes on more colonies simply because she can do it, because she doesn't know what else to do. To build an Empire

seems to be a purposeful activity. But such a promise is - must be - finite. And what comes at the end of it? If such progress is a false idea of progress, what then would real progress be like? Surely it would be connected to the very real superiority of Canopus? It would not be an external achievement but an inner one, not to do with expansion and domination but with containment and honesty. This is a hint of the kind of ideal with which we might replace our own technological obsession.

With regard to colonies, Ambien sees that Canopus behaves very differently. She was 'stabilised on what she had . . . she was developing and advancing them' (SE, p.64). The Canopean idea of development and advancement is set within a limited material sphere - 'she had far fewer than we' (SE, p.64), and consists of improvement through education of a kind that Sirius can hardly believe in. Canopus operates within limits that Sirius is only just beginning to be able to imagine. In Adlantaland, Ambien learns that Canopus has taught that 'they must not take more than they could use' (SE, p.181.).

> . . . for it seemed to me to go to the heart of the Sirian dilemma . . . who should use what and how much and when and what for? Above all what for?
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> SE, p.81

When the necessities of physical life have been satisfied - food and shelter - what then are the urges to striving to be directed at? The question raises perhaps what Doris Lessing would regard as the most important question of all 'What For?'.

What is life for? What are we to do with it?

This is the real existential question, and having put it, Ambien has begun to answer it. Part of what must be done is to find another mode for the striving, the urge of being - something other than simply overblown physical achievements. Ambien learns to recognise a metaphysical reality - for this is the basis of Canopean life - and to understand that real progress takes place in that sphere. And that you can't concentrate on when you have a lot of worldly, or physical matters to contend with.

Ambien already knows this, really, just as Mr. Sammler said, 'we know, we know'.[12] The 'greatness' of Sirius is 'a mirage' (SE, p.242). And having seen through this mirage, Ambien sees also the truth.

> 'No, I am not going to equate us with Shammat, I can't bear it. I cannot stand . . . what we are,' I concluded with difficulty.
> 'But it is not what you will be.'
>
> SE, p.242

Canopus promises, and Canopus points the way. The real task of Sirius is to become what it is capable of being; to become its true self, to be unlike Shammat. It is of course a religious task set it by its teacher Canopus.

> In those respects in which the soul is unlike God, it is also unlike itself.[13]

Saint Bernard here speaks of the essential unity of God, as all things. It recalls too Oliver Sacks and his account of sickness, and Milton and his fallenness. When we are not with God, we are set against him, and the place that battle has to take place in is our souls, 'Which way I fly is hell',[14] when I am not in heaven. When Canopus reminds Ambien that what Sirius is now is not 'what you will be', it is partly by reminding Sirius of its own felt potential for goodness and unity with God, or 'the Purpose' as Canopus calls it. The teaching purpose of the novel is to say that being fallen and partial creatures, it is all too easy for us, like Sirius, to fall into an existential despair, to see ourselves, once battered down from the heights of pompous self-regard as then nothing, or worse than nothing, Shammat, bad, evil; that thing we hardly believed in. Part of the reason why we go on living and being in unreal ways is simply because we cannot stand 'what we are'. But Saint Bernard's remark is able to free us from that despair, because he says that that fallen, bad part

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12. Saul Bellow, Mr. Sammler's Planet, p.313.
13. Saint Bernard, quoted by Aldous Huxley in The Perennial Philosophy (London, 1946), p.18.
14. John Milton, Paradise Lost, iv, 75.

of ourselves that can seem so real to us is not our reality, is not our true self. When we are like God, we are like ourselves. We saw this earlier in John Brent-Oxford, who is not his true self because distanced from Canopus, his true friends. We saw it also in Nasar, no longer his real self because fallen away from Canopus. And we have seen the opposite, at times, fleetingly and falteringly in Ambien II, coming to herself, as she came to Canopus.

What is to be done? Oddly, Canopus's last words to Ambien resoundingly echo those of Cardinal Newman;[15] the truth is more difficult than lies, and yet lies - or made-up solutions are more dangerous and costly in the end. So Nasar warns Ambien.

> ' . . . Do you want to remain of those who make up any kind of solution or answer for themselves, and take refuge in it, because they are too weak for patience?'
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> SE, p.284
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> . . . 'After watching us at work for the long time you have been involved with us, are you still able to believe that we deal in failure?'
>
> 'No.'
>
> 'Remember that then. Remember it.'
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> SE, p.284

The success of good in the eternal battle between good and bad seems too far off for human minds, tiny human lives, to take much comfort in. But we do have to remember that truths, however difficult to live with, are easier to live with, finally, than lies or made up solutions. It is not our job to account for life, or the universe; it is beyond us, and we are subject to it. Better would be to attempt to align ourselves with the forces which might inform us more accurately than our own desires what we are for. Patience in this uncertain and shaky state of being is a great virtue. It is a virtue that the modern world perhaps hardly remembers,

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15. Which we saw quoted in Chapter VIII.

let alone cultivates. And while cultivating patience, we must also cultivate faith. When Canopus asks 'are you still able to believe that we deal in failure?' the real question is 'Do you believe in us?'. For not only will such a belief sustain Ambien through the long years of necessary patience ahead, but also it will feed the purpose of Canopus, it will add to its power. Faith does not only sustain the believer; it also creates the believed.

Ambien II closes her manuscript with an optimistic look towards the future.

> If I have learned so much that I never expected what more can I hope to learn and understand, providing I am patient, and do not allow myself to ask useless questions?
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> SE, p.286

This has some bearing for modern life and literature. Have we been asking useless questions? Doris Lessing clearly feels we have. There is no prescription here; she is not saying 'Turn to religion!'. But she is asking us to think more carefully, and to wonder about more things than we often seem inclined to.

Chapter XII

TRANSLATING FROM THE CANOPEAN

This final chapter will conclude this section on Doris Lessing and my argument as a whole. It consists largely of a defence of individualism, and a qualification of that term. It considers two Lessing novels, first, briefly and in passing The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five, and second, a recent realist novel first published by Doris Lessing under a pseudonym: The Diary of a Good Neighbour. Before I begin the chapter proper I have a small defence to make of my decision to conclude with this novel for it is neither as powerful nor as original as many of the novels at which we have looked. And yet, it seems to me, many of the criticisms which might be levelled at this novel could in fact be used against my argument as a whole, most particularly the criticism of that which locates the most important aspects of human beings in the smallest and most ordinary moments, actions, lives and stories, for The Diary of a Good Neighbour, in line with this whole project, locates vision firmly in the real.

I wanted to end with a non-Canopus novel because it seems important for the future that novels can follow that series, that writers and readers learn to translate from the Canopean, and without its metaphor find new ways to deal with its treasured discoveries. I wanted to be able to imagine life after Canopus, but life changed. I wanted to show a realism which did not suffer the problems of madness and breakdown which characterised Doris Lessing's earlier realist fictions. My choice lay between the pseudonymous 'Jane Somers' novels, either or both, and Doris Lessing's most recently published work, The Good Terrorist, which has received wide-spread critical acclaim: Doris Lessing 'back down to earth' and at her

best 'a daunting latter-day realist'.[1] It seems to me it is easy for us to take The Good Terrorist seriously because, for all its humour and irony, it deals in what is regarded as a serious subject: politics. Could it be that one of the reasons The Diary of a Good Neighbour, dealing in 'beastly descriptions of old age'[2] and matters of personal guilt and fear seems not to be recognised as a 'good' novel is because of its subject matter? Unlike The Good Terrorist it could be found very parochial.[3]

However, the only real defence I would want to make of my choice is this: despite its serious subject, The Good Terrorist is not half so good a novel as The Diary of a Good Neighbour, because it is angry and disappointed, and its transformation of that anger into humour and irony makes it twisted and indirect. The Diary on the other hand is, despite the hoax and the

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1. Lorna Sage, reviewing The Good Terrorist in The Observer, 15 September 1985 begins

> Doris Lessing has come back down to earth. Her new novel is physical, solid, positively immersed in the here and now - as eerily 'right' as her 1960's books, and possibly as prescient.

Nicholas Shrimpton in The Sunday Times 15 September 1985 writes that the novel

> Celebrates common sense bourgeiose values with . . . wit . . . indignation . . . narrative agility . . . over the top but hugely enjoyable.

Claire Tomalin in The Sunday Times 6 October 1985 tipped the novel to win the Booker Prize, writing

> Lessing, who is due to be honoured after years of passionately felt writing, who has written a novel which tackles the experience of her generation with characteristic honesty and directness . . .

2. In comparison with the reviews received by The Good Terrorist we have this account of The Diary of a Good Neighbour by Ian Hamilton in The London Review of Books Nov./Dec. 1984, vol. 6, no. 21

> The first novel has some arrestingly beastly descriptions of old age, but creaks horribly when it tries to describe the innards of a swinging woman's mag. And the heroine's stylish metropolitan know-how is registered with gauche unease.

3. I chose the first of the two 'Jane Somers' novels because it deals most directly with the metaphysical—in-the-real, and because the second seemed infected with the same bitterness and anger that lies

pseudonym and the attempt to write in another persona,[4] genuine and direct in its treatment of its subject matter. Doris Lessing is always at her best when she is writing about someone or something she believes in. And she believes in Jame Somers's attempts at decency where she can only at best scorn Alice and Jasper and their attempts at revolutionary politics in The Good Terrorist.

The discrepancy between the reception of these two novels raises an important point: one in fact that much of the rest of this chapter will be concerned with, the primacy of political belief in the contemporary world. It is from the political ideology of Marxism that the charge of individualism comes, though of course this is not the only criticism of Visionary Realism. Indeed we have seen two other recurring criticisms, coming respectively from the scepticism of materialist science, and the scepticism of modernism. Before I take on the charge of individualism, let me briefly recapitulate the objections emanating from these sources, and my responses to them.

1. Some Defences

I begin this work with a defence of the didactic, challenging the pejorative use of that word, and claiming that a sense of didacticism as excessive teaching was a misapprehension caused by the characteristic modern reluctance to be told anything, to believe there is anyone who can authoritatively and usefully tell us anything. The didactic as practised

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behind The Good Terrorist: an anger at the situation of young people flawed by their own inadequacies.

4. See the Preface to The Diaries of Jane Somers for Doris Lessing's account of her reasons for writing under a pseudonym.

by the authors of Visionary Realism is, as I hope to have shown, our best deference against the very sickness which might cause us to rebel against it: we do need help and instruction if as thinking creatures we are to take on real problems of modern life in the post-Darwinian world, without succumbing to the sickness of despair or absurdism or the retreat into self-regarding aestheticism. Religions, creeds, disciplines of thought, the humane arts have all relied on instruction, on teaching for the transmission of belief, the strengthening of faith, the inculcation of habits of endeavour and practice and committment in their disciples. We do well to remember that a disciple is not merely a follower but also a pupil.[5] I said at the beginning of this work that all writing is didactic whether it recognises this explicitly or not, because all writing is authoritative, whether it pretends to be or not: Beckett's absurdist reduction of human life to idiotic babbling is as compelling as any moral statement from the authorial voice of George Eliot, or statement of 'fact' about the world in Doris Lessing's Shikasta. What must concern us is the moral or amoral intent of those practising such authority.

My second defence has to be against the scepticism of materialist science and of modernism. The scientific vision offers at best a scepticism about human life, and at worst, as we saw it translated by Thomas Hardy, a truly negative disparagement of all human aim, desire, purpose, hope and belief. But the scientific view which would desire to reduce all life to mere explanations of matter, has, as we have seen, in this century rebounded upon itself; and the physical sciences which believed so devoutly during the nineteenth century crisis of faith that there was only matter and we would soon know all about it, seem to stand once again

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5. The OED gives as the primary meaning of disciple,

> One who follows or attends upon another for the purpose of learning from him: a pupil or scholar.

on the brink of a complete change of attitude, forced to recognise that their strict division between objective and subjective vision is simply not true. The scepticism implicit in much nineteenth century science (though not always in its actual practitioners) seems to have disposed of itself in the course of time.

In a sense this may also be true of what we have called modernism. Modernism seems to be the product of the Victorian crisis of faith, rather than an answer or even response to it. The typical modernist figure, alone with his fragments, unable to say anything because unable to believe in human communication and meaning, is created by the loss of God the Father, God the organiser, God the planner and originator, God the custodian of human affairs. Atheism is primarily loss, a negation, and modernism in so far as it is based in atheism is often man denied God and missing Him. The modernist feels he is determined by forces he cannot name, control, or hope to understand. We have seen this figure in Jude Fawley and Sue Bridehead, and their fate is probably the fate of modernism in general: because it sees and can envisage no future it will ultimately be denied one. In _Women in Love_, Lawrence's moderns, Gudrun and Loerke, mock the future they do not believe in, and the novel in return makes it clear that there is no real future for them.

Unlike scientific materialism and modernism, political ideology remains in excellent health, and so its criticisms are more weighty: politics is the real living doctrine of our modern world. To begin my third defence, I would like to return to Maurice Cowling's claim, quoted in the opening pages of part five, that

> No anti-Christian thinker with the authority and suggestiveness of the thinkers discussed in parts one and two [J. S. Mill, Herbert Spencer, George Eliot, etc., through to H. G. Wells and D. H. Lawrence] has begun writing about religion in England since 1930.[6]

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6. Maurice Cowling, _Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England_, ii, p.288.

I said earlier that this was by and large true because 'the best of anti-Christian thought has been channelled into Marxism or other political doctrines'.[7] In the Preface to The Golden Notebook Doris Lessing wrote that

> To give the ideological 'feel' of our mid-century, [the novel] would have to be set among socialists and Marxists, because it has been inside the various chapters of socialism that the great debates of our time have gone on.[8]

Such an idea of the reality of our time is only a few steps away from George Lukács saying

> The struggle between socialism and capitalism is still . . . the fundamental reality of the modern age.[9]

To the committed socialist, such works as I have described would no doubt seem to be ignoring the 'fundamental reality' of the modern age and concentrating instead on individualist solutions to what are essentially non-individual problems. Put crudely the socialist charge against Visionary Realism might be that such writing cannot contend realistically with problems of modern living because it rejects an intellectual analysis of world conditions in the light of the struggle between socialism and capitalism; that is no more than a form of humanism with a semi-mystical language which attempts to give spurious authority to its other-worldly claims, while all the time it offers no more than bourgeois individualism as a solution to socially originating problems.

It is easy to see why Visionary Realism might be seen as making the individual primary. After all, we have seen Lawrence saying

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7. See p.358 of this thesis.

8. Doris Lessing 'Preface to The Golden Notebook , p.29.

9. Georg Lukács, The Meaning of Contemporary Realism (London, 1972), p.13.

> as a novelist, I feel it is the change inside the individual which is my real concern. The great social change interests and troubles me, but it is not my field . . . My field is to know the feelings inside a man and to make new feelings conscious. [10]

In putting the 'great social change' in second place Lawrence is a representative of many of the writers we have considered. But this is not to say that the individual is primary, for a characteristic of Visionary Realism which is just as strong as interest in personal life is the desire to create some sort of external setting of meaning for that individual, though this setting has often been cosmological rather than social. To see this as a matter of _either_ the individual _or_ the external world is to misunderstand the real importance of individual being, which is that it offers the clearest and most direct way of knowing that external setting. We experience the universe through our individual selves. Individuality is our means of knowing reality, but that is not to say that reality is individually determined or shaped. William James writes,

> So long as we deal with the cosmic and the general, we deal only with the symbols of reality, but _as soon as we deal with private and personal phenomena as such, we deal with realities in the completest sense of the term_ . . . That unsharable feeling which each one of us has of the pinch of his individual destiny as he privately feels it rolling out on fortune's wheel may be disparaged for its egotism, may be sneered at as unscientific, but it is the one thing that fills up the measure of our concrete actuality, and any would-be existent that should lack such a feeling, or its analogue, would be a piece of reality only half made up.
>
> If this be true, it is absurd for science to say that the egotistic elements of experience should be suppressed. The axis of reality runs solely through the egotistic places - they are strung upon it like so many beads. To describe the world with all the various feelings of the individual pinch of destiny, all the various spiritual attitudes, left out from the description - they being as describable as anything else; would be something like offering a printed bill of fare as the equivalent for a solid meal. Religion makes no such

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10. D. H. Lawrence, 'The State of Funk' in _Phoenix_, ii, p.567.

> blunder. The individual's religion may be egotistic, and those private realities which it keeps in touch with may be narrow enough; but at any rate it always remains infinitely less hollow and abstract, as far as it goes, than a science which prides itself on taking no account of anything private at all. [11]

Like nineteenth-century science, politics in our time by and large denies the validity of the 'I' - individualism 'disparaged for its egotism' - and concerns itself with abstract and general matters. Yet it remains true, as James says, that so long as we 'deal with the cosmic and the general, we deal only with the symbols of reality' for the one thing we do all experience as shared reality is 'that unsharable feeling which each one of us has of the pinch of his individual destiny'. The great advantage of the realist novel, as we saw in Part One, is that being based on this unsharable 'I', it finds common ground in personal life in a way that no other form, artistic, political or scientific has done. What James calls 'the pinch' of individual being cannot be denied, and is perhaps the only thing that each of us can affirm. Thus it is absurd for science or politics to deny or suppress 'the egotistic elements of experience', particularly a science or politics which is concerned with the synthesis of knowledge and human life: it is a paradox but it is true that unity depends on a recognition and acceptance of our basic separation, our individuality. And this has been one of the commonest apprehensions of the Visionary Realists.

I have to stress that this is not the same as a conviction that subjective experience is reality, a conviction which Lukács has rightly identified as an essentially modernist failure.

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11. William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, pp.476-477.

> The modernist writer identifies what is necessarily a subjective experience with reality as such, thus giving a distorted picture of reality as a whole. (Virginia Woolf is an extreme example of this) [12]

Just as James has argued that any existent that should lack private and personal feeling 'would be a piece of reality only half made up', so we have to agree with Lukács that any existent that consisted only of such subjective experience would also be a piece of reality 'only half made up', and a representation of such a reality would be 'distorted'. William James says 'the axis of reality runs solely through the egotistic places - they are strung upon it like so many beads', making reality the connecting thread between moments or types of personal being. His simile shows that reality is not to be taken as the <u>same</u> as personal life, but rather as our means of knowing reality. This is why, having 'gone through' the fashions of his time, 'behaviourism . . . Marxism . . . psychoanalysis . . . structuralism' Saul Bellow falls back upon the novel - 'it's very hard for me to read books in which there's no personal sense of what really happens within the human being'.[13] Though my thesis has stressed the importance of individuality, 'one's own being - the permanent bedrock',[14] it has done so because individuality is a necessary means, not an end in itself.

It is in exactly this sense that we see individuality or separatedness in Doris Lessing's <u>The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five</u>. A reading of this novel can also indicate the way that such a stiffening or hardening of attitude, implicit in a misunderstanding of individualism, can limit comprehension. It would be wrong, for example, to read the novel as <u>allegory</u> whether we took that allegory to be religious, literary or

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12. Georg Lukács, <u>The Meaning of Contemporary Realism</u>, p.51.

13. See p.357 of this thesis.

14. D. H. Lawrence, <u>The Rainbow</u>, p.190.

sexual. The Zones, and the individuated characters, Al-Ith and Ben Ata, do not stand for anything in particular, though we might let them stand for many things: representatives of men and women, of realism and imagination, or of separated individuals, of opposed religious temperaments. The novel is about any ways of being that seem initially opposed and quite separate ; as the novel opens we are told that before the marriages it was believed that 'the Zones could not mingle, were inimical by nature'.[15] The marriages which take place between the Zones are ways of formally recognising the unity of being which lies behind the very different forms which the Zones, and the individuals represent. Al-Ith and Ben Ata have to become fully themselves and they do this by transcending the initial boundaries of their individuality; by coming together each increases his or her conception of what reality is, but this can only be done by them as individuals. It is here, in personal life that ideas and preconceptions and emotions can be changed or experienced, whereas in the general life of the Zones, ideas of reality are more rigid, more fixed, and much slower to change. When the story teller who is the narrator of the Marriages sums up the fact which the marriage of Ben Ata and Al-Ith was meant to make clear to the people of the Zones, he explains again that the importance of individual being lies in its ability to represent and make real the something which is a greater reality and which runs through such individuality.

> We are the visible and evident aspects of a whole we all share, that we all go to form. Al-Ith was, for most of her life, queen . . . the substance of Zone Three expressed itself in her in that shape . . . queen. Or at other times mother, friend, animal-knower. And when she went down to Zone Four how may we assess the way Zone Three squeezed and forced itself in there, as Ben Ata's wife, queen of that place with him, Yori's protector, Dabeeb's friend . . . yes, but what are all these guises, aspects, presentations? Only manifestations of what we all are at different times, according to how

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15. Doris Lessing, The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five (London, 1980), p.4.

> these needs are pulled out of us. I write in these bald words the deepest lessons of my life, the truest substance of what I have learned.
>
> The Marriages, p.197 [16]

Perhaps these 'bald words' are the best offering Doris Lessing has given us, the 'deepest lessons' of her own life.[17] But the novel wants to teach us that such lessons are never confined to one life, and even as we read,

> And when she went down into Zone Four how may we assess the way Zone Three squeezed and forced itself in there, as Ban Ata's wife . . .

we must surely remember Dorothea ending as no more than Will Ladislaw's wife and understand the beneficial effect of her 'substance' squeezing and forcing its way into that form of being.

Though we have to give absolute recognition to the experience and feeling of individual life, we have to do so always with the qualifying thought tacked on of the relative importance of such individual being being no more than 'manifestations of what we all are'. The individual is only a representative and will become more truly representative if like Al-Ith and Ben Ata he learns that what he represents is not the special and differentiated body (or the Zones of the novel) but an aspect of the thing that stands behind that differentiation, the whole we cannot see or represent in physical terms. 'What we all are' is the permanent and unchanging whole, while forms and manifestations change, depending on the needs of the moment.

We have needed a means of expressing this so-difficult-to remember fact of real life, and this means has been the Visionary novel, which has modelled its changeable form on this fact. Various novels variously

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16. Such a view bears strong resemblance to William James' idea, quoted on p.375 of this thesis, that individuals represent religious 'attitudes': 'each attitude being a syllable in human nature's total message'.

17. Speaking about The Marriages at a conference at Liverpool University in March 1984, Doris Lessing said that of all her books, this one most summed up what she knew, that it was the finished product of all her past years and past thinking, and because it was so complete

manifest the whole, depending on several things: the need, and the way 'needs are pulled out of us', and the response to that need in the individual imagination of the author. The way this process works is not unlike what happens to Al-Ith as she first tries to enter Zone Two, understanding that,

> The blue was only what she could see - was able to see. Probably, with different eyes, the eyes of someone set much finer than Al-Ith's, this world she was walking through would show itself as one of springing flames. An irridescence of flames over this dull blue base . . .
>
> The Marriages, pp.192-193

We have to understand, and the novel can teach us this as well through the form of Middlemarch as through this thought of Al-Ith, that our so-important individual visions of reality are only what we can see: there probably will always be truer and fuller visions available to us if we can discover them by taking up other positions on the axis of reality. This is why George Eliot's kind-ness, which proposes standing in another's shoes, is better for us than selfishness, which proposes sticking only to our own limited vision, for kind-ness reveals more of reality to us even as we remain as most separate beings. The effort of attempting different ways of seeing not only changes what we see (as Al-Ith translates 'blue' into 'flames') but actually translates us into something else, just as Al-Ith feels that,

> she had only to allow herself to be drawn into that cerulean to be translated into something other than anything she had known or imagined . . .
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> The Marriages, p.192

This matter of translation, of understanding what forms (novels or individuals) stand for is an important one, and brings me to the final

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and finished in this way, she thought it would 'last' longer than any of her other novels. It is interesting to compare this with what she said about The Making of The Representative For Planet 8, which was that it had new areas of thought in it, and the most potential for her future.

point I want to make. In the *Canopus* novels we are required to translate metaphors and imaginative vision as we read into aspects of our real life: and we have seen, in Chapter X, that one of the failings of the 'sick' Shikastans was their loss of ability to translate metaphor into reality, Canopus into Shikasta. The sickness means the loss of ability to recognise the elusive quality of metaphor. This is a loss that we as readers need to make up for, in our reading of 'ordinary' novels, stories of everyday existence, for we cannot let Canopean translation go in one direction only. The Canopean novels take 'reality' and translate it into the simpler, clearer, less cluttered and trammeled Canopean, which is why *Shikasta*, for example, was able to make clear some old and forgotten truths about human life. I said at the opening of this chapter that I wanted to close with a non-*Canopus* novel because it seems to me important that we learn to translate from the Canopean, put Canopus into Shikasta. This means we have to recognise the elusiveness of metaphor in real life, understanding that realism or reality also stands *for* something. It is this translative quality which makes *The Diary of a Good Neighbour* not quite such a parochial novel as it might initially seem, for it shows us (unlike *Room At The Top*, for example, which we saw Doris Lessing criticising in 'A Small Personal Voice') that ordinary 'realism' does not, even in our own time, have to mean cynicism of attitude and meanness of spirit.

2. The Vision in the Real

When Doris Lessing began to abandon traditional realism in *The Golden Notebook* it was because she could not get mere words to express the complexity of reality. We have seen how this problem of complexity was later solved by the form of *Shikasta* and the metaphor which created that form, Canopus. Though the form of *The Diary* is closer to that of *The*

Golden Notebook, the new novel is in fact much closer to the Canopus series in this respect: that the belief for which the metaphor of Canopus stands in Shikasta is now also present behind what we might call the metaphor or 'real life' in The Diary. Post-Canopean realism does not simply give us pictures of real life without the metaphors which make meaning in Shikasta (the metaphor of Canopus itself, of the good, the higher power), but tries to find some means of explaining what real life, the personal experience of human beings, actually stands for. We have to return to the point we saw raised by Saul Bellow, and quoted at the opening of Part Five;

> as long as [metaphysics is] a separate category of discourse, there's no point in talking about it. The words for it were used up a long time ago. So the only foundation for it is in actual experience, in one's own felt life . . .[18]

The real difficulty which faces the post-Canopean Visionary novel is exactly this: as realism it has to operate within present mores where there is no metaphysical language in general use, yet the 'foundation' for metaphysics is still 'in one's own felt life'. The problem is that there is something else, but no way of speaking about it, so metaphysical issues seem inevitably bound to be matters not of universal ordering but of individual chaos. As indeed things often are in contemporary real life. There are two choices, either the madness of earlier Lessing protagonists or certain faith in the reality of 'one's own felt life'. This second course follows Mr. Sammler's thought 'inability to explain is no ground for dis-belief. Not as long as the sense of God persists'.[19] The Diary of a Good Neighbour tries, through its central character, Jane Somers, to locate the vision which backs such faith firmly in real life, though it dies so, like Daniel

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18. See p.356 of this thesis.

19. Saul Bellow, Mr. Sammler's Planet, p.236.

Deronda, at the cost of asking a great deal of its reader. Earlier we saw how the Canopean metaphor stood behind and made sense of John Brent-Oxford's indecisiveness; here, without that metaphor, it is hard to see Jane Somers as anything more than 'guilty'

> What I was thinking most of all was that I had let Freddie down, and had let my mother down, and that was what I was like. If something else should turn up, something I had to cope with, like illness or death, if I had to say to myself, now, you will behave like a human being and not a little girl - then I couldn't do it. It is not a question of will, but of what you are. [20]

There is nothing which can in reality either explain or enlarge or justify the things Jane Somers thinks about her self here: there is no referential condition so far as we can see, her universe is limited, fixed and static. The instinctive modern analysis of her condition would be psychological; reading this, one would say, 'she feels guilty'. And indeed it is true that Jane's motivating force here is partly guilt, 'I had let Freddie down, and had let my mother down'; but also it is partly fear of repeating the same mistake again, 'If something else should turn up, something I had to cope with . . . I couldn't do it'; it is partly a sense of wrongness, or emptiness in her life, which is connected to her not behaving 'like a human being' - later she says, 'If I ever lost my job, there wouldn't be much left of me' (DGN, p.18).

To explain Jane's feelings in this way is in a sense to reduce them (as the social worker who tells Jane she is interfering in Maudie's life because of her own needs wants to reduce the meaning of Jane's involvement with and commitment to Maudie), as if we don't count or appreciate the real importance of such feelings and the effects they have. When we are trying to translate from the Canopean, changing what we tend to see as ordinary real life (without metaphysics) back into a full life (with metaphysics) we have to try to reinterpret such feelings or emotions or

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20. Doris Lessing, The Diary of a Good Neighbour in The Diaries of Jane Somers (London, 1984), p.19.

thoughts in life as if they were really signs, hints, indications, pointers towards that fuller life. For, in the other direction, this is not different to the reality we have already translated up into, for example, Ambien II's vague attraction towards Klorathy at the opening of The Sirian Experiments. In real life there is no attractive and god-like figure waiting to teach us when we can learn, and what acts or functions as 'Klorathy' in reality can often be no more than pressure, need, trouble, dissatisfaction, fear; individual human feelings which are perhaps aligned at some hidden level to what William James calls our 'intuitions'; signs of understanding we have but that we don't know we have. To find the metaphysical vision in the real requires a less rigid way of reading not only novels but life itself.

Jane wants to act differently, wants, in effect, another chance to do the right thing in relation to someone who is dying. Her language tells us how serious this matter is to her, for 'that was what I was like' indicates that she does know at some level that she will have to change, even as it seems she is saying 'there is no change, we are fixed': 'It is not a question of will, but of what you are'. Here she outlines the problem that throughout the rest of the novel she will be attempting to solve, and this is basically a problem, as she indicates, of humanity. Like Mr. Sammler, Jane Somers senses some relation between human living and death'.

> If something else should turn up, something I had to cope with, like illness or death, if I had to say to myself, now, you will behave like a human being and not a little girl - then I couldn't do it. It is not a question of will, but of what you are.

'Illness or death' are extremes of human being, a danger point and an end, where one is tested, both as sufferer and as nurse. And Jane knows that what is required in such a test is humanity, kind-ness, because she

has already, twice, failed in this respect. Thus she has to see herself as 'a little girl' not exactly inhuman but humanly irresponsible and emotionally selfish. This is a description of which the reality might easily be recognised also as that of a modern; an isolated, lonely, despairing creature. It is true that change is 'not a question of will, but of what you are', but it is also true, as the novel makes plain, that 'what you are' can change, as Jane Somers does change, largely through coping with death, into a more human being.

As in The Sirian Experiments, the new self is increasingly distanced from the old and from the realationships and feelings that were part of the old way of being, a mechanism we have also seen at work in The Marriages, where the relationship between Al-Ith and her sister was shattered by Al-Ith's relation to Zone Four. The narrator comments,

> When two people have been very close, as Al-Ith and her sister had been, and then one of them moves away into a different experience that seems to be very different from, of even destructive of, past balances and understandings, then the surviving partner will often seem to close up, or perhaps even go retrograde, as if protecting a wound, or an exposed and vulnerable place.
>
> The Marriages, p.241

Jane's one true relationship, her friendship with her old workmate Joyce, is thus damaged by the change she undergoes, for Joyce does not want to understand why Jane should feel any responsibility for or interest in the old. Jane, with her new understanding, looks at Joyce and sees

> an old crone, Mrs. Fowler: fine sharp little face, nose and chin almost meeting. She looked ancient.
>
> DGN, p.75

How are we to take this? The novel seems almost to ask us to consider what is it, what does it mean, when we look at people we know well, and see something in their faces, a reflection perhaps of our intuition, our intimation? It is one of those moments when two old friends look at each other and have to wonder if they do know each other at all; certainly

Jane Somers no longer sees 'Joyce' but simply the old woman she will inevitably become, Mrs. Fowler already fixed in the future. What Jane's split second vision frighteningly reveals is that Joyce is rejecting part of herself in rejecting the claims of the old: because Joyce <u>will</u> be old her rejection is like one part of Joyce disbelieving in another, and so reducing the total 'Joyce' even further. Jane looks again and finds Joyce a child, as she herself was 'a little girl' before her involvement with Mrs. Fowler began.

> Yes, she was a child, after all, and I could say nothing to her of what I had learned and of what I now was.
>
> <u>DGN</u>, pp.75-76

What Jane has learned and cannot say, and what makes her now 'like a human being and not a little girl' is the importance of human claims. This is exactly like Ambien II coming to see what 'Canopus' was and his being inseparable from actually becoming 'Canopus' herself. As if to recognise and understand the nature of humanity is to have human nature. Because there is and can be no Canopus, no Klorathy to back Jane up, make her less lonely with her new knowledge, she has to experience the responsibility of adulthood in a world almost full of children as a great burden: her life in becoming larger also becomes increasingly difficult.

The charge of individualism which I discussed earlier would perhaps include an argument that such a burden of responsibility - and other human existential problems such as ageing, loneliness, redundancy, isolation - are really social problems originating from the exploitation of humanity by capital, and would be better solved by a great social change than by individuals like Jane Somers acting out of guilt. The novel wants to show such an argument as a form of materialism and so the centre of the novel is Maudie's death, a reality which challenges the materialist view, being both a 'fact' and also quite inexplicable. At the same time Maudie's needs while she lives are clearly not material; her great desire is for love, for

recognition. Her need to be seen as a person is signalled by her desire to tell her life-story, as if to convince herself and Jane that she has lived, she has had a life, she has been a human being, and it has all meant something. This same desire to make sense of a life is also behind Jane's desire to hear the stories. But what such stories and such listening mean is that Maudie wants huamn attention, and Jane wants to give it. We are made to understand that Maudie's needs are not essentially physical, and would not be satisfied in any respect by State provision, though her physical condition might be eased by such provision.

> Maudie has been ill again. Again I've been in twice a day, before going to work and after work. Twice a day, she has stood by the table, leaning on it, weight on her palms, naked, while I've poured water over her till all the shit and smelly urine has gone . . . I've been worn out with it. I said to her, 'Maudie, they'd send you in a nurse to wash you,' and she screamed at me, 'Get out, then, I didn't ask you.'
>
> DGN, p.135

What Maudie wants is not someone to look after her, though she does want that too, but someone who will look after her out of love or kindness; she wants to be involved in some bond where asking is not necessary. She specifically rejects the idea of the Council's 'Good Neighbour' scheme: if she can't have a genuine human relationship, however guilt ridden or tortuous, she would rather be alone.

How can we find or recognise the part of life we have called 'the metaphysical' in such a description of ordinary life? Jane's action in caring for Maudie teaches her that the material, physical aspect of life is not the most important even when it is the most pressing and difficult. Jane labours, twice a day, 'before going to work and after work', at caring for the dying body of an old woman who would be perfectly eligible for a district nurse's daily visits. In one sense, there is no need for Jane to involve herself with 'shit and smelly urine' and a screaming old woman. But the fact that she does this when there is no need is a sign that she

does see another need, and that the physical work she does in relation to Maudie is a sign of something else; it is a token of love. The novel, basing itself around the idea of common helpfulness and unrecognised goodness, wants to remind us that humanity rests not on social life but 'little, nameless, unremembered acts'.[21] We have seen Saul Bellow's concern with metaphysics in life lead Mr. Sammler to wonder,

> What is 'common' about 'the common life'? What if some genius were to do with 'common life' what Einstein did with matter?[22]

It is the same concern, in this novel that leads to 'good neighbourliness' being put forward as a useful modern action. And the same concept lies behind Jane's desire to write an imaginative account of a day in the life of a home help. Jane's account shows that 'common' helpfulness has more to it than we normally would imagine. For it is the woman, who knows and bows to the fact that 'Mrs. Coles relies on her for company' (DGN, p.195). Sitting, listening 'while Mrs. Coles grumbles' (DGN, p.195) becomes part of the job, and answers a need the State cannot recognise as it can cleaning or shopping, or making beds. The human individual feels, suffers, and recognises these needs and though they seem small and insignificant, they are in fact primary and essential: good neighbourliness is the point at which human decency, attention, and love begins.

Lukács has argued that modernism sees individuals as isolated and suffering lack of relation to the human world. There is no sense in which such a charge could be levelled at this novel, for in no sense does it, or any of the Visionary Realist novels I have discussed, offer individualism as a beneficial thing in itself, though it may well be that whatever is beneficial does have to come through the medium of individuality.

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21. William Wordsworth, 'Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey', in William Wordsworth. The Poems, i, p.358.

22. Saul Bellow, Mr. Sammler's Planet, p.147. And see p.359 of this thesis.

This novel begins with a modern problem and solved it with a form of old-fashioned humanism, for what Jane Somers learns is George Eliot's kindness. The novel shows the feeling of the transcendent reality in human life as represented by intuition or by emotion, fear and uncertainty, and like other novels of Visionary Realism it shows that the reality of the metaphysical lies in the creation between Feuerbach and Marx were less crudely understood, contemporary political thought could not allow itself to dispose of religion so happily as it does, for Feuerbach's humanism is still religious: that is to say, concerned with the transcendence of individuality, with the individual's sense of the greater-than-me. Thus he writes,

> Conscious of the world is the consciousness of my limitation: if I knew nothing of a world, I should know nothing of limits . . . My fellow-man is the bond between me and the world. I am, and I feel myself, dependent on other men. If I did not need men, I should not need the world . . . Without other men, the world would be for me not only dead and empty, but meaningless. [23]

'My fellow man is the bond between me and the world': such a thought is not merely the province of nineteenth century humanism: we saw it first in Milton, who knew that the vast distance between man and God made such bonds imperative. It is the other side of the importance of individualism; the recognition of what such separation holds in common. Let me give a final example from The Diary of a Good Neighbour of an attempt to create such a bond. The realism of this novel, the fact that it exists without a clear metaphysical language, makes it difficult for Doris Lessing to tell us what happens when Maudie dies (as she has told us about Al-Ith's entry in Zone Two, or the process that makes Ambien II become Canopus). The

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23. L. Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, p.82.

reality we are left with when we are without the imaginative vision of Canopus has to come as it comes in real life as the tentative and uncertain thought of one person. Jane, watching Maudie die, has to try and imagine what is happening to Maudie in order to, as it were, be with her at the end.

> Maudie knows and does not know that she has cancer of the stomach, and is dying.
>
> Rather, there is a Maudie who knows this, and another who does not.
>
> I suspect that it is the Maudie who does not who will still be there when Maudie actually dies.
>
> Oh, God, if only Maudie would die, if only she would. But of course, I know that is quite wrong. What I think now is, it is possible that what sets the pace of dying is not the body, not that great lump inside her stomach, getting bigger with every breath, but the need of the Maudie who is not dying to adjust - to what? Who can know what enormous processes are going on there, behind Maudie's hanging head, her sullen eyes? I think she will die when those processes are accomplished . . . we don't know the first thing about what is really happening.
>
> DGN, pp.252-253

Watching Maudie, Jane can see, as it were, two different old women there in her person, the one who 'knows' that she is dying, and so believes in death, and the one who does not know, because she can't believe she will die. Jane herself is in the same position: she too knows Maudie is dying, and will die soon, and yet she can't believe that the power and strength and being of the Maudie she has come to love can simply disappear, vanish with the old body. This part of Jane is allied to that part of Maudie who does not know or recognise death. Jane senses but cannot know 'enormous processes' going on inside Maudie - not the obvious physical process of death 'that great lump inside her stomach, getting bigger with every breath', but processes of Maudie's internal being, which in another time or by another person might be called 'soul'. Here we see Jane Somers struggling without that word, and all the other metaphysical words which once could have attempted to explain this thing, death. Despite the fact that she

is cut off from such a language the actual experience in Jane's life and Jane's observation of Maudie's life still insists on a metaphysical reality, will not allow life and death to be reduced to merely physical, merely material matters.

> What I think now is, it is possible that what sets the pace of dying is not the body . . . but the need of the Maudie who is not dying to adjust - to what?

Jane believes that the Maudie who is not dying, the permanent thing represented for a time by the near dead physical body of Maudie is learning to exist in some other way. Her belief rests on her faith in that strong aspect of Maudie whoch has fought death for so long. But finally Jane can not 'know' what is happening at all: thus her belief has to end in a blank, in questions, in admission of ignorance.

> To adjust . . . to what? Who can know . . .? . . . I think . . . We don't know the first thing about what is really happening.

Yet this is an attempt to know, to imagine, to guess at what is happening, and certainly it is a dismissal of the notion that we do know what death is. That Jane will sit with Maudie, waiting with her, for these processes, for which there is no material evidence, to be completed, is a sign of her desire to be with the Maudie she believes in until that Maudie has left. The bond Jane keeps up here, through imagination and guesswork, is a religious effort, based on intuition, and inexplicable. We have seen William James saying

> Intuitions . . . come from a deeper level of your nature than the loquacious level which rationalism inhabits . . . [24]

If such feelings and intuitions exist on or come from a level where there is no proof or rationalism, how can we, when we wish to translate them into everyday language, support belief in their existence when they

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24. William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p.88.

cannot externally be proved or shown to be rational? The plain fact is that we cannot prove it, we cannot produce authority for such belief separately from such belief. In a traditionally religious life, such belief would rest on faith. Though it may not have a faith in God as such, the novel too can have faith which is based in intuition and belief, hence it can be a religious form. It is useful here to return to Lawrence's account of the religious effort, first quoted in Chapter VI, where I said that what Lawrence means by 'the statement of the desire in terms which have no meaning apart from the desire' is difficult to know experientially, because such desire is often lost in us, or half-buried, and if this is the case then the statement of the desire can have little meaning for us. I have argued that Visionary Realism asks of its readership the cultivation of such desire, as the necessary preliminary to reading works which attempt to answer such desires. We have seen the metaphor of Canopus, a higher power of Good at work in our world, is an attempt to symbolize a great desire, to answer a great need. Such metaphors point us towards the deeper level of reality which James sees as separate from 'the loquacious'. It is this level which Doris Lessing wants to show Jane Somers inhabiting at this moment, at the point of Maudie's death, and this is probably a much more difficult task than the imaginative work that created the metaphor of Canopus, because it is that much closer to real life: when Jane says 'To what? . . . Who can know? . . . We don't know' it is a translation from the Canopean of Al-Ith's belief that 'the blue' of Zone Two 'was only what she could see - was able to see'. In a novel which patently works through metaphor, like The Marriages, we are prepared and able to make translations from the novel to real life. In a realism like The Diary, as in life itself, we are probably more likely to simply accept words like 'don't know' at face value. But like the 'guilt' we saw earlier, such words, feelings, emotions are themselves the metaphors life itself provides us

with and they point to the reality beyond 'real life' just as clearly as does the explicit metaphorical structure of The Marriages. The marvel of realism is that it can point to the metaphysical through the very medium of life experience, so that religious vision is shown to be not a separate thing from real life itself. Maudie's painful waiting for the 'enormous processes' to be accomplished is the same story, the same experience as Al-Ith's waiting and waiting on the borders of Zone Two and learning that the real barrier between her and the new Zone was 'absolute', and this barrier was the thick clumsy substance of Al-Ith.[25] As in the story of the Zones the higher had to go into the lower in order to get into the even higher (Al-Ith sent down into Zone Four before she could learn to think about Zone Two) so the translations the Visionary novel must make cannot be simple or one way. As the story of The Marriages closes we learn that 'the movement is not all one way - not by any means'.[26] Similarly, I have not wanted to close with one of the obviously metaphysical novels of the Canopus series because it seems vital that the movement of translation should be seen to be 'not all one way - not by any means'. The vision, if we are to have it at all in real terms, has to be found in the real, as Lawrence said the religious symbol would be found in the experience and expression of great need, even when our contemporary sense of reality is not one which can recognise such needs or desires nor find such religious symbols: even as in The Diary the religious symbol has to be reduced to what seems to be the lowest common denominator of human experience: ignorance, followed by uncertain and unauthorised individual thought.

> Who can know what enormous processes are going on there . . . we don't know the first thing about what is really happening.

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25. Doris Lessing, The Marriage Between Zones Three, Four, and Five, p.196.

26. ibid., p.245.

The only authority for belief in such a referential condition of life comes from within the character and from a matching recognition within the reader. It cannot come, as authority in The Bible does, from a belief in the word of God, nor from a secondary reliance on such recognised belief, as in Paradise Lost's reference to Genesis. But though William James rightly insists that belief and intuition do not exist at the 'loquacious level which rationalism inhabits' it remains true that writing itself, here stripped to the bare essentials of a character and situation, retains an ability to serve as an act of faith. When Doris Lessing has Jane Somers say 'we don't know the first thing about what is really happening', she acts upon a conviction that this will be enough, that truth itself will be able to stand firm, and that recognition will be accorded to it in exact relation to its real power. This is an act of authority, as I defined it at the opening of this work. But it is also an act of great faith, in the novel and in life, and in 'reality' when it appears in either. To close, as seems only right since it was my own real starting point, with a quotation from Shikasta, I have to say that this very ordinary realism seems to me at this point like and representative of

> those brave souls on Shikasta, who believing that they stand for what is right and just . . . trust, within their deepest selves, that they have resources which will sustain them through everything.[27]

For this too is vision even though it looks like a humble negation of vision: 'we don't know the first thing about what is really happening'. It is a great achievement to make the novel say this, to make a form which came out of a sense of loss of mystery, loss of metaphysic, acknowledge that mystery and metaphysics are still as much a part of our common life as ever. What sustains this novel, as it sustains other Visionary Realist novels is belief ('that they stand for what is right and just') and trust ('that they have resources which will sustain them through everything').

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27. Doris Lessing, Shikasta, p.210.

Though it has become hard for us to use the word 'souls', 'art' is still available to us: and 'art' can stand for 'those brave souls'. I hope that my thesis has suggested that when we are tired or uninspired during our living, when life itself seems to fail in us, art, and particularly the novel, has the power to remind us of the things we already know but tend to forget. Doris Lessing's writing has often served to remind us in this way, and to enlarge or clarify our sense of reality. She takes her place with George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, D. H. Lawrence and Olaf Stapledon as a contemporary representative of a tradition of Visionary Realism which has above all wanted to remind us that the vision and the real are not and ought not to be seen as separate sights.

APPENDIX I

Letter from Wells to Stapledon, Olaf Stapledon Collection, H II A.

13, HANOVER TERRACE, REGENT'S PARK, N.W.1.

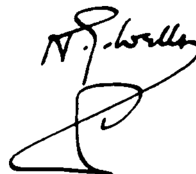
TELEPHONE, PADDINGTON 6204.

June 22nd, 1937.

My dear Stapledon,

I like your book tremendously. STAR MAKER and STAR-BEGOTTEN ought to help each other. They give admirable opportunity for the intelligent reviewer. Essentially I am more positivist and finite than you are. You are still trying to get a formula for the whole universe. I gave up trying to swallow the Whole years ago. I could write you a long letter if I wasn't crippled mentally and physically by this damned neuritis.

But all good wishes,



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This bibliography is not meant to be comprehensive with respect to any of the authors with whom this thesis has dealt. At the same time, it will be clear from the thesis itself that I have not wanted to deal with the vast body of critical literature that deals with 'realism' or literary 'vision'. As far as one can see there are no critical works dealing specifically with Visionary Realism. The bibliography, therefore, is limited to works quoted in the main text, and some few works which though they may not have found a direct place in this thesis have nevertheless been of help to me in formulating certain ideas, or simply as supplementary background material.

I have divided the bibliography into two main sections. The first lists primary material, that is, works of Visionary Realism or works which have played a major role in any given chapter. The second section lists works which may or may not have been quoted in the text, but which have been useful as secondary sources of information or which have played a supportive role of the main argument, and also a selection of background material. This section includes a subsection which lists manuscripts and other materials from the Olaf Stapledon Collection in the Sydney Jones Library, University of Liverpool.

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