Pilgrimage, Death and Apotheosis in the Late-Nineteenth-Century Novel

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy by Bernadette Crowley

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List of Abbreviations

CPTH	*The Variorum Edition of The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, ed. James Gibson (London: Macmillan, 1979)
HB	Mrs Humphry Ward, *Helbeck of Bannisdale*, 1898, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1898)
HR	Charlotte Yonge, *The Heir of Redclyffe*, 1853, ed. Barbara Dennis (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997)
Jude	Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 1895, ed. Dennis Taylor (London: Penguin, 1998)
M	George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 1871-1872, ed. Rosemary Ashton (London: Penguin, 1994)
Mayor	Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, 1886, ed. Keith Wilson (London: Penguin, 1997)
OCS	Charles Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, 1840-1841, ed. Angus Easson (London: Penguin, 1985)

PL John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 1667, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Penguin, 1989)

PMA *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, Longmans Annotated English Poets, ed. Kenneth Allott (London: Longmans, 1965)

PP John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 1678, 1684, ed. Roger Sharrock (London: Penguin, 1987)

R Elizabeth Gaskell, *Ruth*, 1853, ed. Alan Shelston (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998)

RE Mrs Humphry Ward, *Robert Elsmere*, 1888 (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1903)

Return Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, 1878, ed. Tony Slade (London: Penguin, 1999)

Tess Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, 1891, ed. Tim Dolin (London: Penguin, 1998)

Introduction

> Now, I saw upon a time, when he was walking in the fields, that he was (as he was wont) reading in his book, and greatly distressed in his mind; and as he read, he burst out, as he had done before, crying, *What shall I do to be saved?*
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> *PP*, p.12

With these words, John Bunyan, writing in *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), marks Christian's realization of his need of salvation. The given story, then, becomes a pilgrimage, a journey towards a deliverance that will only be fully attained in the next world. Death, in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, is not a completion but a rite of passage depicted as an apotheosis as the pilgrim passes from the life known on earth into the further life of the Celestial City. Bunyan shows that Christian's death in the River is both self-chosen and unavoidable and his pilgrim recognizes and fears its mystery. He is 'much stounded'. It is both a moment in, and a fulfilment of, the pilgrimage undertaken, as God's divine intention is carried into effect by man's acceptance of it: 'They then addressed themselves to the water'. The terrors that the River holds are overcome, 'Oh I see him again!', and apotheosis follows: '*Enter ye into the joy of your Lord*' (*PP*, pp.136, 137, 141).

In a thesis concerned with late-nineteenth-century writing I begin with *The Pilgrim's Progress* because the shape given by Bunyan to Christian's pilgrimage informs the structure of so many later novels. Dorothy Van Ghent notes one aspect of this structure. '[Bunyan] makes a new and integral world with its own gravitational law, its own breathing air, its own inhabitants', she insists before deducing: 'it is

because he makes a fully independent world that we call him a novelist'.[1] U. Milo Kaufmann provides a different emphasis: '*The Pilgrim's Progress* offers us the handsomely-articulated structure of literature's basic plot: the career of a human life.' Towards the end of his study Kaufmann summarizes the part Puritanism's 'meditation upon experience' plays in Bunyan. 'An earmark of his narrative procedure is the arresting of the forward thrust of the action while experience is reviewed', he submits.[2] Wolfgang Iser offers a similar consideration:

> Christian's story is one of an increasing self-awareness, and in this respect it is indisputably a novel, or at least a novel in-the-making. Self-awareness requires experience, and this is what Christian gains in his confrontation with the world.[3]

Thus interpreted *The Pilgrim's Progress* can be seen to have been an influential force in the literary world as well as the religious one. It reshaped the type of spiritual biography current in the middle years of the seventeenth century and became, in the process, a model for the way later stories, especially those that trace the whole of a life, would come to be written.

Like Bunyan, later writers depict protagonists who move through life's experiences towards 'an increasing self-awareness'. These authors do not attempt to go beyond the moment of death as Bunyan did, but they still describe lives as journeys where an initial defect or a series of difficulties have to be overcome in the hope of a satisfactory ending. And, until the late-nineteenth century, novels are, on the whole, characterized by the author's ability to celebrate a true objective for a life. In this they achieve a type of apotheosis. Towards the end of that century, however, writing tends to move away from any sanguine conclusion. This period, as Gilmour

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[1] Dorothy Van Ghent, *The English Novel: Form and Function* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p.31; hereafter cited Van Ghent.
[2] U. Milo Kaufmann, *The Pilgrim's Progress and Traditions in Puritan Meditation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966), pp. vi, 231.
[3] Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), p.28.

notes, 'presents a more diffuse picture as novelists [...] grow from Victorian roots into more modern forms of consciousness'. There is, to quote Gilmour again, 'the sense of a society in transition to less hopeful destinations'.[4] George Gissing's *Born in Exile* (1892) and Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895) are examples of novels where the attempt to shape a life through a purpose is countered by the discovery that no such progression is possible. They continue to mark the pilgrimage of each protagonist and to search for the redemptive answer to the question each pilgrim must ask, '*What shall I do to be saved?*', but these novels are born out of a sense that their question is unanswerable and in place of a divinely-granted redemption they trace journeys that threaten to end in disappointment and regret.

It is with ideas of death, apotheosis, and life as a journey in the late-nineteenth-century novel that my thesis is concerned. My interest does not lie specifically in the final chapters of the novels studied but in how the depiction of the death affects the kind of story being read. Earlier in the century, when death was an occurrence in the book, it was either a point passed through on the way to somewhere else, the marriage of the protagonist, for example, as in *North and South* (1854-1855) and *Little Dorrit* (1855-1857), or it was a resolution of certain problems in the story and could be presented as an apotheosis. This was the case in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-1841), *Ruth* (1853), and *Wuthering Heights* (1847). The shape of these novels followed the structure of *The Pilgrim's Progress* with its promise of salvation as something that exists beyond death. Many later novels, however, end with the protagonist's death as the only way of bringing the painful journey to a close. The protagonist, unable to move forward in life and unsure of his future after death is 'stranded' on this side of eternity, his only way to salvation lying *in* death

[4] Robin Gilmour, *The Novel in the Victorian Age* (London: Edward Arnold, 1986), pp.5, 4.

rather than through it or beyond it. These novels are not necessarily tragic works. It is rather that they rewrite *The Pilgrim's Progress* by describing lives as journeys but without any sense of guiding purpose, and therefore with no ascertainable conclusion except the death itself.

Customarily, the end of the story is the place where the whole truth of it is discovered. As Kermode insists, 'Ends are ends only when they are not negative but frankly transfigure the events in which they were immanent.'[5] An ending can be the place described by Ford Madox Ford where a 'lightning flash is thrown back over the whole story and all its parts fall into place', or it can be the place where the tensions of the story are released allowing the reader to review the whole from the calm perspective provided by the story's last full stop.[6] Marianna Torgovnick suggests precisely this:

> Endings enable an informed definition of a work's 'geometry' and set into motion the process of retrospective rather than speculative thinking necessary to discern it. [...] In part, we value endings because the retrospective patterning used to make sense of texts corresponds to one process used to make sense of life: the process of looking back over events and interpreting them in the light of 'how things turned out'.[7]

The death of the protagonist, then, as the way of ending a novel, is of particular importance. As the last act of the protagonist, and often the last great act of the story, we expect literary death, unlike natural death, to concur with and be defined by the life that has gone before. As such it can provide a unique opportunity for the whole of the life, and therefore the whole of the novel, to be enfolded and reread in a single instant. A tranquil end for George Eliot's turbulent heroine Maggie Tulliver, for

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[5] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending,* 1966 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.175.

[6] Ford Madox Ford, quoted in J. Hillis Miller, *The Form of Victorian Fiction* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), p.50, note 13.

[7] Marianna Torgovnick, *Closure in the Novel* (Princetown, New Jersey: Princetown University Press, 1981), p.5. Torgovnick's views on endings agree with Ricoeur's wider emphasis: 'I see in the plots we invent the privileged means by which we re-configure our confused, unformed, and at the limit mute temporal experience' (Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* 1983, translated Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, 3 vols (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), I, p.xi).

example, would change the meaning of the novel, while a friendless, less apotheotic death for Mrs Gaskell's Ruth would fail to uphold that novel's gradual move towards redemption and forgiveness. Even writers such as Gissing and Hardy harmonize the deaths of their protagonists with the story. The reader may be disappointed or even surprised by the death but cannot argue with its appropriateness. Nor are the deaths that they portray without their own type of beauty. As Levine argues:

> The secular truth might lead [...] to a negative transcendence, as in the structure of Hardy's fiction. There, the Providential patterns are exactly reversed to give to the defeated protagonist an almost transcendent dignity.[8]

> Now I saw in my dream, that these two men went in at the Gate; and lo, as they entered they were transfigured, and they had raiment put on that shone like gold. There was also that met them with harps and crowns[...]. Then I heard in my dream, that all the bells in the City rang again for joy; and that it was said unto them, '*Enter ye into the joy of your Lord.*'
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> *PP*, pp.140-141

> By ten o'clock that night Jude was lying on the bedstead at his lodging covered with a sheet, and straight as an arrow. Through the partly opened window the joyous throb of a waltz entered from the ball-room at Cardinal.
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> *Jude*, p.407[9]

Bunyan is writing of death as apotheosis. Placed beside it, Hardy's depiction of death's aftermath becomes an almost perfect illustration of 'negative transcendence', his language measuring and then reversing Bunyan's religious imagery. The sounds in Bunyan, the bells and the address of welcome, are symbols of an eternal continuance. What Hardy gives is purely of this world. The music is for others, for the living, 'the joyous throb' mocking Jude's stillness even as it beckons the reader

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[8] George Levine, *The Realistic Imagination* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), p.11.

[9] With one exception all references to Hardy's novels are from the first volume editions as published by Penguin Classics. Quotations from *Far From the Madding Crowd* are from Hardy's holograph manuscript of 1873-1874, also as published by Penguin Classics. These choices seemed suitable for a thesis concerned with late-nineteenth-century writing. Where necessary, reference has been made to Hardy's later changes.

towards a merrier secular world where life-in-life, not life-after-death, continues. While Bunyan's vision of eternity offers all the time in the world, or rather all the time in the next world, to celebrate a life's achievement, there is a sense in the later novel's, 'By ten o'clock', that what happens after death needs to be got over with as quickly as possible. The life of the 'ball-room' has supplanted eternity as the place of joy. And Bunyan's sign of transfiguration, 'raiment [...] that shone like gold', becomes for Hardy 'a sheet' that obscures Jude's humanity and confirms him as immobile, 'straight as an arrow'. Death has not halted the 'progress' of Bunyan's pilgrims, they 'went in', they 'entered' and, most importantly, 'were transfigured'. Jude, on the other hand, is transfixed. As Garrett Stewart terms it: 'This swathed sarcophagal image of the rigidified hero.'[10] There is, though, in the dignity of Jude's perfect stillness, a sense of Levine's 'transcendent dignity'. Jude's dead body might appal but it is also Hardy's metaphor for eternal peace.

These are not untenable comparisons. In *Jude the Obscure* Hardy has continually placed his protagonist's life and death beside the biblical and emblematic counterparts of the Book of Job and *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Further, nineteenth-century novelists and their readers would have been thoroughly familiar with Bunyan's story and such an interpretation internally, if not actually, registered.[11] 'There is no ascent, no declivity, no resting-place, no turn-stile, with which we are not perfectly acquainted', Macaulay wrote in 1830 of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and at the end of the century that type of religious recall was still paramount.[12] Qualls, whose book *The Secular Pilgrims of Victorian Fiction* deals with mid-century writers specifically, suggests, 'In the nineteenth century the English Sunday [...] insured that

[10] Garrett Stewart, *Death Sentences* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1984), p.128; hereafter cited Stewart.

[11] Regarding the modern reader's difficulty in appreciating the Victorian novelist's religious references see Robert Lee Wolff, *Gains and Losses: Novels of Faith and Doubt in Victorian England* (New York and London: Garland, 1977), pp.1-8; hereafter cited Wolff.

[12] Thomas Babington Macaulay, untitled essay (1830), in *Bunyan: The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. Roger Sharrock (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1976), pp. 66-77 (p.67); hereafter cited Sharrock.

the Bible, and Quarles, and *Pilgrim's Progress*, and *Paradise Lost* were current, a part of the nation's cultural and imaginative life.'[13] Hardy was no exception to this summation. Gittings notes how '*The Pilgrim's Progress* alarmed him so much that once, reading it on his way home from school, he felt convinced Apollyon would spring out from the dark trees overhanging the road'.[14] This Bunyanesque episode became part of *Jude the Obscure*.

In the nineteenth century it was generally acknowledged that *The Pilgrim's Progress* expressed a universal truth, and for the unbeliever as much as for the believer. '[T]he story of the pilgrimage of *man*, not of Puritan man especially, but man in all ages', William Hale White calls it.[15] More recently Dorothy Van Ghent argues, 'It is an ancient, universal image that Bunyan has used – the image of life as a journey [...] not a mere wayfaring but a "pilgrimage", that is, a journey to a holy place' (Van Ghent, p.21). Van Ghent's evaluation, however, is content to suggest by omission that the 'holy place' may be discovered in this world rather than the next. The representation of the upright man rewarded in a God-given eternity informs the whole character of Bunyan's narrative. The novel, though, even the religious novel, does not move so easily between Earth and Heaven. To do so would be to move away from realism and into something different – allegory or myth. Even Bunyan seems to acknowledge the place where a more earthbound story would have to stop. 'So I awoke from my dream', he writes just before he begins that last sequence of events that leads Christian and Hopeful towards the River of Death and the Celestial City.[16] But, while Bunyan immediately continues, 'And I slept and dreamed again' (*PP*, p.107), the realist novel calls a halt.

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[13] Barry V. Qualls, *The Secular Pilgrims of Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p.12; hereafter cited Qualls.
[14] Robert Gittings, *Young Thomas Hardy* (London: Penguin, 1978), p.45.
[15] William Hale White, *John Bunyan*, 1905 (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, n. p.), p.120.
[16] For other readings of this 'awakening' see *PP*, note 106, p.287.

Allegory, myth and poetry can cross more easily from this world to the next because their business is to express their themes indirectly. Wheeler suggests that a narrative that attempts to write of other-worldly things without the benefit of these filters is confronted by a number of problems:

> Heaven is sometimes defined as or characterized by the beatific vision of the deity, which is in itself unnarratable. Another model of heaven is as a place of everlasting songs of praise [...]. Here again, the subject does not lend itself readily to narrative, although it has lyrical possibilities.[17]

To narrate the unnarratable, then, risks reducing heaven to the type of banality Shaw had in mind when he argued that 'heaven, as conventionally conceived, is a place [...] so dull [...] that nobody has ever ventured to describe a whole day in heaven, though plenty of people have described a day at the seaside'.[18] The realist novel with its insistence that everything should be rooted in the everyday could only be successful as the fictional representation of what was known rather than of what was believed to be known. And there is a further danger. Knowing their fictions to be fictions, realist authors whose narratives dared to enter heaven would be constructing a paradox. While attempting to portray heaven's reality they would actually be fictionalizing it.

In the nineteenth century, belief in orthodox religion was under constant pressure. The disturbance caused by the Oxford Movement in the eighteen-thirties, the doubts cast in the forties by continental biblical scholarship on the timing and authorship of scripture, and the questioning of the doctrines of atonement and

[17] Michael Wheeler, *Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.120; hereafter cited Wheeler, *DFL*. Dante's *Paradiso* (circa 1321) and Newman's 'The Dream of Gerontius' (1865) are examples of Wheeler's 'lyrical possibilities'. There is also a suggestion in Wheeler's argument of that Victorian sense of decorum – there being places into which the novel must not penetrate, the bathroom, the bedroom, and the grave.
[18] George Bernard Shaw, 'Misalliance' (1909), in *The Bodley Head Bernard Shaw*, 4 vols (London: Bodley Head, 1972), IV, pp.15-264 (p.54).

retribution that seemed at odds with the concept of an omnipotent and merciful God, were, as Gilmour notes, only a beginning. 'And looming over the clash of Church parties and interdenominational strife in the second half of the century was a challenge to the validity of religious belief itself, from scientific materialism in general and evolutionary biology in particular.'[19] His own observations lead Owen Chadwick to suggest that 'the vast increase of knowledge in the nineteenth century must issue in extending the areas where the human mind could see doubt and ignorance'.[20] Nineteenth-century writers, even overtly religious writers, were forced to reassess not just the way they thought but the way they should express those thoughts:

> In grappling with [eschatological] themes and debates, theologians and creative writers reopened some of the key questions concerning the nature of religious belief and language. Both preachers and poets, for example, confronted the problem of finding a discourse which could convey an idea of the transcendent in an increasingly scientific-materialist world.
>
> Wheeler, *DFL*, p.xii

Writers needed to be able to suggest the spiritual without leaving this world and in a manner that was in harmony with new ways of thinking. 'In the old days there were angels who came and took men by the hand and led them away from the city of destruction', George Eliot writes in *Silas Marner* (1861). Her way of continuing, however, 'We see no white-winged angels now', insists on a new order and is immediately followed by the dual hopefulness of 'But yet' where Eliot suggests that there are human ways in which man may obtain redemption. '[A] hand is put into

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[19] Robin Gilmour, *The Victorian Period* (London and New York: Longman, 1993), p.64.
[20] Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 187.

theirs, which leads them forth gently towards a calm and bright land [...], and the hand may be a little child's.'[21]

'[T]he realist novel was the holding ground, the meeting point, for the overlapping claims of secularization and belief held together in a version of common life', Philip Davis argues.[22] A nineteenth-century novelist, therefore, who wished to describe heaven, needed to do so in terms that meant something to the non-believer as much as the believer – a moment of illumination that could be interpreted in both religious and secular terms. Mrs Gaskell, then, wishing to portray a place of happiness beyond the story's end, offers, in *Mary Barton* (1848), a new life in the New World – a sort of Paradise regained but in Canada rather than heaven. The realist novel also reflects the nineteenth century's preoccupation with reform by offering achievable, this-worldly solutions to this-worldly problems without relying on the interference of an omnipotent Godhead. Wolff wonders if 'emphasis upon the next world [was not] wholly inappropriate for dwellers in a real world in which there was so much to be done to improve man's lot?' (Wolff, p.365). Heaven, as an answer to man's problems was beginning to be seen as an evasion of responsibility. Change, perhaps, should come from the way things are in this world, not from the way we imagine they may be resolved in the next.[23]

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[21] George Eliot, *Silas Marner*, 1861, ed. David Carroll (London: Penguin, 1996), p.131. Hillis Miller defines this authorial effort: 'The artist is the man who goes out into the empty space between man and God and takes the enormous risk of attempting to create in that vacancy a new fabric of connections between man and the divine power' (J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963), pp.13-14; hereafter cited Miller, *DG*).

[22] Philip Davis, *The Victorians, The Oxford English Literary History, Vol.8, 1830-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.144.

[23] See: 'The new emphasis on Jesus as man rather than as lamb, on religion as a guide to living as well as a passport to Paradise, is probably connected with the growth of Christian social action during the second half of the nineteenth century' (Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p.5).

Nineteenth-century writers as a whole, however, were reluctant to move their stories too far from Bunyan's structure of quest, difficulty of journey and apotheotic arrival:

> Lacking Bunyan's assurance, readers and writers held all the more tenaciously to his language. They were determined to shape the facts of this world into a religious topography, making a path towards social unity in this world an analogue to Christian's progress towards the Celestial City.
>
> Qualls, p.12

As Mrs Humphry Ward's protagonist cried in *Robert Elsmere*, 'the problem of the world at this moment is – *how to find a religion?* – some great conception which shall be once more capable, as the old were capable, of welding societies, and keeping man's brutish elements in check' (*RE*, p.410). And it was not just writers like the religiously inclined Mrs Ward who felt this urgency. In novels not ostensibly religious at all authors endeavoured to find a way through to a humanly inspired meaning that could be the evolutionary successor of the old God-given one. Progression from the old ways of thinking was better than disconnection and writers took Bunyan's story and reformed it, continuing to ask his question, '*What shall I do to be saved?*', even when being saved in the strictly religious sense no longer seemed possible. 'Under scrutiny, Victorian death scenes [...] reveal themselves to be neither sentimental tangents, routine and egregious, nor passing symptoms of a cultural obsession too openly indulged' (Stewart, p.8). Such occurrences are, as Stewart argues, more significant than generally acknowledged. Their depictions tested the limits of the author's linguistic skills as novelists struggled to find human ways through which Christianity's reward system of redemption, apotheosis and Paradise could be re-expressed.

The possibility of a happy ending became increasingly problematic as the nineteenth century progressed. In 'Janet's Repentance' (1858), George Eliot was able

to depict a death where apotheosis and Positive philosophy come together. The evangelical minister, Mr Tryan, has to die but in dying, as David Carroll notes, 'achieves a kind of heaven [...] in Janet's memory'.[24] Writing in the last quarter of the century, however, authors like Hardy and Gissing find little to celebrate in a life and their novels end in sadness more readily than apotheosis and in failure more readily than fulfilment. What is there to do, these authors ask, when Bunyan's structure is so hampered that a life must always fail to reach a fortunate ending? The death of the protagonist in these novels becomes a stumbling block. It forces a confrontation with the old Christian consolations given in the Burial Service in The Book of Common Prayer – what Wheeler calls 'affirmations of faith which are based upon some of the most challenging paradoxes and contraries in the New Testament' (Wheeler, *DFL*, p.xiii).

There is, nevertheless, a continuing desire on the part of these authors to make use of death's extraordinary effects rather than ignoring them. Authors like Mrs Ward, who meets the challenge head on, and William Hale White, who meets it more obliquely, seek to replace Bunyan's eschatologies with something just as compelling but less divinely centred. On the whole, their protagonists discover George Eliot's 'kind of heaven'. Gissing and Hardy, on the other hand, invert Bunyan's apotheosis into a darker exposition of hope extinguished where the very absence of Bunyan's terms of reference is as meaningful as their presence. Roger Sharrock notes how, in Part II of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1684), 'Each invitation [to cross the River of death] follows a formalized pattern which is repeated with variations; there is the speech of the messenger, an emblematic token to attest the genuineness of the summons [...] the bequests of the dying pilgrim to his or her

[24] David Carroll, ' "Janet's Repentance" and the Myth of the Organic', in *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 35.3 (Dec., 1980), 331-348 (p.347).

friends, and their last words when crossing the River'.[25] That 'pattern' is 'repeated with variations' in Victorian literature until, in authors like Gissing and Hardy, it is very carefully *not* repeated in order to generate more firmly the pain and disappointment which is the protagonist's final experience.

In order to establish a contrast with late-Victorian writing I begin my thesis by studying three novels from earlier in the period: Charles Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-1841), Mrs Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853), and Charlotte Yonge's *The Heir of Redclyffe* (1853). I also consider selected instances of autobiography and biography: John Forster's *Life of Charles Dickens* (1872-1874), Mrs Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857), *The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt* (1850), and John Henry Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864). Not only novels but life-writing can be seen to respond to the need to define a purpose for a life and each of these narratives offers their own type of positive account that later writers would react against. The chapter concludes with a study of two works, one biographical, Thomas Carlyle's *Life of John Sterling* (1851), and one fictional, Anthony Trollope's *He Knew He Was Right* (1869). Each is quite different in tone and intention from the above narratives and each prefigures the way in which the life and death of the protagonist might come to be written in the late-Victorian novel.

The main body of the thesis is expressly concerned with late-nineteenth-century writers and it culminates in a study of Thomas Hardy. These chapters do not necessarily follow the chronology of the novels examined. *The Return of the Native* (Chapter Five), for example, was written in 1878 while *Helbeck of Bannisdale* (Chapter Two) was written twenty years later in 1898. '[E]ach writer who finds God absent expresses this absence in a unique form' (Miller, *DG*, p.2) and I have tried to

[25] Roger Sharrock, 'Women and Children' (1960), in Sharrock, pp.174-186 (p.185).

consider each author individually but placed in an order that reflects the changing form of the late-Victorian pilgrimage novel.[26] My next three chapters, then, look at novels by Mrs Humphry Ward, William Hale White writing as Mark Rutherford, and George Gissing. Mrs Humphry Ward writes from her own standpoint of a reformed Christian belief and, in *Robert Elsmere* (1888) and *Helbeck of Bannisdale* (1898), still preserves the outline story of devoted and dedicated lives. Her protagonists, however, find their journeys interrupted and their attempted reformulations of purpose difficult and dangerous. One story comes close to tragedy; the other ends in it. William Hale White, brought up in Bedford, had attended the Meeting-house where Bunyan had worshipped some two hundred years earlier. Powerfully influenced by Bunyan, Hale White eventually found himself caught between the strict Puritanism of his upbringing and his later theological doubts. *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford* (1881), *Mark Rutherford's Deliverance* (1885), *Catharine Furze* (1893), and *Clara Hopgood* (1896), are written as though they were the search for a creed on which to rest the life of his protagonists yet the point of defined belief is never reached. His characters search to discover a lost version of *The Pilgrim's Progress* but, in contrast to Bunyan's apotheotic conclusion, the novels end with the deaths placed as a kind of literary postscript to the story. George Gissing's characters, in place of Hale White's religious intentions, seek to justify their lives in terms of social or secular objectives. The failures, however, of Edwin Reardon in *New Grub Street* (1891) or Godwin Peak in *Born in Exile* (1892) are crushing and much bigger than their eventual deaths which are simply ways of completing the difficult journey.

[26] It is this type of individual journey that William James had in mind when he wrote in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 'Religion [...] 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 the divine*' (William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 1902, ed. Martin E. Marty (London: Penguin, 1985), p.31).

My thesis concludes with a study of Thomas Hardy and I give the penultimate chapter to a consideration of *Desperate Remedies* (1871), *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872), *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), and *The Return of the Native* (1878) before turning in the final chapter to *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), and *Jude the Obscure* (1895). Even in his earliest novels Hardy seems to move his characters into story, into journey, almost against his own wishes – the needs of author, like life itself, bringing into being a progress that he considers would be better not begun at all. The deaths with which these stories conclude are a way of bringing that progress to a close – a fall into stillness being perhaps kinder than a further progress towards Paradise.[27] Although Hardy refuses to offer any promise of heaven to his protagonists, his novels show how he misses the strong redemptive pattern set in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. It is in the later tragedies, however, that the idea of journey, as a pattern of pilgrimage, is strongest even as the deaths with which the stories end emphasize that journey's failure. Nevertheless, and despite the bleakness of these insistently unapotheotic deaths, there is still, in the closing scenes of each story, a sense that something has been gained that is not wholly negative. Devoid of any hope of success in this life, or any compensatory reward in another, these deaths present a great paradox in that they are not entirely hopeless.

[27] Having defined a generalized Victorian view of heaven, Wheeler notes, 'Each of the different states or activities implied in these descriptions reflects an idea of progress, or development, or completion' (Wheeler, *DFL*, p.132).

Chapter One
Mid-century Narratives

In *The Secular Pilgrims of Victorian Fiction*, Qualls observes mid-Victorian authors conforming to the prototype suggested by Bunyan in *The Pilgrim's Progress:*

> Their plots are essentially his plot, even as the complications and variations are Victorian expressions of an age's uncertainties about the very figures it insists upon. Carlyle and the mid-century novelists give us mundane life where few paradises are concretely realizable. But their quest plots and their emblematic language posit a regaining of paradise. The reader feels the pressure of these images and structures, and thus, perhaps without full recognition, feels the Bible's promises and Bunyan's progresses.[1]

This chapter of my thesis is particularly concerned with mid-nineteenth-century writing. It begins with a study of three novels and then moves to consider two biographies and two autobiographies. These works portray Qualls's 'mundane life' as an arduous journey. In each case, however, difficulties are seen to be overcome and the endings, like Bunyan's, are a mark of a life's duties successfully completed. These conclusions 'posit a regaining of paradise'. The final part of the chapter offers a contrast. The novel and the biography discussed at this point are each examples of how a life should *not* be lived. They show a life adrift rather than on a Progress and thus prepare the way for the bleaker, less apotheotic novels written toward the end of the century.

1.1 Charles Dickens: *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-1841), Elizabeth Gaskell: *Ruth* (1853), Charlotte Yonge: *The Heir of Redclyffe* (1853)

The protagonist's death at the end of stories such as *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Ruth*, and *The Heir of Redclyffe*, is seen as the fulfilling moment in a life's

[1] Barry V. Qualls, *The Secular Pilgrims of Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p.13.

pilgrimage and is presented as an apotheosis. The sadness of the death is tempered by the holy purpose of the life preceding it, its righteousness proved by the manner of the death. Importantly, then, the life and the death are seen to have a particular effect on those who remain, ensuring that the spirit of pilgrimage is continued. In these mid-century novels the redemption that was offered by Christ alone in *The Pilgrim's Progress* is given an active expression in the lives of the saintly protagonists. They do not take on Christ's role as Saviour but they do act redemptively and when they die something that outweighs that death is handed on and a tone of resolution brought to the final pages of the story.

Charles Dickens's religious beliefs are never directly stated in his work. His novels, however, are full of Christian references and images; each is a study of the way a life should be lived; and each, in some way, explores the possibility of a personal afterlife. *The Old Curiosity Shop* is no exception and, even as it keeps Dickens's own religious ideas inexplicit, it offers a religious assessment of an individual life. Parallels to Bunyan's allegory are always present.[2] There is the flight of Nell and her grandfather from London, the hazards that ensue, the place of safety that is reached, and Nell's apotheotic death. But Dickens is careful to show that his story does more than simply repeat the earlier one. Nell, at the beginning of her journey, is reminded of 'an old copy of the Pilgrim's Progress'. Her speculations on the story, though, 'wondering whether it was true in every word, and where those distant countries with the curious names might be' (*OCS*, p.175), have judged it as something alien to the world in which she lives, a distancing by Dickens who seems

[2] See Rachel Bennett, 'Punch Versus Christian in *The Old Curiosity Shop*', in *The Review of English Studies*, n.s. 22 (1971), 423 – 434.

to be suggesting that the secular images of his own novel may be more relevant to the middle years of the nineteenth century.

To uphold meaning, however, *The Old Curiosity Shop* needs the idea of holy death as a place of referral and Dickens must explore ways through which to make his heroine's death extraordinary. The manner of Nell's death, then, its length, its exaggerated effects, and the sensibility attached to it, should neither surprise, nor disturb, the reader.[3] The task Dickens sets himself is how to portray his protagonist's death as a passage from this world to the next without exchanging the imagined reality of the novel for the imagined vision of the myth. Nell's death is implicitly promised throughout the story just as her heavenly reward is explicitly assured by the perfection of her nature. The reader, however, is not present at her death but in London watching the villain of the piece, the dreadful Daniel Quilp, die, for Quilp's death is a perceived finality in a way that Nell's is not. While Quilp, drowning in the river, is reduced to something less than human, 'ghastly freight', 'ugly plaything', Nell passes through death to a new existence: 'Sorrow was dead indeed in her, but peace and perfect happiness were born' (*OCS*, pp.620, 654).

In *Paradise Lost* (1667), Milton shows the manner of time that came into existence with the Fall and Adam, given an understanding of the future history of the world, speaks of 'the Race of time, / Till time stand fixt' (*PL*, XII. 554-555). Although Adam and Eve had existed in linear time it had not led to death. Such time only came into the world with the Fall, but, in providing a thrust away from that first sin, time became God's first postlapsarian blessing on a world newly in need of blessing. A world that measures time is a world ready for journey, ready for pilgrimage. As Adam speaks, 'Race', holds both the idea of nationhood – a people

[3] The death of Little Nell has long invited controversy; Oscar Wilde and Aldous Huxley, for example, hated it. For a sympathetic understanding see G. K. Chesterton, *Chesterton on Dickens*, 1911 (London: Dent, 1992), pp.53-54, and Malcolm Andrews, *OCS*, intro., pp. 28-31.

bound by time – and the idea of swift movement. This is movement that will continue even through death until, in rejoining God's original intention, it will, taking the two meanings of 'fixt', be both repaired and eternally held.[4]

Death in a novel that wishes to uphold this redemptive ideal must not mark the end of time for those who die in grace. It needs to be an event through which time can be sensed to pass, a conclusion reached on the other side of its divide:

> In the Destroyer's steps there spring up bright creations that defy his power, and his dark path becomes a way of light to Heaven.
>
> *OCS*, p.659

Nell has always been the innocent victim who entered gladly into the journey for the sake of her grandfather, a frail but sinless Faithful for a weak and difficult Christian. And now, Christlike, out of death's passing arises something greater than it, death's nature challenged by the fruits of its action. The block of death that stands between one world and the next becomes the very way towards eternity. Nell is dead even as her friends travel to be with her but their entrance into the village where she has lived is marked by Dickens as their own entrance into grace: 'A wicket-gate was close at hand' (*OCS*, p.642). The pilgrimage for Nell has brought more than her own reward. Now other pilgrimages are made possible and the fact of death 'a way of light to Heaven'.

The story's final chapter shows the further stages of pilgrimage for all characters willing to embrace it and the book ends with the creative force of a marriage, Kit Nubbles's union with Barbara and the birth of their children. Kit, that faithful friend of Nell, names each child for another worthy character in the novel. There is, however, no child named for Nell herself. Instead it is granted to Kit the

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[4] Ricoeur quotes from Saint Augustine's *Confessions*: 'Eternity is "forever still" [...]. This stillness lies in the fact that "in eternity nothing moves into the past: all is present" ' (Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1983, translated Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, 3 vols (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), I, p.25).

right to tell her story. Nell's death, lingeringly realized across two chapters, is marked as an event longer than its own time, and now the story that precedes it is given its own place in this type of extended time:

> The little group would often gather round him of a night and beg him to tell again that story of good Miss Nell who died. This, Kit would do; and when they cried to hear it, wishing it longer too, he would teach them how she had gone to Heaven, as all good people did; and how, if they were good like her, they might hope to be there too one day, and to see and know her as he had done when he was quite a boy.
>
> *OCS*, p.671

With Nell's name placed in that first sentence between the 'story' and the death, Dickens shows how the story, passing into death through Nell's goodness, takes its character from that goodness; the death can cast no shadow over the 'story' but is instead illuminated by it. And Dickens, as he continues, will not allow the death to confine or limit the story of 'Miss Nell' whose actual life was indeed curtailed. Kit's audience, in 'wishing it longer too', seems to voice discontent both with Nell's span of years and with the span of time given to the story. Kit, as guardian of the story, will not change the fact of the death but instead his readers are promised, not just heaven, but heaven as a way to enter the story themselves, 'and know her as he had done', and Nell becomes both example and objective.

Having entrusted the continuance of the memory Dickens reveals the need to do so as he shows a fading of memory's physical proofs. Kit, revisiting the Old Curiosity Shop after some years, finds that it 'had been long ago pulled down' and he is eventually 'uncertain of the spot, and could only say it was thereabouts'. The very structure of the story seems in danger of fading like a dream even as it is upheld, 'to tell again', and Dickens borrows, for the novel's final sentence, from the language of the psalms: 'Such are the changes which a few years bring about, and so do things

pass away, like a tale that is told!' (*OCS*, pp.671, 672).[5] Unlike Bunyan's ending, an awakening from another dream, Dickens's conclusion surprises and seems to diminish in some part the apotheosis that Nell's death has been. But for Dickens this way of finishing, which does not disturb the natural order, actually reinforces the extraordinary power of that death whose consequence is thus set against the insignificance, decay and change of things in general. Nell passes into the memories of succeeding generations but the shop, which gives its name to the novel, comes to an end even as stories themselves do, 'like a tale that is told!'.

Dickens's religious ideas in *The Old Curiosity Shop* are deeply felt; they cannot, however, be easily aligned to a particular faith. Mrs Gaskell's *Ruth*, on the other hand, with its theme of loving forgiveness for all sinners, is a novel entirely consistent with her Unitarianism. It is also another version of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Mrs Gaskell's protagonist, Ruth Hilton, falls at the first of life's hurdles and elopes with a worthless lover; pregnant and deserted she is rescued from this Slough of Despond by another Help, the Dissenting Minister, Mr Benson; and she journeys towards rediscovered virtue, painfully learning how to conduct a new life in the shadow of the original sin. This life is filled with redemptive acts, Ruth's last good deed causing her final illness. At the end of the story, then, as conclusive proof of how much has been achieved, her death is given as a transfiguration:

> They stood around her bedside, not speaking, or sighing, or moaning; they were too much awed by the exquisite peacefulness of her look for that. Suddenly she opened wide her eyes, and gazed intently forwards, as if she saw some happy vision, which called out a lovely, rapturous, breathless smile. They held their very breaths.

[5] Taken in part from Psalm 90. 9-10.

> 'I see the Light coming,' said she. 'The Light is coming,' she said. And, raising herself slowly, she stretched out her arms, and then fell back, very still for evermore.
>
> *R*, p.448

The dying girl controls the tension of the scene.[6] Her friends are silent, held by 'her look', and the awe they experience is followed through to become greater and more intense in Ruth's own vision. Bunyan could allow the reader to follow Christian through the River to the very gates of the Celestial City. But even a religiously confident writer like Mrs Gaskell will only travel up to the moment of death and she relies for testimony upon the dying words and aspect of her protagonist.

'The last words of the dying [...] had a special significance for the Victorians, and became something of a literary convention in their own right', Wheeler asserts and in this the Victorians were looking to a tradition followed some two hundred years earlier.[7] '*Let the sick man set his house in order before he die*; state his case of conscience [...], cause right understandings, and remove jealousies,' Jeremy Taylor had written in 1651 in *Holy Dying*.[8] This book was a necessary presence in many nineteenth-century households and the average Victorian would understand that death was the place where the meaning inherent in the life should be handed on. Bunyan himself in the second part of *The Pilgrim's Progress* seems to take heed of Taylor's admonitions. Christiana, for example, blesses her children and gives a particular message to each of her friends before being accompanied by a large crowd to the banks of the River. Her last words, like those of each pilgrim who

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[6] It is interesting to note the similarities in this fictional material to Franz Werfel's biographical account of the death of the Roman Catholic visionary, Bernadette Soubirous, who died aged thirty-five in 1897 and was canonized in 1933. See Franz Werfel, *The Song of Bernadette*, translated Ludwig Lewisohn (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1942), p.390. For a scientific description of this phenomenon, 'a mystical experience with chloroform', see William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 1902, ed. Martin E. Marty (London: Penguin, 1985), pp.390-391.

[7] Michael Wheeler, *Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.30; hereafter cited Wheeler, *DFL*.

[8] Jeremy Taylor, *Holy Living and Holy Dying*, 1650, 1651, ed. P. G. Stanwood, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), II, p.167.

follow her to the River, are given prominence: 'I come Lord, to be with thee and bless thee' (*PP*, p.273).

It is this visionary glimpse into the assurance of a heavenly future that Mrs Gaskell allows her heroine. 'I see the Light coming', Ruth cries and her friends, like Christiana's, are granted some share in the revelation. In a fear of disturbance and following Ruth's own 'breathless smile' they have, across these moments, 'held their very breaths'. In this holding, time itself seems held and the moment, like the death of Little Nell, becomes longer than its own time and increases in importance and authority. At this point, Mrs Gaskell allows Ruth the definition and certainty of 'The Light is coming'. At the start of *The Pilgrim's Progress* Evangelist questions Christian: 'Do you see yonder shining light?', and Christian, still unsure of direction and purpose, can only reply, 'I think I do'(*PP*, p.12). Here, at the end of things, Ruth's vision is connected and strengthened as a mark of successful pilgrimage. This is an event worthy of a life. It proves the veracity of Ruth's penitence and the salvation gained while in no way trespassing upon those further shores of the River as Bunyan did.

And, then, Ruth dies, releasing her friends from stillness:

> They did not speak. Mr Davis was the first to utter a word.
>
> 'It is over!' said he. 'She is dead!'
>
> Outrang through the room the cry of Leonard:
>
> 'Mother! mother! mother! You have not left me alone! You will not leave me alone! You are not dead! Mother! Mother!'
>
> They had pent in his agony of apprehension till then, that no wail of her child might disturb her ineffable calm. But now there was a cry heard through the house, of one refusing to be comforted: 'Mother! Mother!'
>
> But Ruth lay dead.
>
> *R*, pp.448-449

Mrs Gaskell's description of Ruth's son's distress heightens, with its biblical echoes, the religious feeling already present.[9] And it does more than this. While Leonard's rejection of the death must be ineffectual his cries of denial do, for a moment, overpower the words of his elder. And this is as it should be. Leonard's words are a reminder that, even if the life is apparently 'over', the pilgrimage is not and it is his unfinished sorrow, 'refusing to be comforted', that will form the place of its earthly continuance.

Jenny Uglow notes Charlotte Brontë's response to the novel, 'Why should she [Ruth] die? Why are we to shut up the book weeping?', and in answer quotes from Chevalier Bunsen (1853), 'Ruth *must needs* perish, but atoned and glorified.'[10] Wheeler goes further. He remarks on the paragraph that precedes Ruth's death where Mrs Gaskell insists that her protagonist ' "home must go, and take her wages" '. This, Wheeler points out, is a quotation from *Cymbeline* and part of the song sung over the apparently dead Imogen. However, Imogen is not dead but lives on to achieve her reward of a happy ending. 'Nor is Ruth, as a Christian, "dead" in any final sense at the end of the novel' (Wheeler, *Durham*, p.159), Wheeler comments. But even this can be taken further. In Mrs Henry Wood's *East Lynne*, Lady Isabel Vane, another 'fallen woman', dies at the end of the book as do her illegitimate son and her oldest legitimate one. Her other children never learn the truth of their mother's story and the nature of her eventual repentance remains largely unknown. When Ruth dies her story is fully recognized and her spirit finds an active place in

[9] See: 'The most important scenes in the novel are underpinned with biblical quotations, which help to shape the text and thus also the reader's response to it' (Michael D. Wheeler, 'The Sinner as Heroine: A Study of Mrs Gaskell's *Ruth* and the Bible', in *The Durham University Journal,* 68, n.s. 37 (1975-1976), 148-161 (p.148); hereafter cited Wheeler, *Durham*). Mrs Gaskell paraphrases Jeremiah 31. 15.

[10] Jenny Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1993), pp.323,324; hereafter cited Uglow.

many hearts. Even more importantly her child does not die, and it is he who is the channel of the book's final passage of healing and redemption.

It is at this point that each part of the story can be truly understood and Ruth's journey read, like Little Nell's, as steps upon the way towards something much greater than a personal salvation. Ruth's erstwhile employer, Mr Bradshaw, has been estranged from Mr Benson, his old friend and Ruth's protector. For months there has been a wish to heal the breach but it is only when Mr Bradshaw finds Leonard weeping beside his mother's grave that the wish becomes action:

> The first time, for years, that he had entered Mr Benson's house, he came leading and comforting her son – and, for a moment, he could not speak to his old friend, for the sympathy which choked up his voice, and filled his eyes with tears.
>
> *R*, p.458

Ruth's role is subtly altered now. A life that was offered as atonement for her own sins can, in death, and acting through her child, be seen to touch the lives of others as these two men come to experience something greater than the friendship previously known. In the long sentence of the extract, the final paragraph of the novel, the actions of the first part are carried across the pause of the dash to become those things that call a halt to action. The enforced silence, 'he could not speak', brings to mind the silence held only a short time ago as Ruth lay dying. But this time the pause allows the tension of redemptive feeling to be felt and there is reassurance too as the phrase 'for a moment' promises a continuance even beyond the novel's end.

The religious implications within the deaths of Little Nell and Ruth Hilton are firmly justified by the nature of their consequences. The problems within each story are resolved and there is left, as an example to those who remain, a saintly model of behaviour. A more formally Christian writer, such as Charlotte Yonge in *The Heir of*

Redclyffe (1853), was maybe inspired by such models to inscribe on the deathbed an even more precisely sacred value:

> At that moment the sun was rising, and the light streamed in at the open window, and over the bed; but it was 'another dawn than ours' that he beheld, as his most beautiful of all smiles beamed over his face, and he said, 'Glory in the Highest! – peace – goodwill' – A struggle for breath gave an instant's look of pain; then he whispered so that she could but just hear – 'The last prayer.' She read the Commendatory Prayer. She knew not the exact moment, but even as she said 'Amen' she perceived it was over. The soul was with Him [...].
>
> *HR*, p.468

Charlotte Yonge's Tractarianism, with its insistence on the importance of ritual and liturgy, gives a particular structure to her protagonist's death – a structure that the Unitarian Mrs. Gaskell had avoided. Yonge's poetic quotation, the New Testament song of praise, and the Commendatory Prayer are all drawn from other traceable texts. Mrs Gaskell allows her death scene to echo earlier largeness; Charlotte Yonge is more explicit, suggesting quite clear forms that may be followed in order to obtain eternal peace.[11]

Guy Morville has died suddenly while on honeymoon in Italy and it is his young wife, Amy, who is beside him. As she and her husband share the same expression of different experiences, 'the sun was rising', 'another dawn than ours', a link is formed through which she attains an understanding of his saintly eternity, a consciousness she is able to express a short while later as she gives her own account of the death:

> ['] – and the angel's song! Don't you remember yesterday, how clear and sweet his voice came out in that? and it was the last thing almost he said. I believe' – she lowered her voice – 'I believe he finished it among them.'
>
> *HR*, p.471

[11] Compare this with the death of Jo in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* where the structured idea of a final prayer collapses into something quite painful and far less satisfactory.

As Amy's words and intonation mirror the event as previously narrated she reinforces the impact and importance of Guy's death. And, with 'I believe he finished it among them', that unfathomed gap of death, 'She knew not the exact moment', is bridged over. Previously there was separation, 'she perceived it was over. The Soul was with Him'. Now there is a continuation as what was begun on earth is seen to be completed in Heaven.

Assured of this continuance Amy becomes the interpreter of the redemptive effects of the death and the one through whom her husband's life can be seen to continue and prosper:

> She missed him indeed, but the power of finding rest in looking forward to meeting him, the pleasure of dwelling on the days he had been with her, and the satisfaction of doing his work for the present, had made a happiness for her [...] likely to bloom more and more brightly throughout her life.
>
> *HR*, p.573

Now the reader can see how the redemptive structure of the novel is working, for Amy's realization is the same that came to Guy a little over a year ago. Newly engaged to Amy, his great happiness had been checked by the idea of 'the frail tenure of all earthly joy':

> [T]he answer came from within, that there was nothing peculiar to him in the perception that earthly happiness was fleeting. It was best that so it should be, and that he should rest in the trust that brightened on him through all, – that neither life nor death, sorrow nor pain, could separate, for ever, him and his Amy.
>
> *HR*, p.372

Guy's life, like Ruth Hilton's, has known a struggle towards goodness. There has been too, a period of misunderstanding and sorrow, representations by Charlotte Yonge of what it feels like, in the middle of the nineteenth century, to be part of a Christian progress. These things have secured for Guy the understanding 'that earthly

happiness was fleeting'. Once this is realized he can enjoy the time of limited happiness while always looking forward, not towards death but through it to a time when happiness will be 'for ever'. From apprehension he has turned first to resignation and then to the joyful philosophy of the final completeness of things. A joy that is presently held is subject to time, is 'fleeting', but stands in its incompleteness as an instance, understandable to finite minds, of the greater thing to come. The earthly life, Charlotte Yonge insists, can never achieve perfection but points instead to the place beyond which the story continues.

It is that realization that brings Charlotte Yonge to move Guy's death back from the end of the novel. In *Ruth* and *The Old Curiosity Shop* the deaths of the protagonists are the focus of redemption for the lives that surround them but, coming at the end of the novel, they complete the story. There are glimpses and promises of what will come but the narratives do not continue into this future. Charlotte Yonge, on the other hand, is much more concerned with the effect that Guy's religious death has on those who remain; and not just on Amy. Particular consideration is given to Philip whose headstrong behaviour causes Guy's death, and to Amy's sister Laura who marries Philip after the misjudgment of a clandestine engagement. 'Yet it was a harassed, anxious life, with little of repose or relief' (*HR*, p.594). It is Philip who inherits Guy's estates and so the physical and earthly story of the heir of Redclyffe, unlike the *Old Curiosity Shop* where the shop of the title fades in a form of closure, is allowed to continue but only as a shadowed reminder of that earlier and more elevated life.

1.2 John Forster: *The Life of Charles Dickens* (1872-1874), Elizabeth Gaskell: *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857), Leigh Hunt: *The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt* (1850), John Henry Newman: *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864)

In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, adversity, transgression and virtue are all woven into the story so that each is manifestly part of the one plan, and the death, which comes before the final ascent into Heaven, is part of the total design. It is not, therefore, a particular point of revelation. Mid-nineteenth-century novelists also show how each event moves the narrative towards the one conclusion, but often the relation of incident to plot cannot be made until the end of the story. In the novels discussed above, this point of disclosure is the death of the protagonist. Death provides a moment in time when the lives of those who remain behind can be brought to a small conclusion and to a sensible understanding of their own journeys.

The novelist has carefully structured the narrative so that the conclusion upholds and further illuminates the story that has gone before. Life writers, however, working from an ending rather than moving towards one are otherwise placed. They write of men and women who are judged to be examples of how a life should be lived, but often need to manipulate their texts so that the worth of the life is affirmed.[12] Nadel terms this biography's 'awareness of narrative strategies and plot structures that enhance the meaning of the life to the reader'.[13]

Great lives, we feel, should be matched by great deaths and there is a wish to give our heroes endings that reflect the stature of their deeds. The contrast with the

[12] It was this type of biography that Lytton Strachey saw himself as writing against in *Eminent Victorians*: 'Those two fat volumes [...] with their ill-digested masses of material, their slipshod style, their tone of tedious panegyric, their lamentable lack of selection, of detachment, of design' (Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, 1918 (London: Penguin, 1986), p.10). Strachey is too dismissive. Long, and biased towards commendation, many biographies may have been, but the best of them show style, form and structure as the authors struggle to reconstruct what were seen to be honourable lives.

[13] Ira Bruce Nadel, *Biography: Fiction, Fact and Form* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), p. 207; hereafter cited Nadel.

actual can be painful. When John Forster, for example, reached the end of his biography of Charles Dickens what he had to describe, after the large, busy, prolific life, was such a very small death. On June 8th, 1870, Dickens had fallen ill at dinner. There was a vain attempt to help him to a sofa and then, as Forster writes:

> 'On the ground' were the last words he spoke. [...] all human help was unavailing [...] and though stertorous breathing continued all night, and until ten minutes past six o'clock on the evening of Thursday the 9th of June, there had never been a gleam of hope during the twenty-four hours. He had lived four months beyond his 58th year.[14]

Somehow it seems that he had lived longer. But, although Dickens's life had resulted in many celebrated works, for Forster he had not lived long enough. His marking of the minutes, hours, months and years indicates, not achievement, but sadness at the thought of how much more could have been done. What Kit Nubbles finds at the end of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, as the physical world around him changes and fades, is that telling 'again that story' will keep Nell's memory clear and safe and Forster, through the biography, does the same for Dickens. But for Forster the ending as it actually was is not enough. Dickens's last words have the painful arbitrariness and sense of bodily dissolution that, for the reader, constitute the actual end of an individual. Forster, however, recognizing that this is not all the reader wants to know, has, some pages earlier, referred to a memorial speech given at a Royal Academy dinner. From this delivery, he finds the noble language that is missing at the death. 'These were the last public words of Dickens, and he could not have spoken any worthier' (*LCD*, III, p.496).

[14] John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, 3 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1872-1874), III, p.501; hereafter cited *LCD*.

And, as a further salute, Forster moves first to show how the death, 'in every country of the civilised earth, had awakened grief and sympathy', and then to the burial site in Westminster Abbey:

> Facing the grave, and on its left and right, are the monuments of CHAUCER, SHAKESPEARE, and DRYDEN, the three immortals who did most to create and settle the language to which CHARLES DICKENS has given another undying name.
>
> *LCD*, III, pp.502, 504

Dickens is remembered by both stone-hewn words and by his own and this, for Forster, is the apotheosis, not a religiously inspired glorification but one that acts as though it is. As it honours the story that has gone before, it is the proof of lasting memory and makes it, as Kit's listeners wished of his, 'longer too'. Forster selects and illuminates the places of significance and brings a shape to the life so that the physical reality of its completion can be found to have meaning.

When Mrs Gaskell wrote the biography of her friend and fellow author Charlotte Brontë in 1857 her reasons were, as Alan Shelston notes, more to do with 'Charlotte Brontë the suffering woman [...] than Currer Bell the successful author'.[15] Like Forster, then, but for subtly different reasons, she brings a selectivity and structure to her work that affirms the story she wishes to tell. She suppresses, for example, Charlotte's infatuation with her Brussels professor, Constantin Heger. As Uglow argues, 'Part of her mission was to defend Brontë against the accusations of sensuality levelled at her novels: the story of her starved love must not be told'

[15] Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, 1857, ed. Alan Shelston (London: Penguin, 1985), intro., p.24; hereafter cited *LCB*. See also: 'Gaskell's attraction to the personal suffering, disadvantages and innate goodness of Charlotte [...] fashioned a sympathetic yet powerful life' (Nadel, p.129).

(Uglow, p.399).[16] Nor do Charlotte's books play a major part in the narrative. What is important to Mrs Gaskell, as she showed in *Ruth*, is the way a life should be lived in the light of imminent mortality. Charlotte's death, then, is acknowledged even before her life begins as the first chapter of the book notes the details of her death as recorded in Haworth parish church. The ending to the story is inevitable; it may disappoint but it cannot surprise.

And fictionally, though not personally, Mrs Gaskell would have seen Charlotte's death as fitting – the manner of it defining the life.[17] Charlotte was, when she died, newly and happily married and expecting her first child, and those last, unexpected and happy months are out of keeping with the rest of the story. Mrs Gaskell writes of this happiness as found 'After a hard and long struggle'. 'And we thought, and we hoped, and we prophesied, in our great love and reverence', she recalls, but the hope, written after the death, is only a memory of hope. It lasts no further than the end of its paragraph for Mrs Gaskell immediately continues, 'But God's ways are not as our ways!' (*LCB*, p.519). She then writes of that time of short, settled joy between the wedding and the death and, in placing the narration of these months between an intimation of death and death itself, isolates them inside a life which has already been shown to be only an interval between these same two things and governed by the incomprehensible ways of God.

This does not mean that the death is to be read as accepted or its sadness in any way diminished. 'I am not going to die, am I? He will not separate us, we have been so happy', are Charlotte's last recorded words, an honest turning away by Mrs

[16] In the same way Forster neglects to mention Dickens's long association with his mistress, Nelly Ternan.

[17] Matthew Arnold expressed this same writer's appreciation when he realized that the Brontë graves are inside the parish church not outside: 'It really seems to me to put the finishing touch to the strange cross-grained character of the fortunes of that ill-fated family that they should even be placed after death in the wrong, uncongenial spot' (quoted in Wheeler, *DFL*, pp.63-64).

Gaskell from the joyful, fictional reception of death in *Ruth.* This is death as it actually happens. And, then, immediately, there is that inescapable conclusion:

> Early on Saturday morning, March 31st, the solemn tolling of Haworth church-bell spoke forth the fact of her death to the villagers who had known her from a child, and whose hearts shivered within them as they thought of the two sitting desolate and alone in the old grey house.
>
> *LCB,* p.524

The lamentation, given from the limited perspective of an isolated community seems a long way from redemptive significance. The narrative, however, is carefully structured and the passage is a preparation for the final mark of approbation.

Mrs Gaskell's intentions in writing this biography had always been clear: 'how I could show what a noble, true, and tender woman Charlotte Brontë really was' (*LCB*, p. 490). The books, for Mrs Gaskell, were only a part of the life and, at the end, an insignificant part. The memory is to be a holy rather than a literary one and she writes, in her final chapter, of uncomplicated, local people who have loved Charlotte for her goodness and generosity of spirit rather than as the author of *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*:

> But I turn from the critical, unsympathetic public [...]. I appeal to that larger and more solemn public, who know how to look with tender humility at faults and errors; how to admire generously extraordinary genius, and how to reverence with warm, full hearts all noble virtue. To that Public I commit the memory of Charlotte Brontë.
>
> *LCB*, p.526

All the reader has to do in response, is to decide to which 'public' he or she belongs.

In the novel, because the author fixes the time of closure, there can be an ending that satisfies the nature of the journey undertaken while in biography the author, aware of the ending, can adjust the text accordingly. Autobiography is

different. Few writers could express their sense of life as shaped by a teleology other than death and, in moving towards completion before the life is over, autobiographical writing requires particular structures.[18] Anthony Trollope, for example, completes his autobiography with a gap in the text, indicative of a death, before writing 'Now I stretch out my hand, and from the further shore I bid adieu to all who have cared to read any among the many words that I have written',[19] while Mrs Oliphant, having watched each member of her family die, concludes with the sad finality of 'And now here I am all alone. I cannot write anymore'.[20] Not all completions are as successfully conclusive.

Leigh Hunt closes the first edition of his autobiography quite decisively by offering the ideal of a new religious doctrine that would be 'the religion of Loving Duty to God and Man', and ends 'And that such a consummation may come slowly but surely [...] will be the last prayer, as it must needs be among the latest words, of the author of this book.'[21] But, when he came to make revisions in his work for its second edition, this settled, hopeful ending, in the light of the events of the extra years, was out of place. Life had moved on in the interim, sadly in many ways, for Hunt's youngest son and his wife of fifty years had died. Another type of ending was needed and the new chapter written to provide it is a sad postscript to the type of valediction on which Hunt had first determined:

> I now seemed – and it has become a consolation to me – to belong as much to the next world as to this, and think I know exactly how I shall feel when I die; more than half, perhaps, unwilling to go, inasmuch as pangs may attend the process,

[18] See: 'The successive series of events that makes up a life, said the Idealist philosopher F. H. Bradley, "can not be summed till we are dead, [...] before death, we can not have realized it, because there is always more to come" ' (Philip Davis, *The Victorians, The Oxford English Literary History, Vol.8, 1830-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.429).

[19] Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography*, 1883 (London: Williams and Norgate, 1946), p.319.

[20] Mrs Oliphant, *The Autobiography and Letters of Mrs M. O. W. Oliphant*, ed. Mrs Harry Coghill (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Son, 1899), p.150.

[21] Leigh Hunt, *The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt*, 1850 (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1891), pp. 402,403; hereafter cited *ALH*.

> and life, by its nature, is not made willingly to be parted with; but as far as affections are concerned, half sorrowing to leave those that still remain to be loved, and half solaced – I think I could even say rejoicing, if it were not for them – in the hope of meeting with those that are gone.
>
> *ALH*, p.408

This is like Guy and Amy Morville as they look to the next life for the completion missing on earth. But, unlike their more positive, fictional sentiments, Hunt's 'consolation' cannot travel further than 'half solaced'. For him, each thought that propels towards the next life is countered by a thought that pulls back to this one. Everything is measured and everything is qualified. Because of earlier failure he is held, precariously, on the brink of an ending with a weakened trust in the stability of feeling that the ending will bring.

For Hunt, the failure of his determined ending has been as unexpected as it was unwelcome: 'I fancied I should go on, living as I did before' (*ALH*, p.403). The endings that we prepare for, he finds, are not always the ones that we achieve, and it is necessary, therefore, to look beyond them, not towards them, for the completion of the picture:

> May all of us who desire to meet elsewhere do so, and be then shown the secret of the great, the awful, yet, it is to be trusted, the beautiful riddle; for why [...] so much half-beauty here, and such need for completing it, if complete it is not to be?
>
> *ALH*, pp. 409-410

Hunt's original conclusion is overtaken by events but he revises in order to maintain significance. Through the failure of his expectation, 'so much half-beauty', he points to the place, 'elsewhere', where incompletion may come to completion.

For John Henry Newman, later Cardinal Newman, this search for completion was a search for truth that dominated the middle years of his life, leading him finally

to Catholicism. An inspirational and zealous Anglican clergyman Newman had been a major force behind the Oxford Movement. This group had aimed, through the publication of *Tracts For the Times* (1833-1841), to alert the clergy to what was considered to be a dangerous liberalization of Church doctrine and to stress Anglicanism's relationship to the early Christian Church. In 1841 Newman's Tract XC argued that the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England were largely compatible with Roman Catholic teaching. Opposition was immediate and further tracts were banned. Two years later Newman resigned his Anglican living; he joined the Roman Catholic Church in 1845. The record of this journey was set out in 1864 in his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua.*

Looking back on his life Newman discovers:

> [F]or years I must have had something of an habitual notion [...] that my mind had not found its ultimate rest, and that in some sense or other I was on journey.[22]

Newman's 'journey', is like those stories of Little Nell, Ruth and Guy, which, like his conversion, are physically completed on this side of heaven; and it is like Christian's journey in that his mind must suffer a form of death before finding its 'ultimate rest'. 'From the end of 1841, I was on my death-bed, as regards my membership with the Anglican Church, though at the time I became aware of it only by degrees.' Newman's conversion was no sudden revelation on the Damascus road. 'Great acts take time' (*Apologia*, pp.141,159), he insists and his was a journey whose focus was something only gradually recognized.

Like the novelist, Newman is concerned with the working out of plot towards conclusion. He makes, however, a clear distinction. For him the conclusion is known only to God and the Church to which it is revealed; elsewhere there is confusion and

[22] John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, 1864, ed. Ian Ker (London: Penguin, 1994), p.117; hereafter cited *Apologia.*

darkness, and in this he foreshadows that later nineteenth-century view that this world offers no satisfactory conclusion at all. In the *Apologia* he shows that the pattern for a life may be discerned before death but only through the belief in an absolute truth as revealed by the Catholic Church. Kermode argues, 'One may perceive in a life some moment that gives sense and structure to the whole, and it need not come at the end of the life', and offers as an example another great conversion, Saint Augustine's.[23] Newman has felt, 'led on by God's hand blindly' (*Apologia*, p.117), but it is only when the place of 'ultimate rest' is reached that the journey itself can be understood and written down.

Newman's reception into the Church, like so many fictional deaths, is shown through a gap in the text. For Newman there was a time when he was not a Catholic and a time when he is and the moment of change is as private as the moment of death.[24] The conversion, in reading like a death, brings the same sadness of loss, of friends, 'Various friends came to see the last of me', and of place, 'I have never seen Oxford since' (*Apologia*, pp.212, 213).[25] But for Newman it is not a conclusion:

> From the time that I became a Catholic [...] I have had no variations to record, and have had no anxiety of heart whatever. I have been in perfect peace and contentment; I never have had one doubt. [...] it was like coming into port after a rough sea; and my happiness on that score remains to this day without interruption.
>
> *Apologia*, p.214

This is that point when, because of where you stand, all may be understood. And what is carried from here into the remaining pages of the work is, quite simply, 'my happiness'. The mind, Newman has shown, can find rest on this side of heaven: the

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[23] Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1980), p.16.

[24] Nor does *Loss and Gain* (1848), Newman's fictional account of conversion, show the protagonist's reception into the Catholic Church.

[25] For a sensitive reading of the pain this last statement holds see Walter E. Houghton, *The Art of Newman's 'Apologia'*, 1945 (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon, 1970), p.66.

exercised mind, driven towards truth, can arrive at a place of 'perfect peace and contentment'.

Newman differs from the novelist, then, in not seeking for an equivalent for religious doctrine in the human world but for the doctrine itself. Oxford is left behind; he enters the City of God, the Roman Catholic Church; and novelistic structures are discarded. For him the pattern of the journey was eventually understood from the standpoint of his religious conversion. The symbolic death that he undergoes is both a place of renewal where, as Christian finds as he steps from the River, the problems of the world are left behind, and a place such as Hunt hopes for, where there will be no more puzzling questions, 'no variations'.

In a sermon preached in 1836, Newman took as his subject 'The Greatness and Littleness of Human Life' and, as his text, the passage from Genesis where Jacob describes the one hundred and thirty years of his 'pilgrimage' as 'few and evil':

> Thus we are ever expecting great things from life, from our internal consciousness every moment of our having souls; and we are ever being disappointed, on considering what we have gained from time past, or can hope from time to come.[26]

While Dickens, Mrs Gaskell and Charlotte Yonge seek to justify the relation of death to life in terms of its temporal effects, Newman seems to offer an account of a life closer to the disillusion of Gissing's Godwin Peak or Hardy's Jude Fawley:

> Our earthly life [...] gives promise of what it does not accomplish. It promises immortality, yet it is mortal; it contains life in death and eternity in time; and it attracts us by beginnings which faith alone brings to an end.
>
> Sermon, p.144

The rise and fall of hope and disappointment confirm the earlier thought. The stop, however, that words such as 'mortal', 'death', and 'time' should bring is never

[26] John Henry Newman, 'The Greatness and Littleness of Human Life', 1836, in *A Newman Treasury* (London: Longmans, Green and Co. 1945), pp.142-151 (pp. 142, 144); hereafter cited Sermon.

completely realized. For Newman, the religious man, the greater words, 'immortality', 'life', and 'eternity', are in no way diminished by their finite counterparts but become, as they stand beside them, more expansive, more eternal. Together they form a haunting reminder of what was originally intended, a life that did not suffer the division of death between hope and the realization of expectation.

For Newman the wholeness that should be ours and was lost has left a residual memory of what it might feel like to be whole in a world where 'faith alone' can reach towards such 'an end'. In the *Apologia* and in his novel *Loss and Gain*, he shows lives beset by paradox, incompletion striving towards fulfilment. In the sermon he shows the mind forced 'forward to the thought of another life, as almost the necessary counterpart and consequence of this life' (Sermon, p.144). Guy Morville, in perceiving 'that earthly happiness was fleeting', comes to a confidence in something more lasting beyond the death. Amy, through the restriction of 'She missed him', gains the larger power of 'looking forward to meeting him'. Kit Nubbles, at the end of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, is left puzzled but trusting. His simple nature lacks the deeper understanding of Guy and Amy, but he knows to look beyond life for a soul's continuance. Newman finds that within the very incompleteness of life lies the security that it will continue into wholeness: 'a certainty striking home to our hearts' (Sermon, p.145). Disappointment with our journey occurs because we are not, as Leigh Hunt discovered, looking to the right place for the ending. Life's endings appear as hopes frustrated because, quite simply, they are not the ending.

In her commentary on *The Divine Comedy*, Emelia Russell Gurney rewrites Dante's journey as another version of *The Pilgrim's Progress* – a travelling through death to see God. The heaven that this pilgrim attains is entered into in a way that

Bunyan could only envy: 'I looked in after them' (*PP*, p.141). Mrs Gurney's meditations, however, remind the reader how Dante, as narrator, travels into a greater completion. 'The mysterious Secret, which is the goal and the inspiration of the long Pilgrimage, is revealing itself to the spiritual eye – the Alpha and Omega of all Life in its fulness, of all Hope, of all Love'.[27] Dante, as pilgrim, is seen to achieve the type of fulfilment that the novel cannot aspire to and that Newman, in his sermon, had shown to be the quest of every man. Newman's own depiction of such attainment, the fulfilment of the thought within the sermon, is given in his poem 'The Dream of Gerontius' (1865) written many years after his conversion. The first lines of the poem, the words of the dying Gerontius, 'JESU, MARIA – I am near to death, / And Thou art calling me', are not so very different from the final words of Ruth Hilton and Guy Morville. For Newman, however, this is only a moment in the pilgrimage and he traces the journey of the Soul through death to the throne of God. 'I go before my Judge', the Soul submits, and the poem is both an expression of that necessary further journey beyond life's unsatisfactory span of years and a celebration of the soul's ability to acknowledge its final place of completion.[28]

1.3 Thomas Carlyle: *The Life of John Sterling* (1851), Anthony Trollope: *He Knew He Was Right* (1869)

Each of the narratives discussed above is intended to be read as a celebration of a life, a submission of the way a life should be lived. When Thomas Carlyle wrote *The Life of John Sterling*, however, he was writing, as he himself confessed, the life of a man who did not seem to merit the record of a biography:

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[27] Emelia Russell Gurney, *Dante's Pilgrim's Progress* (London: Elliot Stock, 1893), p.420.
[28] John Henry Newman, 'The Dream of Gerontius' (1865), in *The Dream of Gerontius and Other Poems* (London: Oxford University Press, 1914), I.1-2, VI.837.

> His character was not supremely original; neither was his fate in the world wonderful. What he did was inconsiderable enough; and as to what it lay in him to have done, this was but a problem, now beyond possibility of settlement.[29]

Carlyle acknowledges his disappointment even before the story has been told. There is, he feels, no mark in such a life by which success can be measured. He saw Sterling's life as, 'an expressive emblem of his time' (*LJS*, p.6) and emphasizes the loss of religious direction that leads to a misappropriation and waste of talent.

For Carlyle himself, orthodox belief had given way to an understanding of God much wider than the traditional God of Christianity. '[H]is divinity is a sort of amalgam of Jehovah, Odin, Calvin's predestinating God and the Soul of the World', Willey suggests and then immediately insists on the full integrity of Carlyle's commitment. '[T]his faith, describe it as we will, was the invisible sun by which he lived'.[30] Carlyle's writing gives shape to his beliefs by offering religious structures that complement rather than replace the old ones. The bible is joined by literature, for example, saints by 'heroes' such as Muhammad, Shakespeare and Cromwell, and the sustaining force behind a life was to be a true vocation, work, and the fulfilment of each capacity. The inability to realize these last things was the mark of Sterling's failure. At the end of each new project he finds 'that the goal of his pilgrimage was *not* there [...] wherever it may be!'. Travelling so arbitrarily through life, always hopeful, always failing, always reformulating but always unable to fix the true centre of the quest, Sterling's life was, for Carlyle, a characteristically modern one. Carlyle judged his age to be one where, 'The roads are many; the authentic finger-posts are few' (*LJS*, pp. 106-107, 108), and he saw Sterling as astray in it.

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[29] Thomas Carlyle, *The Life of John Sterling*, 1851 (London: Oxford University Press, 1907), p.5; hereafter cited *LJS*.

[30] Basil Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies: Coleridge to Matthew Arnold* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961), p. 113.

Carlyle's concern is for those caught up in the times he lives in and he heaps contempt, not on the individual, but on the journey itself:

> No fixed highway more; the old spiritual highways and recognised paths to the Eternal, now all torn up and flung in heaps, submerged in unutterable boiling mud-oceans of Hypocrisy and Unbelievability, of brutal living Atheism and damnable dead putrescent Cant: surely a tragic pilgrimage for all mortals; [...] and for the young pious soul, winged with genius, and passionately seeking land [...] more tragical than for any! – A pilgrimage we must all undertake nevertheless, and make the best of with our respective means.
>
> *LJS*, p.100

Throughout this 'pilgrimage' the paths to 'the Eternal' are either blocked or askew and the Godhead cannot be sighted as the place of destination. When Ruth Hilton finds herself near despair she is saved by looking the short distance towards the birth of her child. Nothing of this sort is offered here, only the push from behind by the blind duty of 'we must'. This is the pilgrimage that Hale White, Gissing and Hardy will narrate, pilgrimage bravely continued, born out of a residual race memory of how life should be lived. Carlyle does find hope, but it is based on those who have failed, who have 'bequeathed their life as a contribution to us, have valiantly laid their bodies in the chasm for us' (*LJS*, p.100). It is their failure, not their success, which may lead to the salvation of others and it is where Carlyle's tentative hope for Sterling's redemption lies.

Significantly, then, Carlyle refuses to see Sterling's death as in any way apotheotic:

> His business with the world was done; the one business now to await silently what may lie in other grander worlds.
>
> *LJS*, p.269

With the break of the semi-colon the meaning of 'business' changes from that first implication of failed urgency to a calm and more hopeful attentiveness. It is perhaps

only now, with the final partition of death actually upon him, that Sterling can find the stillness and reflection that he had so long needed. Nevertheless, it is the first more urgent activity that, in the world's terms, gives value to a life and the implication here is that this 'business' did not amount to very much at all.

It is a new model for biography to write of a life as an instance of waste and misdirection, a story of how a life was not to be lived. The intense sympathy Carlyle felt for his subject, however, and the dignity he gives it as a perfect illustration of the spirit of the age, make this biography more than extended satire and it anticipates how, later in the century, models of narrative will move away from portraying lives that are justified by their deaths. *John Sterling* looks forward to later nineteenth-century works such as *Middlemarch* (1871-1872), which, twenty years after, tells the story of another life whose great hopes become 'dispersed among hindrances, instead of centring in some long-recognizable deed' (*M*, p.4). However, while the failure of Dorothea Brooke to be a new Saint Theresa may owe something to Sterling's incapacity to be as Bunyan's Pilgrim, George Eliot resists Carlyle's stern criticisms and insists upon the achievements of a life however anonymous and subdued its effect. It is William Hale White, writing thirty years after Carlyle, who, through the pages of *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford* (1881), really tries to explain what a life lived as incomplete and faltering might feel like. This 'autobiography' is John Sterling's biography experienced from the inside.[31]

Novels contemporary to *The Life of John Sterling* might, it is true, indicate lives that end with comparable severity. There is the death of William Dorrit, for instance, Hetty Sorrel or Mr Casaubon. In these cases, however, the novel does not

[31] Hale White wrote an introduction to the 1907 edition of *LJS*.

centre itself in that death. They are part of larger designs that indicate the significance of the lives attained by characters that carry the novel forward. There are cases where the main protagonist's life is brought to a premature and difficult end, but these tend to be properly tragic and a source of illumination to the reader. The deaths that close *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), for instance, give intensity to the family life and enmity that is at the root of the whole novel. It is different from the sense of futility that the death as a conclusion gives to George Gissing's *Born in Exile* (1892), Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895) or Mrs Humphry Ward's *Helbeck of Bannisdale* (1898). These are pilgrims' progresses where the design of the novel indicates the possibility of destination and depicts significant stages on the journey, but where the experience of the characters is of a loss of meaning, or worse, a failure to find any meaning at all.

Few novels of the mid-nineteenth century give their first attention to the failure of a life to develop so that the death manifests, not some interior worth of character, but the delusion in which the life has been lived. It is this attribute that makes Anthony Trollope's *He Knew He Was Right* (1869) so distinctive a work. Trollope writes of a life that fails to realize its gifts and talents. His story is of an anti-progress; it tells of a life adrift, as Carlyle showed Sterling's to be, on the 'no fixed highway' of the mid-nineteenth century.

In *Ruth*, *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *The Heir of Redclyffe*, the holy deaths of the protagonists celebrate the life that has gone before and signal the redemptive qualities the life has offered. The deaths also bring their own solace and comfort as well as a deepened understanding of pilgrimage to those who remain behind. The lives of the protagonists are seen to have an enduring effect that death will not destroy and the link established between earth and heaven is well defined in order

that the death should be seen, not as a conclusion, but as a step in a rite of passage. These marks of true pilgrimage are used to prove the internal register of morality. In *He Knew He Was Right* this internal register goes awry. Trollope's story, as his title suggests, is not of man's struggle to stand finally in uprightness before God, but of a man holding fast to his own self-conceived conviction. This protagonist, Louis Trevelyan, becomes suspicious that his wife, Emily, is behaving indiscreetly, an apprehension that hardens into an all-consuming undertaking, leaving no space in his life for anything other than the gathering of proofs against her. 'His mind was at work upon it always.'[32] Such busyness directed to one end holds none of the religious joy that a pilgrim such as Christian brings to the journey. This 'at work' is a hard and unremitting obsession that, as it deepens into madness, makes the reader aware of a life moving towards destruction rather than redemption.

The prophetic imperative used by Bunyan in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, '*Fly from the wrath to come*' (*PP*, p.12), underlies the title of the first chapter of Trollope's story: '*Showing How Wrath Began*' (*HK*, p.9). This is Trollope's ironic deception, placed to illuminate more fully man's foolishness in adopting the certitude of the novel's title, the revelation of which should belong to God alone. The judgments and anger that come from Trevelyan's type of knowing turn inward to wreak damage on the self from which they spring. What is begun, in this chapter, is Trevelyan's dreadful end.

That first suggestion of righteous pilgrimage, however, is reinforced momentarily by the book's opening phrases as they reword the closing lines of *Paradise Lost:*

[32] Anthony Trollope, *He Knew He Was Right*, 1869, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Penguin, 1994), p.326; hereafter cited *HK*.

> When Louis Trevelyan was twenty-four years old, he had all the world before him where to choose; and, among other things, he chose to go to the Mandarin Islands, and there fell in love with Emily Rowley, the daughter of Sir Marmaduke, the governor.
>
> *HK*, p.9

Trollope gives that first high impression as a memory of an age that has passed. The fall from grace is immediate and unrelieved as the tone descends first into looseness and uncertainty, 'among other things', and then into parody, 'the Mandarin Islands'. Trollope is not writing of a redemptive determination directed by holy guidance but is looking towards a life where caprice and accident lead inexorably to unpremeditated and unavoidable catastrophe.

'He seemed [...] to be withering away', Trevelyan's wife says of him in one of those reminders, at the end of the book, of the illusory promises of the beginning, and again, as his doctor notes, 'there is nothing left in him by which he can lay hold of life again'. The story tells, not of a life being used even for some mistaken end, but of its being used up and the terrible phrase, 'there is nothing left in him', shows how life cannot accomplish an 'again'. Life is only given once and here has gone to waste and for nothing. Neither is this, nor the death that follows, a punishment for wickedness like the death of Bill Sikes or Daniel Quilp, for this story is not about wickedness. It is about what can happen, unwittingly, to any man who fails to find direction. It is pitiful rather than tragic, and while Trevelyan's madness might, in places, echo the grander madness of Lear, 'I have no tie, sir – no tie anywhere', it is an echo weakened by the banalities of a lesser age, 'I don't even want the *Daily Record*, [...] think of that!' (*HK*, pp.756, 817, 769).[33]

[33] Kermode notes that Trevelyan's story is 'Othello's jealousy replayed [...] in a remote key' (*HK*, intro., p.xvii).

Little Nell, Ruth Hilton and Guy Morville were all examples of lives that came eventually to the path that leads towards the Celestial City. Trevelyan does not find such a way through to deliverance and even at the end, being nursed by a more compliant Emily, he hovers between forgiveness and his old conviction that she had, in some way, sinned against him. All Emily wishes is that she should be 'acquitted in this world by him' (*HK*, p.818), but the finality of death only shows her husband at first undecided and then struggling too late towards what is nothing more than inarticulacy and ambiguity:

> 'Kiss my hand, Louis, if you believe me.' And very gently she laid the tips of her fingers on his lips. For a moment or two she waited, and the kiss did not come. Would he spare her in this the last moment left to him either for justice or for mercy? For a moment or two the bitterness of her despair was almost unendurable. She had time to think that were she once to withdraw her hand, she would be condemned forever – and that it must be withdrawn. But at length the lips moved, and with struggling ear she could hear the sound of the tongue within, and the verdict of the dying man had been given in her favour. He never spoke a word more either to annul it or to enforce it.
>
> *HK*, p.820

This is an obscure vision with which to end a life, for Trollope gives nothing to suggest that death for Trevelyan presents either terror or apotheosis. There is no moment of revelation, and no glimpse beyond the barrier that separates this world from the next. The death does, however, suit the present temper of a man with 'nothing left in him'. None of his emotions are described, only Emily's. All the actions too come from her except those last, so painfully awaited. There is, held in his immobility, a wish to die uncommitted to his wife's forgiveness that is being fought by the strength of her desire that this should not be so. But, if Emily's action, in holding firm her hand even in the conviction of her own sense 'that it must be withdrawn', can be seen as a small feat of heroism, then Trevelyan's last efforts, so

alien now to what is his nature, can be granted their own type of magnitude. Viewed from this perspective there is a tiny coming together here that the death holds fast. And this, for Trevelyan, is what death does. He has reverted to his old belief so often that if he had lived longer it is probable that he would have done so again. Instead, through death, he is kept forever at the moment of an appearance of forgiveness. This is an eternal holding between one extreme, 'to annul', and another, 'to enforce'. As such it is the nearest to blessedness such a life can aspire to.

But Trevelyan's final gesture of forgiveness towards his wife is so small and relies so heavily upon her interpretation that the reader cannot wholly accept the sense of her meaning. What we are seeing here, in the final scene of this terrible marriage, is the struggle of two wills to hold their own to the end; there is Emily's insistence on a kind of victory when it no longer matters and Trevelyan's concession, if that is what it is, which avoids the terms laid down by his wife that he kiss her fingers. Death, which might create its own meaning at this point in the novel, is simply taken over by the same sterile pursuit of dominance that has ruined both their lives, a perseverance that has, in the end, denied Emily a fullness of conviction and Trevelyan a fullness of redemption. But for Emily, this has to do. ' "He declared to me at last that he trusted me," she said – almost believing that real words had come from his lips to that effect' (*HK*, p.820). In a reversal of what Kit Nubbles does for Nell, Emily holds safe her husband's small link with redemption precisely because she will never tell the whole of the story. She enters into complicity with his memory and tells the part she wants to believe – the part that will make her own story whole and will grant to it the blessing of a calm future.

It is the reader, unable to know for certain the truth of Trevelyan's deathbed intentions, who enters into an inconclusiveness that parodies the title of the book, a

lack of certainty in the ending that came to characterize books written at the end of the century. And Trollope, as those later novelists will often do, finds a way to release the tension of that uncertainty by moving to a safer ending, for, as the story draws to a conclusion, its remaining concern is with characters less problematic than Emily and Trevelyan. In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Ruth*, and *The Heir of Redclyffe*, the characters that continue the story are smaller and more imperfect than those who have died but, in taking on their mantle, gain some of their stature. This does not happen here and neither are these instances of, as Kermode expressed it, 'the world [going] forward in the hands of exhausted survivors'.[34] The characters who continue in *He Knew He Was Right*, Emily's sister, for example, or Trevelyan's friend, Hugh Stanbury, are simply examples of how happier lives may be lived – more considerately and with the type of thoughtfulness that moves them away from tragedy. This type of ending is indicative of those in later novels where the high and misguided aims of the main figures come, after the deaths, to be replaced by a shift in expectation. After Michael Henchard's death, for example, his stepdaughter, Elizabeth-Jane, finds that she holds 'the secret [...] of making limited opportunities endurable' (*Mayor*, p.322). But for Hardy, as for Trollope, there was no story in 'limited opportunities' or in 'endurable'. The story lies elsewhere and has already been told.

Then, surprisingly, there is a further move away from Trevelyan's story. As the last thought the novel gives, Trollope presents those small-part actors, Giles Hickbody and his sweetheart Martha. Martha is the devoted servant of another minor character in the story, but we have never been led to believe that she has a life of her own and, in a very long novel, Giles, another servant in the same household, has

[34] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, 1966 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.82.

hardly been mentioned above twice. And now, a marriage between these two, previously suggested as a joke at the expense of customary conclusions, becomes the way in which Trollope chooses to end his narrative. The sense of underlying providence that justifies the numerous marriages at the end of other novels gives place here to a sense of the arbitrary and to the thought that happiness might come, if to anyone, then to those content to live without a story at all – to those who simply fill in the background to other people's lives. Trollope, in ending, dispenses with the references to Milton and Bunyan, not because he finds a lack of truth in their stories, but because the greatness contained in them seems inappropriate to the way life has come to be lived in the middle of the nineteenth century. With the promise of another marriage he brings his story back to a place similar to where it began so that he can make a significant adjustment downwards. Such homely, obscure lives with which he finishes will never merit their own story. They will, however, in not achieving too much, achieve just enough for ordinary people to be 'made happy' (*HK*, p.823).

The death of the protagonist, in other novels of this period, is usually big enough to honour the intentions of the life that has gone before and to give satisfaction and meaning to the end of the story. These deaths act as a positive culmination of everything the life has come to be and as a redemptive example to other, smaller lives. Biographies such as Mrs Gaskell and John Forster's take the tone of their endings from such fictional works and are adjusted by their writers so that they can underline the implications and ideals found in their subjects' lives. The disappointment and unfulfilled nature of human endings that Newman wrote about in his sermon are compensated for by both these authors in a fashion that carries them beyond mere closure. Nor does Newman's autobiography, as the journey of a

religious soul towards its own certainty, fail to provide the conclusiveness and satisfaction of an end to that journey although the life may not be over. Even the subdued nature of Leigh Hunt's second ending looks, as Newman also taught, beyond it to something more hopeful and complete. Of the works considered above it is only Carlyle's biography and Trollope's novel, which, in failing to find value in the lives depicted, are unable to show fulfilment or true redemption in the death. These works look forward to the way characters later in the century may come to be depicted.

Later authors came to rewrite *The Pilgrim's Progress* so that the efforts of pilgrimage were always discernible in the lives of the protagonists. Lacking the type of explicit moral guidance granted to Christian, these pilgrimages are often confused, frequently misguided, and sometimes lacking in direction. Some end in failure; others end in a new form of fulfilment. It is with a study of such narratives that the remainder of this thesis will be concerned.

Chapter Two

Mrs Humphry Ward (1851-1920)

Mrs Humphry Ward was born Mary Arnold in 1851. She was the granddaughter of Thomas Arnold, the great, reforming headmaster of Rugby School, and the niece of Matthew Arnold, the poet and essayist. Mainly because of her father's conversion to Catholicism in 1856, Mary's early years were unsettled and often unhappy. In 1865, however, her father left the Catholic Church and the family settled in Oxford where, upon leaving school in 1867, Mary joined them. Thoroughly at home in Oxford's scholarly atmosphere she undertook a comprehensive study of medieval Spain and its literature. This resulted in her own conversion – in the opposite direction to her father's – for, shortly after her marriage to Thomas Humphry Ward in 1872, she came, through her research, to question the validity of scriptural miracles and therefore the whole historical basis of the Christian faith including the Resurrection. Mary never lost her belief in God but practised a reconstructed Christianity that recognized the spiritual truth in the biblical stories without accepting them as an accurate history.

Mrs Ward was a well-known figure in the intellectual circles of late-Victorian England, an energetic philanthropist, and an active supporter of higher education for women. She was also a successful and prolific novelist. Balancing the needs of family with her many social and charitable commitments she was the author of twenty-five novels. These works reflected her concerns with the political, social and religious issues of her day and for a time she enjoyed enormous popularity on both sides of the Atlantic. By the end of her life, however, interest in her work was waning and she died in 1920 having, in her final years, lamented her inability to

write a good detective story. She is little read today, her type of moral earnestness, so admired by the Victorian reader, having gone out of fashion.

Her two most famous novels are *Robert Elsmere* (1888) and *Helbeck of Bannisdale* (1898). Her experience of doubt and adaptation, combined with the memory of a family unit eventually destroyed by religious division (her mother was a staunch Protestant and her father's reconversion to Catholicism in 1876 brought about a separation), inform the nature of these works. The stories rewrite her parents' struggles to uphold a relationship in the face of religious difference even as they explore Mrs Ward's own concerns with the necessity of maintaining a personal truth. While Mrs Ward sees religion as something that should be allowed to develop, and 'dogmatic Christianity [...] but one of many systems that human nature has in turn framed for its shelter and support', she recognizes the dangers inherent in her conviction. Neither is she afraid to ask the questions that haunted so many late-nineteenth-century writers and that are central to this thesis:

> What follows? [...] Is the Christian's happy certainty of an ideal purpose in this life and an ideal justice in the next indeed a delusion? [...] Is there indeed no certainty of our whence, no news of our whither? Is death the end?[1]

These questions helped shape the contrasting structures of *Robert Elsmere* and *Helbeck of Bannisdale*, the eponymous hero of the former finding a way through to a secular form of continuation, the heroine of the latter dying convinced that death is indeed, 'the end'.

2.1 *Robert Elsmere* (1888)

The above quotations are taken from *Unbelief and Sin: A Protest*, a pamphlet written and published by Mrs Ward in 1881 in answer to a sermon she had attended in Oxford. Here the preacher had taken as his subject, 'The present unsettlement in

[1] Mrs Humphry Ward, *Unbelief and Sin: A Protest* (n. pub.: 1881), p. 15; hereafter cited *Unbelief*.

religion', and to Mrs Ward's distress, he had 'connected the "unsettlement" definitely with "sin" '.[2] A reply she felt was necessary and her pamphlet tracks sympathetically 'that great movement of the human mind against the traditional Christian theology' (*Unbelief*, p.4). *Unbelief and Sin*, due to a printing irregularity, was almost immediately withdrawn from sale. It did, however, contain 'the germ of the later book' (*Recollections*, p.169), her second novel, *Robert Elsmere*. 'The popular rejection of supernatural Christianity, the greatest religious phenomenon of late Victorian England, [...] found in *Robert Elsmere* its most vivid and intelligent expression in fiction',[3] Margaret Maison declares and the novel, in fact, had a greater effect than the pamphlet could ever have enjoyed for, in spite of its length and protracted theological arguments, it was a huge and immediate success.

Robert Elsmere is a novel about a dedicated life, its eponymous protagonist a young and idealistic clergyman who loses his belief in a miraculous Christianity and resigns his living. It is a story of progress, 'of a quick soul's development', but, unlike Christian's progress, Elsmere's test is that he should have the courage to accept that he is on the wrong road and to change direction. Through her protagonist, Mrs Ward seeks to discover a way of life that could still be judged as saintly even as he follows a path which is not traditionally religious – a new type of religious life that would combat both orthodoxy and, what she describes as, the 'spiritual anarchy and poverty' (*RE*, pp.42, 410) of atheism. As she explains in her *Recollections*, 'I wanted to show how a man of sensitive and noble character, born for religion, comes to throw off the orthodoxies of his day and moment, and to go out into the wilderness where all is experiment, and spiritual life begins again' (*Recollections*, p.230). 'The world was all before him where to choose' (*RE*, p.47), Robert's mother thinks as her

[2] Mrs Humphry Ward, *A Writer's Recollections* (London: W. Collins Sons, 1918), p.168; hereafter cited *Recollections*.
[3] Margaret Maison, *Search Your Soul, Eustace* (London and New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961), p.265.

son leaves home for university and this, for Mrs Ward, is not the ironic referral given by Trollope in *He Knew He Was Right.* Instead, she insists upon the heroic nature of the journey, on its dangerous breadth of choice, and, poignantly, of the paradise lost as the security of orthodoxy is left behind. Mrs Ward insists in *Robert Elsmere* that the nature of pilgrimage should change, should progress. The transformation, however, is presented not as gain but as loss and pain as the book struggles to define a path for Elsmere that will lead to a destination that has new value and meaning.[4]

Robert journeys from religious conformity into a new form of the old religion, his objective becoming the establishment of this new faith among London's working class – the founding of the 'New Christian Brotherhood' in London's Elgood Street. The structure of the novel entails that Robert dies, but his death is regarded by others in the book as a waste, an ending that involves pathos rather than triumph or tragedy. Mrs Ward describes Robert's work as, 'the New Jerusalem of a regenerate faith', and Robert as nearly overcome by the thought of what his death will mean: '*My God! my God! no time, no future!*' (*RE*, p.592). In this novel, the 'New Jerusalem' is not any Celestial City but the mission in Elgood Street. When all meaning is constituted in this life, however, there is a danger that death may be the thing that stops the life's work being completed. Mrs Ward gives other instances. Robert's friend, Squire Wendover, for example, dies with his last book unfinished and one of the Elgood Street disciples dies saddened by his inability to continue to support his alcoholic wife. Mrs Ward uses both occasions to suggest that it must be another's duty (Robert's in these cases) to continue the work.

This is one way, Mrs Ward feels, into the new religious future and at the end of her story she slightly misquotes from Clough's 'Come, Poet, Come!':

Others, I doubt not, if not we,

[4] Mrs Ward gives the title 'Gain and Loss' to the last book of *Robert Elsmere*, an inversion of the title Newman gave to his novel of religious conversion, *Loss and Gain.*

> The issue of our toils shall see;
> And (they forgotten and unknown)
> Young children gather as their own
> The harvest that the dead had sown.[5]
>
> *RE*, p.604

The continuation of the earthly pilgrimage in earlier novels had also relied upon other characters in the story but, in these cases, the this-worldly task has been completed before death by the protagonist. Nell, for example, achieves safety and saves her grandfather; Ruth atones for her sin and nurses her local community through a typhus epidemic; and Guy, having conquered his own shortcomings, becomes an example of the way a life should be lived. These completions are both anticipation and proof of the greater fulfilment that the protagonist will realize in heaven. Robert, however, dies with his task unfinished, with no vision of heaven to sustain him, and with only the promise that the 'harvest' will be gathered at some point in the future.

In *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), Olive Schreiner includes a tale of pilgrimage that, like *Robert Elsmere's*, fails to be completed. A hunter sets out as a young man in search of the bird of Truth; he leaves behind him the 'valleys of superstition' but, growing old in the search, is set to die long before he reaches the summit of the mountain where he believes the bird is to be found. Like Elsmere, however, he discovers that 'salvation is in work', is in the contribution the individual makes to the progress of the journey. A work that is bigger than the life will not be completed within the confines of any one pilgrimage and the consolation comes in knowing that what has been well begun will be continued and achieved by others, that 'no man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself'. The hunter's joy as he

[5] The original pamphlet began with this quotation and it was inscribed by Mrs Ward's family on her tombstone. This last is a fitting postscript to the story as Mrs Ward, in 1897, in answer to her claim at the end of *Robert Elsmere*, 'The New Brotherhood still exists, and grows' (*RE*, p.604), set up her own venture for work among the poor in London, The Passmore Edwards Settlement. It survives today as Mary Ward House and accommodates an Adult Education College in central London.

expresses this conviction is profound: 'My soul hears their glad step coming'. And then, because this story within a story is given as allegory, such belief is brought to proof and a connection between the pilgrim and the unattained goal accomplished: 'Then slowly [...] through the still air, came something falling, [...]. It was a feather. He died holding it.'[6]

Such an interruption to the natural order of things is beyond anything that Mrs Ward, in a novel that is a testament to rationalist thought, can allow.[7] Instead, as Robert lies dying, she follows the example of earlier 'holy deaths' just so far and then brings about a change. Robert dies at length from a noble cause; his wife is beside him as he dies; and she will continue Robert's work even as their child, Mary, connects the coming hope to Robert himself. His last words, then, look backward not forward as Ruth and Guy's did. He looks not to heaven but to the moment when that connection was forged and when, like Schreiner's hunter, he can rejoice in the next generation of pilgrimage:

> An ecstasy of joy was on his face; the whole man bent forward listening.
> '*The child's cry! – thank God!* [...] *Catherine – thank God!*'
>
> *RE*, p.604

As Robert's last cry becomes part of the first cry of his own daughter the death achieves a secular apotheosis – his 'ecstasy' recollective rather than transcendent. '[P]ray [...] that at the end there may be light!' (*RE*, p.325), he had asked of

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[6] Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm*, 1883 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), pp.162, 167, 168, 169. See: 'People seldom realise the enormous period of time which each change in men's ideas requires for its full accomplishment' (John Morley, *On Compromise* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1874), pp. 179; hereafter cited *On Compromise*). Morley (1838-1923) was a lifelong friend of Mrs Ward. Sutherland details his support of her as an aspiring author and how he made the main speech at the 'second grand opening' of The Passmore Edwards Settlement in 1898 (John Sutherland, *Mrs Humphry Ward* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), pp.90, 224; hereafter cited Sutherland). Of *On Compromise* Mrs Ward wrote, 'I shall never lose the impression that "Compromise", with its almost savage appeal for sincerity in word and deed, made upon me – an impression which had its share in "Robert Elsmere" ' (*Recollections*, p.184).

[7] Neither can Schreiner. The actual novel ends hopefully but without the inserted story's demonstration of certainty.

Catherine and, 'at the end', he turns all the meaning he has found in his new religious life towards the greatest of human gifts that he has been given, his wife safe from the dangers of childbirth and his daughter newly born.

Catherine's role of continuance has been part of the novel from the start for she has taken on the burden of her dead father's unfinished pilgrimage even before the story begins. Mr Leyburn had been an Oxford don affected by the religious turmoil of his age. It is the story of his heroic pilgrimage sustained, even in the face of doubt, to the point of death, that holds Catherine steady. Her father, in dying, has handed on to her his care of duty towards those whom he must leave behind and she becomes his immortality and the Christiana to his Christian, forming her life by what she distinguishes to be the perfect pattern. And, like Christiana, who in pilgrimage is joined by so many diverse souls, Catherine takes seriously her responsibility towards the very different lives of the family left in her charge. The difficulties placed in the path of Robert's courtship are never the accustomed ones of a conventional romance but are shaped by Catherine's own religious conviction that her path is chosen and that marriage cannot be for her. Persuaded, she marries Robert and this conventionally religious soul becomes the link between the religious doubt experienced only ever as difficulty by her father and of the same doubt brought to crisis by her husband. Catherine, devout in the traditionally religious sense, emerges as an intense figure of interest in the novel continually making real to the reader the strengths of the older orthodoxy. Her struggles to accommodate Robert's religious revisions within her own belief are as painful and profound as anything he suffers. 'The future faith, like that of the past, brings not peace but a sword' (*On Compromise*, p.121), Morley insists, and Catherine's eventual, if partial, accommodation of Robert's new belief is perhaps the book's greatest triumph.

Standing against Catherine in the structure of the novel is Squire Wendover. His life has been a model of rationalism and atheistic certainty, doubts have been early disposed of, and he unequivocally embraces the completeness of unbelief. But this clearness of thought fails him in the end. Wendover's move away from traditional religion has been too complete and the novel, that cannot promote the idea of Hell, provides a dreadful retribution on this side of death.[8] The squire, in fact, goes mad before his death and lives through a time of ghostly fears where all that surrounds him is far from the world of lucid analysis that he was used to inhabit. He is haunted by the type of other-worldliness he has long denied and the madness surrounding his death seems larger than the rational life preceding it. He dies sane but outside the direct action of the novel and the author offers no final consolation to restore the stature of the man as he once was to its pages.

In contrast to these troubled lives and deaths Mrs Ward offers the holy agnosticism of Robert's friend and mentor, Henry Grey. This man was modelled upon Thomas Hill Green, Professor of Moral Philosophy at Oxford, whose life and teaching Mrs Ward much admired.[9] His life is described as 'saintly [...] a beacon, a witness', and his death is intended by the author to reflect his life. He dies, like Wendover, away from the immediate story, but his death, as reported to Robert, is peaceful and the funeral, that Robert attends, suggests an apotheosis sufficient to satisfy the rational mind. It is Grey's life and teaching on which the meaning of the novel is founded and his last days hold fast to its truth: 'Only it seems to be His Will,

[8] See: 'Squire Wendover is for Mrs Ward an object lesson in the terrors of modern rational thought divorced from ethical considerations' (William S. Peterson, *Victorian Heretic* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1976), p. 146; hereafter cited Peterson). See also: 'Here seems to be a little literary intolerance [...]. Robert Elsmere stopped in the downward slide at theism, and it calms and glorifies his death-bed. But the Squire had not stopped there' (W. E. Gladstone, '*Robert Elsmere* and the Battle of Belief', in *Nineteenth Century*, 23 (Jan.– June, 1888), 766-788 (p.771); hereafter cited Gladstone). Gladstone read *Robert Elsmere* with great, if critical interest. Before publishing the above review he exchanged numerous letters with Mrs Ward as well as meeting her to discuss the novel's religious dialogue.

[9] Green is one of 'two friends' to whom the novel is dedicated (*RE*, dedicatory page).

we should be certain of nothing – *but Himself!*' (*RE*, pp.532,536). Although Grey's appearances in the novel are few his spirit is a constant presence. His last meeting with Robert and his death come on either side of the conflict that Robert's religious change brings to his marriage. The most painful part of the journey, then, is bracketed by Robert's two farewells to Grey and this outstanding soul can be seen to stand as guardian over this difficult time. The religious life is still the only deep life in this novel and the issue is whether Robert, through all his changes, can continue to live from that depth. Mrs Ward's hope is to persuade the reader that a life modelled upon the perfect example must itself come to perfection. Through her story she intends to offer shape and structure to what, in the hands of an author such as Gissing or Hardy, could easily become Carlyle's 'no fixed highway'.

The expected patterns of development in this story are all reversed as Mrs Ward deliberately struggles to bring a new meaning out of the actual loss of meaning that is the novel's painful centre. When Robert first recognizes his religious dilemma the Christian who thinks he is far on in his progress finds that he is transfixed. Acknowledging the weight of more than personal responsibility he looks outward as Christian did for saving counsel and carries his anxieties to Oxford and Henry Grey. But Grey's counsel to Robert is to look not outward but inward, to be dependent upon himself: '[L]earn to seek God [...] *in your own soul*, – in the constant verifications of experience, in the life of Christian love'(*RE*, p.356).[10] Bunyan's Christian finds purpose brought to him by Evangelist from a place outside his own mind and experience. Grey describes a state where God's expression of himself, animated by man's own inquiry, will be made manifest in the love that so earnestly seeks him. But the responsibility of salvation is completely internal. For Robert there

[10] See: 'God is not to be sought in nature [...] but in man himself' (*Works of Thomas Hill Green*, ed. R. L. Nettleship, 3 vols (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1888), III, p.265; hereafter cited Green).

will be no divinely-granted saving intervention and he is offered no one but himself to play Evangelist.

This journey relies upon the traveller for both impulse and direction. As such it is dangerously hypothetical and unconfirmed but the religious argument is never afraid to explore the magnitude of what has been lost. Robert tells his wife, 'I can believe no longer in an Incarnation and Resurrection [...] God was in Jesus – pre-eminently, as He is in all great souls, but not otherwise [...] in kind than He is in me or you.' Catherine's reply is full of pain:

> 'So to you,' she said presently in the same strange altered voice. 'My father – when I saw that light on his face before he died, when I heard him cry, "Master, *I come!*" was dying – deceived – deluded. Perhaps even,' and she trembled, 'you think it ends here – our life – our love?'
>
> *RE,* p.364

The 'altered' nature of Catherine's voice is more than a purely physical thing. It is an expression of what must happen, at the end of the nineteenth century, even to a faith as strong as hers when it meets an 'altered' path of belief. As she personalizes what Robert is saying, she reduces his new vision to the sad possibilities of 'deceived – deluded'. Now the father whom she saw as having passed into everlasting life is, in part, denied it. The story of his death is changed as it comes to lie beside Robert's version of it. For Catherine, doubt, like the first sin in Eden, has been made manifest and what is lost is more significant than Robert's own belief as the innocence of faith in which countless thousands have lived and died is brought to uncertainty. Not that Catherine will ever be otherwise convinced but it is not enough that she believes. If Robert does not have faith some part of the continuance into an afterlife is lost. In *Robert Elsmere* Mrs Ward rewrites what earlier Victorian novelists had more confidently claimed because, even when challenged by Catherine's pain, Robert can

only reply, 'I know nothing! But I trust God with all that is dearest to me, with our love, with the soul that is His breath, His work in us!' (*RE*, p.364).

Robert, seeking God in his own soul, is given back the concept of a purely human Christ for whom no resurrection follows the pain of crucifixion. It is this that alters the shape of the novel and transforms what might have been revelation into further suffering as Robert wears himself out in the service of this new faith. But what saves both Robert and the story from bleakness and ineffectuality is the love between husband and wife. Although the couple stand in the novel as opposite poles of religious virtue Catherine, with her steadfastness and depth of faith, is to Robert the part of his soul that once held to conformity and the old belief. As Peterson notes, 'The preservation of Catherine's love is supremely important to Robert, because it is for him the primary evidence of divine love and a reassuring link with the old faith' (Peterson, p.150). 'Help me through this difficult world' (*RE*, p.143) he calls to her as Bunyan's Christian had called to Hopeful and Faithful, and Catherine would be as constant as those two companions. To Robert, without an Evangelist, Catherine's love is a source of revelation. She cannot enter into her husband's spiritually divergent path, nor can her faith hold him back from his journey into the uncharted ways of unorthodoxy, but it can serve to form the yardstick by which he may measure how far he has travelled.

Robert, like Catherine, travels religiously but, in constant danger of trusting to the value of purely rational thought, he is always in need of her anchoring spirit. When he reaches his Vanity Fair in the shape of a society drawing room in fashionable London, he faces an attempted seduction. It is Catherine's name that breaks into his confusion. Made thoroughly conscious of how much he needs his wife's saving goodness he hurries home. Catherine, in Robert's absence, has come to understand the power of his work in Elgood Street and she greets him in tears. As the

couple come together in a joint humility of repentance the religious breach that the story has brought into being is healed and Catherine delivers the pivotal words of the novel – the words that reconcile religious difference:

> ['] God has not one language, but many. I have dared to think He had but one, the one I knew. [...] But I *will* learn my lesson; I will learn to hear the two voices, the voice that speaks to you and the voice that speaks to me – I must.[']
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> *RE*, p.530

Catherine's speech marks another change for this resolute pilgrim, this time into a willingness to open her mind to new ideas, to 'development'. At the very end of the story she will be left, an example of one who has learnt to 'hear [...] two voices', living her own religious life and Robert's:

> Every Sunday morning, with her child beside her, she worshiped in the old ways; every Sunday afternoon saw her black-veiled figure sitting motionless in a corner of the Elgood Street Hall. In the week she gave all her time and money to the various works of charity which he had started. But she held her peace. Many were grateful to her; some loved her; none understood her. She lived for one hope only; and the years passed all too slowly.
>
> *RE*, p.604

It is not a conclusive ending. Catherine does not take the child to Elgood Street and the silence of 'she held her peace' breaks the thread of charitable action. Sutherland feels that 'The novel ends in vague tatters, with Robert dead and the reader unsure whether his crusade has been a victory or quixotic futility' (Sutherland, p.121). But this is intentional. In this changed type of pilgrimage there cannot be satisfactory endings, only conclusions that come as close as possible to that older form and a waiting, 'one hope only', for what may be revealed after death. Gladstone found this structure too difficult. He wrote, 'It is still required by Mrs Ward to fly, and to fly as high as ever; but it is to fly without wings' (Gladstone, p.777). The ending that Mrs Ward gives her story, however, is true to the philosophy of Elsmere's new religion.

'[W]e should be certain of nothing – *but Himself!*' Grey had said and his words proclaim an order where authoritative endings are neither appropriate nor possible.

In 1911 Mrs Ward wrote a sequel to *Robert Elsmere*, *The Case of Richard Meynell*, in which Robert's family reappear, his daughter married to the Richard Meynell of the title, another reforming clergyman. At the end of the book Catherine dies and she looks, as Robert did, back into her life but then, as he could not, forward to a heavenly certainty:

> For one remaining moment of consciousness there ran through the brain the images, affections, adorations of her life. Swift, incredibly swift, the vision of an opening glory – a heavenly throng![11]

This is not a contradiction of Robert's last moments but a death-vision that is completely true for Catherine, the older ways of belief receiving a full, if final, apotheosis.

Towards the end of her husband's life, however, Catherine still hopes for a 'final restoration'. The couple's last endeavours – 'Catherine was making her last effort, Robert his last stand' – are separate in intent but reach a conclusion of compromise as Catherine accepts Robert's plea that all duty should be relinquished to God: 'Leave me in God's hands' (*RE*, pp. 532, 598-599, 600). It is now that Robert attempts to answer the question Catherine asked so long ago concerning life after death, her father, and the love shared between herself and her husband:

> He made it [...] this love – this yearning. And in life He only makes us yearn that He may satisfy. He cannot lead us to the end and disappoint the craving He Himself set in us. No, no – could you – could I – do it? And He, the source of love, of justice –
>
> *RE*, p.600

Newman's insistence, that the mind is forced 'forward to the thought of another life, as almost the necessary counterpart and consequence of this life', still remains for

[11] Mrs Humphry Ward, *The Case of Richard Meynell*, 1911 (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1912), p.525.

Robert.[12] But, while Newman moved his argument from expectancy to certainty, this, the most satisfactory answer that Robert can give, fades into incompletion. The answers that death may contain are, in this novel, kept hidden by the impenetrable barrier of death itself.

In *Ruth*, *The Heir of Redclyffe* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*, the spirit of the three protagonists remains strong after their deaths, convincing the reader that not only was the pilgrimage continued on earth through the death's effects on the survivors but that it was also continued, unseen and unrecorded, in heaven. What the reader is invited to do, at the end of *Robert Elsmere*, is to follow the direction given by Robert's last words, '*The child's cry! [...] Catherine – thank God!*', and reinterpret the death not simply in terms of the continuation of the life-work by Catherine, but still more of the love that makes it possible:

> For eternal life, the ideal state, is not something future and distant. [...] Paradise is here, visible and tangible by mortal eyes and hands, whenever self is lost in loving, whenever the narrow limits of personality are beaten down by the inrush of the Divine Spirit.
>
> *RE*, p.531

The author wants to retain the finality of the traditional terms without turning them into a teleology. The religious narrative ceases to have a destination, 'something future and distant', and has to offer instead moments of insight, the repeated 'whenever'.

Robert's life and death rewrites T. H. Green's statement: 'Faith is not to be saved by anything that would supersede faith, but only by its own faithfulness' (Green, p.272). The road that Robert travels is not the way of pilgrimage as described in *The Pilgrim's Progress* and neither is his death given in the manner of that book's

[12] John Henry Newman, 'The Greatness and Littleness of Human Life' (1836), in *A Newman Treasury*, ed. Charles Frederick Harrold (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1945), pp.142-151 (p.144).

conclusion. Nevertheless, it is still pilgrimage that follows this model as closely as it is able. As Mrs Ward wrote in 1894, 'Yet the Eternal City still crowns the hill; and if the new ways which lead to her often cross and efface the old, if her ancient walls and gates are crumbling, thither still the pilgrims go up.'[13] Like Christian on his journey, Robert comes many times to near disaster but he avoids the rejection of pilgrimage as experienced by Squire Wendover or its failure as has been described in the life of his Oxford tutor, Edward Langham.[14] He has never replaced Christ as the perfect model for the journey but his purely human Christ has been joined by that other pattern of goodness, Henry Grey. Although pilgrimage in *Robert Elsmere* has been taken by its author and adapted to a more secular journey, the spiritual strengths of Christian's earlier journey remain strong in the life of the protagonist. What has changed most particularly is that the journey refuses to end in any well-defined, God-granted conclusion. As Robert says, at the end of his story, 'No, we cannot realise Him in words – we can only live in Him, and die to Him!' (*RE*, p.603). By simply not knowing, he dies in a trust braver than any undoubting religious soul ever had recourse to.

2.2 *Helbeck of Bannisdale* (1898)

Mrs Ward arranged the narrative in *Robert Elsmere* to make certain that the pilgrimage in it would not be seen as a failure. The hero's premature death is given validity by the work he leaves behind; his isolation from his wife is appeased by her own admission of a kind of rightness in his theist beliefs; and his death achieves a secular form of apotheosis. Ten years later, however, in *Helbeck of Bannisdale*, Mrs Ward rewrites the story and confronts the issues she had before ameliorated. From

[13] Mrs Humphry Ward, *Unitarians and the Future* (London: Philip Green, 1894), p.34.
[14] Paralysed between the desire to act and the probable ineffectiveness of any action Langham is another version of Clough's anti-hero, Claude, in 'Amours de Voyage' (1849).

the viewpoint of this novel's ending, the life stories of the main protagonists, Laura Fountain and Alan Helbeck, are marked by futility, hers by her death and his by the failure of all his plans. When Laura dies the novel is brought to a form of completion that Mrs Ward had been careful to avoid in the earlier work and further, the death is given no validity beyond that provided by Laura's own confused, though sincere, reasoning.

Like *Robert Elsmere*, *Helbeck of Bannisdale* is a love story but one where love can neither bring healing nor come to compromise. Rather, as Thomas Hardy also shows, there is only a terrible sense of the irresistibility of its passion, its glorious power, and its irrelevance to the actual conduct of life. While this novel is another version of Robert and Catherine Elsmere's story it also re-examines Rose Leyburn, Catherine's sister, and Edward Langham's, where love demands either a highly unsuitable marriage or a painful separation. The intensity of feeling between Alan and Laura mirrors that earlier passion and, as she does in *Robert Elsmere*, Mrs Ward allows the reader's wish for a happy outcome to become paramount only to disappoint it. In the earlier novel she avoids the issue to some extent for, although Langham retires from the world much as Helbeck does after Laura's death, Rose is permitted to marry. While the man she chooses is a character less developed and less interesting than Langham, he is a rich aristocrat who, in being persuaded by Robert's religious beliefs, enfolds Rose within the religious idealism of the story. Thus Rose and Langham's separation is made bearable and the reader provided with an example, other than Robert and Catherine, of how love may be redemptive. In *Helbeck of Bannisdale*, however, there is only the single couple through whom the story is told and, while the problems that marriage to Helbeck will bring seem to Laura insurmountable, separation is never a possibility. Like Rose she comes within a hairbreadth of a romantically satisfactory but eventually destructive marriage

without the safe harbour of a more prudent option. Laura's love for Helbeck brings tragedy and conclusion for only through suicide can she maintain an escape from what has become an otherwise inextricable difficulty.

The book tells the story of Alan Helbeck, the Catholic squire of an ancient but penurious estate, the Bannisdale of the title, and Laura Fountain, the atheistic daughter of a Cambridge academic who had married Helbeck's sister, Augustina. On the death of her father Laura is removed from Cambridge, the type of place that had formed Robert Elsmere's progressive philosophies, and comes to live in the more backward looking world of Bannisdale. She has friends, the Friedlands, who reserve a life in Cambridge as an option for her, but she is kept away, first by duty and then by her fascination for Helbeck. In the earlier story, Robert's 'development' follows Bunyan's type of allegorical symbolism as each religious change moves him physically as well spiritually – Westmoreland, Murewell, London, and the death in Algiers, all being distinct stages in the journey of a soul.[15] The later novel, however, focuses upon the one place, Bannisdale, as Mrs Ward's metaphor for the lack of progress within its pages.

While Robert and Catherine start religiously from the same point, Laura and Helbeck begin their stories from opposite ends of the theological spectrum and it cannot be said that within the pages of the novel that either of them comes to journey, to 'development'. The flux and change of ideas that was the rationale behind *Robert Elsmere* has become an immovability of belief. Any religious change that does occur, Helbeck's own religious doubts for example and Augustina's lapse from Catholicism and her reconversion, have, on the whole, happened before the novel begins. The only character who changes within the story itself is the young artist,

[15] 'The different locations in which *Robert Elsmere* is portrayed are more than mere backdrops, for the spirit of the place in each location suggests parallels between his development and that of nineteenth-century culture' (Michael Wheeler, *The Art of Allusion in Victorian Fiction* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979), p.122).

Edward Williams who, having been attracted to an aesthetic Catholicism, regresses into unbelief. His conversion, however, is completed before the story opens and his relapse happens outside the narrative. Within it there is no movement. All the modes of religion are distinct but cannot be communicated or brought to development.

Helbeck of Bannisdale illustrates what happens to the pilgrimage story when it is impossible for either protagonist to move away from firmly held convictions. Helbeck's scruples have long been overcome, transformed into a fervent faith, while Laura's atheism is not so much a belief as obedience to her father, an assumption inherent in all her judgments that makes any religious expression incomprehensible to her. Laura's father had not believed in any form of eternal life. He had been a man of great integrity who, even when dying would not compromise his ideals to make the fact of death easier for his beloved child to bear. But Dr Friedland indicates that Mr Fountain had never discussed the intellectual foundation of his beliefs with his daughter. She can only assume them as a legacy, never argue them, and of the possibility of a life after death she can only think, 'He had not believed it, and so she must not' (*HB*, I, p.27). Her attempted interpretations of her father's philosophies are childish, 'dying [...] going quite away – for ever' (*HB*, II, p.240), but must suffice as her only guide through life. Hence, between her total naturalism and Helbeck's supernaturalism, there can be neither negotiation nor movement.[16] This is a novel, not of progress, but of a paralysis that in the end infects the whole plot for Laura's death brings a halt to all things – her life, Helbeck's worldly life, and the story itself. The compromises and tolerance that had enabled an accommodation to be reached at the end of *Robert Elsmere* become, in *Helbeck of Bannisdale,* a darker, sterner denial of any relation between the opposed convictions of belief and non-belief.

[16] See: 'Doubt [...] appears here as 'misery' to Helbeck but as 'life' to Laura' (Lance St John Butler, *Victorian Doubt* (London: Harvester, 1990), p.124).

Laura comes to Catholicism because she is in love with Helbeck and his severity, certainty and kindness put her unconsciously in mind of the father she has so recently lost. She flies Bannisdale once, to gain release from her engagement to Helbeck, but, unable to stay away, she returns to become more deeply committed, this time not only to marriage but also to an expressed desire to convert to Catholicism. These decisions are almost immediately followed by her suicide as an acknowledgement that such things cannot be. She must go 'quite away – for ever'. This is not to say that she does not understand the awful finality of death, indeed she sees it only too well but judges its effects upon a world ruled by time. To Laura, who does not believe in the eternal world, death is 'for ever'.

Laura drowns herself in the river that runs through Bannisdale, the location of her suicide, outside the house but within the boundaries of the estate, showing how close she came to achieving happiness while stating her inability to bring it to completion. Her death, like Little Nell's, happens while the attention of the reader is fixed elsewhere. Mrs Ward's purpose, however, is very different from that of Dickens. In taking herself outside the story to die, Laura gives emphasis to her final act as one of withdrawal from the religious dispute of the novel; she also denies the reader entry into the death. In this novel there is no recorded, transcending moment to mitigate death's sadness or any witness to ease its loneliness.

Laura carefully arranges the death so that it looks like an accident but leaves a letter for the Friedlands in order that they alone may know the truth:

> ['']You understand – I must trouble him no more. And there is no other way. This winter has proved it. Because death puts an *end*.['']
>
> *HB*, II, p.333

Laura reasons here in a kind of childish surprise on the discovery of suicide as a punctuative device, 'an *end*', that can be used at will but only once. The tiny words,

'puts' and '*end*', are her attempt to make the death a very small event beside the problems that have previously harassed her, but a small moment can be completely effective and here is intended to indicate the full stop after which nothing really happens at all. In *Ruth*, *The Heir of Redclyffe* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*, the reader is invited to believe that the life continues elsewhere after the death. In *Robert Elsmere* that image is more difficult to realize but eventually possible through Catherine's love and firm belief. When Laura dies, however, death could hardly be more complete for she is the 'trouble', the agitation, that brought the plot into being and the story dies with her. Upon her death, Helbeck retires from the world into a Jesuit noviciate, her stepmother, Augustina, dies just before her, and Bannisdale is handed on to a distant cousin of Helbeck's who is never part of the plot. Helbeck and Laura do not marry and there are no children and no joint enterprise to carry the spirit of the novel beyond its final pages.

Anne Bindslev, writing from a feminist perspective, argues that Laura's death is 'the triumph of the "modern" and the feminine conscience', a 'triumphant weakness', she claims quoting Mrs Ward's introduction to the novel.[17] As a self-chosen deliberate act Laura's death is certainly conclusive in a way that Robert Elsmere's is not, for it does exactly what she wants it to do and brings 'an *end*'.[18] Any 'triumph' attached to her death, however, must be a very muted one. Like the deaths of Michael Henchard or Jude Fawley, Laura's death is necessary because it is the only way of calling a halt to the painful story, while the manner of it confirms the

[17] Anne Bindslev, *Mrs Humphry Ward* (Stockholm, Sweden: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1985), pp. 131,121; hereafter cited Bindslev.

[18] It is also a more satisfactory conclusion than the sceptic, Markham Sutherland, achieves in J. A. Froude's *The Nemesis of Faith*. As a reverse image of Laura's death, Markham is saved from suicide, embraces Catholicism and enters a monastery. His doubts return, however, and he spends the rest of his life filled with 'remorse [...] for what he had not done' (J. A. Froude, *The Nemesis of Faith* (London: John Chapman, 1849), p.226). Froude (1818-1894) was one of the century's 'honest doubters'. He wrote the partly biographical *The Nemesis of Faith* in 1849. Mrs Ward had almost certainly read Froude's novel; she refers to it in her 1885 review of *Marius the Epicurean* as the type of book valuable for its portrayal of the intimate and personal.

waste of it all as it echoes the ending of another sorry life, that of a previous Squire of Bannisdale:

> Laura was not far to seek. The tyrant river that she loved, had received her, had taken her life, and then had borne her on its swirl of waters straight for that little creek where, once before, it had tossed a human prey upon the beach.
>
> There, beating against the gravelly bank, in a soft helplessness, her bright hair tangled among the drift of branch and leaf brought down by the storm, Helbeck found her.
>
> *HB*, II, p.329

The language here is ambiguous, blurring the responsibility for the death. And there is, at first, a sort of kindness in the river's action, it 'had received her, had taken her life'. But, as she continues, Mrs Ward changes the language radically and what begins as a discrete individuality, 'Laura', is carried 'straight' towards an identification with another useless death and then 'tossed' completed, and again useless, upon the edge of things, 'the beach'. Laura has not, like Christian, crossed the River. She has entered it and brought about 'an *end*'. There is, here, no promise of a further life of any kind. There is only inanimation brought to a cruel parody of life by the action of the river. In death, Laura is not enfolded by a Wordsworthian vision of re-creative nature, as Anne Bindslev argues,[19] but by the 'eternal note of sadness' Mrs Ward's uncle, Matthew Arnold, wrote of in 1867 in 'Dover Beach' (*PMA*, p.239). Even the place of her burial, 'a little chapel high in the hills', seen as so suitable by Dr Friedland – ' How she loved this country! And now it holds her tenderly'– is only another symbol of unachieved connection. 'She lies in sight, almost, of the Bannisdale woods' (*HB*, II, p.335) Friedland has noted, and 'almost' radically reduces his proposed aim of comfort.[20]

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[19] See Bindslev, p.128.

[20] Mrs Ward's depiction of Laura's burial retains the type of imagery employed by Emily Brontë in the final paragraphs of *Wuthering Heights*. The completion of Laura's separation from Helbeck, however, rewrites Brontë's suggestion of achieved connection.

The chapel chosen for Laura's burial service and committal had once been a place of pilgrimage built long before the Reformation by Catholic monks and it still contains traces of that previous time. In another novel this would provide metaphors of healing, intimations of unity achieved if not in this life then in the next. Laura's atheistic death, however, contains no such comfort. As a staunch Catholic, Helbeck cannot attend her funeral; he can only stand at a distance. Laura had intended that her lover should always believe that her death was accidental but Helbeck's questioning of Friedland leaves him in no doubt that it is suicide and, at one stroke, the pain of his loss becomes twofold. For the protagonists, in this novel, there is no compromise, no middle ground. To the strict Catholic, suicide signals the sin that, coming as a final act of despair, carries the soul away from God's forgiveness. It is a sad irony that Helbeck, through his complete belief in a life eternal, is now not only denied a life with Laura on earth but, knowing that the death is suicide, is refused any hope of a reunion with her in Heaven.[21]

While the plot of *Robert Elsmere* is driven forward by Robert's religious reformations *Helbeck of Bannisdale* is driven by the deaths that surround Laura. Her father has just died when the novel begins, her stepmother is dying throughout the book, and she witnesses the hideous death in Froswick of the factory worker who falls into the furnace at the steel works. Each provides the impetus for a particular section of her story. Her father's death brings about her first meeting with Helbeck; the death of the factory worker begins a sequence of events that end in their engagement; and the death of her stepmother plays a significant part in her own. These deaths, in contrast with Laura's vitality, make the reader's conception of the

[21] St George Mivart argues that Laura commits no sin. 'She was a Pagan, and as such had a full right to conform to Pagan ethics' ('Another Catholic's View of "Helbeck of Bannisdale" ', in *Nineteenth Century*, 44 (1898), 641-655 (p.645)). A tricky theological problem this, for while Laura thinks as a pagan she has been baptized. I feel, however, that Helbeck would see a permanent division.

possibility of hers remote and hence more terrible and surprising when it happens. Mrs Ward sets the fact of death as a constant threat behind Laura's rebellious gaiety even as she is seen to be absorbed in the immediate puzzle it presents to her.

Laura remembers her father's caustic remarks on a Christian funeral they had attended together but that earlier service, recalled as an instance of 'academic decorum' (*HB*, II, p.9), is replaced, on the death in the steel works, by drama and substance. Here, as she comforts the dead man's child, the words of the English Burial Service penetrate her consciousness. Now Laura, after some months spent in Helbeck's company, can appreciate how the force of spiritual power can work:

> Laura shivered. The constant agony of the world, in its constant search for all that consoles, all that eases, laid its compelling hand upon her. By a natural instinct she wrapped her arms closer, more passionately, round the child upon her knee.
>
> *HB*, II, p.11

It is the pain suffered and the need of consolation that grips Laura as Mrs Ward shows her brought, through the upheaval of a dreadful death, into a realization of the common lot of humanity. George Eliot's 'roar which lies on the other side of silence' (*M*, p.194) is Mrs Ward's 'constant agony of the world' brought into observation through the sudden rush of tragedy.

Central to the scene, but not quite part of it, Laura is awakened into a sense of how, through a given form of religious expression, the unbearable can become tolerable.[22] And words are all there are. There is no body as a focus for the mourning but, while all that is physical has been destroyed, a meaningless death is given form through a ritualized expression of grief, the workmen's shapeless 'sobbing and groaning' harmonized into 'Amens' (*HB*, II, p.10). Laura, through her lack of belief, and the child, by virtue of its few years, are separated from the religious ideology

[22] The loss of religious faith puts special stress upon the forms of that faith, its language and its rituals, as, for example, Thomas Hardy shows in 'The Oxen' (1915).

open to the larger group but Laura is touched by the feeling generated and is moved to an action of comfort that surrounds the whole of the other's distress. How much more difficult it then appears when such a healing opportunity is, at Laura's own funeral, not available to Helbeck. Retrospectively, the death in the factory becomes another way of marking the unassuaged pain that Laura's brings.

The injection of feeling that comes to Laura in Froswick, however, is not religious and neither does it open for her a new way of belief. The text may indicate permanence, 'How the scene penetrated! – leaving great stabbing lines never to be effaced', but Laura's reactions are almost immediately marginalized. She tells Helbeck, 'I saw a man die yesterday [...] but somehow as we were in the train I had almost forgotten it. I was so glad to get away from Froswick – to be coming back' (*HB*, II, pp.9, 54-55). These words, as they lay bare Laura's feelings, show Mrs Ward forcing the events in Froswick into the background of the novel as she allows Laura's reunion with Helbeck and their subsequent engagement to become paramount. The dangers inherent in Laura's love are revealed as the strength of its feeling overwhelms both her and the plot itself. The dreadful death at the steelworks and her previous concern for the child are hardly mentioned again as the development of this strand of the story is itself affected by the very feeling that holds Laura in the same place both emotionally and physically. Love in this story denies true development as it holds the protagonists in the grasp of an emotion that overpowers prudent thought.

When Arnold Bennett dismissed Mrs Ward's depiction of Laura's journey from Froswick to Bannisdale as unnecessary elaboration, 'endless trouble to give verisimilitude to [an] age-worn device', he misunderstood its purpose.[23] The journey,

[23] Arnold Bennett, 'I Read a "Thriller"- And Startle My Friends', 1928, in *The Evening Standard Years: 'Books and Persons', 1926-1931*, ed. Andrew Mylett (London: Archon, 1974), pp.176-179 (p.178).

its difficulties and its terrors are so thoroughly described because of the distance they put between Laura and the place that offered an unrecognized liberation:

> Froswick, with its struggle and death, its newness and restlessness, was behind her – she was going home, to the old house, with its austerity and peace.
>
> Home? Bannisdale, home? How strange! But she was too tired to fight herself to-night [...]. In her submission to it there was a secret pleasure.
>
> *HB*, II, p.20

The journey into security may look like progress but it is actually an evasion. Laura's lack of inner self makes her vulnerable but there is a feeling in the novel that she might have been better staying in Froswick where she had found a role for herself. Unable, however, to see Froswick as the place of hope and salvation her unreligious sense of pilgrimage leads her back to what is, for her, the City of Destruction. There is a suggestion, in this story, that submission and obedience are attached and that they are parallels to a fixity such as Helbeck and Laura's. Development, perhaps, involves a kind of disobedience (as in both Robert and Catherine Elsmere) and a willingness to embrace the insecure and the disturbing.

Laura, in fact, turns away from the type of social work Robert Elsmere (and Mrs Ward) so willingly accepted. In Froswick she does not see any possibility of a 'New Jerusalem', as Robert would have done, but a spiritually deficient, materially flawed world to which Bannisdale, with its associations of heritage, self-discipline and renewal, is the perfect counterpart. As a rootless orphan she is drawn away from Froswick's disturbing 'newness and restlessness'. She is fascinated by the way in which religion, and particularly the Catholic religion, can provide all the aspects of a loving family, and further, Helbeck's ordered religious life, if she can ever come to comprehend it, seems to offer her a system through which her own life can be stabilized. That this fails her in the end is because of the nature of her relationship with Helbeck. The kind of partnership Catherine Elsmere achieves with her husband

is not possible for Laura. The difficulty that comes to lie behind Robert's cry to Catherine, 'Help me through this difficult world', is eventually resolved. When Helbeck, more tentatively than Robert, makes the same type of request to Laura, 'won't you recognise my difficulties, and – and help me through them?' (*HB*, II, p.95), she can offer only incomprehension and resistance. The love in these later lives, because of the greater religious divide, is unstable and eventually destructive and the pain that becomes the centre of the couple's relationship remains even after Laura's death. 'Harmony of aim, not identity of conclusion, is the secret of the sympathetic life. [...] It is certainly not less possible to disbelieve religiously than to believe religiously' (*On Compromise*, pp.141-142) Morley suggests. But this high ideal, that Robert and Catherine come so close to, is not possible for Laura and Helbeck. The 'harmony of aim' that the former couple found through his social work is never there in the later novel. Laura disapproves of the way Helbeck spends Bannisdale money on Catholic charities and, more importantly, unlike Robert, she does not 'disbelieve religiously'. She is held in disbelief through the example of her father, and Helbeck, tightly bound by the strictures of his faith, is severely limited as to how far he can move spiritually towards her.

Laura's journey back from Froswick is beset with all the difficulties, choices and mishaps of Christian's Progress transformed into a nineteenth-century nightmare of misread timetables, suspicious railway porters and telegrams that arrive too late to be useful. But always, through every wrong turning, through every doubt and missed connection, her face is turned towards Bannisdale. And this is where, symbolically fixed within the boundaries of his Catholicism – 'by now he is in his study. She sees the crucifix, the books, the little altar' (*HB*, II, p.33) – Helbeck waits for her:

> 'You were glad to be coming back – to be coming here?' he said in his deep voice. 'Is that true? Do you know that I have sat here all night – in misery?'

> The struggling breath checked the answer [...]. Suddenly he snatched the little form to his breast. She made one small effort to free herself, then yielded. Soul and body were too weak, the ecstasy of his touch too great.
>
> *HB*, II, p.55

Helbeck's offering of his own time of 'misery' brings himself and Laura to a place of unity. Moments of experience lived through separately but simultaneously come together, as they did for Robert and Catherine Elsmere at the end of their story, in a recognition of feelings shared. But, unlike that earlier couple, Laura and Helbeck's position cannot be held. This novel asks, as so many of Thomas Hardy's do, how far purely human love, as opposed to the religious account of it, can serve as a purpose in life, if the Celestial City can ever be replaced completely with an objective on this side of death and there still be a concluding satisfaction. Love as an end could be enough for the atheistic Laura but she knows it is not enough for Helbeck. The apparently novelettish final phrase actually contains its own criticism; 'ecstasy' does not prove to be a valid ground for a relationship.

Laura tries to escape her commitment to Helbeck as much for his sake as for hers, 'It would be a crime [...] to marry him', and she leaves Bannisdale only to be brought back by her stepmother's approaching death. This death, however, like the workman's, serves a greater purpose than simple movement of plot. Again the novel shows the comfort that religion can bring and not only to the bystanders, but also to the departing soul itself. The good Catholic death, Laura marvels, 'is a work of art [...] the most wonderful thing of its sort in the world!'. This 'new power of observation' (*HB*, II, pp.188, 287) is the legacy of Froswick, the capacity to reach out to, though not to become part of, the religious experiences of others. Once more it is the order that ritual brings to the otherwise meaningless event that impresses Laura and she is allowed a glimpse of what death can mean to the firm believer:

> The physical fact [...] became comparatively unimportant, except as the evoking cause of certain symbolisms – nay, certain actual and direct contacts between earth and heaven, which were the distraction of death itself – which took precedence of it, and reduced it to insignificance.
>
> *HB*, II, p.288

Mrs Ward shows more than a bridging of the gap of death between 'earth and heaven'; it is almost a denial of it, 'reduced it to insignificance'. The tone does not allow for apotheosis but, as 'symbolisms' become 'direct contacts', it is death as looked towards in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, death as part of, not an end to, the journey. There are compelling echoes here of Newman's 'The Dream of Gerontius' where the dying soul hears after death the prayers that he heard as he was dying, 'I hear the voices that I left on earth', and that Mrs Ward can write so persuasively of such ritual is not only a testament to the respect she bore for her Catholic father but the measure of the importance she felt it still must carry.[24]

Laura, brought in fascination before the Last Sacraments of the Catholic Church, sees how they enable even a character as ineffectual as Augustina's to gain in dignity and holiness. Her stepmother's strength in weakness works upon her, offering not only the same straight path to God that Christian found – 'the Church is the only way' – but the promise of the earthly companionship that she craves, 'And Alan's love with it' (*HB*, II, p.302). Laura's request for instruction into the Catholic faith betrays this confused intention as she literally puts herself into her lover's arms rather than the Church's:

> ['] And if you can't love me unless I am a Catholic – now, I know you wouldn't – I must just *be* a Catholic – if any power in the world can make me one.[']
>
> *HB*, II, p.312

This should be the culminating moment in the novel, the place where, like Catherine Elsmere's 'I will learn to hear the two voices', love can be allowed to triumph.

[24]John Henry Newman, 'The Dream of Gerontius' (1865), in *The Dream of Gerontius and Other Poems* (London: Oxford University Press, 1914), VI.3.

Instead Laura's cry is too negative, too conditional, and her understanding of the way religious conversion works too inaccurate, to suggest that its meaning may be carried into a significantly altered future. And, then, the approaching death, that has played such a large part in her decision, disappoints, for Augustina dies even as the couple hurry to share their news with her.

Immediately the novel shows division. Helbeck can look on his dead sister 'with a deep, mysterious joy' (*HB*, II, p.321). Laura, however, feels only unbearable grief expressed in a repeated wonder at death's strangeness:

> ['']Then, she was dead! – all in a moment – without a word – before we came to her almost. She had prayed so – and yet God would not leave her a moment in which to hear it. That struck me so. It was so strange, after all the pains – all the clinging to Him – and entreating. It might have been a sign, and there! – she never gave a thought to us. It seemed like an intrusion, a disturbance even to touch her. How horrible it is that death is so *lonely!*['']
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> *HB*, II, p.332

For Laura, bereaved a second time, the lament 'death is so lonely', is not just for Augustina but also for herself. Such feelings on the death of her father had been natural but Augustina's death filled, as it seemed to be, with religious promise should have been otherwise. '[A]s if indifferent quite, / You would close your term here, up and be gone', Thomas Hardy wrote on the death of his first wife and Laura feels the same sense of surprised betrayal.[25]

Earlier nineteenth-century novels that end with a marriage often use the love within that union as a form of allegory that moves towards a greater reward beyond the pages of the novel and, by implication, beyond life itself. In *Jane Eyre* (1847), for example, love that could have been destructive is turned to beneficence and healing while novels where the protagonist dies, such as *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *The Heir of Redclyffe* and *Ruth*, provide, through the death, the promise of a more hopeful future.

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[25] 'The Going' (1912), *CPTH*, p.338.

At the end of each of these novels, as it is in *Robert Elsmere,* the relationship with God is paramount. Laura Fountain however, like Trollope's Louis Trevelyan, is different. Of Trevelyan the reader is told, 'there is nothing left in him by which he can lay hold of life again', and this, for so many different reasons is what happens to Laura.[26] Loving Helbeck yet needing to distance herself from him she has, at the end of her story, simply nowhere to go.

In her letter to Dr Friedland, Laura confesses:

> ['I don't know what drives me exactly – but the priests want my inmost will – want all that is I – and I know when I sit down to think quietly, that I cannot give it.']
>
> *HB*, II, p.333

Laura's central understanding, 'want all that is I', is her revision of the thought that began, 'I must just *be* a Catholic'. She sees now, without being able to become part of it, the totality of the commitment with which one must enter upon religious journey. There is either journey, 'all that is I', or there is not, 'I cannot give it.' And, through Laura, Mrs Ward shows how there can be honesty and integrity even outside the journey. In Laura's indecision, this not knowing for certain what forces drive us, only knowing that we are so driven, Mrs Ward offers the state for many at the end of the nineteenth century. 'Oh! if God hears, may He forgive me – I prayed to-night that He would give me courage' (*HB*, II, p.333) and, dependent upon a God in whom she does not believe, Laura moves towards her own death. This is a meaningless end to a life that has never fulfilled its earlier promise, a promise that could, perhaps, have been realized away from Helbeck and Bannisdale in an embrace of the social duties of Froswick.

In *Robert Elsmere* the novel resists the idea that the death of its hero should be a waste. In *Helbeck of Bannisdale* Mrs Ward stresses the futility of Laura's

[26] Anthony Trollope, *He Knew He Was Right*, 1869, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Penguin, 1994), p.817.

because, to a very large extent, she still wishes to uphold the ideas of the former novel by bringing before the reader the views of a world where lives continue to move forward:

> There was religion as the Friedlands understood it – a faith convinced of God, and of a meaning for human life, trusting the 'larger hope' that springs out of the daily struggle of conscience, and the garnered experience of feeling. Both in Friedland and his wife, there breathed a true spiritual dignity and peace.
>
> *HB*, II, pp.251-252

While this family example is Mrs Ward's illustration of the best kind of religious development, the Friedlands play a very small part in *Helbeck of Bannisdale.* Their story had been told ten years previously in *Robert Elsmere.* Their lives are lived in Cambridge apart from the main action of the story and their influence upon affairs at Bannisdale is minimal. Friedland does try, towards the end of the story, to bring his world to Bannisdale by giving Laura the reasonable, rational arguments she needs to combat Helbeck's Catholicism. It is, however, all too late and, after the tragedy, Friedland finds that neither reason nor rationality can explain what has actually happened:

> ['] What a fate! – that brought them across each other, that has left him nothing but these memories, and led her, step by step, to this last bitter resource – this awful spending of her young life – this blind witness to august things!'
>
> *HB*, II, p.336

It is ironic that Friedland, the man of 'larger hope', should have to voice his concern in terms of 'fate' rather than personal responsibility. But his speech is intended by Mrs Ward as a retrospective assessment of the novel. It emphasizes how the story's themes deny to the ending even the tentative hopefulness of *Robert Elsmere* so that it has become closer to something Hardy or Gissing could have written. The final pages of the novel are given to Friedland for his is the life that continues but it is

important for the moment that his developed reasoning should be defeated by Laura's story. Instead of the secular optimism of *Robert Elsmere* he is forced to judge it in terms of so many other late-nineteenth-century protagonists, Tess and Jude, for example, or Edwin Reardon, who try so hard to come to terms with their lives and seem, in the end, to be defeated by chance and circumstance.

But Mrs Ward's philosophy is not that of her contemporaries, Gissing or Hardy, but of the earlier religious earnestness of Mrs Gaskell and Charlotte Yonge. As Gilmour notes, '*Helbeck of Bannisdale* is a reminder of the strength, seriousness and humanity of the high Victorian tradition.'[27] Certainly the novel is nostalgic for the liberal compromise of Friedland, Oxbridge and Elsmere even as Mrs Ward senses its outdatedness.[28] Perhaps this is why she took up the theme again in *The Case of Richard Meynell*, where Mary Elsmere fulfils the earlier promise of a humanist continuation and where Meynell practises a less radically reformed version of Christianity than Elsmere. In this book Mrs Ward is still insisting that compromise is both possible and desirable. Peterson endorses this argument: 'In emulating [Matthew] Arnold's tolerance and Newman's sacramentalism, Meynell represents Mrs Ward's effort to reconcile at last those two opposing forces of English Church life that had pulled her father back and forth and thus had blighted her own childhood' (Peterson, p.202).

It is this inability to find the middle ground that destroys the lives in *Helbeck of Bannisdale*. In the manner of *The Life of John Sterling* and *He Knew he Was Right* the story is a warning of the way a life should not be lived. In this Mrs Ward

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[27] Robin Gilmour, *The Novel in the Victorian Age* (London: Edward Arnold, 1986), p.198. See also: '[In *Robert Elsmere*] Mary Ward finds in herself a version of the Hebraism of Charlotte Yonge meeting the counter-influence of her own uncle, Matthew Arnold' (Philip Davis, *The Victorians, The Oxford English Literary History, Vol.8, 1830-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.133). See also Peterson, pp. 49-50.

[28] *Robert Elsmere* was seen by some critics as outdated when it was written. Oscar Wilde, for example, wrote of 'the unfortunate hero gravely heralding a dawn that rose long ago' (Oscar Wilde, 'The Decay of Lying', 1889, in *The Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. G. F. Maine (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1961), pp.909-931 (p.914)).

dissociates her narrative from other late-nineteenth-century novels for, while the lives within these stories often come to nothing, they are statements of how things are rather than cautionary tales. Miller notes: 'The development of Victorian fiction is a movement from the assumption that society and the self are founded on some superhuman power outside them, to a putting in question of this assumption, to the discovery that society now appears to be self-creating and self-supporting, resting on nothing outside itself.'[29] Mrs Ward wrote *Robert Elsmere* and *Helbeck of Bannisdale* not in support of such a statement but as examples of the hazards that lie within it. The pilgrimage Robert enters into is a changed one, adapted to nineteenth-century thinking, but he never stops believing in God or in the possibility of a God-given eternity. A liberal compromise is achieved between Catherine and Robert so that Elsmere's death is comparable to Ruth Hilton and Guy Morville's. In contrast, Laura Fountain's pilgrimage comes to nothing and after her death there is neither continuation nor a wish for continuation. Hers is the story of the devastating effects of complete atheism when it comes into contact with an absolute religion. Robert, adapting his religious journey, dies in hope; Laura, who cannot journey religiously, who has no knowledge of pilgrimage, dies, not in despair perhaps, but, as Hardy terms it, in 'unhope'.[30]

[29] J. Hillis Miller, *The Form of Victorian Fiction* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), p.30.
[30] 'In Tenebris I' (undated), *CPTH*, p.167.

Chapter Three

William Hale White (1831-1913)

William Hale White was a contemporary of Mrs Humphry Ward. His writing, like hers, reflects a religious seriousness but, while Mrs Ward's novels have their roots in Anglicanism, Hale White's are the product of Dissent. Born in Bedford, he had, as a youth, been a member of Bunyan's church, the Old Meeting. (Cunningham notes that 'White was No. 1936 on the Church Roll on which John Bunyan was No. 27'.[1]) Aged nineteen, Hale White enrolled at a Dissenting theological college in London only to be expelled five months later for questioning the authority of the scriptures. He spent many years in what is best described as a spiritual wilderness eventually finding comfort in a devout agnosticism where simply not knowing became a type of faith. He never lost his admiration for Bunyan, however, or for the largeness of meaning contained in his works. In 1904 he published his own biography of Bunyan in which this appreciation is made clear:

> [Bunyan] is the poet of Puritanism, but also of something greater, that is to say, of a certain class of experiences, incident not especially to the theologian, artist, or philosopher, but to our common nature.[2]

'Elstow and the Ouse and in a measure the temper of the man are in my blood', Hale White confesses and his novels take Bunyan's *Progress* and adapt it in order to explore the way life has come to be lived at the end of the nineteenth century.[3]

Other influences on Hale White's thinking were the poet William Wordsworth and the philosopher Baruch Spinoza. He had read the *Lyrical Ballads*

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[1] Valentine Cunningham, *Everywhere Spoken Against: Dissent in the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 257; hereafter cited Cunningham.
[2] William Hale White, *John Bunyan*, 1905 (London: Nelson, n.p.), p.238; hereafter cited *Bunyan.*
[3] William Hale White, *Letters to Three Friends* (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), p.328; hereafter cited *Letters.*

while at college and its effects stayed with him throughout his life. As his protagonist says in *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford*:

> Wordsworth unconsciously did for me what every religious reformer has done, – he re-created my Supreme Divinity; substituting a new and living spirit for the old deity, once alive, but gradually hardened into an idol.[4]

The impression made by Spinoza was as profound. '[T]here is something in Spinoza which can be superseded as little as the *Imitation of Christ* or the *Pilgrim's Progress*', he wrote, and in 1857 he began a translation of Spinoza's *Ethic* that was finally published in 1883.[5] Willey sums up Spinoza's importance to Hale White:

> Spinoza could relieve that sense of the commonplaceness of life, and of himself, which lay heavy upon Hale White's spirit; through Spinoza he could feel that 'being part of the whole, the grandeur and office of the whole are ours'.[6]

Hale White came late to novel writing and it was in middle age that he published, under the pseudonym of Mark Rutherford, a remarkable series of books. Each of them is imbued with the spirit of Spinoza, of Wordsworth and of Bunyan. 'The theme of all these novels is Salvation', Catherine Macdonald Maclean insists and four of them, *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford* (1881), *Mark Rutherford's Deliverance* (1885), *Catharine Furze* (1893), and *Clara Hopgood* (1896), are particularly relevant here in that they give the whole of a life as they record each protagonist's search for fulfilment in a challenging and bewildering world.[7] The

[4] William Hale White, *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford*, 1881, ed. William S. Peterson (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 22-23; hereafter cited *Autobiography*.
[5] William Hale White, *Pages From a Journal* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1900), p. 32; hereafter cited *Journal*.
[6] Basil Willey, *More Nineteenth Century Studies: A Group of Honest Doubters* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1956), p.230. Willey quotes from Hale White's chapter on Spinoza in *Pages From a Journal*, see *Journal*, p.42.
[7] Catherine Macdonald Maclean, *Mark Rutherford: A Biography of William Hale White* (London: Macdonald, 1955), p.275; hereafter cited Maclean.

protagonists of these stories are portrayed as living ordinary lives that threaten to be overwhelmed by disappointments and setbacks. As Mark Crees asserts:

> Hale White's writing is concerned, above all, with the difficulty, strangeness and precariousness, of life itself, of the sheer *effort* of living and the constant need to renew that effort.[8]

All too aware that a life defeated by ongoing failure may have to look to death as the only way to halt the meaningless journey, Hale White depicts man's continuous strivings that this should not be so. His writing explores the gap between the dream of attainment and what actually happens, and he hopes to offer enough comfort to sustain those whom he saw as burdened by 'mischance and defeat'.[9]

Hale White was a respected if not overly popular writer in his own day. Stock notes that 'his admirers, though they have not been many, have been choice' and offers contemporary enthusiasts such as Matthew Arnold, Swinburne, Conrad and Gosse.[10] 'The Mark Rutherford books are not as well known as they [...] should be', A. E. Taylor declared one year after Hale White's death and, writing nearly thirty years later, David Daiches agreed. '[Hale White] is a remarkable writer who is too little read.'[11] It is the form of Hale White's stories that provides a stumbling block for some readers. Arnold Bennett, for example, who, with reservations, liked the novels, is moved to suggest that 'he must have constructed as he went along' and there are others whose readings conform to such a belief.[12] Margaret Maison is a case in point. 'White's plots are always weak and poorly structured', she submits and suggests that

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[8] Mark Crees, 'Before Mark Rutherford' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Liverpool, 1999), p.33; hereafter cited Crees.

[9] William Hale White, 'Notes on the Book of Job', 1885, in *Autobiography*, pp.169-195 (p. 180); hereafter cited Job.

[10] Irvin Stock, *William Hale White (Mark Rutherford): A Critical Study* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1956), p. 3; hereafter cited Stock.

[11] A. E. Taylor, 'The Novels of Mark Rutherford', in *Essays and Studies*, V (1914), 51-74 (p.51). David Daiches, *Some Late Victorian Attitudes* (London: André Deutsch, 1969), p.123; hereafter cited Daiches.

[12] Arnold Bennett, *The Journals of Arnold Bennett: 1921-1928*, ed. Newman Flower (London: Cassell and Co., 1933), p.16; hereafter cited Bennett.

his 'genius' lies elsewhere.[13] Crees, comparing the writing to Hale White's own life, offers a different summation: 'The narratives in all his novels are wayward, unexpected in their moves and outcomes, like the life itself' (Crees, p.33). Daiches is of the same opinion:

> Of course White is inconsistent. Part of the fascination of these books is that one can follow the precise curve of his mind and sensibilities as they respond to different phases of his own experience.
>
> Daiches, p.105

Hale White gives us life as it is lived, not life as encountered in formulated narrative. His novels depict the problems inherent in a life and the structural difficulties of each story allow the reader to discover what it feels like to be on such a journey.

In *Robert Elsmere*, Mrs Ward had clung deliberately to the old form of the novel, relying on intimations of perpetuity to lead the reader through the death to the point where the pilgrimage could be seen as being carried forward. Hale White resists such structures. Instead of promoting any defined pattern for a life, he suggests that it is probably better to give up on a life plan – and on the usual form of narrative expression. In his novels chance event and moments of epiphany replace the more ordered world of religiously inspired progress and the reader needs to remain as alert as the protagonist in order to comprehend this type of pilgrimage. 'The world is immense, constructed on no plan or theory which the intellect of man can grasp. It is *transcendent* everywhere' (Job, p.193), Hale White insists in his commentary on the Book of Job. 'He had learnt [...] that God was not to be revealed by any system of argument', Maclean notes and then quotes from Hale White's writing: ' "The proof lies in hints and dreams which are not expressible by human language" ' (Maclean, p.285). Through Elsmere's Elgood Street activities Mrs Ward shows her desire for the corporate expression of a private experience – a nostalgia for

[13] Margaret Maison, *Search Your Soul, Eustace* (London and New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961), p.244.

a form of religion that possibly only ever really existed in story. Hale White, on the other hand, is more interested in the solitary unsought encounter – the type that came to Paul on the Damascus road. Man does not have to work as Christian did for redemption, Hale White would suggest. He simply needs to be ready for it. The posture of his eponymous hero at the beginning of *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford*, for example, is (like Gissing's Godwin Peak, perhaps, or Hardy's Jude) heroic and combative, 'I tried men by my standard, and if they did not come up to it I rejected them'. Having fought and failed, however, Rutherford learns how to make concessions without seeing this as failure, 'He was content to rest and wait' (*Autobiography*, pp.29,165).

Bunyan's depiction of pilgrimage, however, is still the perfect model for Hale White – just too perfect for a life being lived at the end of the nineteenth century:

> So it is that the main obstacle to our success is a success which has preceded us. We instinctively follow the antecedent form, and consequently we either pass by, or deny altogether, the life of our own time, because its expression has changed.[14]

The trouble is, that when 'deliverance' is dressed in 'the life of our own time', there is a possibility that we may not be able to identify it. 'He came as Jesus, and we look for Him as Jesus now, overlooking the manifestation of to-day, and dying, perhaps, without recognising it' (*Deliverance*, p.24), Hale White continues, and the measure of his protagonists' lives is that they should 'recognise it' before they die.

3.1 *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford* (1881), *Mark Rutherford's Deliverance* (1885)

These two books recount the 'autobiography' of one man, Mark Rutherford, and, although *The Autobiography* is able to stand alone, neither it nor *The*

[14] William Hale White, *Mark Rutherford's Deliverance*, 1885 (London: T. Fisher Unwin, n.p.), p. 24; hereafter cited *Deliverance*.

Deliverance should be considered in isolation. But Hale White did write and publish these books separately and, read in this way, they become one story with two endings and, importantly for this thesis, two deaths as endings – Rutherford's friend Mardon's at the end of *The Autobiography* and his own at the end of *The Deliverance*. Further, *The Autobiography* begins with a poem about a death so that both books, and particularly the first, are, like Rutherford himself, overshadowed by death's inevitability. 'Death has always been a terror to me' (*Autobiography*, p.2), and Rutherford carries with him the same 'darkness and horror' (*PP*, p.137) that only come to Bunyan's Pilgrim in death's final moments.

Rutherford, beset by theological doubts and personal loneliness, loses faith and direction, and spends many years in an elusive search for friendship and an answer to the religious questions that continue to disturb him. 'Had I found [friendship] my life would have been redeemed' (*Autobiography*, p.131), he cries at one point and he is an example of that type of disappointed, alienated character so prevalent in the novels of Gissing and Hardy. Rutherford's religious problems, however, are very much those that beset Robert Elsmere and, like the early stages of that journey, Rutherford's lacks form and precision:

> In after years, but not till I had strayed far away from the President and his creed, the Bible was really opened to me, and became to me, what it now is, the most precious of books.
>
> *Autobiography*, p.17

Rutherford, in order to begin the journey towards 'deliverance', has, like Elsmere, to move away from the paths of revealed religion. He needs, in fact, to have 'strayed', but held in that word is all the indirection and loneliness suffered between his abandonment of orthodoxy at the beginning of the first book and his 'deliverance' towards the end of the second.

Rutherford never denies God or the possibility of eternal life. As Hale White insists in *Pages From A Journal*: 'A child-like faith in the old creed is no longer possible, but it is equally impossible to surrender it' (*Journal*, p.86). Although most of the 'religious' characters in *The Autobiography* practise a creed that has become narrow and mechanical there are characters that show a holy and charitable observance of faith. These last, as they offer Rutherford advice and practical assistance, act in agreement with those other, strongly moral protagonists that live outside the traditional version of Christianity. Through Rutherford's story Hale White wishes to suggest a way in which a life can be lived that unites the old orthodox ideas and the non-religion of atheism, to show how the faith and non-faith of these different expressions of goodness can be brought together.

Although Hale White writes 'autobiographically' in these books, Mark Rutherford is not an exactly reproduced self. Hale White was a much more successful man than Rutherford ever was. He eventually had a good, if exacting, job in the Admiralty; his various writings were, on the whole, well received; he lived into old age enjoying, in later years, a fair degree of prosperity and, his first wife having died in 1891, a happy marriage in 1911 to a much younger woman.[15] Hale White, however, saw his own life in constant terms of bareness and incompletion and it was the bleakness of that *felt* life that writing 'autobiographically' enabled him to give form to. '[A] truer self which the efficient civil servant concealed' (Stock, p.53).[16] Rutherford suggests that his story is hardly worth telling: 'But mine is the

[15] Hale White's first wife, Harriet, was ill for many years before she died. He met his second wife, Dorothy, in 1907. She was forty years younger than he was.

[16] See: 'His biographers have found [...] in his wife's tragic illness that lasted over many years, and in his feelings of guilt, because he and she were not fully congenial [...] the mainsprings of his own continued emotional malaise' (Robert Lee Wolff, *Gains and Losses: Novels of Faith and Doubt in Victorian England* (New York and London: Garland, 1977), p.347). Hale White's story bears a strong resemblance to George Gissing and Thomas Hardy's whose own first marriages were variously disappointing and who, later in life, found happiness with women younger than themselves. Hardy also wrote his own life story, disguised in his case as biography, and published under the name of his

tale of a commonplace life, perplexed by many problems I have never solved; disturbed by many difficulties I have never surmounted; and blotted by ignoble concessions which are a constant regret' (*Autobiography*, p.1). The reader, however, protests against such an assessment preferring to believe that the life is worth more than it appears.

Hale White, all too aware of the difficulties within his protagonist's story, attempts to alleviate present pain with the promise of future healing: 'Only when I got much older did I discern the duty of accepting life as God has made it' (*Autobiography*, p. 29). Hale White replaces Bunyan's vision of the Celestial City with a promise of what will happen in this life – a human glimpse into the future. Rutherford's pilgrimage, however, lacks Bunyan's certainty and the conclusion reached is far less defined. In his biography of Bunyan, Hale White outlines this uncertainty: 'We can follow [Bunyan] through all the incidents of his journey [...] but we are not sure, as he was sure, that the wayfarer will reach a celestial home at last' (*Bunyan*, p.170). Peterson paraphrases this: 'in reading the *Autobiography* one is always conscious of the considerable differences between Bunyan's Christian and the much more troubled and confused pilgrim who stumbles through White's novel' (*Autobiography*, intro., p.xv). Rutherford's physical journeys are as well mapped as Christian's. He travels from his hometown in the midlands to his Dissenting College, to two ministries in the east of the country, and then to London. While the outer man moves on, however, the inner seems stranded. No paths, no guidelines, are given in Rutherford's story only retrospective realization: 'when I got much older'.

Christian is granted glimpses of a constant vision and, early in the pilgrimage, is shown the connection between his present state and his future goal. From the Palace Beautiful he can see a distant, mountainous country, from which, he is told,

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second wife. Gissing wrote *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, a confusion of autobiography and wishful thinking.

'thou mayest see to the Gate of the Celestial City' (*PP*, p.50). In the same way, in mid-Victorian narratives, life can be seen as having a shape and happiness comes from knowing the goal. Ruth Hilton, for example, looks towards the birth of her baby as 'a beacon' (*R*, p.137) and the event connects her to the greater happiness to come. Rutherford's friend, Miss Arbour, offers similar encouragement. It is, however, substantially reduced:

> ['']We have no light promised us to show us our road a hundred miles away, but we have a light for the next footstep, and if we take that, we shall have a light for the one which is to follow. ['']
>
> *Autobiography*, p.82

Rutherford learns to use this way forward by keeping his unhappy work life separate from his home life. He finds happiness by inhabiting the present – by not looking before or after. 'I learned [...] to live in each moment as it passed over my head' (*Autobiography*, p.65), and in this he resembles Hardy's Tess as she enjoys a brief contentment towards the end of her story: 'I am not going to think outside of now' (*Tess*, p.389). Fulfilment is in the everyday – life having meaning, not because it travels into eternal life, but in itself, in the here and now.

The distinctive format of two books to tell the one story reflects Rutherford's way through to 'deliverance'. Even the four year gap between the books, filled as it was by the publication of Hale White's translation of Spinoza's *Ethic*, can be read as an actual representation of the gradual lessening of Rutherford's 'long conflict', the place where 'He was content to rest and wait'. *The Autobiography* covers Rutherford's early life from a Calvinist childhood to the young man working in increasing unhappiness for a small publishing house in London. Between these two stages Rutherford prepares for the ministry at a Dissenting College, discovering there that the 'theological and biblical teaching was a sham'. His attempt to succeed as an Independent minister fails and, aware of how much he has changed in past years, he

breaks off his engagement to be married. Leaving the Independents he tries, with no more success, to become a Unitarian preacher and then, before journeying to London, briefly and unhappily considers a career in teaching. The bleakness of his life is, it is true, often leavened by powerful reminders of blessedness, his 'Damascus' reading of the 'Lyrical Ballads' (*Autobiography*, pp.15, 21), for example, or his sensibility to natural beauty, but it seems, in spite of all, that the desired journey into 'deliverance' has not really begun.

More important than the physical stages of the journey are the people Rutherford meets for these characters jolt him away from introspection. They make him 'take an interest in the topics which concern average men and women', the requirement for a happy life proposed by Reuben Shapcott the story's fictional editor. The allegorically named Miss Arbour, for example, shows Rutherford kindness and, with the story of her own experience, gives advice. As he listens to his friend's surprising account of marital discord, Rutherford is 'confounded', and his resulting thought, 'that unknown abysses [...] lie covered with commonplace in men and women' (*Autobiography*, pp.xxxiii, 83), echoes George Eliot's 'element of tragedy which lies in the very fact of frequency' (*M*, p.194).[17] Just as the secondary characters in *The Pilgrim's Progress* provide for Christian an external representation of his inward struggle between good and evil, the other people in Rutherford's story bring him, through a gradual acceptance of the limitations of others and a joy in their abilities, to a kinder understanding of self and, finally, to 'deliverance'. 'I had seen the kingdom of God through a little child' (*Deliverance*, p.125), he writes at the end of *Deliverance* when he has watched his young and rather difficult stepdaughter

[17] Hale White was a great admirer of George Eliot. He worked with her for a time in London at John Chapman's the publisher and bookseller. She appears in *The Autobiography* as Theresa, an unconventional yet deeply sympathetic figure with whom Rutherford falls in love. It was probably George Eliot who introduced Hale White to Spinoza. She completed her own translation of Spinoza's *Ethic* in 1856. It was never published.

successfully nurse her mother through a dangerous illness. God has been a powerful presence all along, in the poetry and in the beauty of nature but, the 'kingdom' itself, Rutherford's realization of Christian's Celestial City, becomes apparent through a dull and unprepossessing child's care for its mother.

An important figure in *The Autobiography* is the atheistic freethinker, Edward Mardon. Mardon is a good friend to Rutherford and his advice is always honest and sincere. Rutherford, however, is never completely persuaded by the certainty of his friend's atheism. In Mardon he sees doubt brought to a completion, the end place of unbelief, and this is a journey he is unwilling to take. Insisting that God, unknowable and indefinable, must still remain even when all else is gone Rutherford cries, 'I *do* believe in God' (*Autobiography*, p.103), as almost the smallest statement of religious belief possible, pathetic in its brevity yet sufficient in its conciseness and he concludes:

> ['] Often I have felt thoroughly prostrated by you, and yet when I have left you the old superstition has arisen unsubdued. [...] An unshapen thought presents itself to me, I look at it, and I do all in my power to give it body and expression, but I cannot. I am certain that there is something truer and deeper to be said about the existence of God than anything I have said, and what is more, I am certain of the presence of this something in me, but I cannot lift it to the light.'
>
> *Autobiography*, p.105

Rutherford's God is not the God of revelation as in *The Pilgrim's Progress* nor is he the personal God of intervention from Milton's *Paradise Lost* but God as sensed in Matthew Arnold's poem: 'There rises an unspeakable desire / After the knowledge of our buried life'.[18] As Hale White wrote in his introduction to *The Life of John Sterling*, 'there is a faith which is not a certainty demonstrable to ourselves or to others, but is by no means a doubt, and may be strong enough to inspire and control

[18] 'The Buried Life' (1849-1852), *PMA*, p.271.

the whole of life.'[19] Rutherford, 'certain' only on trust of hidden feelings, still hopes to journey in the direction of Bunyan's Christian but remains, for the moment, stranded in his own inexpressiveness. As he speaks, 'the old superstition has arisen' through 'unshapen thought' to 'something truer and deeper', until at last he is forced to a close, not through disbelief, but through his fallen, human inability to express the inexpressible. As T. S. Eliot wrote, 'Words strain, / Crack and sometimes break, under the burden'.[20]

The Rutherford / Mardon relationship is not the Christian / Faithful, Christian / Hopeful relationship of *The Pilgrim's Progress* where each character's qualities are evenly balanced by the other's. It is the one depicted by Mrs Ward between Robert Elsmere and Squire Wendover and that shown in other stories – Jude and Phillotson, for example, in *Jude the Obscure*; Godwin Peak and the geologist, Mr Gunnery, in *Born in Exile*; Stephen Smith and Henry Knight in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*; and Daniel Deronda and Mordecai in *Daniel Deronda.* In each case writers show their protagonists benefiting from a received wisdom before needing to travel beyond that to a personal creed. Movement for Rutherford, then, begins to depend upon the absence of Mardon, 'when I have left you'. Away from Mardon, Rutherford can hold to the path that will lead him, not towards religious conviction or towards the certainty of an eternal life, but not away from these things either.

Mardon's death, however, at the end of *The Autobiography* is more than a way of allowing Rutherford independence. It is also Hale White's expression of how positive an experience non-religious death can be:

> Mardon was perfectly conscious, in no pain, and quite calm. He was just able to speak. [...] 'Learn not to be over-anxious

[19] Thomas Carlyle, *The Life of John Sterling* (London: Oxford University Press, 1907), intro. pp.xxxii-xxxiii.
[20] T. S. Eliot, 'Burnt Norton' (1935), in *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1974), p.189, V. 13-14; hereafter cited Eliot, *Poems.*

> about meeting troubles and solving difficulties which time will meet and solve for you.'
>
> *Autobiography*, pp.159-160

Dying, Mardon turns from polemic to good counsel so that, through the power conventionally given to the final words of good and noble souls, he is seen to offer a way to move from perplexity into resolution. And, his death being peaceful but uneventful, others are allowed to provide the apotheosis. Rutherford depicts the majesty of a perfectly observed autumn sunrise that coincides with the death, while another friend of Mardon's, as he conducts a form of burial service, brings the dead man to a Schopenhauerian idea of immortality. 'Mardon would live as every force in nature lives – for ever; transmuted into a thousand different forms'. But then, just as Hale White seems to be adjusting the shape of the novel into a conventional ending – the meaningful last words, the beautiful sunrise, and the promise of a sort of eternity – Rutherford, with characteristic dubiety shows his disappointment with the purely humanist exposition of immortality. 'This may be true, but, after all, I can only accept the fact of death in silence, as we accept the loss of youth and all other calamities' (*Autobiography*, p.162). This story is not about to offer a perfect conclusion.

Mardon's death, the reader is informed by Shapcott, is almost immediately followed by Rutherford coming close to a breakdown. Forced to give up his job and take a holiday, however, things improve and he becomes less anxious about his many concerns. No huge reason is given for this change, just, 'I fancy that something happened', and, 'I find it very difficult to describe exactly' (*Autobiography*, pp. 164, 164-5). There is no particular guidance for the reader only the reassurance that this is what can happen: 'He was content to rest and wait.' And indeed, when *Deliverance* begins, there is an immediate change of tone for now, Rutherford, as Maclean notes, 'tends rather to look outwards and to reconcile himself to life by making the most of

those mercies of which he can be sure' (Maclean, p.279). As the book begins, Rutherford finds a new place to live, a new job, uncongenial but remunerative enough, and, most importantly, a friend. 'I fell in with one poor fellow whose line was something like my own' (*Deliverance*, p. 8), he declares – the casual nature of the phrases suggesting lucky chance rather than design. This 'poor fellow' is McKay, the Faithful figure at last for Rutherford's Christian as he proves how even poor and inadequate men can be of service to others.

McKay has 'a passionate desire to reform the world' which, translated into the possible, becomes a reduced version of Robert Elsmere's mission for the London poor. 'He had no talents wherewith to found a great organisation or create public opinion' (*Deliverance*, pp.22, 27), and McKay does what he can in a small room in Drury Lane. In *Robert Elsmere* Mrs Ward wished to make evident how a life that moves away from orthodoxy may still be seen as saintly and she shows a thriving, enduring community. Hale White's concern is different. He wants to demonstrate that, in a world where great deeds are achievable only by a few, small endeavours and small outcomes must be sufficient for the many. In this story Hale White depicts the same type of social endeavour suggested as possible by Gissing in *The Nether World* – both authors revisiting George Eliot's Positivism but more soberly and with less assurance:[21]

> It often happens that a grand attempt, although it may fail – miserably fail – is fruitful in the end and leaves a result, not the hoped for result it is true, but one which would never have been attained without it. [...] So it was with McKay. He did not convert Drury Lane, but he saved two or three.
>
> *Deliverance*, p.66

Hale White is writing for those whose dreams are only rarely brought to fruition but who still look for some way of continuing. Although the original ideal cannot be

[21] See: 'Hale White lacks George Eliot's moral fervency because he knows only too well that it has failed to answer to the problematic reality of his times' (John Lucas, *The Literature of Change* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1977), p.58; hereafter cited Lucas).

achieved, it is replaced by partial success not total failure, righteousness lying in the strength of the intention rather than its effects.

The aid offered by McKay, and Rutherford as he comes to share the project, is always delivered practically and the sermons preached suggest the simplest of theologies. 'Our main object was to create in our hearers contentment with their lot, and even some joy in it' (*Deliverance*, p.83). This creed, not religious in the usual sense, becomes for Rutherford, through the act of offering it to others, the connection that proves him still a part of Christianity:

> For my own part, I was happy when I had struck that path. I felt as if somehow, after many errors, I had once more gained a road, a religion in fact, and one which essentially was not new but old, the religion of the Reconciliation, the reconciliation of man with God [...].
>
> *Deliverance*, p.84

Hale White, as he brings his pilgrim to 'a road' paraphrases Bunyan's language in *The Pilgrim's Progress* as Christian passed through the Wicket Gate for this is Rutherford's Wicket Gate, *The Autobiography* having been one long Slough of Despond. But, while Christian speaks of grace –'But oh, what a favour is this to me, that yet I am admitted entrance here' (*PP*, p.27) – Rutherford, once again uses the language of chance – 'struck that path', 'somehow [...] gained a road'. There is more than chance at work here, however. 'Help came suddenly, miraculously', Hale White asserts in *John Bunyan* describing Christian's escape from the Slough of Despond, but he is careful to insist that if Christian 'had not obstinately striven to keep his head above the mud, Help would not have saved him' (*Bunyan*, p.122). Rutherford's years of endurance are now rewarded. Helping others to realize 'contentment' has led him to his own so that a religion that reconciles man with man becomes 'the reconciliation of man with God'. Through McKay's practical Christianity, Hale

White leads his protagonist, not away from religion as Mardon would have done, but into a return to a simpler form of it.

McKay's home life, too, becomes a place of revelation as it illustrates to Rutherford how his own life may have turned out if he had married as originally intended. Rutherford had broken his engagement feeling that, after a passage of some years, too much had changed both religiously and intellectually for the marriage to be successful. McKay's marriage enacts this prediction but now Rutherford is the wife's champion, pitying her greatly as he watches her 'struggles with her limitations' (*Deliverance*, p.19). Judging what could have been his particular story he criticizes McKay and comes to an unconscious comprehension of how his own life should be lived:

> I think McKay's treatment of her wholly wrong. I think that he ought not to have imposed himself upon her so imperiously. I think he ought to have striven to ascertain what lay concealed in that modest heart, to have encouraged its expression and development, to have debased himself before her that she might receive courage to rise, and he would have found that she had something which he had not; not *his* something perhaps, but something which would have made his life happier.
>
> *Deliverance*, p.20

This assessment is never shared with McKay but is held internally, 'I think [...] I think [...] I think', where what began as judgment, 'wholly wrong', becomes first what ought not to be done, and then moves to that long and positive list of what could be offered to *another* to make one's *own* life happier. McKay does redeem his harsh treatment towards his wife. She becomes seriously ill and he is given just enough time to effect a change. In a fresh environment of love and attention the wife also changes and becomes, quite fully, her own person and McKay has 'just time enough to see what she really *was*, and then she died' (*Deliverance*, p.21) – a

discovering of internal truth rather than external appearance that has implications for Rutherford towards the end of the story.

Thanks to a happy chance Rutherford hears of his former fiancée, Ellen Butts, now a widow with a young daughter living in impoverished circumstances. And then, in one of those unexplained but important moments through which the book offers a God revealed through 'hints and dreams', Rutherford realizes that he still loves her:

> It was a mystery to me. What should have induced that utterly unexpected resurrection of what I believed to be dead and buried, is beyond my comprehension.
>
> *Deliverance*, p.94

Drury Lane and McKay's reformed marriage have proved watersheds for Rutherford's introspective nature. They have shown him how to look to others and have prepared him for Ellen so that when they meet all is as it was before and yet quite different. The rediscovered love is indeed a 'resurrection' for it is, like the religion that came to be in Drury Lane, 'not new but old'. It is what has always been there but, like the key 'called promise' (*PP*, p.103) that lies forgotten in Christian's bosom throughout the trials of Doubting Castle, it can only be recalled when mind and soul are in accord enough to make it useful. 'The love of woman is [...] a living witness never failing of an actuality in God which otherwise we should never know' (*Deliverance*, p.109).[22] And so, in Rutherford's new life, God is made incarnate and 'deliverance' can be attained.

Hale White does not end his story with the marriage as another author may have done. He is not writing of 'epochs' he says, but of lives that change 'slowly and imperceptibly'. The 'actuality in God' that Rutherford finds through his wife's love

[22] For a different expression of this, see the realization that comes to Henry James's protagonist, George Stransom, in 'The Altar of the Dead': 'The church had become a void; it was his presence, her presence, their common presence, that had made the indispensable medium' (Henry James, 'The Altar of the Dead', 1895, in *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, ed. Leon Edel, 12 vols (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1964), IX, pp. 231-271 (p.266)).

is a vital, growing thing. Once realized it is not confined but is brought to even greater strength through his stepdaughter, Marie. Ellen falls seriously ill and Marie, previously considered by Rutherford to be rather dull and stupid, turns out to be an excellent nurse. 'Fool that I was, not to be aware that messages from Him are not to be read through the envelope in which they are enclosed', he confesses. The joy that comes, then, to this small family on Ellen's recovery is described as 'our deliverance' (*Deliverance*, pp.102, 125, 127). Connections are completed now between both man and woman and man and God and there is a joyful acceptance of life as it is.

It is easy to underestimate the meaning of Hale White's 'deliverance'. Peter Allen, for example, argues that Rutherford's 'promised "deliverance" proves to be no more satisfactory than the rest of his life'. And again: 'Renunciation of desire – mere submission to fate – [Hale White] sees as man's only tenable religious attitude.'[23] Stock's submission shows a clearer understanding: 'What we see [...] is how the absolute demands are modified, how the original dreams are brought closer to reality, not destroyed.' And, to quote Stock again as he examines Hale White's interaction with Spinozian teaching: '[R]ight doing and joy come from actions which are voluntary, because we have understood that they are necessary, that is, are the will of God' (Stock, pp.110, 73). What Hale White suggests, in other words, is not the littleness of 'mere submission' but a way of moving within the general will of the world that is, in the end, not too far from Christ's prayer to his Father the night before he died: 'not my will, but Thine, be done' (Luke 22.42).

To mark their 'deliverance', Rutherford, Ellen and Marie spend a day in the country, the end of which finds them 'completely happy':

[23] Peter Allen, *The View From the Pulpit*, ed. P. T. Phillips (Toronto, Canada: Macmillan, 1978), pp. 146, 156.

> Everything in the future, even the winter in London, was painted by Hope, and the death of the summer brought no sadness. Rather did summer dying in such fashion fill our hearts with repose, and even more than repose – with actual joy.
>
> *Deliverance*, p.128

Rutherford discovers the same sense of calm expressed by Wordsworth in poems such as 'Resolution and Independence' (1802) and 'Daffodils' (1804) – a retrievable calm that can combat future 'sadness'. And, as Hale White's language moves so quickly from 'repose' to 'actual joy', he celebrates all those other moments of 'resurrection'. What had once been a matter of concern, 'the old superstition has arisen unsubdued [...] but I cannot lift it to the light', had found itself newly depicted in the story of MacKay's wife, 'that she might receive courage to rise'. The metaphorically expressed dilemma, however, had been brought to resolution through Rutherford's reunion with Ellen, 'that utterly unexpected resurrection', and confirmed in his stepdaughter's transformation, 'Faculties unsuspected grew almost to full height in a single day' (*Deliverance*, p.124). The great Christian miracle of the resurrection has been re-enacted in human terms and this last realization, the 'actual joy', is the story's apotheosis. 'Death has always been a terror' to Rutherford but now that fear is, in a measure, overcome – Wordsworthian ideas of nature and the love of family succeeding where formal religion has failed.[24]

Rutherford's realization can be compared with the ending of Oscar Wilde's short story, 'The Selfish Giant': 'He did not hate the Winter now, for he knew that it was merely the Spring asleep'. The Giant's understanding, however, that what seems like an ending is really the forerunner to a type of resurrection, becomes his way

[24] See: 'Joy is the passion by which the mind passes to a greater perfection' (Hale White quotes from Spinoza's *Ethic* in *Journal*, p.45). See also: 'For as men have found themselves putting less and less trust in the truths and absolutes of the past, they have more and more come to stress the *trivia* of existence. They have sought meaning in what they could see, all around them, in the apparently inconsequential objects and events of everyday life' (Morris Beja, *Epiphany in the Modern Novel* (London: Peter Owen, 1971), p.17).

through to eternity. '[T]o-day you shall come with me to [...] Paradise', he is told and Wilde's story offers a heavenly assurance confirmed through the Giant's apotheotic death.[25] In contrast, Rutherford's sense of continuance is limited to the natural world and the passage is immediately followed by Shapcott's depiction of his death that is, as Thomas Hobbes wrote of the way life can be, 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short':[26]

> Here ends the autobiography. A month after this last holiday my friend was dead and buried. He had unsuspected disease of the heart, and one day his master [...] was more than usually violent. Mark, as his custom was, was silent, but evidently greatly excited. His tyrant left the room; and in a few minutes afterwards Mark was seen to turn white and fall forward in his chair. It was all over! His body was taken to a hospital and thence sent home.
>
> *Deliverance*, p.128

This account is a deliberate break with the traditional depiction of death where the moment is meaningful and, where possible, holy. Even the old forms of continuance seem, in 'dead and buried', to be denied. At the end of *The Autobiography*, with Mardon's death, the death and apotheosis are separate but part of the same story. Now, with Rutherford's death, they are not connected at all. Between Rutherford's final words and Shapcott's conclusion there is a small space partly bisected by a line so that the death is separated from the rest of the story. The apotheosis has been in the life, in its 'actual joy', but its meaning is not carried into the death which is outside the narrative altogether – a postscript and an afterthought. But, in placing the death outside the story, Hale White is faithful to his intention for his inference is that death is the part of life that does not matter. As Dr Turnbull says in *Catharine Furze*,

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[25] Oscar Wilde, 'The Selfish Giant', 1888, in *The Works of Oscar Wilde*, ed. G. F. Maine (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1961), pp. 297-300 (pp.299, 300).

[26] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1651, ed. Edwin Curley (Cambridge, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), p.76.

'there's nothing in it'.[27] In *Pages From a Journal* Hale White quotes from Spinoza's *Ethic*, 'A free man thinks of nothing less than of death, and his wisdom is not a meditation upon death, but upon life' (*Journal*, p.43).

And then, unexpectedly, there is a possibility of continuance:

> The next morning his salary up to the day of his death came in an envelope to his widow [...]. Towards midday, his office coat, and a book found in his drawer, arrived in a brown paper parcel, carriage unpaid.
>
> *Deliverance*, p.128

Even as Hale White links the inanimate effects of the dead man with the body that was 'sent home' and brings all things to the same end, with, 'came in an envelope', he moves the story back into the life and then, with 'a brown paper parcel', towards a possible future. The first phrase takes the reader back to the moment of Rutherford's great understanding, 'messages from Him are not to be read through the envelope in which they are enclosed', while the second moves the story towards the place where Shapcott examines the dead man's papers and finds 'the sketch of his life and a mass of odds and ends' (*Deliverance*, p.128). There is a price, however, for receiving these things. The phrase 'carriage unpaid' suggests that we have to pay for what we take on, an implication that enfolds the reader within the story's purpose.

Mrs Ward had demonstrated how the meaning inherent in Elsmere's life was exemplified by his holy death and how his work would be continued after death. Hale White, unable to depict a happy, holy death, also insists that it is the work that is important. He aligns his writing at this point with that other version of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, where the 'Biographical Documents' arrive at the fictional editor's in 'Six considerable PAPER-BAGS' and where the

[27] William Hale White, *Catharine Furze*, 1893 (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1923), p. 307; hereafter cited *CF*.

book's message is also the blessedness of the work.[28] '[A] man who has passed from youth to age cannot naturally rest in the sad conviction that what he has learned is to go for nothing, and that in no sense is there any continuance for him'(*Bunyan*, p.170). Through the further writing Hale White promises a form of 'continuance'.

3.2 *Catharine Furze* (1893)

Catharine Furze is Hale White's fourth novel and, while it develops the themes of *The Autobiography* and *The Deliverance*, it offers a more straightforward representation of a life's journey than those earlier works. Although Hale White is still writing as 'Mark Rutherford' this novel is not 'autobiography' and his main character is a woman. Twice removed from his protagonist he is less immediately involved so that comment and interpretation come from an authorial distance and, completed within the covers of one volume, there is no break in the book's delivery. The real gap between *The Autobiography* and *The Deliverance* illustrates, in part, the hidden, largely inexplicable nature of Rutherford's redemption. In *Catharine Furze*, Hale White finds a place for the mystery within the narrative itself. 'It is as if something or somebody took hold of me', Catharine, the novel's eponymous heroine, says at one point as she attempts to explain her often instinctive and yet totally appropriate decisions and, later, as she is saved from an act of indiscretion with the man she loves: 'Suddenly something passed through her brain swift as the flash of the swiftest blazing meteor' (*CF*, pp.67, 144).

Towards the end of the story, that same lover, Theophilus Cardew, a married clergyman with an ailing wife, is himself brought to redemption by 'the same Something which had so often restrained Catharine. It smote him as the light from

[28] Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, 1833-1834, ed. Kerry McSweeney and Peter Sabor (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp.58, 60.

heaven smote Saul of Tarsus' (*CF*, p.342). Catharine's 'something' is now 'Something', its meaning still undefined but capitalized into importance. Cardew's saving moment, then, assumes a biblical stature and he becomes a loving husband, genuinely attentive to his previously neglected wife. Cunningham suggests that *Catharine Furze* 'reduces the Damascus Road to a guilty strengthening of the will [...] and the Atonement to renouncing an extra-marital alliance' (Cunningham, p.258). For Hale White, however, the small things in a life are always large enough to merit an equivalence with more apocalyptic events. He still looks towards *The Pilgrim's Progress* as the foundation of all pilgrimage but the thought behind so much of *The Autobiography* and *The Deliverance*, that the human understanding of God has undergone a change, is expressed again in this story. 'He will come to you in a shape in which it will not be easy to recognise Him' (*CF*, p.113), Cardew preaches, and Hale White reintroduces the idea of a disguised Christ who will be discovered through the ordinary rather than the extraordinary.

The novel tells the story of Catharine Furze, a girl growing up in a country town, 'accustomed to believe that what she willed was in accordance with the will of the universe' (*CF*, p.44). The 'deliverance' she will discover is how to move that 'will' away from self towards others. She meets Theophilus Cardew, the married rector of a neighbouring church; the two find themselves spiritually and intellectually attuned and they fall in love. Hale White is never tempted, however, as Hardy may have been, to show the destructive side of love's nature but, as George Eliot does in 'Janet's Repentance', he demonstrates its saving power. While Cardew is far from the saintly ideal that Eliot portrayed in Mr Tryan, for Catharine he is another type of Evangelist. Without Cardew, Catharine would have remained as she was – headstrong and determined but ultimately unchannelled and unfocused. Having met him she is able to find an expression for the thoughts within her. '[W]hen Mr.

Cardew talked to her, and she to him, she rejoiced in the flow of all her force' (*CF*, p.193), and Hale White celebrates the sheer rightness of a relationship that exists in a true harmony. As Stock concludes, 'For the mixture of spirit and flesh, of the divine and the human, which is found in love is also the distinguishing characteristic of Christianity' (Stock, p.177).

Hale White does not applaud Catharine and Cardew's love but neither will he judge it. 'Was it legitimate or illegitimate? In many cases of the same kind the answer would be that the question is one which cannot be put' (*CF*, p.186). Mrs Gaskell's story of illicit love had shown Ruth Hilton to be saved through the acts she undertakes as reparation for wrongdoing and as eventually aware that the love she thought existed between herself and Henry Bellingham to be, on his side at least, untrue. In *Robert Elsmere* the flirtation between Robert and Madame de Netteville remains just that. But, even though Robert is innocently unaware of the danger in the friendship and his eventual sense of unfaithfulness to his wife brings them closer together, the 'affair' itself contains neither goodness nor virtue. The love that exists between Catharine and Cardew, on the other hand, is real and pure and from the heart of it comes fulfilment. The novel's theme, in fact, is close to Dante's in *The New Life*: 'The lordship of Love is good, in that it withdraws the inclination of his liegeman from all vile things.' While Dante sees the goodness and beauty of Beatrice as a way of expressing God's own perfection and excellence he also realizes the terrible responsibilities that love carries: 'The lordship of Love is not good, because the more fidelity his liegeman bears to him, so much the heavier and more grievous trials he must needs endure.'[29]

Like all of Hale White's protagonists Catharine is thoughtful, individual and unable to conform to the pattern expected by the society in which she lives. She is,

[29] Dante Alighieri, *The New Life*, 1290-1294, translated Charles Eliot Norton (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1895), p.22; hereafter cited *NL*.

until she meets Cardew, one alone. Her parents love her but they do not understand her and neither, for much of the novel, can Catharine understand herself. Introspective and isolated, she is, like Rutherford (and like Carlyle's depiction of John Sterling), unable to find a point of reference that will give her journey coherence:

> When life runs high and takes a common form men can walk together as the disciples walked on the road to Emmaus. Christian and Hopeful can pour out their hearts to one another as they travel towards the Celestial City and are knit together in everlasting bonds by the same Christ and the same salvation. But when each man is left to shift for himself, to work out the answers to his own problems, the result is isolation.
>
> *CF*, pp. 189-190

Hale White contrasts Catharine's experience with an era when support was more certain and when Christian and Hopeful's journey was a continuum of that undertaken on the Emmaus road. The protagonists in *Catharine Furze*, like those in Hardy's *The Woodlanders*, journey in a procession of unrequited feeling where each one loves one who loves another who, in turn, loves yet another. This contrast with the perfect model is reminiscent of Matthew Arnold in 'Rugby Chapel' (1857) where he looks back to a time when connection through a strong ideal (in his case God and his father, Thomas Arnold, as the servant of God) was possible. Arnold marks the lack of cohesion within his present: 'Factions divide them, their host / Threatens to break, to dissolve' (*PMA*, pp. 444, 180-181).

The isolated individual is common in the late Victorian story – the protagonists acting out what T. S. Eliot identified as 'The dissolution of thought in that age, the isolation of art, philosophy, religion, ethics and literature'.[30] For writers

[30] T. S. Eliot, *Points of View*, ed. John Hayward (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), p.92. See also Tennyson's 'Idylls of the King' where what had begun as community and collective endeavour ends with Sir Bevidere's sad lament: 'But now the whole Round Table is dissolved / Which was an image of the mighty world, / And I, the last, go forth companionless' (Alfred, Lord Tennyson, 'Idylls of the

like Hardy and Gissing such characters tend to remain isolated reaching always for the love that will rescue them without ever quite reaching fulfilment. Hale White's Catharine, however, like Rutherford before her, makes that connection. In *The Deliverance*, Hale White demonstrated how love, even when it comes so late, could bring its own reward. In *Catharine Furze*, he explains that even unlawful love can hold redemption within it:

> As it was, her position was critical because she stood by herself, affiliated to nothing, an individual belonging to no species, so far as she knew. She then met Mr. Cardew. It was through him the word was spoken to her, and he was the interpreter of the new world to her.
>
> *CF*, p.192

Through Hale White's careful phrasing, what has been static, 'she stood', and solitary, 'by herself', is transformed through human love into movement, 'through him', and openness, 'the new world', and the relationship that must not look to fulfilment paradoxically achieves it. The change is expressed in biblical terms, 'the word was spoken to her', and the secular phenomenon takes the form of a religious awakening. Bunyan would have expanded this moment into a form of divine revelation and so too, in a different way, would Mrs Ward. Hale White, however, refuses any religiously inspired interpretation. God may reach man through human love but He may also remain hidden.

Hale White is not interested in a conventionally holy Catharine. The spiritual longing for God that drove the more traditional pilgrimage is endured by her in purely human terms and she is never shown as divorced from the power of it. A decision never to see Cardew again leads to a depression. Her health suffers and her doctor, noting how her face 'lighted up a little' at his diagnosis of 'a slight tenderness

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King', in *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed, Christopher Ricks (London: Longmans, 1969), 'The Passing of Arthur' (1833), 402-404).

in the chest', suggests that she 'turn the position [...] by work and a determination to be of some use'. Catharine obeys this proposal by nursing her servant, Phoebe, through the final hours of a consumptive death, a death that follows a life of small acts of duty towards others. Realizing this, Catharine understands how her own life has 'had self for a centre' and she imagines 'the bliss of waking up in the morning with the thoughts turned outwards instead of inwards!' (*CF*, pp. 309, 311, 327). Between this death and her own that occurs shortly afterwards all Catharine's actions are 'of some use'. She organizes her father's affairs when he is on the point of bankruptcy; after one last dangerous meeting, she removes herself from Cardew; and she is present as her old friend, Tom, is declared innocent of a disgrace she was inadvertently responsible for. All Catharine's concerns, in fact, are made right and the redemptive acts complete. The nature of the 'deliverance' gained, however, is difficult to appreciate. Her parting with Cardew, while necessary, is painful and Tom's restoration is through another's extraordinary 'deliverance' rather than Catharine's hidden one. 'I find it very difficult to describe exactly what the change was, because it was into nothing positive; into no sect, party, nor special mode' (*Autobiography*, pp.164-165), Shapcott, the editor figure, confesses at the end of *The Autobiography* and so it is with Catharine.

Catharine's struggles to resolve her feelings are difficult and painful but, when she dies at the end of the story, she is at peace with both her world and her lover. There has been that same fear of death that troubled Mark Rutherford: 'Terrors vague and misty possessed her' (*CF*, p.299). Shortly before her death, however, she experiences the same healing joy realized through the effects of nature that came to Rutherford:

> She felt as if she lay open to all the life of spring which was pouring up through the earth, and it swept into her as if she were one of those bursting exultant chestnut buds, the sight

> of which she loved so in April and May. [...] The bliss of life passed over into contentment with death, and her delight was so great that she could happily have lain down amid the hum of the insects to die on the grass.
>
> *CF*, pp.361-362

Again Hale White depicts a type of resurrection, 'pouring up through the earth', so that Catharine not only accepts, as Rutherford had done, that death need not be feared, but actually wishes to move herself towards it. She does not look towards death with any Christian sense of joy in the life to come, however, but with a perception of becoming one with nature. There is a feeling here that Catharine is making a return to the place her surname would indicate as home. It is the same type of curative homecoming (even to a repetition of the 'furze' motif) depicted by Hardy when Clym Yeobright accepts the life of a furze cutter and becomes as one with his beloved heath. 'He was a brown spot in the midst of an expanse of olive-green gorse, and nothing more' (*Return*, p.247). While Clym's return cannot be held, however, Catharine's can and Hale White adopts the same quiet tone of the turbulent soul now at one with nature employed by Emily Brontë at the end of *Wuthering Heights*. Catharine's story then – the falling in love, the recognition of love's effects, and the relinquishing of the selfish part of that love – is made manifest in this moment. 'We are anxious about what we call "personality," but in truth there is nothing in it of any worth, and the less we care for it the more "blessed" we are' (*Journal*, p.42). When Catharine dies she is, in this sense, 'blessed'.[31]

Hale White had suggested in *The Autobiography* and *The Deliverance* that the incidents that govern a life journey may happen quite arbitrarily – the revealed

[31] See: 'For the salvation which is here won it is not acceptance which is required but renunciation; and the reconciliation is less with life than with death, or with an annihilation of self and the natural impulses of self, which is almost death's equivalent' (Maclean, p.308).

faith that had made the structure of Christian's progress possible having been lost. In *Catharine Furze*, however, he insists that a life consists of more than a series of haphazard incidents – that what may *seem* like chance is something more. 'The more I think about accidents, the less do I believe in them.' There is, he argues, 'a non-theological Providence which watches over us and leads us. It appears as instinct' (*CF*, pp.227, 228). In *Robert Elsmere*, Mrs Ward showed how a new interpretation of pilgrimage could bring its own particular problems to the novel. It is difficult for an author to justify these new lives with the same intensity as the authors of *The Heir of Redclyffe* and *Ruth*, for example, where the connection between God and man is absolute. Hale White does not attempt such certainty and, although the death with which the story ends is granted an affinity with other holy deaths, he deliberately disturbs the meaning that the reader may wish to find within it.

At the centre of Catharine's story Hale White interposes another love story, one set in third-century Rome and that echoes Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* (1885). It is the story of a pagan sculptor, Charmides, and a Christian slave, Demariste, who meet when Charmides, out of curiosity, visits a Christian place of worship. Attracted by Demariste as much as by the new religion he begins to attend these meetings and the two fall in love. It is, however, a love that is different: 'It was a love of the soul, of that which was immortal, of God in her; [...] of reality outlasting death into eternity [...] the love of Dante for Beatrice' (*CF*, pp.165-166). This love remains unconsummated, 'of the soul', for Charmides and Demariste are arrested and killed within weeks of meeting. The power of it, however, is transcending and, in a secular manner certainly, redemptive:[32]

[32] Dante's *The New Life* states that love brings death and a new, resurrected life afterwards. 'And of a truth it seemed to me that my heart was so gladsome, that it did not seem to me to be my heart, because of its new condition' (*NL*, pp.53-54). Hale White was possibly thinking of this when he inserted Charmides's story.

> Charmides could just raise his head, and saw nothing but Demariste. He was able to turn himself towards her and move her hand to his lips, the second, only the second and the last kiss.
>
> So they died. Charmides was never considered a martyr by the Church. The circumstances were doubtful, and it was not altogether clear that he deserved the celestial crown.
>
> *CF*, pp.169-170

In death Charmides looks to Demariste. In life he had seen 'God in her' and so it is as he dies. Like Pater's Marius, Charmides has died for the sake of human love rather than the divine and, like Marius, his death is something of a problem. The death of Pater's protagonist, however, is considered 'to have been of the nature of a martyrdom; and martyrdom, as the church had always said, a kind of sacrament with plenary grace'.[33] The holy nature of this death may be qualified but it is sufficient for the promise of eternal life – if eternal life should be possible. The 'circumstances' of Charmides's death, on the other hand, are 'doubtful', he is 'never considered a martyr'. While Pater's ending moves a little way from uncertainty, Hale White's embraces it.

Charmides's story can easily be read as a metaphor for Catharine's own life but at no time does Hale White explicitly refer to it again or offer any explanation for its inclusion as Bunyan (and George Eliot) would have done. Instead he leaves it as a simple presence in the story as, perhaps, the Wordsworthian meaning found in nature that should be ever present in a life waiting for the moment when remembrance may be useful. In all the instances of Catharine's love for Cardew the reader will be reminded of the story but it is only at the end of the novel, as a dying Catharine takes leave of her lover, that its extraordinary significance becomes apparent:

[33] Walter Pater, *Marius the Epicurean*, 1885, ed. Michael Levey (London: Penguin, 1985), p.297.

> 'Mr. Cardew, I want to say something.'
>
> 'Wait a moment, let me tell you – *you have saved me.*'
>
> She smiled, her lips moved, and she whispered – '*You* have saved *me.*'
>
> By their love for each other they were both saved. The disguises are manifold which the Immortal Son assumes in the work of our redemption.
>
> *CF*, p.365

As Cardew interrupts Catharine he says what she would have said anyway so that, as she gives his own words back to him, this becomes a totally closed moment. Redemptive as it is, there seems no place within it for God and, as it recalls the story of Charmides, there is the danger that it may not be enough. Will Catharine, looking only to Cardew as she dies, be, like Charmides, denied her 'celestial crown'? As one may have come to expect from Hale White, the arrangement of events within the story as a whole has contradicted any attempt at an absolute conclusion. An ending, that should in itself be sufficient, fails in the face of what has gone before and can only be rescued by the authorial intervention.

What is immediately recognized, as Catharine and Cardew come together for the last time, is the human quality of their love, their coincidence of expression bringing the relationship to a type of consummation. Without the paralleled story of Charmides and Demariste this could be left as the conclusion to a successful secular pilgrimage. At the end of *The Deliverance*, there is no disappointment shown by either author or protagonist at the lack of a link between earth and heaven. Rutherford dies having found 'actual joy' in life and it is enough. Heaven may exist as a continuation or it may not. In *Catharine Furze*, however, the reader disturbed by the inconclusiveness of the inserted story, demands something more and is given a celebration of the 'hidden' presence of Christ in the human. 'If the religious ideal has been adulterated by the human, the human has been ennobled by that ideal' (Stock, p.185), and Hale White suggests that even if man cannot be recognized as living in

Christ, Christ can be found living in man. Catharine's story, then, rescues the earlier one as her death is given an integrity that does not rely upon traditional interpretations of martyrdom. Hale White has written a novel that shows the struggle towards the old idea of pilgrimage even as he suggests that some other forms may be as useful. These forms may not continue into the next world or even grant glimpses of it but they do show how the next world may be present in this and in this way they bring 'deliverance'.

The ending after this is deliberately subdued. Catharine dies somewhere in the space between Hale White's redemptive interpretation and the single paragraph with which he concludes the story while Cardew fades into a better but a less charismatic future, preaching sermons of the 'simplest kind' (*CF*, p.365). Such a structure is another reminder of *The Return of the Native* where Eustacia Vye also dies outside the narrative and Clym Yeobright lives on as an itinerant preacher of doubtful consequence. But Hale White's ending is less restrained than Hardy's. Catharine has successfully completed her pilgrimage and her death is unimportant because she continues to live, not through an as yet unpublished body of work as with Mark Rutherford, but through the way Cardew subsequently lives his life:

> Before Mr. Cardew was set for evermore the face which he saw white and saintly at Chapel Farm that May Sunday morning when death had entered, and it controlled and moulded him with an all-pervading power more subtle and penetrating than that which could have been exercised by theology or ethics.
>
> *CF*, p.366

3.3 *Clara Hopgood* (1896)

Clara Hopgood is Hale White's fifth and final novel. It tells the story of two sisters, Clara and Madge Hopgood, who at the beginning of the story, like Jane

Austen's Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, seem to represent the opposing voices of reserve and emotion. Clara tends to distrust her sister's more immediate decisions. 'The planning and the forecasting are the soul of the game', she says of chess while Madge suggests that playing well is 'a gift, an instinct'.[34] Hale White finally works out, in this story, whether the road to salvation is discovered through this type of instinct or through the slow process of inquiry and, as Stock notes, 'faces squarely the difficult truth that for life as a whole the way of foresight and rule no more constitutes a royal road to righteousness – or to evil – than that of unexamined impulse' (Stock, p.201). As Hale White himself wrote in 1896, 'Thomas à Kempis is true, but so are the senses' (*Letters*, p.181).

Although the title and the ending of this novel are given to Clara the story begins with Madge.[35] It is her sentience and impulse that move the plot into being as she forms a relationship with a young man, Frank Palmer. She becomes pregnant, the actual lovemaking marked by a gap in the text not just through delicacy but also as an indication of what will happen in other silences later in the story. Immediately conscious that she has mistaken passion for love, Madge refuses to marry Frank. 'It would be a crime' (*CII*, p.74), she tells him showing no confusion as to where the greater sin would lie if she entered into a joyless marriage. Frank is not a villain and he begs Madge to marry him. The reader, however, is all too aware of the truth behind Madge's refusal, for Frank's motivation is self-justification rather than love.

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[34] William Hale White, *Clara Hopgood*, 1896, ed. Lorraine Davies (London: Everyman, 1996), p.15; hereafter cited *CH*.

[35] Some critics have expressed dissatisfaction with the title. See, for example, ' "Clara Hopgood" is not about Clara Hopgood at all, but about her sister Madge Hopgood, and Clara is only dragged in at the end' (Bennett, p.16). Lorraine Davies, however, suggests: 'The inability of these reviewers to understand why the novel is named after Clara comes from a failure to see how the expected continuities of the narrative are broken in order to put idea, discussion and reflection into the foreground. The difference between the sisters' stories [...] is fundamental to the novel both as argument and exploration. Madge's struggle has been easier to read because it is largely explicable from the 'outside', it has been one with the flesh. Clara's 'action' will be almost entirely undisclosed, her emotions displaced into the descriptions of nature that occur more frequently in the second part of the novel' (*CH*, intro., p.xxxvii).

Because of Madge's pregnancy the two sisters and their mother move from their midland home of Fenmarket to London. Mrs Hopgood dies before the baby is born and Clara needs to work in order to support herself and her sister. She obtains a situation in a second-hand bookshop where she meets a Spinozian figure, the middle aged, half Jewish, Baruch Cohen. The two fall in love but, before this love can be explicitly owned, Clara, in a sudden gesture that seems out of keeping with her nature, gives up all thoughts of marriage. Convinced that Baruch will make a fitting husband for her sister she puts aside his tentative advances and, having met Giuseppe Mazzini, the Italian patriot then living in exile in London, she decides to leave England to work for Italian independence. Letters come to Madge at intervals until, after a long silence she learns through Mazzini that her sister is dead. Clara, then, dies outside the pages of the narrative, out of sight of all who have known her in life and in a way her friends, and the reader, can scarcely comprehend.

Death as an ending in these stories is always qualified by a postscript where Hale White allows the rhythms of continuing life to suggest a future beyond the death. This is a common enough device in novels. The authors of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Adam Bede*, for example, move their stories some distance beyond their natural endings as a way of informing the reader of the various happinesses, and sometimes retributions, that may be visited on the surviving characters in the novel.[36] Hale White, however, concludes this story rather differently. After the brief account of Clara's death he moves the novel forward ten years to a short scene acted out between Baruch and 'a younger Clara', Madge's child:

> "I had an Aunt Clara once, hadn't I?"
> "Yes, my child."

[36] See Henry James's sardonic definition of such endings: 'a distribution at the last of prizes, pensions, husbands, wives, babies, millions, appended paragraphs, and cheerful remarks' (Henry James, *The Art of Fiction and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), p.7).

> "Didn't she go to Italy and die there?"
> "Yes."
> "Why did she go?"
> "Because she wanted to free the poor people of Italy who were slaves.'
>
> *CH*, p.136

This passage works in two ways. First it affirms that Clara's plans for her sister's future have succeeded, a reassurance that her sacrifice was not made in vain. It is, however, also the place where the difficult secrecy behind Clara's actions is made manifest. At the end of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Kit Nubbles is found telling his own children the story of Little Nell. Like Kit, Baruch is speaking of one he had loved; he too is speaking to a child, the next generation; and he uses simple words to describe a complex series of events. Kit, however, as the reader knows, tells Nell's story often, in detail, and represents it accurately while giving an assurance of immortality. Baruch does none of these things. The child's uncertainty shows how rarely she has heard the story; Baruch's replies are of the shortest and, in the last instance, only partially correct; and neither is there any mention of heaven as a just reward for bravery. That Nell's memory should not suffer decay and change was the idea Kit upheld but, after this other, later life, there is a difficulty with full understanding for even the reader must be perplexed by Clara's decision. Clara, it would seem, is half forgotten, only half understood, and denied a prize equivalent to the one that Nell was allowed.

As in *Catharine Furze*, however, there is a story inserted into the early chapters of *Clara Hopgood.* It is an account of sacrifice misread but ultimately clarified and, as in the earlier book, its full significance is not immediately apparent. The story tells of a widower and his only daughter who was troubled by periods of narcotic abstraction. During one of these periods she 'stole' a silk handkerchief and, to save her from prosecution, her father confessed to the crime, was convicted, and

sentenced to a term of imprisonment. He left the true facts to be discovered after his death but only on the condition that the daughter herself was dead and had died childless. When this last has come about the truth is revealed. Death, in this little story, cannot become a place of revelation. A full understanding by the sleepwalking daughter would be painful and damaging. So it would be for Madge and Baruch. What Hale White offers, as illustrated in the inserted story, where the truth is revealed so many years later and then only to those who have played no part in its drama, is a time of understanding in a place further on than the novel itself. This insight, which mimics but does not replace the greater insight promised by Christianity after death, can, in Clara's case, only be discovered through the efforts of the reader.

As he did at the end of *The Deliverance* with 'carriage unpaid', Hale White is suggesting that his readers have a particular duty that a simple, naïve reading will not satisfy. Mink writes of the part 'memory, imagination, and conceptualization' play in our understanding of a sequenced event, a symphony, for example, or a novel. Of the first pages of Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* he suggests, 'It is not until later in the book that these opaque pages become intelligible in retrospect; one must read the later pages with the earlier in mind, and in fact reread the earlier pages with the later in mind.'[37] Such a submission can also be applied to *Clara Hopgood* where, in the end, Clara acts through flashes of intuition and impulse half concealed by the busyness of life itself:

> Clara looked up from her desk, watched them as they went out at the door and, for a moment, seemed lost. Barnes turned round.
>
> 'Now, Miss Hopgood.' She started.
>
> 'Yes, sir.'
>
> *CH*, p.119

[37] Louis O. Mink, 'History and Fiction as Modes of Comprehension', in *New Literary History* (1969-1970), I, 541-558 (pp.547, 548).

Madge has called at the bookshop where Clara works in order to collect her sister. Clara, however, has extra work to do and Madge must leave without her. Baruch is also present and, as he offers to accompany Madge, Clara is struck by a thought that is immediately interrupted by the concerns of her employer. It is as if Christian, about to do battle with Apollyon, had been diverted by some mundane household task. And this is Clara's Apollyon. It is one of the most important moments in the novel, the place where, combining her own 'planning and [...] forecasting' with her sister's trust in 'instinct', she begins to realize what she must do.

Baruch returns to the bookshop in order to walk Clara home and he comes close to a proposal: 'A husband was to be had for a look' (*CH*, p.120). The idea that came to Clara earlier, however, unformed though it was, is strong enough to make her hesitate in her response:

> [H]er tongue actually began to move with a reply, which would have sent his arm round her, and made them one for ever, but it did not come. Something fell and flashed before her like lightning from a cloud overhead, divinely beautiful, but divinely terrible.
>
> *CH*, p.121

'Between the emotion / And the response / Falls the Shadow / *Life is very long*', and Hale White, like T. S. Eliot, shows time expanding to be filled by a feeling that can only be symbolically expressed.[38] The first intuition, 'for a moment, seemed lost', barely perceptible to the reader, was recognized and accepted by Clara. Instances of insight, Hale White is saying, are intense and momentary and may be missed altogether. What he has done, therefore, is to take Clara's moment of realization and highlight it so that it becomes not longer but bolder, 'fell and flashed', and more specific, 'divinely terrible'. This Damascus experience, outlined even more

[38] 'The Hollow Men' (1925), Eliot, *Poems*, p.87, V. 13-16.

dramatically than Mr Cardew's, has the same effect and, as Cardew turned from thoughts of a future with Catharine, so Clara turns from Baruch.

Some time afterwards Clara watches Baruch and Madge together and knows that she has been right: 'The message then was authentic' (*CH*, p.130). And then, a few pages later, the story is resolved:

> 'Clara,' [Madge] said, 'I want a word with you. Baruch Cohen loves me.'
> 'Do you love him?'
> 'Yes.'
> 'Without a shadow of a doubt?'
> 'Without a shadow of a doubt.'
> Clara put her arm round her sister, kissed her tenderly and said, -
> 'Then I am perfectly happy.'
>
> *CH*, p.133

As Clara finds her own perfect happiness in Madge's life, Hale White unites the sisters in a secular perception of successful pilgrimage. If each human journey is not separate but part of another then man is not alone and, even if man's conception of God is obscure, there can be found reason for his journey and connective consequences to his actions. As Madge gives back her sister's question as a firm reply, the reader is reminded of that other affirmation, Catharine and Cardew's final words, while Clara's response, 'Then I am perfectly happy', looks back to Rutherford's 'actual joy'.[39] The 'deliverance' of each story, then, is enfolded in this one, and for a particular reason. Clara, unlike Rutherford and Catharine, has an extra trial to undergo. Catharine may have welcomed the illness that led to her death but she did not actively instigate it. Clara must, like Christian as he entered the River, take a step that she knows will end in death. Before he reached the last trial of the River, Christian was given a time of strengthening and refreshment in the land of Beulah where he and Hopeful were 'met with abundance of what they had sought for

[39] See: 'Love in *Clara Hopgood*, is the means [...] to a Spinozan unity of the finite and the infinite' (*CH*, intro., p.xxxii).

in all their pilgrimage' (*PP*, p.135). This is Clara's land of Beulah and the moment that strengthens her for what is to come.

Lucas suggests that throughout the story Clara is 'acting out of convictions that will trouble the living stream but not, finally, compel it to alter course' (Lucas, p.113). Typically, though, for Hale White this is enough for celebration. Clara, like Rutherford and MacKay, 'saved two or three' – the people she loves most in the world – and she is lucky enough to die assured of it. Her story, in the end, comes close to a traditional representation of pilgrimage. She has, like Christian, travelled in the hope of 'deliverance'; the usefulness of her sacrifice is confirmed; and she comes as close as any character in this type of novel can to a sort of mystical apotheosis:

> All efforts to obtain more information from Mazzini were in vain, but one day when [Clara's] name was mentioned, he said to Madge, –
>
> 'The theologians represent the Crucifixion as the most sublime fact in the world's history. It was sublime, but let us reverence also the Eternal Christ who is for ever being crucified for our salvation.'
>
> *CH*, p.135

This, for Hale White, is a confirmation of earlier ideas: 'The disguises are manifold which the Immortal Son assumes in the work of our redemption.' He does not suggest a belief in a purely human Christ, as Mrs Ward did in *Robert Elsmere*, Christ as man. Clara's death is intended to represent something larger, the human expression of Christ's salvation – Christ *in* man. It is, however, a veiled allusion for Mazzini only speaks indirectly of Clara. As with all things in Hale White's stories the connection is there – but it is up to the reader to implement it. Mazzini, however, is a real figure. An Italian patriot who advocated a free and united Italy, he was republican and anti-church. His position, therefore, gives a sort of authority to the story – a spokesperson from the real world who offers a religious interpretation for

Clara's death without the need to believe in the religious doctrine itself.[40] Hale White, in his final novel, would have his readers discover that Clara is indeed a heroine and that her sacrifice is worthy of remembrance.

Written across the same period as Mrs Ward's *Robert Elsmere* and *Helbeck of Bannisdale*, Hale White's novels offer a different type of pilgrimage. Like her, he has replaced the large symbolisms of *The Pilgrim's Progress* but the moment of death, so important to the structure of *Robert Elsmere*, is missing. All his protagonists die outside the narrative and each death, in its own way, misses Mrs Ward's holy significance. But neither do the deaths suggest the sad completion of Laura Fountain's. The moment of death for Hale White is unimportant rather than tragic and he offers, for each protagonist, a form of continuance – the published writing for Rutherford, Cardew's new life for Catharine, and for Clara the happiness and security of Madge, Baruch, and Madge's child. Each character, having understood how the Jesus of scripture has been made manifest in 'the life of our own time', achieves 'deliverance'. It is what happens in the silences of life, Hale White finally concludes, that affects the pattern of our lives. Man's duty is to be ready to receive and interpret the message. Aware of the difficulty in recognizing Christ in 'the manifestation of to-day' he illuminates it each time into the importance of a Damascus experience in order to stress and authenticate its meaning. As he wrote in 'Principles': 'What we have once *heard*, really heard in our best moments, by that let us abide.'[41]

[40] Lucas suggests: 'Mazzini's reputation had sunk very low by the 1890s, so that readers of the novel could hardly be expected to think Clara's sacrifice unambiguously noble' (Lucas, p.212, note 33). The respect that Hale White's writing gives to Mazzini, however, suggests a personal appreciation of the man's ideals that today, if not then, overrides any contemporary fall from popularity.

[41] William Hale White, 'Principles', 1885, in *Autobiography*, pp. 197-205 (p.201).

Chapter Four

George Gissing (1857 – 1903)

George Gissing was born in Wakefield, Yorkshire, the son of a chemist who died when the boy was thirteen. A brilliant student, Gissing won a scholarship to Owens College, Manchester, in 1872. This promising start to his career was cut short in 1876 when he was discovered stealing from his fellow students. Gissing had met, and fallen in love with, a young Manchester prostitute, Nell Harrison, and the money was intended to provide her with an alternative means of support. Expelled from college, he was convicted of theft and served a term of imprisonment that was followed by a period in America. On his return, still convinced he could make a difference, he married Nell. She was, however, a hopeless alcoholic, the marriage was difficult and, in 1882, the couple separated. A second marriage after Nell's death in 1888 was no happier than the first and there was another separation. It was not until 1898, when he met a young Frenchwoman, Gabrielle Fleury, that Gissing achieved a real domestic happiness. His second wife, however, was still alive and he and Gabrielle could not marry. Instead they lived together, mainly in France, until Gissing's death in 1903.

Gissing was a prolific writer. He wrote twenty-three novels, numerous short stories, a travel book, and a critical study of Charles Dickens. Many of his novels were well received but he was, for many years, dogged by financial problems and to the end of his life he considered himself to be alienated from the type of society to which he felt he should belong. These things, combined with his marital unhappiness, are a constant presence in his novels. '[H]onestly and sincerely doing that which ruined his own life and did not turn his wife from the path which nature had already set for her', Frank Swinnerton writes of Gissing's marriage to Nell and

his final phrase echoes Gissing's eventual assessment that the lives into which we are born are a form of entrapment.[1] In the novels of Mrs Humphry Ward and William Hale White, the lives of the protagonists were, as far as was still possible, modelled on ideas of progress. While these authors illustrated the difficulty of finding the path of pilgrimage, each of their protagonists, with the exception of Laura Fountain, does begin the journey and does reach a tolerable conclusion. Gissing's novels, on the other hand, oppose the usual Christianized account of how this life is a journey towards something better. He traps his characters within their own particular world, the place from where the flight into progress would once have begun but from where escape is now hardly possible.[2] His men and women are trapped by virtue of character, aptitude, social position or gender and most, to some extent, are trapped by poverty.[3] Isolated within unhappy marriages or within unwanted celibacy, within worlds of the unempowered or within worlds that seem to be the wrong one, they live lives where the struggle to escape is endlessly repeated until either hopelessness is accepted or life itself is over. Instead of rewriting *The Pilgrim's Progress* his novels often seem to deny the usefulness of journey at all. There are lives that do move forward but Gissing is always careful to illustrate the limited, or sometimes less than desirable, nature of these progressions.

A lifelong agnostic, Gissing laboured under the non-religious man's difficulty of finding this-worldly answers to seemingly impossible problems. Korg asserts:

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[1] Frank Swinnerton, *George Gissing: A Critical Study*, 1912 (London: Martin Secker, 1924), p.25; hereafter cited Swinnerton.

[2] See: 'Characters are caught in daily lives, as they are enclosed in zoned spaces', and: 'Gissing's characters [...] are mobile but not travelling' (John Goode, *Ideology and Fiction* (London: Vision, 1978), pp.92, 105; hereafter cited Goode, *Ideology and Fiction*). See also Michael Wheeler's comparison of Gissing's structures with Dante's circles of hell (Michael Wheeler, *English Fiction of the Victorian Period* (London and New York: Longman, 1994), pp. 187-192; hereafter cited Wheeler, *English Fiction*).

[3] Gissing saw even moderate poverty as an evil that inhibited development: 'to one who lacks money the world is but a great debtors' prison' (George Gissing, *Demos*, 1886 (London and Toronto: Dent, n.p.), p.25; hereafter cited *Demos*).

> To many, agnosticism offered relief from the impossible task of solving the riddle of the universe, but to Gissing it meant only that man was doomed to pitiful ignorance and loneliness in a harsh universe he could never understand.[4]

Korg suggests that 'Gissing was one of a minority of Victorians who felt with equal force the attraction and the impossibility of faith', and quotes from Gissing's correspondence: 'Well, well, let us agree that it is very good to acknowledge a great mystery' (Korg, p. 176). Thinking religiously, then, but without a religious faith Gissing looked to philosophies other than Christianity for guidance.

His essay, 'The Hope of Pessimism', written in 1882, considers the theme of life's imperfection much as Newman had done in 'The Greatness and Littleness of Human Life'. '[T]he longing for a future life is the hope of recompense hereafter for the miserable failure of existence on earth', Gissing insists, but the argument that follows dismisses Newman's type of religious comfort. '[W]e may not deceive ourselves with the visionary heritage of a life to come'.[5] Early Socialist ideas had given way to Positivism but, by 1882, Gissing had largely rejected what he called Positivism's 'agnostic optimism'. 'It is in the pessimistic philosophy as developed by Schopenhauer that we find the true successor of pure Christianity' (HP, pp.78, 96), and the essay outlines his acceptance of those austere beliefs. It also provides vital clues to the structure of his novels where the effectiveness of reform or any substantial move away from the given circumstances of life is so often denied.[6]

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[4] Jacob Korg, *George Gissing: A Critical Biography* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963), p.177; hereafter cited Korg.

[5] George Gissing, 'The Hope of Pessimism' (1882), in *George Gissing: Essays and Fiction*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), pp. 75-97 (pp. 76, 93); hereafter cited HP.

[6] See: 'The ideas of Schopenhauer manifest themselves more or less clearly in all the succeeding novels [those written after the essay]; partly [...] in the form; very noticeably, in the view of life presented' (C. J. Francis, 'Gissing and Schopenhauer', in *Collected Articles on George Gissing*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (London: Frank Cass, 1968), pp. 106-116 (p.112); hereafter cited Francis). Gilmour notes that the message of the essay 'is essentially that of Hardy's line in "In Tenebris II" – "if way to the better there be, it exacts a full look at the worst" ' (Robin Gilmour, *The Novel in the Victorian Age* (London: Edward Arnold, 1986), p.151).

'Physical anguish and the misery of sin all men inherit' (HP, p.92). From these things, Gissing feels, there is no escape but, through the pity he feels for himself, man may be led to feel pity for others: 'Save our brother we could not, knowing not, alas, how to save ourselves; but our last word to him was one of kindness' (HP, p.95). This Gissing sees as man's duty until a full peace can be discovered through a blessed extinction:

> The establishment of the kingdom of righteousness can only ensue upon the destruction of egotism, and egotism only perishes together with optimism, together with 'the will to live.' Only with the absolute extinction of every lust of the flesh can sin cease to be; only with the final cessation of conscious life can evil disappear from the earth.
>
> HP, p.96

This does not mean that Gissing ever completely relinquished his Positivist ideas; they can be found in each novel, sometimes contradicting, sometimes simply mitigating, the pessimism of Schopenhauer. As Grylls suggests, 'In the treatment of all his central themes, belief in the power of redemptive effort conflicts with acceptance of defeat or loss'.[7] This is partly what makes Gissing so interesting, for the structure of his novels, governed by Schopenhauerian concepts, is continually drawn towards the pattern set by other texts where redemption remains a possibility. Although Gissing's stories inevitably succumb to less than hopeful conclusions the memory of other ways of writing is never ignored. Instead they are explicitly invoked and worked through and the sense of what has been lost becomes all the greater.[8]

Three of Gissing's novels are considered in this chapter, *The Nether World* (1889), *New Grub Street* (1891), and *Born in Exile* (1892). These stories show

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[7] David Grylls, *The Paradox of Gissing* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1986), p. 18; hereafter cited Grylls.

[8] See: 'As happens so often in Gissing, the conventions of the Victorian novel seem to be used to create expectancies in the reader which are sardonically frustrated' (Goode, *Ideology and Fiction*, p.132).

Gissing's Socialist / Positivist / Schopenhauerian ideas being worked out through the lives of the protagonists. Each novel shows lives failing to reach their full potential and each novel ends with a death. The deaths are seen as defeats rather than victories and, in the two later novels, as the only way of ending lives that seem in danger of going on too long. The sadness each time, however, is mitigated by a sense of continuance. This is never the continuance that was originally desired nor is it always particularly laudable. It is, however, a way forward and as such it serves to move the conclusions away from tragedy.

4.1 *The Nether World* (1889)

The Nether World, Gissing's seventh novel, begins as Michael Snowdon, searches for his missing granddaughter, Jane. It concludes at his graveside as Jane talks to the man she loves. What has happened between these scenes, however, is far from a traditional story of rescue and romance. Michael, the recipient of a substantial inheritance, has intended that Jane should use the money to set up schemes to help the underprivileged of the 'nether world'. Snowdon's proposals, reminiscent of Elsmere's Elgood Street rather than Rutherford's Drury Lane, are indicative, in this novel, of a dangerous largeness. Far from offering fulfilment, Michael's plans for Jane overwhelm her with feelings of inadequacy, separate her from her lover, Sidney Kirkwood, and then, after Michael's death, the money goes by default to her improvident father who loses it all through speculation.

Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* is another story of misguided benevolence. By the end of the novel, however, there has been a change, not only in the convict, Magwitch, but also in Pip's perceptions of him. That progression from one feared to one loved enables Dickens to give the convicted man the type of

literary death reserved for those who have found a way through to salvation. In Gissing's novel, when Michael Snowdon dies, he too is loved and respected but it is a love and respect inspired by the man as he once was and his death is a sad and empty experience:

> The day waned. Its sombre close was unspeakably mournful in this haunted chamber. Jane could not bear it; she hid her face and wept.
>
> When the doctor came again, at six o'clock, he whispered to Joseph that the end was nearer than he had anticipated. Near, indeed; less than ten minutes after the warning had been given Michael ceased to breathe.
>
> Jane knelt by the bed, convulsed with grief, unable to hear the words her father addressed to her.[9]

Here, as Gissing emphasizes the purely physical expression of death, 'ceased to breathe', there is no moment of apotheosis, no last words through which the pilgrimage can be handed on. Michael is not the chief protagonist of *The Nether World*, Jane is, and the scene, unlike the death of Ruth Hilton, centres upon the living child. But, while Jane's feelings dominate they put her apart, she 'hid her face' and was 'unable to hear', and, although the business between the doctor and her father, Joseph, closes the gap between her anticipation of death and its actuality, the death is given no moment of prominence. Michael's death does not unite the other characters as Ruth Hilton's did; rather it emphasizes their disconnection.[10]

The idea of life continuing in a personal loneliness is marked again by Gissing at Snowdon's funeral:

> [N]o ray of sunlight fell upon his open grave, but the weather was mild, and among the budded trees passed a breath which was the promise of spring. Joseph Snowdon and the Byasses were Jane's only companions in the mourning-carriage; but at the cemetery

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[9] George Gissing, *The Nether World*, 1889, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.325; hereafter cited *NW*.

[10] See: 'For Gissing [...] the idea of hell as separation from God [...] is scaled down to the separation of man from man' (Wheeler, *English Fiction*, p.190).

> they were joined by Sidney Kirkwood. Jane saw him and felt the pressure of his hand, but she could neither speak nor understand anything that was said to her.
>
> *NW*, p.349

There is, in Jane's recognition of Kirkwood's greeting, an echo of Tennyson's lines: 'And in my thoughts, with scarce a sigh / I take the pressure of thine hand.'[11] But, while Tennyson is moving away from grief towards the possibility of a new form of connection with his dead friend, Jane is held by her sorrow and Kirkwood's gesture is of compassion not conjunction. For Jane and Sidney there cannot be a deeper physical relationship and Gissing will not offer his protagonists the mystical resolution to loneliness that Tennyson was able to discover. In contrast to Tennyson's positive response, 'I take', Jane's is passive, 'and felt'. The touch of the hand here is the only connection that Kirkwood can offer, a gentle kindness replacing Tennyson's larger statement.

There is, too, the deliberately restrained nature of Gissing's writing. Compare, 'no ray of sunlight', for example, with Guy Morville's burial in *The Heir of Redclyffe* where every symbol of sainthood is used from the white sheet over the coffin that 'gave the effect of the emblematic whiteness of a child's funeral', to the sudden appearance at the graveside in 'despair and bewilderment' (*HR*, pp. 475,476) of the repentant Philip who has caused the death. Or consider it alongside Dickens's depiction of Little Nell's burial place. Light, filtered by the boughs of trees, passes through a coloured window: 'With every breath of air that stirred among those branches in the sunshine, some trembling, changing light would fall upon her grave' (*OCS*, p.658). Dickens's words promise a continuously renewed apotheosis through the changing seasons of the year. Even Mardon, the atheistic figure in *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford*, is, through the glorious sunrise that coincides

[11] Alfred Tennyson, 'In Memoriam' (1850), in *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Longmans, 1969), CXIX. 11-12.

with his death and the eloquence of the minister who conducts the funeral service, given more than Gissing can grant. Instead of apotheosis he offers smaller things, the mild weather, the budding trees, the coming spring. There are ways in which a life can be offered comfort, he is implying, but they are muted rather than celebratory and as such may be overlooked. It is all the more significant, then, that Gissing moves immediately away from the funeral to the scene of one of those small acts of altruism that will be part of the rest of Jane's life. This is what Michael's death means to the story. It removes the possibility of any great philanthropic undertaking and leaves space instead for the novel's theme of small kindnesses offered in the face of hopelessness.

The Nether World is set within a London that is a veritable City of Destruction. Here reform is mainly ineffective and the inhabitants live in constant fear of a hostile future. Like those who wander in James Thomson's 'The City of Dreadful Night' (1874) they know too intimately, 'Infections of unutterable sadness,/ Infections of incalculable madness, / Infections of incurable despair.'[12] In *The Nether World*, the act of living is so difficult that the act of dying, seen as conclusion, becomes a sort of blessing. As one of the bleakest lives in the 'nether world' reaches its end Gissing writes, 'Mrs. Hewett died just before daybreak without a pang, as though death had compassion on her' (*NW*, p.190). Death in this story is often the only mercy, providing, as it does, the peace of closure.

The Nether World has much in common with other, earlier narratives written to denounce deprivation and injustice, *Mary Barton* (1848), for instance, or *Bleak House* (1852-1853) and *Oliver Twist* (1837-1838). The ending of *The Nether World*,

[12] James Thomson, ' The City of Dreadful Night' (1874), in *The Poetical Works of James Thomson*, ed. Bertram Dobell, 2 vols (London: Reeves and Turner, 1895), 1, pp.122-172 (p.158); hereafter cited CDN.

however, provides a more partial solution to the problems depicted for Gissing refuses to offer either a vision of a significantly different future as in Mrs Gaskell's novel, or any Dickensian act of private philanthropy. Gissing's story is perhaps closer in its themes and intentions to a contemporary novel, Arthur Morrison's *A Child of the Jago* (1896). The two styles, however, are quite different, and Gissing's meaning more difficult to determine. The scene, for example, in *A Child of the Jago*, where the young hero's father, Joshua Perrott, is sentenced to death, is, by comparison with the death of Michael Snowdon, instantly recognizable as a place where love is brought to fulfilment:

> The gaoler touched his arm. Right. But first he took a quick glance through the glass partition. Hannah was falling over, or something – a mere rusty swaying bundle – and Dicky was holding her up with both arms. Dicky's face was damp and grey, and twitching lines were in his cheeks. Josh took a step toward the partition, but they hurried him away.[13]

Subdued by the force of law, Josh's normally robust movements have become mechanical and he fails to understand his wife's reaction. The whole burden of the moment, then, falls upon his son, Dicky. Like Jane Snowdon at her grandfather's deathbed he becomes the focal point of the scene but, unlike Jane, he unifies the people within it. As Dicky holds his mother 'up', a dignified gesture that recalls earlier sculptural 'Pietàs', the spell of incomprehension upon Josh is broken and he steps towards his wife and son. Even though this triangle of family is immediately fractured by outside interference, that movement towards completeness gives a meaning to all three lives and a certain nobility to the moment.

Large things happen to Dicky. The excitement of gang fights and petty thievery come to be part of his life and, at the end of the story, he dies gloriously and defiantly, defending his home patch from an attack by a rival gang. His death might

[13] Arthur Morrison, *A Child of the Jago*, 1896, ed. Peter Miles (London: Everyman, 1996), p. 166; hereafter cited *Jago*.

be born out of the tragedy of his life but, while Gissing's novel fades into a sad and lonely conclusion, Morrison's ends with a climax that rescues Dicky from 'unendurable stupor' and 'dull heedlessness' (*Jago*, p.171). The underlying structure of Morrison's novel is not actually redemptive, there is too great a sense of failure for that, but it contains a vitality and strength that is purposefully missing from *The Nether World.*[14] Morrison moves the reader effortlessly into an understanding of the pity and waste of it all; Gissing's novel is more complex and more demanding.[15] Meaningful and noble lives are a part of the 'nether world' but are not so easily comprehended.

The final scene of *The Nether World*, then, as Jane and Sidney meet at Michael's grave, is subdued rather than celebratory:

> On the first anniversary the meeting had been unanticipated; the same thought led her and Sidney to the cemetery at the same hour. This was the third year, and they met as if by understanding, though neither had spoken of it.
>
> When they had stood in silence for a while, Jane told of her father's death and its circumstances. She told him, too, of Pennyloaf's humble security.
>
> 'You have kept well all the year?' he asked.
>
> 'And you too, I hope?'
>
> Then they bade each other good-bye. ...
>
> *NW*, p.391

There are Jamesian feelings of anticlimax in this passage, such as occur, for example, at the end of *The Beast in the Jungle* (1903) where what might be expected to happen, in *The Nether World* a declaration of passion, does not take place. Gissing could have allowed this to collapse into parody of other, more sentimental novels but the language turns away from it and insists instead upon a sad tension and restraint made almost unbearable by the promise of its continuance. As he ends with an

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[14] See: 'For Gissing, [...] the only structure possible [...] is a vagueness of conclusion, a destructuring of the rounded conception of life' (Goode, *Ideology and Fiction*, p.28).

[15] Gissing called *A Child of the Jago* 'Poor stuff' (George Gissing, *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist*, ed. Pierre Coustillas (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1978), p.430).

ellipsis the reader is left to follow Jane and Sidney through a life where union is again and again approached and again and again refused. There will be a constant reaching towards fulfilment followed by a constant repetition of failure through which the reader is forced to feel compassion for the living rather than the dead. 'Pity is alone for the living' (HP, p.97).

Through Jane and Sidney, Gissing demonstrates the unavoidable truth of the 'nether world', that lives can learn the passing story of another – 'You have kept well all the year?' – while remaining powerless to affect development. 'How can we any of us help what we're driven to in a world like this?', Kirkwood asks, his cry giving an absolution, not from blame exactly, but from an ability to have an effect. Gissing continually withdraws from the necessity of large solutions. He offers instead ways of managing through the smaller thing, 'the day's duties' (*NW*, pp.102, 318), his place of truth being the conclusion given in 'The Hope of Pessimism': 'The prospect of happiness on earth is a chimera, but peace and good-will may prevail to an extent not easy as yet to realize' (HP, pp.96-97). It is this type of 'good-will', restricted but large enough for its purpose, that he offers at the end of *The Nether World*:

> Michael Snowdon's wealth had melted away; with it was gone for ever the hope of realising his high projects. All passed into the world of memory, of dream – all save the spirit which had ennobled him, the generous purpose bequeathed to those two hearts which had loved him best.
>
> *NW*, p.391

As 'memory' is equated with 'dream', the once living force of the former becomes less substantial. Gissing removes the power of 'wealth' and 'hope' from the journey thus rendering its purposes, its 'high projects', unattainable even as he leaves the 'spirit' that conceived them as both 'ennobled' and 'generous'. This is Gissing's way through to continuance, a way of continuing from within the place of entrapment itself:

> Well, well; of course it would all begin over again; Jane herself knew it. But is not all life a struggle onward from compromise to compromise, until the day of final pacification?
>
> *NW*, p.386

As Jane realizes, as she performs one of her acts of kindness, each moment of pain in the 'nether world' is endlessly renewable and no deed can ever be large enough to remove completely the cause of that pain: 'the hopeless circularity of the lives of the poor' (Wheeler, *English Fiction*, p.188).[16] In this world, a full happiness is something that can only be moved towards, never reached, until death, the 'final pacification', calls a halt to the journey.

And, for many, the burdens imposed by that journey seem unbearable:

> ['']This life you are now leading is that of the damned; this place to which you are confined is Hell! There is no escape for you. From poor you shall become poorer; the older you grow the lower shall you sink in want and misery; at the end there is waiting for you, one and all, a death in abandonment and despair. This is Hell – Hell – Hell!'
>
> *NW*, p.345

As Mad Jack retells his 'angelic' visitation he speaks of a world as surely marked as Dante's Inferno: 'No room for hope, when you enter here.'[17] He also offers a reminder of that shadowy traveller in Thomson's poem who, unable to pay Hell's entrance fee of 'hope', cannot escape from life to death and realizes that, 'Our destiny is fell; / For in this Limbo we must ever dwell, / Shut out alike from Heaven and Earth and Hell' (CDN, p.139). Mad Jack's declamation is the antithesis of *The Pilgrim's Progress* where Christian travels not only in hope but, as he is joined by his second companion, with Hope. Through Mad Jack, Gissing provides a movement of events that goes nowhere and offers an allegory, not of how a life should be lived

[16] Gissing symbolically expresses such 'circularity' by ending the novel where it began – in a graveyard.

[17] Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, circa 1307-1321, translated C. H. Sisson (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), III. l.9, p.56.

in order to gain the Celestial City, but of the way a life that is 'damned' is forced to exist. The seeming contradiction between 'no escape' and 'at the end [...] a death' is the anti-pilgrimage of hell where all processes are blocked and where death leads to death and never to life.

Although this is the voice of madness its strength makes it an important moment in the novel and, coming as it does at the end of the story, it threatens to drown out Jane and Sidney as the book's sources of goodness. In a novel where the usual structures have been deliberately broken down Gissing's problem is not only one of how goodness can be shown to exist but of how it may be seen to be continued in a world where, to some extent, all lives are damaged. The three main protagonists are religiously thinking souls but each exists on the very margins, not just of religious belief, but also of religious interest. As Gissing writes of Jane:

> Prayers she had never said; enough that her last thought before sleeping was one of kindness to those beings amid whom she lived her life, that on awakening her mind turned most naturally to projects of duty and helpfulness.
>
> *NW*, p.152

And, for Gissing, goodness is 'enough'. It allows Jane to remain faithful to the spirit of Michael Snowdon's ideas while expressing them through her own small endeavours.

Each step forward in the 'nether world', however, is a qualified one, all attempts at progress risking being brought to nothing by the malevolence of the world itself. Jane is a constant support to Pennyloaf Hewett, for example, but it is eventually another's benevolence that rescues that difficult life and, while Jane's integrity touches both her father and her would-be lover, Scawthorne, it cannot free them from imperfection. Sidney too, as out of compassion he marries Clara Hewett, the woman he had once loved, now hideously scarred and temperamentally ruined, finds that he cannot bring his new wife to a complete happiness. 'We are husband

and wife, Clara, and we must be kind to each other' he pleads, his entreaty a more immediately impotent version of Matthew Arnold's in 'Dover Beach'. The nearest to hope, however, that Clara can give is, 'I'll do my best. It won't last long, but I'll try' (*NW*, p.379).

But such efforts are, for Gissing, 'enough' and Clara and Sidney's achievement remarkable under the circumstances. '[S]hall one go over to the side of evil because one despairs of vanquishing it?'(*NW*, p.372). Jane and Sidney are not as Robert Elsmere whose success needed to be depicted as substantial and enduring in order to ensure that his life would not be judged as wasted. In *The Nether World* there are no high-flown dreams, just modest acts of kindness that are never too far away from the rejected Positivism:

> In each life little for congratulation. [...] Yet to both was their work given. Unmarked, unencouraged save by their love of uprightness and mercy, they stood by the side of those more hapless, brought some comfort to hearts less courageous than their own. Where they abode it was not all dark. Sorrow certainly awaited them, perchance defeat in even the humble aims that they had set themselves; but at least their lives would remain a protest against those brute forces of society which fill with wreck the abysses of the nether world.
>
> *NW*, pp.391-392

Gissing's expression of a reduced vision echoes Dickens's sentiments at the end of *Little Dorrit*, 'They went quietly down into the roaring streets',[18] and George Eliot's in *Middlemarch*, 'the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts' (*M*, p.838).[19] Gill notes the likeness to George Eliot's novel and argues,

[18] The main difference here is that Amy and Clennam are together: 'inseparable and blessed' (Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, 1855-1857, ed. Harvey Peter Sucksmith (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) p.688).

[19] The unnamed reviewer of 1889 must have had *Middlemarch* in mind when he wrote: 'even in this "nether world" pure lives are led, noble ambitions cherished, heroic sacrifices not unknown, obscure martyrdoms bravely borne' (*Gissing: The Critical Heritage*, ed Pierre Coustillas and Colin Partridge (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p.137). *The Nether World*, in fact, retells the story of *Middlemarch* to a very large extent with the character of Dorothea divided between the three main protagonists. The structure insists that Michael dies, as the part of Dorothea that wanted to be

'Comparison [...] will indicate what a sad and muted statement this is. Something is wrested from defeat, but how little and at what cost' (*NW*, intro., p.xviii). However, while Dorothea's reduced life seems too limited Jane's does not, for the life she achieves is the one she had always judged as suitable. The last sentences of *The Nether World* are 'muted' but, within a limited scope, they are an affirmation of man's ability to make a difference. Gissing wrote in 'The Hope of Pessimism', 'In the pity of it we must find our salvation. The compassion which each man first feels for himself, let him extend to his fellow-sufferers' (HP, p.94). In this way, Jane and Sidney's lives, tempered by disappointment, can be judged as redemptive.

4.2 *New Grub Street* (1891)

Mid-nineteenth-century novelists, still honouring Christian ideas of the way a life should be judged, had endeavoured to make the end of their stories a place of celebration with the wicked punished and the valiant rewarded. In *The Nether World* Gissing had suggested that such endings are neither completely truthful nor particularly helpful in that they embody more fulfilling solutions than man can hope to attain and he offers reduced, more achievable goals. *New Grub Street*, however, Gissing's ninth novel, is brought to a more complicated conclusion as literary, classical, scientific, as well as Schopenhauerian counters to Christianity's model of redemption are explored.

The book is considered by Halperin to be 'perhaps the greatest novel ever written about the collision of the creative impulse with material circumstances'.[20] It is set in the world of writers, 'in the valley of the shadow of books' is the

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Saint Theresa had to die, so that Jane and Sidney can fulfil the novel's theme of redemption discovered through small acts of goodness.

[20] John Halperin, *Gissing: A Life in Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 141; hereafter cited Halperin.

Bunyanesque image Gissing offers.[21] The novel, however, is aligned with *The Pilgrim's Progress* only to denote its difference. In this story the main protagonist, Edwin Reardon, is unable to enter into a progress. Reardon is a writer who cannot write productively. He has a friend, however, Jasper Milvain, who can. Reardon, the man of greater integrity, dies at the end of the book, his life a failure; Milvain lives on, his pragmatic approach to literary composition rewarded by a comfortable life style and a marriage to a rich and beautiful woman, adaptation resulting in success.

Each character in the book is caught up in the Darwinian idea of progress, 'The struggle for existence among books', but the pain of it is most clearly expressed through Reardon. 'There's something amiss between me and everyone' he confesses at one stage of the story and the novel places him as a type of anti-hero who journeys physically and spiritually distanced from the rest of mankind.[22] Reardon's death is indicative of his life's failure. As his wife, Amy, explains six months after his death, 'he died believing that already he was utterly forgotten, that his books would never again be publicly spoken of' (*NGS*, pp. 456, 265, 467). This not only expresses all the sadness of her husband's final days but also the completeness of the extinction that Reardon has himself judged to be the only reward for a life of unproductive effort:

> ['']A year after I have published my last book, I shall be practically forgotten; ten years later, I shall be as absolutely forgotten as one of those novelists of the early part of this century, whose names one doesn't even recognise.['']
>
> *NGS*, p.53

Reardon is a man who is judged and who judges himself in literary terms and he speaks of his absence from the literary scene in the way other men would speak of

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[21] George Gissing, *New Grub Street*, 1891, ed. John Goode (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.189; hereafter cited *NGS*.

[22] See: 'It is neither working-class London nor middle-class London that the writer inhabits, but something poised between the labour aristocracy and the lower middle-class. [...] And the mark offered to the writer is his secure insertion into the middle-class for whom he writes' (Goode, *Ideology and Fiction*, pp. 113-114). Milvain secures that 'mark'; Reardon never does.

death. The 'lot of a great genius', he has already argued, may be a lasting reputation but for those, like himself, who only achieve 'mediocrity' (*NGS*, p.53) there can only be this measured fading into oblivion. While his speech moves towards the Schopenhauerian ideal of 'extinction' Reardon still regrets the lack of something more enduring. He mourns the loss of that form of continuation given to 'great genius' that, as the pale shadow of the eternity that lay within Bunyan's Celestial City, is infinity reduced to temporal permanence. Reardon misses, in fact, those Romantic ideas of genius and posthumous fame as a secular version of religious concepts of sainthood, inspiration and eternal life. The type of writer Carlyle had depicted: 'He, with his copy-rights and copy-wrongs, in his squalid garret, in his rusty coat; ruling [...] from his grave, after death, whole nations and generations'.[23]

Reardon struggles to write with integrity in times that demand shallower, more populist, narratives. His third novel, a modest success, had allowed him to travel in Europe and to propose marriage to Amy Yule whom he meets and falls in love with on his return. Reardon's subsequent attempts to support his wife (and eventually their son), however, are inadequate, the marriage fails and Amy leaves him. A reconciliation is effected but shortly afterwards Reardon dies, his death, brought about by poverty and effort. Reardon's inability, however, to adapt his course to suit this world is, while failure, the mark of his integrity. Like Laura Fountain 'there is a shut door between me and it' (*HB*, II, p.127) and, for quite similar reasons, he cannot move into the type of journey a happy ending demands. If he is to write profitably it is another's world that he must inhabit, Milvain's, a world as alien to him as Helbeck's is to Laura. Milvain is Gissing's example of one of those followers of 'agnostic optimism' whose effects can be seen as 'Every man for

[23] Thomas Carlyle, 'The Hero as Man of Letters', 1840, in *Sartor Resartus / On Heroes, Hero-worship and the Heroic in History / Past and Present* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1905), Book II, pp.143-180 (p.143).

himself, and the Devil take the hindmost'. Reardon, on the other hand, is beginning to occupy that Schopenhauerian state where 'Life is no longer a good to him; he is a Pessimist' (HP, pp. 90,91).

However, unlike his friend Harold Biffin, who only once, and that at the very end of the novel, deviates from his clear-sighted path of Realism, Reardon is an unreliable hero. Compelled by the needs of his family he does complete and sell some stories but, unworthy of his talent, they bring neither contentment nor money enough to save the marriage. Writing for profit is wholly disapproved of by Schopenhauer: 'Only he who writes entirely for the sake of what he has to say writes anything worth writing.'[24] Reardon has moved away from the truth of his nature and, with the same care that Bunyan showed towards his pilgrim, Gissing brings him back to the place of Schopenhauerian virtue, the place of resignation to failure. 'Let the man of letters be forgotten' Reardon tells himself as he seeks other employment, '[...] just as if he had never written a line' (*NGS*, p.259). If Reardon had found success and happiness the novel would have ended very differently but it would, paradoxically, have become the story of a man who had lost his way not found it.

'There is no momentum, no sense of irresistible life pushing forward' (Swinnerton, p.170). Although Swinnerton intends this judgment of *New Grub Street* more as criticism than compliment, it precisely defines the novel's mood. The great acts that Reardon does undertake, the fine writing, the travel in Europe that culminates in a visit to Greece, and his marriage to Amy, happen just before the novel begins. By the time the story starts he has slid into ineffectiveness, the writer's block from which he suffers a metaphor for his whole life journey where, beset by 'the cares of responsibility' (*NGS*, p.63), he cannot find a way to travel forward.

[24] Arthur Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms*, translated R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1970), p.199.

Throughout their earlier fictional lives Ruth Hilton, Little Nell and Guy Morville travelled assured by faith of the goal of heaven that lay at the end of their journeys and, if the goal itself was sometimes obscured, there were points of illumination within the journey that gave promise of what was to come. Even the later written lives of Robert Elsmere and William Hale White's protagonists eventually found sufficient affirmation as to the truth of their journeys. For Reardon, however, the earlier success that seemed an indication of the path he should take has proven illusory and the jolts away from the ordinary the very things that cause the writing to dry up. The times of great joy, are shown to have broken too severely into a life 'adjusted to circumstances of hardship, privation, struggle':

> ['The stage I had then reached was the result of a slow and elaborate building up; I could look back and see the processes by which I had grown from the boy who was a mere bookworm to the man who had all but succeeded as a novelist. It was a perfectly natural, sober development. But in the last two years and a half I can distinguish no order.']
>
> *NGS*, p.77

Reardon, again reading his life as story, cannot incorporate the sudden departures from plot into an understandable narrative. Instead he relinquishes all sense of development from what has been and helplessly accepts that the place where he finds himself is bereft of structure.

Journeys away from the habitual in Gissing's novels are rarely useful. They either confirm the impossibility of escape from inadequacy, as in the bank holiday excursion in *The Nether World*, or disrupt the suggested plan for a life, as when the eponymous heroine of *Thyrza* (1887) is overcome by new and ungovernable emotions during a weekend in Eastbourne. Even moments of quiet happiness such as Jane and Sidney encounter during a country vacation are not something that can be of lasting benefit and, for Reardon, while his new wife and his time abroad are the most cherished parts of his life, they perplex and stultify rather than help. The

optimism with which the marriage begins bears the seeds of its breakdown and the European holiday returns, just before Reardon's death, as the fevered memories of a dying brain and an illusionary vision of apotheosis that passes before it can become a place of any importance: 'The glory vanished. He lay once more a sick man in a hired chamber, longing for the dull English dawn' (*NGS*, p.448).

Reardon's blissful time in Greece has been too overwhelming; it is as if Christian had lived for a time in the Celestial City before the journey began. Reardon has attained the ideal too early and it hinders rather than helps his subsequent progress. To Edgar Allan Poe 'the glory that was Greece' represents a homecoming, a literary place to which the weary wanderer returns.[25] But, even in his dream, Reardon is leaving Greece. The moment of grandeur is brought into play at the end of his life not as apotheosis as with Ruth Hilton, 'I see the Light coming', but as failure, 'The glory vanished', because, significantly, the departure from Greece is the place where his life's failure began.

And failure, towards the end of the story, is, for a time, accepted:

> To have had even a small reputation, and to have outlived it, is a sort of anticipation of death. The man Edwin Reardon, whose name was sometimes spoken in a tone of interest, is really and actually dead. And what remains of me is resigned to that. I have an odd fancy that it will make death itself easier; it is as if only half of me had now to die.
>
> *NGS*, p.437

As he speaks, Reardon surrounds his present with the literary death that has gone before and the actual death that is to come until, with that unconscious slip into the language of the funeral parlour, 'what remains of me', what is still living seems overcome by the completeness of death. It is from this depth of pessimism that Reardon wrests some hope. If failure and death are to be his lot he would make use of the former to mitigate the effects of the latter, an attempt perhaps to reach towards

[25] Edgar Allan Poe, 'To Helen' (1831), in *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Thomas Ollive Mabbott, 2 vols (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1969), 1, p.166.

that time shown in 'The Hope of Pessimism' when death, 'regarded as a consummation devoutly to be wished, will lose a portion of its terrors' (HP, p.97). Reardon's 'as if only half of me had now to die' is almost Keats's 'half in love with easeful Death' with active yearning modified into inactive resignation.[26] In *Marius the Epicurean*, Walter Pater 'quotes' from the *Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*: 'Count not for how long, nor repine; since that which sends thee hence is no unrighteous judge, no tyrant, but Nature, who brought thee hither'.[27] It is this sense of acceptance of the shape given to a life, classical rather than Christian, that Reardon comes close to achieving.[28] The pull, however, between resignation and progress asserts itself and death, when it does come, is intrusive and far from welcome.

Having moved towards the acceptance of failure, Reardon, just before he dies, glimpses the possibility of regaining his lost happiness. But, even as the illness of their young son brings himself and his wife together, Amy having received a legacy that would ensure that the couple could live in comfort while Reardon wrote at ease, he falls dangerously ill. Alarmed by this, Reardon no longer entertains the consideration that death has been made 'easier' but struggles instead against its inevitability:

> He was still quite a young man; there must be great reserves of strength in him. And he had the will to live, the prevailing will, the passionate all-conquering desire of happiness.
>
> *NGS*, p.448

Such a 'will to live' is directly opposed to Schopenhauerian philosophy. Gissing has shown Reardon coming so close to the desired rejection, but now, having found

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[26] 'Ode to a Nightingale' (1819), in *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. Miriam Allott (London: Longman, 1970), p. 523.

[27] Walter Pater, *Marius the Epicurean*, 1885, ed. Michael Levey (London: Penguin, 1985), p.152.

[28] See Gilbert Highet, *The Classical Tradition* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p.365: 'But for the Greeks death was as natural a process as birth: mournful, no doubt, but not to be resisted, not to be hated and vainly shunned.'

again reasons for living he tries to look towards a positive future. Gissing shows, then, what it is to move towards that greatest sadness of all, the sadness attached to a death that comes at the wrong time. Like the joys of marriage and pregnancy that came to Charlotte Brontë just before she died, Reardon's moments of happiness are too brutally interrupted by a death that is difficult and painful. To have died before his new chance of happiness would have been a release, an example of how to see death 'as a consummation devoutly to be wished'. To die now is the final failure.

Reardon's death is Gissing's last extended metaphor for a life incapable of reaching fulfilment. His young son, an expected form of continuation in the Victorian novel, dies just before he does and Reardon's final days, instead of being a time when idealistic projects are handed on, are passed in a delirium divided between 'those last efforts to write something worthy of himself' and his wish to return to Greece. 'I can do no more, Amy. My brain seems to be worn out' (*NGS*, p.451), he cries, his nightmare taking his life back to the time when his anguish began. Trapped in an existence where incompletion has become the norm even Reardon's last given words, spoken to Biffin, are left unfinished:

> 'How often you and I have quoted it! – "We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our – " '
>
> The remaining words were indistinguishable, and, as if the effort of utterance had exhausted him, his eyes closed, and he sank into lethargy.
>
> *NGS*, p.454

Schopenhauer's depiction of a perfect and easy death is also given as an incompletion, 'One day a sleep is his last, and his dreams are – '.[29] Schopenhauer, however, is writing not of youth but of extreme old age, 'the death which is properly in accordance with nature [...] a gradual vanishing and sinking out of existence' (Schopenhauer, p.256). Reardon's incompletion is not a 'gradual vanishing' but an

[29]Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World As Will and Idea*, 1819, translated R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp, 3 vols (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1891), III, p.257; hereafter cited Schopenhauer.

effort to finish cut short by exhaustion and his death is a sad contrast to Schopenhauer's idea of perfection. Schopenhauer's dash of punctuation is both a fading into stillness and an acknowledgement that an afterlife is unknowable and unimaginable.[30] For Gissing the dash is simply incompletion but, being incompletion, it becomes the place where Reardon's story is handed on to the more perfect Schopenhauerian soul, Harold Biffin. When Guy Morville dies his final words of prayer are not concluded. His wife's belief, however, that the prayer was finished in heaven allows a comforting assurance of continuation. Reardon's struggle to finish feels closer to Louis Trevelyan's dying efforts to articulate what was possibly forgiveness, but there is a crucial difference. What Trevelyan intended to say is conjecture only while each reader, and of course Biffin, is able to finish Reardon's sentence for him – a chorus of understanding made explicit through Biffin's own death that occurs shortly afterwards.

Biffin's great work, the perfect Realist novel, is finished just before Reardon dies but, doomed to be unread and unappreciated by all but the most discerning, it brings Biffin nothing but the satisfaction of completion. Unexpectedly, however, after Reardon's death, he falls in love with Amy and his final days are haunted and unsettled by thoughts of her: 'There was an end of all his peace, all his capacity for labour, his patient endurance of penury.' The 'distracted idleness' (*NGS*, pp.487,489) that results imitates Reardon's days of delirium. The love Biffin feels is not comforting; Amy's beauty 'was anguish to his excited nerves, and her voice was so cruel in its conventional warmth', and she becomes an almost malevolent symbol of the unattainable. It is, however, the very hopelessness that this passion generates that brings Biffin back to Schopenhauerian perfection. At the limit of his financial

[30] While Gissing quotes from *The Tempest*, Schopenhauer was thinking of Hamlet's 'sleep of death' (*Hamlet*, III. I. 66), see Schopenhauer, p. 257. Hamlet's last words are, 'the rest is silence' (*Hamlet*, V. II. 350).

resources, expecting no recognition from his book and, most importantly, suffering the 'despair of suppressed emotion' he comes to know 'the actual desire of death, the simple longing for extinction' and takes his own life. 'One must go far in suffering before the innate will-to-live is thus truly overcome' (*NGS*, pp.487, 491), Gissing insists showing, through Biffin's suicide, how the 'hope of pessimism' may be accomplished.

According to Schopenhauer 'the living being suffers no absolute annihilation through death, but continues to exist in and with the whole of nature' (Schopenhauer, p.262). It follows then, that the place and the time of Biffin's death, a quiet, lovely night on Putney Hill, is a metaphor for the Schopenhauerian continuation that is Biffin's final reward:

> His mood was one of ineffable peace. Only thoughts of beautiful things came into his mind; he had reverted to an earlier period of life, when as yet no mission of literary realism had been imposed upon him, and when his passions were still soothed by natural hope.
>
> *NGS*, p.493

Gissing places each part of Biffin's death in contrast to Reardon's.[31] He dies at one with the classical idea of nature, Pater's 'no unrighteous judge'; the things he leaves behind are tidied and ordered; and in death he looks back to tranquillity, that hint of reversion suggesting that the death is peaceful because he gives up on ideas of progress. In Biffin's death we can clearly trace the youth's death in 'Alastor' – Shelley's vision of death as the perfect escape from life's demonic pursuits. 'Hope and despair, / The torturers, slept; no mortal pain or fear / Marred his repose, / [...] his last sight / Was the great moon'.[32] And then, at the very end of all, Biffin's death makes perfect Reardon's own. Reardon had died with the Shakespearian quotation

[31] Francis considers this as 'eventually over-obvious' (Francis, p.115). Perhaps, but the pattern discovered as Gissing's intention unfolds is important to the structure of the story.

[32] 'Alastor' (1816), in *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works*, ed. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neil (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.92, 639-641, 645-646; hereafter cited Alastor.

unfinished. Biffin, with his dying breath makes it whole; a literary completion that acts as gentle closure: 'and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep' (*NGS*, p.493).[33]

Reardon's story is also 'rescued' by Marian Yule who, as Grylls rightly suggests, is his female counterpart in the novel.[34] The relationship Marian has entered into with Milvain comes to nothing when her promised inheritance fails and she looks forward to a life of continuing literary toil in the British Museum. A smaller sum of money, however, is raised and Marian, the sole support of her parents, moves away from London to become a librarian in a small provincial town. The meaning inherent in Marian's loveless life, where the burden of work is reduced rather than eliminated, is hardly made evident. Instead, she and her family suffer a literary annihilation: 'and the name of Yule was no longer met with in periodical literature' (*NGS*, p.506). This fading into an insignificant life filled with small acts of helpfulness towards others, resembles the continuing life of Jane Snowdon. It is not, however, made as explicit in the later novel and is easily overlooked as a form of redemption. Marian's story runs parallel to Reardon's and here she can be seen offering an alternative ending where tragedy is avoided without progress being entered into.

The end of the story, however, is given to Milvain as he settles into the life of a successful writer. Milvain has promoted the posthumous republication of Reardon's two best novels and, married now to Amy, he seems to fulfil his friend's dream of matrimonial happiness as well as carrying forward his literary reputation. But Milvain does not realize his friend's intentions as Biffin does. Instead he reinvents them and makes them able to survive in the new world, New Grub Street.

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[33] It is interesting that Biffin's choice of death, an overdose, is the death that Milvain had once predicted for Reardon (*NGS*, p.6), another way in which Reardon's journey is fulfilled by Biffin's.
[34] See Grylls, pp.84-86.

Neither does Amy conform to the religious model of widowhood suggested by the continuing lives of Amy Morville and Catherine Elsmere; Amy is a woman who chooses her own future. In many of the novels discussed above, the surviving characters are seen to continue the protagonist's story, Kit Nubbles, for instance, and Leonard Hilton. The story Amy and Milvain have to tell, however, is not Reardon's but neither is their function the same as Giles and Martha Hickbody at the end of *He Knew He Was Right*. Amy and Milvain's story is not particularly pleasant but it is important. It is one way, perhaps the only way, into a notable future as opposed to Marian's unimportant one.

Milvain, as he says of himself, is 'far from a bad fellow' and he is capable of honourable deeds so long as they coincide with his own intentions. 'Poverty and struggle [...] would have made me a detestable creature' (*NGS*, p.514), he declares as he and Amy relax in their comfortable Bayswater home. And then:

> ['Go to the piano, dear, and play me something. [...] Ha! isn't the world a glorious place?'
>
> 'For rich people.'
>
> 'Yes, for rich people. How I pity the poor devils! – Play anything. Better still if you will sing, my nightingale!'
>
> So Amy first played and then sang, and Jasper lay back in dreamy bliss.
>
> *NGS*, p.515

At the end of his story Trollope turned towards lives lived too modestly to risk a descent into tragedy; Gissing turns towards lives that are too superficial. The language that Reardon uses, 'dear', 'glorious', 'my nightingale', is the language of light romance and 'lay back in dreamy bliss' seems to challenge the deeper meaning behind Reardon and Biffin's 'we are such stuff as dreams are made on'. Gissing is, in fact, giving his readers a choice. There is Reardon and Biffin's type of journey, he is saying, that will, through failure, aspire to a Schopenhauerian perfection; there is Marian's Positive one which will be lived out in total obscurity; or there is Amy and

Milvain's Darwinian success story that finds the changed world of New Grub Street 'a glorious place'.

4.3 *Born in Exile* (1892)

In *Born in Exile*, the novel written one year after *New Grub Street*, Gissing's protagonist, Godwin Peak, is pressed forcibly and continually by that Schopenhauerian antithesis, the 'will to live'. Introspective and egotistic, he is both protagonist and instigator of the drama that unfolds, making every effort to shape his life journey in a way that seems appropriate to his nature. 'You're an aristocrat, Godwin,' his brother tells him. 'I hope I am. I mean to be, that's certain', Godwin replies, his phrases rising from aspiration through intention to conviction.[35] He never feels, even when things are at their worst, that death is an option. He may express a Schopenhauerian wish for extinction. '[I]f ever I crush a little green fly [...] at once I am filled with envy of its fate', he claims but such a philosophy seems forgotten in the light of what actually happens. When things are difficult he tends to see the answer in terms of geographical change – the fresh opportunities that 'might open to him at Buenos Ayres' perhaps, or in 'some thriving little town at the ends of earth'. Even his great challenge to fortune, 'It was Sidwell or death' (*BE*, pp.159, 120, 212, 225), after a proposal to the woman he loves, is not converted into 'death' when Sidwell leaves the equation by refusing to marry him. After the failure of his great venture Peak still looks forward to 'When I am old' proclaiming, 'We have only one life, and I want to live mine throughout.' Even when illness threatens his life at the end of the story he still attempts to control his destiny. 'I know what it is to look steadily into the eyes of Death', he submits, but then continues, 'An invitation [...]

[35] George Gissing, *Born in Exile*, 1892, ed. David Grylls (London: Everyman, 1993), p.30; hereafter cited *BE*.

has decided me to strike for Vienna. Up there, I shall get my health back' (*BE*, pp. 363, 415). However, death in a Viennese boarding house soon follows this boast, such irrevocability being the only event large enough to bring his journeying, and the story, to a halt.

The academically gifted son of poor but respectable parents, Peak has felt all too keenly the limitations imposed on his life by birth and social position. Resolving to make a change he determines to leave home and make his own way in London:

> [H]e was leaving Twybridge for good, and henceforth would not think of it as home. In these moments of parting, he resented the natural feeling which brought moisture to his eyes. He hardened himself against the ties of blood, and kept repeating to himself a phrase in which of late he had summed his miseries: 'I was born in exile – born in exile.' Now at length had he set forth on a voyage of discovery, to end perchance in some unknown land among his spiritual kith and kin.
>
> *BE*, p.83

Gissing's language here imitates the Poet's leave-taking in Shelley's 'Alastor': 'When early youth had passed, he left / His cold fireside and alienated home / To seek strange truths in undiscovered lands' (Alastor, 75-77). It also readdresses Pilgrim's departure from the City of Destruction, the poetic and religious expansiveness raising Peak's aspirations to a position above the ordinary. Like Christian's cry, 'Life, life, eternal life' (*PP*, p.13), Peak's 'unknown land' fixes the end of the journey in the place of spiritual belonging and both men experience and fear the pull between the physical demands of the present and the ones only as yet imagined. Peak, like Christian who put his fingers in his ears in order not to hear the restraining cries of wife and children, needs to be 'hardened' and 'natural feeling' has to be subsumed by the demands of the greater moment. They both feel that the forward-looking mind cannot allow itself to look back lest, like Lot's wife, it should be held forever in fixity. ' I was born in exile,' Peak cries, the 'I' in this first phrase

being captive. By the time he repeats it, however, the 'I' has moved away and has, in imagination, begun the pilgrimage towards the 'spiritual' homeland. Peak's mantra, unlike Christian's, does not speak of the place of arrival but of the place of restraint, a distinction that is not the point of radical difference that it may seem. Constantly reiterated throughout the journey Christian's 'eternal life' is both his goal and his ending and paradoxically, and although he cannot yet realize it, Peak's 'exile', the place from where he begins, is the place of his conclusion. Peak will not escape that circular trap of non-fulfilment which closed more easily on Jane Snowdon. He begins in exile, flies from it and meeting it wherever he goes, eventually dies in it, 'Dead, too, in exile!' (*BE*, p.416) being the obitual summary with which the novel ends.

Peak's life story, being a reflection on ideas of a life following a pilgrimage structure, is wholly appropriate to the course he eventually undertakes. Knowing that 'his poor origin, his lack of means' bar him from intimacy with the class to which he feels 'he should by right of nature associate' (*BE*, pp.120, 103), he determines to breach that strata of society by any means possible. This is his Promised Land, his Celestial City, and to achieve it he enters into a deception in which he denies his atheism and shows every intention of becoming an Anglican clergyman. This acting out of orthodox belief means that his life both imitates and parodies that of Bunyan's Christian. And the fact that Peak is doing this in order to progress along quite another life path to Christian – that of social mobility and self-advancement – means that Gissing can suggest contrasts and ironic similarities between the Christian way of life and the worldly one. There is for example a 'Christian' in Gissing's story – a weak and ineffectual man whose goal is simply one of marriage to a totally unsuitable woman. The main concern of the novel, however, is Peak's journey, the journey of a non-Christian posing as a Christian.

'[T]he moment I denied my faith [...] great possibilities opened before me' (*BE*, p.361), Peak argues at the end of the story, the 'faith' that he denied being the anti-faith of atheism. But Peak's voice, the non-Christian one, struggles to define a new type of integrity where to *leave* what he calls the 'barren and solitary track', Bunyan's 'straight and narrow' (*PP*, p.27) way, is actually the way forward. There are ways, Peak would suggest, in which belief and unbelief can become part of the same journey, 'easy to picture the unbelieving priest whose influence was vastly for good, in word and deed' (*BE*, p.147). Such a journey, however, like Robert Elsmere's, is hazardous and experimental. It leads Peak through an unstable landscape where the story can be seen rewriting *The Pilgrim's Progress* in a way that makes it resemble Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland.* As Korg argues, 'He finds that he has wandered into a strange amoral realm, where certainty, on either scientific or religious grounds is impossible, and every question of right and wrong is an intolerable nightmare' (Korg, p.175).

Holidaying in Devon, Peak meets an old college friend, Buckland Warricombe, and is persuaded to spend some time at the Warricombe family home. Determined to impress Buckland's traditionally religious father, and Sidwell, his seriously minded sister, Peak delivers a remarkable exposition of a sermon he had only half heard while visiting the Cathedral the day before:

> Half-a-dozen pulsings of his heart – violent, painful, and the fatal hour of his life had struck.
> [...] Now, under the marvelling regard of his conscious self, he poured forth an admirable rendering of the Canon's views, fuller than the original – more eloquent, more subtle. For five minutes he held his hearers in absorbed attention, [...] and when he stopped, rather suddenly, there followed a silence.
>
> *BE,* p.128

As he speaks, Peak takes the truth of yesterday and enlarges it into something more than was actually present, a metaphor for much in his life whether it be the burden of

poverty he carries or the depth of shame he experiences when faced with his less than cultured relatives. But Peak, who as a boy had been too honest to cheat in his school exams, cannot give up all claims to integrity. Driven forward and yet held back, the self becomes divided into participant and observer. Considered in terms of pilgrimage this split becomes the honourable man who cannot journey, Reardon, and the less scrupulous man who can, Milvain. The complete separation of *New Grub Street*, however, is not possible here and the stress Peak feels is shown through the release of tension as he finishes, 'there followed a silence'. What began as something that resembled a birth, 'violent, painful', passes all too soon into an apprehension of death, 'the fatal hour of his life'. This ends with the completion of closure so that afterwards, when congratulated on his performance, all Peak can do is to smile 'as one might under a sentence of death' (*BE*, p.128), an observation that is at once unsettling and prophetic.

In a distorted sense Peak has passed the Wicket Gate of pilgrimage but there is one part of him that remains aware of the unreality of the journey, a part that sees it all as performance only. Alone that night he looks back on the 'comedy' and takes 'count of the character he had played'. From the moment of commitment until the unmasking of his deceit, Peak's emotional life veers dangerously between the twin possibilities of success and failure. His honest self admits to 'playing the conscious hypocrite' and his inability to find a secure place of being induces an internal argument where the atheistic self continually confronts the religious pretender: 'he could not help confuting every position as he stated it' (*BE*, pp.146, 138, 206). This is reminiscent of the argument and discussion that were a constant part of Christian's journey in *Pilgrim's Progress* but Christian's confrontations, being allegorically represented, are the internal made external and, as in *New Grub Street*, the tension is between the characters and not within them. In *Born in Exile*, Peak's disputes and

differences are internal and more dangerous, self at war with self, and are Gissing's painful assessments of a life intent upon progression at any cost. As Charles Swann notes, 'Peak has (privately) experimented with a very old moral vocabulary: the dichotomy between heart and head – in the hope that what happens in the head may remain separate from the desire of the heart to "compass worthy alliances" '.[36]

Unsettled within each dimension, Peak, like Alice in Wonderland, finds that identity is called into question. As both challenger and defender of his own case he experiences 'an uncomfortable dreaminess' and 'a tormenting metaphysical doubt of his own identity' (*BE*, p.206). 'Who in the world am I?', Alice cries as she contrasts present strangeness with past normality. But Alice's experiences of breakdown, not being able to complete the multiplication table, for example, or recite a familiar poem, all relate to an externally indicated correctness, the place of home. She continually joins her present self with memories of home, particularly through the comforting friendship and domesticity of her cat, Dinah, and her liberating announcement, 'Who cares for *you*? [...] You're nothing but a pack of cards!', comes as she finally realizes the difference between dream and reality.[37] Pip, too, in *Great Expectations*, another example of one who has travelled away from his origins towards an illusion, comes home. His restoration is made possible through illness and an imagined return to childhood: 'I did slowly and surely become less weak, and

[36] Charles Swann, 'Sincerity and Authenticity: The Problem of Identity in *Born in Exile*', in *Literature and History*, 10.2 (Autumn, 1984), 165-188 (p.177); hereafter cited Swann.

[37] Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*, 1865, 1872, ed. Roger Lancelyn Green (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp.18, 109. Peak nearly manages this same route to freedom: 'One is occasionally possessed by a desire to shout in the midst of a silent assembly; and impulse of the same kind kept urging him to utter words which would irretrievably ruin his prospects' (*BE*, p.252). See also: 'There is an innate dichotomy between his conscious and his unconscious self, so that the more he plays the charlatan, the more he despises himself. Hence the more torn he is between the desire for power and the desire for the salving of his conscience, the less Peak is master of his fate. This explains the unconscious urgings of his better self to unthrone his wilful self' (Markus Neacey, 'The Coming Man and the Will to Power in *Born in Exile* ', in *The Gissing Journal*, XXXVI. 2 (April, 2000), 20-30 (p.27)).

Joe stayed with me, and I fancied I was little Pip again.'[38] Peak, however, has broken all ties with home. Attempts to return, even as a visitor, are disorientating, 'like a dream dreamt for the second time' (*BE*, p.358). The quality of unreality that pervaded the place of deception, the 'uncomfortable dreaminess', is now part of this earlier world, cutting off any hope of a retreat and the sense of being in the wrong place, the place of 'exile', has entered the journey itself.

Each of Gissing's novels has its share of exiled and displaced people. Emma Vine, for example in *Demos*, has 'feelings too refined for the position in which fate had placed her' (*Demos*, p.365) and Walter Egremont in *Thyrza* finds his life 'to be a struggle between inherited sympathies and the affinities of his intellect'. Emma, however, like Jane Snowdon, submits with dignity to her lot in life while Egremont attempts to see his predicament in the light of usefulness, 'as a mediator between two sections of society'.[39] It is a usefulness doomed to failure, as Gissing is careful to show, but it is still a way of working within the problem rather than defying it. Neither Jane nor Emma move away from their environment of poverty and Walter, like Peak a character brought from humble roots by way of education, maintains a connection with both worlds just as Peak's successful friend Earwaker manages to do in *Born in Exile*. Even Bruno Chilvers, the too agreeable cleric who succeeds in the same self-fashioning way that Peak aspires to, works with 'inherited aptitude' (*BE*, p.213) for his father was a clergyman. These characters progress to a greater or a lesser extent but they do not completely sever their links with the world in which they were born. Monica Madden, on the other hand, in *The Odd Women*, Richard Mutimer in *Demos*, Clara and Bob Hewett in *The Nether World*, and Peak himself, are all example of lives where the will to change breaks the chain of connection

[38] Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, 1861, ed. Margaret Cardwell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.461.
[39] George Gissing, *Thyrza*, 1887 (London: Eveleigh, Nash and Grayson, 1927), pp.83, 84.

between what is and what was and they are all lives that end in tragedy. The break with home that is a necessity in *The Pilgrim's Progress* is too challenging, too radical, in Gissing's later world where resignation is the Schopenhauerian quality to be aspired to.

Peak's move into reality is sudden and, faced with the proofs of his deception, he prepares for it as the final confrontation between self and self. '[A]lready he had strung himself to encounter it. Yet even in the same moment he asked, "Is it worth while?" ', and the attempted 'progress' is brought to a halt, not through any external accusation, but through Peak's own submission. After this, the release from tension is absolute and, while what is left is anti-climax, it is also truthful. When Peak next meets Sidwell it is in a spirit of 'sincere indifference'. He feels 'the story was ended' and even though the emotion of the occasion and Sidwell's subsequent 'avowal of continued love' (*BE*, pp.306,328) work upon him he never returns to that strange, unbalanced world of internal division.

Peak and Sidwell could be left here as another Jane and Sidney, possibly unmarried, but willing to live within the boundaries set by their own real lives, a rewriting of the journey away from those earlier heroic ideas to something more suitable and more achievable:

> He took her hands, held them for a moment, and turned away. At the door he looked round. Sidwell's head was bowed, and, on her raising it, he saw that she was blinded with tears.
>
> So he went forth.
>
> *BE*, p.333

The novel's language, as Peak leaves Sidwell, tries to uphold the spirit in which he left Twybridge. Sidwell, having half promised to consider marriage at some later date, has revealed to Peak his great error. 'You have been trying to adapt yourself [...] to a world for which you are by nature unfitted', she explains and points him

towards a more suitable path: 'go and take your part with men who are working for the future' (*BE*, p.330). Peak's future, she indicates, can still be great but it is necessarily elsewhere. This is a proposal worthy of 'So he went forth' and, as a place to end, could bring the story to a less than gloomy conclusion with Peak entering into a Darwinian 'progress'.[40] But this is not what happens. Peak does find scientific work in a north of England town, a very ordinary exile now, unglamorous but, like Laura Fountain's Froswick, the place where a real and useful life could begin. An unexpected legacy, however, brings hope of another beginning and Peak insists upon re-entering the same journey, but with that first great intention, the romantic / religious quests of Shelley's Poet and Bunyan's Pilgrim, transmuted into the usual Victorian tourist routes to Paris and Rome.[41] This is a metaphor for diminishment rather than progress and Peak's exuberant acceptance of it, 'How grand it is to go forth as I am now going!' (*BE*, p.396), is depressing rather than uplifting. The danger is that Peak's story may have become trapped in a circle of intention and failure and Peak an example of a pilgrim who is actually going nowhere but who refuses to accept that fact. The news from Vienna, then, that he has died can be read as a release from the tension of it all – 'a happy release', as a death at the end of a long illness is often expressed. And, occurring away from companionship and country, the very letter informing his friends of the event being a thing apart, written as it is by a stranger and in German, Peak's death does more than reaffirm the 'exile' of the title. In clasping the final stages of the story to its beginning it provides the peace of closure.

Nearly all the other characters in the novel discover a way of travelling beyond its conclusion, each finding a secure place to live out the rest of their lives.

[40] See also Swann, p.186, for other alternative endings, Schopenhauerian, for example, or like *Daniel Deronda's*.

[41] See: 'he turns his back on a new world to fight for a place in an old world in which there is no place for him' (Goode, *Ideology and Fiction*, p.66).

Three of them are of particular interest here – Sidwell, the woman Peak loves, Earwaker, his closest friend, and Chilvers, the man who has been his rival since their schooldays. Sidwell, restricted by her 'little world', has found she cannot marry Peak but neither does she achieve the kind of independent future she has come to wish for. Instead, like Marian Yule, she accepts a life of unobtrusive endeavour as a companion to her mother and father. Earwaker, on the other hand, 'naturally marked for survival among the fittest' (*BE*, pp.393, 86), accomplishes so many of the things that Peak had looked forward to, 'with no sacrifice of principle'. 'You look back on life, no doubt, with calm and satisfaction', Peak half enviously suggests, only to find himself corrected: 'Rather, with resignation' (*BE*, pp. 364, 395). 'Earwaker', Ralph Pite maintains, 'is resigned to his own limits and while we admire him for having such strength of mind, we also see he is lucky enough to be limited.'[42]

It is, however, Bruno Chilvers who shows what bounty can be amassed by one willing to move away from sincerity in order to progress. A cleric of the broadest principles, of 'fantastic liberality' (*BE*, p.285), Chilvers gives his listeners exactly what each would hear. He would trouble no one's conscience and offend no one's sensibility. He succeeds where Peak fails and, at the end of the story, has married a wealthy heiress and is destined for great, if unspecified things. Pretending to be a Christian is Peak's way of pursuing the goal of social advancement and it is seen that for Chilvers the two paths overlap completely – the worldly equals the Christian. So, the book seems to ask, is that it? Is the Christian way of structuring a life empty in fact and no more than a convenient mask for the worldly way of structuring it? Is the pilgrimage, as it were, already a parody before Peak parodies it or is there an escape from parody provided in an embrace of resignation by Sidwell and Earwaker?

[42] Ralph Pite, 'Place, Identity and *Born in Exile*', in *Rereading Victorian Fiction*, ed. Alice Jenkins and Juliet John (Basingstoke and New York: Macmillan, 2000), pp.129-144 (p.141).

These questions collide with Peak's seeming discovery that there is no way forward in the end. 'Ill again, and alone. If I die, act for me' (*BE*, p.416), he writes to Earwaker from Vienna, each phrase punctuated into the type of isolation of which he is all too consciously aware as he faces the pain of a life that is ending in disappointment. And, what Earwaker does, as Biffin did for Reardon, is 'act' for him. What we have seen throughout the story is Peak's life being worked out in opposing ways by Earwaker and Chilvers but with those words 'act for me' Peak, as it were, hands the baton to his friend:

> The man of letters walked slowly back to his own abode.
>
> 'Dead, too, in exile!' was his thought. 'Poor old fellow!'
>
> *BE*, p.416

In giving the final sentences of the novel to Earwaker, Gissing indicates that Peak is, in a way, set free by his friend. And not just by Earwaker. 'If he sinned against anyone, it was against me, and the sin ended as soon as I understood him' (*BE*, p.404) Sidwell has claimed and her forgiveness and Earwaker's pity, 'Poor old fellow!', combine to defeat the more cynical triumph of Chilvers. Neither Sidwell nor Earwaker can save Peak, nor can they be said to continue his pilgrimage, but they provide the novel's place of redemption by ensuring that Peak's memory can rest in peace.

And, as though Gissing had worked through something important in this story, the novels change after this. They do not become happier exactly; but they do become different. Tragedy is avoided on the whole and Gissing tries to find a way for his chief protagonist to achieve liberation through the death of a minor character. Both *The Odd Women* (1893) and *In the Year of Jubilee* (1894), for instance, depict unfortunate marriages each of which ends in a death. The main protagonists,

however, Rhoda Nunn and Nancy Lord, do not die but are left at the end of their stories as liberated examples of how a new life may come to be lived. In *The Whirlpool* (1897) it is Harvey Rolfe's troubled, ambitious wife who dies. He lives on, the father of a young and much loved son, looking towards a quieter more obscure life than his wife had desired. The novel's final sentence is another example of a place where an author rewrites the closing lines of *Paradise Lost*. What is remarkable is that Gissing is able to show a form of peace: 'Hand in hand, each thinking his own thoughts, they walked homeward through the evening sunshine.'[43]

Gissing himself died in 1903 while living in the southern French town of St Jean-Pied-de-Port with Gabrielle Fleury. He was only forty-six. Gissing's relationship with Gabrielle had brought him a truer sense of love and companionship than he had previously experienced but, imitative of his writing, his life was unable to come to a happy completion. The short time spent with Gabrielle was marred by many difficulties; his death, in exile, was reminiscent of Godwin Peak's; and, in that it was lingering, troubled and confused, it was painfully similar to Edwin Reardon's.[44] It was also a sad non-realization of the last of his novels, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903).

This story is hardly a story at all but a collection of fictional diary entries supposedly discovered by Gissing after his 'friend's' death. Ryecroft's story is Gissing's story, not as it actually happened, but as Gissing wished it could have happened. It exists as a fantastic, escapist contrast to *The Nether World*, *New Grub Street* and *Born in Exile*. It is Gissing's demonstration of how the lost state of paradise can be recreated, not in any next world Celestial City, but in the here and

[43] George Gissing, *The Whirlpool*, 1897, ed. William Greenslade (London: Everyman, 1997), p.419.
[44] For a helpful account of these last years and Gissing's final days see Halperin, pp. 316-351.

now through the very modest blessing of 'a life annuity of three hundred pounds'.[45] There is, in the book, the discovery of a previously hidden self, '[a] conscious enjoyment of powers and sensibilities which had been developing unknown to me', a discovery of order, 'My house is perfect' (*Ryecroft*, pp.21, 5), and, most importantly, a discovery of how to die:

> When I was ill at ease in the world, it would have been hard to die; I had lived to no purpose, that I could discover; the end would have seemed abrupt and meaningless. Now, my life is rounded; it began with the natural irreflective happiness of childhood, it will close in the reasoned tranquillity of the mature mind.
>
> *Ryecroft*, p.267

We can see here all the themes of *The Nether World*, *New Grub Street*, and *Born in Exile* being worked out to a happy conclusion. Ryecroft is able to make good use of his inheritance in a way that was denied his earlier protagonists; he is fully released from the necessity of working for a living; he comes to live near Exeter, the place where Peak was happiest; and, with 'my life is rounded', he, like Biffin, completes Reardon's incompletion.

And so, through Ryecroft's death, Gissing can pay homage to the ideal:

> On a summer evening, after a long walk in very hot weather, he lay down upon the sofa in his study, and there – as his calm face declared – passed from slumber into the great silence.
>
> *Ryecroft*, p.x

This, as a Schopenhauerian way of ending, is entirely satisfactory, but it is not real in the way that *The Nether World*, *New Grub Street*, and *Born in Exile* are real. Ryecroft's story is beautiful but it is as far from reality as the promise of a celestial afterlife was to the agnostic Gissing. It is a fantasy, an escape. *The Nether World*, *New Grub Street*, and *Born in Exile* are not escapes but fictional representations of life as Gissing saw it happening and the deaths he showed are ways of ending a too

[45] George Gissing, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, 1903 (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1930), p. ix; hereafter cited *Ryecroft*.

difficult existence. In such worlds redemption can never be completely possible but, in spite of the challenges set by the worlds themselves, moments of it can manage to be made manifest. Through the gentle endeavours of Jane and Sidney, through the sadness of Reardon and the strength of Biffin, and through Peak's challenge to the world and Sidwell and Earwaker's understanding of it, each novel ends, not in hope exactly but in 'the hope of pessimism'.

Chapter Five
Thomas Hardy (1840-1928): The Early Novels

In *Robert Elsmere* Mrs Ward had remodelled Bunyan's idea of pilgrimage – but only to an extent; her protagonist is still to be seen as saintly, the life worthwhile, and the death apotheotic. In *Helbeck of Bannisdale*, on the other hand, she carefully outlined the dangers inherent in a life that cannot follow the Christian path of pilgrimage at all. Hale White's Mark Rutherford struggles, but eventually, like Catharine Furze and Clara Hopgood, he finds a form of fulfilment in this world and the death is placed as an afterthought, as something less important than the life that had preceded it. Both of these authors find a way through to salvation in a secular if not a religious sense, even Laura Fountain's death being redemptive in that it releases her from the greater error of committing her life to Helbeck's. Gissing's writing is altogether bleaker. The protagonists in *The Nether World*, *New Grub Street*, and *Born In Exile* fail to reach their desired ends and the deaths, which close the lives of Reardon and Peak, are painful in a way that Mrs Ward and Hale White managed to avoid. Gissing's saving moments are there, however, but, as Hale White also showed, they are hidden within everyday concerns and as such are in danger of being missed altogether.

Having looked so closely at the ideas of life as a pilgrimage in these late-nineteenth-century novels I intend, in the final chapters of this thesis, to consider certain works of Thomas Hardy, the ways in which the stories end, and the ways in which he shapes the lives of his protagonists. In *The Secular Pilgrims of Victorian England*, Qualls suggests that Hardy's novels 'declare [the] death' of the pilgrimage

novel.[1] Qualls's study is dedicated to mid-nineteenth-century writers who, in his estimation, continue to see life as a purposeful journey, Thomas Carlyle, Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, and George Eliot, and he gives one paragraph only to Thomas Hardy. I cite part of it here:

> His fiction is the great anti-type for the novels of this study. He does not question if we can know God or nature or the godlike, or man's relationship to them; he *knows* man cannot achieve such visions. Although he structures his fiction around pilgrimages, it is simply to parody the effort: paradises await no one, only more intense awarenesses of hell and cataclysm. [...] The very clumsiness of the voices of his narrators makes grisly fun of his predecessors. A real mirror shows man dying – nothing else. Words are simply 'mere *words.*'
>
> Qualls, pp. 192-193

This chapter of my thesis is particularly concerned with four novels written by Hardy between 1871 and 1878: *Desperate Remedies* (1871), *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872), *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), and *The Return of the Native* (1878). Chapter Six will look at the later tragedies: *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), and *Jude the Obscure* (1895). It will be interesting to study these novels with Qualls's summation in mind, to discover if it can in any way be qualified, to consider how far Hardy intended 'parody', and to examine how death, if it is 'nothing else', informs not only the moment of death but the structure of the narrative that has gone before.

It is certainly true that Hardy's writing turns away from the received and long continued ideas of progress, redemption and meaning. Brought up, as he himself claimed, 'according to strict Church principles', he had, by early manhood, very largely, given up these beliefs.[2] Butler notes that 'the germ of [his] doubts seems to

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[1] Barry V. Qualls, *The Secular Pilgrims of Victorian Fiction* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p.15; hereafter cited Qualls.

[2] *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate, 7 vols (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1978), I, p. 259; hereafter cited *Letters*.

have been planted almost exactly at the time of the publication of the *Origin of Species*, which took place when he was 19'.[3] Roger Ebbatson, observing Darwin's particular influence on Hardy, suggests that he 'was enabled creatively to restructure his imagination in the light of *The Origin of Species*, in a prolonged and seminal process of reorientation'.[4] However, while Hardy accepted the truth of Darwin's theories, he felt weighed down by the patterns they imposed – patterns that were at once unpredictable and indifferent and that refused to put man at the centre of the story.[5] Consequently, while each of Hardy's fictions can be seen as attempts to place the lives of his protagonists in the context of Darwin rather than Bunyan, his stories continually lament the loss of that strong redemptive structure. 'Hoping it might be so' (*CPTH*, p.468), he wrote in 'The Oxen' (1915), a poem that looks back to the Christian myth of the stable animals kneeling before the Christ Child each Christmas Eve. But Hardy, even though he must voice it, knows that it is *not* so. Like Mrs Ward, Hale White and Gissing, he consistently feels himself pulled back to the shape that Christianity had been able to give to the life journey.[6] Even more so than these

[3] Lance St John Butler, *Victorian Doubt* (London: Harvester, 1990), p.190. See: 'As a young man he had been among the earliest acclaimers of *The Origin of Species*' (Thomas Hardy, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy,* ed. Michael Millgate (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1984), p.158; hereafter cited *Life*). Hardy maintained a life long interest in Darwin's works and in 1882 he attended Darwin's funeral in Westminster Abbey.

[4] Roger Ebbatson, *The Evolutionary Self* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1982), p.x; hereafter cited Ebbatson.

[5] See: 'Though the individual may be of small consequence in the long sequence of succession and generation, yet Hardy in his emplotment opposes this perception and does so by adopting again the single life span as his scale' (Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots* (London: Ark, 1983), p.239; hereafter cited Beer).

[6] Millgate writes: 'Unbeliever though he was, Hardy retained to the end of his life not merely a personal attachment to the Anglican traditions with which he had grown up but a strong sense of the social [...] value of such traditions and of the rituals and observances in which they were outwardly embodied' (Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: A Biography* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p.247). See also Hardy writing in 1902: 'If the doctrines of the supernatural were quietly abandoned to-morrow by the Church, & "reverence & love for an ethical ideal" alone retained [...] our venerable old churches & cathedrals would become the centres of emotional life that they once were. Well: what we gain by science is, after all, sadness, as the Preacher saith' (*Letters*, III, p.5).

authors, however, his religious feelings remain largely unresolved, 'nagging as memory, as pained need, as lost questionings'.[7]

5.1 Hardy and Ideas of Pilgrimage

As the minor characters gather at the beginning of *The Return of the Native* an incident is discussed from the previous Sunday:

> 'Ah, well, I was at church that day,' said Fairway, 'which was a very curious thing to happen.'
>
> If 'twasn't my name's Simple,' said the Grandfer, emphatically. 'I ha'n't been there to-year; and now the winter is a-coming on I won't say I shall.'
>
> 'I ha'n't been these three years,' said Humphrey; 'for I'm so dead sleepy of a Sunday; and 'tis so terrible far to get there; and when you do get there 'tis such a mortal poor chance that you'll be chose for up above, when so many baint, that I bide at home and don't go at all.'
>
> *Return*, p.24

This is Hardy considering all the journeys that the idea of Christianity embraces and juxtaposing them with the safer option of simply staying put. Through Humphrey he suggests that the type of Christian venture undertaken in stories such as *The Pilgrim's Progress* is probably foolhardy and the outcome too uncertain for the journey to be worth the disturbance. 'I will be no companion of such misled fantastical fellows' (*PP*, p.14), Obstinate cries in *The Pilgrim's Progress* as he turns away from Christian and the unknown dangers of pilgrimage. But, while Bunyan insists that Obstinate will be dreadfully punished for his inaction, Hardy will not discipline his heath men. Instead he seems to imply through his name for Fairway that the occasional foray into religion, for reasons of marriage, funerals and gossip, may be the 'fair way', the moderate way, to proceed.

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[7] Philip Davis, *The Victorians, The Oxford English Literary History, Vol.8, 1830-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.544.

Such characters, however, cannot provide the stuff of story and, while Hardy is all too willing to propose that journey may be dangerous, as author his interest and sympathy lie with those who sacrifice themselves to life's difficulties. Like Bunyan, then, he gives the main part of his attention and approbation to the 'misled fantastical fellows' of pilgrimage. Unlike Bunyan, though, he cannot allow his characters any strong apotheotic conclusion and, even when his endings reach towards a restoration of happiness, they are always modified – removed from the more celebratory conclusions that his protagonists had originally hoped for. And, as the writing progresses, Hardy's characters increasingly fail to discover that lasting, *saving* interaction with another in the story that was an important part of Christian's progress. After all their strivings that it should not be so, each of Hardy's later protagonists eventually stands isolated in a world that has never really been understood. 'No: he never comes; nor my son neither, nor nobody' (*Return*, p.279), Mrs Yeobright claims in *The Return of the Native* while Jude Fawley, the eponymous hero of *Jude the Obscure*, dies alone and neglected, distanced from the type of happiness he had once thought possible.

The journey of each Hardy protagonist is ruled by fate and chance rather than divine goodness. But it is not, as in Hale White's writing, chance that can be used constructively. Instead Hardy proposes an 'Immanent Will' that, as Hillis Miller suggests, is 'a blind force sweeping through the universe, urging things to happen as they do happen'.[8] For Hardy, particularly in the later novels, attempts to reform a life are always futile. Berger suggests that Hardy's 'writings present [a] chaotic world and its inhabitants, who yearn to universalize and organize – who try to give

[8] J. Hillis Miller, *Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1970), p.15; hereafter cited Miller, *DD*.

meaning to the meaningless and valueless world'.[9] In *The Woodlanders* (1887), for example, when old John South is dangerously ill he is troubled by the height of the tree seen from his bedroom window. Fearing the worry might hasten South's end and acting on the advice of the doctor, Giles Winterborne cuts down the tree. The effort is useless. South is as frightened by the sudden absence as by the ominous presence and dies anyway, his passing being partly responsible for the chain of events that culminate in Winterborne's own tragic death. Winterborne's unwitting participation in his own tragedy is Hardy's statement that being good is simply not enough to avert disaster – acting kindly and acting selfishly (or thoughtlessly or drunkenly) can have the same effect in the end. Giles's death, then, is particularly distressing for, like so many Hardy characters, he dies loved but unable to maintain connection and with all he had hoped to gain from life unaccomplished. David R. Schwarz notes of Hardy's fiction: 'The most significant movement is not the development of the central character's moral awareness, but the dwindling of his expectations and the consequent loss of mental and emotional vitality.'[10] This 'dwindling' and 'loss', however, forms a sort of progress for Hardy – a way of coming to terms with the idea that things 'happen as they do happen'.

Fanny Robbin's death in *Far From the Madding Crowd* is a powerful illustration of the sadness Hardy felt when he considered man's present inability to follow that older path of pilgrimage. As the pregnant Fanny journeys towards her goal of the Casterbridge Union he calls upon the vision of death and apotheosis depicted in *The Pilgrim's Progress* in order to change it into something less

[9] Sheila Berger, *Thomas Hardy and Visual Structures* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1990), p.11.
[10] David R. Schwartz, 'Beginnings and Endings in Hardy's Major Fiction', in *Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Dale Kramer (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979), pp.17-35 (p.19).

uplifting. 'A heavy unbroken crust of cloud stretched across the sky, shutting out every speck of heaven', and then, heaven having failed to manifest itself, he offers a more earthly focus in the shape of, 'a distant halo which hung over the town of Casterbridge'.[11] Moneyless and exhausted, Fanny uses the pretence of an ending to aid her progress, 'a practical application of the principle that a feigned and factitious faith is better than no faith at all'. As each 'ending' is reached, however, the effort has to be renewed until, like Christian, she reaches a space that must be crossed although she cannot imagine how. 'The road here ran across a level plateau with only a bank on either side' (*FFMC*, p.232), and Hardy re-presents Bunyan's, 'betwixt them and the Gate was a River, but there was no bridge to go over'. Both pilgrims suffer the same overwhelming despondency, Christian as he attempts to cross the space, 'a great darkness and horror fell upon [him]' (*PP*, pp.136, 137), and Fanny as she admits defeat before it, 'Hopelessness had come at last.' And then, like Bunyan, Hardy continues:

> 'No further!' she whispered, and closed her eyes.
>
> From the strip of shadow on the opposite side of the way a portion of shade seemed to detach itself, and move into isolation upon the pale white of the road. It glided noiselessly towards the recumbent woman.
>
> She became conscious of something touching her hand; it was softness and it was warmth. She opened her eyes, and the substance touched her face. A dog was licking her cheek.
>
> *FFMC*, pp. 232-233

The dog is the means by which Fanny reaches her destination, the saving moment coming, as it does with Christian, as 'Hopelessness' enters consciousness. That Christian's uplifting companion should be so replaced may seem an instance of Quall's 'parody' but, upon consideration, this is not so. The dog image, after all,

[11]Thomas Hardy, *Far From the Madding Crowd*, 1874, ed. Rosemarie Morgan and Shannon Russell (London: Penguin, 2000), p.229; hereafter cited *FFMC*.

keeps intact Bunyan's ideas of humility and faithfulness and if, as in Christian teaching, God can become man it may be possible, allegorically, for man to become dog.

More important is what Bunyan's story now means to Hardy, for what happens next still uses that earlier progress as a model but stripped of apotheosis. Fanny reaching her goal pulls at the bell provided; a man opens the door – a 'little door in the large one' – and he summons two women who help her inside:

> 'There is a dog outside,' murmured the overcome traveller. 'Where is he gone? He helped me.'
> 'I stoned him away,' said the man.
> The little procession then moved forward; the man in front bearing the light; the two bony women next, supporting between them the small and flexuous one. Thus they entered the door and disappeared.
>
> *FFMC*, pp. 234-235

And so is Christian and Hopeful's glorious entrance into paradise brought to futility. Bunyan's 'company of the heavenly host' is only just discernible now in Hardy's threesome while his City that 'shone like the sun' is reduced to a workhouse doorway lit by one, purely functional light. Present in Hardy's text are the possibilities of redemption that he cannot bring to fulfilment. Fanny is not now delivered into either life and happiness, or death and the promise of everlasting life, but into death itself, for after 'they entered the door and disappeared' there will be nothing more. 'And after that, they shut up the Gates' (*PP*, pp.139, 141), Bunyan laments as his pilgrims enter the Celestial City, but the joyous clamour that greets them seems to echo on. The last thing Fanny hears within the narrative is the fate of the dog that rescued her, now an abused saviour denied any form of reward. What Hardy seems to be saying is that it may be better to drown in the River than to reach Paradise and find that it cannot help you after all. 'It will be warmer when / I blow the trumpet (if indeed / I ever do; for you are men, / And rest eternal sorely need)',

his God cries in 'Channel Firing' (1914), (*CPTH*, p.305), Hardy suggesting that the paradise man requires might be a very different thing from Paradise itself.

In 'Friends Beyond' (undated), Hardy depicts the burial place of each member of an older community. 'William Dewy, Tranter Reuben, Farmer Ledlow late at plough, / [...] lie in Mellstock churchyard now!' While he as poet feels the sadness of loss, a loss shared by the reader, for these men are easily recognized as characters from *Under the Greenwood Tree*, the dead see death as a release. 'We have triumphed: this achievement turns the bane to antidote'. Nor is this afterlife the type of further progress suggested by Bunyan. Rather it is simply lack of life, where each of the dead finds rest in 'a morrow free of thought' (*CPTH*, p.59). Maybe Fanny's 'Hopelessness had come at last' was, after all, the moment to be welcomed and her 'No further' not despair but thankfulness that the journey, having become impossible, could be brought to a conclusion – the dog being an unwarranted intrusion that forces life beyond the place where it would willingly end.

5.2 *Desperate Remedies* (1871)

While *The Pilgrim's Progress* had looked beyond the death to the moment of apotheosis Hardy's endings often turn back into the novel itself in an attempted return to a lost state of innocence – trying to find what James Thomson marked as, 'the long-lost broken golden thread / Which reunites my present with my past'.[12] In *The Return of the Native*, for example, this pattern is evident not only in the implications of the novel's title but in its final paragraphs where Clym Yeobright is discovered preaching on Egdon Heath's Rainbarrow, the place where the narrative's

[12]James Thomson, 'The City of Dreadful Night' (1874), in *The Poetical Works of James Thomson*, ed. Bertram Dobell, 2 vols (London: Reeves and Turner, 1895), I, pp.122-172 (p.164); hereafter cited CDN.

movement into story had begun; in *The Mayor Of Casterbridge* Michael Henchard attempts to return to the very spot where he had sold his wife; and in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* Angel Clare tries to begin again by marrying another version of Tess. In these novels such structures are never fully realized. As a young man Hardy had trained as an architect and had been involved in church restoration. When he was older, however, he regretted these attempts at re-creation. 'The old form inherits [...] an indefinable quality [...] which never reappears in the copy',[13] he argues and his later novel writing tends to concur with James Thomson's sad conclusion: 'What never has been, yet may have its when; / The thing which has been, never is again' (CDN, p.165).

Desperate Remedies, Hardy's first published novel, ends with an attempted return. It does, however, end happily. But even here, as the story's reunited lovers attempt to replicate the moment of their first kiss, Hardy is offering something more than a simple imitation of the romantic genre:

> 'Ah, darling, I remember exactly how I kissed you that first time,' said Springrove. 'You were there as you are now. I unshipped the sculls in this way. Then I turned round and sat beside you – in this way. Then I put my hand on the other side of your little neck –'
>
> 'I think it was just on my cheek, in this way.'
>
> 'Ah, so it was. Then you moved that soft red mouth round to mine –'
>
> 'But dearest – you pressed it round if you remember [...].'[14]

Cytherea Graye and Edward Springrove's careful re-creation of their past is an attempt to rediscover what Hardy had termed as 'the supremely happy moment of

[13] Thomas Hardy, 'Memories of Church Restoration', in *Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings: Prefaces: Literary Opinions: Reminiscences*, ed. Harold Orel (London and Melbourne: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 203-218 (p.214). See also the final verse of Hardy's undated poem 'On the Departure Platform' (*CPTH*, p.221).

[14] Thomas Hardy, *Desperate Remedies*, 1871, ed. Mary Rimmer (London: Penguin, 1998), p.407; hereafter cited *DR*.

their experience' (*DR*, p.50). And, with the problems of the story resolved a happy ending is possible. Hardy, however, has already indicated the artificiality of this re-creation by replacing the 'sea' of the original excursion with the manmade (and safer) artifice of a 'lake' and now he illustrates the difficulties inherent in a faithful restoration by showing Cytherea forced to correct each of Springrove's lapses of memory as they enact a nineteenth-century version of Maurice Chevalier's 'I Remember it Well'. There can never be, Hardy is saying, a full return. Better, he would argue, never to have moved away from that first moment of happiness at all. Hillis Miller notes this concern. 'Hardy's fundamental spiritual movement is the exact opposite of Nietzsche's will to power. It is the will not to will, the will to remain quietly watching on the sidelines' (Miller, *DD*, p.6).[15]

The feeling that life is a journey better not entered into was part of Hardy's consciousness from an early age. The *Life* notes how, as a boy, 'he did not wish to grow up [...] but to remain as he was, in the same spot' (*Life*, p.20),[16] and much later, in 1887, he wrote in his journal:

> It is the on-going – i.e., the 'becoming' – of the world that produces its sadness. If the world stood still at a felicitous moment there would be no sadness in it.
>
> *Life*, p.210

As a writer of novels, however, Hardy feels the sense of urgent pressure to move forward, to become, but this means that any 'felicitous moment' can never be held and he moves towards endings where he finds happiness increasingly hard to

[15] See also: 'He does not distrust passion, gaiety and sunshine but he records how through event and time they are threatened, thwarted, undermined' (Beer, p.242).

[16] The *Life* was originally published in two parts in 1928 and 1930 under the authorship of Hardy's second wife, Florence Emily Hardy. Except for the final section, however, it was written entirely under Hardy's supervision. Widdowson calls it 'Hardy's last completed novel' (Peter Widdowson, *Hardy in History* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), p.7). This summation is possibly true and certainly the contents of the *Life* should be treated with caution. A wish as outlined above, however, was clearly important to Hardy for he repeats the idea in *Jude* and again in his undated poem 'Childhood among the Ferns': 'Why should I have to grow to man's estate, /And this afar-noised World perambulate?' (*CPTH*, p.864).

celebrate, the reader haunted by the possibilities of what *could* have happened rather than satisfied by what *has*.[17] The 'sadness' inherent in this 'becoming' has, by the end of the later novels deepened into a sorrow that the protagonist can hardly bear. 'I don't want to go any farther' (*Tess*, p.393), Tess says to Angel as they halt in their flight from retribution at Stonehenge, and she expresses the utter weariness with living, with trying, felt by the central character in each of these stories. Even the sad and unfulfilled deaths of Edwin Reardon and Godwin Peak do not equal the ending of these lives where the wish of each is obliteration rather than continuation. '[T]hat no man remember me' (*Mayor*, p.321), Henchard writes in his will, a wish for erasure as the only way back into peace – a conception taken even further by Hardy in the poem he wrote for Tess: 'I cannot bear my fate as writ, / I'd have my life unbe',[18] and in the final words he gives to Jude: '*Why died I not from the womb?*' (*Jude*, p.403).[19] These terminations seem a denial even of story as a useful way of expressing the journey. The strength of despair, however, that Hardy injects into his protagonist's language ensures that through their wish to be forgotten they will be remembered. These characters will, in other words, remain central to their story and will not be sidelined by any Darwinian act of evolutionary indifference to man's place in the natural order. Through the pathos inherent in his characters' realizations that this, the only life they have, has come to failure, Hardy paradoxically manages to

[17] See: 'The urgency of intended happiness, intended perfection, pervades Hardy's text, but its poignancy derives from the failures of perfection [...]. That is what allows the reader to recognise and yearn for the shadow plots of achievement and joy which can never fully manifest themselves' (Beer, p.249).

[18] 'Tess's Lament' (undated), (*CPTH*, p.175).

[19] Such ideas are part of Jude's attempt to comfort Sue after the death of the children: 'The doctor says there are such boys springing up amongst us [...]. He says it is the beginning of the coming universal wish not to live' (*Jude*, pp. 336-337). Strange comfort perhaps but a type already expressed by Hardy in a letter to Rider Haggard in 1891 on the death of the latter's young son. 'I think the death of a child is never really to be regretted, when one reflects on what he has escaped' (*Letters*, I, p. 235). Although Hardy always denied any direct Schopenhauerian influence on his writing he is suggesting here a Schopenhauerian model for a life – the giving up of the will to live. Seymour-Smith suggests, 'what he really did owe to his reading of Schopenhauer was a crystallization of his own thinking' (Martin Seymour-Smith, *Hardy* (London: Bloomsbury, 1994), p.329).

express human loss as human worth and to give man's failure its sad but memorable place of celebration.

Even though story is only possible through movement, the wish not to 'become' became part of every novel Hardy wrote. Many linger explicitly within a space when, like Milton's pre-fall time in *Paradise Lost* or Bunyan's depiction of Christian's dilemma in the fields outside the City of Destruction, it might have been possible for there to have been no story at all. Thus Cytherea and her brother could have chosen not to leave their hometown in order to seek their fortunes, and Eustacia Vye need never have broken the perfection of her unity with Rainbarrow that, in *The Return of the Native*, is Hardy's metaphor for what happens when a story's progress is begun. 'Then the town pitied their want of wisdom in taking such a step' (*DR*, p.21), he comments in *Desperate Remedies* and, in *The Return of the Native*, he notes that 'the discontinuance of immobility in any quarter suggested confusion' (*Return*, p.18). In the earlier story Hardy defends the movement into journey. 'But what is Wisdom really? A steady handling of any means to bring about any end necessary to happiness' (*DR*, p.21). Of Eustacia, however, he simply records, 'Yet that is what happened' (*Return*, p.18) – a joyless acceptance of his heroine's entrance into a story that will, for her, end in tragedy. While both Milton and Bunyan appreciate the dangers and the hardships of pilgrimage, they are also aware of its exciting possibilities. For Hardy the former came to outweigh the latter. Hillis Miller offers a supposition that is certainly true of the later novels: 'As soon as [a Hardy protagonist] engages himself in life he joins a vast streaming movement urging him on towards death and the failure of his desires' (Miller, *DD*, p.22).

In this earlier story, though, Hardy is in a fuller sympathy with his protagonists' venture into journey and, although he cannot grant their efforts at re-

creation a full success, he insists that they should reach a place of rest. 'And then I [...] turned my two lips round upon those two lips, and kissed them – so.' (*DR*, p.407), Springrove concludes. Unwilling to risk the possibility of further plotting, another 'becoming', Hardy uses both punctuation and intonation to seal his protagonists' happiness within the moment of his ending. It is impossible, almost impossible, for the narrative to go any further.

5.3 *Under The Greenwood Tree* (1872)

Hardy's protagonists frequently begin their stories within a type of Eden. They are, however, Edens where Christian mythology and Darwinian theories of 'Isolation and Invasion' (Ebbatson, p.20) come together – Edens that are about to submit to an external force of disturbance. Even *Under the Greenwood Tree*, the most light-hearted of Hardy's novels, depicts a world where old ideas are being displaced by new ones and where lovers are not always faithful.[20] The story does end happily with its heroine, Fancy Day, married to her constant lover, Dick Dewy, but she has, if only for the space of a few hours, been untrue and is thus removed from an ideal innocence. Fancy is also the inadvertent cause of the story's pain as she displaces Mellstock's long established church choir by agreeing to play the organ in their stead. The choir's amicable acceptance of her as their supplanter can be read as Hardy's agreement with Darwin's perceptions of necessary change. But Hardy is not wholly satisfied with such adaptations, and Fancy's departures from grace also embody, as both a personal fall and the cause of the disruptive shift of a whole community, the loss occasioned by Adam and Eve's sin in Eden.

[20]Michael Millgate suggests that 'it is necessary to acknowledge that if *Under the Greenwood Tree* is an idyll it is one in which, at the end, many things are less than idyllic' (*Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist* (London, Sidney and Toronto: Bodley Head, 1971), p.54; hereafter cited Millgate, *CN*).

Significantly, then, Dick's first interaction with his future bride anticipates the way in which the story will end. 'Remember Adam's fall / From Heaven to Hell',[21] he sings with his fellow choristers outside Fancy's house and, although Fancy does not deserve hell, neither does she quite deserve her heaven. 'We'll have no secrets from each other, darling, will we ever?' Dick asks his new bride at the end of the story and she replies with a promise that is another form of deception:

> 'None from to-day,' said Fancy. 'Hark! what's that?'
> From a neighbouring thicket was suddenly heard to issue in a loud, musical, and liquid voice,
> 'Tippiwit! swe-e-et! ki-ki-ki! Come hither, come hither, come hither!'
> 'O, 'tis the nightingale,' murmured she, and thought of a secret she should never tell.
>
> *UGT*, p. 159

Fancy's sudden start can be read as either a ploy intended to distract Dick from her evasiveness or as an expression of her own fear of discovery. Both meanings are valid and both look ominously towards those later Hardy novels where secrets are uncovered and that end so tragically, Fancy's secret only remaining undetected because this is where Hardy chooses to end the story. To achieve a happy ending in *Under the Greenwood Tree* he does not look backward as in *Desperate Remedies* but he does contrive to hold his ending in a place of fixity.[22]

Hillis Miller argues:

> The aporia of ending arises from the fact that it is impossible ever to tell whether a given narrative is complete. If the ending is thought of as a tying up in a careful knot, this knot could always be untied again by the narrator or by further events, disentangled or explicated again.[23]

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[21] Thomas Hardy, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, 1872, ed. Tim Dolin (London: Penguin, 1998), p.23; hereafter cited *UGT*.

[22] Hardy changed *UGT*'s final phrase in 1896 and later editions to 'would never tell' – a more defined promise of 'fixity'.

[23] J. Hillis Miller, 'The Problematic of Ending in Narrative', in *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 33.1 (June, 1978), 3-7 (p.5).

There is, then, a complexity of feeling behind Hardy's 'never tell' and in his poem 'The Rash Bride' (1902) he gives his story the tragic ending that could have occurred had Fancy's deception been discovered. Even within the novel the reader is uncomfortably aware that there is one besides Fancy who will carry the full story into the future. Mr Maybold, the rector Fancy had agreed to marry while promised to Dick, understands and forgives her but, although he removes himself from Mellstock, his last message to Fancy advises her to tell the whole of the truth to Dick. 'Tell him everything; it is best. He will forgive you' (*UGT*, p.142). The threefold cry of the nightingale is also apprehensively reminiscent of the cockcrows that greeted Peter's duplicity on the night of Christ's passion and again there is the story in Greek mythology of the raped Philomela who has her tongue cut out to ensure silence and is later turned into a nightingale. Even as these stories indicate betrayal they suggest, as Maybold does, a silence that is better broken. Hardy, therefore, offers as much discomfort as comfort in his ending, intimating that, like the consequences of the first sin in Eden, an act of reparation will at some point be necessary.

5.4 *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873)

If, in *Desperate Remedies*, Hardy depicts a paradise partially regained and, in *Under the Greenwood Tree*, a paradise where discord has penetrated, his next novel, *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, depicts a paradise brought to fracture. This book tells the story of the life, and death, of Elfride Swancourt. She is presented as one set apart both physically and spiritually, '*A fair Vestal, throned in the West*', and, while Hardy's reference is taken from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, it also suggests through its indications of isolation and protected innocence another Eve, residing this time in a

Cornish Eden.[24] But this Eden is one into which friction has already entered. Even before the story opens one man, Felix Jethway, has died, weakened into a consumptive decline by his unrequited love for Elfride. As the story unfolds she will be loved by three other men, Stephen Smith, who will lose her, Henry Knight who will reject her, and Lord Luxellian who will marry her. Each offering of love, however, is, like that first, fundamentally flawed. All Elfride's lovers look to her as a way of fulfilling a particular need. Millgate notes, 'Each seeks an adjunct to his own personality: Stephen a queen, Knight a maiden of spotless purity'(Millgate, *CN*, p.76). He could have added that Luxellian seeks a stepmother for his young daughters. Elfride, however, is too susceptible to influence, 'no more pervasive than [...] a kitten' (*PBE*, p.8). In a sort of excess of Darwinism she attempts to conform too often and, as Tess Durbeyfield will be, is brought to tragedy by her lovers' successive and differentiated demands.

The story is consciously Darwinian in places, particularly the scene where Henry Knight, hanging from the edge of a cliff, finds himself face to face with a tiny trilobite and realizes his own unimportance in the evolutionary scheme: 'He was to be with the small in his death.' 'However, Knight still clung to the cliff' (*PBE*, pp. 214, 215) the text insists and it is this human defiance in the face of human weakness and nature's indifference to his plight that Hardy celebrates in his novel:

> Knight perseveringly held on. Had he any faith in Elfride? Perhaps. Love is faith, and faith, like a gathered flower, will live on a long time after nutriment has ceased.
>
> *PBE*, p.216

Knight's determination to live is 'held' by the 'Perhaps' of his faith in Elfride, the action showing a greater belief than the thought can perceive. Love and faith may be

[24] Thomas Hardy, *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, 1873, ed. Pamela Dalziel (London: Penguin, 1998), p.7; hereafter cited *PBE*.

reduced to the weakest thing, 'a gathered flower', but this can be enough to uphold mankind even when the connection that sustained it has been severed.

Elfride has temporarily retired from view and her absence, textually if not actually, is lengthy. It is extended over two chapters, chapters that were originally kept separate by the demands of serial publication. When she returns to the scene, however, something quite surprising happens for she, 'no more pervasive than [...] a kitten', assumes a position of influence:

> It was a novelty in the extreme to see Henry Knight, to whom Elfride was but a child, who had swayed her as a tree sways a bird's-nest, who mastered her and made her weep most bitterly at her own insignificance, thus thankful for a sight of her face.
>
> *PBE*, p.218

'Perhaps' then becomes stronger, 'a wonderful instalment of strength' (*PBE*, p.219), and Elfride resourcefully and imaginatively rescues her lover. The book is full of hints and warnings as to the nature of Elfride's tragic death but this adventure's meaning, as an intimation of her ability to achieve a redemptive influence after a period of absence, is easily overlooked. Her deliverance of Knight from certain death is Hardy's strongest indication of how the novel, not the life, will end.

Elfride's rescue of Knight is improvised and spontaneous. This acting out of impulse is part of her attractiveness but it also makes her vulnerable – a vulnerability that ends in a disaster far in excess of what is deserved. When faced with the decision of elopement, for example, and torn between the need to go and the need to stay, 'she dropped the rein [...] and vowed she would be led whither the horse would take her' (*PBE*, p.110). The horse leads Elfride away from home towards Stephen. When she realizes her mistake she immediately tries to rectify it by a return to Cornwall. It is, however, too late. The two are seen together, her position is compromised, and tragedy ensues. In a book that can partly be read as a dialogue about the nature of

evolution, this outcome is Hardy's ironic comment on the inability of chance selection to enhance an individual life. But, neither is Elfride shown as able to apply the firm pattern given to a life through Christianity, for she is confused beyond reasoned thinking by the choices that love offers. All her journeys, then, save the very last, are metaphors for failure; the elopement is botched; a visit to London to beg Knight's forgiveness is unsuccessful; and her honeymoon journey, usually an indication of procreative continuance, ends in her death. It is her posthumous journey, the one that can do her no good at all, that provides the novel's place of healing.

The main part of the story traces Elfride's love affairs, first with Smith and then with Knight. Her liaison with Smith is a secret she attempts to keep from Knight until he, learning of it, breaks their engagement and leaves her. Heartbroken, she eventually marries Lord Luxellian, an affluent widower. In the world's terms and as an evolutionary yardstick, this can be seen as progress but each new love affair, as Hardy makes clear, takes place against the background of an earlier one. Ea ch courtship, for example, is partly conducted within the boundaries of the parish church, her earlier admirer and her later always shadowily present, the former represented by his grave and the latter by his family tomb. 'What, a lover in the tomb and a lover on it?' (*PBE*, p.318) Knight cries in one of those moments when the novel balances between comedy and tragedy. As Knight begins to uncover the secrets of Elfride's past, however, that balance topples into tragedy and Knight's position as one who stands *by* that same tomb, is merely another in a long sequence of parallelisms and intimations that Elfride's death will bring to fulfilment.

Jo Devereux comments:

> In marrying Lord Luxellian, a man who, unlike Knight, is frankly attracted to her and, unlike Stephen, is her superior in

> rank, Elfride would seem to be fulfilling her function as a romantic heroine as well as a nineteenth-century middle class woman. (Certainly she has progressed in her suitors, from 'smith' to 'knight' to 'lord.') Yet this ominously foreshadowed match actually ends up killing her.[25]

Hardy does depict Elfride as making the successful transition from a deserted girl to a married woman whose husband comes to love her dearly, a reformulation of the type of penalty usually demanded by Victorian writers of women who have sinned or who seem to have sinned. It is, however, a hidden restoration, unknown to the reader until the story's final pages, as if the hope of it is too delicate a thing for public gaze. But even as such it cannot be sustained and Hardy's seeming progress towards a conventionally happy ending is, in the end, no progress at all. Instead, each succeeding stage of the story echoes what has gone before and presages what is to come and Elfride, as Tess Durbeyfield will be, is trapped into a future by the past it imitates. The plot's re-enactments and parallelisms are no longer deliberate attempts at re-creation, as in *Desperate Remedies*, but accidents of place and timing that are indicative of the individual's inability to change the order of things.

'How came she to die – and away from home?' Knight wonders when he hears of Elfride's death in London and is told by her maid:

> Don't you see, sir, she fell off again afore they'd been married long, and my lord took her abroad for a change of scene. They were coming home, and had got as far as London, when she was taken very ill and couldn't be moved, and there she died.
>
> *PBE*, p.379

Even here there is a feeling that if Elfride could have completed the journey back to Cornwall all would have been well, but instead, the return comes to failure and she dies. That second sentence is four times extended, each short clause joined by the

[25] Jo Devereux, 'Thomas Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes*: The Heroine as Text', in *The Victorian Newsletter*, 81 (Spring, 1992), 20-23 (p.22).

most undramatic of conjunctions, until Hardy allows it to come to rest in 'and there she died'. This construction, that expresses the weariness of a life that has gone on too long, looks forward to Abel Whittle's account of Michael Henchard's death but seems here a sad conclusion for a young girl whose life was about to begin again. Devereux suggests that Elfride's death may be a consequence of Hardy's decision to abide by the conventions of Victorian morality while Pamela Dalziel maintains that, 'Elfride's unwomanly conduct is severely punished – the novel could, after all, have concluded with her happily married to Lord Luxellian' (*PBE*, intro., p.xxvii). Such readings are to misunderstand Hardy's intention for Elfride's death is not a punishment. It is certainly fatalistic, connected to the novel's incidents of repetition, but it is far more than a convenient way to remove an erring heroine from the scene.

Millgate argues: 'That Elfride cannot be taken seriously as a tragic figure is chiefly the result of her removal from the foreground during the last four chapters' (Millgate, *CN*, p.75). This is, however, more than clumsy plotting for Elfride is merely the experimental first in a long line of tragic characters whose deaths Hardy places outside the narrative well away from even the possibility of a depicted apotheosis. When Bunyan's Christian enters the River, the reader is involved in an extended metaphor for death that provides a visible connection between one reality and another. This extension of the instance of death, 'Traversing the Interval' Garret Stewart calls it, was what many nineteenth-century authors were attempting through their precisely recorded and much extended deathbed scenes.[26] Hard y, however, unwilling to enter into any suggestion that death may be a gateway into another form of existence, another 'becoming', rarely allows it to enter the story. But, even as he

[26] Garrett Stewart, *Death Sentences* (London: Harvard University Press, 1984), chapter heading; hereafter cited Stewart. See also Stewart's suggestion that 'the ironies of modernism from Hardy and Conrad onward can be read at times as a repressed yearning for the spiritual sureties of a Victorian deathbed' (Stewart, p.321).

puts its actuality outside the narrative, he shows how the narrative misses its importance. He gives the splash as Eustacia falls into the weir, the striking clocks and the flag that mark Tess's execution, but no death-granted moment of understanding. Instead the reader is left abandoned and as half comprehending as the other characters in the story. 'What are we to do?' (*Mayor*, p.321) the previously self-confident Farfrae asks as he reads Henchard's will and Elfride's death has the same confounding effect on those who remain behind. 'Was he very fond of her?' (*PBE*, p.379) Knight asks about Luxellian, his question, like Farfrae's, attempting to find a way in which the story's ending may be adjusted and brought to a more satisfactory completion – to what Kermode calls 'the comforts of sequence [and] connexity'.[27]

The difference between Elfride's death and those other deaths depicted by Hardy is, as Millgate noted, that she is missing from the narrative for so much longer. This absence, however, in a fulfilling imitation of the 'cliff scene', is a necessary part of the plot's structure intended to make her eventual 'return' so much more effective. The moment of Elfride's death is not meant to complete the novel for not only does it take place outside the pages of the story but, as Knight unconsciously notes by saying 'and away from home', it has occurred in the wrong place altogether. 'A long work like a novel is interpreted [...] in part through the identification of recurrences and of meanings generated through recurrences',[28] Hillis Miller insists and *A Pair of Blue Eyes* is full of intimations of Elfride's eventual place of burial, the Luxellian family tomb, that a death in London fails to satisfy. Like Godwin Peak there is a sense that Elfride has died in 'exile' but in this story, to bring things to a close, a return is necessary.

[27] Frank Kermode, *Essays on Fiction: 1971-1982* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), p.137; hereafter cited Kermode, *Essays*.
[28] J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982), p.1.

Removed 'from the foreground' Elfride may be but, like a true ghost, she haunts the novel as her body is brought back to Cornwall, Smith and Knight travelling by the very train to which her funeral carriage is attached. Although a note of uneasiness is established (there is a 'dark and richly-finished van' (*PBE*, p.365) at the rear of the train) this is a retrospectively realized haunting. Not knowing of her death, or indeed of her marriage and move away from Cornwall, the reader, like Smith and Knight, expects Elfride to be there as she always was at the journey's end. When the journey is over, however, and her marriage and death discovered, Elfride re-attains and extends that earlier position of influence. The train her coffin has followed will be met by her father, another source of the novel's difficulty and discord. As rector he will officiate at her funeral and she is, of course, buried in the Luxellian tomb close to the grave of the unfortunate Jethway. As her funeral carriage, then, travels towards Cornwall it symbolizes a last return to the place where the story began and the means by which her death can be seen to be, in perhaps the widest sense, redemptive.[29]

And redemption, as a way of bringing a peaceful end to the story, is necessary. Smith and Knight have argued all the way from London over whom Elfride loves the most and now, learning of her death, they quarrel over who has the greater right to mourn her. 'How can you have killed her more than I?' (*PBE*, p.372), Stephen asks of Knight in an act of possession that goes beyond the usual. It is only

[29] 'The character of the heroine [of *PBE*] is somewhat – indeed, rather largely – that of my late wife, & the background of the tale the place where she lived' (*Letters*, IV (1909-1913), p.288). When Hardy wrote this, many years after the novel's publication, he was also aware of how the story's theme of a necessary return had been denied to his wife. When Emma died in November 1912, not in the Cornish seascape of her birth but in landlocked Dorchester, she was buried in nearby Stinsford churchyard. Through poetry, however, Hardy was able to imagine a return for Emma: 'Yet her shade, maybe, / Will creep underground / Till it catch the sound / Of that western sea' ('I Found Her Out There'). In 1913, troubled like Smith and Knight with complex feelings of sorrow and remorse, Hardy made his own pilgrimage to Cornwall led there, as he suggests in 'After a Journey', by Emma's ghost ('Poems of 1912-1913', *CPTH*, pp.342, 349).

when they learn of her marriage by reading the inscription prepared for her coffin that the completion of their separation from Elfride is realized:

> They read it, and read it, and read it again – Stephen and Knight – as if animated by one soul. Then Stephen put his hand upon Knight's arm, and they retired from the yellow glow, farther, farther, till the chill darkness enclosed them round, and the quiet sky asserted its presence overhead as a dim gray sheet of blank monotony.
>
> *PBE*, p.375

What are enacted here are readings and rereadings of the narrative itself for only when it has reached this conclusion can the symbolic nature of past events be fully understood. Protagonist, narrator and reader then, feel the shared loneliness of a life without Elfride and become as one, 'animated by one soul'. Brought to an approximation of healing each must now move away into non-story, marked here by Hardy as 'a dim gray sheet of blank monotony', what is left being less but perhaps more bearable.

The danger of the evolutionary model offered by Darwin, Hardy feels, is that it cannot take into account the personal lives caught up in its necessary changes. As Knight says of Elfride:

> ['] Circumstance has, as usual, overpowered her purposes – fragile and delicate as she – liable to be overthrown in a moment by the coarse elements of accident. [']
>
> *PBE*, p.376

It is Hardy's concern that one life, even one full of irregularities, may have more to offer than the evolutionary aptness that replaces it. In *A Pair of Blue* Eyes he pays tribute to Elfride's life, weak and insubstantial as it was, by placing her at the centre of her story and allowing her to attain a redemptive influence, limited but real.

After Elfride's death Hardy does not put forward as a contrast other lives that may provide evidence of progression, even progression appropriate to the times as Gissing did in *New Grub Street* with Amy and Milvain and in *Born in Exile* with

Chilvers and Earwaker. Gissing, at the end of these stories, shows evolution marching on – careless and indifferent to the fates of Reardon and Peak. Hardy structures things differently. Both Smith and Knight are successful in their chosen professions – Smith an evolutionary model for social change – but instead of emphasizing this Hardy chooses to give full expression to the human loss that has been sustained. Smith and Knight, then, are shown weighed down by the effects of Elfride's death. Knowing at last of her marriage and death they visit her grave and there find Luxellian in a form of communion with the dead woman, 'his body flung across the coffin'. They are forced then to recognize that he has the right they must relinquish, the right to a full and open expression of grief. 'They felt themselves to be intruders' (*PBE*, pp.379, 380). Then, denied any meaningful consummation with Elfride, they must turn to each other and find, as Elizabeth-Jane will find at the end of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, that what is left may be sufficient but is sadly lacking in splendour:

> And side by side they both retraced their steps down the gray still valley to Stranton.
>
> *PBE*, p.380

Instead of a patient re-creation of happiness or a pause in the position of 'fixity' Hardy gives an ending here that, like the final sentence of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, is uneasily recollective of Milton's in *Paradise Lost* where Adam and Eve, 'hand in hand with wand'ring steps and slow, / Through Eden took their solitary way' (*PL*, XII. 648-649). While Hardy's opening chapter offered a reinterpretation of Milton's paradise, his final sentence rearranges the meaning of Milton's conclusion for the novel's final pairing of male and male refuses to encompass *Paradise Lost*'s re-creative structure. The pilgrimage ideal that the closing lines of Milton's poem offer is changed by Hardy to something more separate and more difficult. Although Smith

and Knight are together, 'animated by one soul', they are 'side by side' not 'hand in hand', an act of referral that exists to posit a specific contrast with the latter's portrayal of fulfilling unity. Hardy's ending in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is another rewriting of Milton's conclusion. 'As soon as they had strength they arose, joined hands again, and went on.' However, the novel's proposed union of 'Liza-Lu, 'a spiritualized image of Tess' (*Tess*, pp. 398, 396), and Angel, whose name implies immaterial virtues rather than physical prowess, suggests little more progress towards a new generation than does *A Pair of Blue Eyes*.[30] But at least Angel and 'Liza-Lu 'go on'. For Smith and Knight this is a return, not a going forward, and even as that it is imperfect, for the paradise that they now turn towards is one without Elfride and, therefore, only partially familiar.

In *A Pair of Blue Eyes* the novel's structure tries, and fails, to get back to Eden, to the 'fair Vestal', and the place where a meaningful pilgrimage could perhaps begin. Neither can it call a halt to the world's 'becoming'. Instead Hardy leaves us with an image of humanity compelled to move on in an unconscious imitation of the models set by earlier pilgrimages – the difference now being that these later journeys lack a particular purpose and have no well-defined place of destination. As James Thomson wrote, 'The works proceed until run down; although / Bereft of purpose, void of use, still go' (CDN, p.129).

5.5 *The Return of the Native* (1878)

Having considered Hardy's ideas of 'return' in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* it is with particular interest that I move to *The Return of the Native*, a novel whose title sets up the expectations of another 'return'. Clym Yeobright, the returning 'native', has

[30]For a more positive example of an author's re-use of Milton's lines see Charles Dickens's revised ending for *Great Expectations*.

given up his occupation as a diamond merchant in Paris and come home to Egdon Heath with a scheme of education for its inhabitants.[31] This is a venture that confronts the Darwinian concept that change should be gradual and connected. 'To argue upon the possibility of culture before luxury to the bucolic world may be to argue truly, but it is an attempt to disturb a sequence to which humanity has been long accustomed' (*Return*, p.172). It takes a life-changing calamity to bring Clym to a true 'return', and even then it cannot be held for long. Made nearly blind through continual study he takes on the role of a furze cutter, becomes in fact a heath man with a heath man's closed perspective, 'his whole world being limited to a circuit of a few feet from his person'. It is now that Clym achieves, not what he thought he had desired, but the desire that lies behind the desire – a return to his familial relationship with Egdon. 'His walk is exactly as my husband's used to be', his mother notes, Clym's father having been a farmer on Egdon. Like Elfride away from Cornwall, Clym has become separated from his true environment and, like her, to achieve a return he goes through a death, in his case the symbolically represented death of blindness. His first attempt at a return had been to bring the new self, the educated self, to the heath. Through suffering, however, Clym comes close to the self that was, the blindness laying bare the man behind the education, and he becomes part of Egdon again, 'not more distinguishable from the scene around him than the green caterpillar from the leaf it feeds on' (*Return*, pp.247, 271, 270). But, as Beer notes, 'The "return of the native" can be achieved only within the smallest extent of time and space. The rest of the book shows Clym obliged to re-emerge from the pleasures of "forced limitation" ' (Beer, pp.255-256).

[31] Grace Melbury in *The Woodlanders* is another returning native. The tragedy inherent in her 'return' to Little Hintock is marked by the death of Giles Winterborne, the man she should have married, and her subsequent unsatisfactory 'return' to her unfaithful husband.

This novel is as much about an escape for its heroine, Eustacia Vye, as it is about a return for its hero but it becomes increasingly difficult to discover a shape for either journey or to see how the wished-for objectives are to be realized. The ending that Clym eventually achieves only mimics his original intention, impotence replacing effectiveness, while Eustacia, the one who would flee her own particular City of Destruction, dies within it – a closure of journey upon itself. There is a Christian in this story of failed pilgrimage, but Christian Cantle is both foolish and cowardly and the least likely character to venture into a Progress. 'Ought we not to run home as hard as we can, neighbours?' (*Return*, p.34), is a typical response to challenge. But, although he is a figure of fun, this Christian occupies a particular place in the novel at a point that exists at the other extreme to the dangerous non-uniformity of the main protagonists. Living his life away from the possibility of change, he functions, along with his fellow heath men, as the strongly fixed standard of immobility.[32] Clym and Eustacia focus their energy on bringing about a change in their modes of being and their efforts result in tragedy. Cantle, on the other hand, concentrates on remaining as he is and he and his fellow heath men are found at the end of the story exactly as they were at its start. But, while nothing has been lost, nothing has been gained. It is Thomasin, Clym's cousin, and Diggory Venn, the man she marries at the end of the novel, who alter their circumstances. Their small, but significant, aspirations are rewarded with a happy marriage and a future that looks beyond the closed world of Egdon.

The heath means many things to Hardy. It is an evolutionary place of isolation 'invaded' by Clym; it is the heath land of *King Lear*; and it is another type of Eden, 'Haggard Egdon', Hardy's choice of name being close enough to the

[32] 'Persistent types', Ebbatson dubs them quoting Huxley's reference to species 'which have existed virtually unchanged for hundreds of millions of years by remaining in equilibrium with their environment' (Ebbatson, p.22).

biblical one to suggest a deliberate referral. It is also, through Hardy's depiction of Egdon as a unified prospect and his emphasis on its paths and bypaths, a reminder of Bunyan's place of pilgrimage.[33] Bunyan's landscape, however, intrudes in a way that Hardy's does not. It pulls you in and trips you up and, as a metaphor for the destructiveness of human sin, is there to be overcome. Egdon, on the other hand, exists as a 'vast impassivity' (*Return*, pp.10, 317); it is entire in itself, neither reflecting nor hindering man's progress. Its named places, its main highway, and its pathways are recollective of Bunyan but they are, for Hardy, emblems of a broken tradition. Where Bunyan sees a journey that must be completed despite Satan's temptations, Hardy sees the 'sadness' brought about by the journey itself and he would prefer to look, not forward, but inward towards a stillness where there need not be a 'becoming'.

As a gesture towards this stillness Hardy withholds all action throughout the first chapter, concentrating instead on a description of twilight on Egdon Heath. The second chapter is the place where the story begins and its title, '*Humanity appears upon the scene, hand in hand with Trouble*', prepares the reader for a 'becoming' that recalls the human effects on Eden. A motionless figure is seen standing upon the heath's Rainbarrow. 'The vale, the upland, the barrow, and the figure above it, all of these amounted only to unity' (*Return*, pp.13, 17). This 'unity' expresses for Hardy the type of perfection known before man's original fall from grace:

> The form was so much like an organic part of the entire motionless structure that to see it move would have impressed the mind as a strange phenomenon. Immobility being the chief characteristic of that whole which the person formed portion of, the discontinuance of immobility in any quarter suggested confusion.

[33] For Hardy's references to *King Lear* see his 1895 preface to *Return* (*Return*, p.429); for an allusion to the preservation of the unities in the novel see *Life*, p.456.

> Yet that is what happened. The figure perceptibly gave up its fixity, shifted a step or two, and turned round.
>
> *Return*, pp.17-18

Here, as Eustacia stands on Rainbarrow, Hardy shows how any move away from perfection is a total move away. To lose part of perfection is to destroy the whole for the nature of perfection is completion. And then, with the shrug of acceptance in 'Yet', the acceptance of what he as narrator must do, Hardy moves the reader and Eustacia into the area where the story can begin. There is no story in 'fixity'.[34] Story begins with fracture, with damage, where perfection meets 'confusion', that messy, disturbed, legacy of life granted to man. Implicit in the passage is the inevitability of the coming tragedy and yet it is also an example of how Hardy's novels suggest ways in which things could end quite differently. In a differently managed universe perhaps, other paths, the other side of the barrow, may have been chosen resulting in another story altogether. Nearly forty years later Robert Frost revisited this idea: 'Two roads diverged in a wood, and I – / I took the one less traveled by, / And that has made all the difference.'[35]

The pilgrim motif in *The Return of the Native* is shared between Eustacia and Clym, one so anxious to leave her home and the other equally anxious to effect a return. It is an uneasy sharing. 'Eustacia and Clym embody in themselves the prime antitheses of the novel',[36] Penelope Vigar argues and the clash of intention formed when these two meet, fall in love and marry, complicates the story's structure away from a simpler, one directional progress as modelled in other stories. In *Far From the Madding Crowd*, for example, Hardy's protagonists are brought almost

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[34] Eustacia's story ends in this 'fixity', Hardy's way of describing the everlasting nature of the moment of death being 'Eternal rigidity' (*Return*, p.367).

[35] 'The Road Not Taken' (1916), *Complete Poems of Robert Frost* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1956), p.129.

[36] Penelope Vigar, *The Novels of Thomas Hardy: Illusion and Reality* (London: Athlone Press, 1974), p.128.

immediately to difference. But Gabriel Oak is appropriately named as Bathsheba's angel and support, and their separate journeys move towards that moment when discord will be resolved. Clym and Eustacia, however, are halted in their individual journeys, each by the other as the very one that should offer aid. Eustacia is as consistent in her desire to leave Egdon as Clym is to stay, and her protest, ''Tis my cross, my misery, and will be my death' (*Return*, p.86), echoes Christian's early recognition of impending destruction in *A Pilgrim's Progress*: 'myself [...] shall miserably come to ruin; except [...] some way of escape can be found'(*PP*, p.11). Eustacia's vision of paradise is smaller than Christian's, Budmouth or Paris against his Celestial City. Like Jude Fawley's dream of Christminster, however, it is another expression of humanity's aspiration to the greatest thing imaginable, and as such it fills her whole mind and soul.

This deadlocked conflict is opposed on both fronts by Clym's mother. Paris and the situation his education has fitted him for are what she wants for her son but it should be Paris without the disturbingly difficult Eustacia. When the two do marry a division is set up between mother and son, an instance in the novel when its pathways become occasions of distance rather than connection: Clym and Eustacia move as far away from his old home, Blooms-End, as possible while still remaining within Egdon's boundaries. Clym's marriage, however, is happy for a short time only and the triangle of difference formed by mother, son and wife is overlaid by another, Clym, Eustacia, and Damon Wildeve, when Wildeve turns away from his own marriage in the hope of renewing an earlier relationship with Eustacia. Involved, and yet subtly distanced from each of these potentialities for tragedy is Thomasin, Wildeve's wife and Clym's cousin, and Thomasin's disappointed admirer and self-appointed guardian, the reddleman, Diggory Venn.

The first edition of *The Return of the Native* included, as a frontispiece, Hardy's own map of Egdon that forms a pictorial representation of these interwoven yet dysfunctional relationships.[37] The Yeobrights at Blooms-End, Wildeve at the Quiet Woman Inn, Eustacia at Mistover and, eventually, Clym and Eustacia at Alderworth, are connected by the paths just as they are disconnected by distance. These paths, in contrast to the main roads that run across the heath, are only subtly outlined but they are more generally used by the heath's inhabitants. And, if the modern is not in constant use here, neither is the ancient. The old Roman Road, its directness an implicit reminder of Bunyan's 'straight and narrow' (*PP*, p.27) way, is also marked, but faintly and as 'Remains'. It seems to be a memory only – pushed to one side by ways of travelling deemed to be more helpful. Neither are the footpaths Bunyan's misleading byways but places of safety to 'the regular haunters of the heath' (*Return*, p.58). These paths represent lives that are determined neither religiously nor with any dependence upon the outside world. They connect individual to individual and do not look beyond the heath towards any other vision whether it be a religious Celestial City or a secular Budmouth.

The story seeks a resolution through death, not Clym's as hero, but the deaths of his wife and mother. Their redemptive effect, however, is hard to discover and neither is it easy to determine the sentiment that lies behind them. Eustacia's death may be suicide or accident (or even the result of witchcraft) and Mrs Yeobright may have died feeling either forgiveness or condemnation but Hardy allows no final words that could serve as an explanation for those who are left behind. Instead each death, and any insight that it may contain, occurs away from the eye of the reader. But, unwilling as Hardy was to enter into any suggestion that death may be a

[37] See *Return*, p.440.

gateway into another form of existence, he still feels the need, as did Mrs Ward with Robert Elsmere and Gissing with Harold Biffin, to mark it as a moment of importance. Mrs Yeobright's death has a devastating effect on her son and daughter-in-law, and Hardy refuses to place it completely outside the story as he did with Elfride's. Instead he filters its occurrence through the ears of Eustacia and Wildeve who are present, and yet not present, at the scene. Hidden from view, the couple listen to Mrs Yeobright's unhappy passing and the feelings of fear and guilt that they experience underscore the bleakness and strangeness of the moment.

Mrs Yeobright, having walked from Blooms-End to Alderworth with the intention of bringing about a reconciliation is, through mishap, denied access to the house. Already exhausted, and knowing that Clym and Eustacia are at home, she sets off again in the direction of Blooms-End. This is her own journey of unsuccessful return for she never reaches her home but dies on the heath. Clym is beside her when she dies and an assorted company of the heath's men and women:

> Then there was a weeping of women, then waiting, then hushed exclamations, then a strange gasping sound, then a painful stillness.
>
> 'It is all over,' said the doctor.
>
> Further back in the hut the cotters whispered, 'Mrs. Yeobright is dead.'
>
> *Return*, p. 296

As sound itself becomes more obscure, 'hushed', 'strange', the hanging connectives of the listeners' 'then' pushes the sentence forward, away from sound itself, into 'stillness'. Silence, then, denied sight, needs the double confirmation of both death sentences, the doctor's euphemism and the cotters' factual interpretation. But the double declaration is more than this. After Ruth Hilton's death, her son, Leonard, will not accept the doctor's summation, 'It is over! [...] She is dead!' 'You are not dead!'(*R*, p.449), he cries, denying not only the death but also the completeness of it.

Hardy does not deny the death but he does, like Mrs Gaskell, deny the story's completion. It is not 'all over' and the cotters are right to correct th e doctor's statement. A death can only complete the life it ends – not the world's 'becoming'. As a moment of revelation, however, the death itself offers nothing. '[P]ainful stillness', a dreadful form of 'fixity', is what is given and the reader is sent further back into the book in the hope of an understanding.

Two hours into her journey of return Mrs Yeobright has been forced to halt and, worn out beyond hope of recovery, has passed into that stage where death is a blessing:

> While she looked a heron arose on that side of the sky and flew on with his face towards the sun. [...] Up in the zenith where he was seemed a free and happy place, away from all contact with the earthly ball to which she was pinioned; and she wished that she could arise uncrushed from its surface and fly as he flew then.
>
> But, being a mother, it was inevitable that she should soon cease to ruminate upon her own condition. Had the track of her next thought been marked by a streak in the air, like the path of a meteor, it would have shown a direction contrary to the heron's, and have descended to the eastward upon the roof of Clym's house.[38]
>
> *Return*, p.282

This is apotheosis almost achieved, where 'wished', struggling against 'pinioned', is overcome by the human feeling that lies behind the smallness of 'But'. Mrs Yeobright's reflection may be pagan rather than Christian but it expresses the same wish for freedom of the spirit as Robert Elsmere's did when, picturing his own death moment, he is calmed and comforted by the 'old familiar image of the river of Death' (*RE*, p.591). But, like Robert, Mrs Yeobright is drawn back to earth by the uncompleted task and, as she chooses the human thing over the godlike, a godlike

[38] Clym has a comparable experience when, gaz ing at the moon, 'he almost felt himself to be voyaging bodily through its wild scenes'. But then, 'Yeobright's mind flew back to earth' (*Return*, p.193). Like his mother, Clym's spiritual contemplation suffers an interruption, prompted in his case by thoughts of Eustacia. See also Tess's description of her soul going into the stars (*Tess*, p.120).

importance is given to the human. With, 'But [...], it was inevitable', imitating that earlier, 'Yet, that is what happened', Mrs Yeobright accepts the possibility of a further journey – a further effort – and the connection that needs to be achieved between herself and Clym.

It is surprising then that the intention behind this attempt at connection, 'a streak in the air', is not interpreted. A *feeling* of reconciliation passes textually between these two paragraphs and the next (there is a further division of a chapter break), but feeling is not strong enough and is destroyed when words are given. Clym is discovered waking from a sleep disturbed by dreams of his mother in distress, and he sets off for Blooms-End to see if all is well. He finds his mother dying on the heath. 'I am your Clym', he cries, and for a short space he forgets 'the chasm in their lives'. His mother, however, has no words, 'She moved her lips [...] but could not speak'. This failure of the body to express what the spirit may have intended leads to the final tragedy for it is her last words then and not her last thoughts that Clym is given, Mrs Yeobright's claim to be 'a broken-hearted woman cast off by her son' (*Return*, pp.286, 281). These words mean heartbreak and collapse to Clym; they cause the final rift between himself and his wife; and, indirectly, they bring about Eustacia's death. Mrs Yeobright's death on its own does not hope to resolve the problems in the novel. Instead, it heightens its difficulties and drives the story forward to a place where redemption may be possible. The burden of redemption, however, does not fall upon Eustacia; her life, and her death, are too inwardly directed to provide it. It is rather that her death, like Sergeant Troy's in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, breaks the tension of the story and offers a place where the process of healing can begin, feelings that the older woman's death may have embodied but was unable to release.

Eustacia, like her mother-in-law, dies on the heath, away from the narrative and distanced from her final words. These have been delivered earlier when Eustacia, having set out to meet Wildeve who has promised to help her escape from Egdon, pauses on Rainbarrow and then, under the strain of the moment, crouches down 'as if she were drawn into the Barrow by a hand from beneath' (*Return*, pp.345-346). As a symbolic reversal of that earlier 'discontinuance of immobility' this, like every other attempt at 'return' in a Hardy novel, is only partially successful. This is not where Eustacia dies nor is it the point at which the story ends. It is, however, the place where her connection with the novel is broken, for what happens to her afterwards is a matter of surmise only. Last words again have to stand in the place of last thoughts as, brought to the extremes of despair, Eustacia cries:

> O the cruelty of putting me into this imperfect, ill-conceived world! I was capable of much; but I have been injured and blighted and crushed by things beyond my control! O how hard it is of Heaven to devise such tortures for me, who have done no harm to Heaven at all!
>
> *Return*, p.346

Unlike Mrs Yeobright Eustacia looks inward and receives no vision of apotheosis. For her, 'crushed' remains so, while, for the older woman, it is transfigured, 'uncrushed', by the flight of the heron. Eustacia too, places herself in the past tense, 'I was capable of much', and this, combined with other intimations, would suggest a mind bent on suicide just as Mrs Yeobright's unspoken thoughts of her son suggest love if not forgiveness. Hardy refuses, however, to offer an easy answer. Final words may or may not express final thoughts and, as he gives no moment in the death itself that can offer a safe interpretation, he shows how the narrative misses the explanatory deathbed scene of so many other stories. There is no point in this novel where the burden of pilgrimage can be passed from one character to another. Instead,

each death signifies its own moment of closure while the lives that remain can only struggle to find a way through to understanding.

The moment of Eustacia's death is, like Mrs Yeobright's, heard but not seen. In the midst of a terrible storm Clym and Wildeve, hero and anti-hero, are both on the heath, the former searching for Eustacia, the latter waiting for her. The two come close to meeting but Clym, already half blind, finds his vision further restricted as Wildeve keeps out of sight behind the lamplight of his carriage. It is then that the noise of the storm is transcended by another noise – not louder, but different:

> While they both hung thus in hesitation a dull sound became audible above the storm and wind. Its origin was unmistakable – it was the fall of a body into the stream adjoining, apparently at a point near the weir.
>
> *Return*, p.360

It is as if both nature and humanity have receded here in order to allow something other than restless activity to enter the consciousness. And, even as 'became audible' suggests such a length of sound, allowing the horror of the death to permeate slowly rather than enter intrusively, 'a body' contradicts the dignified importance thus granted. Mrs Yeobright remained Mrs Yeobright even after the death, but here 'a body' inanimates the animate and refuses to distinguish Eustacia's violent, tragic end as an instance of special significance. Death, at this point, is only death and 'nothing more'. But then, into this blankness, something quite extraordinary enters – for Clym recognizes Wildeve.

There are three dramatic instances given in the text as near encounters between the two men, one when Wildeve sees the newly married Clym and Eustacia travelling to Alderworth, one after the dancing on the heath when Wildeve walks home with Eustacia, and one when he pays a visit to Alderworth. Not once does Clym see Wildeve. In the first instance he has eyes only for his bride while Wildeve

draws back through jealousy; in the second Wildeve turns away before Clym, his eyes now weakened, can see him; and in the third Wildeve discovers Clym asleep, worn out after a long morning's work. 'You are blinded, Clym', his mother had said of his relationship with Eustacia and later, in resignation, 'Sons must be blind if they will' (*Return*, pp.191, 211). So it was to be and it is only now, in a conjunction of circumstances so elusively marked that it passes practically unnoticed, that Clym *sees* Wildeve:

> Both started. 'Good God! can it be she?' said Clym.
> 'Why should it be she?' said Wildeve, in his alarm forgetting that he had hitherto screened himself.
> 'Ah! – that's you, you traitor, is it?' cried Yeobright.
> *Return*, pp.360-361

This is not a recognition of Eustacia's powers as a witch – the 'spell' of blindness cast by the mother and activated by the wife being negated by the death. However superstitiously the heath's inhabitants may have viewed Eustacia, her influence was always wholly human. Instead, that tiny interval that contains her death is Hardy's metaphor for the difficulty that non-apotheotic death presents. A way towards healing is, he feels, still possible but the moment that contains that possibility is hidden and its effects hard to distinguish.[39]

But there is healing, at first a moderated offering, 'a limited badness' (*Return*, p.372) Thomasin feels, but throughout the last book of the novel the story is moved away from tragedy towards a gentler conclusion. Thomasin and Diggory marry and leave the heath, symbolically taking little Eustacia, Thomasin's child by Wildeve, with them; the heath men celebrate traditionally by making a feather bed for the

[39] Kermode discusses a similar use of hidden occurrence in Forster's *A Room With a View*: 'What we have here is not so much a secret as secrecy, an inexplicable consonance. We know it is there because the disturbance in the prose signals its presence. It is so arranged that we [...] may ignore it if we choose; but it is there, and has to do with expansion, with the reconciliation of art with honourable rest' (Kermode, *Essays*, p.14).

newly married pair; and Clym learns how to live on burdened as he is with the double loss of wife and mother:

> 'It was all my fault,' he whispered. 'Oh, my mother, my mother! would to God that I could live my life again, and endure for you what you endured for me!'
>
> *Return*, p.395

Now that he can feel the redemptive quality of the love contained in the death Clym does not wish his mother's life back but his own. And then, the merely commendable is given the appearance of the possible for the narrative almost immediately suggests another return. 'From a distance there simply appeared to be a motionless figure standing on the top of the tumulus, just as Eustacia had stood on that lonely summit some two years and a half before' (*Return*, p.395). As Goode suggests, 'It is as though the story is to begin again.'[40]

Ricoeur, quoting from Aristotle's *Poetics*, argues: ' "Now a thing is a whole if it has a beginning, a middle and an end" [...]. But it is only in virtue of poetic composition that something counts as a beginning, middle, or end.'[41] Victorian writers, on the whole, were happy to accept this form of 'poetic composition'. *Ruth*, for example, like *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Robert Elsmere*, and many other novels, offers a form of continuation through the lives of lesser characters but Mrs Gaskell ensures, with her protagonist's apotheotic and redemptive death, that the novel finishes where it might be expected to finish. In *Desperate Remedies* and *Under the Greenwood Tree* Hardy had tested such structures and now, in this novel, he intimates that there might be a type of 'composition' where the story would not end at all. Instead, through being 'lived again' and other pathways chosen, a different

[40] John Goode, *Thomas Hardy: The Offensive Truth* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), p.59; hereafter cited Goode, *Offensive Truth.*

[41] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1983, translated Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, 2 vols (London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), I, p.38.

happier ending may be hoped for – the one life repeating itself in an arrangement closer to Buddhism than Christianity until perfection is reached.[42]

This is not a return, however, only an appearance of it. The reader is only fleetingly flashed back to that first moment of held stillness before being moved into real time by a small contradiction:

> But now it was fine warm weather, with only a summer breeze blowing, and early afternoon instead of dull twilight.
> *Return*, p.395

Things are not about to begin again. Instead this is Clym's move towards freedom – the life of a preacher that he adopts fulfilling his own desires rather than his mother's. The connection that she so desired is made but the interpretation of it has, by necessity, to be all Clym's own. Neither is this any act of homage towards Eustacia, for Clym begins his new career on Rainbarrow for purely practical reasons; it is a central position and an eminence from which he can be easily seen.

In *Desperate Remedies* Hardy had moved his story away from the usual form of romantic fiction; in *The Return of the Native* he breaks away from the form usually given to romantic tragedy. It is customary, at the end of such stories that either both lovers die, united in death and with the promise of a reformed happiness in a place beyond it, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Wuthering Heights* for example, or, as in *Robert Elsmere* and *The Heir of Redclyffe*, that only one should die, the life that ended prematurely being continued and completed by the other. Hardy's ending in *The Return of the Native* comes closer to *Helbeck of Bannisdale* where Laura Fountain's suicide signals her incapacity to accept Helbeck's Catholicism and he, after her death, acts in a way she would never have understood and enters a Jesuit

[42] Hardy revisits this idea in *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved* (1892) a story he rewrote in 1897 as *The Well-Beloved.* In these stories the 'pursuit' continues through three generations of women – the 'pursuer' becoming older while the 'well-beloved' is reincarnated in the original's daughter and granddaughter. The two stories are subtly different. The first emphasizes the man's strength, the second, the woman's; the first ends in cruel farce, the second more kindly.

noviciate. In the same way, Eustacia's death, whether accident or suicide, is brought about by her despairing inability to come to terms with the sort of existence that Clym offers her, and neither she nor Mrs Yeobright would have been made any happier before their deaths if they had known what Clym was going to do after them.

There is also a lack in both stories of effective continuance. After the deaths of his wife and mother only Clym is left, for Wildeve dies with Eustacia, and Thomasin and Diggory marry and go to live 'two miles to the right of Alderworth' (*Return*, p.375), a place off the map and outside the boundaries of the story's concerns. This novel then concludes with Clym as the companionless inheritor of the heath, a celibate image that offers nothing in the way of a coming generation to carry the burden of the story forward. Just as Helbeck's renunciation is a type of death – a turning of grief into silence – Clym's reformation that turns his grief into words is only an approximation of a continuing life. Although Hardy burdens it with images of Christ, Eustacia, and Mrs Yeobright, it is not really stalwart enough to carry either Clym's own intentions or the significance of those other pilgrimages into a useful future. Clym's return to Rainbarrow is, as Goode suggests, an 'epiphany [...] which concentrates without resolving all the themes of the novel' (Goode, *Offensive Truth*, p.59):

> Some believed him, and some believed not; some said that his words were commonplace, others complained of his want of spiritual doctrine; while others again remarked that it was well enough for a man to take to preaching who could not see to do anything else. But everywhere he was kindly received, for the story of his life had become generally known.
>
> *Return*, p.396

This, like Hardy's simile in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, 'faith, like a gathered flower, will live on', is a way of continuing the journey even when the original reason for it, marked here by a 'want of spiritual doctrine', has all but dwindled away. The story's

ending may look momentarily back to the place where things began but, unlike *Desperate Remedies*, there is no struggle to maintain the structure. The failure inherent in the thought is accepted even as it is articulated, and Hardy concludes with a vision of pilgrimage that lacks the largeness and defined certitude a writer like Bunyan could offer. However good Clym's intentions are, they will not be influential. While, at the end of her story, Dorothea Brooke accepts a life of small sacrifices and hidden endeavour, 'not widely visible', Clym takes on the life of a saint – the sort of life Dorothea had originally hoped to achieve. But, even as such, Clym's life is less effective. Although Dorothea's actions will be unrecorded and unremembered George Eliot can write, 'the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive' (*M*, p.838). Hardy's final sentence can only assure the reader of Clym's inability to make that sort of a difference. With, 'the story of his life had become generally known', Hardy denies his ending any further progress. The story being 'known' there can be no more to add. And neither, as Little Nell's was, is it told again and again. What is 'known' is enough for a peaceful ending, 'he was kindly received', but not enough to carry the story forward. What Hardy depicts, at the end of *The Return of the Native*, is not a 'parody' of pilgrimage but a memory of it and an act of deference towards things that had once been possible.

Chapter Six
Thomas Hardy: The Later Novels

In 1882 Hardy wrote in his journal:

> Since I discovered, several years ago, that I was living in a world where nothing bears out in practice what it promises incipiently, I have troubled myself very little about theories. ... Where development according to perfect reason is limited to the narrow region of pure mathematics, I am content with tentativeness from day to day.[1]

No sooner do the words, 'I am content', fall on the inner ear than they are confused by 'tentativeness'. This shows Hardy's conflict between ease and unease. He can be neither comfortable nor comforting and that shift from expecting development to having to be 'content' with 'tentativeness' affects the identity of his novels. Hardy's statement implies that there may be no circumstance in a life that is large and stable enough to give its story a sense of final purpose. Such a premise was evidenced in *The Return of the Native* by Eustacia's despair: 'I was capable of much; but I have been injured and blighted and crushed by things beyond my control!', and by Clym's failure to have a real effect on the people of Egdon: ' Some believed him, and some believed not' (*Return*, pp.346, 396). Cardinal Newman had been able to argue that life's failure to find completeness is proof of another life beyond this one: 'the very pitifulness of this life forces on our thoughts to another'.[2] For Hardy, the unbeliever, there can be no promise of a heavenly recompense. Instead of looking beyond this world his tragic protagonists become trapped in a journey, 'injured and blighted and

[1] Thomas Hardy, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Michael Millgate (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1984), p. 160; hereafter cited *Life*.
[2] John Henry Newman, 'The Greatness and Littleness of Human Life', 1836, in *A Newman Treasury*, ed. Charles Frederick Harrold (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1945), pp. 142-151 (p. 145).

crushed', that seems to go on too long.[3] For characters such as these, death becomes the only means of concluding the protracted 'tentativeness' – the only way of challenging the world's 'becoming'. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), and *Jude the Obscure* (1895), all end with the painful death of the story's main protagonist and seem, as they portray lives as pilgrimages that can reach fulfilment neither on earth nor in heaven, to disassociate themselves from Bunyan's *Progress*. It is this suggested opposition, Qualls's 'parody' perhaps, that I explore in this chapter of my thesis.

6.1 *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886)

There is an order and structure imposed on the journey of Bunyan's Christian and it can thus be termed a Progress. Michael Henchard, the protagonist of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, fails to discover such an order and Progress is too stately a word to describe his story. In this novel Christian's informed urgency is replaced with a relentless movement from cause to effect to another cause to another effect. Neither is Henchard provided with a companion through whom faith and hope can be sustained, for he fails to sustain each relationship life offers. Instead of Bunyan's depiction of illuminated purpose Hardy shows how man must travel alone with no more guidance than his own stumbling attempts to both write his own story and understand it. Hardy, however, never suggests that Henchard could or should be any different from the man he is. Other writers who depict the failure of a life, Trollope, for example, in *He Knew He Was Right*, may have felt that their protagonists could have modelled their lives on Bunyan's pilgrimage if only in a purely humanist

[3] Qualls notes how Bunyan's 'rigorous marking of time as progress poses a stark contrast to the tomorrow-and-tomorrow weariness of so many characters in Victorian fiction' (Barry V. Qualls, *The Secular Pilgrims of Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p.6). This perception is particularly true of Hardy; see, for example, his undated poem 'The Weary Walker' (*CPTH*, p.742).

fashion. Hardy indicates something else. His imperfect man is the greatest character in the book, seriously at fault, but vulnerable rather than vindictive and, in the end, brought to a form of redemption.

By the closing chapters of the novel, Henchard has endured a time of prolonged suffering. His year as mayor is long over, his reputation destroyed, and his position as leading merchant in the town forfeited. He has also quarrelled with his former colleague, Donald Farfrae, become estranged from his stepdaughter, Elizabeth-Jane, while his wife, Susan, and erstwhile mistress, Lucetta, have both died, Lucetta tragically. Out of all this there comes to the unhappy man the possibility of renewing his relationship with Elizabeth-Jane – a relationship that is, however, based on a great untruth. '[H]e was developing the dream of a future lit by her filial presence, as though that way alone could happiness lie.' But Elizabeth-Jane is not, as she has come to believe, Henchard's daughter. Henchard's 'dream', then, can only be tentatively anticipated and no sooner is the thought articulated than the story continues with, 'He was disturbed'. The disturbance is the sailor, Richard Newson, believed drowned but Elizabeth-Jane's real father, who has travelled to Casterbridge in the hope of finding her. Henchard, holding desperately onto his 'dream', acts, as he always has done on 'the impulse of a moment' (*Mayor*, pp.286, 289), and declares that the girl is dead. Newson leaves, apparently satisfied, but almost immediately Henchard questions the usefulness of what has occurred:

> Was Elizabeth-Jane to remain his by virtue of this hardy invention of a moment? 'Perhaps not for long,' said he. Newson might converse with his fellow-travellers [...] and the trick would be discovered.
>
> This probability threw Henchard into a defensive attitude, and instead of considering how best to right the wrong [...] he bethought himself of ways to keep the position he had accidentally won.
>
> *Mayor*, p.290

Henchard's thought moves immediately into speech and then, instinctively, towards the possibility of *doing*. This is, however, frozen into impotence, 'a defensive attitude' being all that now remains of the truculent militancy of which he had once been capable. That 'invention', then, is rendered ineffectual, becoming another of those instances where Hardy's protagonist attempts, and fails, to inform the structure of the story.

Even when its syntactic duty is changed it is practically impossible to write your own name and not be conscious of it. It is probable, then, that the wording here, 'this hardy invention of a moment', is intentionally ambiguous, intended to be read as both Henchard's instantly conceived daring and Hardy's own ironic comment on the wish for 'fixity' so frequently depicted in his stories. In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian rarely wishes to pause any longer than is strictly necessary; even places of peace and rest serve only as indicators of the everlasting perfections beyond. Hardy's characters are similarly pressed but there comes a point in each story when the wish to remain becomes stronger than the urge to continue. Henchard's desire 'to keep the position he had accidentally won' looks back to Elfride's feeling for Knight, '[she] was automatic in the intoxication of the moment',[4] and Eustacia's cry to Clym, 'I dread to think of anything beyond the present' (*Return*, p.197). It also looks forward to Tess's declaration to Angel, 'I am not going to think outside of now' (*Tess*, p.389), and it finds a culmination in Arabella's final assessment of Sue Bridehead after Jude's death, 'She's never found peace since she left his arms, and never will again till she's as he is now!' (*Jude*, p.408). They all plead, Arabella pleading for Sue, that an instance of joy should somehow be held in the safety of a permanent present. Only in Arabella's after-death scenario, however, is this a possibility. 'Perhaps not

[4] Thomas Hardy, *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, 1873, ed. Pamela Dalziel (London: Penguin, 1998), p.254; hereafter cited *PBE*.

for long,' Henchard says, accepting the probable failure of his attempt to manipulate his story. The 'hardy invention', Hardy would have each of us acknowledge, may be desirable, but the structures that seemed to uphold it in *Desperate Remedies* and *Under the Greenwood Tree* were illusory.[5]

But, even as Henchard attempts to instigate his own fiction, 'asking to be judged by what *he makes happen*', Goode argues, he is perplexed by what actually occurs.[6] Feeling the burden of domesticity at the beginning of his story he claims, 'if I were a free man again I'd be worth a thousand pound before I'd done o't', and then, his judgment blurred by alcohol, offers to sell his wife in order to regain that freedom. Almost immediately control slips away from him. Newson, passing by chance, overhears and accepts the proposal and Susan goes with him taking her daughter with her. 'A stolid look of concern filled the husband's face, as if, after all, he had not quite anticipated this ending' (*Mayor*, pp.9, 13), and it is as if Henchard is trying to come to an understanding of how narrative plotting works. It is the resolution of this moment that Hardy, as author, constantly moves towards with Henchard, as protagonist, concerned to keep it hidden – character and narrator playing out Hardy's own tension between progress and stillness.

'Did I tell my name to anybody last night?' is one of Henchard's first thoughts the following morning, a wish for anonymity that becomes a wish for obliteration by the end of the novel. Like Bunyan's protagonist, Henchard's full name is withheld for the first pages of the story; he is 'the man', 'the hay-trusser', and, 'Michael'. Only when the crime is behind him is he named and, importantly for

[5] Poetry was the medium through which Hardy was able to fix, and so recapture, a moment of joy. See: 'Under the Waterfall' (undated) and 'The Phantom Horsewoman' (1913), (*CPTH*, pp. 335, 353).
[6] John Goode, *Thomas Hardy: The Offensive Truth* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), p.82; hereafter cited Goode, *Offensive Truth*. See also: 'Henchard's [...] drive to impose significance upon his life through a dramatic overreaching of the will' (Irving Howe, *Thomas Hardy* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), p.98; hereafter cited Howe).

one so involved in the structure of his own story, he names himself. There is no longer, Hardy suggests, any God-given directive but man alone, taking control and entering into a self-willed and self-mapped journey. 'I, Michael Henchard', Henchard cries, kneeling before the altar of an empty church and, as one whose story has begun with the biblical enormity of a great sin, he swears a vow of abstinence rendered momentous by the violence of its imagery. Then he undertakes a search for his lost family until, learning at a seaport that 'persons answering somewhat to his description had emigrated a little time before', he gives up the attempt and leaves the district. 'Next day he started, journeying southward, and did not pause till he reached the town of Casterbridge, more than a hundred miles off' (*Mayor*, pp.17, 18, 19). Hardy changed this wording three times. It began as 'westward' became 'southward' and then, in 1895, the latter part of the sentence was given as, 'journeying south-westward, and did not pause, except for nights' lodgings, till he reached the town of Casterbridge, in a far distant part of Wessex'.[7] In this final form the original vagueness has been removed and Casterbridge becomes a place that, with a little effort, a good map, and the minimum of discomfort, we could all find – a Celestial City for a less divinely-guided age.

For Henchard though, this is pilgrimage too soon completed. Each of his attempts at reparation has been too partial for an authentic security to be realized. The vow of abstinence is for twenty years only; the search is hampered by 'a certain shyness of revealing his conduct' (*Mayor*, p.18); and even the suggestion of emigration, though true, is imprecise, 'answering somewhat'. These textual incompletions seek continuance and the chapter that follows skips some nineteen years to reveal Susan retracing her original journey to Weydon Priors – the place of

[7] 'Westward': *The Graphic* (serial edition, 1886) and *Harper's Weekly* (US serial edition, 1886); 'southward': English first edition (London: Smith, Elder, 1886); 'south-westward' etc.: Wessex Novels, collected edition (London: Osgood, McIlvaine, 1895).

the 'wife sale'. Finding news of Henchard there, she travels, like a latter day Christiana, in his footsteps to Casterbridge: 'With this they descended out of the fair, and went onward to the village, where they obtained a night's lodging' (*Mayor*, p.24). Susan's journey is given as a second version of Henchard's; the biblical style of the language stressing its impending importance.

When next encountered, Henchard is mayor of Casterbridge and the town's chief corn-factor. But, while progress measured in worldly terms has been achieved it will not be maintained, some things being already amiss for a trading error on Henchard's part has caused unrest in the town. It is now that Susan arrives in Casterbridge, a juxtaposition of events that heralds an anti-progress that ends in Henchard's tragic death. From now on each past act will be brought before him in an unrelenting exorcism of the first sin. Coincidences there are in this story but they are much more than ways of moving the plot forward. They are visitations of past deeds upon the self – the seeds of what we are being carried within us. In this Hardy seems to be remembering Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) that had, some years before, already offered an example of a man pursued by his own sin. Meeting his monster wherever he travels Frankenstein is always unable to bring the life he has created to an end. It is only when he himself dies that the monster gives promise of his own death – his final words anticipating Henchard's Testament: 'He is dead who called me into being; and when I shall be no more, the very remembrance of us both will speedily vanish.'[8] The idea of death as an obliteration is important for both Shelley and Hardy.

Susan brings with her Elizabeth-Jane, not Henchard's daughter, as he will believe, but Newson's. Henchard's child has died in the early days of her relationship

[8] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 1818, ed. Maurice Hindle (London: Penguin, 1992), p.214.

with the sailor – a secret that Susan keeps to herself. After Susan's death, Henchard interrupts the narrative by reading (literally) Susan's secret when he should not have done so – and thus upsets the way in which the story might have unfolded. '[H]ad he obeyed the wise directions outside her letter this pain would have been spared him for long – possibly for ever' (*Mayor*, p.125) and Hardy suggests that events should be read in the order intended or the story becomes disrupted. The one who reads the story truly is Elizabeth-Jane. She absorbs and ponders upon each section of it, content, unlike her stepfather, to withhold final judgment until the ending is reached. It is only by reading the whole story that we can come to a reliable assessment of what it all means and Hardy, through Elizabeth-Jane, offers a secular adaptation of the religious understanding that Cardinal Newman came to in his *Apologia* – the idea that journeys can only ever be fully apprehended when we reach the other side of them. 'To learn to take the universe seriously there is no quicker way than to watch', and 'watch' is what Elizabeth-Jane does – not just this particularized 'watching' over her dying mother – but throughout the pages of the story. 'Elizabeth-Jane, being out of the game [...] could observe from afar all things', and again, 'From the background Elizabeth-Jane watched the scene' (*Mayor*, pp.116, 180, 262,). Each instance is an example of the girl's careful observation and it is this that gives her the right, in the novel's closing paragraphs, to take hold of all that has happened and make it bearable.

And what does happen seems far from bearable, for Henchard eventually faces, as Fanny Robbin did, the type of 'Hopelessness' that should lead to death. '[T]here was nothing to come, nothing to wait for. [...] The thought of it was unendurable', and Henchard, contemplating suicide, takes himself away from Casterbridge to Ten-Hatches Weir. 'The river here was deep and strong' (*Mayor*, pp.

291-292, 292), and Hardy echoes Bunyan's, 'the River was very deep' (*PP*, p.136). But Henchard, unlike Christian, welcomes this place of danger, the pain of life being greater than the fear of death. As there was with Fanny, however, there is an intervention:

> While his eyes were bent on the water beneath there slowly became visible a something floating in the circular pool formed by the wash of centuries [...]. At first it was indistinct, by reason of the shadow from the bank; but it emerged thence, and took shape, which was that of a human body, lying stiff and stark upon the surface of the stream.
>
> In the circular current imparted by the central flow the form was brought forward, till it passed under his eyes; and then he perceived with a sense of horror that it was *himself.*
>
> *Mayor*, pp. 292-293

It seems at first as if the thought of death and the thought's consequences have been allowed to occupy the same moment, coming together in a unity that removes the necessity of action. And indeed, faced with what appears to be the full evidence of what one's own death must look like, Henchard turns away from his intention. Henchard gives the spectacle a supernatural meaning. 'Are miracles still worked?' he asks, while Elizabeth-Jane, brought to the scene to confirm his understanding, sees factually: 'a bundle of old clothes' (*Mayor*, pp.293, 294). Prefacing the type of shared vision with which the story will end, it is Henchard's dogged insistence on significance that leads Elizabeth-Jane to an actual, if more prosaic, understanding – that the effigy is a likeness of Henchard put together as burlesque by certain citizens of Casterbridge and then, ownership having become a liability, thrown into the river. Understood in this way, the 'bundle of old clothes', reminiscent of Carlyle's symbolism in *Sartor Resartus*, becomes a version of Henchard's story so far. Henchard's life was based upon something other than the truth and, having come to grief, he has been judged by the people of Casterbridge and put aside – replaced by

the seemingly more reliable model of his former colleague, but now arch-rival, Donald Farfrae.[9]

Hornback notes, 'As both irony and coincidence grow larger, they make Henchard more important, so that it is not just his own life he contemplates taking, but that of the hero in us all.'[10] It is certainly true that in this passage Henchard is somehow greater than himself. He is 'the hero in us all' – just as the 'circular pool' is another version of 'the great globe itself' (*The Tempest*, IV.1.153) and the 'wash of centuries' all the years mankind has endured since the world's creation.[11] This episode is typical of Hardy in that it mimics the type of scriptural text discussed by Auerbach in *Mimesis*, texts that are 'fraught with "background" and mysterious, containing a second, concealed meaning'.[12] Hardy's own simplicity demands, like Auerbach's biblical example, further interpretation. Henchard, therefore, even as he accepts Elizabeth-Jane's reasoned explanation, is not completely released from his belief that something more interventionist has occurred maintaining, 'And yet it seems that even I am in Somebody's hand!' He is, then, left clasping his perception of divine involvement – but it is a perception that he fails to hold with any surety once the impact of the moment is past. 'But the emotional conviction that he was in Somebody's hand began to die out of Henchard's breast as time slowly removed into distance the event which had given that feeling birth' (*Mayor*, p.295), and Hardy once again defines man's real weakness before the 'becoming of the world'.

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[9] See: 'The forms which stand in closest competition with those undergoing modification and improvement, will naturally suffer most' (Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, 1859, ed. J. W. Burrow (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p.154).

[10] Bert G. Hornback, *The Metaphor of Chance* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1971), p.99; hereafter cited Hornback.

[11] See also: 'as God becomes a less and less possible recourse for [Hardy] his characters increasingly take on the characteristics of what is best about God (the message of his son) to the point of becoming types of Christ themselves' (Lance St John Butler, *Victorian Doubt* (New York and London: Harvester, 1990), p.206).

[12] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 1942-45, translated William Trask (New York: Doubleday, 1953), p.12. See also: 'One divination spawns another' (Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1980), p.37; hereafter cited Kermode, *Genesis*).

But Henchard is not saved from death. Rather he is saved *for* it, dying, like Fanny, shortly afterwards. Hillis Miller asks, 'Is [Hardy's] writing the sign of a sadistic streak in him, a cruelty which takes pleasure in sharing the implacable refusal of the Void to grant people the oblivion they desire?'[13] It is true that Hardy's tragic characters often have to continue their story long after the pain of it has become 'unendurable' but there is for each of them, as there was for Christian, a right and a wrong time to die. Christian was saved from death again and again so that he can die where God, as understood by Bunyan, had intended, his death and apotheosis marking the place where all things are reconciled and understood. While Hardy's twice given 'circular' images, then, express the type of entrapment from which death is the only escape, he is not quite suggesting, as he did with Fanny, that this moment of 'Hopelessness', should be entered into. His model of death, 'lying [...] upon the surface of the stream', is certainly an example of a withdrawal from the world and an absence of suffering, it being Henchard who sees it as 'horror'. Henchard, however, unlike Fanny Robbin, has further to go – a burden of progression he eventually agrees to: 'But my punishment is *not* greater than I can bear!' (*Mayor*, p.307). As critics have noted, Henchard at this stage is as Lear, and his grand acceptance of his fate echoes the final lines of Shakespeare's play that begin: 'The oldest hath borne most' (*King Lear*, V.3.325).

This novel is another version of the story that would have transpired had *Under The Greenwood Tree* not finished when it did. '[T]ell her the truth. She'll forgive ye both' (*Mayor*, p.78), Farfrae had counselled Henchard, duplicating Maybold's advice to Fancy Day. But Henchard, like Fancy, had kept silence and, the

[13] J. Hillis Miller, *Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1970), p.239. On pages 262-263 Miller answers his own question: 'Hardy's recording of the fated course of a life [...] turns numb suffering into the symmetry of art [...] which is objective recording of the way things are.'

story having continued, he has become caught up in a narrative of his own making. He cannot end the story at Ten-Hatches for there are still truths to be discovered and the narrative structure demands that these should be worked out to a conclusion. Henchard must travel to the point where there are no more secrets so that the text, as in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, can be 'read [...] and read [...] again' (*PBE*, p.375), this time with a completion of understanding.[14] Garrett Stewart argues that 'Hardy's drowning scenes, direct or by proxy, [...] offer [...] not the life history in review but its last sodden, shrunken page'.[15] This may be true of Eustacia's death but Henchard's acts differently. The death 'by proxy' is not the last page of his story, instead the gap between seeing himself dead and the actual death gives a time for consideration – a time to read the story truly.

A return to Casterbridge with Elizabeth-Jane offers a time of uneasy peace, Henchard having to be 'content with tentativeness' rather than achieving a secure comfort. Events, however, move on. Elizabeth-Jane is courted by Farfrae, and Newson returns. Recognizing that he must lose Elizabeth-Jane, Henchard leaves Casterbridge, and as Millgate notes, 'the sense of having come full circle [is] stressed by his departure [...] dressed and equipped as in [the] first two chapters'.[16] Henchard returns to Weydon Priors, the place where the entry into journey had begun, and attempts a symbolic reconstruction of the time before the sin had been committed:

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[14] Kermode discussing Henry James's essay, 'The New Novel' (1914), notes James's 'elaborate plea for novels of which the technical disposition is such that they *must* be read twice [...] a way of stimulating the reader to a fuller exercise of his imagination: to make him *read* in a more exalted sense (*not* devour)' (Frank Kermode, *Essays on Fiction: 1971-1982* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), pp. 95-96). See also Chapter Three of this thesis, p. 120.

[15] Garrett Stewart, *Death Sentences* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1984), p.124; hereafter cited Stewart.

[16] Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist* (London: Bodley Head, 1971), p.226; hereafter cited Millgate, *CN*. See also Hornback, pp.96-97.

> Yes, we came up that way [...]. She was carrying the baby, and I was reading a ballet-sheet. Then we crossed about here [...]. Then we saw the tent – that must have stood more this way.
>
> *Mayor*, pp.312-313

The intention here is honourable but, like Springrove's in *Desperate Remedies*, only partially correct. However, while Henchard, as Hardy points out, is mistaken in the spot he chooses for the furmity tent, the reader should beware of seeing nothing but an undermined value in the shifted scene. The book sees that Henchard's superstitious beliefs are vulnerable and easily disproved but it ultimately respects them. Unaware of error Henchard's re-creation moves him into the memory of that first sin, 'Then I drank, and committed my crime', and to travel through it and past it to where 'his attempts to replace ambition by love had been as fully foiled as his ambition itself'. This truthful rereading of the story brings a great understanding: 'that out of all this wronging of social law came that flower of Nature, Elizabeth' (*Mayor*, p.313).

Such an insight, at once proof of the illogical and unkind structures Nature can impose on a life and its attendant ability to aid and enrich, forms a paradox that holds Henchard in thrall:

> Out of this it happened that the centrifugal tendency imparted by weariness of the world was counteracted by the centripetal influence of his love for his step-daughter [...]. [H]is path [...] became part of a circle, of which Casterbridge formed the centre. In ascending any particular hill, he ascertained the bearings as nearly as he could [...] and settled in his mind the exact direction in which Casterbridge and Elizabeth-Jane lay.
>
> *Mayor*, p.313

This thoughtful circling, from which beams out the same wish for connection with the beloved as experienced by the dying Mrs Yeobright, adds a dignity and significance to Henchard's altered state. It is one of few places in the story where there is a pause in the narrative's rush towards closure and from it there arises a kind

of learning, dimly understood by Henchard perhaps, but part now of what remains of his life. In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre, doubtless remembering Christian's cry at the beginning of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, suggests: 'I can only answer the question "What am I to do?" if I can answer the prior question "Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?" ', and this is where Henchard discovers that truth.[17] When the 'circular current' of Ten-Hatches Weir had brought his effigy towards him, it had been a symbolic representation of his own life as central to the story. Now there is another circling, but one where Henchard becomes part of Elizabeth-Jane's story as well as the chief protagonist of his own – a difficult and powerful concept that the narrative structure attempts to reproduce by juxtaposing his final days with her move into a calm and secure future. So important is this instance of adjustment that it seems that the effigy, in allowing Henchard to continue a little longer, did mean perhaps that he was in 'Somebody's hand', even if it was only Hardy's as author. As Henchard finally gives himself up to death, stripped bare of all that has mattered to him, Hardy has retold the story of *Everyman*, the 'hero in us all', that began with the promise of such an ending.[18] All that remains at the end for Henchard is the morality play's Good-Dedes reduced to one small example and articulated by the town simpleton, Abel Whittle, 'You see, he was kind-like to mother when she wer here below' (*Mayor*, p.320). Whittle repeats this sentence three times so that, its religious / magic implications made manifest, it becomes the place where Henchard's past moves into redemption.

The death itself, as described by Whittle, is a sad and gentle affair, 'and he got weaker; and to-day he died' (*Mayor*, p.321), a peaceful surrender to death rather

[17] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1981), p.201.
[18] See: 'The hint of a "morality" structure implicit in the sequence of Henchard's rise and fall is further stressed in the full title of the novel' (Millgate, *CN*, p.232). In 1886 (London: Smith, Elder) Hardy's title was: '*The Mayor of Casterbridge: The Life and Death of a Man of Character*'.

than an act of self-inflicted violence. The novel does not end here, however. The small celebration of redemption that the death contains is important but it is still only an episode in the story's rush towards Henchard's own self-imposed point of closure – the moment when, *after* death, he makes a last attempt to regain control of his story:

> 'MICHAEL HENCHARD'S WILL
>
> 'That Elizabeth-Jane Farfrae be not told of my death, or made to grieve on account of me.
> '& that I be not bury'd in consecrated ground.
> '& that no sexton be asked to toll the bell.
> '& that nobody is wished to see my dead body.
> '& that no murners walk behind me at my funeral.
> '& that no flours be planted on my grave.
> '& that no man remember me.
> 'To this I put my name.
>
> 'MICHAEL HENCHARD.'
>
> *Mayor*, p.321

This long list of restrictions, each joined by the largeness of the ampersand, tries to take the place now of the episodic life that has just ended – a life where each moment was pursued by another. And Henchard demands in death the same dissociation from significance granted to his effigy when it was eventually discovered: 'But as little as possible was said of the matter, and the figures were privately destroyed' (*Mayor*, p.294). Refusing Christianity's offer of a happiness after death that had long been denied before it, Henchard asks for non-continuance — the block capitals of his name and the final full stop standing between the life and any possibility of Paradise.

The capitalized name at the end of Henchard's testament may remind the reader of that other moment of realized death when Elfride Swancourt's name was discovered on her coffin-plate. The ending of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, however, is in more perfect hands than those troubled pilgrims, Smith and Knight, for, with Henchard dead, the novel moves from tragedy to the mitigated tenor of a life that

finds itself in, 'a latitude of calm weather' (*Mayor*, p.322). What Hardy gives this story, in the place where Heaven would be in a Christian narrative, is Elizabeth-Jane's lesson in life-management, an example of Matthew Arnold's: 'Make us, not fly to dreams, but moderate desire':[19]

> As the lively and sparkling emotions of her early married life cohered into an equable serenity, the finer movement of her nature found scope in discovering to the narrow-lived ones around her the secret [...] of making limited opportunities endurable; which she deemed to consist in the cunning enlargement by a species of microscopic treatment, even to the magnitude of positive pleasure, those minute forms of satisfaction [...]; which, thus handled, have much of the same inspiriting effect upon life as wider interests cursorily embraced.
>
> *Mayor*, p.322

As she travels into her future content with the lesser thing there is much of Dorothea Brooke in Elizabeth-Jane. But, while George Eliot makes some attempt to suggest through her protagonist that such a life though 'unhistoric' may not be small, Hardy insists that it is. This is his answer to George Eliot's Positivism and instead of 'fine issues [...] not widely visible' (*M*, p.838) he will only offer a type of mental gymnastics as a way of achieving 'endurable'. The small, however, is large enough for Hardy. There will be, he feels, no great moment of apotheosis just ordinary human lives that manage, in the face of all difficulty, to find a way through to 'serenity'. Henchard has been a pilgrim overwhelmed by his journey, but always, bravely in the face of its enormity, greater than it. He has never, though, really understood it. Elizabeth-Jane's own life, however, has been informed by her stepfather's transgressions and without Henchard there would be no Elizabeth-Jane. Linked to Henchard not through blood but through experience, she provides the model of a possible future by sharing her understanding of what has happened and

[19] Matthew Arnold, 'Empedocles on Etna' (1849-52), *PMA*, p.147, I.2.386.

translating his earlier 'unendurable' into her own 'endurable', a pilgrimage that by avoiding rapture also avoids 'Hopelessness'. As in the earlier episode at Ten-Hatches Weir, Elizabeth-Jane takes the tragic largeness of Henchard's story and brings it to a tolerable ordinariness.

And this is the place where Henchard finally finds peace. Although Elizabeth-Jane's response to the will has been well defined: 'But there's no altering – so it must be', Hardy immediately continues with the name of his protagonist: 'What Henchard had written'. After this last naming, however, Henchard is allowed to become less and less, 'the man' and 'him', until he is consumed into the generality of mankind as 'others' (*Mayor*, pp.321, 322). He is now unnamed as he was at the beginning of the story. Anonymity, generality, passing away – these are Henchard's rewards and his return to Eden.

6.2 *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891)

The structure Hardy gives to *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is insistently recollective of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. There are the journeys that his protagonist, Tess Durbeyfield, undertakes, often explicitly referred to as pilgrimages, and there is the almost allegorical nature of the landscape itself. Dorothy Van Ghent writing on *The Pilgrim's Progress* refers to this last as 'the scene [...] not only outside the travelers, but within them also, as their personal spiritual topography'.[20] But Hardy is evoking that pilgrimage ideal in order to confound it, intending to show that the set of moral expectations it encloses cannot, in Tess's case, be realized. 'To her and her like, birth itself was an ordeal of degrading personal compulsion, whose

[20] Dorothy Van Ghent, *The English Novel: Form and Function* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), p.25. See also Howe, p.113; Millgate, *CN*, pp. 272-274; and Tim Dolin in *Tess*, Ch. XVI, fn.3, p.421.

gratuitousness nothing in the result seemed to justify, and at best could only palliate.' Instead of celebrating the idea of pilgrimage Hardy stresses, as his protagonist suffers, rallies, and suffers again, the problems and the tragedy that such a theology brings to a life unable to uphold it. 'She – and how many more – might have ironically said to God with Saint Augustine, "Thou hast counselled a better course than Thou hast permitted" ' (*Tess*, pp. 357, 98).

What made *The Mayor of Casterbridge* different was, as Goode suggests, 'its intense sequential drive'(Goode, *Offensive Truth*, p.77). *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* lacks this. Instead, its protagonist seems to be seeking a place of stillness where no more journeying will be necessary. Never particularly interested in the forward movement of her story, Tess shows instead an intuitive preconception of the type of tragedy that awaits her should any form of progress be attempted. Possible futures that do intrude upon her consciousness are always prophetically menacing as when, for example, she visualizes Alec D'Urberville as 'a grimacing personage', and when she considers the date of her own death that 'lay sly and unseen among all the other days of the year'. As unhappy experiences are lived through they come to dominate and threaten a possible future so that she sees not progress but repetition. '[N]umbers of to-morrows just all in a line [...] very fierce and cruel and as if they said, "I'm coming! Beware o' me!" '(*Tess*, pp.32, 98, 124), and Tess's perception is a fictional representation of Hardy's own: 'That a figure stands in our van with arm uplifted, to knock us back from any pleasant prospect we indulge in as probable.'[21] Once Tess falls in love with Angel Clare, she understands more fully the rewards of an eternal stillness and her thoughts echo John Keats's appreciation of motionless tranquillity:

[21] *The Personal Notebooks of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Richard H. Taylor (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1978), pp. 6-7.

'For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!'[22] 'That it would always be summer and autumn, and you always courting me, and always thinking as much of me', she cries, her plea an attempt to enclose the secret that, when told, will destroy her relationship with Angel and her life. 'Tess's desire seemed to be for a perpetual betrothal in which everything should remain as it was then' (*Tess*, pp.202, 200), and Hardy's heroine attempts to hold her happiness with Angel away from development, away from time itself. The story is an elaborated, and tragic, retelling of *Under The Greenwood Tree* with Fancy's flirtation with Maybold replaced by the more serious matter of Tess's seduction by Alec D'Urberville and her subsequent pregnancy. When she meets Angel the baby has died and Alec, like Maybold, having disappeared from the scene, concealment is possible. For a happy conclusion, then, the story needs to end as Fancy's did at the point of marriage, the secret forever untold.

For Hardy, a human life can be 'fragile and delicate' (*PBE*, p.376) and to structure it around something as demanding and potentially dangerous as a Progress is a mistake. Better, he feels, just to 'be' – 'to remain [...] in the same spot' (*Life*, p.20). Tess's home in Marlott, then, 'an engirdled and secluded region' (*Tess*, p.12), is his metaphor for such a 'spot' – for lives that have, so far, been lived away from journey, away from story. A reluctant pilgrim, Tess enters into story and she travels to Trantridge and Alec, to Talbothays and Angel, to Flintcomb-Ash and from there to the home of Angel's parents and back. She finally travels to Kingsbere – the home of her ancestors, and then to Sandbourne and to Stonehenge and death. All of these

[22] John Keats, 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' (1819), *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. Miriam Allott (London: Longman, 1970), p. 532.

journeys, save the final one, radiate from Marlott, and, as each venture comes to grief, it is, as long as possible, followed by a return. [23]

Tess is, however, more than a passive, tragic figure to whom things simply happen. 'Hardy shows her [...] weighing up alternatives, seeing the harshness of her present circumstances and choosing to go on in them', Ralph Pite argues, and there is a gradual growing away from Marlott for Tess that prefaces a final division. 'Yet it was in that vale that her sorrow had taken shape, and she did not love it as formerly', the text notes as Tess passes near to Marlott on one journey and, although on her final homecoming she feels the family cottage to be 'Part of her body and life' (*Tess*, pp.297, 345), it is a painful sensibility based on the broken and damaged oddities of the house's neglected structure. It is this to some extent that she breaks free from until, as Pite notes, 'lacking a home base, she becomes self-reliant' – the idea being that a move away from the place of safety is necessary for growth.[24] Any beneficence, however, is limited. Tess's final leave-taking is caused by the family's eviction and is part of the annual movement of agricultural workers common at the time. '[Hardy] is known to have held that these modern migrations are fatal to local traditions' (*Life*, p.214), the *Life* insists and in *Tess* he connects it to a life being destroyed and the flux of movement to Tess's own muddle with who she is.[25] It seems, in this scene, as if the whole countryside is on the move – a huge upheaval that ends with everybody reinstated but Tess. The symbolically imaged 'body and life' then, is harshly and finally disrupted in a gesture that facilitates and prefigures Tess's own death as the ability to make a safe return, as tentatively explored in

[23] See Hardy's map of Tess's country represented in Harper's in 1925 (Martin-Seymour Smith, *Hardy* (London and Melbourne: Bloomsbury, 1994), between pp.278-279). For a discussion of the shape Hardy gives to Tess's journeys see, J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982), p.134-135.

[24] Ralph Pite, *Hardy's Geography* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p.16.

[25] See also pp. 176-183 in 'The Dorsetshire Labourer', 1883, in *Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings: Prefaces: Literary Opinions: Reminiscences*, ed. Harold Orel (London and Melbourne: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 168-191.

Desperate Remedies, is taken from her for good. As Kermode points out, 'There are no circles in reality, and no novels'.[26]

The progression in Christian's journey is evidenced through its linear structure. Forward movement follows each setback and, even up to the death and apotheosis, there is always the one journey. As Christian constantly retells the journey so far to his fellow travellers each incident becomes a connective gauge in the distance travelled and individual failure and misdirection an important part of the Progress. In contrast, Tess's journeys are many and her death a dreadful finality, symbolically separated, both geographically and physically, from every other part of the story. The book does seem to offer large progressive structures for her to travel through. She undergoes great changes in both place and lifestyle, but it actually shows her going through the same thing over and over again. The use of biblical and literary allusion is, as Marlene Springer notes, one way in which Hardy 'cryptically warn[s] the reader that, in spite of appearances, location makes no difference'.[27] Each change in locality that Tess makes is paralleled by a change in identity as she becomes, successively, maiden, mother, wife, and mistress. Such alterations are damaging rather than useful – not modulations but mutations. 'Verily another girl than the one she had been at home', the text suggests as the pregnant, unmarried Tess returns to Marlott, a perception that expresses disconnection rather than connection. And again, as Tess is forced to affirm after her marriage and confession to Angel, 'It is not me, but another woman like me that he loved, he says.' Angel's inability to recognize the woman he loves in the fallen Tess is mirrored in simpler situations throughout the story. There is, for example, Mrs Durbeyfield's surprise when Tess returns from Trantridge and Talbothays, Tess's fellow-worker's wonder at the

[26] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, 1966 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.149.
[27] Marlene Springer, *Hardy's Use of Allusion* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1983), p.126.

disguise adopted on the way to Flintcomb-Ash, and Angel's bewilderment when she appears richly dressed at Alec's lodgings in Sandbourne. Even the farmer who half betrays her during her day out with Angel uses the language of displacement: 'I thought she was another woman, forty miles from here' (*Tess*, pp.75, 229, 208). Tess's precious sense of selfhood is constantly and dangerously divided between another's illusions and her own reality.

Like Elfride Swancourt before her, Tess does possess a chameleon-like quality that confuses the course of her story. When she leaves home for the first time to seek a future with her newly discovered 'relations' in Trantridge, Hardy sets a scene that, in alluding to Victorian pastoral painting, offers an image of Tess that the reader might actually prefer:

> So the girls and their mother all walked together, a child on each side of Tess, holding her hand, and looking at her meditatively from time to time, as at one who was about to do great things; her mother just behind; the group forming a picture of honest beauty flanked by innocence, and backed by simple-souled vanity.
>
> *Tess*, p.51

Isolated from the story this can be read as the first moment of an idealized journey – the only aspect of a fallen creation being represented by the mother's 'simple-souled vanity' – a phrase that modifies fault into harmlessness. But, as the reader is aware, this is no true idyll, for the coming journey is already compromised by an earlier visit to Trantridge that had ended in the discomfort of highly charged and unsolicited sexual innuendo. The largeness Hardy gives to the grouping is far from anything Tess herself has wanted but she is forced, through a very tender manipulation, 'holding her hand, and looking at her', to become an heroic figure. Just as Alec will see a sensuous woman and Angel a symbol of purity she becomes, to her impecunious family, the means by which they may be released from poverty. Hardy

presents, then, an image given over, not to his heroine's truth, but to what others are too willing to see as truth and it is not Tess who is sent out upon the journey but, as she will say of herself much later, 'one in my image' (*Tess*, p.214). Hardy's intention here, however, is not wholly ironic. Tess is a valiant if unwilling pilgrim and the heroic start to this journey functions as a phenomenon that isolates the start of each other journey from its more subdued return. 'Her journey back was rather a meander than a march', for example, as Tess returns from her wasted visit to Angel's parents and then, exchanging the hope of progress for a spiritual deadness: 'It had no sprightliness, no purpose; only a tendency' (*Tess*, p.302).[28] It is only in the final chapters of the novel, when Alec is dead and Angel changed by illness and misfortune, that Tess, freed from all external pressures, will undertake a journey that, in lacking purpose, will not suffer the contrast of disappointment.

While Bunyan is able to portray Christian as one given both advice and interpretation that he may 'distinguish the right from the wrong' (*PP*, p.27), Hardy shows how Tess is offered no help except that provided by her own 'fancies and prefigurative superstitions', muted indicators that can only ever be partially understood. While Henchard's superstitious beliefs are in some measure helpful, Tess's are less so. 'Why didn't you tell me there was danger?', she demands of her mother on her unhappy return from Trantridge, and then, in an acknowledgement of how literature can help us make sense of our lives, she continues, 'Ladies know what to guard against, because they read novels that tell them of these tricks' (*Tess*, pp.44, 82). Hardy, knowing how his story would be criticized, is saying that novels are

[28] Tony Tanner notes this as 'one of the strangest phenomena of existence – motion without volition' (Tony Tanner, '"Colour and Movement" in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*', 1968, in *Hardy: The Tragic Novels*, ed. R. P. Draper (London: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 182-208 (p.198); hereafter cited Tanner). This paradox is expressed again by Hardy in verse: 'Yet is it that, though whiling / The time somehow / In walking, talking, smiling, / I live not now' ('The Dead Man Walking' (1896), *CPTH*, p.217).

valuable because they are explicit and explicit is a way of being moral. 'I wished to tell the truth, for truth always conveys its own moral to those who are able to receive it', Anne Brontë wrote in the preface to the second edition of her own controversial novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.[29] But Tess is not 'able'. Even the texts written on the landscape, unavoidable and completely understandable, fail to help. 'Crushing! killing!', she feels and in order to continue she must brush aside their effects: 'Pooh – I don't believe any of it!' (*Tess*, pp.80,81).

Hardy offers, as a coded warning of impending danger, variations on the colour red – its employment being particularly intense at critical points in Tess's life.[30] Once noted, this imagery can be followed through the book as it plots an alternative route-map to Christian's 'straight and narrow' (*PP*, p.27) way. Meaning, though, is reserved for the reader only, who, like the 'ladies', is able to interpret such things and can understand the dangerous path that Tess is treading. Tess, in contrast, feels only an inexplicable unease. 'I would rather stay here [...]. I don't quite know why', she tells her mother, inadequately expressing her unwillingness to seek a future away from Marlott, and, persuaded into journey she travels the type of inefficiently signposted highway suggested by Carlyle in *The Life of John Sterling*. At the end of the story, then, as Hardy describes 'the tower and gables of the ancient hospice, where to this day the pilgrim may receive his dole of bread and ale', he is indicating how the ideal of Christian pilgrimage has failed to benefit his protagonist who has just suffered death by hanging in a very different place. '[A] large red-brick building', and 'red' emphatically confirms and completes Tess's journey. It is at this point that the reader can look back and comprehend the whole from Tess's first appearance at the May-Day club-walking – differentiated from the other white-clad

[29] Anne Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, 1848, ed. Herbert Rosengarten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.3.
[30] See Tanner, pp.184 -192.

girls and women by the red ribbon she wears in her hair – to this moment that, in direct contrast to the Christian ideal of apotheosis, offers only silence. Tess has progressed, 'from simple girl to complex woman' (*Tess*, pp. 46, 397, 99), but it is a progression that the death cannot celebrate. Dying as she does, separated from reader and protagonist alike, all access to the conduct of her passing is denied; there is no retold moment as there was for Henchard or any recovery of the body as there was for Eustacia. For Tess there is only the punctuated closure of the black flag and after that, as Angel's agnosticism would insist, nothing.

But there are, perhaps, other ways into continuation and redemption. Millgate notes the likeness between the names of Tess's two lovers and suggests that Hardy may be 'deliberately dramatizing the two sides of [a] fatally divided personality'.[31] Alec and Angel even try on each other's personalities for a time. There is Alec's short-lived conversion and, after his break with Tess, Angel's suggestion to the milkmaid, Izz Huett, that she should accompany him to Brazil. Such a division can easily be applied to Tess herself. Alec and Angel are certainly the recipients, and, by extension, the expression of the two sides of her character; they personify the sensuous and the spiritual, each a road travelled down by Tess, each ending in grief and failure. The situation owes something to Jane Eyre's relationship with Rochester and Rivers where the former's warmth has, in the case of Alec, tumbled over into licentiousness. Jane, however, weighs up her situation and chooses wisely; Tess enters into both of hers and the result is tragedy.

Imitative of the distanced pairing of Eustacia Vye's lovers, the geography of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* keeps Alec and Angel apart. When Clym and Wildeve

[31] Michael Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: A Biography* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p.295; hereafter cited Millgate, *THB*.

meet Eustacia dies, a metaphor, perhaps, for what can happen when opposing forces in our nature come together. When Angel discovers Tess at Sandbourne her two worlds threaten to collide and she divides them completely by murdering Alec thus choosing, finally and irrevocably, one path rather than the other. 'It came to me as an enlightenment', she explains to Angel, a sort of terrible epiphany. In 1892 Hardy rewrote this as 'a shining light', a change that recalls both the light pointed out to Christian at the start of his journey and the 'shining light' (*Tess*, pp.385, 309) that Alec uses to describe his conversion. Both models are valid for Tess. Combined they form a metaphor for the paradox that her life now becomes, for she has initiated a future that begins with a murder and ends with an execution and yet contains within these limits a form of perfection:

> They then walked on under the trees, Tess turning her head every now and then to look at him. Worn and unhandsome as he had become, it was plain that she did not discern the least fault in his appearance.
>
> *Tess*, p.386

The structure of this tableau, its lovers again reminiscent of Jane Eyre and the scarred and blinded Rochester, is given as a powerful reminder of the presumptions that burdened the passage that led into Tess's first journey. At that point, Tess, regarded by her siblings as she regards Angel now, was idealized into 'one who was about to do great things'. Such largeness has become 'Worn and unhandsome'. There is an accessible form of perfection, Hardy is saying, but, like the final scene of *Paradise Lost* that it imitates, it is a fallen perfection, recognizable only by those who have undergone great suffering. The journeying it leads to, however, though wandering and unformed, is genuinely redemptive. 'Their every idea was temporary and unforefending, like the plans of two children' (*Tess*, p.386), Hardy's phrasing another reminder of Milton as Adam and Eve, 'with wand'ring steps and slow' (*PL*,

XII. 648,) take mankind's first pilgrimage steps towards salvation. But, while Milton gives his protagonists both choice and guidance, Tess and Angel have neither – this being the only type of journey, Hardy feels, that, in lacking both plan and purpose, having 'only a tendency', cannot come to failure.

The reader, having followed Tess on each journey through Wessex, has seen Angel retracing her footsteps. From his parents' house at Emminster to Flintcomb-Ash, from there to Marlott, from Marlott to the house of Joan Durbeyfield, and hence to Sandbourne he follows her – his one journey uniting and giving form to so many of her own fractured wanderings. Tess's journey to Sandbourne is the only one not described by Hardy and neither does he describe Angel's, an omission that allows the last one, the redemptive one from Sandbourne to Stonehenge, the distinction of a separation from all that has gone before. 'To escape the past [...] was to annihilate it' (*Tess*, p.99), Tess had wished, and the narrative gap between Kingsbere and Sandbourne is Hardy's metaphor for the way such a thing may be achieved. To start a life again is not a real possibility but narrative can help by providing structures that posit a basis for a new spiritual beginning. In this way Tess reaches, like Ruth Hilton before her but by a very different route, a reclamation of her lost state of purity. Her absolution from sin, however, has less to do with sorrow than with a complete removal of all that is base in her life with the murder of Alec. 'When a married woman who has a lover kills her husband [...] she wishes to kill the situation' (*Life*, p.231). When Hardy noted this in his journal during the writing of *Tess* he was thinking, not of his heroine, but of Clytaemnestra. Its emphasis, however, is directly relevant and Tess reclaims an older theology than Christianity with this act of cleansing violence. 'Was once lost always lost really true of chastity?' (*Tess*, p.99), Tess had wondered and those few happy days are Hardy's answer.

This episode of happiness contains the ghostly presence of the story that could have been. As Millgate notes, Hardy was 'haunted by the sheer irrevocability of moments of decision and choice' (Millgate, *THB*, p.295), and when Angel fails to dance with Tess at the beginning of the book a story is entered into that differs substantially from the simple romance that had for a moment seemed possible. Now Hardy allows Tess access to that moment of missed connection, not through a studied imitative return as in *Desperate Remedies*, but through a narrative deviation from the main path of the novel – it being one of Bunyan's byways that contains the resolution to the story's problems. The time spent with Angel at Bramshurst Manor becomes, then, like the short life of Tess's own baby, 'to whom the cottage interior was the universe, [...] new-born babyhood human existence' (*Tess*, p.96). It forms a completion, a fulfilment that deflects the story's inevitability, for a short time at least, away from death to life. Shriven, forgiven and loved, Tess is wholly happy, happier than Elfride with Lord Luxellian for Angel is the only man that she has loved, and happier than Henchard with Elizabeth-Jane because she finds herself able to manage and control the stillness with which she finds herself blessed. The present having, as Ricoeur notes, 'no extension', Tess puts herself inside its 'indivisible instant'.[32] 'I am not going to think outside of now' she explains, and then, 'What must come will come', showing a clear understanding that all things, even perfect happiness, must end. Just as Tess's idyll, then, completes the story that should have happened it also completes the one that did. It is too large, too apotheotic, for the plot to travel any further. This is why Tess dies and why we do not see her die. It is also why there is no spoken word in the last chapter. 'I have had enough' (*Tess*, pp.389,

[32] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1983, translated Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, 3 vols (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), I, p.13.

390, 396), Tess tells us and with that we must be content. It is sufficient, Hardy is saying, to achieve redemption and apotheosis, even at the cost of eternity.

Physically capable of continuing – walking 'across country' away from Bramshurst 'she showed her old agility in the performance' – it is the sheer mental effort of trying that gets the better of Tess in the end and, like Henchard, like Eustacia, she is happy that her life should come to a close. The fact that she tries to bring a further amelioration to the novel's closing pages through the proposed marriage of Angel and 'Liza-Lu, 'She has all the best of me without the bad of me', is her attempt to find another way forward – to disregard death's necessity, both in this world with 'Liza-Lu becoming a second Tess, and in the next, 'I could share you with her willingly when we are spirits!' (*Tess*, pp.392, 394). It is an attempt to look beyond the tragic inevitability that lies ahead and a way to reclaim the story that might have been. The option of a heavenly reunion is denied, or rather unconfirmed, by an uncompromisingly agnostic Angel but the final lines of the story, linked even more strongly to *Paradise Lost* than Tess's journey with Angel to Bramshurst, do suggest that he and 'Liza-Lu may be moving into the type of pilgrimage that Tess had found to be impossible. Like the ending of *The Return of the Native*, then, there is the suggestion that the story is about to begin again.

There is, within Tess's story, a narrative of redemption for Angel. When he returns from Brazil he is far less 'angelic', more human, and he has lost that distancing self-righteousness. 'O, it is not Angel [...] the Angel who went away!' his mother cries shocked by his altered state, her words ironically echoing his own earlier rejection of Tess. But something more than illness and hardship has changed Angel. Influenced by the advice of a worldlier travelling companion he has come to

view Tess and her history quite differently. 'Despite her not inviolate past, what still abode in such a woman [...] outvalued the freshness of her fellows' (*Tess*, pp.368, 342) and it is this that leads him back to Tess, the reparation of past injustice, and the time of happy fulfilment at Bramshurst Manor. It also leads him to 'Liza-Lu.

At first, we seem to have met this type of continuance before. Baruch and Madge, for example, in *Clara Hopgood*, and Elizabeth-Jane and Farfrae in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, one half of each couple the beloved of the one who has died and the story thus carried into an ever expanding future. 'As soon as they had strength they arose, joined hands again, and went on' (Tess, p.398), but Hardy's ending is hardly pervasive enough to travel much further than its own full stop. Separated as it is into those three bleak phrases, it is drained of the very 'strength' that the protagonists purport to discover. For Angel and 'Liza-Lu there is no industrious indication of what needs to be done as there was with Catherine Elsmere, for example, no philosophy offering a settled contentment as there was with Elizabeth-Jane Farfrae, and no child as there was for Madge Cohen. There is only 'and went on' as a desolate necessity, there being no place to return to. But they do 'go on'. However weakly proposed, this is a form of continuance. It is not grand pilgrimage perhaps but it is sufficient to move the story away from Tess's tragedy. Instead of death offering an afterlife or even a strong memory, Tess, without a future, is replaced and left behind just as Henchard was left behind. Henchard's reward was to die and the two novels share the rather bleak comfort that death's blessings are large enough to counter life's hopes for prosperity and eternity. In this Hardy contrasts with Gissing who rather mourns his loss, with Hale White who attempts to disregard it, and with Mrs Ward who actively promotes it. Both Tess and Henchard want to stop; both have their 'moment' and then vanish. This is what Hardy

celebrates in this novel. 'To be, or not to be' (*Hamlet*, III.1.56) the poet had asked and Hardy emphatically answers 'not to be'.

6.3 *Jude the Obscure* (1895)

Jude the Obscure was Hardy's final novel. At its conclusion, Jude Fawley, the story's eponymous hero, dies – alone, neglected, and with his great dream of a university education unfulfilled. The coincidence of Jude's death and Hardy's own departure from fiction promotes a general feeling on the temper and importance of this ending. '[T]he final impact of the book is shattering' (Howe, p.146). 'Hardy closes the book [...] on a scene of despair, bitterness and death, of mankind still languishing in the wilderness' (Millgate, *CN*, pp.334-335). '[*Jude the Obscure*] is the end of the road for Hardy as a novelist, the accidental human hybrid at the extreme edge of the Wessex map, with nowhere to go.'[33] Critics such as these agree that Jude's death is important and they try to read its large intentions. 'Here, in its first stirrings, is the grey poetry of modern loneliness' (Howe, p.146). '[I]n that ending, Hardy seems to be saying to the 1890s, there is nothing that can simply go on deteriorating, decadently metamorphosing even after everything is really over. This is the worst' (Davis, p.545).

Jude the Obscure, then, with its disturbing ending, forms an appropriate study with which to complete my thesis. Its organization and imagery are often based on events from *The Pilgrim's Progress*; Jude's goal of Christminster, for example, is portrayed as another Celestial City, 'The heavenly Jerusalem' and 'a city of light' wherein dwell 'mentally shining ones' (*Jude*, pp. 20, 25, 22). The book, however, continually responds to the idea that a confident pilgrimage structure is no longer

[33] Philip Davis, *The Victorians, The Oxford English Literary History, Vol.8, 1830-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.545; hereafter cited Davis.

possible. At one point in the story, Sue Bridehead, brought close to madness and despair through the death of her children, asks, 'What ought to be done?', her question a reminder of the way in which Bunyan's pilgrimage story began. The answer given now, however, denies the usefulness of action. 'Nothing can be done', Jude replies. 'Things are as they are, and will be brought to their destined issue' (*Jude*, p.339). The point here for Sue and Jude is that there is no 'destined issue' for all of their children are dead. Jude, however, looks to find a form of comfort as, taking his words from *Agamemnon*, he moves away from Christianized ideas of progress and articulates man's impotence to effect a change when the future is only ever the expression of something already realized.

In this novel Hardy struggles, as he always did, within the gap between what had been once felt as religious certitude, where 'What ought to be done?' could be productively answered, and a life seemingly governed by an indifferent fate. 'I am in a chaos of principles – groping in the dark – acting by instinct and not after example', Jude will cry expressing the awful disappointment of one whose journey has been far from clearly directed. 'Where is this beautiful city?', the young Jude had asked his aunt with all the ardour and expectant eagerness of Bunyan's Christian. Her rely, however, is dismissive. 'We've never had anything to do with folk in Christminster, nor folk in Christminster with we' (*Jude*, pp.327, 18), she insists, a double distancing that is a preparation for the failure of expectation that lies ahead. Each protagonist works within this framework. Richard Phillotson, Jude's forerunner in the quest for a university education, travels to Christminster but gives in too easily; Arabella Donn, the woman who traps Jude into an early marriage, emigrates to Australia in search of the type of happiness she cannot find with Jude but returns in disappointment; and Sue, who loves Jude and marries Phillotson, struggles

hopelessly to arrange and rearrange her story. As Penelope Vigar points out, 'Motifs of wandering and searching dominate the tale.'[34] The point of a fixed place of happiness, however, is never reached.

Jude, distressed by life's events, has looked to his aunt for guidance. The disconnection he finds in her reply only confirms his feeling that his existence is 'an undemanded one'. '[U]ndemanded', combining the meanings of 'not wanted by others' and 'unasked for by self', isolates that self into a self-conscious recognition of what it means to be 'I':

> Growing up brought responsibilities, he found. Events did not rhyme quite as he had thought. [...] 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 scorched it.
>
> *Jude*, p.18

It is the whirling and beating recently administered by his erstwhile employer, that Jude translates into such a meditation – the original event becoming larger than itself as the individual interpretation, 'he found', becomes the universal experience, 'As you got older'. The child, however, struggles to describe the nature of the life that must be travelled through and sensation overwhelms him, 'a sort of shuddering', 'something glaring'. 'If he could only prevent himself growing up!' is the remedy Jude puts forward.[35] The narrative, however, in imitation of life, continues, 'Then, like the natural boy, he forgot his despondency, and sprang up' (*Jude*, p.18), and Hardy insists that it is our nature, 'the natural boy', to move into being, to spring up. It will be Little Time, the unnatural boy, who will complete his father's earlier desire,

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[34] Penelope Vigar, *The Novels of Thomas Hardy: Illusion and Reality* (London: Athlone Press, 1974), p.192.

[35] This type of Schopenhauerian thought runs in the family, it being Jude's Aunt Drusilla who first introduces the ideas to Jude. See *Jude*, p. 13.

when he refuses to enter any further into life's 'becoming' by killing his siblings and then committing suicide.

Hardy's phrase, 'did not rhyme', being immediately qualified by 'quite', suggests that this novel will follow the paths of other, more affirmative stories, just so far before it must suffer a revision. There is the implication that in a differently realized world a path could have been followed where things do 'rhyme quite'. For Jude, however, there will only be determination concluded within sight of achievement. 'Only a wall divided him from those happy young contemporaries of his with whom he shared a common mental life', Hardy stresses as Jude settles into life in Christminster. He then concludes, 'but what a wall!' (*Jude*, p.86), signifying that narratives that do not 'rhyme quite' are as tragically different as ones that do not rhyme at all. Better to remain at the 'circumference', on Rainbarrow, in Marlott, or, as in Jude's case, to stay 'obscure'. Any move away from the place of safety into centrality is hazardous and life's coming events too vague and inexplicitly marked to be sufficiently guarded against.

Charmed by thoughts of Christminster, Jude sees himself as one on pilgrimage and in his beginnings the old structures of Bunyan's allegory are still in place. Poverty and the particular difficulties of a provincial education are obstacles he struggles to overcome and subsequent to each setback, even his untimely marriage to Arabella, there is a rally that in another story would seem helpful. For Jude, however, such recoveries are only temporary and the effort behind them futile. Although he visualizes Christminster in Bunyan's terms these symbolic gestures are, for Hardy, beautiful and dangerous distractions. Instead of leading anywhere they show how mankind, can be enticed away from the peace of non-story into the conflict of a journey whose goals can never be achieved. Jude then, leaves

Marygreen and arrives at the gates of his Celestial City to find, like Bunyan's Ignorance, that he is without the certificate that can grant him permission to enter. 'THITHER J. F.', Jude inscribes on the back of the milestone that measures the distance between Marygreen and Christminster but physical distance is not what actually separates him from his goal. 'It was not till now, when he found himself actually on the spot of his enthusiasm, that Jude perceived how far away from the object of that enthusiasm he really was.' 'THITHER J.F.', then, is a self-imaged pointer to a self-imagined ideal that becomes, as it fades, 'still there; but nearly obliterated by moss' (*Jude*, pp.73, 86, 390), to symbolize the passing of a guide to life that is, sadly, no longer useful.[36]

The goal of a university education is given up quite early in the story and the text speaks of, 'the afternoon on which he awoke from his dream', a suggestion, perhaps, that this is the place where the novel could end. 'His fixed idea was to get away to some obscure spot and hide' (*Jude*, pp.116, 123), and he sets out again for Marygreen. There is, however, another rally, for Jude is encouraged to consider entering the church, not through Christminster as a priest, but though the lesser role of a licentiate. This reduced version of what he originally intended is, from now on, the pattern that his life adopts. From the high ambitions of 'he might become even a bishop', to the lesser possibility of becoming a 'humble curate' (*Jude*, pp.37, 129), from an ecclesiastical stone mason to a baker of cakes sold at country fairs, Jude's life enters a downward spiral of reversed ambition that should lead eventually (he had been brought up in the bakery business), to that original obscurity. The cakes, however, are shaped like the Christminster Colleges and symbolize the aspirations that, while life is ongoing, can never be completely relinquished.

[36] See: 'Jude is the classical instance of failure of imagination, since the tale he tells himself can have no substance and would have been better untold' (Barbara Hardy, 'Towards a Poetics of Fiction', in *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 2.2 (1968), 5-14 (p.11)).

Jude's story is complicated by his feelings for his cousin, Sue Bridehead. His marriage to Arabella is apparently over quite quickly but what it gives way to, is not Christminster alone, but Christminster and Sue. She takes on aspects of Christminster – the city's distant lights, described as a 'faint halo', being recognizable in 'the rays of a halo' that describe the hat surrounding Sue's face in a photograph discovered by Jude. 'The ultimate impulse to come [...] more nearly related to the emotional side of him than to the intellectual' (*Jude*, pp. 74, 78, 77), and Hardy notes that it is Sue more than Christminster that eventually moves Jude into journey. Sue, however, is as elusive as the university education. 'She did not come', and Jude is disappointed as he waits to gain a first view of his cousin in the Cathedral-church of Christminster, and again 'But she did not come' (*Jude*, pp. 91, 176), as he wonders if Sue will return to him after her marriage to Phillotson. Between and beyond each of these instances, of course, Sue does 'come' only to retreat and 'come' again, a pattern that repeats the uncertainty of the same moment over and over again and threatens, like Jude's fascination with Christminster, to extend the narrative indefinitely.[37]

As there was for Tess and Angel, there is a period of peace for Jude and Sue when unmarried but together they turn their backs on thoughts of progress:

> Whither they had gone nobody knew, chiefly because nobody cared to know. Any one sufficiently curious to trace the steps of such an obscure pair might have discovered without great trouble that they had taken advantage of his adaptive craftsmanship to enter on a shifting, almost nomadic, life, which was not without its pleasantness for a time.
>
> *Jude*, p.309

'But nobody did come, because nobody does' (*Jude*, p.31), Jude had realized at the beginning of the story as he languished for want of help and advice, but now 'nobody

[37] See also among other references: 'but no Sue appeared', 'why should she not come?', 'and wondered if Sue would come', 'She did not come' (*Jude*, pp.164, 176, 208, 386).

knew' and 'nobody cared to know' turn away from negativity. The phrases form a positive experience and suggest the way in which peacefulness may be achieved. The 'shifting, [...] nomadic, life' is Hardy's metaphor for the breakdown of the pilgrimage ideal and a plea for the acceptance of things as they are. Formlessness as a way of hiding from progress leads then to another positive use of a negative – 'not without its pleasantness' – not joy exactly, but enough.

Jude, however, never forgets his earlier dream and, like that other disappointed pilgrim Godwin Peak, he continually reassesses and reforms. 'Christminster is a sort of fixed vision', Sue explains and the couple, accompanied by Little Father Time and two children born in the interval of 'pleasantness', return to Christminster, 'receiving the reflection of the sunshine from its wasting walls' (*Jude*, pp.313, 320). Earlier in the story, Sue, visiting a sick Phillotson, had hung a mirror in order that he may see the reflected sunset from his sickbed. It is not the sunset Phillotson wants, however, but Sue. Pite follows this idea through:

> In this respect, Christminster [...] and Sue are [...] the same: they dazzle and lure towards them rustics, including Phillotson and Jude, by seeming to be heavenly [...] and, in each case, they prove not to be so, but only a reflection of those things.
>
> Pite, p.182

'[R]eflection', then, as a substitute for Jude's earlier dream of integration can never be enough and within a few hours of arrival he is declaring, 'I'm an outsider to the end of my days!' Difficulties begin to engulf the little family. Sue is pregnant again and accommodation hard to find. 'If we children was gone there'd be no trouble at all!' (*Jude*, pp.328, 334), Father Time suggests and, fitting thought to action, kills himself and his siblings. For Sue this is a dreadful turning point and, while Jude seeks comfort in a modern philosophy, '[The doctor] says it is the beginning of the coming universal wish not to live', she calls on an altered vision of Christianity.

'There is something external to us which says, "You shan't!" First it said, "You shan't learn!" Then it said, "You shan't labour!" Now it says, "You shan't love!" ', and her cry outlines a story where the positive prohibitions of the Ten Commandments have been distorted into tragedy. Sue, although she does not know it, is attempting to ameliorate the profane change made to a set of Commandments outlined earlier in the story. According to a folk tale the devil is reputed to have completed the work of a group of drunken ecclesiastical sign-painters and, when the congregation arrived for morning service, they found the Ten Commandments painted 'with the "Nots" left out' (*Jude*, pp.337, 303). Sue and Jude's unconventional partnership had called forth the memory of this story and Sue's assertions are an effort to reinstate a pre-existing order. As she puts the 'Nots' back in, however, she moves into something more forbidding than the original and suggestive of excessive penitence.

The scene is a preparation for Sue's painful act of atonement when she attempts to re-establish a Christianized version of the way things should be. She first asserts that she should return to Phillotson and Jude to Arabella. 'It was like a re-enactment by the ghosts of their former selves' (*Jude*, p.369), and the novel parodies the happier 're-enactment' of *Desperate Remedies*. It is then that Sue, in an excess of repentance after a final meeting with Jude, insists that form is not enough and gives herself wholly to Phillotson. Goode argues, 'Nothing mitigates the nauseating wrongness of Sue's return, and Hardy escalates the reader's discomfort by refusing to stop with the wedding and taking us to the consummation' (Goode, *Offensive Truth*, p.165). Forcing a full return, in other words, is more dreadful than failing to achieve it. Out of the near returns of Michael Henchard and Clym Yeobright there

had come a form of healing. Sue's return is too complete and instead of continuing in any way at all she withdraws from the story. 'Sue had disappeared' (*Jude*, p. 398).

It is after this, 'the ultimate horror' (*Jude*, p.400), that Jude dies, not immediately but willingly, after some months of illness and protracted suffering. And, although he dies in Christminster, he dies like Eustacia, Henchard and Tess away from the heart of the story for in death, as in life, his closeness to the goal only acts to determine actual distance:

> 'Ah – yes! The Remembrance games,' he murmured.
> 'And I here. And Sue defiled!'
>
> *Jude*, p.403

Jude's own last words, as distinct from the biblical quotations that follow, place him between the two unachieved ideals of Christminster and Sue. Neither Sue nor Christminster, however, has any part in his present. Jude alone is 'here' for Christminster is 'Remembrance' and the verb that defines Sue's present state, 'defiled', is mercifully placed in the past tense. But, even as the self-cognizant 'I' defines and acknowledges this separation, the double use of the conjunction demands a unity that the punctuation denies and another 'becoming' seems imminent. Separation, even self-governed separation, as Laura Fountain realized, is not enough. The only way of ending the journey for Jude is through death. 'Teach me to live, that I may dread / The grave as little as my bed. / Teach me to die ...' (*Jude*, p.83), is the hymn Jude remembered as he fell asleep on his first night in Christminster, the verse unfinished because this is precisely what he learns to do.

Jude's death is brought about by a cold and fever made worse by a visit to Sue after her marriage to Phillotson. 'I have seen her for the last time, and I've finished myself – put an end to a feverish life which ought never to have been begun!' he tells Arabella. There is, even now, the threat of a revival. 'Despite

himself, Jude recovered somewhat', but at this stage of the story any recovery cannot be sustained beyond its own sentence and Hardy immediately continues, 'After Christmas, however, he broke down again' (*Jude*, pp.391, 398). The death that follows appears to be the perfect representation of disappointment and loss:

> As soon as he could speak he murmured, his eyes still closed: 'A little water, please.'
>
> Nothing but the deserted room received his appeal, and he coughed to exhaustion again – saying still more feebly: 'Water – some water – Sue – Arabella!'
>
> The room remained still as before. Presently he gasped again: 'Throat – water – Sue – darling – drop of water – please – O please!'
>
> No water came, and the organ notes, faint as a bee's hum, rolled in as before.
>
> *Jude*, p.403

Dying, Jude re-enacts an ineffectual version of Guy Morville's apotheotic death in *The Heir of Redclyffe*. In this earlier story, Charlotte Yonge intended to show a completeness between her protagonist and his wife, and between the world being left behind and the new one being entered into. Hardy offers only separation. He shows, on the one hand, Jude's human, punctuated time where the syntactic disconnections of his gasped requests for water are met only by a larger absence, and, on the other, the time outside Jude, Christminster's time, measured first as stillness and then as the conjoined hum of a musical faintness. Each form of time exists apart from the other and can only be made manifest within the spaces that the other leaves. This is made more explicit in the paragraphs that follow where Jude's dying scriptural quotations are succeeded by, but never a part of, the sounds of cheering from the town, the former italicized into difference, '*Let the day perish wherein I was born'*, and the latter parenthesized into separation, '("Hurrah!")' (*Jude*, p.403). In 1924, nearly thirty years after the publication of *Jude*, Hardy gives in verse that indifferently realized world of Christminster as he writes of a car that 'whangs along in a world of

its own' unable to affect the other existence of the poet's world, 'It has nothing to do with me'. Eventually, Hardy concludes, there is only the isolated and impotent self, permanently expectant and permanently disappointed, 'And mute by the gate I stand again alone, / And nobody pulls up there' ('Nobody Comes', *CPTH*, p.743).

With Jude's death, Hardy finally separates his questing protagonist from other pilgrimage stories where fulfilment had been fully or partially achieved and where instances of redemptive companionship had been modelled with Christian purpose on *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Goode suggests that Jude's death 'surely parodies the climactic funeral of Mr Gray at Oxford in *Robert Elsmere*, for he who had sought continuity from within the walls has a proper attention paid to his death' (Goode, *Offensive Truth*, p.167). Deaths such as Gray's, of Elsmere himself, or of Guy Morville, are intended either to confirm the existence of an afterlife or to suggest ways of carrying on the pilgrimage in this. But Jude's lonely, isolated death has a different purpose. The negative phrases that encompass his final moments, 'Nothing but', 'remained still', and 'No water came', take all those other lonely deaths – Mrs Yeobright's, Eustacia's, Henchard's and Tess's – and complete their intention. Negativity now, like the earlier occasion of Sue and Jude's pleasant obscurity, forms a positive. It serves to hold Jude in stillness and away from another 'becoming'.

Jude's final words that begin, *'Let the day perish'*, are not of course his own but borrowed from scripture as Jude, adopting the role of priest, reminds us of his failure to become one. This is something more than irony. Jude's death, with its instances of delirium and its implications of what has not been achieved, may remind the reader of Reardon's death in *New Grub Street*. At this point, however, Hardy gives a formalized pattern to his protagonist's suffering that lifts it away from the

ordinary. The scriptural language and the secular interruptions follow the format of Christian prayer and of that shared by hero and chorus in Greek tragedy – the end of *Oedipus at Colonus* for example, where a man who had travelled through great suffering achieves in death a particular sacredness. There is, then, a type of mystical transformation for Jude, and the narrative allows him to assume the heroic status of priest and king. Garrett Stewart suggests that, 'Jude [...] dies away into the first person of Job's displacing, scarcely consolatory prototype' (Stewart, p.127). To find in the words of another, however, the form of one's own truth is more than a 'displacing'; it is a controlled distancing from the 'I' that has ruled the life and in the final passage Jude moves further. '*Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul?*' (*Jude*, p.403), he asks, moving that already dissociated self into the impersonal remoteness of the third person, into a type of biography and a regaining of the lost place at life's 'circumference'. The story may not end happily but it does end with Jude entering into a formally recognized peace. '[H]e was the sort of man who was born to ache a good deal before the fall of the curtain upon his unnecessary life should signify that all was well with him again' (*Jude*, p.17), Hardy announces in the very first pages of the story, the last phrase being the promise that the narrative has worked towards. The death, then, that realizes that moment, is linked at each stage to other instances in the story in both repetition and fulfilment, the 'Remembrance games' being played out here in more ways than one.

Like all those other deaths in a Hardy novel the reader is not present at the moment of it. After Jude's last question there is a small gap in the text and then the chapter, like life, continues with Jude's wife getting on with her own affairs. 'Meanwhile Arabella' (*Jude*, p.403) the passage begins and it is somewhere in that

'Meanwhile' that Jude dies. This, even for Hardy, is a departure from the forms often followed in Victorian fiction. Eustacia, Henchard and Tess were each given something to mark the moment of their death – a splash, the testimony of Abel Whittle, a flag – but for Jude, like Clara Hopgood and Godwin Peak, there is nothing to mark the actual moment. Death, in Hardy's final story, has nothing at all to do with apotheosis or continuance; it is something that happens in the 'Meanwhile' of other people's lives. 'To think he should die just now! Why did he die just now!' (*Jude*, p.405), Arabella cries on finding Jude's body, paraphrasing Macbeth's great plea for a space in which to mourn the death of his wife: 'She should have died hereafter; / There would have been a time for such a word' (*Macbeth*, V.5.17). 'I / Saw morning harden upon the wall, / Unmoved, unknowing / That your great going / Had place that moment, and altered all' ('The Going', *CPTH*, p.338), Hardy wrote on the death of his first wife as another instance of Arabella's 'Meanwhile'. But this death, the hugely personal thing, had an effect, 'altered all', and Hardy wrote a series of poems, the 'Poems of 1912-13', that acknowledged it and gave it status. For the novel, however, such a death is the story's comfort, for Jude, dying in that 'Meanwhile', dies into the obscurity of the title, into the place of safety, into stillness.

Robert Elsmere was an example of a story where the protagonist dies with his work incomplete. It is Robert's wife, Catherine, who inherits the burden and promises to carry out her husband's purpose. Jude had hopes of realizing his unfulfilled ambitions through his son, 'What I couldn't accomplish in my own person'. However, this is not to be. 'I don't like Christminster! [...] Are the great old houses gaols?' (*Jude*, pp.278, 330), Little Time cries and he changes his father's 'goal' into something more sinister. Jude's hope for this form of continuance, then, is

confounded first through the child's individual reflection and later by Time's double act of child murder and suicide. The one who does continue in this story is not the child, or the beloved who has 'disappeared', but Arabella. Recently re-established as Jude's wife she has left his bedside to attend the more interesting festivities in Christminster. Still seeking the goal of happiness through sexual fulfilment with which her story began she has neither progressed nor regressed. She is an example of the way a life other than Jude's may be lived – happily enough and without being caught between obscure stillness and the pressure to progress. Hardy, as he did in other novels, allows his protagonist to die and then suggests another way forward. But Arabella's continuance is not the gentle endurance of Elizabeth-Jane Farfrae or the brave humility of Angel Clare and 'Liza-Lu. It is both worldly and self-seeking. Like that of Amy and Jasper Milvain in *New Grub Street*, it is neither splendid nor heroic nor even particularly desirable. It is, however, a way to keep on living.

The story, then, ends with Arabella, not Sue, standing beside Jude's open coffin. 'D'ye think she [Sue] will come?', Arabella asks the Widow Edlin and her question acknowledges the way such stories usually end. It also, with its echoes of all those other times when Sue did and did not 'come', suggests that the story may be about to move into another 'becoming'. Hardy does not contradict this impression as he did in *The Return of the Native* or dilute its force as he did in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Instead the given reply is inconclusive, 'I could not say' (*Jude*, p.408), and with it Hardy questions this story's ability to finish at all. As Friedman notes:

> In *Tess* and still more vehemently in *Jude*, [Hardy] undermines the conventionally closed form of the flux of conscience by so weakening its most traditional fictional techniques for securing a 'close' – marriage and death – that

> they cannot possibly resolve the dilemmas, reduce the tensions, or contain the expanding moral and emotional force of the story.[38]

Ruth, like *Robert Elsmere*, *Born in Exile*, and *Mark Rutherford's Deliverance*, is completed, satisfied is a better word perhaps, by the death of the chief protagonist. In this way, these novels abide by the structure of *The Pilgrim's Progress* where, after Christian's death and apotheosis, there is the promise of further journeys but journeys that are not the story's main concern. Sue and Jude, on the other hand, are too conjoined, 'one person split in two' (*Jude*, p.229), to be separated by death and the ending must lie somewhere beyond the one Hardy gives.

Full of 'tentativeness' this idea is both reassuring and unsettling. '[W]e are in love with the idea of fulfilment, and our interpretations show it' (Kermode, *Genesis*, p.65), Kermode argues, and Arabella, like the average novel reader, is not satisfied with incompletion. Her last sentence therefore, the novel's last sentence, holds the promise of completion:

> She's never found peace since she left his arms, and never will again till she's as he is now!
>
> *Jude*, p.408

Hardy does not write, 'until she is with him again' but 'till she's as he is now!' and his phrase forms a syntactic symmetry where one imperfect state of being, 'she's', passes into the perfection and fullness of 'he is'. Such a promise cannot be reached in the narrative itself but it can exist somewhere outside it. And then, as the fluidity of 'till' is moved into that conclusively triumphant 'now!', the final word of the final novel is allowed to celebrate the place where pilgrimage will be no longer necessary, the place of 'fixity'. Hardy's 'now!' is fixed forever in one future moment. It repairs

[38] Alan Friedman, *The Turn of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp.72-73.

the 'unity' broken by Eustacia on Rainbarrow; it is the non-story of Tess's Marlott and the stillness of her time at Bramshurst; it is the obscurity of Jude's Marygreen; and, most importantly for Hardy, with these issues resolved, it is the place where the novel writing could stop.

Conclusion

In his book, *Victorian Doubt*, Butler suggests that 'the only way in which to write coherently about the values of Christian goodness is to use the language of Christian goodness'. Each of the authors in this study has been writing about goodness. It is often a different type of goodness – Laura Fountain's honest but vulnerable atheism or Michael Henchard's difficult story – but it is recognizable as such because of the language and imagery that surround it. To quote Butler again:

> The use of a biblical type or archetype was not a random or fugitive trope, it brought with it a whole picture which it placed behind the text in which it figured.[1]

Butler maintains, as Auerbach did in *Mimesis*, that texts can be imbued with meaning that goes beyond what is immediately discernible. His claim suggests depth and vision, substance hidden behind substance that a simple, naïve reading cannot do justice to. In this way nineteenth-century writing connected itself to the Christian story. And not just to the Bible but to all Christian authorship. In relation to my own study this means that each mention of pilgrimage, each character named for Christian, each shining light, each wicket gate, and all those rivers of death, carry, beside their own individual significance, the extra burden of Bunyan's. These small similarities bring with them large implications, 'a whole picture'. Consciously or subconsciously each writer has rewritten *The Pilgrim's Progress* and consciously or subconsciously each reader will recognize this. Such recognitions might be harder to uncover today than at the end of the nineteenth century, but the symbols are still powerfully present and they demand interpretation.

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[1] Lance St. John Butler, *Victorian Doubt* (London: Harvester, 1990), pp.71, 196; hereafter cited Butler.

Each of the writers discussed in this thesis has provided instances that illustrate Butler's statement and each of their stories can be read as an individual commentary on *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Bunyan, if called upon to read these novels, might have seen misinterpretation and may have lamented the fact that his allegory had been too conveniently secularized. For these later authors, however, Bunyan's structure of journey, death and apotheosis was a deep-rooted part of their inheritance and therefore part of their understanding of how a life journey should be depicted. Even if Bunyan's religious certainty was impossible to attain the depiction of the journey was too perfectly apt to be given up. If it could not be completely adopted it could be reformed, as Mrs Humphry Ward and William Hale White demonstrated, or it could be argued against, as in the novels of George Gissing and Thomas Hardy. It could not, however, for writers brought up in the shadow of its strong statement, be disregarded.

Mrs Ward drew on Bunyan's structure in both *Robert Elsmere* and *Helbeck of Bannisdale*. In the former she intended to show how religious thinking could and would change but that such changes did not mean that a life could not be lived religiously. In *Helbeck of Bannisdale* she wanted to reveal what happens when a life, fully religious in the old sense, comes into contact with a life that knows no religion at all but is still pure in its intentions. The protagonist of *Robert Elsmere* is rewarded with a holy death; apotheosis is achieved by looking back into the life rather than beyond it; and a sort of secular eternity is promised through the good works left behind. For the protagonists of *Helbeck of Bannisdale* there is no apotheosis and no future. Death, in this case, brings about 'an *end*'. William Hale White's protagonists struggle to define belief but discover that divine intervention has been replaced by a type of epiphanic moment hidden within the life itself. It is this then, and not any

point beyond the death, that informs the story's purpose and death becomes the part of the journey that does not matter. For Gissing's protagonists, Edwin Reardon and Godwin Peak, life's journey is bleak and, while one suffers a fatal lack of direction, the other feels that he is in the wrong life altogether. Death, in each case, is a way of bringing the protracted journey to a close. Both lives, however, find a kind of redemption and, even though Peak dies alone he is loved, while for Reardon there is a posthumous recognition of his talent as a writer. These things, combined with Gissing's suggestions that there are other ways in which lives can be lived, mean that the novels' conclusions, while sad, are not tragic.

It is Hardy, with the deaths of Michael Henchard, Tess Durbeyfield and Jude Fawley, who depicts tragedy. Hardy, a man who had hoped for more, knew the frustration of failed pilgrimage: 'I have been looking for God 50 years, and I think that if he had existed I should have discovered him.'[2] But, even as he presents life as a journey that will, in all likelihood, end in disappointment, Hardy did not, as Qualls argued, intend parody. He breaks away from Bunyan's structures not to offer distortion but to propose another form of differently inspired guidance. As Butler, who also notes Qualls's argument, suggests, 'the technique is one of parody, but that is not the whole picture' (Butler, p.202). The very suffering of Hardy's protagonists, greater than anything deserved in Henchard's case while Tess and Jude are fundamentally innocent, ensures something close to martyrdom with the death itself presented in the nature of a blessing after torments nobly borne. In this way these three deaths pay homage to Bunyan even as Hardy refuses to treat them as a gateway to anything other than perpetual stillness.

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[2] Thomas Hardy, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Michael Millgate (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1984), p. 234.

This thesis has traced the trajectory of cultural thought that had moved the deathbed from Dickens's willed transcendent vision in *The Old Curiosity Shop* to the secular, earthly conclusions of Hardy and Gissing, conclusions that still contain the memories of those earlier aspirations to paradise. This concern with death's effects was reborn in the twentieth century with the rise in popularity of the murder mystery. Writers such as Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers, and more recently Ruth Rendell and P. D. James, wrote novels that conventionally begin with a death and where plot is at every moment centred upon that death. The structure here, in starting where *The Pilgrim's Progress* ended, resembles a hugely extended apotheosis where illumination is given in retrospect and the life, even a bad or shallow one, given honour and respect. And, pre 1965, with the abolition of the death penalty, the murder mystery almost inevitably ended with the promise of another death – a balancing of victim and perpetrator that ensured satisfaction was visible and the story complete.

In ways such as this, we still live and understand our lives in the shadow of the pattern set by *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Many twentieth and twenty-first century novels and film scripts look back as much as Hardy and Mrs Ward to that older Christian structure. Today we are less and less likely to have read Bunyan but, having read Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* (1995, 1997, 2000) and having seen Steven Speilberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), we are connected to Bunyan's understanding of how a life journey was to be constructed. An example that combines both film and novel is L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. The novel was written in 1900; Victor Flemming's film was released in 1939. Due to the public's lasting appreciation of the latter, Baum's narrative forms a bridge between the earliest years of the twentieth century and the present day.

The parallels between Baum and Bunyan are pronounced. There is the road – yellow, the City – Emerald, and the Wizard – Wonderful; except that he is not. In this story, Bunyan's *Progress* is revealed to be a myth where the God figure is a human invention. The Wizard is, however, helpful. 'I'm really a very good man, but I'm a very bad Wizard', he confesses and offers advice that is both practical and attainable in a secular sense.[3] Writers like Mrs Ward and William Hale White have kept alive the tradition of pilgrimage writing; Baum continues it. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* is Bunyan's *Progress* rewritten in order to convince the American people that home values are best and that even seemingly insoluble problems can be solved with a little ingenuity and a lot of common sense. The enduring popularity of Baum's work is our acceptance of the usefulness of its message; our familiarity with its structures keeps us in contact with what was going on in Bunyan.

Baum's fantasy seems to be closely modelled on *The Pilgrim's Progress*, its structure accepting everything but an omnipotent Godhead. Other twentieth-century writers move further away from Bunyan. Patterns of journey, goal and redemption can still be traced in stories as diverse as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), Arnold Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908), James Joyce's 'Araby' (1914), and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927), but these are works more thoroughly affected by Hardy and Gissing's patterns of revision and difference. Like Hardy's ghostly reflections in his undated poem 'Old Furniture' the original is ever present just growing always fainter: 'As in a mirror a candle-flame / Shows images of itself, each frailer / As it recedes' (*CPTH*, p.485).

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is a vision of a journey that travels inward, geographically and psychologically, into a knowledge so dreadful that it cannot –

[3] L. Frank Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, 1900 (Dorking, Surrey: Templar Publishing, 2002), p.123.

like the awfulness of God – be made explicit. 'And after that, they shut up the Gates' (*PP*, p.141), Bunyan laments while Marlow, Conrad's narrator, who becomes seriously ill but recovers, is also denied access to the full vision: 'I had peeped over the edge'. It is Kurtz, the one with a fuller knowledge, who dies, corrupted away from what had been judged as goodness into, not wickedness, but something other:

> He had summed up – he had judged. 'The horror!' He was a remarkable man. After all, this was the expression of some sort of belief; it had candour, it had conviction, it had a vibrating note of revolt in its whisper, it had the appalling face of a glimpsed truth – the strange commingling of desire and hate.[4]

Earlier writers had lamented God's absence, Hardy in 'The Oxen' (1915), for example, 'Hoping it might be so' (*CPTH*, p.468), or Mrs Ward in *Robert Elsmere*, 'pray [...] that at the end there may be light!' (*RE*, p.325). Conrad's God, however, is present as a powerful non-presence. As Hillis Miller writes of Conrad (and others): 'God in his absence turns into a destructive power, the heart of darkness.'[5]

The death in James Joyce's 'Araby' occurs before the story begins. 'The former tenant of our house, a priest, had died in the back drawing-room', and the nature of that death with its intimations of a religious faith having come to a prosaic and rather undignified end, pervades the whole of the story. The tale that follows, tells of a young boy's attempt to reach a bazaar, Araby, in order to buy a present for a first love. The goal is reached just too late; the bazaar is closing when the protagonist arrives and the present is never bought:

> Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger.[6]

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[4] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 1902, ed. Paul O'Prey (London: Penguin, 1983), pp.112, 113.
[5] J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963), p.13.
[6] James Joyce, 'Araby', in *The Dubliners*, 1914 (London: Secker and Warburg, 1994), pp.19-25 (pp.19,25).

Pilgrimage, in this story, is a painfully realized failure. It illustrates what twentieth-century man has so recently lost, the ability to reach the old forms of apotheosis.

In *The Old Wives' Tale*, Arnold Bennett shapes the lives of two sisters, Sophia and Constance Baines, and shows how a life that struggles to be different will, in the end, be remarkably similar to one that has hardly struggled to embrace change at all. Bennett does not, however, portray such failure as particularly tragic. Instead, like Hardy, he insists that while we cannot escape the smallness of our lives, we should celebrate all that exists within that smallness. A life's journey, he argues, in all its detail, is only really known to the one who has lived it. 'No one but Constance could realize all that Constance had been through, and all that life had meant to her', and he indicates that even story is not comprehensive enough to do justice to one person's existence however obscure. In spite of this, or perhaps because of it, death in this story, as Hale White also showed, is inevitably lonely and not the place where anything learnt within the life can be handed on. It is also, and here Bennett's distance from Bunyan can be measured, faintly ridiculous. The novel ends with Constance's death, Sophia having died some chapters earlier, and its final paragraph makes gentle fun of the importance earlier novels had given to death's effects. The little dog, Fossette, seems to mourn Constance by refusing to eat. Bennett makes it clear, however, that the dog is merely 'conscious of neglect', and then shows how it immediately reconsiders. '[S]he awkwardly balanced herself on her old legs and went to it again', and Bennett, like Hardy in his poem, 'Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave?'(undated), expresses life's continuance through canine indifference.[7]

[7] Arnold Bennett, *The Old Wives' Tale*, 1908 (London: Penguin, 1988), p.615.

Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* centres on the beautiful and inspirational Mrs Ramsay. She dies about two thirds of the way through the story but the death is not presented as a matter of importance. Instead, like Jude Fawley who dies in Arabella's 'Meanwhile' (*Jude*, p.403), it is given as a parenthesized interjection that suggests an irrelation to what is actually happening. Mrs Ramsay's death, however, occurs between the failure of pilgrimage and its ultimate success and is connected to both, first as a gesture of what has not happened and then as a signal of accomplishment. The eventual journey, the trip to the lighthouse, is enacted as a memory of other pilgrimages, Mrs Ramsay's original wish that it should take place and larger more spiritual journeys that must include Bunyan's *Progress*. It also readdresses the stoic melancholy of Matthew Arnold's 'Rugby Chapel' (1857), where the journey after the death of the poet's father, Dr Arnold, has become fragmented and difficult. 'We bring / Only ourselves! we lost / Sight of the rest in the storm.' And, like so many late-Victorian images of pilgrimage continued in deference to what had once been rather than what still is, the original reason for the trip to the lighthouse seems to have been lost. 'What does one send to the Lighthouse?' becomes a recurring question and one that only Mrs Ramsay could have answered – she had been knitting socks for the lighthouse keeper's son. Like Arnold's conclusion, however, the power that drives the journey is still there. But, while Arnold's journey could only be completed at some point in the future, 'On, to the City of God',[8] Virginia Woolf's conclusion *is* a conclusion and a triumphantly secular form of apotheosis:

> [Mr Ramsay] rose and stood in the bow of the boat, very straight and tall, for all the world, James thought, as if he were saying, 'There is no God,' and Cam thought, as if he were leaping into space, and they both rose to follow him as

[8] *PMA*, p. 444, 117-119, 208.

> he sprang, lightly like a young man, holding his parcel, on to the rock.

We can still attain the goal, Virginia Woolf is saying, without really understanding what drives us – where what is being carried in Mr Ramsay's parcel, for example, no longer matters. What does matter, and here both Hardy and Gissing would concur, is the effort and the struggle. Even the final possibility, 'There is no God', is of little consequence now for it is immediately followed by another type of resurrection, 'as if he were leaping into space'. And, after the firm expression of landing, 'on to the rock', there need be no more. In this story neither the journey nor the novel needs continuance; that has been provided by the drawn out sequence of events that occur after the death of Mrs Ramsay. As Lily Briscoe realizes, as she draws the concluding line across the troublesome painting that, like the journey, had seemed to defy completion: 'It was done; it was finished. [...] I have had my vision.'[9]

From Robert Elsmere's New Jerusalem, through Clara Hopgood's hope for her sister and Godwin Peak's desire to be a gentleman, to Jude Fawley's hope of a university education, it is the idea of 'vision' that has drawn all of these narratives together. The deaths with which these stories end have varied in their implications. They have, however, all been truthful reflections of the meaning inherent in the life. Each story owes its own debt of gratitude to *The Pilgrim's Progress*. So long as life offers difficulties to be overcome there will be novels of pilgrimage. So long as death retains its mystery there will always be a human need to explore its effects. This thesis began with John Bunyan. It ends with Philip Larkin:

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[9] Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 1927 (London: Flamingo, 1995), pp.160, 223, 224.

And that much never can be obsolete,
Since someone will forever be surprising
A hunger in himself to be more serious,
And gravitating with it to this ground,
Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,
If only that so many dead lie round.[10]

[10] Philip Larkin, 'Church Going' (1954), in *Collected Poems*, ed. Anthony Thwaite (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), p.58.

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