

**"GLEAMS FROM A BRIGHTER
WORLD, TOO SOON ECLIPSED
OR FORFEITED":
RELIGIOUS ORTHODOXY IN
THE VICTORIAN NOVEL.**

September 1989

Karen Elizabeth Lawrence

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements
of the University of Liverpool for the degree of
Doctor in Philosophy by Karen Elizabeth Lawrence.

Abstract

Much critical attention has been given to the effects of the Victorian religious climate on the literature of the period, and on the novel in particular. Most studies, however, either focus on the numerous "Novels of Faith and Doubt" (to quote the title of a long series of novels republished in the mid 1970s), seeking simply to demonstrate that Christian belief continued to be an important element in the cultural matrix, and often viewing the novel primarily as a historical document, or, alternatively, stress is laid upon the process of "secularisation", by which the language of orthodox religion is seen as being adapted, through the medium of the novel, to the purposes of the new humanism.

This study challenges both these approaches by asking specifically what happens to religious belief when it is voiced from within the realist novel. Because this literary form is, by definition, ill-equipped to describe a transcendent level of experience, faith as held by characters in the novel is shown in this study to be limited and distorted as compared with historical records of Victorian religious ideas and feelings. The study also argues, however, that the persistent and positive accounts of Christian belief, even in novels by writers, such as George Eliot, whose personal allegiance is primarily to humanism, and in particular, the frequent demonstration of moral strength possessed specifically by characters whose religious faith gives them a spiritual, other-worldly perspective on human experience, indicates that the so-called "secularising" novelists still retain, at the least, strong emotional ties with Christian belief. For them, faith offers not merely a uniquely powerful language for profound human feelings, but, agreeing here with orthodox believers, a means of communicating with truth absolutely beyond the human world which is real in every sense. If the nineteenth-century novel transforms faith into a means of voicing humanist concerns, then, the study contends, this is the effect not so much of the novelists' conscious desire to conquer new territories for secular morality as of the this-worldly focus of the novel form itself.

The study opens by discussing two "Novels of Faith and Doubt" - Charlotte Yonge's *The Heir of Redclyffe*, and George MacDonald's *David Elginbrod* - in order to show how the novel form both distorts and is distorted by a religious content. The following four chapters undertake detailed examinations of a number of novels, including texts by George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell and Mark Rutherford, looking at these works in the light of various specifically religious writings to demonstrate the relations within the Victorian novel between the individual's consciousness of his or her self, of the world of human experience, and of both moral and other-worldly levels of being. Chapter Six, focusing primarily on Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, explores the difficulty of finding any means at all by which experience beyond the scope of secularised speech can be communicated in the social and cultural environment of the Victorian age. The study concludes with a brief look at nineteenth century religious poetry as an alternative literature which attempts to convey both the importance and the limitations of Christian faith in the period, suggesting that, by contrast with poetry, the novel has unique strengths and weaknesses in this area.

Throughout, the Bible is appealed to as the standard of faith, but also as a central religious text for Victorian writers. Relevant quotations are used to provide a perspective from which to evaluate the transformations of doctrine in these novels.

Table of Contents

Chapter One - Introduction	1
Chapter Two - Personal Experience of Objective Reality	44
Chapter Three - Interpretation and Individuality	108
Chapter Four - The Self and Beyond the Self	179
Chapter Five - Sin in Social and Historical Context	253
Chapter Six - Speech or Silence?	327
Chapter Seven - Conclusion	404
Bibliography	423

Preface

This study seeks, through detailed examination of a number of Victorian novels, to explore the extent to which religious belief can be expressed within realist fictional writing. Although questioned from every direction, religious, and specifically Christian, faith continued to play a major role in shaping the feelings and ideas of most Victorians, since even those who rejected Christian teachings could not escape the vivid awareness of that rejection. The novel, also, was of enormous importance in providing a shape and an identity for nineteenth century life, acting as a mirror within which lay a looking-glass world, reality and yet not reality, where the difficulties of living as a whole individual while retaining meaningful relationships with a society which was increasingly both impersonal and sentimental could be worked out in relative safety. This dissertation asks what happens when these two powerful forces, central to the Victorian age - religious faith and the novel - are brought together.

In order to maintain the distinct identity of these two areas of interest, attention is focused on novels which could be described as "humanist" rather than "religious" in the sense that they are ultimately more closely concerned with the fate of human beings than with the success or failure of Christian teachings. This means that the texts examined are first and foremost novels, rather than works produced primarily for religious instruction or edification which happen to assume, more or less, the novel form.

Because the meeting point of the novel and religious faith occurs, for the Victorian age, in the area of the individual consciousness and its relation to structures apparently larger than the self, works such as the novels of Trollope, which deal with ecclesiastical forms and

politics, or those of Charles Kingsley, which are concerned mainly with national and social rather than personal issues, are not included. Instead, emphasis is placed on attempts to reveal and to understand the interior life, both through fictional writing and through faith.

This study takes Christianity as the normative form of religion, since most Victorians who believed in a Divine order were, broadly speaking, Christian. Orthodoxy is an important concept for this dissertation since Christianity in some of its more liberal aspects often tends to look very much like humanism, so that the distinctions which the dissertation is attempting to explore break down. For this reason, religious belief is represented by a range of material drawn from sermons, commentaries and other writings mainly from either Evangelical or Catholic sources, as it is these branches of Christianity which tended, in the nineteenth century, to preserve most clearly the sense of a God and a Divine order of reality which transcend the realm of human experience.

Particular attention is also given to the biographies and autobiographies of religious figures, since such writings offer a narrative expression of Victorian faith which in many ways resembles the novel, allowing fruitful comparisons to be made. In addition, the Bible is an especially important text for this dissertation. It continued to hold a unique position as an authoritative basis for belief throughout the period, and its words lay deep within the consciousness of most Victorians, shaping their language and their thought, whether they liked it or not. Frequent quotations from the Authorised Version are used in this dissertation to illuminate, question and challenge passages from novels.

* * * * *

Special thanks are due to my supervisor, Mr Brian Nellist, whose warm encouragement and numerous helpful suggestions have been invaluable. Thanks, also, must go to my husband,

Adrian, without whose continual support, and help with babysitting and other practical tasks this dissertation could not have been completed.

Chapter One - Introduction

I wish to begin by asking how far the novel is to be viewed as an essentially secular form of writing, and how far it can resemble the roles of sermons, treatises, tracts and other genres designed specifically for the purpose of religious instruction and edification. The eighteenth century was the period in which the English novel established itself as a literary genre in its own right, and it was also the age of rationalist approaches to theology. The major religious and philosophical thinkers of the mid 1700s were increasingly convinced that reality consisted wholly in the humanly knowable world:

The world of the rationalists, while not devoid of wonder and awe, was a demythologised or naturalized world. ... There could be no violation of the laws of nature. The rejection of the theology of miraculous evidences, given classic statement in Hume's famous *Essay on Miracles* (1748), was as sharply expressed by Diderot: "I should believe, without hesitation, a single honest man who announced that 'His Majesty has just won a complete victory over the allies'; but all Paris could assure me that a dead man had just been resurrected at Passy, and I would not believe a word of it."

1

This approach can be seen significantly to influence the early development of the novel as a form of writing which has little or nothing to do with that which lies outside the limits

¹ Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, Volume I, 1799-1870 (New Haven and London, 1972), p.39.

of the natural world of humanly knowable reality. Samuel Richardson views this exclusion of the miraculous and the extraordinary from his work as a positive step towards the moral power and socially and religiously beneficial influence of fictional writing:

... I thought that the story, if written in an easy and natural manner, suitable to the simplicity of it, might possibly introduce a new species of writing, that might possibly turn young people into a course of reading different from the pomp and parade of romance-writing, and dismissing the improbable and the marvellous, with which novels generally abound, might tend to promote the cause of religion and virtue.

2

Interestingly, Richardson does not view his project as a secular one, but rather as a means of promoting "the cause of religion and virtue" by creating in his readers an increased awareness of the conditions of their existence.

The thesis which I wish to test in this chapter can be expressed as follows:

... the novel is properly concerned only with the nature of human reality without regard to its possible metaphysical essence.

3

² Samuel Richardson, Preface to *Clarissa, The History of a Young Lady* (1747-8), quoted in Miriam Allott, *Novelists on the Novel*, paperback edition (London, 1964), p.85.

³ Catherine Sandbach-Dahlström, *Be Good Sweet Maid: Charlotte Yonge's domestic fiction: A Study in Dogmatic Purpose and Fictional Form*, Doctoral dissertation at the University of Stockholm (Stockholm, 1984), p.24.

In other words, I am asking whether religion in the novel can only be understood as a part of human experience, and not as some transcendent power which can define reality from outside. If the novel itself takes on this role of describing "the nature of human reality", then a set of meanings for this reality derived from its "metaphysical essence" would be in competition with the meanings which the novel supplies. Other literary forms might perhaps be suitable for writing about religion in religion's own terms, but the novelist, if he or she is to write a successful novel, would have to stay within the bounds of human joys and griefs, human ideas of right and wrong, human love and hate, and the shared, knowable reality which is part of the experience of all humanity.

To investigate this question, I shall look at two novels which attempt to defy such limitations, asking whether these works can be considered to be part of the nineteenth century realist tradition. Both Charlotte Yonge's *The Heir of Redclyffe* (1853), and George MacDonald's *David Elginbrod* (1863) seek to combine the credible, ordinary, solid world of the realist novel with an awareness of "a brighter world" which, though never seen directly, illuminates the world of "human reality", altering its values and perspectives by placing it within a larger context of meaning. Can this daring and ambitious project produce a "proper" and successful novel, or will its outcome be something rather different? Charlotte Yonge is aware of the double levels upon which *The Heir of Redclyffe* operates, and she knows the difficulties, but also the fascinations, of attempting to marry two separate ways of looking at the world. She describes Guy's desperate struggle to forgive his cousin Philip's malice in language which reveals the complexity of her task:

Guy had what some would call a vivid imagination, other a lively faith. He shuddered; then, his elbows on his knees and his hands clasped over his brow, he sat, bending forward, with his eyes closed, wrought up in a fearful struggle; while it was to him as if he saw the hereditary demon of the Morvilles watching by his side, to take full possession of him as a rightful prey, unless the battle was fought and won before that red orb had passed out of sight.

There are two alternative ways of reading this scene, and this is necessary because the same phenomenon will be called by one name by "some", and by another by "others". "Vivid imagination" is the nineteenth century translation of "lively faith", in the spirit of the German philosopher and theologian, Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-72), whose *Das Wesen des Christentums* (1841), translated into English as *The Essence of Christianity* by the young George Eliot in 1854, epitomises much of the thinking which lies behind Victorian difficulties with regard to traditional religion. "Lively faith" is deliberately kept in slightly archaic, Prayer Book language in order to emphasise the contrast between the old and new ways of understanding Guy's experience. Both "faith" and "imagination" are to do with seeing that which is invisible, but the former implies that the invisible is more real than the visible, whereas the latter holds the thing imagined in a position subordinate to that of the person imagining. This is because "faith" carries religious and Biblical associations. It is described in the Bible as "the gift of God",⁵ and as the means by which transcendent, non-materialist truths are known:

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

⁴ Charlotte Yonge, *The Heir of Redclyffe*, two volumes in one, Garland "Novels of Faith and Doubt" series, reprint of 1853 edition, (New York and London, 1975), vol.I, p.269.

⁵ *Ephesians* 2 v.8.

⁶ *Hebrews* 11 v.3.

I shall throughout this dissertation be referring extensively to the Bible, which is a text of major importance to my argument, both as a book absolutely central to Victorian social, cultural and religious life, and as an extremely significant example of narrative writing in its own right. My quotations from the Bible are intended to provide reference to an Evangelical orthodoxy with which most Victorian writers and readers would have been familiar. I am directly concerned with the voice of the Bible as both a challenge to and a source for the voice of the novel; it is the space between these two voices which will constitute one of my primary areas of interest. And so when Charlotte Yonge uses the word "faith" to describe Guy's motivating force, a whole range of Biblical associations is immediately evoked for the reader familiar with his Bible which will then either conflict with or reinforce - or perhaps both - the narrative thrust of the novel. I hope, by quoting frequently from the Bible, to reinvest the novels under discussion with something of the force they would have carried for a Victorian, churchgoing readership, far more conscious of Biblical language than many twentieth century readers.

The verse quoted above from the book of *Hebrews* implies that humanly knowable reality is "framed" both in the sense that it is created by God, and also in the sense that a limit is placed upon it, and it is seen in the context of something far larger. The man of faith knows that the visible world is wholly dependent upon a higher level of being. Faith is a God-given understanding that all "the worlds" are God-given, and it teaches the importance of the invisible, since it shows that all visible things have their origin in the invisible.

Imagination, on the other hand, is primarily a human faculty. Feuerbach describes the role of the second person of the Trinity as follows:

The Son is the satisfaction of the need for mental images, the nature of the imaginative activity in man made objective as an absolute, divine activity.

In orthodox theology, the word "satisfaction" when applied to Christ refers to His "perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction, for all the sins of the whole world",⁸ in which it is God's demand for justice which is satisfied. Here, however, it is not a Divine requirement, but a human need, which is satisfied. Imagination is rooted firmly "in man", and the religious activity towards which Feuerbach is pointing involves the mental formation of an image of God and the affirmation of the human power of imagination as an objective "divine activity". Here it is not that which is perceived by imagination which is of supreme value, but the power of imagination itself.

To go back to Guy's experience as he watches the sun go down, this means that if he has a "vivid imagination", then his struggle is to be won by his establishing personal control over the images in his mind. If, on the other hand, Guy is characterised by "a lively faith", then victory will be gained through his submission to that in which he trusts, which is greater than his comprehension. Both these possibilities are acknowledged and explored in Yonge's text, since Guy's experience is registered in two forms of language, one focusing on its natural, and the other on its supernatural aspects. The reader is first given an intensely physical view of Guy, as his precise bodily position and movements are described. He is placed carefully, limb by limb, in an attitude of impassioned prayer and mental suffering, and this apparently excessive concern with elbows, hands and eyes is significant precisely because Guy himself does not notice it at all.

This neutral, external view is powerfully contrasted with the consciousness of the same moment "as it was to [Guy]". This second perspective replaces the simple, matter-of-fact

⁷ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* translated from the second German edition by Marian Evans (New York, 1855), p.107.

⁸ *The Book of Common Prayer*, (1662), "The Articles", xxxi.

naming of physical parts and locations with a heightened, romantic diction reminiscent of knightly legend. The words "hereditary" and "the Morvilles" recall the family curse, while "demon", "possession", and "prey" point to invisible evil forces claiming some "rightful" power over Guy by virtue of laws not made by men. "The battle was fought and won" and "passed out of sight" are phrases more formally constructed than those in the first half of the sentence, which contains several short, hanging phrases without main verbs, and the description of the sinking sun as a "red orb" gives it a slightly archaic grandeur, linking it with royal regalia, and hinting, perhaps, at its likeness to a Divine eye, watching Guy. This account of how "it was to him" recalls Christian's struggle with Apollyon in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and also the battles of Sir Galahad, with whom Guy is explicitly compared elsewhere.⁹

But the idea of a family curse seems a curiously extravagant notion for a Christian Victorian gentleman seriously to entertain, and one wonders if Guy is not more strongly influenced by his reading of romance, such as the stories of Sintram and Thabala¹⁰, than by his reading of the Bible. Laura Edmonstone experiences these misgivings when Guy declares dramatically:

"Is it not written that the sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children? You wondered to see me so foolish about Sintram. Well, it is my firm belief that such a curse of sin and death as was on Sintram rests on the descendants of that miserable man [Guy's ancestor]."

Amy is deeply impressed by this, reminding Guy in a whisper that, "Sintram conquered his doom", but Laura is more sceptical. She says:

⁹ cf *Heir*, vol II, p.130.

¹⁰ cf *Heir*, vol I, pp.77,135-6.

"This must be an imagination. You have dwelt on it and fostered it till you believe it, but such notions should be driven away or they will work their own fulfilment."

Guy will not accept this, but speaks again of his family's history, and so Laura offers him "a better argument":

"The doom of sin and death is on us all, but you should remember that if you are a Morville you are also a Christian."

Amy's reply is brief but full of meaning:

"He does remember it!"

11

The problem lies in ascertaining on what level Guy holds his "firm belief". From the realistic standpoint it is, as Laura sees, a rather unhealthy "imagination" which should be controlled and "driven away" in order to prevent it from damaging Guy's personal equilibrium to such an extent that he does indeed come to some terrible end. If, however, Guy's belief is held on the level of faith, then he will deny it at his peril, since within Christianity, evil is never conquered by the denial of its presence, but rather through facing up to it in repentance:

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

¹¹ *Heir*, vol 1, pp.80-81.

The evasion of a sense of sin involves self-deception and an exclusion of "the truth" from one's life. "Imagination" is similarly equated in the language of at least some strands of Christian tradition with that which is untrue. Laura's use of the word implies that Guy is believing a lie, for not all belief is faith. She is hinting that Guy is in danger of becoming, in some respects at least, like those people described by St Paul, who:

... became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened ... Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator.

"Imagination" is always a suspect word in the Bible since it recalls so strongly the sin of worshipping "graven images"¹⁴ into which the people of God fall repeatedly throughout most of the Old Testament, and for which they are severely punished. In New Testament terms, this same sin continues to be committed by all those who "served the creature more than the Creator", elevating the visible above the invisible, and placing more reliance upon their own ability to make the world than upon God's.

This old, religious, Judaeo-Christian fear of fiction and imagination goes a long way towards accounting for Samuel Richardson's ready association of a genre which carefully avoids all mention of "the improbable and marvellous" with "the cause of religion and vir-

¹² *1 John* 1 vv.8,9.

¹³ *Romans* 1 vv.21,25.

¹⁴ *Exodus* 20 v.4.

tue".¹⁵ And this trend continues well into the nineteenth century as morally and even religiously positive writing is increasingly associated with a subject matter which concentrates solely upon the real life experiences of ordinary human beings:

The flowering of the novel of social realism in the second half of the [nineteenth] century owes something to the influence of Evangelical strictures upon the use of the imagination. Evangelicals had stressed that the escapist element in fiction dissipated love for one's fellow creatures upon imaginary figures and diverted the mind from the consolations of the Gospel, and so responsible writers became the more anxious to demonstrate that the use of the imagination might be spiritually profitable in extending a reader's knowledge of and directing his sympathies to his fellow creatures.

16

It is at this point that, for the Victorians, orthodox Christianity becomes most modern. For the most philosophically and culturally aware realist writers - George Eliot, for example - are also the most ardent upholders of this traditionally religious concept of the dangerous propensities to escapist fantasy of the unbridled imagination:

The pencil is conscious of a delightful felicity in drawing a griffin - the longer the claws and the larger the wings, the better; but that marvellous felicity which we mistook for genius is apt to forsake us when we want to draw a real unexaggerated lion. Examine your words well, and you will find that even when you have no motive to be false, it is a very hard thing to say the exact truth, even about your own immediate feelings - much harder than to say something fine about them which is *not* the exact truth.

¹⁵ cf above p.2.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Jay, *The Evangelical and Oxford Movements* (Cambridge, 1983), p.15.

Many Victorians are equally aware, however, of the dangers inherent in reacting too violently against the lure of "the improbable and marvellous". Edmund Gosse, describing his education by his parents, writes:

I can but think that my parents were in error thus to exclude the imaginary from my outlook upon facts. They desired to make me truthful; the tendency was to make me positive and sceptical. Had they wrapped me in the soft folds of supernatural fancy, my mind might have been longer content to follow their traditions in an unquestioning spirit.

There are things, Gosse seems to be suggesting, which matter more than truth. This is an amazing confession, for Gosse is coming very close to saying that although that which he now believes is, he is convinced, true, it would nevertheless be better if he believed something different. "The soft folds of supernatural fancy" sound very comfortable, and the reader perhaps pictures a baby lovingly wrapped in soft, warm coverings, completely secure. The implication is that this realm of safe "fancy", of fantasy, has an attraction for Gosse far stronger than that of the "positive and sceptical", which he sets up in opposition to "truthful" as if it is something smaller and uglier than that. Like Tennyson in "The Lotos-Eaters", Gosse allows himself to dream wistfully for a moment of the delicious peace of "an unquestioning spirit". "Supernatural fancy" has become a realm forever inaccessible to him, and a part of him cannot help regretting it.

¹⁷ George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (1859), quoted in Allott, p.25.

¹⁸ Edmund Gosse, *Father and Son* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1983), p.50.

It is by their inhabiting this realm of "supernatural fancy" that Guy and Amy become spiritually superior to Philip and Laura. Their great advantage is the imagination which admits them to higher levels of knowledge, but this to some extent calls into question the orthodoxy of their Christian belief. The phrase, "the sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children", is, of course, Biblical, but Guy's very specific application of it to his own family does seem to derive more from romantic than from Christian sources. Laura seeks to give a broader and more orthodox interpretation to the Scriptural teaching about inherited sin when she says:

"The doom of sin and death is on us all, but you should remember that if you are a Morville you are also a Christian."

She means that:

... as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

19

She interprets "the sins of the fathers" not as the particular vices of one's noble ancestors, but as original sin, the sin of Adam, which all mankind inherits. This curse is not restricted to knightly houses, but is shared by "us all", and one understands it and believes in it, not by imagination, but by faith. Because it is "in Christ" that salvation from the curse is offered to "all", Laura urges Guy to remember that he is "also a Christian". Even if he is "a Morville", and, as such, inherits a particular curse, it is only as "a Christian" that he can overcome "the doom of sin and death" in any form. This, as Amy bears witness, Guy fully accepts.

¹⁹ *1 Corinthians 15 v.22.*

The Morville family curse is being used in two different ways in the novel: it is the central pivot of a romantic story of knightly valour and self-sacrifice, but it is also a type or metaphor for the universal "doom of sin and death". Guy is both a unique hero and a representative of every Christian in his or her struggle against sin. Now this would be quite normal and easily comprehensible in other literary genres. It is exactly what the reader expects, for example, in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, or Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*. *The Pilgrim's Progress*, however, while more fully and obviously an allegory than either Spenser's or Malory's works, presents its central protagonist as clearly unheroic. Christian, as his very name implies, is no one special; he simply exemplifies the role of any and every believer, beset by fears, enemies, failures and sins:

Bunyan's allegory is deeply rooted in the actual. It is of this world in its most familiar aspects; its concreteness is startling in its vividness if we compare it, say, with an allegory like *The Faerie Queene*.

20

Because of this, *The Pilgrim's Progress* can be said to display far more of the characteristics of the novel than either *Morte D'Arthur* or *The Faerie Queene*, and Christian's ordinariness goes a long way towards evoking this sense of the "actual" and the "familiar" in Bunyan's readers.

The character in *The Heir of Redclyffe* who most closely resembles Christian in this respect is not Sir Guy, but Philip. Philip, despite all his virtues in the early part of the book, does not seem like a hero. Guy notices this:

"I only wonder I am not more enthusiastic," said Guy. "I suppose it is his plain good sense that drives away that sort of feeling, for he is as near heroism as a man can be in these days."

²⁰ Walter Allen, *The English Novel* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1958), p.33.

Mrs Edmonstone, in reply, introduces the story of Philip's two sisters, both lost to him, with the words:

"Poor Philip! If disappointment can make a hero, it has fallen to his share."

21

It is the phrase "in these days" which explains Philip's situation. Although he has Morville blood in his veins and, with it, aspirations towards heroism, he is not of the ancient knightly line, but is rather "a man of these days". He is characterised not by imagination, but by "plain good sense" - the virtue central to a "positive and sceptical" age and of considerable importance within Puritan Christianity. But he is "Poor Philip!"; something vital is lacking from his life. In this he differs from Bunyan's Christian, towards whom one might not be able to feel "enthusiastic", viewing him as a superhuman hero, but whom no one could pity as Mrs Edmonstone pities Philip.

Whereas the "concreteness" of the landscapes in *The Pilgrim's Progress* does not make them seem small, Philip's problem is that he inhabits a lesser world, a smaller and more restricted universe than that in which Guy dwells. Both Philip and Guy sacrifice themselves in a manner which might make some claim to being called heroic, and both suffer severe disappointment. The effects of these experiences on their respective personalities are, however, wholly different from one another. One obvious distinction is that Philip begins by sacrificing himself by going into the army, and then suffers disappointment in the physical death of one sister and the spiritual death of the other, whereas Guy reverses the process, first experiencing the disappointment of alienation from the Edmonstone family, then learning to endure this, and only afterwards sacrificing himself by nursing Philip through the fever. "In these days", in the smaller world of the realist novel, heroism is not

²¹ *Heir*, vol I, pp.62-3.

available because self-sacrifice cannot have any really big purpose. Disappointment in itself cannot "make a hero", for Guy's heroism is the result not of his disappointment, but of his discovery that, in the midst of disappointment, there exists something which can never disappoint those who trust in it. Similarly, self-sacrifice does not destroy Guy as it does Philip, because Guy's deepest reliance is upon something larger than and independent of himself.

"Plain good sense" is neither faith nor imagination, but a this-worldly virtue which is "properly concerned only with the nature of human reality without regard to its possible metaphysical essence."²² Philip and his sister Margaret both use "sense" as their guide; the only difference is that his is "good sense" whereas hers is bad sense. Philip, having been disappointed, is no longer able to trust; there no longer seems any value in sacrifice if the world contains nothing bigger than the self. He is, in fact, a disillusioned humanist. It is most curious that the narrator, describing Philip's behaviour with regard to Laura, does not censure the basis of his world-view, but simply says that he is wrong in abandoning that which he already holds to be true:

Philip, with all his sense, was mystifying himself, because he was departing from right, the only true "good sense". His right judgement in all things was becoming obscured, so he talked metaphysical jargon instead of plain practical truth, and thought he was teaching Laura to strengthen her powers of mind, when he was only leading her to stifle meditation, and thus securing her complete submission to himself.

23

²² cf above p.2.

²³ *Heir*, vol 1, p.180.

"Plain practical truth", which has surely much to do with "human reality", is in this context seen as clearly superior to "metaphysical jargon". Philip's problem lies in the fact that it is possible for him, while still holding onto "all his sense", to deceive himself. He is moving from clarity into confusion, and this is the result of his "departing from right" - the "right" which is "good sense", the very core of his identity. "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind",²⁴ writes St Paul, and he goes on in the same chapter to say that "whatsoever is not of faith is sin".²⁵ Philip must follow his own deepest convictions, his "sense" which makes him what he is. For the man of "right judgement in all things", a lack of faith in that judgement, which is exemplified by Philip's taking refuge in the mystical and the obscure and by his failure to do that which he himself believes to be right, must end in moral chaos. One must be true to what one is and to what one knows - and it is upon this Protestant basis of personal integrity that many nineteenth-century ideas concerning the novel are founded: the truth that is the personal experience of human beings must be scrupulously adhered to. And so Maupassant writes of Zola:

His theory goes like this: life is our only model since we cannot conceive anything beyond our senses; consequently to distort life is to produce a bad work of art, since it would be a work of falsification.

26

The difficulty, both for Philip and for the reader, is that comparisons are constantly being drawn between Philip and Guy. They are like the cherubs in the painting described in Philip's book:

²⁴ *Romans* 14 v.5.

²⁵ *Romans* 14 v.23.

²⁶ Guy de Maupassant, "Emile Zola", *Les Célébrités Contemporaines* (1883), quoted in Allott, p.52.

"Those two little angels, what faces they have! Perfect innocence - one full of reasoning, the other of unreasoning adoration!"

27

A relativism is proposed here which is, even as it is put forward, called into question. Both figures are "angels" and both are characterised by "perfect innocence"; the immediate implication is that "reasoning" and "unreasoning adoration" are, while different, equally valid expressions of virtue. But the word "adoration" is put next to "unreasoning", while "reasoning" is left to stand on its own, and is placed in close proximity to "full of", hinting at the idea that reason is self-referring, leaving no space for anything external to itself. The Biblical teaching that "Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth"²⁸ is inescapably indicated. Even seeing it straightforwardly asserted here, the reader familiar with the Scriptures has difficulty in believing that a face of "perfect innocence" can be "full of reasoning", since he or she knows that it was only through the loss of their innocence that Adam and Eve could become "as gods, knowing good and evil".²⁹ The novel seems to want to say that Philip's modern, materialist, realist approach of "reasoning" is just as good as Guy's "unreasoning adoration", but this claim is undermined even by the very language in which it is asserted. Philip is "one in whom there is no tangible evil"³⁰, and yet he does not seem like an angel.

Guy expresses the reader's perplexity when he says of Philip:

²⁷ *Heir*, vol I. p.62.

²⁸ *1 Corinthians* 8 v.1.

²⁹ *Genesis* 3 v.5.

³⁰ *Heir*, vol II, p.275.

"It is very strange, that with all his excellence and real kindness, there should be some distortion in his view of all that concerns me. I cannot understand it."

31

Despite, or almost because of Philip's "perfect innocence", there is some terrible "distortion" in him, which can co-exist with "all his excellence and real kindness" and with "all his sense".³² He is almost evil in the very fact of his excellence; the reader and Mrs Edmonstone feel far safer with Guy's frequent failures and self-condemnation than with Philip's flawless perfection. The reason for this sense of intangible evil in Philip is, like so much in the novel, double. *The Heir of Redclyffe* is a novel in which "a fruitful dramatic tension exists ... between the representation of the "fallen" world's sense of an empirical reality that obeys its own human laws and the implied author's belief in a world ruled by an immanent Divine spirit."³³ In other words, Philip fails to recognise the forces governing the world in which he lives. In attempting to live by his own "sense of ... empirical reality" in a world under Divine control, he is doomed to failure.

But, although Philip's sin is closely bound up with his inability to function freely in every area of the novel, he would still be wrong even in the most rigidly realist novel. Philip sins, as we have seen, even against his own limited sense of right, because he is, not only from a Christian viewpoint, but also from a simply human one, a bad man. This is possible because:

³¹ *Heir*, vol I, p.68.

³² cf above p.15.

³³ Sandbach-Dahlström, p.21.

Although her philosophical position with regard to the nature of reality differs from that of the secularised realists of the day, Charlotte Yonge still resembles them, not only in her choice of form but in the fact that they too write as if the reality they depict is meaningful and even instructive, and because, "realism's quest for a world beyond words" in the hope that it would show itself to be "meaningful and good" was accompanied by a persistent fear "that it [was] merely monstrous and mechanical".

34

The removal of God from the world of the novel does not remove purpose and morality from it - or, at least, this is the realist's dearest hope. A reviewer of 1853 voices forcefully his conviction of the novelist's responsibility in this respect:

Let not the novelist plead in excuse "that it is not his province to play the moralist". The artist might with equal truth justify the introduction of a distorted limb, on the plea that anatomy is no concern of his. Life is profoundly moral.

35

Human reality, the realist believes, should be capable of containing its own positive values without having to move outside itself into the realm of metaphysics in order to find meaning. Within the novel, knowledge should be generated which is both "meaningful and good". Philip is the embodiment of the realist's nightmare, because his virtue is "merely monstrous and mechanical".

³⁴ Sandbach-Dahlström, pp.25-6.

³⁵ Anonymous, "Recent Works of Fiction" (1853), in Edwin M.Eigner and George J. Worth, *Victorian Criticism of the Novel* (Cambridge, 1985), p.89.

Philip's repentance is necessary not only because *The Heir of Redclyffe* is a Christian romance or parable, but also because it is a realist novel. This repentance is depicted most clearly at the moment when Philip kneels at the altar rail in his father's church:

He knelt down, with bowed head and hands clasped. Assuredly, if his father could have beheld him then, it would have been with rejoicing. He would not have sorrowed that that robust frame was wasted, and great strength brought low; that the noble features were worn, the healthful cheek pale, and the powerful intellect clouded and weakened ... such would have been his joy that the humble, penitent, obedient heart had been won at last. Above all, he would have rejoiced that the words that most soothed that wounded spirit were, - "A broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise."

36

It is significant that this scene is described as if seen through the eyes of Philip's dead father, while at the same time it is implied that his father cannot, in fact, see Philip. By this means this apparently intensely religious moment, perhaps the central point about which the whole novel pivots, is made also, and arguably primarily, a human moment. For Philip's repentance is presented not so much as his reconciliation with God as his return to the values of his earthly father. Philip can believe that God will "not despise" his repentance, but the idea of "joy ... in heaven over one sinner that repenteth"³⁷ is seen only indirectly as joy that "would have" existed in a man now dead. Although the dominant emotion of this moment is a happy one, this is undercut by a lurking suspicion that, for Archdeacon Morville, it has come too late. Philip's first guilt, it seems, lies in his sin against his father's teaching, and his sin against God is merely a secondary result of this.

³⁶ *Heir*, vol.II, p.276.

³⁷ *Luke* 15 v.7.

It is interesting to compare this description of Philip arriving at a new awareness with the account of Guy's spiritual struggle which I have already examined.³⁸ In both passages, close attention is given to the physical attitude, location and appearance of the man in question, and both passages suggest the possibility of invisible spectators. The act of looking at Philip and Guy at these moments is presented as being of great importance, and by this means, the reader's gaze is focused and directed. The narrator, the reader, and the shadowy watchers described in the novel all to some extent stand in the place of God, whom one would expect to be the witness of such moments in a novel of faith, and yet who is never explicitly said to be present. The only person who can be said to be watched by no one is God Himself, and it is worth noting that, up until this moment of repentance in the church, Philip has lived as if his life were entirely unwitnessed - as if he, in fact, were God. Different watchers, however, understand a scene differently, and this is of crucial importance in the description of Philip.

The account begins with a neutral picture of Philip in a formal attitude of prayer. This, however, requires interpretation, because anyone, any hypocrite, can kneel down and clasp his hands together:

Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.

39

In this sense, Philip's father does indeed stand in the place of God, for he displays a powerful lack of concern with the visible. Everything that once looked strong has now been made weak, which is the inevitable result of Philip's calling weakness strength, and strength weakness. All Philip's physical virtues, all those good things which have made him "merely

³⁸ cf above p.3.

³⁹ *1 Samuel* 16 v.7.

monstrous and mechanical" have been lost, in exchange for a "humble, penitent, obedient heart". All these adjectives used to describe the heart imply the existence of a greater power, before which the heart is to humble itself, to which it owes penitence, and which it must obey. Does this mean, then, that Philip has ceased to be a realist character and has become a Christian character, taking a full part in a Christian novel? The Archdeacon's greatest joy is, after all, to be found in Philip's desire that God should accept his repentance.

Of course, Philip has always been nominally a Christian, although, as we have seen, his understanding of the world has been based solely upon the resources of his own reason. But characters in secular novels can and often do repent, turning from the "monstrous and mechanical" to the "meaningful and good" by re-ordering their relations with the rest of the human world. I shall explore this further in my examinations of George Eliot's "Janet's Repentance". and *Silas Marner*⁴⁰ Philip certainly achieves this kind of secular repentance, but it would be difficult to demonstrate that he also establishes a new relationship with God. He learns one very simple moral lesson: that he should not place absolute trust in his own judgement. The important fact about his repentance is not the new life to which it leads, but rather the repentance itself. Philip is humbled and "brought low", and he is never again anything but a penitent. It is in this that his father "would have rejoiced", and not in anything else that might come out of it. The Psalm from which the words in which Philip seeks comfort are taken also asks for far more than Philip ever seeks or receives:

Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then I will teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

41

⁴⁰ cf below Chapters Two and Four.

⁴¹ *Psalms* 51 vv.12-13.

Although Philip's sin seems far less serious than the adultery and murder of the Psalmist, King David, Philip never fully enters into "the joy of thy salvation"; he is always "a grave, melancholy man".⁴² And in this respect Philip is strikingly similar to Mr Tryan in Eliot's "Janet's Repentance".⁴³ Philip is unable to "teach transgressors thy ways" because, although he has learned to submit to the rules which govern the world in which he lives, he cannot understand these rules, for they do not belong to his world, but to another, larger one which is beyond his knowledge.

"Gleams from a brighter world, too soon eclipsed or forfeited",⁴⁴ is Guy's definition of happiness. Unlike Philip, who can only see human reality, Guy is a visionary. The problem with this is that only the visionary can perceive this "brighter world"; the ordinary novel reader cannot. When Guy finally enters that towards which he has aspired, he becomes invisible. While Philip becomes a "grave" man, enduring the living death of repentance, Guy enters into his higher world, which is, as far as the reader is concerned, separation and death. Amabel is the only figure to maintain some form of contact with him, and in so doing, she also brings her life to an end:

"Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace." Those words seemed to come from her own heart. She had brought Guy's daughter to be baptised, and completed his work of pardon, and she had a yearning to be departing in peace, whither her sunshine was gone. But he had told her not to wish that his child should be motherless; she had to train her to be fit to meet him. The sunshine was past, but she had plenty to do in the shade, and it was for his sake.

⁴² *Heir*, vol II, p.366.

⁴³ cf below Chapter Two.

⁴⁴ *Heir*, vol.I, p.45.

The whole novel seems to end in death; even this baby, having been baptised, is now prepared for death, and the remaining purpose of her life is that she may be trained "to be fit to meet [Guy]". Amy will remain alive only for the purpose of teaching her child to die well.

It is difficult for the reader inhabiting a world which places a high valuation on human development and achievement not to feel horror at the thought that this twenty-one year old girl now considers her life to be over. The novel makes it clear that Amabel will never re-marry, but will remain "in the shade", existing "for his sake", and one tends to think of this attitude as unhealthy and neurotic, and to wonder what will be the unfortunate fate of the daughter upon whom Amy will thrust all her frustrated aspirations. But this is to read the novel from a realist standpoint. The only way, in fact, to sympathise with this idea of devoted widowhood is to think of it as part of a romance. No reader thinks it out of place, for example, that Malory's Fair Maid of Astolat should die for the love of Sir Launcelot, and one could scarcely imagine Juliet shrugging her shoulders and setting off to look for another husband after the death of Romeo. But perhaps death is easier than perpetual widowhood. Amy seems to be uncomfortably trapped between the heroic, medieval genre which teaches her to die with her husband, and the humanist expectations of the nineteenth century, which would render such a death sinful and escapist. Many Victorian novels treat re-marriage as an important indication of life continuing to grow and develop after mistakes, failures, and sorrows, so that the closing sections of both *David Copperfield* and *Middlemarch*, for example, focus upon the difficulties and the needs involved in achieving a second marriage which builds upon and to some extent redeems the past. It is here, at the end of *The Heir of Redclyffe*, that the tension between the different ways of reading the world which the novel presents is at its most obvious and problematic.

⁴⁵ *Heir*, vol.II, p.301.

The reader cannot feel completely happy about either Philip or Amy, because neither character is fully at home in the novel.

* * * * *

Similarly, it is the ending of George MacDonald's *David Elginbrod* which most clearly reveals the discrepancies within that novel. MacDonald's characters operate on a number of different and largely separate levels, and it is when two figures from different levels attempt to come together in marriage that the gap between them becomes most apparent:

But dared he think of marrying her, a creature inspired with a presence of the Spirit of God which none but the saints enjoy, and thence clothed with a garment of beauty, which her spirit wove out of its own loveliness? ... She would bring with her the presence of God himself, for she walked ever in his light, and that light clung to her and radiated from her.

46

Margaret does not need Hugh; she is a complete being. She already has with her the presence of God, but Hugh can only have the "light" which he longs for as Margaret brings it to him. It will be a wholly unequal marriage, for Hugh exists on a far lower level than Margaret. It will be, in fact, an attempt at union between members of two different spiritual species, for Hugh is an ordinary, fallen sinner, whereas Margaret is a saint.

⁴⁶ George MacDonald, *David Elginbrod*, Garland "Novels of Faith and Doubt" series, reprint of 1863 edition, three volumes in one, (New York and London, 1975), vol.III, pp.376-7.

Nor is she merely a "saint" in the Protestant sense: she is not simply a sinner depending on Christ for salvation, but she is also personally holy. A modern Roman Catholic catechism defines a saint as follows:

A saint is one who lives by the Holy Spirit, and in this sense all are called to be saints; but the word is also used to mean those especially holy men and women whom the Church (often by canonisation) recommends to us as examples of virtue and holiness, and whose public cult she permits.

47

Margaret does not only absorb the light of God; it also "radiate[s] from her". Her personal faith is of less importance in the novel than the power her holiness has for good among all those with whom she comes into contact. Through Margaret, others come to know God, and experience His "presence". She is a "holy ... woman", an "example of virtue and holiness" to the world in which she lives, and it would be difficult to claim that she is not, also, an object of veneration. The author becomes a substitute Church, offering his characters as objects of a "public cult". Holiness carries with it the idea of purity, and thus of separation from all that is tainted with evil. It is appropriate that Hugh should wonder how he "dare[s]" even to "think of" marrying Margaret when one considers the terrible fates described in the Bible which befall those who bring themselves into unauthorised contact with that which is holy.⁴⁸ The word "creature" used to describe Margaret conveys something very different from "woman" or "person" because it points away from her humanity, suggesting rather that there is much about her that is not humanly knowable. All that Hugh can be sure of is that she is a "creature", created by God; only in this is she in the least like himself.

⁴⁷ The Catholic Truth Society, *The Teaching of the Catholic Church: A New Catechism of Christian Doctrine* (London, 1985), p.25.

⁴⁸ cf eg *1 Chronicles* 13 vv.9,10; *Daniel* 5; *1 Corinthians* 11 vv.26-34.

What is it in Margaret that Hugh falls in love with? It seems almost to be her unattainability, for he thinks of her as being "clothed with a garment of beauty". That which is most lovely about her is also that which excludes him from her body. It is her spiritual beauty which he loves, yet it is precisely this that he cannot be a part of. Margaret is constantly forming beauty out of her "own loveliness"; she is, with God, completely self-sufficient. Hugh cannot add any further meaning to her beauty, and so, giving her nothing, he can only feed upon her like a parasite. Margaret does love Hugh, but she does so in an abstract way which never reaches the physical level. When he asks her to marry him, she replies, "I don't care ... if you never marry me"⁴⁹ and later she explains this speech by saying that she loves him and that "love is enough".⁵⁰ It is enough for Margaret, but is it enough for Hugh? Whereas she is content with transcendental versions of emotional experience, the reader can scarcely help feeling concerned on Hugh's account, because he is about to marry a woman who displays no comprehension of the whole range of human needs more mundane than "love". Because *David Elginbrod* is written in the form of a novel, and because Hugh, and even, to some extent, Margaret, seem like realist novel characters, this basis for a marriage is worrying.

It becomes clear that something very odd is going on when, in volume one, the narrator stops the story to explain to the reader the reasons why, at this point, he cannot answer the question whether or not Hugh and Margaret are in love:

I have two answers to make to this. The first is: "I do not pretend to know so much about love as you; and must confess, I do not know whether they were in love with each other or not". The second is: "That I dare not pretend to understand thoroughly such a sacred mystery as the heart of Margaret; and I should feel it rather worse than presumptuous to talk as if I did. Even Hugh's is known to me only by gleams of light thrown, now and then, and

⁴⁹ *Elginbrod*, vol.III, p.391.

⁵⁰ *Elginbrod*, vol III, p.398.

here and there, upon it". Perhaps the two answers are only the same answer in different shapes.

51

It is quite shocking to find a Victorian novelist confessing ignorance of his characters in such a manner. MacDonald's repeated use of "pretend", and the word "presumptuous" even go so far as to hint at censure of the practices of other writers who, like the novel's implied readers, "think" they know more about humanity than they really do, and who claim to understand that which is a "sacred mystery", closed to the eyes of all but God. The narrator of *David Elginbrod* is presented as a mere reporter of a series of events which are, in themselves, completely outside his control. By this means, MacDonald seeks to avoid the nineteenth-century convention of authorial omniscience. He wishes, in fact, to present the created world of the novel as being greater than the storyteller, and thus to suggest that the novelist is not the true creator of that of which he writes.

It is interesting to view his approach in the light of that described by an anonymous reviewer in 1853, who speaks of the novel as:

... the glowing pages of romance, where stand revealed those hidden passages of experience, which in actual life are witnessed only by the eye of Him who seeth in secret; and as we listen to the wail of sorrow or the tones of joy ... our heart responds to the sympathetic touch, and we recognise the deep truth of the poet's words, "that we have all of us one human heart".

52

⁵¹ *Elginbrod*, vol.I, pp.198-9.

⁵² Anonymous, "Recent Works of Fiction", in *Victorian Criticism of the Novel*, p.85.

This writer draws a distinction between "actual life", which is made, controlled and fully known only by God, and the fictional world of "romance". The curious thing is that the "hidden passages of experience" are the same in both worlds, the only difference being that, whereas in God's universe they remain "hidden", in the novel they are "revealed". The claim being made here is that aspects of the Divine creation which are visible only to the Creator become, in the novel, open and publicly knowable, while still retaining the objective status of having been made by an absolute being. One could argue that such a theory of the novel is simply an expression of the general human desire both to have one's cake and to eat it. Surely the basis for God's seeing "in secret" is His total knowledge of and power over that which He has made? As its Creator, He is necessarily greater than His creation, and can therefore comprehend it completely.

But how can the novelist be greater than God's creation? Surely he or she can only be greater than his or her own creation? But if the novel is merely the creation of a human novelist, why should it be able to reveal anything beyond that which is ordinarily humanly knowable? An attempt is made to answer these complaints by the assertion that "our heart responds" to the novel. One of the aims of at least some realist writers - George Eliot, for example - is that the novel should be "meaningful and even instructive";⁵³ it should, in other words, affect the way in which its readers think and behave in their own "actual life".

Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying and extending our contact with our fellow men beyond the bounds of our personal lot. All the more sacred is the task of the artist when he undertakes to paint the life of the People.

54

⁵³ cf above p.18.

⁵⁴ George Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life: Riehl", (*Westminster Review*, 1856), in

The use of the word "sacred" here is significant; the realist writer is not interested in secular, this-worldly life because it is secular, but, on the contrary, because it is the point at which humanity comes closest to reality - and reality is the most holy, spiritual level of existence.

The revelations made within the novel become objectively true as the reader recognises the characters' experience as being similar to his own and to that of other people, and as he "responds" emotionally to the characters in the novel just as he would, or should, if they were his own neighbours. Such a reader perceives that "we have all of us one human heart", and this "us" includes the people within the world of the novel as well as those outside it. Through his understanding of those human beings in the novel, by seeing their, "secret passages of experience", the reader will come to know far more than he could otherwise have known about his fellow human beings in his own world, and will thus be enabled to treat them more sympathetically. It is for this reason that the credibility of a novel is commonly thought of as being of great importance, so that the reader tends to feel that there is something wrong with a novel if its plot or characters do not seem, according to his experience of the world, likely to exist in reality. That which the reader cannot believe is censured as both bad art and bad morality:

He always thought that *sudden conversions*, such especially as were left to the candour of the reader to *suppose* and *make out*, had neither *art*, nor *nature*, nor even *probability*, in them; and that they were moreover of very *bad* example.

55

George Eliot, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such, Essays and Leaves from a Note-book*, Blackwood and Sons (Edinburgh and London, undated), p.360.

⁵⁵ Samuel Richardson, Postscript to *Clarissa, The History of a Young Lady* (1747-8), quoted in Allott, p.61.

The problem with this approach is that it sets up the reader's prior knowledge of "actual life" as the supreme judge. There is a sense in which such a teaching mode can never impart anything new, but can only reinforce beliefs already held.

Such an emphasis seems to be based upon the Romantic, Wordsworthian feeling that all knowledge of real value is buried somewhere within the self and needs to be recollected:

But there's a Tree, of many, one,
A single Field which I have looked upon,
Both of them speak of something that is gone:
The Pansy at my feet
Doth the same tale repeat:
Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

56

It is at this point that the relationship between the realist novel and religion in their approach to epistemology begins to become clear. We have, now, three uses of the word "gleam", each of which is concerned with knowledge not ordinarily available to humanity. Guy Morville speaks of happiness as "gleams from a brighter world"⁵⁷; the narrator of *David Elginbrod* says that Hugh is known to him "only by gleams of light"⁵⁸; and Wordsworth is in search of a lost "visionary gleam" which is now "something that is gone".

⁵⁶ William Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood", part IV, in *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, edited by Thomas Hutchinson (Oxford, 1923), p.588, ll.51-57.

⁵⁷ cf above p.23.

⁵⁸ cf above p.27.

I will begin by looking at Wordsworth's "gleam" in order that this non-novelistic example might throw light upon the others. The universe "speaks" to the poet; fields, trees and flowers tell him a "tale", but this is not itself the "gleam". In looking again at these things, the poet is reminded of that which he has lost: the "visionary gleam" which once accompanied these same sights. The problem is a simple one of change through time: "Where is it now?". The same person in the same place lacks the supernatural awareness he once had in that place. Because in his experience the poet is free to move at will only through time and not through space, his question focuses naturally upon the location of his vision, so that he asks, "Where is it now?", and not "When is it here?". In order to recover his lost "glory", the poet must travel not through space, but through time, in memory. He must stay with the same field, and tree, and flower, the same world external to himself, since it is this that triggers his recollection of the vision. And the vision was never a vision of another world, but rather a power coming from another world which enabled the child to see "splendour in the grass" and "glory in the flower".⁵⁹ The knowledge sought after is knowledge of this-worldly meaning based upon the existence of a greater world. That which is lost is a "dream", because it came from within the poet's own consciousness, but also a "glory" because it transfigured his whole world. It is of crucial importance that it is "I" who has "looked upon" the field and the tree; somebody else could look at them and experience nothing at all out of the ordinary.

Wordsworth's yearning for this "visionary gleam" is in many ways similar to Guy Morville's idea of "gleams from a brighter world, too soon eclipsed or forfeited." In both cases the "gleam" comes from beyond the limits of day to day, this-worldly human experience, and the awareness of it gives meaning to the mundane aspects of life. Like Wordsworth, Guy suffers the loss of his visions through time, so that his "gleams" are "too soon" lost. The difference is that Guy is removed from the reality of his vision in space as well as in time, so that his gaze is wholly fixed upon another world. His desire with

⁵⁹ Wordsworth, Ode, part X, l.182, p.590.

regard to the temporal, human world is limited to little more than the salvation of his own soul, so that he may enter the "brighter world" towards which he aspires. Guy is something of a poet, but the novel represents his poetry through the eyes of Amabel, who:

... was studying not his intellect but his soul; she did not care whether he would have been a poet, what she looked for was the record of the sufferings and struggles of the sad six months when his character was established, strengthened and settled.

60

Poetry is here firmly subordinated to "character", whereas for Wordsworth the powers of the human heart are valued because they give rise to "Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears",⁶¹ which are the roots from which poetry springs. Guy's aim is not to make the human world a more beautiful place so much as to enter into the beauty of "a brighter world". There is a great gulf in his imagination between these two worlds, whereas Wordsworth sees birth, which marks the division between his "visionary gleam" and its source, as "but a sleep and a forgetting".⁶² That which is altered through birth is merely the individual's mode of consciousness, and not the objectively positive or negative nature of his surroundings.

The reason for this distinction is that, while the poet writes about a world bigger than himself, the novelist, in order to establish full, omniscient control over his created universe, has to define the universe by placing limits upon it. And these limits both create huge power and freedom for the novelist's imagination and also confine it within a narrow

⁶⁰ *Heir*, vol.II. p.247.

⁶¹ "Ode", II.204-207.

⁶² "Ode", I.58.

framework. This leads to problems for the novel, which Valentine Cunningham describes as follows:

To put it briefly and roughly, Defoe wrote a sort of programme for the English novel. The Puritan background, the diary-keeping habit, the practice of daily self-scrutiny before God, provided him, as it were, with some of the novel's most recognisable features, particularly its sense of ... the everyday, the domestic circumstance; the quotidian process, the diurnal round ... and the ordinary life of ordinary people ... And underpinning this interest in ordinariness was the Puritan liberalism, the faith in democratic rule and in the priesthood of all believers, the rights of every man to follow his conscience in politics and religion. Paradoxically, of course, this Puritan tradition also bore with it the seeds of its own decay: there was also the fatal commitment to bourgeois values, to middle-class myths and consolations that is so manifest in Defoe's plots. And this bourgeois flavour of the English novel has been constantly at odds with the accompanying commitment to ordinariness ... The one seems to me a closing, illiberal pressure, the other an opening, liberal thrust, and ... they create a continuing tension within individual novels as well as within the historic continuum of the novel.

63

This confinement to the limits of "the ordinary life of ordinary people" is both the novel's greatest strength and its greatest weakness. Its power lies in its intensely individualistic focus upon the humanly knowable world, but anything which falls outside this world can then be presented only at the price of depicting it as being wholly separate from normal, earthly experience, and also of seriously endangering the novel's credibility. If there are regions beyond the novelist's domain, then the novelist is God no longer. Because a human being can have, at best, only a limited form of omniscience, then the novel can present only a limited world. This clearly affects the way in which religion is portrayed

⁶³ Valentine Cunningham, *Everywhere Spoken Against - Dissent in the Victorian Novel* (Oxford, 1975), p.9.

in the novel. For Charlotte Yonge, it means that Guy's "gleams" come very much from another, a separate world, which can never be opened up to Philip, and which the reader will not necessarily be able to believe in or sympathise with. The smooth continuation of "actual life" into and throughout the novel is broken.

George MacDonald perceives this problem, and attempts a somewhat different approach to it. His approach is, in fact, very similar to that of the poet, in that he attempts to portray the world of which he writes as being bigger than himself. The difference between MacDonald's and Wordsworth's productions, however, is that MacDonald is writing fiction, and it is not easy to account for the existence and nature of fictional characters if their author will not admit to having invented them. The narrator is emphatic in his insistence that there is far more to the characters than he knows, thereby implying that they are real people, made by God, about whom it would virtually be blasphemous to claim omniscience. But the reader knows that the situation cannot really be so straightforward as this since the story is, after all, fictional. Whereas Guy Morville's "gleams" came into the character's experience from regions outside the ordinary bounds of the novel's world, in Hugh's case "gleams" come from some mysterious agency inside the fictional world, shining out to the narrator, who seems to live on the very edge of the reality in which Margaret, Hugh and the others dwell, seeing them as people sharing an equal reality status with himself, yet considering himself qualified to write their story.

He displays, even for a biographer, a surprising lack of control over his information, saying that Hugh's character is known to him, "only by gleams of light, thrown, now and then, and here and there, upon it."⁶⁴ This knowledge seems to come by chance, as if at the whim of some hidden agency, and the passivity of the narrator in relation to it seems curious. He does not, apparently, set out actively to look for facts upon which to base his story, but rather sits and waits for intermittent and inconstant, wavering "gleams of light".

⁶⁴ cf above p.27.

He is like a poet, or a prophet, waiting for inspiration. He is also like a reader, seeking to interpret Margaret and Hugh; his implicit faith in the complete reality of these figures makes him seem far more like a naive, childlike hearer of a story than a crafty, witty teller of tales. Speaking, as he is at this point, to the reader of *David Elginbrod*, the narrator suggests that this reader is at fault in attempting to adopt the role of the author, for how can a flawed, limited human being pretend to understand such a "sacred mystery"⁶⁴ as that which is "witnessed only by the eye of Him who seeth in secret"⁶⁴ Such knowledge as that of which he speaks can only be known by revelation, by "gleams of light" over which their recipient has no control whatever. The attitude called for is one of profound humility before the great book of nature, of the works of God. The highest activity to which a man or woman can aspire is simply to read this Divine book as light is given so that it may be understood. Any attempt to write a rival book is a lie and a blasphemy.

But surely *David Elginbrod* is just such a rival book? By using a narrator in this manner, MacDonald is putting himself, as author, in the place of God more completely and more brazenly than virtually any other Victorian novelist? For who made the heart of Margaret, if it was not MacDonald? MacDonald, however, will never admit this, and in some ways the novel can be seen as the ultimate realist text, since at no point will it confess to any separation between itself and the "actual life" which is the world of the writer and of the reader. We, as readers, are living in the same universe as Margaret and Hugh - this, at least, is the narrator's claim. The idea of an invisible human author, MacDonald in disguise, shaping the characters behind the scenes is constantly being undermined by the narrator's total refusal to admit that his story is fictional, which goes hand in hand with his claiming to inhabit the same world as the reader.

Describing Falconer as a truly generous, rich person, the narrator says:

She to whose memory this book is dedicated is - I will not say was - one of the noblest of such. There are two ways of accounting for the difficulty a reader may find in believing in such a character: either that, not being poor, he has never needed such a friend; or that,

being rich, he has never been such a friend. Or if it be that, being poor, he has never found such a friend; his difficulty is easy to remove: - I have.

65

At this point, *David Elginbrod* is made to look rather like fiction in that the narrator acknowledges the problem that there is some possibility that Falconer, as a "character", may not be credible to the reader because he behaves in a fashion different from anything in the reader's experience. MacDonald, however, now makes a bold attempt to push back the frontiers of realism. He takes this narrator, to whom Margaret's heart is "a sacred mystery", who is smaller than that of which he writes, and offers his experience as a substitute for that which the reader may lack. We are asked to take the word of a figure who is in some sense inside the novel that the generosity portrayed in the novel is true in "actual life". If the reader has not personally known Lady Noel Byron, the woman to whom the book is dedicated, MacDonald has, and if she can exist, so can Falconer. There is, evidently, a very close identification between the voice of the narrator and that of MacDonald himself.

MacDonald is seeking to go further in the direction of poetry as revelation even than Wordsworth. Although, as he implies, Lady Byron could now be thought of as "something that is gone",⁶⁵ his imagination holds her in the present, as a part of his "actual life", so that he will not even say "was". He expects to see truth revealed directly, not indirectly, in fictional experience that is also real. There is no need, he suggests, to alter the focus of one's consciousness in order to see the transcendent: it is here and now. The reader who will not believe in Falconer is one of: "those who are in the habit of regarding the real and the

⁶⁵ *Elginbrod*, vol.III, p.359.

⁶⁶ cf above p.31.

ideal as essentially and therefore irreconcilably opposed.”⁶⁷ It is this attitude, MacDonald believes, which characterises the irreligious person. If one drives a wedge between facts and the supernatural, one becomes like Hugh’s enemy, the evil Herr von Funkelstein, a superstitious scientist, seeking, like the worst sort of novelist, to manipulate both natural and supernatural forces to obey oneself. One is, in effect, claiming to be God. If the real and the ideal are opposed to one another, then each can be used as a weapon to destroy the other, which is the most terrifying form of evil.

Hugh realises this when he is in a thunderstorm with Harry:

A common tutor would have seized the opportunity of explaining what he knew of the laws and operations of electricity. But Hugh had been long enough a pupil of David to feel that to talk at such a time of anything in nature but God, would be to do the boy a serious wrong. One capable of so doing would, in the presence of the Saviour himself, speculate on the nature of his own faith; or upon the death of his child, seize the opportunity of lecturing on anatomy.

⁶⁸

The phrase “seize the opportunity” is used twice here, emphasising the danger of treating all human experience as raw material from which to extract knowledge. The “common tutor” does not see a storm on its own terms, but rather extracts from it that which he most readily understands and is able to explain. Because he is not prepared to admit to his pupil that the universe contains mysteries beyond his comprehension, he limits the storm, both for himself and for his pupil, by calling it “only electricity”.⁶⁸ Anything which eludes this definition will then either become wholly invisible, or will be thought of as belonging to a

⁶⁷ *Elginbrod*, vol.III, p.357.

⁶⁸ *Elginbrod*, vol.II, p.108.

different and somehow less real world altogether, which is exactly the same problem as that faced by the novelist wishing to depict religious experience in a realist novel. There are some things which it seems almost impossible to include:

There is a kind of tragedy, it seems to me, which has hitherto almost entirely eluded literature. The novel has dealt with the contrariness of fate, good or evil fortune, social relationships, the conflicts of passions and of characters - but not with the very essence of man's being. ... Properly speaking there are no Christian novels. There are novels whose purpose is edification; but that has nothing to do with what I mean. Moral tragedy - the tragedy, for instance, which gives such terrific meaning to the Gospel text: "If the salt have lost his flavour wherewith shall it be salted?" - that is the tragedy with which I am concerned.

69

The danger is that, seeing partially, within the limits of that which is knowable, one will see falsely. It is not that the individual's faith and the principles of anatomy are of no importance: the problem is that their value is very, very much smaller than that of the experiences from which speculation about them is derived. A faith which looks at itself in the presence of God has missed the very reason for its existence; it puts knowledge in the place of the very source of life. It says: "The small thing I know is better, more valuable, more worth my consideration, than the big thing I do not know", and to say this is to accept spiritual stagnation and death. This was the central belief of F.D Maurice, who greatly influenced MacDonald:

Both Puseyite religion *about* God and Carlyle's religion of man amounted to the same thing: "religion against God ... the heresy of our age ... leading to the last, most terrific form of infidelity". To seek principles rather than systems and realities rather than opinions - these seemed to Maurice to be correlative if not identical movements of thought. By such a

⁶⁹ Andre Gide, *Les Faux Monnayeurs*, Part I, chapter xiii (1925), translated by Dorothy Bussy (1952), in Allott, p.105.

movement the theologian stood in continuity with the Bible and the creeds ... which "deliver us from partial ideas of God, and from dependence on particular systems of doctrine, whether religious or philosophical", by directing attention to the reality of God and not to their own religious ideas.

70

Maurice thinks like a realist novelist in that he is seeking always to replace ideas and arguments with the direct personal experience which he sees as the only means of making contact with "reality".

Hugh, then, realising the terrible narrowness of this approach to education, begins to teach Harry by telling him stories:

A solemn stillness fell upon Hugh's spirit, as he recalled these words [David's words about human ignorance of the individual's own, God-given destiny] out of which stillness, I presume, grew the little parable which follows; though Hugh, after he had learned far more about the things therein hinted at, could never understand how it was, that he could have put so much more into it, than he seemed to have understood at that period of his history.

71

This approach to storytelling is that which MacDonald seeks to follow himself; the little phrase "I presume" here reminds us of his repeated insistence that he does not fully understand that of which he writes. It is important here that it is not directly David's teaching which gives rise to Hugh's "parable", but rather the "solemn stillness" which Hugh experiences as he recalls that teaching. Knowledge is never to be passed on in the form of an

⁷⁰ Welch, pp.246-7.

⁷¹ *Elginbrod*, vol.I, p.281.

impersonal set of precepts or definitions; instead one must speak out of the entire, only partially comprehended experience of having been taught and of recalling what that teaching was like.

This is like the Wordsworthian approach, for it is the personal recollection of a moment rather than the moment itself which can fruitfully be expressed in words. The story comes, as far as Hugh is concerned, out of the unknown. He is able to convey in parable form "much more ... than he seemed to have understood"; there is an important element of mystery involved. It seems almost as if David is speaking through Hugh, like God speaking through a prophet, telling truths beyond ordinary human understanding. Even after Hugh has "learned" a great deal, still he "could never understand" the means by which he was enabled so to teach Harry. But this is not nearly so important as the fact that he could tell the parable and teach Harry. And I feel that at this point MacDonald would caution me, the critic, perhaps more than any other species of interpreter, since I stand in such great danger of divorcing my responses to the text from my own "actual life", to be very careful. Why should I, after all, possess a deeper understanding of such matters than Hugh, who has learned a great deal from Margaret, or than the narrator/MacDonald figure? I am being precisely the sort of reader MacDonald most fears and mistrusts if I claim the ability to explain that which is a "sacred mystery".

I do want to ask, however, how far Hugh can be said to be the author, the creator of his "little parable", because this will help to answer the question how far MacDonald is the maker of his big parable, *David Elginbrod*. Hugh certainly could not have told his story had he not known David, nor could he have constructed it out of a set of propositions, even if David had taught him those propositions. The story depends more upon Hugh's experience than upon his intellectual knowledge. It is also significant that the story is a "parable", an earthly story with a heavenly meaning, not clearly stating, but rather "hint[ing] at" eternal, spiritual truths. Hugh speaks about seeds and flowers which everyone, even children, know about, and yet hidden within this simple tale is a higher, spiritual level of meaning. The tale is bigger than its teller: this is MacDonald's central belief con-

cerning fiction. The question whether the teller of a story is the creator and controller of the whole world depicted in the story leads inevitably to the question: who is the teller anyway? One could say that Hugh is the author of his parable, if by "Hugh" one means all that Hugh has ever experienced, his spiritual state, the effect other people have had upon him, all his unrecognised beliefs, ideas and impulses, and all the meanings and implications which such beliefs may carry with them, much of which will, of course, be unknown to the smaller, self-conscious, knowing "Hugh". If the author is more than he understands, so will his book be.

David Elginbrod is largely a novel about a dead man. It deals essentially with the unseen, and with that which lies outside the limits of an ordinary realist novel. MacDonald attempts to account for this unusual approach as follows:

He [David Elginbrod] was dead. - Yet his name will stand as the name of my story for pages to come; because if he had not been in it, the story would never have been worth writing; because the influence of that ploughman is the salt of the whole; because a man's life in the earth is not to be measured by the time he is visible upon it; and because, when the story is wound up, it will be in the presence of his spirit.

72

The issue is one of "worth"; in the end, a story is only "worth writing" for MacDonald if it deals with more than the merely visible. The day to day details of human life on earth are, for him, meaningless without the "salt" of the faith that this "actual life" is part of a larger continuum. He is happy to write about life "in the earth", but it must be "life" in the earth - something which depends neither upon time nor upon visibility; something which alone makes a novel "worth writing". The story will end, it will be "wound up" and finished, but David's spirit will transcend this ending, presiding over it as something greater

⁷² *Elginbrod*, vol.II, p.198.

than it. He is greater than the novel because he - not a doctrine or a proposition - is the purpose which drives it.

Fiction cannot contain faith, which is why *David Elginbrod* is constantly slipping into the realms of biography in one direction and fantasy in the other, so that the reader never quite knows whether she or he is dealing with a parable, a report of historical events, or some odd, distorted form of novel. For the same reason, *The Heir of Redclyffe* is split in two, with several major characters ending up on the wrong side of the divide. David Elginbrod is dead; he cannot be restricted to one place and time, but must rather become a "name", because only as a "name" does he have any real "life". It is easy to think of him in the first section of the novel, particularly if one approaches him from a realist standpoint, as a rather dull, naive old man, talking about his heterodox religious opinions in a semi-comprehensible dialect. The problem is that he is one of those "of whom the world was not worthy";⁷³ he belongs to "a brighter world", and therefore does not speak the language of the earthly, realist world. While in his Scottish forest, David is no more than a "ploughman"; only as a "spirit" does he gain our awed admiration, but as a spirit he is bigger than anything that can remain within a novel. The "life" which makes *David Elginbrod* worth writing is not the life of "human reality"⁷⁴ and the novel, if it is to contain David Elginbrod's kind of "life", stands in need of radical redefinition.

⁷³ *Hebrews* 11 v.38.

⁷⁴ cf above p.2.

Chapter Two - Personal Experience of Objective Reality

I propose in this chapter to examine two fictional works which are concerned with the question how an individual's theological understanding - or lack of it - relates to his or her humanity. This issue is, in the Victorian age, of immense importance to anyone seeking to establish what it would feel like to be a religious believer and how one could know whether one had a relation with God. I shall begin with a discussion of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, thus demonstrating the problem and some possible solutions against the relatively stable background of seventeenth century Calvinist Christianity, and then move on to delineate the disintegration of this epistemological base which was taking place throughout the period with which I am primarily concerned. I will then go on to ask how George Eliot's short story, "Janet's Repentance", succeeds in handling the two views of Christian belief as a personal commitment to humanity and as revelation by a transcendent God which, by the mid nineteenth century, appear frequently to be in conflict with one another.

During a recent visit to a friend's home, I was invited by my friend's son, Luke, who is five years old, to view a selection of his artwork. His most prized achievement was a collage, which he had made at school by gluing various twigs, seeds, shells and pebbles onto a piece of card. Like most young children's pictures, this, to my eyes at least, required interpretation, so that my task of intelligently commenting upon the work seemed to be made much easier when Luke began to point to one item in it after another, explaining that the twig was a man, the acorn a tree, the large stone a hill, and so on. Taking courage from

this, I indicated a shell, particularly prominent in the design, and asked, "What's this shell, then?". Looking at me as if I were a complete imbecile, Luke replied, in tones of innocent amazement at my cognitive weakness, "It's a shell, of course." After that I dared ask no more questions - I had been well and truly trapped.

Now, this feeling of being caught out is the repeated experience of characters in and, to some extent, readers of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. If a given object can represent either itself or something at an unspecified degree of abstraction from it, but only one of these at any given time, then interpretation becomes wholly unreliable if one is not told which rules apply when. Just as I had not seen the finished design within Luke's collage, so the reader of *The Pilgrim's Progress* cannot understand the true significance of each separate part of Christian's journey until he or she has read the entire book and can see the story as a whole. Neither Luke nor Bunyan is a relativist - there is only ever one correct understanding of their worlds - but there is no interpretative key external to these worlds by which their meaning can be fixed and defined at any given moment. The laws by which both the child's collage and the pilgrimage landscape are to be read are "the laws of [the creator's] nature",⁷⁵ - unless they are read as a whole, as their makers conceived of them, they cannot reliably be understood at all. It is this idea of the self-contained nature of any individual mind, and its incomprehensibility to any other mind unless it is apprehended in its entirety, from the inside, which substantially informs Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and which is of importance to the handling of religious belief in the Victorian novel.

Hopeful is made to look foolish in much the same way as I was by Luke when, while discussing the story of Little-faith with Christian, he proffers what appears to be a completely reasonable comment:

⁷⁵ John Henry Cardinal Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (London and New York, 1889), p.347.

Hopef. But 'tis a wonder that his necessities did not put him upon selling, or pawning some of his Jewels, that he might have wherewith to relieve himself in his Journey.

Chr. Thou talkest like one upon whose head is the Shell to this very day: For what should he pawn them? or to whom should he sell them? In all that Countrey where he was Robbed, his Jewels were not accounted of, nor did he want that relief which could from thence be administred to him; besides, had his Jewels been missing at the Gate of the Coelestial City, he had (and that he knew well enough) been excluded from an Inheritance there; and that would have been worse to him then the appearance and villainy of ten thousand Thieves.

76

If one views Little-faith's story from the realist standpoint which much of Christian's narrative would seem to evoke, then Hopeful's comment is perfectly valid. The problem is that *The Pilgrim's Progress*, rather like *The Heir of Redclyffe* or *David Elginbrod*, functions on both realist and non-realist levels, shifting freely and unpredictably from one to the other. The story of Little-faith looks as if every element within it exists on a literal, physical level. Little-faith is a hungry man, travelling along a road from a town to a city, who has slept by a gate and has been attacked and wounded by thieves. He bleeds, he walks, he is forced to "scrabble on his way"⁷⁷ - all the evidence points to a physical man on a physical journey with a physical empty stomach and a physical jewel in his pocket which he is not using correctly. What is he supposed to do with the jewel? Hopeful's suggestion that he pawn or sell it is the only solution which preserves the integrity of the genre of the story he has been told. Yet he is wrong, for the genre shifts. The jewels, it

⁷⁶ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress, from this world, to that which is to come* (London, 1926), p.123.

⁷⁷ *Pilgrim's Progress*, p.122.

seems, are the currency of "the World to come";⁷⁸ they are "not accounted of" in "all that Countrey where [Little-faith] was Robbed."⁷⁸ The difficulty lies in the fact that they are, nevertheless, as far as one can tell, visible and tangible in "all this World".⁷⁸ Christian has told Hopeful that Little-faith "was forced to beg as he went, to keep himself alive,(for his Jewels he might not sell)",⁷⁷ surely implying that, were it not for this mysterious prohibition on the sale of the jewels, Little-faith could have exchanged them for food. But when Hopeful suggests this course of action, Christian tells him, "nor did [Little-faith] want that relief which could from thence be administred to him". There is a dislocation between his hunger, and that which he "want[s]"; "relief" of some kind would indeed be forthcoming, it appears, if the jewels were sold, but it would be worthless to Little-faith.

One is reminded of Esau selling his birthright⁷⁹ - a major theme in Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*.⁸⁰ This narrative makes it clear that the real sin lies in evaluating one's possessions solely in terms of that for which they can be exchanged in the human, material world. Because Little-faith has saving faith, albeit small, he realises the worthlessness of earthly things as compared with spiritual things. By correctly evaluating his jewels, he is enabled to keep them, and so also to keep his "Inheritance" in the Celestial City:

But Little-faith was of another temper, his mind was on things Divine: his livelyhood was upon things that were Spiritual, and from above; Therefore to what end should he that is of such a temper sell his Jewels, (had there been any that would have bought them) to fill his mind with empty things?

⁷⁸ *Pilgrim's Progress*, p.131.

⁷⁹ cf *Genesis* 25 vv.29-34.

⁸⁰ cf John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1978), eg pp.56,62,63,78-9,83,89-90.

Herein lies Little-faith's little faith: he is a "stranger and pilgrim on the earth",⁸² of "another temper", seeking no "relief" in a world of crime and violence, but rather finding his entire "livelyhood" - his purpose, vitality and substance - in the "Spiritual", higher world. One wonders why such faith is called "little" at all! It is a person's true identity and destiny - his "temper" - which determines the value of his possessions. Simple exclusion from the Celestial City is seen by Little-faith as being worse than the violence of "ten thousand Thieves", for to be emptied of empty things is nothing compared with the heartbreak of being emptied of full things.

The central problem for the reader in all this is the ever-increasing semantic emptiness of the word "Jewel". It comes to seem like a symbol which can be interpreted only in terms of its immediate context, because the picture of a physical, saleable ruby or diamond is being undermined at the same time as one is being taught to perceive the other-worldly and thus unshareable bent of Little-faith's mind and the identification of the jewel with that which is most valuable to Little-faith. It cannot therefore function straightforwardly as a metaphor. The "Jewel" seems both too physical for one world and too spiritual for the other, yet it exists, mysteriously, in both, because Little-faith himself exists in both. A quotation from W.H.Auden on "Christianity and Art" will perhaps serve to clarify what I mean:

The Incarnation, the coming of Christ in the form of a servant who cannot be recognised by the eye of flesh and blood, but only by the eye of faith, puts an end to all claims of the imagination to be the faculty which decides what is truly sacred and what is profane. A pagan god can appear on earth in disguise, no man is expected to recognise him nor can.

⁸¹ *Pilgrim's Progress*, p.124.

⁸² *Hebrews* 11 v.13.

But Christ appears looking just like any other man, yet claims that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and that no man can come to God the Father except through Him. The contradiction between the profane appearance and the sacred assertion is impossible to the imagination.

83

The central issue here - indeed the central demand of Christianity as Auden understands it - is recognition. The Christian believer is the person who can respond as Simon Peter did to the question: "whom say ye that I am?"⁸⁴ and yet what is needed to do this is not the ability to see through a disguise - Christ is not playing a guessing game - but rather the power to accept that He is what He appears to be - that it is not metaphysical essences which elude the human mind so much as appearances. Like Little-faith's jewel, Christ is not a symbol for anything other than Himself, yet He is, "the image of the invisible God".⁸⁵ He both represents and is the unknowable. "Imagination" is the ability to comprehend meaning within form, but when meaning is coterminous with form, and this form is only comprehensible to those already in possession of its meaning, then imagination can perceive only "contradiction". Faith differs from imagination in that, whereas faith is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen",⁸⁶ imagination consists in both hoping for and seeing those things in which one believes - and belief is itself a primary factor in determining what is seen. Recognition is not a matter of seeing but of believing

⁸³ W.H.Auden, "Postscript: Christianity and Art", in *The Dyer's Hand and other essays* (London, 1963), p.457.

⁸⁴ *Matthew* 16 v.15.

⁸⁵ *Colossians* 1 v.15.

⁸⁶ *Hebrews* 11 v.1.



- believing that Christ is indeed, as He says He is, "the Way, the Truth, and the Life". "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed".⁸⁷ For the visible Christ, "the image of the invisible God", who "appears looking just like any other man" cannot be recognised by "the eye of flesh and blood" precisely because He can be seen by it.

Christ is not a symbol, but a representation - yet a representation accommodated to human understanding. Images are dangerous because they can only be recognised for what they are by those who are already familiar with that which they represent; to the unaided "eye of flesh and blood", the image will stand in the place of and obscure its own purpose, so that it serves only to "fill [its beholder's] mind with empty things". Francis Close, writing in 1884 on the subject of church architecture, expresses powerfully this sense of the threat of images to spiritual life:

In exact proportion as attention has been paid to ... [church architecture and decoration] in any age of Christianity - and places, vessels, and ceremonies have been esteemed holy - in that proportion has the church lost sight of the true sanctity of the heart, and removal of the spirit by divine grace.

⁸⁸

The distrust of the imagination is, of course, a well-established Protestant tendency. Tyndale, in his *Parable of the Wicked Mammon*, expresses it as follows:

Many are there, which when they hear or read of faith, at once they consent thereunto, and have a certain imagination or opinion of faith: as when a man telleth a story or a thing done

⁸⁷ *John* 20 v.29.

⁸⁸ Francis Close, "Church Architecture spiritually considered from the Earliest Ages to the Present Time" (1884), in Elizabeth Jay, *The Evangelical and Oxford Movements* (Cambridge, 1983), p.63.

in a strange land, that pertaineth not to them at all; which yet they believe and tell as a true thing: and this imagination, or opinion, they call faith. They think no farther than that faith is a thing which standeth in their own power to have, as do other natural works which men work; but they feel no manner working of the Spirit, neither the terrible sentence of the law, the fearful judgements of God, the horrible damnation and captivity under Satan.

89

False faith, Tyndale suggests, is like an appropriation of fiction as one's own property - something akin to the evil activities of Funkelstein in George MacDonald's *David Elginbrod*⁹⁰ - whereas true faith has to do with that which is "terrible", "fearful", and "horrible". It is not enough to "believe and tell as a true thing" a body of religious knowledge because this is, in effect, a reliance upon an image of faith which has been seen, but not recognised for what it is. Those who merely "hear or read of faith" and then believe that this faith "standeth in their own power to have", fail to see that they do not know what it means to "have" faith. That which they "have" is not faith, but "a certain imagination or opinion of faith", created not by God, but by their own minds, just as a fictional world cannot be said to be created directly by God. Such people do not possess "the substance of things hoped for" - nothing so solid - but only a mental picture of this "substance". Their minds are full of "empty things", because their response is given not to feelings directly brought about by the Holy Spirit, but to feelings about feelings, to semi-fictional art.

For to them the experience of hearing about faith is "as when a man telleth a story or a thing done in a strange land, that pertaineth not to them at all." This is not a realist genre of fiction, for it is set "in a strange land" and seems to its hearers to have no bearing

⁸⁹ William Tyndale, *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon*, in W.Tyndale, *Doctrinal Treatises*, edited by H.Walter, Parker Society, (Cambridge,1848), pp.52-3.

⁹⁰ cf *Elginbrod*, pp.172-5,211-3.

whatsoever upon their lives. It comes from an alien culture whose structures and definitions of significance are incomprehensible to these outsiders. They can learn nothing from it, for all its basic assumptions are different from their own. "Yet they believe" - but only, Tyndale claims, as an "imagination, or opinion", by which he means that these people place their own belief on a fictional level, assenting to the truth of a picture, or an abstract concept, without relating such truths to any personal meaning. An "imagination or opinion" cannot, of itself, change someone, because "consent" to a set of ideas wholly external to the self is at the same time both too active and too passive - too active, because it presumes one can choose faith by one's "own power", without waiting for the "working of the Spirit", and too passive because there is no terror-driven sense of urgency to appropriate faith for oneself, but rather a readiness to settle with the idea that it is there should it ever be required - "a thing which standeth in their own power to have". The individual has no right calmly to "consent" to God's mercy; he must be prepared to plead for it.

Unaided imagination cannot get past the "contradiction"⁹¹ between this-worldly appearances and other-worldly assertions; it does not "feel" the emotions of horror and fear in relation to God's judgement because it thinks of faith as "a thing", an object, located outside the self, so that the punishments for which faith is the remedy are externalised along with the faith. The only way forward is to put recognition in the place of contradiction, transforming faith from something which one can impersonally "believe and tell as a true thing" into the heart of one's identity, one's "temper",⁹² without which one could not exist as the same person at all. And this is the task of Bunyan's pilgrim. C.H. Spurgeon, arguably Victorian England's most popular nonconformist preacher, is always keen to stress this crucial need for a personal identification with that which lies at the heart of the Christian faith:

⁹¹ cf above p.49.

⁹² cf above p.47.

I am sure that I am speaking to many of you who can use the expression, "My God", and mean by it that the God in whom you live and move and have your being is your friend, and your Father; that he dwells in you by the Holy Ghost, and that in him you dwell as you hide yourselves in the wounds of Christ. Oh happy men and women that can with knowledge and affection say, "My God".

93

Christian's self-knowledge and his knowledge of the Way which he is following need to be brought into a relationship whereby each illuminates the other. For it is apparent from the outset that Christian's conscience is not the arbiter of reality; there are things outside his straightforward "power to have" - things he cannot see:

Then said Evangelist, pointing with his finger over a very wide Field, Do you see yonder Wicket-gate? The Man said, No. Then said the other, Do you see yonder shining light? He said, I think I do. Then, said Evangelist, Keep that light in your eye, and go up directly thereto, so shalt thou see the Gate; at which, when thou knockest, it shall be told thee what thou shalt do.

94

A wicket-gate seems a far more physical, mundane and visible object - far more this-worldly than the mysterious "shining light". For Christian, however, it is the ordinary, not the extraordinary, which is invisible, and the ordinary can be discovered, according to Evangelist's instructions, only through a faithful pursuit of the extraordinary. Evangelist's questions are not questions about the Way - he knows quite well that the wicket-gate exists,

⁹³ Charles Haddon Spurgeon *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Volume 31, sermons preached and revised in 1885, reprint of Passmore and Alabaster edition of 1886, (London, 1971), p.40.

⁹⁴ *Pilgrim's Progress*, p.11.

and it is only to Christian that even the shining light seems merely like a subjective impression; faith, for Christian, will lie in living his life in the belief that that which seems only subjectively true is in fact more than that. This is the belief which lies at the centre of Søren Kierkegaard's understanding of Christianity:

Christianity comes into existence when the object of infinite passion is the absolute paradox of the God-man and Christ becomes the pattern. The God-relationship is no longer found within oneself, as in immanent religiousness, but in relation to something outside oneself.

95

Evangelist is asking questions about Christian - is he the sort of man who can see the gate, or, failing that, the sort of man who can see the shining light? There is a real sense in which no one can tell anyone else anything at all about the Way.

When Christian reaches the wicket-gate, and there meets Good Will, he is told, in answer to his explanation that Evangelist has sent him here for further instruction: "An open Door is set before thee, and no man can shut it."⁹⁶ This is far from being the type of practical guidance that Evangelist's promise - "it shall be told thee what thou shalt do" - seemed to offer; it has nothing to do with doing, but instead suggests that, essentially, no action is needed, for human powers cannot alter the existing situation - "no man can shut it". It is true that Good Will, after questioning Christian extensively on his journey so far, tells him to remain on the straight and narrow path, and not to stray from it, but even here he is not so much imparting directions as proclaiming the absence of need for directions. It re-

⁹⁵ Welch, p.310.

⁹⁶ *Pilgrim's Progress*, p.27.

mains Christian's task to "distinguish the right from the wrong"⁹⁷ and it is clear which is which; the mystery lies in the suggestion that there is any possibility of getting it wrong.

Christian does not ask directly whether he will be able to wander from the correct route, but says: "Is there no turnings nor windings by which a Stranger may loose the way?" Good Will replies in the affirmative: "a Stranger" may certainly get lost, but he goes on to tell Christian how "thou may'st distinguish the right from the wrong", having previously twice said, "This is the way thou must go". He is speaking not to "a Stranger", but to "thou", an individual distinguished by his acquaintance. He is not concerned so much with the way itself, as with the person following it, and this makes sense when one considers that in the sentence, "This is the way thou must go", "way" could at least as readily denote a manner of behaving as a physical path. Christian is not being told what to do, so much as how to do it. A strong commitment to something apparently small and uninteresting says far more about the person making the commitment than about the thing to which he commits himself, and the extent to which Christian remains on the straight and narrow path will be a gauge of his identity, either as the "thou" to whom Good Will addresses his words, or as a "Stranger".

It is, perhaps, Christian's honesty about himself which has enabled him to come this far. His blunt "No.", and frankly uncertain, "I think I do", in reply to Evangelist's questions declare him, in contrast with his questioners, to be more concerned with his journey than with himself. By admitting his failure clearly to see them, Christian affirms for himself the real existence of those things to which he is blinded. Faith is "the evidence of things not seen";⁹⁸ the pursuit of the invisible confirms the reality of the visible. If Christian could see the wicket-gate, he could not be sure that it was an authorised stage on his journey and

⁹⁷ *Pilgrim's Progress*, p.29.

⁹⁸ cf above p.49.

not merely a creation of his imagination - a picture obscuring the truth. On the other hand, if Evangelist took hold of him and led him all the way to the Celestial City, Christian would effectively be no more than an actor in somebody else's story; his movement would be merely geographical. The "Progress" central to the pilgrimage is primarily the movement from being "a Stranger" on the road to belonging there and at the road's end. The true pilgrim must get to know the way for himself. Newman expresses the same idea in "The Tamworth Reading Room", laying stress upon the inadequacy of a theoretical religion and the need to take the risks involved in personally journeying through the landscape of one's faith:

I have no confidence, then, in philosophers who cannot help being religious, and are Christians by implication. ... They have worked out by a calculation the lie of a country which they never saw, and mapped it by means of a gazetteer; and like blind men, though they can put a stranger on his way, they cannot walk straight themselves, and do not feel it quite their business to walk at all.

99

Over-helpful guides are always dangerous, and Worldly Wiseman leads Christian astray by showing him a destination which is visible:

Chr. Sir, which is my way to this honest man's [Mr Legality's] house?

Worl. Do you see yonder high hill?

Chr. Yes, very well.

Worl. By that Hill you must go, and the first house you come at is his.

⁹⁹ J.H.Newman, "The Tamworth Reading Room", *Discussions and Arguments* (1872), in *Evangelical and Oxford Movements*, pp.178-9.

There is an ironic contrast, as Christian discovers, between the ease of seeing the hill and the difficulty of climbing it; the great size of the hill makes it very clear to see, just as the smallness of the wicket-gate, along with its situation on the far side of "a very wide field", prevents Christian from seeing it. Trusting one's eyes, then, becomes a very crude means of evaluation, whereby whatever is biggest is best. It foolishly overlooks the reality of perspective, assuming that travelling towards something will not change its appearance, but that the world is static - that the eye tells an absolute and eternal truth. If the individual is journeying through a landscape not of his own making, he cannot safely assume that any location he may arrive at will be knowable from the standpoint of any other location. To think in such a way is to impose one's own, inner rules upon a world which is essentially objective and external to the self. The act of travelling is constantly changing Christian, so that he cannot with any wisdom evaluate a place before he gets there. The sight of anything "yonder" is therefore deceptive.

What, then, is the significance of the shining light which Christian thinks he sees "yonder", and which Evangelist tells him to follow? The marginal note at this point in the text comments: "Christ and the way to him cannot be found without the Word", and the reader's attention is drawn to such Bible verses as: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path".¹⁰¹ Both "Word" and "light" have a curiously semi-abstract, metaphysical status; both exist to give information about something not themselves, and yet both are commonly revered in religious, and, more recently, in scientific and literary critical writings as having an inherent value of their own. "Word" is pure language and "light" pure visibility; abstraction and universality go hand in hand in giving them their power. They are supremely impersonal, and yet the knowledge of all personality depends

¹⁰⁰ *Pilgrim's Progress*, p.21.

¹⁰¹ *Psalms* 119 v.105.

upon them. They are the essence of communication. In following a "shining light", then, Christian is in possession of no knowledge whatsoever about where he is going, but this ignorance - far superior to the explanations offered by Worldly Wiseman - is the true condition of a journey towards revelation.

When Christian and Hopeful reach the shores of the River of Death, the Celestial City shines so brightly that they cannot look directly at it.¹⁰² The true light is so powerful that it does not look like light at all, but dazzles and blinds all whose eyes are not strong enough for it - all who are not at home in it. The "shining light" tells Christian both everything and nothing; it bears no message except that it is itself a message. And following it is thus an act of pure faith in the revelation, not in the thing revealed or person revealing - a submission of self to the entirely unknown and unknowable. Something in Christian weakly responds to this light, finding an affinity with it, so that he "thinks" he can see it, and so, by keeping it "in [his] eye", constantly reinforcing his recognition of it, he can proceed.

Newman's *Grammar of Assent* circles repeatedly around the way in which a person's most real knowledge cannot be known at all outside the precise context and language in which it offers itself. Like the "shining light", something to which one gives a "real assent" is not, so far as the person assenting is concerned, comprehensible in terms of anything but itself:

But we cannot make sure, for ourselves or others, of real apprehension and assent, because we have to secure first the images which are their objects, and these are often peculiar and special. They depend on personal experience, and the experience of one man is not the experience of another. Real assent, then, as the experience which it presupposes, is proper to the individual, and, as such, thwarts rather than promotes the intercourse of man with man.

¹⁰² *Pilgrim's Progress*, p.154.

Newman's axiom is individualism: "the experience of one man is not the experience of another". These personal, individual experiences, he believes, are the sources of "real apprehension and assent", because this type of assent can be given only, by definition, to "things represented by the impressions which they have left on the imagination",¹⁰⁴ whereas notional assent, with which it is contrasted, is achieved when "the mind contemplates its own creations instead of things".¹⁰⁴ There is, then, a distinction being made between "images", which are, for Newman, an internalised form of memory, and the mind's "creations", which refer back, not to "things", made by God, but only to the mind itself, as their maker. The question then arises why these "images" should be "peculiar and special" if they represent an external, objective world. To this, Newman would reply that, although the world is objective, we, as human beings, can and must experience it only subjectively; we cannot see it as God sees it, but only as we ourselves, whose faculties are flawed and incomplete, see it. This does not necessarily imply that the individual's understanding of the world is false, but rather that she or he cannot know whether it is true or false, since the test can be carried out only by the same mind as has reached the view being tested. One person cannot test another's world-view because he cannot share it. The shared world is not knowable, and the knowable world - or at least the world which is perceived and embraced by a real assent - is not shared.

Thus the foundations of the realist novel are called into question, for, while realism in fiction would be well defined as "things, represented by the impressions which they have left on the imagination", as opposed to "the mind contemplating its own creations instead of things", the question remains how I can appreciate George Eliot's images if I have not shared her personal experiences. One can argue that the intention of a novel is to re-create

¹⁰³ *Assent*, p.83.

¹⁰⁴ *Assent*, p.75.

these experiences within the experience of the reader, but, for Newman, experience is "proper to the individual", existing in the way it does because that individual is the person that he or she is. Experience does not straightforwardly make a man what he is; it becomes a particular kind of experience because of what a man already is. It is personally received.

Bunyan, more effectively than any later or more easily defined "novelist", seems to have found a means of expressing and exploring this very problem: the problem of the relationship between realism and the individual. And perhaps part of the reason for his success is that he is a committedly religious writer, and this problem is best understood in religious terms: "We cannot make sure", says Newman, "for ourselves or others, of real apprehension and assent", because there is an unbridgeable gulf between "sure", by which we mean objective certainty, and "real apprehension and assent", which are subjective forms of knowledge. The Christian believer has a similar difficulty in relating his or her personal, inner experience of belief to this same belief as it appears to God. John Keble acknowledges this in many of his pastoral letters to people struggling for some feeling of assurance that God accepts their approaches to Him:

Try still to be good and religious, and Faith will in His good time come after; or rather the *sense* of Faith. For no doubt, in the sight of Him who sees all, the soul, which, feeling as if it could not believe, resolutely perseveres in trying to go on as if it did believe, that soul believes, with a faith more and more acceptable the longer it stands so sharp a trial.

105

Here the problem becomes crucially important, since a faith real only in man's eyes but not in God's cannot save. An "imagination or opinion of faith" is not, says Tyndale, the

¹⁰⁵ John Keble, *Letters of Spiritual Counsel and Guidance*, edited by R.F.Wilson (Oxford and London, 1870), p.134.

true faith which can face "the fearful judgements of God"¹⁰⁶ - but how is one to distinguish between true and false faith when one has personal experience of only one variety?

Bunyan confronts this problem directly in his presentation of the character of Ignorance:

Chr. But why, or by what, art thou perswaded that thou hast left all for God and Heaven?

Ignor. My heart tells me so.

Chr. The wise man says, He that trusts his own heart is a fool.

Ignor. This is spoken of an evil heart, but mine is a good one.

Chr. But how dost thou prove that?

Ignor. It comforts me in the hopes of Heaven.

Chr. That may be, through its deceitfulness.

107

Ignorance sees his heart as the source of his self-image as a man dedicated to God and bound for Heaven. The problem is that he assumes that his heart must, by definition, be fully known to his inner self, while at the same time he separates himself from his "heart" so that it can give him information about himself. It cannot do so reliably, because it is not, in fact, the source, but the image itself. He has a vivid picture of a "good" heart, endowed with "the characters of perfect veracity and faithfulness", and seeing this, he puts his trust in it, failing to ask whether there is any "external reality ... corresponding to it". He

¹⁰⁶ cf above p.51.

¹⁰⁷ *Pilgrim's Progress*, p.142.

has convinced himself that his heart is itself an external reality - but one of which he has complete and exclusive understanding. His words lack authorisation, for he is seeking both to claim full control over his heart, thus excluding the possibility of its "deceitfulness", and at the same time, to place himself under his heart's instruction. The Christian, however, trusts his own heart at his peril, as Keble teaches in another of his letters: the believer, when tempted by Satan, is to fight back manfully, but he is never to rest in the complacent illusion that the sense of peace he has achieved is in itself any lasting security against temptation:

Say a short prayer; use the sign of the cross; exorcise [Satan] in the Saving Name, or in that into which you were baptised, and fear not but that he will retire discomfited, and after a time you will not have help only, but peace. Only do not depend on that peace, but fear and suspect yourself, and pray very often against that special danger.

108

The need is not simply to have a low opinion of oneself; the man in the iron cage whom Christian meets in the Interpreter's house does this:

Then said Christian to the Interpreter, But is there no hopes for such a man as this?

Ask him, said the Interpreter.

Nay, said Christian, pray Sir, do you.

Inter. Then said the Interpreter, Is there no hope but you must be kept in this Iron Cage of Despair?

Man. No, none at all.

¹⁰⁸ Keble, *Letters*, p.111.

Inter. Why? the Son of the Blessed is very pitiful.

Man. I have crucified him to my self, a fresh. I have despised his Person, I have despised his Righteousness, I have counted his Blood an unholy thing ...

Inter. But canst thou not now repent and turn?

Man. God hath denied me repentance; his Word gives me no encouragement to believe; yea, himself hath shut me up in this Iron Cage; nor can all the men in the world let me out.

109

It is significant that the Interpreter does not answer Christian's question directly, but instead says, "Ask him". Only the caged man himself can voice his despair, because the despair is the condition of being in the cage. He believes there is no hope because he is in the cage, and he is in the cage because he believes there is no hope; the circularity of his position is very similar to that of Ignorance, who believes that he is Heaven-bound because his heart tells him so, and believes that his heart tells him so because he is Heaven-bound. Neither man will reach the Celestial City.

But what is wrong with the caged man's thoughts regarding himself? It is, to begin with, worth noting the liberal scattering of first person pronouns throughout the caged man's speech. Virtually every sentence he utters contains at least one "I", "my", or "me" - very often more, and it thus becomes very clear that his preoccupation is not with God or the Celestial City, but with himself and his own sense of failure. The caged man is himself the subject of the majority of the verbs he uses, with God being the object, and most of his own actions are positive - "crucified ... despised ... counted" - whereas God's are nega-

¹⁰⁹ *Pilgrim's Progress*, p.37.

tive - "denied ... gives no encouragement". "I have provoked God to anger", he says, "and he has left me".¹¹⁰ Man initiates, and God responds.

Like Ignorance, the caged man believes that God's actions will be determined by a man's image of himself; he is convinced that he knows exactly how God will judge, and indeed already has judged him by putting him in the cage. The question arises whether despair is this man's punishment, or his crime. Certainly there have been prior sins involved - he speaks of being led astray by "the Lust, Pleasures and Profits of this World"¹⁰⁹ - but none of these seem sufficient to overthrow the "very pitiful" nature of "the Son of the Blessed". The account of his sins is mainly very generalised, serving simply to indicate how he has "provoked God to anger". The clue is perhaps to be found in the sentence, used by the caged man: "I have so hardened my heart that I cannot repent".¹¹⁰ His heart is, he believes, impenetrable to God's mercy. He says that he cannot repent because "God hath denied me repentance", but he cannot know what God has decided in his individual case, but only his own, subjective view of the situation. The man is, in fact, imprisoned by his own pride. He believes that he has in himself the power to sin so much as to defeat God's power to give repentance. Like Ignorance, he wishes both to rule and to be ruled by his own heart, to the exclusion of "the judgement of the Word of God".¹¹¹ He believes that he fully knows and understands himself and the consequences of his actions, not merely from his own point of view, but from God's. Because he is seeking to make a fully knowable world for himself, created entirely out of his own subjective consciousness, the price to be paid for such a world is that it can be shared with no one - so that the man sits in his iron cage, and Christian is afraid to talk with him. The "Iron Cage of Despair" is the world in which an individual has the power to crucify Christ, in which God is a tyrant to be defied from behind secure bars, and which not "all the men in the world" can break into. Despair

¹¹⁰ *Pilgrim's Progress*, p.36.

¹¹¹ *Pilgrim's Progress*, p.144.

and pride, it appears, are very closely related. There can, it seems, be "no hopes" for a man who asserts his individuality by thus shutting out God and all the world - except that to say the case is hopeless would be to enter the cage oneself, since it would involve setting up one's own judgement against the unknowable.

Christian, by the time he meets Ignorance, has learned a great deal about the relationship between knowledge of God and self-knowledge. "Good thoughts concerning God" occur, he says, "when our thoughts of God do agree with what the Word saith of him".¹¹¹ The subjective belief is tested against the objective Word, and judged (although not objectively so by the believing individual) to be good or bad accordingly. Christian continues:

But, to speak of him with reference to us, Then we have right thoughts of God, when we think that he knows us better then we know our selves, and can see sin in us, when and where we can see none in our selves; when we think he knows our in-most thoughts and that our heart with all its depths is alwayes open unto his eyes.

111

The highest form of human knowledge is, in fact, an admission of ignorance with regard to that which one might most expect to know: oneself.

The character named Ignorance is ignorant of this true, positive ignorance, because he tries to know God through his self, instead of knowing the self through God. And "right thoughts" of the self are surely determined by "right thoughts of God"; someone who thinks of God in this way will think of his or her own cognitive faculties as possibly unreliable, not even knowing whether they are to be trusted or not, but will not therefore adopt a world-view which holds that there is no objective knowledge and thus no shared reality. Instead, such a believer will place faith in God as the holder of all knowledge and judge of the world. God is, for the believer, the being in whom all objectivity inheres.

As a result, as the unreliability of Worldly Wiseman's advice demonstrates,¹¹² the individual's view of the world is never to be trusted as a fixed truth. Christian is journeying through a landscape which is constantly altering its shape as his understanding of it alters, and perhaps the most startling example of this takes place in Doubting Castle - a location which can helpfully be compared with the Iron Cage of Despair in the Interpreter's House:

Well on Saturday about midnight they began to pray, and continued in prayer until almost break of day.

Now a little before it was day, good Christian, as one half amazed, brake out in this passionate speech, What a fool, quoth he, am I thus to lie in a stinking Dungeon when I may as well walk at liberty? I have a Key in my bosom, called Promise, that will, I am persuaded, open any lock in Doubting Castle. Then said Hopeful, That's good News; good Brother pluck it out of thy bosom and try.

113

"He that trusts his own heart is a fool", says the wise man,¹¹⁴ and Christian can be both fool and wise man. He is a fool when he forgets that there is a world outside his own heart - a way out of the dungeon of despair. It is significant that the dungeon is described as "very dark", "without ... any light"¹¹⁵ and yet Christian and Hopeful pray "till almost break of day". This "break" is echoed a couple of lines later in the phrase "brake out", thus linking the concepts of renewed illumination and jail-breaking.

¹¹² cf above p.56.

¹¹³ *Pilgrim's Progress*, p.113.

¹¹⁴ cf above p.61.

¹¹⁵ *Pilgrim's Progress*, p.112.

When Christian crosses the River of Death, this same conjunction of ideas recurs: "And with that, Christian brake out with a loud voice, Oh I see him again!"¹¹⁶ Christian's escape from "great darkness and horror"¹¹⁷ is a liberation into vision; as he breaks out of the bondage of his terror, he sees Christ. The wise man finds inside himself - "in my bosom" - a means of attaining that which is outside. The key is called "Promise", and a promise is, of course, worthless unless one believes it. Christian's words, "I am persuaded", then, and Hopeful's responding encouragement constitute the subjective element in their liberation. It is also important that "I am persuaded" is in the passive voice, for this is indicative of the "heart-humiliation"¹¹¹ which is so lacking in the man in the iron cage, and which contrasts dramatically with his claim that he has "provoked God to anger".¹¹⁸ Christian submits to a persuasive power, only to discover that the object of its persuasion is located within himself. The key in his "bosom" is only to be discovered through prayer, looking upwards and outwards to God, and not by introspection. Curiously, the surrounding and engulfing castle is far more part of Christian's subjective consciousness than the key buried within him. He escapes by moving from identification with that which encloses him to identification with that which he encloses. "Pluck it out of thy bosom", says Hopeful; an externalisation of that which is hidden within the self serves to re-establish one's links with the outside world. For outside one sees as God sees and is released from despair.

Christian is called "good" both by the narrator and by Hopeful at this point, and Hopeful also describes his discovery of the key as "good News". And "good", as we have seen,¹¹⁹ denotes in *The Pilgrim's Progress* primarily a willing acceptance of the judgements

¹¹⁶ *Pilgrim's Progress*, p.157.

¹¹⁷ *Pilgrim's Progress*, p.156.

¹¹⁸ cf above p.63.

¹¹⁹ cf above p.65.

of the Divine mind, to the extent that one on the one hand shares God's view of oneself as "crooked" and "perverse"¹¹¹ and on the other hand accepts a limitation even here, confessing that "he knows us better than we know our selves".¹¹⁹

As he approaches the River of Death, Christian is told: "You shall find it deeper or shallower, as you believe in the King of the place".¹²⁰ Entering the water, Christian immediately begins to sink, but his "good friend Hopeful" tells him, "Be of good cheer, my Brother, I feel the bottom, and it is good."¹²⁰ Both Christian and Hopeful are undergoing a real, personal experience, but Hopeful's understanding of the situation is "good" in a way in which Christian's is not. On the one hand, the river can be of any depth at all, depending solely upon the attitude of mind of the person crossing, but, on the other hand, it has a fixed depth in the mind of its Maker, and it is in recognising this depth that one finds the bottom "good". There is, potentially, a shared, knowable world - a "good" world - but to take part in it one must be truly a "wise man".

* * * * *

Ludwig Feuerbach, writing in the nineteenth century, attempts to sweep away these distinctions between the human individual's view of the world in which he lives and the Divine view. The two views are, Feuerbach claims, essentially the same:

And it is our task to show that the antithesis of divine and human is altogether illusory; that it is nothing else than the antithesis between the human nature in general, and the human individual: that, consequently, the object and contents of the Christian religion are altogether human.

¹²⁰ *Pilgrim's Progress*, p.155.

The true believer, Feuerbach implies, is he whose consciousness extends outside his own individuality into a larger awareness of what it is to be human. All the emphases are upon extension, not limitation, so that the word "human" reaches beyond the solitary person to embrace a whole society, a whole race, a whole religion. Even the phrase "our task" suggests that this project is not that of one man, but that it belongs to a wider group; it is, Feuerbach suggests, the task of all humanity to come to this awareness. The word "antithesis" as applied to "divine and human" raises few eyebrows, but the same word becomes somewhat startling when it is used of "the human nature in general and the human individual", for, from an orthodox Christian standpoint, the "human" can never become "divine" - the distinction is absolute and eternal - whereas "the human individual" is recognised as being always and inescapably an integral part of "human nature in general". Yet by repeating the word "antithesis", and thus stressing that the two types of separation are in fact the same, Feuerbach is saying that that which is human can, should and must be assimilated into the divine.

One possible response to this redefinition of the boundaries according to which religion and human experience are understood is to argue that its effect is not to make humanity bigger, but to make God smaller - so small, in fact, that He effectively disappears altogether. This is Kierkegaard's answer in *Fear and Trembling* where he claims that if God can be served only in the service of man, then, since God is encountered always and only in doing one's duty, the word "God" can mean nothing more than the word duty:

It is a duty to love one's neighbour, but in performing this duty I do not come into relation with God, but with the neighbour whom I love. If I say then in this connection that it is my duty to love God, I am really uttering only a tautology, inasmuch as "God" is in this

¹²¹ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, translated from the second German edition by Marian Evans (New York, 1855) p.34.

instance used in an entirely abstract sense as the divine, ie the universal, ie duty. So the whole existence of the human race is rounded off completely like a sphere, and the ethical is at once its limit and its content. God becomes an invisible vanishing point, a powerless thought, His power being only in the ethical which is the content of existence.

122

A "God" Who is everything is also nothing if He is wholly immanent, but not transcendent. If "God" has no separate existence outside the human knowledge which can be expressed through human language, then in speaking of "God" one enters the realms of "tautology". The phrase "come into relation with God" makes a bid for a Deity who is personal, with a being of His own distinct from human substitutions. Feuerbach would tell Kierkegaard that it is precisely in loving his neighbour that he does most fully "come into relation with God", but to Kierkegaard this is a fraud, a game with words which cheats the seeker after God of genuine religious experience. For Kierkegaard, this generalisation of the meaning and role of "God" leads, paradoxically, to limitations being placed upon human experience. Whereas "the universal" might sound impressively expansive, Kierkegaard's image of the finished "sphere" of human existence evokes the idea of inescapable bounds and depressingly fixed horizons. This "universal" is very similar to Feuerbach's "human nature in general"; it is both the "limit" and the "content" of the sphere. All that humanity possesses - the wealth, beauty and variety of its experience - is also *all* that it possesses - there is nothing else within the sphere. Human knowledge, claims Kierkegaard, is finite, forever chasing itself round in circles, enclosed within nothing but itself. But the sphere can only be recognised as a sphere if it can be considered from a viewpoint external to itself. There must still remain some sort of concept of transcendent reality - a space in which the sphere can exist. But this outer space is empty; it is merely a "powerless thought", offering nothing to the inhabitants of the sphere but the awareness

¹²² Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling- A Dialectical Lyric*, translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton, 1945), p.102.

of their limitation. It is "entirely abstract", like a term introduced into a calculation purely in order that a solution may be arrived at.

"God" is thus in some sense philosophically necessary to those who live in the sphere, but they can never "come into relation" with Him because He is merely a creation of their own minds to satisfy their intellectual need for an "invisible vanishing point"; they have no further use for Him. A personal relationship with God is required if God is to be more than an abstraction. But this approach also is fraught with dangers. George Moore's heroine, Evelyn Innes, remarks to Monsignor Mostyn, a Roman Catholic priest:

"The scientists fail to see that what we feel matters much more than what we know".

The comment meets with a mixed reaction:

"True, quite true", he said, turning sharply and looking at her with admiration. Then, recollecting himself, he said, "But God does not exist because we feel he exists. He exists not through us, but through himself, from all time and through all eternity. To feel is better than to observe, to pray is better than to enquire, but indiscriminate abandonment to our feelings would lead us to give credence to every superstition".

123

God must be experienced personally, but personal experience cannot be trusted; the believer, and even the priest, thus finds him or herself walking an alarmingly narrow tight-rope stretched across deep and treacherous waters. If one lives in an age - such as the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries - dominated by "scientists" who teach that all

¹²³ George Moore, *Evelyn Innes and Sister Teresa*, Garland "Novels of Faith and Doubt" Series, reprints of 1898 and 1901 editions respectively, (New York and London, 1975), *Evelyn Innes*, p.333.

knowledge must first be impersonally validated by observation and inquiry before it can become real for the individual, one may well be tempted to react against this by elevating "what we feel" to the place of supreme importance. This was the direction in which Schleiermacher moved in his theological thought, stressing human feeling and non-rational awareness as the only reliable means of religious knowledge:

Schleiermacher emphasised the distinction of religion from metaphysics and morality, from knowing and doing. ... Thus Schleiermacher set himself firmly against the most characteristic idea of the Enlightenment (and also against orthodoxy's rationalism). ... [He] located religion in the center of the heart and dispositions. ... Religion is, in his famous phrases in the first edition of the *Speeches*, a "sense and taste for the infinite," an "intuition and feeling of the infinite," of the universe.

124

Evelyn, however, does not go this far; she says that feeling matters "more than" knowledge, and the Monsignor reiterates this relative relationship in his repeated use of "better". Knowledge must be in a relation to feeling, but Evelyn does not say precisely how she believes that relation should function.

The fact, however, remains that "we feel" God's existence. It is feeling and prayer, not observation and enquiry, which will convince an individual of the transcendent being of God. This is why they are "better" - because they result in faith. Right feeling towards God saves souls, yet feeling can never define God. The ever present danger, as Monsignor Mostyn perceives, is that one will, perhaps without even recognising it, play straight back into the hands of Feuerbach by in some way placing God under human control, thus

¹²⁴ Welch, *Protestant Thought*, p.65.

making Him "altogether human".¹²⁵ Yet how can one say anything about God at all without placing Him under human control - under the control of human language? Monsignor Mostyn can say that God exists "through himself, from all time and through all eternity" because the dogmas of his Church, which are, he believes, Divine revelation, say so.

"You must return to the Church", he tells Evelyn. "Without the Church we are as vessels without a rudder or compass."¹²⁶ The Church, or, for a Protestant, the Bible, is of immense power because it offers knowledge which, by its very nature, could not be ascertained by any ordinary human means. The difficulty is that while this knowledge, which could conceivably be altogether inhuman, is objectively available, those who need and receive it remain "altogether human". Schleiermacher claims that such knowledge can only be personal, rooted in the individual's faith:

The authority of Scripture does not rest on any prior judgement about its "inspiration", nor faith in Christ on the authority of Scripture. Rather, faith in Christ must be presupposed "in order to allow any special standing to holy Scripture".

127

What is the relationship between God's revelation of truth and the human individual's reception of it? How can one at the same time understand Divine realities while still recognising their eternal, non-human nature? How can God speak in human language, while yet remaining God? Tolstoy attempts, in the character of Levin in *Anna Karenina*,

¹²⁵ cf above p.68.

¹²⁶ *Evelyn Innes*, p.333.

¹²⁷ Welch, *Protestant Thought*, p.85.

to show what it might feel like to understand that which is by definition beyond human understanding:

"He said we must not live for our needs - that is, we must not live for what we understand and what attracts us, what we wish for, but must live for something incomprehensible, for God whom nobody can understand or define. Well? And did I not understand those senseless words of Theodore's? And having understood them, did I doubt their justice? ... No, I ... understood completely and more clearly than I understood anything in life; and I have never in my life doubted it, and cannot doubt it."

128

The central word here, frequently repeated, is "understand", with the key sentence being that in which Levin admits to himself that he "understands" that which is "senseless". God is "incomprehensible", whereas it is only human needs which a human being can understand; yet Levin understands that the sanest thing a person can do is to live for the "God whom nobody can understand or define". It is important that Levin does not claim to have understood anything at all about the being of God beyond the fact that He is incomprehensible. But he has "understood completely" that "we must not live for what we understand".

To live for the comprehensible is to live within Kierkegaard's sphere, limited to the human world. The means of liberation, Levin believes, is to live for that which is outside the sphere, even though - or perhaps because - it is by its very nature incomprehensible. In understanding this "senseless" solution, Levin discovers areas of knowledge which operate beyond the realms of "sense". He realises now that he has "never in [his] life" been without this knowledge, and that he "cannot" deny it, since it is not under the control of the modes of thought of which he has formerly been aware. Through some mysterious,

¹²⁸ Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, translated by Louise and Aylmer Maude, (Oxford, 1980), p.789.

newly-discovered aspect of his being, which works on a level different from the rationality he has been used to, Levin is compelled to "live for" the "God whom nobody can understand or define".

But how is this knowledge to be both lived by the believer and expressed by the novelist - how is it to become real for both Levin and Tolstoy in daily human experience? The phrase "live for" which is so important to Levin inescapably implies that religious understanding has significance for the whole of a person's life. The idea is that genuine faith involves not only mental and emotional concepts, but actions. From this point, however, one can too quickly leap to the conclusion - as Levin does at first - that in changing the focus of one's life from "one's needs" to God, one must necessarily alter all one's day to day activities. The central difficulty for all nineteenth century attempts to establish and define something which is more than human - some essentially religious area of being - is found in the realisation that, since "God created man in his own image",¹²⁹ a life lived for God, and one lived for human needs, might look very much the same, or indeed, in Feuerbachian terms, might actually be the same. This is because a person's spiritual virtues - faith and repentance - can only be tested by himself or by other human beings by the effect they produce on his outward life in the world - on his day-to-day actions. Keble acknowledges this in his letters of spiritual counsel:

The only sure and sufficient test of reality in one's feelings, I suppose to be our *conduct*, ie our deliberate thoughts, our words, and our actions, and especially in little everyday unnoticed and unnoticeable matters: if we are gradually trying more and more to bring them into captivity to the love of God and our neighbour, we may have the comfortable hope that God accepts our repentance, however imperfect.

¹²⁹ *Genesis* 1 v.27.

St John writes:

If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

The words "I love God" are empty and false if they are accompanied by the action of hating a fellow human being; merely to use the right language is worse than inadequate. Because God cannot be perceived by human senses, there is a great temptation to relegate Him to the solely cerebral and abstract level. For the man described by St John, "God" is merely a word, a concept held within the man's mind, and nobody can love a "God" who is nothing but an idea since, as St John has said immediately before the words quoted above, "We love him, because he first loved us".¹³² God is the Creator, and so the primary action comes from Him; He is the originator of all love. How, then, can a man love even his brother if "God" is for him no more than a sound or collection of letters?

It is interesting that St John does not say, "We love him, because we first loved our brothers," which would be much closer to the Feuerbachian position. The significance of loving one's brother lies in the fact that the brother has been "seen". Christ is described in

¹³⁰ Keble, *Letters*, p.56.

¹³¹ *1 John* 4 v.20.

¹³² *1 John* 4 v.19.

the Bible by St Paul as both "the image of the invisible God",¹³³ and "the firstborn among many brethren".¹³⁴ As the first and greatest of all the Christian's brothers, it is Christ, first and foremost, who makes visible the being of God. The emphasis is placed upon revelation - upon the Divine image entering into the world of human experience; as God makes Himself known through His creation and His Son, so He can be loved. No one can love God in the abstract; one must instead receive and respond to His love which is expressed, for humanity, in that which can be "seen". Christ, according to orthodox Christian doctrine, is both man and God. This fact is crucial, because in loving "the image of the invisible God", the believer can, at the same time, love God. If, however, one takes the next logical step by saying that, in loving his human neighbour, a man loves God, then one has very nearly joined hands with Feuerbach.

In this connection, then, Feuerbach is able to claim the words of Luther as being in support of his position:

Thus Luther, for example, says, "He who can truly conceive such a thing (namely, the incarnation of God) in his heart, should, for the sake of the flesh and blood which sits at the right hand of God, bear love to all flesh and blood here on earth, and never more be able to be angry with any man."

135

The same words - "flesh and blood" - are here used to describe both Christ, who is God, and the whole of humanity, and this would seem to imply that both Christ and "human

¹³³ *Colossians* 1 v.15.

¹³⁴ *Romans* 8 v.29.

¹³⁵ *Essence of Christianity*, p.87.

nature in general"¹³⁶ require the same response from the individual Christian. The distinction between the two is seen here solely in terms of place: there is "flesh and blood ... at the right hand of God", and "flesh and blood here on earth". The phrase "for the sake of" suggests that because human flesh has been elevated to the right hand of God, humanity is to be honoured and loved; but, since the elevated "flesh" - Christ Himself - is not directly accessible, the flesh and blood on earth must be honoured as well. Feuerbach then goes just a small step further and claims that earthly humanity is to be loved, not as well as Christ, but, in effect, instead of Him, Christ being an image projected outwards from the flesh and blood on earth which is the primary reality.

Luther's comment is not unorthodox, since it does not deny that Christ is "the incarnation of God" and thus, in His own being, the focus for the Christian's love of God. The strong emphasis, however, which Luther places upon Christ's humanity, means that his words are easily appropriated by Feuerbach and used as a historical precedent for his views. To describe God as "flesh and blood" in the nineteenth century becomes a vulnerable position for anyone concerned to keep Feuerbachian ideas out of the Christian fold to adopt. Spurgeon, while retaining an orthodox understanding of both Christ's deity and His manhood, tends in his preaching to lay emphasis upon His deity as the more endangered doctrine:

For though he was man, he was not merely man. He was assuredly and truly man in all respects, "man of the substance of his mother", bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh; and yet he was indeed and of a truth very God. ... I have sometimes heard objections made against certain expressions in Dr Watts's hymns in which our Lord is spoken of as the God that bled and died, and so forth. I fear that the objection is frequently aimed less at the poet than at the truth of the deity of our Lord: the objector figures as a critic because he dares not avow himself a heretic.

¹³⁶ cf above p.68.

The archaic language of "indeed and of a truth very God" is an indication of Spurgeon's sense that he is uttering an ancient doctrine, which is widely held to be outmoded by modern scholarship. Those who continue to uphold this belief, he seems to be suggesting, are going to look very old fashioned, and will have to be prepared for that.

Kierkegaard says of Abraham:

He believed by virtue of the absurd; for all human reasoning had long since ceased to function.

The believer whose faith shares this foundation could be seen, in one sense, as having been pushed into a corner. On the other hand, as Kierkegaard is at pains to point out, such faith is "the highest passion in a man"¹³⁹ because it carries a man to the furthest limit of his nature, bringing him as close as he, as a human being, can ever come to a Divine being who is in Himself not at all human, although man is made in His image. This sort of faith is deliberately anti-rationalist, in that it responds to a revelation in the face of which "all human reasoning" crumbles into dust. Abraham does not directly "believe the absurd", since God's words to him telling him to sacrifice his son are in themselves quite comprehensible, as is the notion of sacrifice, of giving up that which one most loves. The problem is that he can see no logical connections between the different things which he believes; he must believe both that God has told him to sacrifice Isaac, and also that God will give Isaac back

¹³⁷ *Metropolitan Tabernacle 31*, p.210.

¹³⁸ *Fear and Trembling*, p.48.

¹³⁹ *Fear and Trembling*, p.191.

to him in the present life, and also that God is in His very nature immutable. Human reasoning will not allow Abraham to hold all these beliefs together, but faith is a greater power. "By virtue of the absurd", Abraham accepts the revelation, making his own life absurd to fit the absurdity of God's words. Only this Kierkegaardian paradox is powerful enough to break the hold of Feuerbach's rationalism.

But although, as Kierkegaard contends, faith begins when human reasoning has "long since ceased to function", faith still remains a fully human "passion". It is difficult to see, however, how an obedience to commands which run counter to all human ideas of virtue, sanity and happiness can have anything to do with that which can consistently and honestly take place "in a man". How can an act like Abraham's be "human" at all? The problem is that Kierkegaard's idea of what "human" means is in many respects very different from that of, say, George Eliot:

The true knight of faith is a witness, never a teacher, and therein lies his deep humanity, which is worth a good deal more than this silly participation in others' weal and woe which is honoured by the name of sympathy, whereas in fact it is nothing but vanity.

140

"Humanity", Kierkegaard suggests, is not a matter of being like other people, but depends rather upon one's being different - an individual, able to bear "witness" to that which one has seen of the world beyond humanity, even if one's words sound "absurd" to all other men and women.

If a man becomes human by becoming a unique individual, then, if God were "human", this would mean that He would be wholly unlike any person who might consider Him, and that the Divine nature could in no way be determined through any human being's exam-

¹⁴⁰ *Fear and Trembling*, p.123.

ining his own nature. Instead, a "human" God would be more individual than any created human being, and so would be undefinable, except, perhaps, "by virtue of the absurd". "Sympathy" is "silly" if people do not essentially resemble one another; and if God is unlike the believer, then it is useless for the believer to consult his own feelings as a guide to the mind of God.

* * * * *

I need at this point, however, to pursue further the view of George Eliot: that "humanity" has a great deal to do with the "participation in others' weal and woe which is honoured by the name of sympathy". Eliot is convinced, with Feuerbach, that the essence of religious truth lies in the deep likeness of all men and women both to one another and also to that which is called "God", and she is constantly seeking, in her fictional writing, to demonstrate and to explore this belief. G.H.Lewes, writing under George Eliot's direction to Blackwood, proposing *Scenes of Clerical Life*, describes the intention of the work as follows:

It will consist of tales and sketches illustrative of the actual life of our country clergy about a quarter of a century ago; but solely in its human and not at all in its theological aspect ... representing the clergy like any other class with the humours, sorrows, and troubles of other men.

141

¹⁴¹ *The George Eliot Letters*, edited by G.S.Haight, II, p.269. Quoted in David Lodge's "Introduction" to *Scenes of Clerical Life* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1973), p.17.

In order to remain safely within the capabilities of realist fiction, George Eliot desires to write human, this-worldly stories. That would be relatively straightforward, did she not then choose to write her solely human tales about the clergy. In doing this, she is seeking to make a point, claiming that religious leaders and teachers can be seen as being "like any other class with the humours, sorrows, and troubles of other men". This assertion greatly complicates Eliot's project, since it necessitates her dealing not only with the "human" aspects of life, but also with the "not at all ... theological". She has somehow either to separate that which is clerical in a clergyman from that which is human, or to subsume the clerical under the human. Her protagonists will have to be at the same time unlike other men in that they are "clergy", and yet wholly "like any other class". Both everything and nothing is sacred.

Unlike Trollope, George Eliot is not content simply to write about the personal and social lives of ordained people, although Lewes's description of the *Scenes* may seem to suggest this. It is not merely their social position which sets Eliot's characters apart as "clergy", but also their personal religious beliefs. Those men whose lives she wishes to depict in their "human" and not their "theological" aspects are sincere, practising Christians, whose faith affects even their most mundanely "human" actions. This genuine belief is most apparent in "Janet's Repentance", and the religious content of the story is so important to the characters and so powerfully and positively expressed by them that it is reasonable to ask whether the story could not, in fact, have been written in just the same way by an Evangelical believer. In other words, does religious content result inevitably in a religious story, or is Eliot able to present her own, post-Evangelical world view through an account of what is apparently a conversion to Evangelical belief, presented as a wholly desirable change in an individual's life? The question is important because it asks how far secular writers can use orthodox Christian ideas and characters in their fiction in a manner supportive of the writer's own beliefs about the world and about literature, and when Christian content in a novel may become subversive of the novelist's stated goals.

The reader of "Janet's Repentance" gradually becomes uneasily aware of a doubleness of vision and of language which hint that the story does not move straightforwardly in one direction. Within one paragraph, for example, Mr Tryan is described in two contradictory modes:

But Mr Tryan has entered the room, and the strange light from the golden sky falling on his light-brown hair, which is brushed high up round his head, makes it look almost like an aureole. His grey eyes, too, shine with unwonted brilliancy this evening.

A few sentences further on, however, one reads:

Mr Tryan's face in repose was that of an ordinary whiskerless blond, and it seemed difficult to refer a certain air of distinction about him to anything in particular, unless it were his delicate hands and well-shapen feet.

142

What is Eliot doing here? It would appear that she is presenting two different attitudes to Tryan - but whose?

If we take the first, haloed icon to be the picture created in the minds of those plump and elderly women who adore Tryan, then the reader, having been placed in a position of superiority to these women in the preceding pages, has little choice but to reject this image as a fanciful, rather silly idealisation. There is a suspiciously large number of adjectives, particularly colour words, in this description, which would seem to indicate that this may be a parody of the over-written "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" which Eliot attacks in her essay of that name, written immediately before *Scenes of Clerical Life*. Particular attention is given in this essay to the "white neck-cloth species" of novel, whose customary hero is:

¹⁴² George Eliot, *Scenes of Clerical Life* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1973), p.276.

... the young curate looked at from the point of view of the middle class, where cambric bands are understood to have as thrilling an effect on the hearts of young ladies as epaulettes have in the classes above and below it.

143

In "Janet's Repentance", in the same chapter as that which includes the description of Tryan quoted above, one of Tryan's female followers is described as being in the process of "making him a black silk case to hold his bands".¹⁴⁴ Is it, then, only foolish "Lady Novelists", along with their "middle class" sisters in "Janet's Repentance" who see Tryan's halo? It is difficult to feel certain that this is the case, especially in view of the apparently serious treatment of Tryan in relation to Janet later in the story, and the reader at this point does not know whether to laugh or to adore. To adopt the wrong response, either way, would be a serious error of taste.

The use of the present tense, emphasised by "this evening", suggests that this first description may represent the thoughts of the women in the room, which Tryan enters without warning so that he is already there before anyone sees him, like Christ after His resurrection.¹⁴⁵ On the other hand, the purpose of this immediacy may be to emphasise the authentic power of Tryan, his closeness to God, the eternal "I AM",¹⁴⁶ and the way in which his appearance instantly changes the direction of people's thoughts, focusing them upon spiritual realities which transcend time. "This evening" could function either as an

¹⁴³ George Eliot, "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" (1856), in *Victorian Criticism of the Novel*, p.175.

¹⁴⁴ *Scenes*, p.271.

¹⁴⁵ cf *John* 21 vv.19,26.

¹⁴⁶ cf *Exodus* 3 v.14.

indication of the tones of lightweight, trivial feminine conversation or as a quiet reminder that it is in the ordinary moments of day-to-day living that the deepest truths are to be found. Similarly, the description of the light around Tryan's head as "almost like" an aureole could express either the yearning idealism of a romanticising woman or, alternatively, the important realisation that our profoundest experiences never come in quite the way we feel they ought, that genuine spirituality never obeys a stereotype.

The problem lies in distinguishing between the language of "Silly Novels" and that of genuine Christian experience; the task is not so simple as one might expect. Eliot herself writes:

The real drama of Evangelicalism ... lies among the middle and lower classes; and are not Evangelical opinions understood to give an especial interest in the weak things of the earth, rather than in the mighty?

147

This surely implies that those whose faith is most powerful may well express themselves crudely or vulgarly. Middle class ladies, weak in intellect, are, if anything, more likely than the nobly sensitive and well-educated to take part in the "real drama" of Evangelical faith. The problem is that, holding this opinion, George Eliot is on very shaky ground when she censures the writers of Evangelical novels because they regard their curate heroes "from the point of view of the middle class". Perhaps the best Evangelical fiction is, of necessity, silly. Perhaps "aureole", while remaining pretentious and fussy, is the only word capable of expressing a particular sort of utterly real religious experience.

In the light of all this, what are we to make of the second, very different description of Mr Tryan? This seems to be the view of a scientific person, a materialist, in search of

¹⁴⁷ "Silly Novels", p.176.

empirical data upon which to found an understanding of Mr Tryan. There is no "strange light" of supernatural revelation in this picture, and the onlooker expects to be able to find a physical, visible explanation for the "air of distinction" which surrounds Tryan. This person views Tryan's difference from those around him solely in terms of social class, and he finally settles on the curate's small hands and feet as an explanation of that which distinguishes him, which completely evades any consciousness of spiritual and non-physical qualities. This description would appear to be given from the point of view of a rational person, possibly male, who does not in the least share the adoring feminine attitude to Tryan, being somewhat irritated by it. He replies to the sensitivity to detail of "light-brown hair", to the interest in Tryan's hairstyle and the colour and lustre of his eyes, to the sense that he brings with him that which is "strange" and "unwonted", with the flat, dismissive phrase: "ordinary whiskerless blond". That, this beholder claims, is all that Tryan is. He is defined by what he lacks - whiskers - rather than by what he has, and the most interesting thing about him is his feet. Anything more is the product of an over-active imagination.

So who is this beholder? Surely he must be at least one facet of the writer whose intention is to describe clerical life, "solely in its human and not at all in its theological aspect". For one possible method of carrying out this design functions by rejecting all supernatural interpretations of human phenomena, looking instead for temporal explanations of that which religious people ascribe to the miraculous. This would be in line with the view of the novel - and "Janet's Repentance" is a short story written very much in the tradition of the realist novel - which sees the supernatural as having no place in shaping the development of either plot or character:

A good novel is an epic in prose, with more of character and less (indeed in modern novels nothing) of the supernatural machinery.

The problem here is that the temporal account seems self-consciously shallow and unsatisfying, cynical and mocking.

This uncertainty in determining whether or not characters and events are to be regarded as inhabiting a world much of whose significance depends upon a "supernatural" dimension extends right to the heart of the story, for one of the biggest problems in this story entitled "Janet's Repentance" is in determining precisely what sin Janet has to repent of. Is she to be judged solely by her actions and her relations with humanity, or is her attitude to spiritual things of major importance? Mr Tryan's followers cannot agree on the subject:

"Only last night when I met [Janet], I saw five yards off she wasn't fit to be out; but she had a basin in her hand, full of something she was carrying to Sally Martin, the deformed girl that's in a consumption."

"But she is just as bitter against Mr Tryan as her husband is, I understand", said Rebecca.

"Her heart is very much set against the truth, for I understand she bought Mr Tryan's sermons on purpose to ridicule them to Mrs Crewe."

"Well, poor thing," said Mrs Pettifer, "you know she stands up for everything her husband says and does. She will never admit to anybody that he's not a good husband."

"That is her pride", said Miss Pratt.

¹⁴⁸ Anna Laetitia Barbauld, "On the origin and progress of Novel-writing", *The British Novelists* (1810), volume I. Quoted in Allott, p.48.

¹⁴⁹ *Scenes*, pp.273-4.

Christ teaches:

"Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?"

150

But how is one to apply such a method of evaluation to Janet? Janet does seem very much like a thorn bush bearing grapes because her moral life is fundamentally lacking in order. Her experience is fragmented, so that these women can all speak the truth about her, and yet do so in the form of an argument, in which each statement contradicts that which precedes it.

The relationship between Janet's actions and her motives, in particular, is extremely complicated. It is as a beaten and bruised woman, not "fit to be out", that she goes to tend a "deformed" and dying girl, displaying kindness which is the result of the cruelty Janet experiences. Because she is accustomed to pain, she appreciates the worth of anything which relieves it, and it is partly this acute awareness of human need which renders her so impatient of Tryan's teachings as she perceives them. Speaking to her mother of her personal wish to get rid of Tryan, Janet says:

"Preaching the Gospel indeed! That is the best Gospel that makes everybody happy and comfortable, isn't it, mother?"

151

¹⁵⁰ *Matthew* 7 v.16.

¹⁵¹ *Scenes*, p.290.

There is a real sense in which Janet's life is held together solely by her husband's violence. It is here, in being beaten, that her identity lies. In ridiculing Tryan she can both express her indignation at a creed which seems to her to place ideas above human pain, and also act as a creature controlled entirely by Dempster. Janet cannot complain about Dempster's treatment of her because to do so would be to admit a need for help from outside her own resources, and she knows of no way in which such a need could be met. It is precisely because she senses that Tryan has a different solution to offer her that Janet is so hostile to him. Pain and alcohol give her a day-to-day source of strength and even of purpose which she cannot imagine living without. As a result, her practical virtues are, on the level of Janet's experience, intimately connected with her bitterness against Tryan, while, on a more theoretical, moral level, it is incomprehensible that Janet should do any good works when "her heart is very much set against the truth". Her fear is that, in becoming righteous in a doctrinal, theological sense, she would lose the ability to live a practically righteous life - and it is a fear which one sees worked out in the character of Mr Bulstrode in *Middlemarch*. The immediate, impulsive reaction to stimuli which seeks to put comfort in the place of suffering is perceived by Janet to be in conflict with a systematic approach which would introduce other factors and so complicate and perhaps see as unimportant the simple relief of pain.

Janet, however, has misunderstood Tryan. She expects him to apply doctrine where she would apply kindness, but he is not like that:

There was none of the self-satisfied unction of the teacher, quoting, or exhorting, or expounding, for the benefit of the hearer, but a simple appeal for help, a confession of weakness. Mr Tryan, like herself, knew what it was to tremble at an unforeseen trial - to shudder at an impending burthen, heavier than he felt able to bear?

152

152 *Scenes*, p.331.

The crucial phrase here is "like herself". Ironically, Janet's conversion has begun as soon as she realises that there is nothing so very special about Tryan. He has no more power than Janet has, except for the ability to make "a confession of weakness". He is not a man with theories or lessons, but a man with needs, so that the expected relationship between the pastor and the dying girl whom he is visiting is reversed; it is not a teacher-hearer encounter, but rather a "fellowship in suffering",¹⁵² in which there is no preaching, but only sympathy.

The impact of Tryan's practical expression of his faith in acts of human compassion can be interestingly compared with the effect upon a previously antagonistic fellow clergyman of a visit to an impoverished and dying elderly couple by John Newton - another Evangelical preacher who, like Mr Tryan, is deeply aware of his own sinful past. Thomas Scott, the former enemy, confesses as follows:

"Directly it occurred to me that, whatever contempt I might have for Mr N's doctrine, I must acknowledge his practice to be more consistent with the ministerial character than my own. He must have more zeal and love for souls than I had, or he would not have walked so far to visit and supply my lack of care to those who, as far as I was concerned, might have been left to perish in their sins. This reflection affected me so much, that without delay, and very earnestly, yea, with tears, I besought the Lord to forgive my past neglect."

153

Tryan is exactly like Janet in that it is his own suffering which enables him to help Sally Martin. Like Janet, he is not in control of the sources of joy and misery, but, unlike Janet, he is free to admit this. And in realising that Mr Tryan is "like herself", Janet also receives access to the knowledge that she, like Mr Tryan, is "like herself", and is afraid of future suffering which she feels unable to bear. It is only as she recognises her own inadequacy

¹⁵³ Robert Bickersteth, *A Memoir of the Rev. John Newton*, (London, 1865), p.118.

in Tryan that Janet can see it in herself. There is a sense in which, up until this point, Janet has been "self-satisfied", finding significance in her own misery and expressing this in kindness to those in need. By being a helper, she has escaped being helped. But Tryan does not need to be self-satisfied. Whereas Janet "will never admit to anybody" that her husband beats her,¹⁵⁴ Tryan will freely confess that he is weak and sick, because his weakness is not the driving purpose of his life as it is Janet's.

What, then, is Tryan's purpose? The ugliness of his study reveals an unusual disregard for personal comfort:

The man who could live in such a room, unconstrained by poverty, must either have his vision fed from within by an intense passion, or he must have chosen that least attractive form of self-mortification which wears no haircloth and has no meagre days, but accepts the vulgar, the commonplace, and the ugly, whenever the highest duty seems to lie among them.

155

The "either ... or" structure of this sentence sets up in opposition two ideas which one might rather expect to find working together. "Self-mortification", it appears, is not the fruit of an inner, passionate "vision", but is rather the acceptance of imaginative poverty for the sake of "the highest duty". Two distinct types of person are being described here: the former fulfilled "from within", and therefore indifferent to external circumstances, and the latter accepting an apparently unheroic, "commonplace" way of life which is not transfigured by the principles which lead him to it.

¹⁵⁴ cf above p.87.

¹⁵⁵ *Scenes*, p.325.

The first possibility looks far more like saintliness than the second. It is the way described by Thomas à Kempis in his *Imitation of Christ*:

"The Kingdom of God is within you", says Our Lord. Turn to the Lord with all your heart, forsake this sorry world, and your soul shall find rest. ... All true glory and beauty is within, and there He delights to dwell. ... If you renounce all outward consolation, you will be able to contemplate heavenly things, and often experience great joy of heart.

156

This sort of spiritual life is characterised by a turning from the "outward" attractions or otherwise of one's physical surroundings to that which is "within". "Within" is the realm of "intense passion", "true glory and beauty", and "the Kingdom of God"; the heights of religious experience are here. "Great joy" is to be found "within"; true "rest" is discovered here as the soul communes with God, untrammelled by worldly considerations. The man who can "renounce" "outward" hopes of happiness will be "fed from within", so that an ugly room becomes irrelevant because his vision is not focused upon it.

The alternative mode of accepting ugly surroundings suggested by Eliot offers far less happiness to those who pursue it. It is the "least attractive form" of asceticism, characterised by its lack of special religious practices. The use of "haircloth" and of "meagre days" implies an ordered, purposeful discipline, designed to teach joy through suffering. In seeking extremes of negative self-limitation, one may hope also to attain to extremes of positive liberation. For the follower of that way which "wears no haircloth", however, everything takes place on the same, mediocre level. Such a life is "lukewarm, and neither cold

¹⁵⁶ Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, translated and with an introduction by Leo Sherley-Price, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1952), pp.67-9.

nor hot"¹⁵⁷ in its emotional and imaginative experience, constrained to act according to "the highest duty", despite the fact that such duty is expressed not in that which is "high". but rather in "the vulgar, the commonplace, and the ugly". Duty does not result in happiness, nor in comfort, but, at least as far as earthly rewards go, only in its own fulfilment.

What, then, enables Mr Tryan to live in his uninspiring room? On one level, he is motivated by a desire to expiate his guilt towards the girl he once loved and then abandoned:

"My friend used to urge upon me that my sin against God was greater than my sin against her; but - it may be from want of deeper spiritual feeling - that has remained to this hour the sin which causes me the bitterest pang. I could never rescue Lucy; but by God's blessing I might rescue other weak and falling souls; and that was why I entered the Church. I asked for nothing through the rest of my life but that I might be devoted to God's work, without swerving in search of pleasure either to the right hand or to the left."

158

Devotion to "God's work" seems here to be primarily expressed in involvement with "weak and falling" human beings. Tryan has adopted "an especial interest in the weak things of the earth",¹⁵⁹ and this interest has nothing to do with "pleasure". He "entered the Church", not to leave the world - Lucy's downfall was initiated by Tryan's abandoning his responsibility to her while on "a vacation spent in travelling"¹⁶⁰ which could be seen as a journey

¹⁵⁷ *Revelation* 3 v.16.

¹⁵⁸ *Scenes*, pp.361-2.

¹⁵⁹ cf above p.85.

¹⁶⁰ *Scenes*, p.359.

away from this-worldly duty - but rather to immerse himself more deeply in it. In other words, particularly for Tryan, who is by birth a gentleman, "unconstrained by poverty", entering the Church is a means of entering the world - the world of human suffering and need, and of poverty, financial, imaginative and spiritual.

He comes very close to equating pleasure with sin, echoing the Biblical injunction, "to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left".¹⁶¹ Pleasure, it would seem, is to be found on "a vacation spent in travelling" away from human need and Tryan's substitution of "pleasure" for "all that is written in the book of the law of Moses" is closely linked with his sense that his sin against Lucy is worse than his sin against God despite the views of his friend, which find Biblical support in King David's repentant response to his sin with Bathsheba.¹⁶² It is interesting to consider how Tryan might have spent the rest of his life if it had been his sin against God which had caused him "the bitterest pang". Perhaps, paradoxically, he would not then have needed to enter the Church, which is, for him, also the doorway into the world, because his guilt would not have been directed towards the world. To say "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned",¹⁶² looks very much like callousness towards the human beings damaged by the sin, and yet, interestingly, Tryan attributes his sense of overwhelming responsibility towards Lucy to a possible "want of deeper spiritual feeling", implying that greater passion for God would draw him further away from human need. His unending quest vicariously to "rescue Lucy" is, we must conclude, not so much the fruit of a passionate vision, not even a humanistic one, but rather the outworking of "the highest duty".¹⁶³ It is not the greatest hope of happiness and comfort that fires him, but rather "the bitterest

¹⁶¹ *Joshua* 23 v.6.

¹⁶² cf *Psalms* 51 v.4.

¹⁶³ cf above p.91.

pang" of remorse. He is not moving towards a Celestial City, but only away from a City of Destruction.

But Tryan is no cold rationalist. Both faith and feeling are of vital importance to him. He tells Janet:

"But once we feel our helplessness ... , and go to the Saviour, desiring to be freed from the power as well as the punishment of sin, we are no longer left to our own strength. As long as we live in rebellion against God, desiring to have our own will, seeking happiness in the things of this world, it is as if we shut ourselves up in a crowded, stifling room, where we breathe only poisoned air; but we have only to walk out under the infinite heavens, and we breathe the pure free air that gives us health, and strength, and gladness."

164

This offers a striking contrast with the extract from the *Imitation of Christ* quoted above. For Thomas à Kempis equates saintliness with inwardness, calling that which separates a person from God "outward consolation". God is indoors and the world is outdoors. George Eliot, however, reverses these images, so that anyone "seeking happiness in the things of this world" is pictured as being enclosed in "a crowded, stifling room", whereas the free, unrestricted outdoor life is reserved for those who are willing to "go to the Saviour". In this situation, it is the person seeking happiness in this world", who is, paradoxically, restricted in both his enjoyment and his understanding of the world. His "room" is "crowded", but its inhabitants do not support one another, but are mutually destructive, breathing one another's air until it becomes "poisoned". This is not communion, but war. The desire to "have our own will" means that an attempt is made to force the whole world into the self, thus distorting and confining it, leaving no space for fruitful development. The world becomes a spiritually negative environment when an individual

¹⁶⁴ *Scenes*, p.361.

seeks not to serve it but instead to dominate it - to possess it. A person can only possess the world by his or her own will if it is first made smaller than the self, and then it becomes a prison, just like the iron cage in the *Pilgrim's Progress*.

The reason why this account differs so radically from that of Thomas à Kempis is that, instead of offering either a relationship with the world or a relationship with God, Tryan offers two different types of relationship with the world. Just as the individual, by his own will, shuts himself up into a world made in his own image, so he is able to "walk out" into a larger universe, where the "pure free air" is infinitely available to nourish him. So what is God's role in all this? "Infinite heavens" can only be experienced by someone who believes in some form of infinite existence, and for Tryan, the Christian God is the object of this belief. The concept of a big self has proved deeply unsatisfying, since it results in a small world. Having made this discovery, a person can "feel [his or her] helplessness" and perceive the need for a larger source of significance. "The Saviour", then, is the necessary alternative to "our own strength" as the maker and sustainer of "the infinite heavens". The problem with this type of thinking is that, as Kierkegaard recognises,¹⁶⁵ it risks turning God into a philosophical necessity rather than a self-existent Person, so that He becomes a means to a more fulfilling world-view: "something to be lived for beyond the mere satisfaction of self".¹⁶⁶ There can be no doubt that Tryan's personal need is real enough; the question is whether God is in Himself the answer to that need, or merely a means of discovering the answer. If God is denied the central place in the believer's experience, then any subsequent religious life will tend to be based more upon a sense of personal guilt and failure than upon a desire for communion with Him.

¹⁶⁵ cf above p.70.

¹⁶⁶ *Scenes*, p.320.

In order to find out how closely the ideas and attitudes I have been examining approximate to at least one nineteenth-century expression of Evangelical belief, it will be helpful at this point to give some attention to the ideas of a historical figure who is presented in "Janet's Repentance" as a possible model for Tryan: Henry Martyn. Martyn was an Anglican Evangelical, strongly influenced by Charles Simeon, who became first a curate and then a missionary, and whose exemplary life, as recounted in John Sargent's biography, first published in 1819, was extremely influential during the nineteenth century. George Eliot's Janet reads this biography, and comments:

"I've been reading about that wonderful Henry Martyn; he's just like Mr Tryan - wearing himself out for other people."

167

It is perhaps of some value to note that "Tryan" is almost an anagram of "Martyn", and it will be worthwhile to examine in what ways Martyn is, or is not, "just like Mr Tryan".

Sargent's *Life of Henry Martyn* mentions at one point a woman whose fate is strikingly similar to that of Tryan's Lucy, although Martyn, unlike Tryan, is not personally guilty. Martyn hears, one day, of, "the death of one whom he had remembered in innocence, and in the bloom of youth, and who died after a very short career of vice". He cries out in sorrow:

"Oh, my God, it is enough; hasten, O hasten the day when I shall leave the world to come to Thee; when I shall no more be vexed, and astonished, and pained, at the universal wickedness of this lost earth. But here would I abide my time; and spend and be spent for the salvation of any poor soul; and lie down at the feet of sinners, and beseech them not to plunge into an eternity of torment."

¹⁶⁷ *Scenes*, p.380.

Martyn, although he is willing to remain on earth for the sake of lost souls, clearly does not think of himself as belonging to "this lost earth", but rather adopts the attitude of Christ when He says:

O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?

This sense of a sinless self, "pained" and "vexed" by the evils of a sinful world is appropriate to Christ, but one worries a little upon hearing a fallible human being expressing it quite so forcefully. Tryan, however, would presumably call this the "deeper spiritual feeling" which he himself lacks, since his greatest grief is evoked not by "the universal wickedness of this lost earth", but rather by Lucy's suffering and death. His "crowded stifling room" is nevertheless in many ways an expression of the same sense of oppression as Martyn feels living in a world of sin.

Martyn's focus of attention moves very quickly from the particular, personal sorrow to the universal, large-scale cause, whereas Tryan's devotion to "God's work" is constantly in danger of appearing to be a substitute for his true desire to "rescue Lucy". Tryan's world is full of Lucies in need of help, whereas Martyn's is full of "wickedness". Martyn thinks of God as being essentially outside the world; he wants to "leave the world and come to Thee". The world for him is a hopelessly rotten mass of evil, soon to be eternally destroyed

¹⁶⁸ John Sargent, *The Life and Letters of Henry Martyn*, reprint of 1862 edition (Edinburgh, 1985), p.74.

¹⁶⁹ *Matthew* 17 v.17.

in judgement, from which a few souls are to be snatched away and transported to the safety of the Divine presence. In remaining there he is in some sense separated from God; he is a "stranger and pilgrim on the earth", desiring "a better country, that is, an heavenly".¹⁷⁰ His remaining there is an act both of submission to God and of self-sacrifice in order that he may share his vision of coming destruction with "sinners" and thus alert them to and save them from "an eternity of torment".

Both Martyn and Tryan wish to spend their lives in the task of rescuing "weak and falling souls"; the difference is that Tryan wishes to save people like Lucy - or Janet - who are primarily victims of greater sinners, whereas Martyn directs his efforts towards "sinners" who are destined for "an eternity of torment" - it is only for the world to come, not the present life, that Martyn is able to hold out any hope at all for those whom he wishes to "beseech" not to continue on their present paths to destruction. Tryan, however, describes the experience of salvation in terms of being "under the infinite heavens";¹⁷¹ he is interested primarily in inhabiting a big, God-given world instead of a small, self-made one. Martyn believes that the infinite can be worse than the finite, for there exists "an eternity of torment", so that knowledge of the absolute is not necessarily liberating. True happiness is for him located not "under" the heavens, but in them, in "a better country, that is an heavenly". He wishes to rescue souls from an infinite Hell, whereas Tryan wishes to rescue them from a finite self.

This is not to say that Tryan has no basis in Christianity for his approach - St Paul himself cries out from within the agony of a limiting self: "Who will deliver me from the body of this death?"¹⁷² The idea of submission is of great importance in the teachings of

¹⁷⁰ *Hebrews* 11 vv.13,16.

¹⁷¹ cf above p.95.

¹⁷² *Romans* 7 v.24.

both Tryan and Martyn. Tryan tells Janet that a person is saved when he is "no longer left to [his] own strength"; he will then receive "strength" as he experiences that which is described in terms of "the pure free air" which is to be found "under the infinite heavens". Janet's need, he believes, is that she should passively entrust herself to God's care, with faith in His omnipotence and love:

"We cannot foretell the working of the smallest event in our own lot; how can we presume to judge of things that are so much too high for us? There is nothing that becomes us but entire submission, perfect resignation."

173

Similarly, Schleiermacher believes that an individual can only be saved as she or he comes to an awareness of her or his total dependence upon God; God can only truly be known at all, he claims, by those who entrust themselves to Him completely:

The point of departure for proper language about God ... is the experience or consciousness of sin and grace, or more fully, the self-awareness of redemption in Christ from the deficiency and alienation in our consciousness of God, an experience which presupposes and also gives that consciousness of ourselves as utterly dependent, which is to say "as being in relation to God".

174

Human misery and pain are controlled by determining factors beyond human knowledge, factors which are "much too high for us". To blame God for one's own suffering is to talk about something which no human being can understand. It is presumptuous, because it

¹⁷³ *Scenes*, p.362.

¹⁷⁴ Welch, p.77.

is, in effect, a claim that a finite mind is capable of judging the decisions of the infinite mind. The only possible response to pain is, paradoxically, one of perfect resignation, because this alone places the self in a true relation to God.

Martyn speaks of submission on an occasion when he has been greatly disturbed by "metaphysical inquiries into the nature and end of [his] being and in what consists the happiness of [his] soul". He says:

"I tremble ... to enter on these inquiries, lest my beclouded reason should lead me to the brink of hell. But I know by experience that the spirit of submission and a sense of the authority of God, is the only state in which I can ever be happy; and precisely in proportion as I depart from that state of things, I am unhappy. And so strong is this sentiment, that were it not my hope that I should one day wholly submit to God and descend to my right place, I would not wish to exist another moment."

175

Martyn's "sentiment", which he "know[s] by experience", is to be trusted, while his "beclouded reason" may well go seriously astray. The problem here is not so much that the knowledge sought by reason is essentially unknowable, but rather that the reason is itself "beclouded". The emphasis here is upon the limitations of human faculties, which are not only inadequate to discover certain areas of truth, but which may even lead those who rely on them "to the brink of hell". Francis Close, preaching in 1841, declares vehemently the fallen nature of the human mind and the great dangers of trusting it as a guide to spiritual truth:

The fall of man was an *intellectual fall*; effected by that master-spirit of evil, Satan - a being of intellectual power far surpassing ours. Man became as to his passions, *animal*, and as to his *mind, satanic*: his intellect lost the moral image of God, and received the impress of

¹⁷⁵ Henry Martyn, pp.61-2.

the power of darkness: and the result necessarily is, that though he reasons well on all secular subjects, on religious ones he draws only false conclusions.

176

Martyn desires to be "happy", but an assertion of his own powers of intellect which ignores "the authority of God" makes him "unhappy" - so unhappy, in fact, that he can only bear to exist while he can hope that his unhappiness will "one day" come to an end. Submission to God is an emotional experience for Martyn; being in his "right place" makes him happy.

The evaluation of an individual's own ideas, feelings and motives surfaces as a real problem in "Janet's Repentance" when, having previously been quite willing to die, and thus to leave the world, Tryan discovers in himself a wish to live on as he begins to realise that he loves Janet. This feeling stirs up a painful conflict within him:

He struggled with it, because he felt it to be an indication that earthly affection was beginning to have too strong a hold on him, and he prayed earnestly for more perfect submission, and for a more absorbing delight in the Divine Presence as the chief good. He was conscious that he did not wish for prolonged life solely that he might reclaim the wanderers and sustain the feeble: he was conscious of a new yearning for those pure, human joys which he had had voluntarily and determinedly banished from his life - for a draught of that deep affection from which he had been cut off by a dark chasm of remorse.

177

¹⁷⁶ Francis Close, "Divine and Human Knowledge", (1841), in *Evangelical and Oxford Movements*, p.47.

¹⁷⁷ *Scenes*, pp.407-8.

It is interesting that the same word - "pure" - is used both here to describe that which Tryan has "banished" from his life since his conversion, and also in connection with the "pure free air" which functions as a metaphor for the liberation which he discovered as a result of that same conversion.¹⁷⁸ It is difficult - difficult both for the reader, and, one suspects, for George Eliot - to decide whether or not, in the terms of the story, Tryan is right to struggle against this "pure" desire for human love. It seems that Tryan is perhaps driven by his sense of guilt to the exclusion of all positive relationships, primarily with God, but also with human beings. "Earthly affection" - which is both a poor substitute for Divine love and also a temptation to value God's presence too little - appears to be something different from that "deep affection" which is one of Tryan's primary needs, from which he has been unnaturally cut off and for which he desperately thirsts.

Two ideas of human love have here clashed in a head-on conflict - a conflict which also takes place within orthodox versions of Christianity - and this conflict, this "struggle", takes place in the very roots of Tryan's nature. At one extreme is the belief that, "unless a man is freed from dependence on creatures, he cannot turn freely to the things of God".¹⁷⁹ Holding this view, the seeker after God will tend towards the ideal of celibacy as a means of freeing the self to enter fully into the Divine Presence, since any attachments to transitory things will hold him back from having communion with eternal realities. Tryan, because of his awareness of his sin, is deeply aware of the value of this sort of liberation, and fears, particularly as he faces death, that earthly, created things will have "too strong a hold on him", tying him to the world, and so cutting him off from God. He is afraid that he will be unable to share St Paul's sentiment:

We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.

¹⁷⁸ cf above p.95.

¹⁷⁹ Thomas à Kempis, p.133.

The problem is that all this depends upon the idea that the closer one is to the world, the further one is from God, and Tryan does not straightforwardly hold this belief. The world, he believes, can be either good or bad, depending upon the individual's attitude both to it and to God. "Earthly affection", then, if viewed as a sin, must be a form of love whose object is not an independent, externally created being, but rather an image generated and controlled by the lover, in accordance with his own self-willed desires. Zeal to avoid such a destructive, confining relationship, however, risks resulting in a wholesale repression of emotional and imaginative development.

Tryan prays "earnestly for more perfect submission" because he believes that the primary relationship of his life should in fact be with "things that are so much too high for us". His problem is that he cannot feel the "deep affection", which he desperately needs to feel for something, or, preferably, someone, for a distant infinite being. He seeks "a more absorbing delight in the Divine Presence as the chief good", but "the chief good" is a metaphysical abstraction, and he cannot find emotional sustenance directly in this. There is a subtle difference between this, and the "spirit of submission" which Henry Martyn calls "the only state in which I can ever be happy": Martyn does not look for happiness as an immediate consequence of his perception of God, but instead he simply depends upon past "experience" to tell him that, by the agency of some uncomprehended working of "the authority of God",¹⁸¹ in this state, he is happy. Submission does not in itself bring joy, but it produces the only attitude of mind and heart in which joy can thrive. Tryan, however, sets up two goals in opposition to one another which one might rather expect to find as two expressions of the same central aim: the need to "reclaim the wanderers and sustain the feeble", and the search for "pure, human joys" and "deep affection". He separates them

¹⁸⁰ 2 *Corinthians* 5 v.8.

¹⁸¹ cf above p.101.

with "a dark chasm of remorse" - his guilt regarding Lucy which splits Tryan's purpose and identity in half, and finally kills him.

How far, then, can Tryan help Janet? It is interesting to note that he does not do so by initiating anything new in her so much as by gently lulling to sleep the conflicting elements in her life:

Janet had lived through the great tragedy of woman's life. Her keenest personal emotions had been poured forth in her early love - her wounded affection with its years of anguish - her agony of unavailing pity over that deathbed seven months ago. The thought of Mr Tryan was associated for her with repose from that conflict of emotion, with trust in the unchangeable, with the influx of a power to subdue self.

182

Janet's life, in fact, seems in many ways to be drawing to its close. Tryan is for her a figure of stasis. The experience of time passing - "her early love"; "years of anguish"; "seven months ago" - is replaced by a "trust in the unchangeable", which can desire no permanent process of development because it believes that nothing susceptible to change is of any lasting value. The only movement remaining is the movement to "subdue self" - the movement towards eternal "repose". Previously, Janet has lived on her emotions - her anguish was the power behind all her actions, good or bad.¹⁸³ Now all that is past - but what takes its place?

There is a real sense in which "that deathbed seven months ago" was Janet's deathbed as well as her husband's, just as Amabel in *The Heir of Redclyffe* seems to die with Guy,

¹⁸² *Scenes*, pp.408-9.

¹⁸³ cf above p.88.

since there remains no further room for growth in her life in this world. Janet "had lived through ... woman's life", but now it is all over, and she has entered a state of "repose". Comparing Janet with Yonge's Amabel, however, one is compelled to ask whether Janet is alive to the bliss of a world to come in the same way as Amabel. One could say, adopting the words of St Paul, that Janet is "dead indeed unto sin", but can one also say that she is "alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord"? What would be the evidence that this was the case? Are the new positive forces in Janet's life which the story is able to express equal to the old negative ones? She has a "power", but it is a power "to subdue self" - to destroy that which is harmful rather than to build something good. The most positive thing Tryan has given her is "trust in the unchangeable", but even this is a reliance upon something highly abstract.

In reply to these anxieties, one could say simply that all religious life is lived in relation to that which is humanly unknowable and indescribable, and that no one can ever say what God is like except by saying what He is unlike. Knowledge of God and knowledge of the world are in many ways separate, and one cannot properly be described in the language of the other except by negations. "Janet's Repentance" is, after all, supposed to be a story about clerical life "solely in its human and not at all in its theological aspect".¹⁸⁴ It is also, however, a story in which theology and knowledge of God is discovered and expressed through personal, human experience. Tryan is converted by Lucy's sorrow, and Janet by Tryan's, for "the tale of the Divine Pity was never yet believed from lips that were not felt to be moved by human pity".¹⁸⁵

Knowledge of God derived in this manner, then, is not at all impersonal, but depends wholly upon human experience:

¹⁸⁴ cf above p.81.

¹⁸⁵ *Scenes*, p.358.

I cannot know whether God is something else in himself or for himself, than he is for me; what he is to me, is to me all that he is.

186

There is, in other words, no purely "theological aspect", but only that which God "is to me". The problem is located in the phrase "all that he is", which suggests that a personally perceived God is a small, limited God, and not "an infinite Being whom man only faintly takes in".¹⁸⁷ Very little space is left for the believer's awareness of the limitations of his or her own belief. If God is "to me" infinite and unknowable, then to say that this is "all that he is" is absurd. Tryan believes both that God is infinite and unknowable, and also that it is only through "human pity" that He can be known, but somehow these two beliefs fail to meet one another.

"Janet's Repentance" seems to suffer somewhat as a result of its author's ambitious attempt to portray a universe which is, from the point of view of the major characters in the story, ruled by a transcendent God, but which is also, from the point of view of the author, governed solely by that which is "human". The problem is that the reader is constantly aware of an uncomfortable tension between these two ways of viewing the world in which Janet and Tryan live, since the orthodox Christian and Feuerbachian approaches to theology and humanity persist in conflicting with one another instead of merging into a harmonious whole.

¹⁸⁶ *Essence of Christianity*, p.37.

¹⁸⁷ Richard Holt Hutton, *Aspects of Religious and Scientific Thought*, selected from the *Spectator*, and edited by his niece, Elisabeth M. Roscoe, reprint of 1899 edition, (Westmead, Farnborough, 1971), p.346.

Chapter Three - Interpretation and Individuality

I have investigated, in Chapter Two, some of the difficulties faced by nineteenth-century writers, and by novelists in particular, in establishing a relationship between the personal religious experience of individual human beings and the existence or otherwise of an objective and self-revealing God. Chapter Three moves on from this discussion, looking more closely at what it means to be an individual in the context of the Victorian novel, and at the ways in which individuals are interpreted, both by external sources and by themselves. Because the Bible is the single most widely acknowledged body of religious language used to define what it means to be a human being in the nineteenth century, I begin with an exploration of its use in relation to Tess in Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, a novel particularly notable for its extensive quotation of and allusion to Scripture. A short look at the role of children in several novels then focuses the discussion more directly upon the problem of the development and expression of individual identity, and I then demonstrate the importance of this theme in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, paying special attention to Jane's progressive establishment of a socially and personally meaningful sense of self in relation to the various expressions of Christian doctrine with which she is confronted.

* * * * *

In his poem, "The Holy Scriptures II", George Herbert describes a Christian's experience of reading the Bible:

Such are thy secrets, which my life makes good,
And comments on thee: for in ev'ry thing

Thy words do finde me out, and parallels bring,
And in another make me understood.

188

There is here an important relationship between the "life" of the reader, and the text. The contrasting of "thy secrets" with "my life" and the way in which the speaker directly addresses the Scriptures conveys the impression that the Bible is a living companion, like another human being, which can understand people talking to it. "My life" is needed to make "thy secrets" "good" because the secrets are secrets about the Christian's life. Such a life is able to be a commentary upon the Scriptures because the Scriptures are intended to affect human lives, and their truth is only understood as it is seen at work. As the words of the Bible "find out" its reader by offering explanations and models for his experience, so that experience becomes a witness to the reliability of the words which describe it so accurately. The Bible, in fact, knows more about its reader than the reader knows about himself. When the reader is "understood", primarily by himself, then he will also have understood the secrets about humanity which the Bible contains. The reader sees in Scripture some aspect of himself and is thus enabled to read the Bible as a book which applies to his own life, gaining a greater understanding of the Bible as he does so. As he understands it better, he is able to see himself in it with greater clarity, and so it goes on.

One of the central questions in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is how Tess is to be "understood". The novel's subtitle, "A Pure Woman" offers one definition of her, and the main title presents a different idea: that of the daughter of an ancient and noble family. All the novel's major characters are, to some extent, Bible readers, and their attempts to comprehend Tess are repeatedly linked with their attempts to understand the Bible. Tess-reading

¹⁸⁸ George Herbert, "The Holy Scriptures II", in *The English Poems of George Herbert*, edited by C.A. Patrides (London, 1974), p.77.

and Scripture-reading frequently go hand in hand. The problem, however, is that not every reading is equally to be trusted.

One possible approach is the typological identification of one's present situation with a Scriptural scenario. This was a method of Biblical interpretation widely used in the Victorian age:

... the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century saw a great, almost astonishing, revival of biblical typology, which left its firm impress upon Victorian literature, art, and thought.

189

Angel Clare attempts this approach in order better, he hopes, to perceive the qualities of the woman he is beginning to love:

The spectral, half-compounded, aqueous light, which pervaded the open mead, impressed them with a feeling of isolation as if they were Adam and Eve. ... The mixed, singular, luminous gloom in which they walked along together to the spot where the cows lay often made him think of the Resurrection hour. He little thought that the Magdalen might be at his side.

190

These ideas are evoked by light, which is traditionally a symbol of Divine revelation, but this light is "spectral", "half-compounded" and "mixed". Like Angel's hermeneutics, it is rather attractively gentle and hazy, but is not, perhaps, the best means of discovering a full

¹⁸⁹ George P. Landow, *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows*, (Boston, Mass. and London, 1980), p.3.

¹⁹⁰ Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Macmillan Students' Hardy edition, (London, 1975), p.204.

view of the situation. "Luminous gloom" creates "a feeling of isolation" - a sense of freedom from all but the simple outlines of nature which are visible at such a time. Such an experience is beautiful but "singular"; like the Resurrection, it is liberated from the laws of day-to-day existence, but it therefore cannot be maintained in everyday life.

Angel indulges in the luxury of being very selective with his Scriptural images, and he separates out any idea of sin from the Christian ideas to which he mentally alludes. His - and Tess's also but since the rest of the passage focuses upon Angel's idea of Tess, this would seem to be Hardy's primary concern at this point - his Adam and Eve are innocent, alone in a new world. Yet Adam and Eve are figures of primeval sin, as well as of primeval innocence, and the identification of Tess with Eve places her in an alarmingly unstable position. Similarly, Angel's idea of "the Resurrection hour" seems to consist wholly of the concept of renewed life as a natural power source, since the need for Christ's death and resurrection - the presence of sin and suffering in the world - which is symbolised by His encounter with the repentant prostitute outside the tomb has no imaginative force for him. Angel could not, of course, be expected to recognise Tess specifically as "the Magdalen", but his idealising of the Bible is evidence of dangerously unrealistic patterns of thought. He is attempting to make Scripture "good" before he has learned, either from Scripture, or from any other source, a real understanding of the world which Scripture claims to describe. And this is the great danger in all Victorian uses of typology - the danger that the precarious balance of the reality of different levels of experience and truth will be lost:

What is perhaps unique about Victorian typology is that it comes into being during an age when men have increasingly come to accept that reality inheres in present fact, and not in a realm of ideas, forms, or spirituality ... typology promises a means of linking two conceptions of the real within a coherent intellectual framework. ... Problems appear when the believer's understandable delight in emphasising Christ's transcending reality and importance downgrades the reality possessed by the type.

Angel has insufficient awareness of the force of the type he is linking with Tess, and, as a result, his understanding of Tess is distorted also.

Angel is not alone in comparing Tess with Eve; Alec D'Urberville does so too, but with a very different effect:

"I was as firm as a man could be till I saw those eyes and that mouth again - surely there was never such a maddening mouth since Eve's? ... You temptress, Tess; you dear damned witch of Babylon - I could not resist you as soon as I met you again!"

Alec's Eve is primarily a seductress, a very similar character to the "great whore" of *Revelation*, at the opposite end of the Bible, who is called "Babylon the great, the mother of harlots".¹⁹³ To Alec, Eve is, at least potentially, an evil woman, because she represents all women, and, just as all the women Angel Clare will admit into his inner consciousness must be pure, so Alec believes that the women who come into his life all become evil. All, that is, except Tess, who fascinates Alec because he cannot understand her virtue. He tells her:

"Why I did not despise you was on account of your being unsmirched in spite of all."

¹⁹¹ Landow, pp.54,57.

¹⁹² *Tess*, pp.446-7.

¹⁹³ cf *Revelation* vv.1-6.

The only means by which he can comprehend such a phenomenon is to conclude that Tess must be a "witch", an enigmatic female who, like Eve, seems innocent, and yet contains within herself enormous power for evil.

Alec's preoccupation with Tess's eyes and mouth also indicates the way in which he allows his own experience to shape his idea of the Biblical text. There is no mention of Eve's mouth in *Genesis*, but Alec is recalling his first meeting with Tess, when he placed strawberries in her mouth, feeding her with forbidden fruit.¹⁹⁵ Alec sees himself not as Adam, but as Satan, the tempter and seducer, and, as such, the natural partner of the temptress and seductress. Knowing that he is no fit counterpart for a pure woman, he seeks to make Tess evil so that the whole direction of her development will force her to join him. Satan is notable in the Bible as being a manipulator of the Scriptural text. All the temptations of Christ in the wilderness, for example, are based upon misapplications to Jesus of words from the Old Testament.¹⁹⁶ Alec D'Urberville follows in this Satanic tradition in his attempts to persuade Tess to forget Angel and return to himself. His quotation from the book of *Hosea*, for example, lends great weight to his argument:

"The words of the stern prophet Hosea that I used to read come back to me. Don't you know them, Tess? -

'And she shall follow after her lover, but she shall not overtake him; and she shall seek him, but shall not find him; then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now!'"

¹⁹⁴ *Tess*, p.446.

¹⁹⁵ *cf Tess*, p.84.

¹⁹⁶ *cf Mathew 4 vv.1-11.*

The comment, "Don't you know them, Tess?" carries great force, implying that the words quoted, since they come from the Bible, are a part of that which is taught to every child as the truth, and which is to be unequivocally obeyed. This question to Tess is almost an accusation, suggesting that her life ought to be more closely in accordance with that which she surely knows. In addition to this, the frequent repetition of "she shall" seems to hammer home the words from *Hosea* as a prophecy for Tess, creating the feeling that she is fated to return to Alec. It is a terrifyingly powerful prediction, tempting Tess to believe that it would be useless to resist such a conclusion. The pattern of "shall ... but shall not ... shall ... but shall not ..." is the pattern of Tess's life - a pattern of despair. Yet Alec has removed the verse from its Biblical context,¹⁹⁸ and, in so doing, has altered its meaning in his own interest. The woman in question in *Hosea* is a notorious prostitute, and her "first husband" is on one level the godly prophet, and, on another level, God Himself, both of whom seek the woman's ultimate benefit. There can be no doubt of the genuine status of this woman's "first husband", whereas Alec's claim to such a title with respect to Tess is at best problematic.

The word "better" at the end of Alec's quotation means something very different in the case of Tess returning to Alec from what it means for Hosea's wife. For Tess, it is the "better" of despair: a situation so horrible that only previously unimaginable sufferings could ever teach her to call it "better". It is "better" solely in a relative sense - "better", but in no way "good".

¹⁹⁷ *Tess*, p.457.

¹⁹⁸ cf *Hosea*, especially Chapter 2.

Like Christ in the wilderness, Tess is confronted with a reading problem. It is not enough simply to accept Alec's words as truth because they are lifted from Scripture; the crucial issue is the relationship between the context to which Alec is trying to apply the verse, and the context in which it is found in Scripture. For the Bible, in orthodox Christian thought, is always to be respected for what it is in itself; it must not be manipulated to support the prejudices of its readers. The Puritan position is unmistakably clear:

The Scripture is to be its own interpreter, or rather the Spirit speaking in it; nothing can cut the diamond but the diamond; nothing can interpret Scripture but Scripture.

199

This opposition to external impositions of meaning upon the Biblical text continues vehemently to be upheld by many Christians in the nineteenth century:

Surely we know not what we do, when we venture to make a system and scheme of our own respecting the revelations of God. His ways are so vast and mysterious, that there may be some great presumption in our taking one truth, and forming around it a scheme from notions of our own. It may not be the way to arrive at even that truth; and also it may counteract some others, which it is equally important that we should be impressed with.

200

The validity of Alec's application of the phrase "first husband" to himself must be tested, since if Angel is the genuine "first husband", then the meaning of the entire prophecy

¹⁹⁹ Thomas Watson in I.D.E.Thomas, *The Golden Treasury of Puritan Quotations*, (Edinburgh and Carlisle, Pennsylvania, 1977), p.37.

²⁰⁰ Isaac Williams, "Tract No.87 On Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge" (1840), in *Evangelical and Oxford Movements*, p.119.

is reversed. How, then, is Tess, to decide who her "first husband" really is? Two approaches are open to her, and she uses them both. The first test is the character of the suspect exegete. "By their fruits ye shall know them", says Christ, warning His followers against false prophets; and, referring back again to Herbert's two-way Scripture reading process,²⁰¹ it would seem that the life of the true Bible reader must be fully in harmony with that which he reads if he is to understand it correctly. There is to be an intimate communication between text and reader, for the Bible is to be understood personally, by an individual, in the context of his own relationship with God: "Read the Scripture", says Thomas Watson, "not only as a history, but as a love-letter sent to you from God."²⁰² In Alec's case, however, Tess perceives, "a ghastly bizarrerie, a grim incongruity, in the march of these solemn words of Scripture out of such a mouth".²⁰³ Alec quoting the Bible is like a joke that isn't funny. This is because, as Tess recognises, Alec is still the same person as he was when he seduced her. "It was less a reform than a transfiguration. The former curves of sensuousness were now modulated to lines of devotional passion."²⁰³ Alec's mouth reminds Tess of all the lies and insults which he has spoken to her, and of his humiliating kisses. It is a mouth which has betrayed her, and she cannot trust it now. Whatever her religious doubts, Tess still thinks of the Scriptural text as "solemn", whereas seriousness is the last quality she would associate with Alec. Yet, because Alec apparently takes his preaching seriously, his quotation of the Bible is not mere satire, but something far more sinister. The implication is that he is, consciously or unconsciously, not simply mocking Scripture, but rather seeking to use it for some purpose of his own. His character has not changed, but is rather being expressed through a different set of ideas; and character, as Tess realises, shapes ideas - not vice versa.

²⁰¹ cf above p.109.

²⁰² Thomas Watson, in *Puritan Golden Treasury*, p.35

²⁰³ *Tess*, p.424.

Christ replies to Satan's temptations by quoting Scripture back at him,²⁰⁴ and Tess's second test of Alec's use of Biblical prophecy is carried out by means of her own application of the Bible. She does this, not directly, but by setting up Biblical contexts within which the alternative candidate for the role of "first husband" will operate if his claim is genuine. Her long letter to Angel is, therefore, full of Scriptural allusions:

"If you will send me one little line and say 'I am coming soon', I will bide on, Angel, O so cheerfully! ... I would be content, ay, glad, to live with you as your servant, if I may not as your wife; so that I could only be near you, and get glimpses of you, and think of you as mine. ... I long for only one thing in heaven, or earth, or under the earth, to meet you, my own dear!"

205

The "first husband" in the verse from *Hosea* quoted by Alec is the highest being in the life of the woman in question. Within the context of the Biblical prophecy, the "first husband" is equated with God. Tess takes up this idea, and, by the references she makes in her letter, implies that Angel will be God to her, the highest point of her existence, if he is able correctly to read the Scriptural language with which she addresses him. In using the phrase, "I am coming soon", Tess is asking Angel to adopt the role of Christ in *Revelation*, who says, "surely I come quickly",²⁰⁶ referring to His return in glory to unite Himself with His bride, the Church, and to complete her happiness.²⁰⁷ Tess thus expresses more powerfully than she could if speaking simply in her own voice her deep reverence for Angel and her

²⁰⁴ cf *Luke* 4 vv.1-13.

²⁰⁵ *Tess*, pp.508 and 464-6.

²⁰⁶ *Revelation* 22 v.20.

²⁰⁷ cf *Revelation* 21,22.

high vision for their marriage. Having already been cast by Alec in the role of the symbolic, universal Bride, the people of God whom Hosea's wife represents, Tess seeks to communicate this image to Angel, and thus to redeem it.

Tess's second allusion is to the parable of the prodigal son.²⁰⁸ She was perhaps reminded of this by the words of the woman in Alec's quotation: "I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now". The verses Tess has in mind are those in which the prodigal decides to go back to his father:

And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

209

Alec's words from *Hosea* suggested that Tess was an adulteress, and here she deliberately takes upon herself the role of the repentant sinner. She implies in so doing that Alec has confused two separate possibilities for her: the return of the evil woman to the evil man as her natural counterpart, and the return of the penitent to the man who has been sinned against. By so clearly embracing the latter of these two alternatives, Tess repudiates the former. The "first husband" in *Hosea* is the victim of his wife's infidelity, not her partner in adultery. If she has sinned at all, Tess is telling Angel, she has sinned against him. If she has sinned, she is worthy only to be his servant, but if she has sinned against him, then he must be her true husband, and her only home is with him. Paradoxically, the man who recognises Tess's unworthiness of him is the man she can call "mine", since it is precisely

²⁰⁸ cf *Luke* 15 vv.11-32.

²⁰⁹ *Luke* 15 vv.17-19.

because the prodigal can speak of a wealthy man in a distant country as "my father" that he knows he is "no longer worthy to be called thy son".

Tess writes of having only one desire, "in heaven, or earth, or under the earth". This is a reference to *Philippians* 2 v.10, where St Paul speaks of the exaltation of Christ, before whom, "every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth". Tess's words, coming right at the end of her long letter, are intended both to speak to Angel of her complete commitment to him, on every level of her existence, and also to hint at the state to which she might be reduced should Angel fail to help her. *Philippians* 2 v.10 has traditionally been interpreted as follows:

Then shall ... [Christ's glory] ... be manifested to all, good and bad, angels as well as men, who shall be subjected to his sovereign Majesty, as the Lord God omnipotent; the good willingly, and the bad by constraint.

210

There is, in Tess's letter, at least a shadow of the idea that Tess is in danger of becoming "bad", and that by the time Angel returns, he might find her "on earth" or even "under the earth". She wants to stress that, however "bad" she might be already, or might yet become, Angel will have her worship. Good or bad, alive or dead, she will simply long to meet him, however impossible such a meeting might become. In almost the last words she utters in the novel, Tess asks Angel, "do you think we shall meet again after we are dead?".²¹¹ Angel cannot reply, because he does not believe they will. In spite of everything, however, Tess lays claim to some form of immortal union with Angel in her passionate assertion here in

²¹⁰ Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3 vols., (Edinburgh and Carlisle, Pennsylvania, 1963), vol 3, p.691.

²¹¹ *Tess*, p.541.

the letter that even in sin, even in failure, and infidelity, and denial, even in death, however "bad" she has been in her relationship with Angel, still she will long only to meet him. Just as even unrepentant sinners will eventually be subjected to Christ "by constraint", so even a woman as fallen as Tess fears she might become will still, somehow, adore her "first husband".

Tess, then, resists and fights back against Alec's attempts to use Scripture to read and control her with superb courage. Yet, despite all this, Alec's prophecy does still in some sense come true, for Tess returns to him. Somehow she is forced, outwardly at least, to accept him as her "first husband". This is because her letter fails to reach Angel in time, as he has travelled so far away from her, and it is only his sufferings in Brazil which teach Angel how to read the letter in such a way that he can return to Tess at all. Up until this point, Angel, in reaction against his Evangelical parents, has been a materialist in his readings both of Scripture and of life, believing that scientifically verifiable fact is the basis upon which he should act. Tess quotes his agnostic views to Alec, displaying as she does so an ironically simple trust in the truth of every word of a man who takes his own reason rather than the honesty and virtue or otherwise of the source of any given body of ideas as the only basis for belief in or rejection of those ideas. She voices Angel's "mercilessly polemical syllogism[s] ... which might possibly have been paralleled in many a work of the pedigree ranging from the *Dictionnaire Philosophique* to Huxley's *Essays*."²¹² Angel believes that:

What essentially characterises a religious teacher and gives him his permanent worth and vitality is, after all, just the scientific value of his teaching, its correspondence with important facts, and the light it throws on them.

²¹² *Tess*, pp.444-5.

This is not to say that the Bible is to be read as a scientific textbook; it is rather to be tested by such textbooks, and is to be valued to the degree to which it "corresponds" with "important facts" and "throws light" on them. The designation of "important facts" is in itself a wholly extra-Biblical activity, and the role of Scripture and religious teachings is to extend and illuminate knowledge in accordance with that which is scientifically verifiable. Angel is, in many ways, a man of his times, thinking in accordance with the views expressed by Benjamin Jowett in *Essays and Reviews*, the book which so shocked Britain on its publication in 1860:

Christianity cannot be opposed to the love of truth. "Any true doctrine of inspiration must conform to all well-ascertained facts of history or science." And, most horrifying of all to many of Jowett's contemporaries, Scripture must be "interpreted like any other book, by the same rules of evidence and the same canons of criticism."

This is the way in which Angel uses the Bible when he first decides by observation and experiment that Tess is "a fresh and virginal daughter of Nature"²¹⁵ and then proceeds to apply Scriptural images consistent with this idea, as I have shown.²¹⁶ The problem with this approach, particularly for a first-generation rebel against Evangelicalism, is that Angel

²¹³ Matthew Arnold, "St Paul and Protestantism", in *Dissent and Dogma*, edited by R.H. Super (Michigan, 1968), p.9.

²¹⁴ Welch, pp.168-9.

²¹⁵ *Tess*, p.192.

²¹⁶ cf above p.111.

combines with his refusal to read the Bible literally at its own valuation a tendency to take the "facts" of which he is aware rather too literally. He is claiming the right to name his own world and then to use Scripture to provide a metaphorical level of vision rather than letting the Bible name the world for him. As a result of this, Angel has far less freedom to apply his own definitions, created for his specific situation, with flexibility, than he would if he were using the language of the Bible, written for historically distant situations and therefore always in need of interpretation and application. And so:

... the figure near at hand suffers on such occasions, because it shows up its sorriness without shade; while vague figures afar off are honoured, in that their distance makes artistic virtues of their stains.

217

Angel's parents, for example, have no difficulty in applying to Tess a passage of Scripture which, in Angel's eyes, cannot fit her at all:

"Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies." ...

When prayers were over, his mother said - "I could not help thinking how very aptly that chapter your dear father read applied, in some of its particulars, to the woman you have chosen. The perfect woman, you see, was a working woman; not an idler; not a fine lady; but one who used her hands and her head and her heart for the good of others ... Since she is pure and chaste she would have been refined enough for me."

218

²¹⁷ *Tess*, p.373.

²¹⁸ *Tess*, p.371.

The passage which Angel's father reads²¹⁹ offers a definition of "a virtuous woman", and it makes no mention of sexual purity or impurity. Angel's mother is quite ready to apply the passage to Tess, "in some of its particulars", realising that only very rarely is there an exact one-to-one correspondence between a Biblical situation and a present day one. She allows her knowledge of the woman described in *Proverbs* and her knowledge of Tess to work with instead of against each other. She does not, like Alec D'Urberville, force the whole of the Biblical text onto Tess, saying that Tess must be a virtuous woman, and that this passage describes a virtuous woman, and so therefore Tess must be exactly like the woman described in the passage; such syllogisms belong to those who, like Alec and Angel, can read the Bible only through bending it to make it fit their own desires for reality. Following Herbert's method,²²⁰ Mrs Clare allows Tess to be a commentary upon the words of the Bible and lets the Bible words describe and appreciatively express some of Tess's qualities. Her approach is similar to that of John Newton:

"In perusing the New Testament, I was struck with several passages, ... but particularly the prodigal (Luke,xv.), - a case I thought that had never been so nearly exemplified as by myself: - and then the goodness of the father in perceiving, nay, in running to meet such a son, and this intended only to illustrate the Lord's goodness to returning sinners; - this gained upon me: I continued much in prayer: I saw that the Lord had interposed so far to save me, and I hoped he would do more."

221

Newton does not expect his own situation to be exactly like that of the prodigal in every respect, but is rather amazed and impressed to see the close similarity between his own case

²¹⁹ cf *Proverbs* 31.

²²⁰ cf above p.109.

²²¹ R.Bickersteth, *A Memoir of the Rev. John Newton* (London, 1865), p.46.

and that described in the Gospels; his identification with the Scriptural figure does not involve an attempt rigidly to force himself into an externally defined framework - it is the recognition of a dynamic pattern, ordered by a living and active God, who, Newton hopes, will "do more" in accordance with the Biblical example.

Angel, however, hears in his father's reading only the words "virtuous", "pure" and "chaste", and believes that everything his parents are saying is negated because these words cannot be applied to his wife in their most obvious and literal "scientific" sense. His universe is black and white, so that if Tess is not "the perfect woman", she is the opposite of such, and he can have nothing to do with her. His mother, on the other hand, does not for a moment think of Tess as "perfect", but rather allows the contemplation of an ideal to enhance her understanding and love of a sinner by focusing upon "virtuous" qualities which Tess shares. Virtue, she perceives, is always, among fallen humanity, partial and incomplete. It is only her humanist son who can hold such idealistic and deterministic views of the world as to hope to find a "perfect woman".

Having failed to understand his parents' recommendation of Tess, Angel is next confronted with another Biblically-based description of the woman he is planning to leave. Having invited Izz Huett to go to Brazil with him, Angel asks her if she loves him more than Tess did. Her reply brings to an abrupt halt all his desires to "shape his future domesticities loosely":²²²

"No ... Because nobody could love 'ee more than Tess did! ... She would have laid down her life for 'ee. I could do no more."

223

²²² *Tess*, p.378.

²²³ *Tess*, p.179.

It was Izz who, on the occasion when Angel carried the four milkmaids across the flooded path, quoted from the book of *Ecclesiastes*, and, when gently rebuked for so lightly using the words of Scripture, said, "I've always a'car at church for pretty verses".²²⁴ Being in the habit of applying Biblical language to her own experiences, she now does so with a natural simplicity which carries more force than she realises or perhaps even intends. As a romantic young girl, Izz likes "pretty verses" which offer a more expressive language than she could find herself to describe her own emotional life, and it is this sensitivity to language which has enabled her to understand Tess's love so clearly. She is echoing the words of Christ describing His own love for His disciples:

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

225

This is the love of Christ, of God made man, and it is therefore the ultimate human love, in which a "man" can take part in that which is Divine. The simplicity both of Christ's words and of Izz's application of them is immensely powerful. Knowing that "greater love hath no man than this", Izz concludes that "I could do no more"; her virginity cannot give her any more powers of loving than Tess has, because Tess has already attained the limit of human love. There is "no more" love available after a person is willing to "lay down her life" for the loved one, because the lover has given up her entire being. It is impossible to expect any more of Tess than she has offered already, and nobody else can give more than she does.

It takes a milkmaid to explain this to Angel, despite all his privileged education. But why, having understood this - for he does understand it, and consequently refuses to take

²²⁴ *Tess*, p.221.

²²⁵ *John* 15 v.13.

Izz to Brazil - does Angel not go back to Tess? Because, to him, it is irrelevant. He does not return to his loving wife because:

... despite her love, as corroborated by Izz's admission, the facts had not changed. If he was right at first, he was right now.

226

Scripture, interpreted by a woman who has every reason to hide the fact, tells Angel that Tess's love is the very best anyone could ever give him, and yet he goes abroad because this information has no "scientific value".²²⁷ These words from the Bible change nothing for Angel because they have no correspondence with his previously and rigidly determined "important facts".²²⁷ This is, surely, a terrifyingly limiting way to read. This "hard logical deposit" in Angel which "had blocked his acceptance" of both the Church and Tess²²⁸ is not broken down until he meets with suffering in Brazil.

The change which eventually takes place in him is expressed in terms of his methods of reading:

He had undergone some strange experiences in his absence; he had seen the virtual Faustina in the literal Cornelia, a spiritual Lucretia in a corporeal Phryne; he had thought of the woman taken and set in the midst as one deserving to be stoned, and of the wife of Uriah being made a queen; and he had asked himself why he had not judged Tess constructively rather than biographically, by the will rather than by the deed.

²²⁶ *Tess*, p.381.

²²⁷ cf above p.120.

²²⁸ *Tess*, p.343.

The phrase, "he asked himself" is the clue to Angel's new awareness; he has been "found out" and "understood" at last,²³⁰ having discovered that any fruitful reading process, either of the Bible or of the world, must be undertaken by a reader prepared to look into "the thankfull glasse/That mends the lookers eyes".²³¹ Now that he is able to judge himself, Angel can fairly judge Tess. The reader who sees "parallels"²²⁷ for his own life in Scripture perceives that he has not one possible self, but many, and in seeing himself in that which he reads he experiences a form of separation from himself, so that the self becomes an objective entity.

Having come this far, Angel realises that there are many possible "parallels" for other people's lives also. There is, in other words, more than one way to read. This discovery does not necessarily open wide the door to relativism, since it does not in itself imply that every approach to a text is equally valid. On the contrary, Angel's belief is that his previous reading methods have been very seriously flawed. It is only in moving from his "scientific" reliance upon "the facts"²³² to this apparently more liberal idea of numerous possible viewpoints that Angel is enabled to say, quite definitely, that he has been wrong. It is not a question of a simple choice between limited and unlimited possibilities for truth; it may be that a greater openness promotes greater strength of conviction, and vice versa:

²²⁹ *Tess*, pp.507-8.

²³⁰ cf above p.109.

²³¹ Herbert, p.77.

²³² cf above p.120.

Religion, to be a relation between God and man at all, must rest on a belief in the Infinite, and also on a belief in the Finite; for if we deny the first, there is no God; and if we deny the second, there is no Man.

233

The word "relation" is central to Angel's new understanding. The acknowledgement of uncertainty, Angel discovers, actually facilitates the formation of personal commitments as the "Infinite" and the "Finite" inter-react to create new, dynamic levels of comprehension and experience.

Angel's re-readings of what it means for a woman to be virtuous take place in two stages. Firstly, he considers a number of women from extra-Christian literary history - Faustina, Cornelia, Lucretia and Phryne - and realises that, while each of these figures is in herself wholly moral or immoral, these are, like the wife in *Proverbs* 31, ideals, not real women. Living people who can become human wives are more complex, operating on more than one level and experiencing more than one mode of moral existence. By desiring in Tess a Cornelia or a Lucretia, Angel has killed the life she offered him by attempting to turn her into a flat image of virtue. He has denied the Faustina and the Phryne who live in her, and thus has denied her wholeness, her personality. Secondly, Angel moves on to look at Biblical women who, because of their moral complexity, are open to misconstruction. The "woman taken in adultery"²³⁴ would have been stoned for her sin, had not Jesus said to her accusers: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at

²³³ Henry Longueville Mansel, *The Limits of Religious Thought, examined in eight lectures*, Bampton Lectures for 1858, fourth edition (London, 1859), pp.119-20.

²³⁴ cf *John* 8 v.3.

her”.²³⁵ Angel, as he now discovers, is himself not “without sin”, and so he cannot be confident of his ability to make moral judgements. In the Gospel account, Jesus was the only person present who was “without sin” and so the only one capable of judging justly, and He did not stone the woman. While sinful people saw the woman as a Faustina or a Phryne, the Divine understanding of the case was entirely different. This Divine viewpoint is not fully humanly comprehensible, which should serve as a powerful warning to anyone attempting to determine for himself the virtue or otherwise of a woman.

Such judgements are not, as Angel previously assumed, straightforward tasks depending upon easily ascertainable facts. “The wife of Uriah” committed adultery, yet she became the wife and the mother of Israel’s greatest kings.²³⁶ One blot upon a woman’s past need not, Angel learns, darken the rest of her life, particularly when, as in the case of both Uriah’s wife, Bathsheba, and Tess, the woman had little choice about committing the immoral act. Shame and honour can both characterise the same life, for one action does not alter a person’s essential being. Tess is both the mother of Alec’s illegitimate child and the true wife of Angel; neither of these identities invalidates the other. “The deed” seems in the end to be unimportant because Tess can carry out all sorts of deeds, even murder, remaining unchanged by them. Instead of reading Tess according to what she has done, Angel ought to have undertaken the far more difficult project of learning to read her “constructively”, discerning the many different facets of her nature and seeking out all the contradictory elements in her before attempting to say what she is.

Throughout the novel, virtually from the beginning, Tess is struggling to find recognition of her true identity against the crushing weight of crude Scriptural interpretations of what she is. Her encounter with the text painter on her return from Alec’s home to that

²³⁵ *John* 8 v.7.

²³⁶ cf *2 Samuel* 11,12.

of her parents becomes a direct confrontation with the very words of Scripture. The impersonal paint marks seem to Tess to be directly addressed to herself, which is precisely the painter's intention:

"I leave their application to the hearts of the people who read 'em."

"I think they are horrible", said Tess. "Crushing! killing!".

"That's what they are meant to be!"

Then, realising that the next text to be painted condemns the sin with which she now feels herself to be branded, Tess walks away hurriedly, "her eyes fixed on the ground":

"Pooh - I don't believe God said such things!" she murmured contemptuously when her flush had died away.

237

Tess and the painter disagree on some level, it appears, but not straightforwardly on the level of their reading of Scripture. Both would describe the texts as "horrible", "crushing" and "killing", but the painter seems positively to relish these effects of his work, whereas for Tess the texts serve only to underline her suffering and to mock her in it. Tess applies the Scriptural words of condemnation to herself exactly as the painter means her to, but they do her no good, because they do no more than declare her alienation from God. The problem is that the reading process here works in one direction only; the texts do, at least in a crude sense, "finde [Tess] out", but, in doing this, they prevent Tess freely from reading them since a damned adulteress surely has no right to "comment on" Scripture.²³⁸ The texts

²³⁷ *Tess*, pp.137-9.

²³⁸ cf above p.109.

read Tess, and, in so doing, prevent her from reading them. Her immediate, unreasoned sense of guilt prevents her from asking herself whether she has really committed adultery or exactly what those sins of which the texts speak would look like in her own life. The text painter forces Tess completely out of a relationship with Scripture by negatively describing her in terms which are Scriptural, but which are drawn only very selectively from those parts of Scripture which condemn sin. The words of faith and promise are never used. In the end, his error is the same as that of both Alec and of Angel: all three want to make Tess into a cut-out character from the Bible, insisting that she conform completely to the Scriptural definitions of her which they set up. Only Angel's parents perceive the dangers of this approach through their belief that the Bible is greater than the human beings to whom it is addressed.

Hardy repeatedly emphasises the dangers, primarily for human beings, but also for Christianity itself, of forcing life into narrow, rigid Biblical frameworks, forgetting that both human beings and even, in the right circumstances, the Christian faith, are not fixed, easily definable entities, but dynamic, vital forces. The epigraph to *Jude the Obscure* - "The letter killeth" - concisely declares this deeply held conviction of Hardy's. I am concerned in this chapter with a literalism used to limit the spirit; crude, over hasty applications of Biblical words and phrases are terrifyingly potent in confining and stunting the development of human lives. This process can be seen most clearly, and, as a threat both from and to Christianity, is analysed most acutely, in novels about education, especially the tutoring of orphans.

One such orphan is Dickens's David Copperfield, who finds himself labelled and defined against his will by somebody else's theology:

As to any recreation with other children of my age, I had very little of that, for the gloomy theology of the Murdstones made all children out to be a swarm of little vipers (though there was a child once set in the midst of the Disciples), and held that they contaminated one another.

David is eventually physically locked away as an expression of his unfitness to take part in human relationships.²⁴⁰ Images of enclosure are frequently used in the Victorian novel in accounts of children whose lives are governed by religious dogma. Jane Eyre is locked up in the red-room, and Lowood school is "convent-like", with its garden walls too high to see over;²⁴¹ Ernest Pontifex in *The Way of All Flesh* has literally to be imprisoned before he can truly begin to escape his parents' influence; Pearl in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* is born in prison; and Mrs Clennam's house in *Little Dorrit* is a far more stifling place for a child to grow up in than any of the novel's literal jails. This recurrent theme of isolation is important because it underlines the mid-Victorian novel's constant emphasis upon the need for social interactions as the essential counterpart to individualism. Ian Watt, in his book, *The Rise of the Novel*, argues that the development of modes of thought which gave primacy of place to the human individual - a development deeply rooted in Protestant Christianity - led in turn to a renewed belief in the value of human communication:

By weakening communal and traditional relationships, [the rise of individualism] fostered not only the kind of private and egocentric mental life we find in Defoe's heroes, but also the later stress on the importance of personal relationships which is so characteristic both of modern society and of the novel - such relationships may be seen as offering the individual a more conscious and selective pattern of social life to replace the more diffuse, and as it were involuntary, social cohesions which individualism had undermined.

²³⁹ Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, Collins Clear Type Press edition, (London, undated), p.59.

²⁴⁰ cf *David Copperfield*, p.63.

²⁴¹ Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1966), pp.80-81.

A child cut off from all external influences can develop in only two possible ways: either in the way required by his guardians, or in the way inherent in his own personality, his nature. The struggle between the demands of the external world and those of the self is thus intensified in such situations because no middle way is permitted.

David's protest that, "there was a child once set in the midst of the midst of the Disciples" recalls a Biblical scenario in which the power structure upon which Murdstone depends seems to be reversed. Whereas the Murdstone "gloomy theology" views children as evil and assumes that adults are sufficiently good to rule over them, Christ in the incident referred to²⁴³ sets up a child as an example from which adults can learn. The social centrality of a child placed "in the midst" of a group of adults presents a powerful contrast with the isolation of David, hidden away, lest he should "contaminate" other people. David has no opportunity, under Mr Murdstone, to determine what it means to be David Copperfield, since he is categorised merely as a part of "all children", who are "a swarm of little vipers", all alike in their sinfulness and wholly lacking in individual characteristics. Once again the reader familiar with the Bible sees an ironic reversal of Christ's example, for Jesus calls the Pharisees, not the children, a "generation of vipers",²⁴⁴ and if any character in *David Copperfield* resembles the Pharisees, it is manifestly Mr Murdstone. It is the denial of the right of those under Murdstone's control to be individuals which is perhaps the most "gloomy" aspect of his creed. But if David fights back by asserting his own authority, he will risk losing his status as a child, as one fitted by his humility to be "set in the midst

²⁴² Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel, Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London, 1963), p.177.

²⁴³ cf *Matthew* 18 v.1ff.

²⁴⁴ *Mathew* 12 v.34.

of the Disciples”, since power and adulthood seem , in spiritual terms at least, to be indivisible. If he adopts Mr Murdstone’s “firmness” in order to oppose him, David will, in effect, become Mr Murdstone.

For this reason, David is horrified far more than could logically be expected when he is told that, having grown up as an orphan, he is to have a father: “What do you think?”, Pegotty tells him, “You have got a Pa!”.²⁴⁵ It is evident at once that something is wrong, for it is a father that gets a child, not a child a father; for the father to arrive later, breaking into the child’s life instead of the child into his, totally reverses the natural order. Before he has consciously understood the full meaning of Pegotty’s words, David recoils in fear:

I trembled and turned white. Something - I don’t know what, or how - connected with the grave in the churchyard, and the raising of the dead, seemed to strike me like an unwholesome wind.

245

David’s encounter with Murdstone’s dog conveys intensely the nature of the child’s terror:

... the empty dog kennel was filled up with a great dog - deep-mouthed and black-haired like Him - and he was very angry at the sight of me, and sprang out to get at me.

246

²⁴⁵ *David Copperfield*, p.47.

²⁴⁶ *David Copperfield*, p.48.

Like Murdstone, the dog "fills up" an "empty" space: that of the father and guardian. The capital "H" in "Him" is more often used in this way when God is the person referred to; here it suggests the hugeness of Murdstone as a figure in David's life, omnipotent, omniscient and totally to be feared. "The sight of me" is the crucial phrase here, since it links with David's earlier reference to his father who "never saw me";²⁴⁷ it is nothing that David says or does which so infuriates the dog, but merely the "sight" of him. Because he did not experience it in its natural context, being seen by an authority figure is fundamentally terrible to David. The dog's anger and its purposeful attack are exactly what he expects.

This response is not straightforwardly triggered by the personality of Mr Murdstone. It was foreshadowed years earlier, on the occasion when David's mother read the Biblical account of the raising of Lazarus, and David reacted with terror which abated only when he was shown "the quiet churchyard out of the bedroom window, with the dead all lying in their graves at rest".²⁴⁸ It is, of course, in this churchyard that David's father is buried. The terrors which, for David surround the idea of a father brought back to life are truly those of the apocalypse, of the destruction of all order as he has come to know it. It is not as if David Copperfield senior - it is significant that his son adopts his name, just as he takes his place in the world, so that the return of the father must surely imply the annihilation of the son - was in himself a frightening figure. On the contrary, both Aunt Trotwood's and David's mother's accounts of him give the impression of a kind young man who erred, if anything, in the direction of impracticality and an excess of romantic imagination - altogether a gentle character, and as unlike Mr Murdstone as anyone could be. David never, however, expresses a clear wish that his father had survived, but instead says:

There is something strange to me, even now, in the reflection that he never saw me.

²⁴⁷ *David Copperfield*, p.8.

²⁴⁸ *David Copperfield*, p.20.

The phrase "even now" implies that even the adult, narrating David, as a successful author, married to Agnes and a father himself, cannot shake off this impression of strangeness.

A father who never sees his son is like an impersonal deity, a blind creating force - like the evolutionary process, which has no knowledge of and accepts no responsibility for that which it produces. Until the arrival of Mr Murdstone, David Copperfield has no story - only scattered memories and impressions.²⁴⁹ The presence of the father-figure gives direction and sets up a story - like God. The orphan's state of non-definition offers a certain liberty, since there is no father to lay down rules for such a child to live by - to authorise his experiences and activities. The problem, for the novelist at least, is not so much that any particular, individual father may be a bad one, as that the very concept of parenthood, particularly in some of its more extreme, Evangelically-based formulations, may contain within itself the seeds of the novel's destruction, for the realist novel depends for its very existence upon society's belief in the right of the individual to define his own being, free from the limits set by the representatives of the past:

The novel's serious concern with the daily lives of ordinary people seems to depend upon two important general considerations: the society must value every individual highly enough to consider him the proper subject of its serious literature; and there must be enough variety of belief and action among ordinary people for a detailed account of them to be of interest to other ordinary people, the readers of novels. ... The existence of such a society ... depends ... on an ideology primarily based, not on the tradition of the past, but on the autonomy of the individual, irrespective of his particular social status or personal capacity.

²⁴⁹ cf *David Copperfield*, pp.18-21.

²⁵⁰ Watt, p.60.

The novel and Protestant Christianity share a common need to view people, in effect, not as children, but as adults. Edward Miall, in a series of articles on the "Voluntary Principle", the very foundation of Non-Conformity, repeatedly stresses this point:

Do but consult man, and you go far to win him - show him the respect due to his manhood, and you put yourself in the direct road to his esteem. Cautiously abstain, in all your dealings with him, from violating his individual independence - recognise his inherent right to freedom of judgement and freedom of agency - ... in one word, treat him as a man having unquestioned liberty of thought, choice, action, rather than as a child possessing neither ... and he will prove himself to be not so intractable a being as state priests have represented him.

251

The position of the child, then, in the novel, is inevitably going to be problematic, for the child must prove his right to be "the proper subject of ... serious literature", which can be securely established only by either growing up, or creating a mode of childhood in which there is "unquestioned liberty of thought, choice, action" - in other words, a form of childhood which successfully defies all adult authority.

The novelist himself, as a godlike creator figure, is at least potentially implicated in any attack upon the role of the Christian father, and it is perhaps for this reason that so many of the major Victorian novels dealing with the difficulties of children, particularly orphans, are also written in autobiographical form. The greatest need and struggle faced by the individual is seen as that of finding a voice of one's own which can give one's life order and meaning - which can, in effect, tell one's own story, and yet will find validation. The problem is in essence the same as that experienced by Tess when she finds herself circum-

²⁵¹ Edward Miall, *Views of the Voluntary Principle, in four series*, second edition (London, 1850), p.67.

scribed by other people's readings of Scripture, but is unable to read it in a way which is meaningful for herself.

Jane Eyre, for example, is ostensibly given the opportunity by Mr Brocklehurst to give an account of herself, but realises that she does not have the authority necessary to do so:

"Well, Jane Eyre, and are you a good child?"

Impossible to reply to this in the affirmative: my little world held a contrary opinion: I was silent. Mrs Reed answered for me by an expressive shake of the head, adding soon, "Perhaps the less said on that subject the better, Mr Brocklehurst".

252

Jane is silent because she realises that she is trapped. Personally, she does not believe that she is a bad child - otherwise she would presumably say so. But it is "impossible" to say that she is good. Why? On the most obvious, physical level, Mrs Reed is standing at Jane's side, ready with her own idea of the child's character, and armed with the doubly superior authority of being first an adult and second Jane's guardian. Mr Brocklehurst's question is addressed to the child, paradoxically, not because he wishes to learn from Jane, but rather to instruct her. But the question is not straightforwardly that of a catechist, for there is no correct answer which Jane could truthfully offer as evidence of her understanding - it is too personal for that. Mr Brocklehurst's question aims to catch Jane out, rather than simply to evoke either an orthodox, externally decided reply or to discover information about Jane which only she can supply. To Jane, the questions, "Do you believe that you are a good child?", and "Is it generally believed that you are a good child?" are radically different, but Mr Brocklehurst is attempting to ask both at once. As a result, she cannot answer. The adult, narrating Jane does not clearly say that she wished on this occasion to

²⁵² *Jane Eyre*, p.64.

say she was good, but merely that such a declaration was "impossible". The opinion of "my little world" is clear enough, and Jane knows that this is not necessarily her own view, but the establishment of a fully separate personality which can exist independently of the entire "world" of her experience is something which can only be achieved gradually.

By saying nothing, Jane is, quite simply, expressing no opinion, because she cannot determine what the question means. She is, as a child, trapped by the complexities of adult language, encountering a use of words which is no more intelligent than her own, but which refuses to deal honestly with one thing at a time. When Jane first encounters Helen Burns, she contemplates her patient and resigned response to punishment with bafflement, and can get no further in comprehending this than to ask herself: "I wonder what sort of girl she is - whether good or naughty."²⁵³ This curiously banal question indicates the inadequacy of Jane's moral education, or at least her inner resistance to the adult language on offer which purports to deal with an individual's spiritual state in more complex, but, Jane feels, less truthful terms. Some children, Jane has learned, are called "good" and others "naughty"; these definitions are mysteriously assigned by adults, who claim the power to know which is which merely by virtue of their seniority. Yet Helen, while unequivocally labelled "naughty" by Miss Scatcherd, does not seem personally affected in any way by this label. The terms "good" and "naughty" lose their power when Miss Scatcherd, despite her sending the child to stand in the middle of the room, has evidently no real authority over Helen. This is because the labels are of no importance to Helen, since her true life is lived beyond their reach.

Helen's solution to the problems of being an orphan is that recommended in the song which Bessie has previously sung to Jane:

²⁵³ *Jane Eyre*, p.84.

There is a thought that for strength should avail me;
Though both of shelter and kindred despoiled;
Heaven is a home, and a rest will not fail me;
God is a friend to the poor orphan child.

254

Jane Eyre, however, lacks the innocence required to take comfort from such lyrics. On the contrary, she describes Bessie's ballad as "a really doleful one"²⁵⁴ and cries when she hears it. The method recommended here for the orphan is to relinquish all claims upon earthly, human happiness and to depend on a "thought" for "strength" in the midst of starvation both physical and emotional. Helen can say that "degradation never too deeply disgusts [her]" because the "thought" of her Heavenly home has become more real to her than her earthly sufferings. Jane, however, while in many ways impressed by this attitude, can never adopt it for herself. The word "should" in the first line of the stanza is somewhat worrying, since it suggests that the orphan is struggling to adopt precepts taught by someone else, who, the reader begins to suspect, may well be an adult. The song is like Mr Brocklehurst's questions in that it forces a child to voice ideas which ensure that he or she is never enabled to grow up. If orphan children do as they "should" and look to God and another world after death for their happiness, all responsibility for their care is neatly removed from human society.

The ideal child, according to such songs, is perhaps embodied by a boy described to Jane by Mr Brocklehurst as exemplary in his behaviour and in his ostensibly other-worldly inclinations:

"I have a little boy, younger than you, who knows six Psalms by heart: and when you ask him which he would rather have, a ginger-bread-nut to eat, or a verse of a Psalm to learn,

²⁵⁴ *Jane Eyre*, p.54.

he says: 'Oh! the verse of a Psalm! angels sing Psalms', says he; 'I wish to be a little angel here below'. He then gets two nuts in recompense for his infant piety."

255

The most immediately worrying thing here is the word "recompense"; there is a startling discrepancy between the little boy's stated belief that the learning of a Psalm brings its own reward and Mr Brocklehurst's apparent view that "infant piety" is some form of loss or handicap, that must be compensated for in other, more worldly ways. It seems that material benefits are the only form of reward that mean anything to Brocklehurst. While, on the most obvious level, the two ginger-bread-nuts function as the highest pay-out which any performing animal can and will learn to win, this feeding of the good child is also important as the counterpart of the starvation of the Lowood girls for the sake of their spiritual health, as Brocklehurst claims. In one sense Mr Brocklehurst is always consistent, in that he never gives a child that which the child says he wants. It is not clear whether this little boy is even given his verse to learn; the nuts are Brocklehurst's first concern.

In saying, "I wish to be a little angel here below", the boy claims to be something other than "all children" who are, in some Evangelical eyes, "a brood of little vipers",²⁵⁶ while at the same time using the language authorised by adults as that of "infant piety":

I'm glad my Blessed SAVIOUR
Was once a Child like me,
To show how pure and holy
His little ones might be. ...

²⁵⁵ *Jane Eyre*, p.65.

²⁵⁶ cf above p.131.

For He has kindly promised
That even I may go
To sing among His Angels
Because He loves me so.

257

It is words such as these, placed in the mouths of children, which, in the hands of the novelists, become the basis for many portrayals of Evangelical egotism. In this hymn, Christ is "my" Saviour first and foremost, and He is especially to be congratulated for having become "like me", in order to demonstrate the immense potential for virtue in children (like the speaker). He is "kind" but no more - it is not really surprising - in permitting "even I" - and this emphasis so firmly on the "I" rather than on the speaker's disqualifications for Heaven is surely false modesty - to join the "Angels". It is difficult to see why a human child should wish to become an angel since angels, as described in the Bible,²⁵⁸ are an entirely separate order of beings, quite alarmingly different from people. The child seems to envisage himself singing with the angels, as if he and they could comfortably be all choirboys together! One wonders whether he is not perhaps tempted, as Eve was, by the suggestion, "ye shall be as gods".²⁵⁹ This language does, however, as Mr Brocklehurst's little boy realises, have one major point in its favour: it offers terms in which a child is permitted to define himself as something other than a sinner. It is one possible answer to the question, "Are you a good child?" - one can be even more than a

²⁵⁷ Mrs Miller, "I love to hear the story", in W.H.Monk and C.Steggall (ed.), *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, Old edition, (London, 1889), no.330.

²⁵⁸ cf eg *Ezekiel* 1.

²⁵⁹ *Genesis* 3 v.5.

good child if one is prepared to become "a little angel here below". Angels, of course, do not have human parents, and are too holy to be subjected to human discipline.

While the idea of God as the orphan child's father can lead to the orphan having nothing to look forward to except death it might perhaps be possible that by becoming a non-human being - an angel, or maybe a devil - whole new areas of freedom could be opened up to the child, and thus to the novelist. Pearl in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* is a lawless child, suspected by many to be a "demon offspring".²⁶⁰ She "could not be made amenable to rules",²⁶¹ and when Hester tries to suggest that she has her origins in God, the child is vehement in her denial:

"He did not send me!", cried she, positively. "I have no Heavenly Father!"

260

This is a child to be feared - a child with power. Like the scarlet letter itself, Pearl can limit and restrict adult freedoms because she stands right outside the moral and religious system of her world. Is she, then, still a child? Like Hardy's Little Father Time - a child whose name suggests that he is his own father - Pearl is wholly unpredictable because she has "no Heavenly Father". Her liberty is possible because she lives in a society governed by orthodoxy, the entire language and world-view of which is based upon the assumption that every child has a Heavenly Father. Pearl is thought of as a "demon offspring" because the belief that every child must have a parent is too deeply rooted to be altered.

²⁶⁰ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, Penguin American Library edition (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1983), p.122.

²⁶¹ *Scarlet Letter*, p.114.

By definition, a child has a father. And yet in saying "I have no Heavenly Father!", Pearl is not denying or renouncing her childhood. On the contrary, she represents a new idea of childhood; D.H.Lawrence describes her as "perhaps the most modern child in all literature"²⁶² because, like Little Father Time, she is the result of an "evolutionary process".²⁶² Such children demonstrate to the adult generation the inadequacy of their Christian-humanist idealism. "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy",²⁶³ the idea of the inspired child, to whom knowledge hidden from the learned is given is a very ancient one. And particularly under the influence of evolutionary thought, a sense of horror at the unknown, alien nature of the new creatures to which a generation might give birth becomes a very real fear for the Victorians. Little Time is one of the "boys of a sort unknown in the last generation - the outcome of new views of life".²⁶⁴ The unimagined terrors buried deep within the beliefs of the parents spring into independent being and turn, like Frankenstein's monster, against their makers. The forces of development are indeed "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children"²⁶⁵ And it is in the deaths of Jude and Sue's children that the orthodox-sounding sentiment: "God is a friend to the poor orphan child"²⁶⁶ finds its final distorted expression.

How, then, does Jane Eyre manage to resist definition destructive both of her personal value in the eyes of God and man, and, consequently, of the novel which bears her name, without either succumbing to death or becoming some sort of monster, existing beyond

²⁶² D.H.Lawrence, *Selected Literary Criticism*, edited by Anthony Beal (London, 1961), p.360.

²⁶³ *Joel* 2 v.28.

²⁶⁴ Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, Macmillan Students' Hardy edition, (London, 1975), p.448.

²⁶⁵ *Exodus* 20 v.5.

²⁶⁶ cf above p.140.

that which can be understood to be human? She does so only at the price of considerable self-sacrifice. In her flight from Mr Rochester following her discovery of the existence of his mad wife, Jane suffers acute deprivation and social alienation. She is forced to beg scraps of food, becoming so hungry that she feels herself to be on the point of death. This experience of friendless starvation is the immediate consequence of what may be thought of as Jane's personal declaration of independence:

"I care for myself. The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man. I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad - as I am now. Laws and principles are not for times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour; stringent are they; inviolate they shall be. If at my individual convenience I might break them, what would be their worth?"

267

The temptation haunting Jane has seized as its most powerful weapon the idea of Jane's insignificance, and the resulting meaninglessness of her actions: "Who in the world cares for you? or who will be injured by what you do?"²⁶⁷ In reply, Jane powerfully asserts the self's ability to find, in itself, its own significance, hand in hand with the defining force of external "laws and principles", "given by God", whose very "worth" lies in refusal to bend in accordance with the whims of "individual convenience".

And this is the difficult balancing act of Protestantism. On the one hand, the individual has the responsibility of caring for her own soul, finding her worth in her own existence. All her guiding principles must be personally appropriated - "received by me" - and the decision to keep the law must be expressed in the form of a defiant "I will". The Protestant believer is to be separate, set apart from the world - no one "in the world" cares for Jane,

²⁶⁷ *Jane Eyre*, p.344.

she fears - finding in this very alienation the identity she can "respect". But on the other hand, the Protestant must submit and obey, placing no trust in her wishes and impulses or the promptings of "individual convenience", but setting herself to "keep the law". The purpose of the law seems to be to control the individual whose very individuality comes into being due to her decision to obey the law. Miall, in his *Views of the Voluntary Principle*, vehemently declares both Protestantism's strong emphasis upon the individual's duty to order his own world, and also its unwavering call for total submission and obedience to a higher power:

The voluntary principle ... recognises in man all his individual claims. It constitutes him sole arbiter within his own domain. It submits a duty - it appeals to conscience, compassion, and spiritual principle - and it leaves the man himself at liberty to hear, to incline, to resolve.

Christianity is a pure theocracy, whose sphere comprises the conscience and the affections - a system of government in which one will, the will of its divine Head, is to control all other wills; and in which all minds and hearts, like the planets which wheel their courses around the sun, are to revolve about Him, reflecting His light, and obedient to His all-pervading influence.

268

It is in the coming together of these apparently contradictory requirements, in the marriage of complete liberty and absolute obedience, that the force of Protestantism, the force which directs Jane Eyre's life, is to be found.

One should also bear in mind Jane's perception of two different levels of consciousness within herself - one "sane", the other "mad". This whole speech is, according to Jane, the pronouncement of a "mad" woman. She has reached in her experience a moment "when

²⁶⁸ Miall, pp.83,207.

body and soul rise in mutiny" against the "rigour" of "laws and principles". She "received" her principles when sane, but must "hold to" them now that she is mad; only when her whole being is in rebellion against them do they become meaningful. This law-keeping is a paradoxical business, for the sort of "care" for oneself to which it leads looks very much like self-immolation. Only the really painful removal of friendship, help and sustenance; only the denial of the cries of body and soul; only the crushing of individual choice can create respect, worth and care. And this looks very much like madness. One cannot simply say that the sane self is controlling the mad self, nor vice versa; Jane looks deliberately outside herself, to "the law given by God, sanctioned by man". Both her Creator and her race uphold this law, yet in obeying it she does not so much offer herself up into the hands of something larger, but rather appropriates the large, the universal, to give "worth" to her individual action. She is never passive - always active.

Her achievement here is her recognition of the "moment" through which she has been living; it is "for such moments as this" that she has "received" her principles, and so she decides now, now that she is "mad", to obey them. "Inviolable", she says, "they shall be", just as Jane herself will remain "inviolable", virgin and untouched by the adulterous desires of Mr Rochester, by running away. Like her principles, Jane herself will lose all "worth" if she allows Mr Rochester to "break" her self-respect at his "individual convenience", for one individual must not be permitted to destroy the individuality of another. Jane chooses to starve, because the alternative would be the annihilation of the "I", the "Jane Eyre" who sustains the novel and who here defends her existence with such power and spirit.

She has, of course, known hunger before, for physical deprivation lies at the heart of her Lowood education. Mr Brocklehurst explains his philosophy as follows:

"You are aware that my plan in bringing up these girls is, not to accustom them to habits of luxury and indulgence, but to render them hardy, patient, self-denying. Should any little accidental disappointment of the appetite occur, such as the spoiling of a meal, the under or over-dressing of a dish, the incident ought not to be neutralised by replacing with some-

thing more delicate the comfort lost, thus pampering the body and obviating the aim of this institution; it ought to be improved to the spiritual edification of the pupils, by encouraging them to evince fortitude under the temporary privation.”

269

This is really very close in spirit to Jane’s declaration: “the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself”. Mr Brocklehurst can be condemned both for his implications that the Lowood girls are fussing over such delicate details as “the under or over-dressing of a dish” when their food is completely inadequate and largely inedible, and also for his hypocrisy in treating his own family and the schoolgirls entirely differently with respect to their bodily comfort. He does, moreover, profit financially by his meanness. But the Jane who runs away from Mr Rochester would surely agree that “habits of luxury and indulgence” involve the utmost moral and personal danger, whereas the “hardy, patient, self-denying” woman is entitled to think of herself as having genuine value. A life of “rigour”, with “stringent” restraints, seems to Jane to be essential to inner strength and maturity, for any hope of independence is only possible for her if she is able to go without “pampering”. What is imposition in Brocklehurst becomes in her experience a necessary discovery of her identity in Miall’s terms.

The Lowood girls are not, like the pupils at Madame Beck’s pensionnat in *Villette*, being prepared to make advantageous marriages, but are instead destined, like Jane, to become companions or governesses, unless they die first. The question arises as to which sort of education gives a woman the best chance of power, independence and freedom in the world of Charlotte Brontë’s novels, and there seem to be strong indications that material poverty is not necessarily to be viewed as a disadvantage. Self-starvation is, after all, conceived early in *Jane Eyre* as a possible if somewhat desperate means by which the self might make some headway against a hostile and repressive environment:

²⁶⁹ *Jane Eyre*, p.95.

Resolve, equally wrought up, instigated some strange expedient to achieve escape from insupportable oppression - as running away, or, if that could not be effected, never eating or drinking more, and letting myself die.

270

Hated by the entire Reed family, locked up in the red-room, Jane will not admit defeat. The smaller the realm over which she may exercise control, the more intense her sense of power becomes. If all that is left to her is her own body, then she will assert her individual will by subjecting her body to the most harsh and rigorous disciplines, starving it of its most basic needs.

Starvation is power:

Betty [a victim of anorexia nervosa] explained that losing weight was giving her power, that each pound lost was like a treasure that added to her power. This accumulation of power was giving her another kind of "weight", the right to be recognised as an individual.

271

Anorexia is "a strange expedient to achieve escape from insupportable oppression"; it is a fruit of "resolve" - the ability of an individual to choose and then rigidly to adhere to some "law" or "principle" through all temptation.²⁷² Permanent decision is given entire authority over fluctuating desire, so that self-denial becomes a victory primarily over oneself, but

²⁷⁰ *Jane Eyre*, p.47.

²⁷¹ Hilde Bruch, *The Golden Cage - The Enigma of Anorexia Nervosa*, paperback edition, (Shepton Mallet, Somerset, 1980), p.5.

²⁷² cf above p.145.

symbolically over the entire world. For letting oneself die appears such an extreme expedient that it would seem to imply a greater degree of strength in the anorexic than any power possessed by those who would not be willing so readily to forgo their own lives. The ultimate self-sacrifice is seen as buying "the right to be recognised as an individual", for it acts in defiance of the apparently selfish value system of the rest of the world.

The anorexic stance has affinities with a religious other-worldliness, laying stress upon the difference between the starving individual and her well-fed oppressors:

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven."

273

The person who appears poor is truly most rich; the real, lasting treasure is invisible. Self-denial is something that can be accumulated, stored up by a woman almost entirely bereft of positive assets. By giving away, painfully, even the little that she has, such a woman may, like the widow commended by Christ at the temple treasury, display control over "more than they all".²⁷⁴ Susan Casteras, writing of Victorian attitudes towards both Anglican and Roman Catholic sisterhoods, comments that:

... ironically, the decision to enter a convent was one of the rather few assertions of independence that a female might be able to demonstrate and as such might be considered a quasi-feminist statement.

²⁷³ *Matthew* 6 vv.19-20.

²⁷⁴ cf *Luke* 21 vv.1-4.

If in the act of giving up one's "freedom" one can shock the world, one has at least defied one set of conventions, even if the price of doing so is life-long conformity to another.

Eliza Reed in *Jane Eyre* takes the veil, but meets with little approval for this from Jane. Indeed, Jane despises her, in spite of the similarities between some of the two women's attitudes. When they finally part, Eliza for her French convent, and Jane for Thornfield and Mr Rochester, each woman admits, with grudging approval, that the other has "some sense". But they feel no mutual affection whatsoever. Jane describes Eliza as follows:

Eliza spoke little: she had evidently no time to talk. I never saw a busier person than she seemed to be: yet it was difficult to say what she did: or rather, to discover any result of her diligence. ... She divided her time into regular portions, and each hour had its allotted task. Three times a day she studied a little book, which I found, on inspection, was a Common Prayer Book. I asked her once what was the great attraction of that volume, and she said, "the Rubric". ...

She told me one evening ... that John's conduct, and the threatened ruin of the family, had been a source of profound affliction to her: but she had now, she said, settled her mind, and formed her resolution. Her own fortune she had taken care to secure: and when her mother died - and it was wholly improbable, she tranquilly remarked, that she should either recover or linger long - she would ... seek a retirement where punctual habits would be permanently secured from disturbance, and place safe barriers between herself and a frivolous world.

²⁷⁵ Susan P. Casteras, "Virgin Vows: The Early Victorian Artists' Portrayal of Nuns and Novices", in Gail Malmgreen (ed.), *Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760-1930*, (London and Sydney, 1986), pp.137-8.

²⁷⁶ *Jane Eyre*, pp.262-3.

Eliza's life is marked ^{by} a total inversion and negation of passion, so that she is fanatical only with regard to order and retirement. She pursues her tasks with great energy and diligence, "yet it was difficult to say what she did". She is in one sense intensely religious, but her religion is concerned solely with external practices. She attends endless services, embroiders altar-cloths and reads her Prayer Book, but it is "the Rubric", the rules and regulations of Anglo-Catholicism, which so fascinates Eliza - not the person of Christ, nor the Church Militant, nor treasures in heaven. She is concerned solely with what she can see, hear and touch, and her creed is best expressed in her own account of that which she goes to seek in the Church of Rome: "the doing of all things decently and in order".²⁷⁷

The goal of Eliza's life is "to place safe barriers between herself and a frivolous world". She and Jane achieve some degree of mutual comprehension because each perceives the need to preserve the self against the constant assaults made upon it by forces alien to the self's best interest but which nevertheless maintain a powerful, tempting attraction for some aspects of the individual. Discipline is thus required, if one is to hold onto one's selfhood; firm, immovable anchors must be established:

That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.

²⁷⁸

For Eliza, however, the overwhelming desire to barricade herself from the world has resulted in a degree of self-enclosure which is actually destructive of the self. She has become, in effect, not a person, but a machine, living her whole life, day by day, in accordance with

²⁷⁷ *Jane Eyre*, p.270.

²⁷⁸ *Ephesians* 4 v.14.

a pre-conceived pattern of hourly "allotted tasks", with the result that she is unable to respond to external stimuli and unable to change. In a sense, she presents a problem similar to that which I have discussed in relation to Amabel towards the end of Yonge's *The Heir of Redclyffe*, in that, having achieved stasis, there seems to be no life left in her.²⁷⁹ Just as the character who has attained Christian peace seems to cause immense difficulties for the novelist, so Eliza, in her fixed, unmoving "resolution", evokes a kind of horror in Jane. Now Eliza is Jane's cousin, and her "judgement untempered by feeling"²⁸⁰ offers a model of what Jane herself might quite easily become were she to seek security in "laws and principles"²⁸¹ without a purposeful Lawgiver, in rules for the sake of rules, in religion without God. Eliza is a powerful woman - she becomes Superior of her convent -²⁸² but powerful only within the confines of a world of her own making.

The opposite extreme is represented by Eliza's sister, Georgiana, who is characterised by "feeling without judgement".²⁸⁰ Like Eliza, Georgiana is deeply selfish, but, instead of filling her days with "Rubric", wishes to fill them with pleasure. She does not wish to shut herself away from a "frivolous world", but rather to be its pampered darling. Whereas Eliza seeks to deny the existence of men altogether, Georgiana attempts to exploit as far as possible the male idea of feminine weakness and silliness in order to get her own way. In this she anticipates the more fully developed character of Ginevra in *Villette*. Marriage is her sole end for she believes it will allow her to be relieved of all responsibility and to be cared

²⁷⁹ cf above Chapter One.

²⁸⁰ *Jane Eyre*, p.265.

²⁸¹ cf above p.145.

²⁸² *Jane Eyre*, p.270.

for like a helpless child. She spends most of her time lying on a sofa²⁸³ and chattering nonsense to a canary²⁸⁴ - a non-talking bird, so that there can be no interruption whatsoever to the ceaseless flow of Georgiana's empty words. She is entirely unproductive - an escapist, living in a fantasy world, as Jane discovers when she listens to her lengthy outpourings:

We were deep in confidential conversation ... various soft conversations were reported, and sentimental scenes represented; and, in short, a volume of a novel of fashionable life was that day improvised by her for my benefit. The communications were renewed from day to day: they always ran on the same theme - herself, her loves, and woes. It was strange that she never once adverted either to her mother's illness, or her brother's death, or the present gloomy state of the family prospects. Her mind seemed wholly taken up with reminiscences of past gaiety, and aspirations after dissipations to come.

285

Georgiana does not live in the present, but in "reminiscences" and "aspirations". All unhappiness is simply blocked out of her consciousness, so that the world in which she lives is entirely one of her own choosing. Unlike her sister, she spends a good deal of time talking to Jane, for Georgiana is not a woman to be enclosed, but a woman to be looked at. She requires an audience, her existence being essentially not a solitary, but a social one. But the kind of society in which Georgiana revels is not a society which recognises the reality of other people, but is instead a fantasy of "fashionable life". Everyone within it must conform to an ideal which is essentially "improvised" and fictional, like a novel. Georgiana's world is full of "sentimental scenes", all adjusted exactly to her liking - not a

²⁸³ *Jane Eyre*, p.263.

²⁸⁴ *Jane Eyre*, p.261.

²⁸⁵ *Jane Eyre*, p.262.

real world, but an imagined one, like that of a play. It is also a world which exists only when it is talked about; it depends absolutely upon gossip - upon the sort of "confidential conversation" Georgiana insists upon having with Jane. It can only be experienced at second hand, for Georgiana's self and her "loves and woes" have no meaning outside the "novel of fashionable life" which she has constantly to write for herself. She exists, in effect, only as a fictional character, because it is only thus that she can sufficiently control her experiences according to her wishes.

The achievement by a woman of some measure of control, then, appears to be a very costly business. It can be purchased at the price of self-starvation, or self-seclusion, or self-fictionalisation. Each of these alternatives seems far from satisfactory, for each prevents any real intercourse with other people, isolating the powerful woman in a world of her own. And Jane is characterised above all by her adamant refusal to forgo meaningful human relationships, despite constant and often subtle persuasion to the contrary. Helen Burns, as we have seen,²⁸⁶ offers Jane what appears to be a painless way out. Having heard Jane's account of her ill-treatment by Mrs Reed, Helen advises her as follows:

"Would you not be happier if you tried to forget her severity, together with the passionate emotions it excited? Life appears to me too short to be spent in nursing animosity, or registering wrongs. We are, and must be, one and all, burdened with faults in this world: but the time will soon come when, I trust, we shall put them off in putting off our corruptible bodies; when debasement and sin will fall from us with this cumbrous frame of flesh, and only the spark of the spirit will remain - the impalpable principle of life and thought, pure as when it left the Creator to inspire the creature; whence it came it will return, perhaps again to be communicated to some being higher than man - perhaps to pass through gradations of glory, from the pale human soul to brighten to the seraph!"

²⁸⁶ cf above p.140.

Helen's theology seems in many ways more closely related to Hindu than to Christian thought. For she does not hold the Biblical doctrine of the resurrection of the body:

"And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me."

In Judaeo-Christian thought, the flesh will be destroyed and then restored in a different form, individual personality being maintained - "I shall see God ... I ... for myself ... mine eyes ... and not another". In Biblical teaching, the physical body cannot be excluded from the essential and lasting nature of the person. The flesh eagerly awaits redemption²⁸⁹ because of its corruption by sin - it is not to be discarded, but saved. Hinduism, however views the individual quite differently:

Imagine the individual as a nut. The kernel hidden inside is the transmigrating soul or self, the essence or religious potential of the individual. The outer shell combines the circumstances of birth, personality, and all the existential trappings of a particular lifetime. Femaleness is evidently to do with "existence" not "essence".

²⁸⁷ *Jane Eyre*, pp.90-91.

²⁸⁸ *Job* 19 vv.26-27.

²⁸⁹ cf *Romans* 8 vv.19-23.

The "individual" is, in fact, a transitory, not a permanent entity. To Helen Burns, "severity", "passionate emotions", "animosity", "wrongs" and "faults" are all part of the "outer shell" of existence - the accidents of a "short" and corrupt "life", which have no power to touch the "impalpable principle of life and thought".

The attractions of this view, particularly for such a person as Helen Burns, or Jane Eyre, are readily apparent. The belief that all the factors which would seem to hamper one's freedom and happiness - such as poverty, "severity" and "femaleness" - have nothing to do with the essential "soul or self" holds out a real hope to a woman whose circumstances are far from promising. This inner self remains undefiled by the vicissitudes of existence, and can therefore be "in essence the same"²⁹⁰ as the inner self of the most powerful, wealthy and beautiful person that has ever lived. Under this creed, the sufferings involved in existence are to be accepted calmly and forgotten, as being of no lasting significance. And "passionate emotions" have no place, for they are a response to the corrupt world and can have nothing to do with the soul, which must remain "pure as when it left the Creator to inspire the creature". Helen has no aspirations, no hopes whatever for her present personality, for herself as an individual. Instead she attaches her desire for change and escape to "the spark of the spirit", which is both more and less than herself. She speaks of her life in the first person - "we" and "us" - only up until the point where she describes the "fall[ing] from us" of "this cumbrous frame of flesh". After this, the "spark of the spirit" becomes "it" - an impersonal force, with no sense of selfhood with which Helen can identify. And this "principle" is not inherently even human. It is capable of being "communicated to" a higher form of life, an altogether different level of existence, and Helen's one hope is that the "spark of the spirit" which is at present held within her body might one day "brighten to the seraph". For Helen Burns herself, there is no future.

²⁹⁰ Julia Leslie, "Essence and Existence; Women and Religion in Ancient Indian Texts" in Pat Holden (ed.), *Women's Religious Experience*, (London and Canberra, 1983), p.89.

Now Jane refuses to accept this philosophy. Her rejection of a Hindu-type world-view is exemplified later in the novel, when Mr Rochester sings her a song which concludes with a stanza expressing the lover's delight at his beloved's promise to die with him. Jane responds uncompromisingly:

Soft scene, daring demonstration, I would not have; and I stood in peril of both; a weapon of defence must be prepared - I whetted my tongue: as he reached me, I asked with asperity, "whom was he going to marry now?"

"That was a strange question to be put by his darling Jane."

"Indeed! I considered it a very natural and necessary one: he had talked of his future wife dying with him. What did he mean by such a pagan idea? I had no intention of dying with him - he might depend on that."

"Oh, all he longed, all he prayed for, was that I might live with him! Death was not for such as I."

"Indeed it was: I has as good a right to die when my time came as he had: but I should bide that time, and not be hurried away in a suttee."

291

It is worth noting in this context that it was William Carey, the Baptist missionary to India in whose footsteps St John Rivers follows, who was instrumental in the banning of the Hindu custom of suttee - the ritual burning of widows. His chief objections to the practice seem to have been based upon the belief that widows were burned against their own free will:

²⁹¹ *Jane Eyre*, p.301.

I asked them if this was the woman's choice, or if she were brought to it by any improper influence? They answered that it was perfectly voluntary. I talked till reasoning was of no use, and then began to exclaim with all my might against what they were doing, telling them that it was a shocking murder. ... It was impossible to have heard the woman had she groaned, or even cried aloud, on account of the mad noise of the people, and it was impossible for her to stir or struggle on account of the bamboos which were held down on her like the levers of a press. We made much objection to their using these bamboos, and insisted that it was using force to prevent the woman from getting up when the fire burned her.

292

It is this concept of "improper influence" and of the violation of individual "choice" which lies at the heart of the differences between Hinduism and Protestant Christianity.

Jane believes in "my time". To Helen Burns, life is short - "too short" for anger or bitterness. "The time will soon come", she hopes, when her individuality may be dissolved. "I live in calm", she says, "looking to the end."²⁹³ The time-content of days, weeks and years has no meaning and no value for her, because her eyes are fixed on "the end". The only time that matters is the moment of release from time; there is no sense of a proper pace of life, or of a growth and development of experience. The personal present is nothing; the impersonal future everything, and the movement from one to another is to be achieved not by progress, but by catastrophe, for Helen cannot work towards her own dissolution - to do so would be a contradiction in terms - but can only wait in total passivity. Now Jane is concerned not to be "hurried away". There is, in her view, a right moment for death, which belongs to her, as an individual, and upon which she wishes to lay claim. By the exercise of her will, Jane intends to "bide that time", so that her death will be an action

²⁹² George Smith, *The Life of William Carey, D.D., Shoemaker and Missionary* (London, 1885), pp.108-9.

²⁹³ *Jane Eyre*, p.91.

performed by herself, as an individual. Hardy's Jude, as I shall demonstrate,²⁹⁴ dies in this fashion, so that he achieves more and is more personally present in his death than in anything he attempts to do beforehand. And this painful, active death can be contrasted with the far more passive, resting approach to death found in such novels as *The Heir of Redclyffe*. Because the circumstances of Jane Eyre's "particular lifetime" are important and meaningful to her, and, in some sense, a part of her whole and indivisible self, her death is something she will do, not something that will happen to her. In this it follows the death of Christ:

"Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."

295

Obviously Jane does not possess Christ's Divine control over life and death, but she is able to share in His idea of death as a personal and individual experience. "No man taketh it from me". Jane will not deliver her most basic rights - those things which make her an individual - into the hands of any man. The ultimate power - the power of God - is the power to "lay down" and to "take again" one's own life, and it is this ideal of Christian individualism which Jane seeks to follow.

Jane will have nothing to do with Mr Rochester's suggestions that she is some sort of superhuman being, living outside the rules governing ordinary mortality. She would acquiesce readily in the advice given to Catharine by Dr Turnbull in Mark Rutherford's *Catharine Furze*:

²⁹⁴ cf below Chapter Four.

²⁹⁵ *John* 10 vv.17-18.

"Nothing is more dangerous, physically and mentally, than to imagine we are not as other people. Strive to consider yourself ... as a piece of common humanity and bound by its laws. It is infinitely healthier for you ... self-separation means mischief. It has been the beginning even of insanity in many cases which have come under my notice."

296

Jane Eyre can be thought of as a woman constantly battling for her own sanity. The mad Mrs Rochester, always lurking in the shadows, serves as a potent reminder of what Jane might become if she were, even for a few moments, to permit the temptations which surround her to have their sway. Isolation is particularly dangerous, for it tends to promote extremism, often painfully lonely. Jane is under pressure to seek relief either in an image of herself as something extraordinary - "not as other people" - which could lead to a relinquishing of socially acceptable limits to her behaviour, or in a total merging of her identity with that of another, more powerful being, thus losing any sense of personal responsibility to the "laws" of "common humanity". And it is precisely these two alternatives which Mr Rochester is offering Jane. Either she is to be above death - an angelic, other-worldly being with no foothold in human reality - or she is to die with her husband, possessing no life outside of him and no destiny other than him. The most certain of all the "laws" by which "common humanity" is "bound" is the one which declares: "it is appointed unto men once to die."²⁹⁷ Sanity is rooted in a personal acceptance of this inevitable limitation. By holding on determinedly to the belief that, "I had as good a right to die ... as he had", Jane manages to retain a meaningful relationship between herself and the external world, and thus to remain sane.

She struggles, however; and she perceives her difficulties in religious terms:

²⁹⁶ Mark Rutherford, *Catharine Furze* (London, 1985), p.167.

²⁹⁷ *Hebrews* 9 v.27.

Yet after all my task was not an easy one; often I would rather have pleased than teased him. My future husband was becoming to me my whole world; and more than the world; almost my hope of heaven. He stood between me and every thought of religion, as an eclipse intervenes between man and the broad sun. I could not, in those days, see God for His creature, of whom I had made an idol.

298

Jane realises that her love is suffering as a result of her fight to maintain a self capable of loving. There is another purpose coming between her desires for herself and those for her lover. And, at the same time, she sees that, just as she is not giving enough of herself to her future husband in the sharing of happiness, she is also giving, on another plane of experience, too much, for she understands that Mr Rochester should be clearly subordinated to God in her spiritual life. He is merely God's "creature" - on the same level as Jane herself - yet she finds herself regarding him not only as everything of value on her own existential plane (which would, in itself, be excessive), but also as the sum of her aspirations for a higher level of being.

Jane is blinded. She cannot "see God" and "the broad sun" of religion is entirely eclipsed by the dark mass of human strength upon which she has decided to gaze instead. Ironically, this means that she can see neither God nor Mr Rochester, for the light of the sun is necessary to illuminate everything on the earth. Jane cannot have Mr Rochester instead of God; the consequence of making the wrong choice is that she can have neither, for there is only one "whole world" and one "heaven", and to believe that an individual can elevate his or her own version of the truth to an absolute status is to be deceived. As I have shown in my Introduction, and in my examination of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* in Chapter Two, although every individual may have his own subjective conception of the world in which he lives, there is only one genuine, God-given objective reality, and only

²⁹⁸ *Jane Eyre*, p.302.

by living in accordance with this reality can one's experience become meaningful and "good". This is a Christian approach to the problem of objectivity and subjectivity which is of particular relevance to the nineteenth century novel.

On the eve of her wedding, Jane is overwhelmed by a sense of unreality. She tells Mr Rochester:

"I cannot see my prospects clearly tonight, sir; and I hardly know what thoughts I have in my head. Everything in life seems unreal."

"Except me; I am substantial enough - touch me."

"You, sir, are the most phantom-like of all: you are a mere dream."

He held out his hand, laughing. "Is that a dream?" said he, placing it close to my eyes.

He had a rounded, muscular, and vigorous hand, as well as a long, strong arm.

"Yes; though I touch it, it is a dream", said I, as I put it down from before my face."

299

There is in *Jane Eyre*, as in *The Pilgrim's Progress*,³⁰⁰ a curious reversal of the usual identification of physical proximity and visibility with reality, and vice versa. It is the sheer size of Mr Rochester which cuts Jane off from him - she calls him "sir" instead of addressing him by his name, and the distance of respect destroys the personal knowledge necessary for an intimate relationship. Jane is acutely aware of Mr Rochester's body with all its power and size and sexuality; she can see it and touch it, describe it in detail and know with complete certainty that it has the strength to master her - and yet "it is a dream". Similarly,

²⁹⁹ *Jane Eyre*, p.307.

³⁰⁰ cf above Chapter Two.

Mr Rochester's mad wife is on the one hand a mysterious, dream-like creature, who appears and disappears without warning or explanation in the middle of the night, like some ghost, some nightmare created by a disturbed imagination; and yet, on the other hand, her presence is intensely and alarmingly physical:

She was a big woman, in stature almost equalling her husband, and corpulent besides: she showed virile force in the contest - more than once she almost throttled him, athletic as he was.

301

Like Mr Rochester's "rounded, muscular and vigorous hand", this woman displays a great capacity for violence. Blanche Ingram also, like Mrs Reed, is a large woman, but Jane is small and slight. This fragility of body is linked to an immense independence and individuality - an existence wholly outside anyone else's dream or imagination:

"Never", said [Mr Rochester], as he ground his teeth, "never was anything at once so frail and so indomitable. A mere reed she feels in my hand! ... I could bend her with my finger and thumb - and what good would it do if I bent, if I up tore, if I crushed her? Consider that eye: consider the resolute, wild, free thing looking out of it. defying me, with more than courage - with a stern triumph. Whatever I do with its cage, I cannot get at it - the savage, beautiful creature!"

302

³⁰¹ *Jane Eyre*, p.321.

³⁰² *Jane Eyre*, p.344.

Jane's moral and spiritual force is inversely proportional to her physical strength and bulk. "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day."³⁰³ The least substantial beings are the most real, for they are not subject to manipulation or control by the world which surrounds them, and are thus "free" to be fully themselves. Mr Rochester may have a "muscular" hand and a "long, strong arm", but Jane Eyre - ethereal as the "air" which her name recalls - can calmly "put it down from before [her] face", "with a stern triumph" because she has the power of complete self-possession. If Mr Rochester were to force Jane to live with him, he would not, he realises, gain control over the real Jane, whom he loves. His superior bodily strength is of no use to him, for that which he desires thrives upon material suffering and deprivation. The only sort of woman that can be purchased with material wealth and physical power is the woman whom Mr Rochester already has, and loathes - his mad wife.

The cage image is in some ways similar to the Hindu idea of an individual as a temporary conjunction of essence and existence,³⁰⁴ and I therefore need to ask whether Jane's unsubstantiality genuinely promotes her personal freedom and autonomy, or whether it does so only by denying her a permanently coherent self. The mad Mrs Rochester, is, of course, another caged creature; she, however, is locked away at Mr Rochester's command, and constantly seeks her liberty - Jane, on the other hand, is not Mr Rochester's prisoner, nor is it her "cage" which renders her inaccessible to him, for he has the power to destroy the cage. In her case, the cage stands not for confinement nor even for separation; it is simply the limit of Mr Rochester's power. The whole point of the cage image here is to demonstrate the impossibility of controlling women by locking them up:

"If I tear, if I rend the slight prison, my outrage will only let the captive loose. Conqueror
I might be of the house; but the inmate would escape to heaven before I could call myself

³⁰³ 2 *Corinthians* 4 v.16.

³⁰⁴ cf above p.156.

possessor of its clay dwelling-place. And it is you, spirit - with will and energy, and virtue and purity - that I want: not alone your brittle frame. Of yourself you could come with soft flight and nestle against my heart, if you would: seized against your will, you will elude the grasp like an essence - you will vanish ere I inhale your fragrance."

305

Jane's independent self is more than "an essence"; she becomes "like an essence" only when "seized against [her] will". The "cage" does not limit Jane, nor does its destruction alter her in any way; she is supremely indifferent to it.

It is being used here very differently from the fashion in which Gerard Manley Hopkins employs the same image in his poem, "The Caged Skylark":

As a dare-gale skylark scanted in a dull cage
Man's mounting spirit in his bone-house, mean house, dwells -
That bird beyond the remembering his free fells;
This in drudgery, day-labouring-out life's age.

Though aloft on turf or perch or poor low stage,
Both sing sometimes the sweetest, sweetest spells
Yet both droop deadly sometimes in their cells
Or wring their barriers in bursts of fear or rage.

306

³⁰⁵ *Jane Eyre*, pp.344-5.

³⁰⁶ Gerard Manley Hopkins, "The Caged Skylark", in *Poems and Prose of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, selected and edited by W.H.Gardner (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1953), pp.31-2.

Here the cage and the body present "barriers"; they are "cells" whose inmates are beyond even "remembering" their liberty. The cage prevents its inhabitant from expressing its true nature as a "dare-gale" or a "mounting" creature, fearlessly seeking new heights, engaging with vast forces and aspiring always to greater experiences. Imprisonment is "dull", "mean" and oppressive; the caged spirit is altered adversely by its environment, so that that which should be "mounting" is instead overwhelmed with lassitude, terror and anger. Lacking its liberty from the "bone-house", the soul cannot be that which it has the potential to be.

Hopkins does not, of course, deny the resurrection of the body, but rather emphasises the difference between mortal and resurrected flesh:

Man's spirit will be flesh-bound when found at best,
But uncumbered; meadow-down is not distressed
For a rainbow footing it nor he for his bones risen.

306

Here "bound" has nothing to do with "scanted" or with "drudgery"; flesh beautifies and completes the spirit without in any way preventing it from being itself, just as a rainbow perfects the beauty of a meadow without altering it. A rainbow is intangible and seems almost visionary, while a meadow is very physical; both are visible. They seem almost to occupy different levels of reality, just as the spirit and body both make up the same, coherent being with a single identity, while at the same time remaining essentially different. The resurrection of the body is like the marriage of body and soul, in which the two become one. There is, in a Christian world-view, something better than liberation from the "bone-house" - better than a return to the skylark's forgotten "free fells". It is the rising of a new body which does not "cumber" the soul, but rather enriches and fulfils it:

For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.

It is not so much the removal of the burden that is sought after as its replacement by something similar, and yet utterly different. One tabernacle, one clothing is mortality, while the other is life eternal. Being "flesh-bound" is either far worse than simple freedom, or far better; it can never be neutral.

This would be a fairly orthodox Christian use of the caged bird image, viewing the body as both exterior to the soul and placing limits upon it, yet also as being absolutely necessary for the soul's full experience of the joy of salvation. Mr Rochester, on the other hand, uses the image in a far more limited context to denote that aspect of Jane over which he can exert power. It would be inaccurate to identify this aspect simply with Jane's body and thus to conclude that her body and spirit are separable. Phrases like "house", "clay dwelling-place" and "brittle frame" all recall the religious dichotomy of flesh and soul, emphasising the eternal nature of the latter as opposed to the temporal nature of the former. But Mr Rochester is employing this language in a secular context, seeking to stress the emptiness of the only part of Jane which he could possess by an act of his own will. His language is simply metaphorical, and neither theological nor philosophical, for he is considering the question of Jane's liberty solely as it affects himself. He has reached the point where he can see that to coerce Jane into living with him would be to destroy for himself those very qualities which he most loves in her - her "will and energy, virtue and purity". He remains, however, unable to distance himself sufficiently from his own concerns in order to use the language of body and soul in a more serious and universal fashion. His entire speech about the caged bird is, after all, a last ditch attempt to persuade Jane not to leave, concluding in the words: "Oh! Come, Jane, come!"³⁰⁸

³⁰⁷ 2 *Corinthians* 5 v.4.

³⁰⁸ *Jane Eyre*, p.345.

"The inmate would escape to heaven" means for Mr Rochester merely that she would elude his grasp; he fails to see what the gaining or losing of heaven might mean to Jane herself. Emotional and psychological force are as much an affront to the will as physical violence, and Jane's own body and soul, her own spiritual life, matter to her far more than they matter to Mr Rochester, and so she leaves him. She leaves, willing to undergo suffering, starvation and death as the price at which her independence must be purchased. After some days of hunger, feeling herself to be about to die, Jane hears a voice which seems, in its honest directness, to be saying exactly what she is so desperately in need of hearing: "All men must die".³⁰⁹ As an Evangelical and a Calvinist, St John Rivers is powerfully aware of the individual responsibility of every person before God and, above all, of the need for self-denial and self-sacrifice in order to achieve goals of lasting value. Only when one's own death has been faced and accepted can one become free:

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

310

St John seems to represent, in many ways, all that Jane has been striving after. Just as Jane has left Mr Rochester's temptations to a life of worldly and sinful comfort and ease, so St John strenuously denies his own desire to marry the beautiful "earthly angel",³¹¹ Rosamond Oliver, in order to remain in every sense independent (Rosamond is an heiress), and to go to India as a missionary. Jane must inevitably feel within herself a sympathetic response to St John's account of his spiritual progress:

³⁰⁹ *Jane Eyre*, p.362.

³¹⁰ *Romans* 8 v.13.

³¹¹ *Jane Eyre*, p.389.

"It is hard work to control the workings of inclination and turn the bent of nature; but that it may be done, I know from experience. God has given us, in a measure, the power to make our own fate; and when our energies seem to demand a sustenance they cannot get - when our will strains after a path we may not follow - we need neither starve from inanition, nor stand still in despair: we have but to seek another nourishment for the mind, as strong as the forbidden fruit it longed to taste - and perhaps purer; and to hew out for the adventurous foot a road as direct and broad as the one Fortune has blocked up against us, if rougher than it."

312

St John takes upon himself the role of Jane's teacher and counsellor, and his words seem almost uncannily appropriate to her situation, of which he is largely ignorant. He is offering Jane the next step in her development by affirming that to which she clung when she declared, "I care for myself": "the power to make our own fate". The denial of "energies" and of "will" is not the end, but the beginning, for "the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself."³¹³ Paradoxically, it is the life which is denied the "sustenance" it demands which finds the strength to "seek another nourishment". Starvation is the forerunner of a "purer" food. Jane is to use the power she has created in herself by her battle with "the bent of nature" to erect something which is both "purer" and "rougher" than the natural. Her task is to convert the force of denial into some new shape, strong and stark, full of the energy of asceticism.

But at this point, Jane begins to perceive problems with St John's solution to the difficulties of personal frustration and deprivation. His sort of independence, she begins to

³¹² *Jane Eyre*, pp.387-8.

³¹³ cf above p.145.

realise, has a direct and to some extent negative impact upon his Christian experience.

After hearing him preach, she comments:

The heart was thrilled, the mind astonished, by the power of the preacher: neither were softened. Throughout there was a strange bitterness; an absence of consolatory gentleness; stern allusions to Calvinistic doctrines: - election, predestination, reprobation - were frequent; and each reference to these points sounded like a sentence pronounced for doom. When he had done ... I experienced an inexpressible sadness: for it seemed to me ... that the eloquence to which I had been listening had sprung from a depth where lay turbid dregs of disappointment, where moved troubling impulses of insatiate yearnings and disquieting aspirations. I was sure St John Rivers - pure-lived, conscientious, zealous as he was - had not yet found that peace of God which passeth all understanding.

314

Denial produces power - yes; but not peace. The new nourishment discovered only by the starving is indeed "as strong as the forbidden fruit ... and perhaps purer", but it has a bitter taste. During severe food shortages:

People will "toy" with their food and make what under normal conditions would be considered weird and distasteful concoctions, markedly increasing the use of spices and salt. The same is observed in anorexic girls who may take vinegar as their drink, or put enormous amounts of mustard on their one lettuce leaf. As the starvation progresses, the desire for food does not diminish.

315

³¹⁴ *Jane Eyre*, p.378.

³¹⁵ *Golden Cage*, p.8.

St John Rivers is drinking "turbid dregs of disappointment", which in some sense fulfil his desire, but whose strength is the expression of a terrible lack. Instead of "peace", St John's preaching is filled with "doom" and "disappointment"; with all that is "troubling", "insatiate", and "disquieting". And, as a result, his Christianity seems incomplete.

Just as mustard and vinegar, while they may in some fashion meet the need for the sensory experience of eating, cannot on their own constitute a healthy diet; so election, predestination and reprobation, while they may truthfully describe God's dealings with mankind, cannot on their own form a satisfying and fulfilling religious faith. There is in St John's sermon "an absence of consolatory gentleness" which evokes in Jane "an inexpressible sadness", for she perceives that what she is listening to is a sublimated cry of pain. Purity, conscientiousness, and zeal are immense achievements, but it is the very difficulty of attaining to such a level and the struggles and sacrifices involved in maintaining it of which St John's hearers are made constantly aware. The fruit of true communion with Christ is the one thing which St John cannot achieve by his own power and self-denial, for the peace of God is a gift which sweeps away all "troubling impulses of insatiate yearnings and disquieting aspirations." All these long, complex words, full of difficulty and anxiety, tricky even to pronounce, are replaced by the calm, slow, repetitive and meditative sound of the promise of Christ:

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you.

Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

316

As soon as she inherits her share of her uncle's money, Jane gives up her job as a schoolmistress, and, when St John asks her, "What aim, what purpose, what ambition in

³¹⁶ *John* 14 v.27.

life have you now?", she replies that she intends to clean the house and to cook - in other words, to absorb herself in traditional female tasks. St John is not impressed:

"It is all very well for the present", said he, "but seriously, I trust when the first flush of vivacity is over, you will look a little higher than domestic endearments and household joys."

"The best thing the world has!", I interrupted.

"No, Jane, no; this world is not the scene of fruition; do not attempt to make it so; nor of rest; do not turn slothful."

"I mean, on the contrary, to be busy."

"Jane ... look beyond ... the selfish calm and sensual comfort of civilized affluence. I hope your energies will ... once more trouble you with their strength."

I looked at him with surprise. "St John", I said, "I think you are almost wicked to talk so. I am disposed to be as content as a queen, and you try to stir me up to restlessness! To what end?"

317

It is St John Rivers, who is often thought of as an entirely and unequivocally anti-feminist figure, representing "an unacceptable male Christianity",³¹⁸ who here encourages Jane to "look a little higher" than the roles into which such repressive religion is commonly thought of as pushing women. The confinement of women to the material world, to the production of food, warmth, comfort and all that is antipathetic to asceticism seems to many feminists to be "negative" and the result of male "prejudice", the "idealised female

³¹⁷ *Jane Eyre*, p.416.

³¹⁸ Eva Figs, *Sex and Subterfuge: Women Writers to 1850*, (London, 1982), p.137.

roles" of wife, mother and homemaker being seen as persuasive "propaganda" to maintain male control over society.³¹⁹ Here, however, the positions seem to be reversed, with the woman declaring her desire for domestic life in the face of the religious man's exhortations to her to make fuller and broader use of her "energies". Jane, with a certain degree of wit, adopts the only stance from which she, as a woman, can safely call St John "almost wicked". Whereas Mr Rochester saw Jane almost as a disembodied soul, too spiritual for him to be able to grasp,³²⁰ for St John, she is excessively concerned with the things of the body. Having actively sought starvation, she now declares her determination to use an abundance of "coals and peat to keep up good fires in every room", and of "eggs ... currants ... spices" to make Christmas cakes and mince pies.³¹⁷ She wishes, in other words, to fulfil as extravagantly as possible all the desires of the senses. Pleasure is her goal: "the selfish calm and sensual comfort of civilised affluence", and, despite the negative connotations which St John attaches to this description, Jane's declared aim is to embrace it wholeheartedly as "the best thing the world has!".

Jane is, of course, doing everything possible deliberately to defy St John's views. This is not to say, however, that she is not serious in her intentions. Her difficulty is that, as a woman, she repeatedly finds herself in reaction against the attempts of a powerful man to crush her into his mould. In order to remain free to choose for herself what is truly of value she must first resist all assaults upon her independence, even if the content of such an assault may seem to be an invitation to some degree of liberation. The inner decision - the personal act of choosing - is in many ways of greater importance than the outer action - the thing chosen. Jane could live either for this world, or for the next, and could in each case find herself imprisoned by the distorting influence upon her religious choice of a will other than either her own or God's.

³¹⁹ cf J.Leslie, "Existence and Essence", pp.100-101.

³²⁰ cf above p.164.

The virtue of contentment means nothing to St John, and, as a result, his Christianity is flawed, for he forgets Christ's exhortation: "Let not your heart be troubled",³²¹ but, on the contrary, actively hopes that Jane's "energies ... will ... trouble [her] with their strength". He cannot accept that she might have something to teach him about the positive aspects of "this world" because he fails to understand that she has already undergone a rigorous education in the importance of self-sacrifice and of struggling with temptation. She is in many ways not behind St John, but ahead of him in her spiritual progress.

Returning to Mr Rochester, Jane tells him: "To be your wife is, for me, to be as happy as I can be on earth." He replies: "Because you delight in sacrifice", but Jane has left her anorexic, self-denying identity far behind her. Her answer affirms the reality of the joy she anticipates in marriage:

"Sacrifice! What do I sacrifice? Famine for food, expectation for content. To be privileged to put my arms round what I value - to press my lips to what I love - to repose on what I trust: is that to make a sacrifice? If so, then certainly I delight in sacrifice."

322

The achievement of happiness does, in a sense, involve sacrifice for Jane, for, in order to marry Mr Rochester, she must destroy in herself her own propensity for suffering. Famine and expectation do have a value, a power of their own, of which St John Rivers is an awe-inspiring embodiment. Jane feels an affinity with him and is moved by his passionate dedication to his task. She knows that she too, if she so chose, could attain to a similar degree of heroism:

³²¹ cf above p.172.

³²² *Jane Eyre*, p.470.

"By straining to satisfy St John till my sinews ache, I shall satisfy him ... If I do go with him, if I do make the sacrifice he urges, I will make it absolutely: I will throw all on the altar - heart, vitals, the entire victim. He will never love me; but he shall approve me; I will show him energies he has not yet seen, resources he has never suspected. Yes, I shall work as hard as he can, and with as little grudging."

323

Jane has within herself the strength necessary to live her life "absolutely". But it is, paradoxically, precisely this strength which enables her to resist all St John's attempts to persuade her to marry him, for the same "energy to command" herself which she has already achieved in response to Mr Rochester's temptations can now be used, under the pressure of the final conflict, to win obedience even from St John.³²⁴ When she hears Mr Rochester's voice calling her name, Jane is enabled to show St John "energies he has not yet seen, resources he has never suspected". This is the energy born of denial, the power of the anorexic;³²⁵ Jane will no longer possess it when she is fulfilled and content. Such power can be used many times, growing ever stronger, in the pursuit of sacrifice and the offering up of oneself as a victim; it can only be used once, however, to create peace and happiness. And it is this latter use which Mr Rochester's voice offers Jane, and which she joyfully seizes upon.

Jane does indeed sacrifice, "Famine for food, expectation for content". According to the psychiatrist, Hilde Bruch, the anorexic patient:

³²³ *Jane Eyre*, p.430.

³²⁴ cf *Jane Eyre*, pp.443-5.

³²⁵ cf above p.149.

... take[s] so much pride in being skinny that [she] has sacrificed everything else to it. To get well demands a new, greater sacrifice - namely, giving up this unnatural pride in something that doesn't accomplish anything.

326

Jane Eyre becomes fully well when she learns to sacrifice her own ability to sacrifice. Self-control is relinquished in return for "repose on what I trust". She allows her "value", "love", and "trust" to be invested outside herself in another person, thus achieving a relationship between two whole people - a relationship of her own choosing, which then involves, necessarily, a sacrifice of the autonomy of her will. Jane has on the one hand willingly decided to marry Mr Rochester, yet on the other hand she can describe herself as being "privileged", for in this version of sacrifice she is receiving as much as she is giving. Jane is, then, "as happy as [she] can be on earth".³²⁷

St John Rivers responds to this by commenting, in a letter to Jane, that he "trusts [she] is not of those who live without God in the world, and only mind earthly things".³²⁸ To this, Jane offers no answer, except to conclude her story, not with the description of her wedded bliss and family life, but with a brief account of St John's heavenly vision. Jane is content; St John continues to starve. Jane is well and happy, and that is a great deal, but she does not claim that it is everything. Passionate, self-denying seeking after another world has both its own painful costs, and its own very great reward:

³²⁶ *Golden Cage*, pp.131-2.

³²⁷ cf above p.175.

³²⁸ *Jane Eyre*, p.475.

His is the exaction of the apostle, who speaks but for Christ, when he says, "Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me". His is the ambition of the high master-spirit, which aims to fill a first rank in the place of those who are redeemed from the earth - who stand without fault before the throne of God, who share the last mighty victories of the Lamb, who are called, and chosen, and faithful.

329

Jane is content - yes - but content with far less than this. Perhaps there is, after all, something greater than the novel's highest achievement - something greater even than the establishment of a genuinely free and human individual personality.

³²⁹ *Jane Eyre*, p.477.

Chapter Four - The Self and Beyond the Self

This chapter investigates the challenges facing the nineteenth-century novelist in portraying the human individual's self-awareness in relation to God and to society. The central issue raised is that of scale: how big or small is a human being in the context of the world in which he lives? And how big does he appear in the eyes of God? And in his own eyes? The Victorian novelist's interest in these questions and his or her sense that this whole area stands in need of re-negotiation offers an index of the insecurity of belief in God in the nineteenth century. I begin with a discussion of George Eliot's *Silas Marner*, focusing on the idea of trust and investigating the different ways in which the major characters seek to establish for themselves some significance beyond their own subjective experience. A brief examination of the Victorian consciousness of the relevance of the Biblical book of *Job* for the age demonstrates the nineteenth century quest for a large scale and religiously sanctioned language for feelings frequently feared to have no real significance. I then look at Mark Rutherford's *Autobiography* and *Deliverance* and Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, discovering in these novels an impassioned, even desperate expression of society's and orthodox religion's failure to provide an adequate context of meaning for the individual life.

"Christianity", writes Richard Holt Hutton, "cannot be understood in any degree without being approached with a certain passion both of hope and fear".³³⁰ Hope and fear imply some kind of relationship with the unknown, looking to the future, not the present, pinning

³³⁰ Richard Holt Hutton, *Aspects of Religious and Scientific Thought*, selected from the *Spectator*

all one's expectations upon something not yet visible. And the central paradox of faith is that it is: "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen".³³¹ In order to understand Christianity, the potential believer must first acknowledge that "things not seen" exist and are of personal importance to him or her. Christian faith is the possession of an expectation; God is relied upon to control future events outside the believer's power or comprehension in such a manner as meaningfully to affect the believer's experience. The problem for the novelist is therefore to present events as though they are not known, but could be. The Christian can come to know the unknowable only by first committing himself to it, in what must inevitably be "a certain passion both of hope and fear", becoming at the same time wholly confident in the object of his faith, and also wholly aware of the need for faith - of the absence of certain knowledge.

It is precisely this aspect of religious experience - and its absence - in which George Eliot is interested in *Silas Marner*. In the young Silas Marner and his friend, William Dane, she portrays the effects in the individual of, on the one hand, an excess of hope and fear, and, on the other hand, the complete lack of these emotions:

But whatever blemishes others might discern in William, to his friend's mind he was faultless; for Marner had one of those impressible self-doubting natures which, at an inexperienced age, admire imperativeness and lean on contradiction. The expression of trusting simplicity in Marner's face, heightened by that absence of special observation, that defenceless, deer-like gaze which belongs to large prominent eyes, was strongly contrasted by the self-complacent suppression of inward triumph that lurked in the narrow slanting eyes and compressed lips of William Dane. One of the most frequent topics of conversation between the two friends was Assurance of salvation: Silas confessed that he could never arrive at anything higher than hope mingled with fear, and listened with longing wonder when

and edited by Elizabeth M. Roscoe, reprint of 1899 edition, (Westmead, Farnborough, 1971), p.22.

³³¹ *Hebrews* 11 v.1.

William declared that he had possessed unshaken assurance ever since, in the period of his conversion, he had dreamed that he saw the words "calling and election sure" standing by themselves on a white page in the open Bible.

332

Christ, sending out His disciples to preach and to heal, instructs them to be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves".³³³ This Christian character is here, in William and Silas, split into two halves. Silas is "self-doubting", and is therefore unable to make a full, personal act of trust, but instead, lacking faith in his own individuality, his ability to make choices and commitments, seeks the nearest available and apparently most solid, fixed object to "lean on". He is heavily dependent on the self-assurance of another human being. Silas is, at this "inexperienced" stage in his life - and this word, "inexperienced" hints at something of the innocence of Eden, forfeited when humanity admired too readily the apparent wisdom of a serpent - characterised by "trusting simplicity ... heightened by that absence of special observation ... which belongs to large prominent eyes". On the physical level, this is presumably a reference to Silas's short-sightedness, but it also suggests that naive trust such as Silas possesses is accompanied by a serious inability to perceive the details and the more subtle aspects of those things and people upon whose generalised virtue and benevolence he relies. The serpent is "more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made",³³⁴ but Silas's consciousness functions only in the realms of the obvious. He fails to understand that in order to perceive all that he needs to know, he may have to look at the world around him in far greater detail:

³³² George Eliot, *Silas Marner* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1967), pp.57-8.

³³³ *Matthew* 10 v.16.

³³⁴ *Genesis* 3 v.1.

Where is the eternal? Where are the unseen things that we may look at them? And the answer is - *in the temporal*. Look then at the temporal, but do not pause there. You must penetrate it. Go through it, and see its shadow, its spiritual shadow, on the further side.

335

Because Silas is unable to "penetrate" that which is before his eyes, his admiration is given to "imperativeness", and he "lean[s] on contradiction". A declaration that one article of belief or course of action is either both indubitably correct and absolutely necessary, or that it is wholly false and to be repudiated at every possible opportunity, is easily comprehensible to someone whose powers of "special observation" are limited.

Silas lives in a world of large-scale ideas uncomplicated by any exact knowledge of the ways of the human beings with whom his ideas purport to deal. He is, as a result, both vulnerable and dangerous. Being "impressible" and "self-doubting", he is at the mercy of anyone willing to impress him with any set of beliefs whatever, so long as these beliefs are held with sufficient force. But he is also, in his desire for big and simple concepts, for pronouncements so all-embracing that no attention to detail is required, coming dangerously close to the state of mind censured so severely by George Eliot in her essay of 1855: "Evangelical Teaching: Dr Cumming":

That highest moral habit, the constant preference of truth, both theoretically and practically, pre-eminently demands the co-operation of the intellect with the impulses - as is indicated by the fact that it is only found in anything like completeness in the highest class of minds. And it is commonly seen that, in proportion as religious sects believe themselves to be guided by direct inspiration rather than by a spontaneous exertion of their faculties, their sense of truthfulness is misty and confused. No one can have talked to the more enthusiastic Methodists and listened to their stories of miracles without perceiving that they require no

³³⁵ Henry Drummond, *The Ideal Life and other Unpublished Addresses*, with Memorial Sketches by W. Robertson Nicholl and Ian Maclaren, second edition (London, 1898), p.132.

other passport to a statement than that it accords with their wishes and their general conception of God's dealings.

336

There is, Eliot believes, an alarming failure among Evangelical Christians to think with a sufficient degree of truthfulness, and this "moral" weakness is the result of permitting the "impulses" to direct one's actions without the "co-operation of the intellect". A "general conception of God's dealings" is substituted for the discerning power of "special observation", so that the Evangelical's view of the world in which he lives becomes increasingly divorced from his own everyday experience. Passivity of human "faculties" and a diminished sense of "truthfulness" go hand in hand, for the "constant preference of truth" is not innate, nor the gift of direct Divine "inspiration", but a difficult human achievement. It is humanity's "highest moral habit", attained by the "highest class of minds". Silas Marner is not a Methodist as such, but his attitude of "trusting simplicity" is nevertheless very far removed from the intellectual exactness, acute questioning, precise definition and energetic, unresting analysis required if a person is to be fully truthful in both theory and practice. He lacks the "desire to see things as they are", which, according to Matthew Arnold, "implies a balance and regulation of mind which is not often attained without fruitful effort".³³⁷

Silas does, however, have an open, accepting face. He is weak in discernment, but his "defenceless, deer-like gaze" and "large prominent eyes" seem greatly preferable to William Dane's "narrow slanting eyes and compressed lips". Silas has nothing to hide; the world

³³⁶ George Eliot, "Evangelical Teaching: Dr Cumming" (1855), in *Impressions of Theophrastus Such, Essays and Leaves from a Note-book*, Blackwood and Sons edition, (Edinburgh and London, undated), pp.306-7.

³³⁷ *Culture and Anarchy*, p.44.

within him is so simple and uncomplicated that he assumes the world outside to be similarly easily comprehensible. Because of his "self-doubting" stance, combined with his innocent faith in the world exterior to himself, Silas conceives of the Christian life as involving an ongoing struggle to live beyond the self, losing one's inner uncertainties in big, universal laws. Because he is afraid to look too closely into himself, he is also afraid to seek too diligently to perceive the issues of the compensatory exterior universe "as they are". William, on the other hand, has no doubts whatsoever with regard to himself; in his private, self-enclosed world he knows utter "triumph" - and he is also shrewd enough to realise that, to Silas, such power and victory would be utterly incomprehensible. But his suppression of his triumph remains "self-complacent", for the suppression is an integral part of the internalised dominance in which he takes such pleasure. By suppressing and concealing everything, including the fruits of that suppression, those fruits - the "triumph" - are created. The circularity of this position means that there is no outside reference point, no source of meaning other than the self:

Now when Jesus Christ came among men, He found them nearly all revolving in one circle. There was but one centre to human life - self. ... But [Jesus] ... put everything out of his life that had even a temptation in it to the world's centre. He humbled Himself - there is no place in the world's vortex for humbleness; He became of no reputation - nor for namelessness. He emptied Himself - gravitation cannot act on emptiness. So the prince of this world came, but found nothing in Him. He found nothing, because the true centre of that life was not to be seen. It was with God.

338

William is always holding something back, concealing something behind his half-closed eyes and tight lips. His vision of the words on the white page in the open Bible would appear to link him, far more closely than Silas, with the "enthusiastic Methodists", with

³³⁸ Drummond, pp.94-5.

their faith in "direct inspiration", visions and miracles, but he does not look beyond himself, nor does he forget his own faculties in a passion of adoration for the supernatural and the glory of God. For William, personal knowledge is the only knowledge that counts, for he can conceive of no meaningful reality beyond himself, and it is therefore typical that his sense of assurance should come to him in the form of a dream - the product conceivably of Divine inspiration, but far more likely of the dreamer's own consciousness.

Silas's approach to the question is the direct result of his "self-doubting nature". Like Legh Richmond's *Dairyman's Daughter*, he places no faith in his own powers of spiritual truthfulness: "When I ask my own heart a question, I am afraid to trust it, for it is treacherous, and has often deceived me."³³⁹ He lacks, however, the *Dairyman's Daughter's* theological sophistication and experience of the Christian life, for she does not divide the world into self and other, but instead sees her own heart as part of an entire fallen order. "I dare not", she says, "look for my hope in any thing short of the entire fulness of Christ."³⁴⁰ Silas is fundamentally insecure in his Christian faith, as the phrase, "he could never arrive at anything" indicates. He thinks of assurance as the result of personal effort, and, since he lacks William's contented dwelling within a universe made up solely of his own faculties, he is acutely and painfully aware of the vast gap between his view of himself, and Christ's view. All that he can be sure of in himself in an emotional state - "hope mingled with fear" - whose existence is validated by the very fact that he experiences it. He does not look to "the entire fulness of Christ". To do so would mean, initially at least, bypassing his own inner awareness as "treacherous", and looking outside. But he must not merely look outside himself, at other human beings, but outside the entire world, focusing upon Christ in such a manner that Christ - the only wholly truthful and trustworthy being - becomes not

³³⁹ Quoted in Elizabeth Jay, *The Religion of the Heart* (Oxford, 1979), p.103.

³⁴⁰ Legh Richmond, *The Dairyman's Daughter*, Religious tract society edition, (London, undated), p.117.

only the object of his thoughts, but the very substance, "the way, the truth, and the life",³⁴¹ of his thinking:

Little-faith, thy hope lies in keeping thy little self wholly dependent upon thy great Lord. If thou beginnest to measure circumstances, it will go ill with thee, poor trembling creature that thou art! What have you and I to do with measuring? There is one that measures with a span the whole world, and weighs the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance. With unmeasured faith let us leave ourselves in the hands of our immeasurable God; so shall our souls be kept in perfect peace, stayed on him. I walk the waves; yet not I, but Jesus: therefore will I not look to the winds, but to Jesus; neither will I think of sinking, but see him standing and hope in him.

342

Silas is unable to look wholly to Jesus for his assurance because the church in Lantern Yard - or at any rate William Dane, who so greatly influences Silas - does not think in this way. Assurance is not for these people to be found in a relationship, in union with Christ, in the denial of self for the sake of real objectivity, but rather in dreams and visions, the consciousness of the self. In order, however, to understand the reasons for Silas's difficulties in greater depth, it is necessary to compare the Lantern Yard view of the role of the self in religious belief and experience with the other views presented in the novel.

The second major form of reliance which the reader of *Silas Marner* encounters is that employed by Godfrey Cass. Godfrey does not think of himself explicitly as a religious believer, but he is far from being a materialist. Godfrey's form of "faith" is exemplified by his failure to tell either his father or Nancy of his marriage in the hope that, before any crisis

³⁴¹ *John* 14 v.6.

³⁴² *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 31, p.461.

is reached, something may come about - "some unforeseen turn of fortune, some favourable chance which would save him from unpleasant consequences - perhaps even justify his insincerity by manifesting its prudence".³⁴³ The narrator's comment with regard to Godfrey's optimism explains the religious content in such hopefulness:

Favourable Chance is the god of all men who follow their own devices instead of obeying a law they believe in. Let even a polished man of these days get into a position he is ashamed to avow, and his mind will be bent on all the possible issues that may deliver him from the calculable results of that position. ... Let him betray his friend's confidence, and he will adore that same cunning complexity called Chance, which gives him the hope that his friend will never know. Let him forsake a decent craft that he may pursue the gentilities of a profession to which nature never called him, and his religion will infallibly be the worship of blessed Chance, which he will believe in as the mighty creator of success. The evil principle deprecated in that religion, is the orderly sequence by which the seed brings forth a crop after its kind.

344

Reliance upon "Chance" is, in fact, a repudiation of nature. It is an anarchistic religion, deliberately flying in the face of order and design, of reason and good sense. The mind of a man such as Godfrey is "bent" in more senses than one, for he has forsaken all law, development and predictable growth, running into the arms of a "cunning complexity". "Chance" is seen as a supremely clever magician, twisting reality into weird forms, whose ways are beyond human comprehension. It is, therefore, a deity with great powers, a "mighty creator of success", bringing something out of nothing and causing solid objects to vanish without trace. There is an alarming lack of integrity - of the "sense of

³⁴³ *Silas Marner*, p.126.

³⁴⁴ *Silas Marner*, pp.126-7.

truthfulness" -³⁴⁵ in Godfrey's belief, for he is deliberately disobeying "a law [he] believe[s] in". He has entirely rejected "the desire to see things as they are",³⁴⁶ for things as they are are not at all to his liking. Central to his position is the refusal to live, not only by rules which are not of one's own making, but by any rules at all. Chance is "adored" for its infinite flexibility, and the result of this worship is that natural processes are blocked and denied. It is no accident that Godfrey's marriage to Nancy produces no children, for he has deprecated, "the orderly sequence by which the seed brings forth a crop after its kind". By failing to tell Nancy of his first marriage and of Eppie, its fruit, Godfrey loses contact with the reality of the physical world, choosing instead to dwell in a region of dream and fantasy - a region representing the world, not as it is, but as Godfrey believes he would most like it to be. As a result, he is cut off from that which he believes in his heart, and lives instead with his "own devices". And it is important that the word "devices" is used here, and not "desires" or "wishes" or "dreams" since it hints at a manipulation of nature, and also demonstrates the split forged between Godfrey's mind, "bent" into a belief in chaos, busily seeking tricks and tools, "cunning complexities" to "deliver him from the calculable results" of his actions, and his will, forced into impotence by shame. For the self can only function as a whole when one decision, one choice or action, can be thought of as part of an "orderly sequence" of cause and effect - otherwise the concept of personal choice becomes virtually meaningless.

The worship of "Chance" diminishes the power and status of the worshipper almost to nothing; it is a deity which demands utter abasement and abject humiliation in those who come to seek its favours. It is in the Valley of Humiliation that Bunyan's Christian meets with Apollyon, whose tactics are on the one hand to remind Christian accusingly of his

³⁴⁵ cf above p.182.

³⁴⁶ cf above p.183.

many failures as a follower of "the King's High-way",³⁴⁷ and on the other hand to offer deliverance from the dangerous and difficult service of Christian's new "Prince":

Thou knowest that for the most part his Servants come to an ill end, because they are transgressors against me and my ways: How many of them have been put to shameful deaths? and besides, thou countedst his service better than mine, whereas he never came yet from the place where he is, to deliver any that served him out of our hands: but as for me, how many times, as all the World very well knows, have I delivered, either by power or fraud, those that have faithfully served me, from him and his, though taken by them, and so I will deliver thee.

348

This is indeed the voice of Godfrey Cass's deity. Apollyon's aim is totally to rule his subjects; his talk is of mastery and submission. The "deliverance" he offers is not the rescue of a whole individual, but the absorption of another self into "me and my ways". Like Godfrey's "Chance", Apollyon offers a way out of "shame" - his power over the individual begins when the consequences of one's actions appear unbearable because of the belief that the much desired love, respect or good opinion of another person will be forfeited. Christian escapes Apollyon's clutches by holding fast to the faith that, "the Prince whom I serve and honour, is merciful, and ready to forgive".³⁴⁷ The temptation is to seek to evade shame by severing one's identification with the self capable of shame. A "shameful death" is, after all, in the context in which Apollyon uses the phrase, the death of a martyr.

Shame and personal integrity go hand in hand, and the possibility of shame is removed only with the amputation of the sense of responsibility for one's own actions - the sense

³⁴⁷ *Pilgrim's Progress*, p.63.

³⁴⁸ *Pilgrim's Progress*, p.62.

of purpose and of choice. W.H.Auden, in his essay, "Dingley Dell and The Fleet", makes some interesting comments on the subject of shame and of guilt:

In a shame culture, the moral judgement a man passes upon himself is identical with that which others pass on him; the virtue or shamefulness of an act lies in the nature of the act itself, irrespective of the doer's personal intention or responsibility. In a guilt culture, the subject passes moral judgement upon his thoughts and feelings even if they are never realised in action, and upon his acts irrespective of whether others know of them or not, approve of them or not.

349

The distinction being made here is between an understanding of evil as a wholly objective activity, so that a doer of evil deeds is an evil man, and vice versa, and a concept of sin as the behaviour of a split person, one part of whom "passes moral judgement" upon the other - the experience, for example, of St Paul, as he relates in *Romans* Chapter Seven:

For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that I do not; but what I hate, that I do. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good.

350

³⁴⁹ W.H.Auden, "Dingley Dell and The Fleet", in *The Dyer's Hand and other essays* (London, 1963), p.414.

³⁵⁰ *Romans* 7 vv.14-16.

The product of a guilt culture possesses "a unique ego which is unchanged by anything he does or suffers",³⁵¹ for he does not become what his actions and experience define him to be, but he instead holds himself responsible for his behaviour.

The teaching of Christ on the subject of false prophets is of interest in this connection:

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit."

352

There is a link here with "the orderly sequence by which the seed brings forth a crop after its kind".³⁵³ Christ is warning His disciples about deception, and it is significant that Apollyon claims to "deliver" his own, "either by power or fraud". Christ does not say how the "false prophets" view themselves; "inwardly", they are ravening wolves, but this does not preclude the possibility that they might think of themselves as reasonable and well-meaning, or even divinely-inspired teachers. For "inwardly" here does not mean "in their own eyes", but "secretly" and "invisibly". The presence of deception does not necessarily imply a consciously split self, for the most radically false person may be the one who is entirely given over into the clutches of an alien will - who, in other words, has lost all awareness of his own true identity. William Tyndale in his *Parable of the Wicked*

³⁵¹ *Dyer's Hand*, p.413.

³⁵² *Matthew 7 vv.15-17*.

³⁵³ cf above p.187.

Mammon, expounds Christ's teaching on the subject of the good and bad trees in such a manner as to uphold the doctrine of justification by faith:

So now by this abide sure and fast, that a man inwardly in the heart, and before God, is righteous and good through faith only, before all works: not withstanding, yet outwardly and openly before the people, yea, and before himself, is he righteous through the work ... so yet, that thou understand by the outward righteousness no other thing save the fruit that followeth, and a declaring of the inward justifying and righteousness of the heart; and not that it maketh a man righteous before God, but that he must first be righteous before him, in the heart; even as thou mayest call the fruit of the tree the outward goodness of the tree, which followeth and uttereth the inward natural goodness of the tree.

354

The word "inwardly" takes on a new dimension of meaning here by being linked with the phrase "before God". This "inward" vision is not the believer's own view, for "before himself", a Christian is "righteous through the work" - a view shared by "the people" also. "Inwardly in the heart" refers to the spiritual aspect of the individual - his soul, his supernatural being, visible only to God, and rendered "righteous and good through faith only". The fruit of the tree, then, corresponds to that which is apparent "outwardly and openly before the people, yea, and before himself". And it is worth noting that the novel can scarcely expect or be expected to offer a perspective more comprehensive than this.

The "inward" state of a man cannot be known directly to a human being; the fruit, however, - and this would seem to be its only, or at least its primary purpose - offers "a declaring of the inward justifying and righteousness of the heart". "The orderly sequence by which the seed brings forth a crop after its kind", the principle "deprecated" as "evil" in

³⁵⁴ William Tyndale, *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon*, in W. Tyndale, *Doctrinal Treatises*, edited by H. Walter, Parker Society, (Cambridge, 1848), p. 61.

Godfrey Cass's religion,³⁵⁵ implies a progress through time, by which an object gradually develops in such a way as to "declare" and "utter" its inward "nature". The word "nature" or "natural" in this context offers a link between the material world and the metaphysical reality seen by God, hidden from human eyes. For the natural world - trees and their fruit, for instance - is both God-given, outside the power of human "devices", and also contains its own, inherent order. God created all fish, birds, plants and animals "after their kind"³⁵⁶; man, however, was created "in [God's] image, after [His] likeness".³⁵⁷ And it is perhaps the special, Divine nature in which he shares which, paradoxically, gives man the capacity for deception, for falsehood, and for the denial of his own nature. For to please God, according to Tyndale, man has only to be his natural self, living within the world as God has made and ordered it:

As pertaining to good works, understand that all works are good which are done within the law of God, in faith, and with thanksgiving to God; and understand that thou in doing them pleasest God, whatsoever thou doest within the law of God, as when thou makest water.

³⁵⁸

Both Protestant Christianity and the Victorian realist novel are founded largely upon this passionately held conviction that the most mundane, everyday human experience is replete with spiritual value.

³⁵⁵ cf above p.187.

³⁵⁶ *Genesis* 1 vv.11-25.

³⁵⁷ *Genesis* 1 v.26.

³⁵⁸ Tyndale, p.100.

Godfrey becomes aware of the enormous costs of his refusal to accept the natural order when he finally tells Nancy that he is Eppie's father. He expects Nancy to be angry, but she is simply filled with sorrow:

"Godfrey, if you had but told me this six years ago, we could have done some of our duty by the child. Do you think I'd have refused to take her in, if I'd known she was yours?" At that moment Godfrey felt all the bitterness of an error that was not simply futile, but had defeated its own end. He had not measured this wife with whom he had lived for so long.

359

Godfrey argues in reply that Nancy would not have married him had he told her the truth about Eppie. But Nancy's beliefs allow no room for such pragmatism:

"I can't say what I should have done about that, Godfrey. I should never have married anybody else. But I wasn't worth doing wrong for - nothing is in this world. Nothing is so good as it seems beforehand - not even our marrying wasn't, you see." There was a faint sad smile on Nancy's face as she said the last words.

359

Godfrey's marriage with Nancy has failed precisely to the extent that he has sought it as an end in itself instead of viewing it as an integral part of his existence. The follower of Chance fails to take himself quite seriously enough, and must pay the price. In his flight from the "calculable results"³⁶⁰ of telling Nancy about his first marriage, Godfrey has lost the power by which he might have "measured" his wife. As a result, his attempts to hide the past from Nancy have not only been "futile", in that they have failed, but, worse than

³⁵⁹ *Silas Marner*, p.224.

³⁶⁰ cf above p.187.

that, they have destroyed the relationship of trust, understanding and mutual knowledge which they were intended to create. Godfrey could not "measure" Nancy because he could not first face the possibility that she might not be as big as he wanted her to be. Unwilling to accept her as he feared she might be, he defensively assumed her to be small, and then set up barriers to protect himself from her smallness. The concept of generosity and forgiveness in another person is profoundly alien to a man whose mind is "bent" upon his "own devices".³⁶⁰ Godfrey has been sinking deeper and deeper into a morass of guilt, deluded into the belief that by clinging to guilt he can avoid shame, and that shame is worse than guilt. His position is similar to that of that of Hugh in MacDonald's *David Elginbrod* in that he has attempted to offer up something smaller than the sacrifice required of him, failing to perceive the dangerous inadequacy of such a substitute:

Pleasing was an easy substitute for well-doing. Not acceptable to himself, he had the greater desire to be acceptable to others; and so reflect the side beams of a false approbation on himself - who would be ill-provided for with any substitute.

361

Like Hugh, Godfrey needs true light, not false "side beams", and, as a result of his dwelling in darkness, his perceptions are tragically dulled. He has become, in a curiously inverted fashion, so obsessed with his own inner life and its concealment - an obsession which he expresses by the total refusal to think about it, for as long as he can - that he has been able to live "for so long" with Nancy, and yet never to see her true nature. He has seen her only in his own image, disastrously lacking an external, objective viewpoint.

"I wasn't worth doing wrong for", says Nancy, "nothing is in this world". With an astounding degree of moral courage, Nancy describes her own marriage, to a man whom she deeply loves, as a temptation. Nancy believes - and in this she is very much the product

³⁶¹ *Elginbrod*, vol II, p.66.

of a guilt culture - that the external circumstances of life are in themselves morally neutral and are shaped almost entirely by the moral condition of the person experiencing them. It is, therefore, delusive to suggest that, in the abstract, any given action or decision, such as a marriage, is necessarily good or bad. Everything depends upon the attitudes in the minds of the people involved. Even in the eyes of such thinkers as the Tractarian Isaac Williams the intentions of the individual have a great deal to do with the value of any given action in the eyes of God:

Doubtless the very name of Christ must ever carry with it a blessing; and earnestness in religion, in views however mistaken, seems ever to have annexed to it the reward of God.

362

Many things may appear to be "worth doing wrong for"; the difficulty is that the "doing wrong" actually alters the thing itself, so that it loses the value it had "beforehand". As abstract philosophising this is all very well; it all comes to life when Nancy applies these beliefs to her own marriage. Her "faint sad smile" is the expression of a woman who, like Eve, possesses knowledge which has been bought at too high a price. Not all games are necessarily worth winning, when one bears in mind the value of the stakes which must be forfeited along the path to victory, and achievement for achievement's sake is a very dangerous end to pursue. Godfrey is not the only one to discover disappointment; Nancy could not speak as she does here unless she too had experienced at first hand the sense that the most important thing in her life is not worth enough - not worth the sacrifices made to gain it.

What, then, has Nancy sacrificed? She is in many ways the exact opposite of Godfrey in her conduct, for she has allowed moral principle to govern personal desire to such an

³⁶² Isaac Williams, "Tract No 87 On Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge" (1840), in *Evangelical and Oxford Movements*, p.128.

extent that she too finally discovers that her efforts have largely "defeated [their] own end". For although her greatest personal longings in life are to please her husband and to have a child, Nancy has denied her own wishes in both these areas in order to uphold her fixed belief that adoption is wrong because it seeks to defy the decrees of Providence. It is deeply ironic, then, when she eventually learns that Eppie is Godfrey's daughter, and realises that she and Godfrey have failed to do what she sees as their "duty" with regard to the child. Nancy's failure to heed her own inner desires is the mirror image of Godfrey's permitting his desires to choke the voice of his conscience. Married to one another, these two mistakes combine to form a situation which is deeply painful for both Nancy and Godfrey - but particularly for Nancy. Nancy does not, however, carry a large part of the blame for these problems in her relationships with Godfrey and with Eppie; the irony of her position is that guilt would be a wholly inappropriate response, for her behaviour has been morally virtually flawless according to the terms of a guilt culture. With profound integrity, she has acted consistently in accordance with what she believed to be right, always aware both of her duty and of her fallibility, always striving after perfection:

She was not theologically instructed enough to discern very clearly the relation between the sacred documents of the past which she opened without method, and her own obscure, simple life; but the spirit of rectitude, and the sense of responsibility for the effect of her conduct on others, which were strong elements in Nancy's character, had made it a habit with her to scrutinise her past feelings and actions with self-questioning solicitude. ... This excessive rumination and self-questioning is perhaps a morbid habit inevitable to a mind of much moral sensibility when shut out from its due share of outward activity and of practical claims on its affections - inevitable to a noble-hearted, childless woman, when her lot is narrow. "I can do so little - have I done it all well?" is the perpetually recurring thought; and there are no voices calling her away from that soliloquy, no peremptory demands to divert energy from vain regret or superfluous scruple.

363

³⁶³ *Silas Marner*, pp.214-5.

It is "inevitable", for a woman in Nancy's position, that an excessive internalisation of her personal qualities should come about. Nancy is living in a moral vacuum, containing no object sufficient to employ the strength of her "affections". As a result, she falls into an ironical, circular trap, in which her very lack of a child to "divert energy from ... superfluous scruple" creates in her both the state of mind which sees adoption as unacceptable and also the firmness to adhere to this view, which, in turn, prevents her from being able to care for a child. She might in some respects be compared with Charlotte Brontë's Lucy Snowe, whose excessive need to protect her own individuality, which is the consequence of her alienation from human, inter-personal affections, renders her both unwilling and unable straightforwardly to take part in honest and open relationships.³⁶⁴ So many of Nancy's difficulties stem from the fact that her life is "obscure". Very few of her thoughts and feelings ever have the opportunity to be "realised in action", and even her actions are, if noticed at all, scarcely of any importance to anyone but herself. The inevitable response for a "noble-hearted" person such as Nancy to the realisation, "I can do so little", is the anxious question, "have I done it all well?" John Keble, in his letters of counsel to anxious souls, is constantly warning against the spiritual dangers attendant upon precisely such a secluded and limited life as Nancy leads. "I hold it a selfish and dangerous sort of thing", he writes, "for people to be always turning their eyes inward." This excessive preoccupation with self, Keble seems to be saying, goes hand in hand with a deep fear of total personal insignificance, and it is perhaps the nineteenth century's greatest threat to spiritual well-being. To an aged clergyman suffering spiritual depression, he writes:

You feel, my dear Sir, (you would not wish to feel otherwise,) what a nothing, and worse than nothing, is what you have done for our Lord, compared with what it ought to have been; and the thought will at times occur - "how is it possible that such an one can be accepted?" and the comfort and hope which you know to be intended for all, seems somehow to be denied to you, for the time.

³⁶⁴ cf below, Chapter Six.

The Christian virtue of humility has become, in the Victorian age, something of a problem; Keble writes "you would not wish to feel otherwise", but the aged clergyman is in difficulties because he is feeling what he should "wish to feel", and yet he is unhappy - for that which is true "for all" seems to be unreal for him as an individual.

Nancy reads the Bible "without method", and it is her uneducated simplicity and directness of belief which links her with the fourth major religious figure in the novel: Dolly Winthrop. Dolly is of crucial importance in completing and providing a centre for the various attempts portrayed in *Silas Marner* to find a relationship between the self and some higher, external being, for she possesses Nancy's "obscure, simple life", yet without her "morbid habit" of "excessive rumination and self-questioning"; she combines the strong sense of natural order, so dangerously mocked by Godfrey, with a total absence of the desire to "admire imperativeness and lean on contradiction".³⁶⁶ Her Christianity is not the slave of guilt, running in flight from shame into the trap of either excessive internalisation or superfluous externalisation of consciousness. Instead, Dolly's faith transcends guilt, moving naturally from the profound vision of her own utter unworthiness and insignificance to an unshakable confidence in a Deity who is in every way infinitely and incomparably greater than herself.

Having heard about and considered the series of events which resulted in Silas being forced to leave Lantern Yard, Dolly's response flows straight from the source of her own faith:

³⁶⁵ Keble, *Letters*, pp.3,175.

³⁶⁶ cf above p.180.

"But what come to me as clear as the daylight, it was when I was troubling over poor Bessy Fawkes, and it allays comes into my head when I'm sorry for folks and feel as I can't do a power to help 'em, not if I was to get up i'the middle o'the night - it comes into my head as Them above has got a deal tenderer heart nor what I've got - for I can't be anyways better nor Them as made me; and if anything looks hard to me, it's because there's things I don't know on, ... for it's little as I know - that it is. ...

"And all as we've got to do is trusten, Master Marner - to do the right thing as fur as we know, and to trusten. For if us as knows so little can see a bit o'good and rights, we may be sure as there's a good and a rights bigger nor what we can know - I feel it i'my own inside as it must be so. And if you could but ha'gone on trustening, Master Marner, you wouldn't ha' run away from your fellow creaturs and been so lone."

367

It is important that, like Nancy's religious ideas, Dolly's beliefs are not the logical outcome of abstract thought, but are instead the fruit of her own experience, although this experience is understood "by a spontaneous exertion of [Dolly's] faculties" so that she is far from being one of the amoral or even immoral followers of personal impulse attacked in Eliot's essay on Dr Cumming.³⁶⁸ Dolly's practical realisation of her inability to help a dying woman is the catalyst which causes her to look up to "Them above", for her weakness reminds her of "Their" strength. She has no conception, however, of the argument which claims that a God who fails to intervene to prevent human suffering must be terribly deficient either in compassion or in power. This is an ancient problem, carrying real force for generations of religious thinkers:

³⁶⁷ *Silas Marner*, pp.204-5.

³⁶⁸ cf above p.182.

The dilemma was apparently first formulated by Epicurus (341-271 BC), and is quoted as follows by Lactantius (c.AD 260-c.340):

"God either wishes to take away evils, and is unable; or He is unable, and is unwilling; or He is neither willing nor able, or He is both willing and able. If He is willing and is unable, He is feeble, which is not in accordance with the character of God; if He is able and unwilling, He is envious, which is equally at variance with God; if He is neither willing nor able, He is both envious and feeble, and therefore not God; if He is both willing and able, which alone is suitable to God, from what source then are evils? or why does He not remove them?"

369

This is, to some extent, the problem for all the other partial believers whose views I have examined: Silas leaves Lantern Yard with his faith deeply shaken by God's apparent failure to vindicate him through the drawing of lots;³⁷⁰ Godfrey deludes himself into the belief that "Favourable Chance" can be for him "the mighty creator of success",³⁷¹ unable to trust any intelligent, personal deity to help him in his difficulties; and Nancy is overwhelmed by "the sense of responsibility for the effect of her conduct on others",³⁷² because she perceives the universe to be governed almost entirely by blind, fixed laws of cause and effect.

³⁶⁹ *On the Anger of God*, chap.13, trans. by William Fletcher in *The Writings of the Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm.B.Eerdmann) vol vii, 1951. In John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, second edition (London, 1977), footnote, p.5.

³⁷⁰ cf *Silas Marner*, p.61.

³⁷¹ cf above p.187.

³⁷² cf above p.197.

Dolly, however, is comforted by the very fact which variously torments all these other characters: the awareness of the vast gap between God's perception of the world, and her own, and the sense that she will never be able to answer the biggest theological and philosophical questions. When she says, "it comes into my head as Them above has got a deal tenderer heart nor what I've got - for I can't be anyways better nor Them as made me", she is making a declaration of joy. She begins with the personal, with self-awareness, but awareness of self, not in relation to self, but in relation to another human being. Perceiving her own feelings of weak and impotent compassion for "poor Bessy Fawkes", Dolly can truthfully and in humility see her own goodness. She is not trapped into questioning the basis upon which she assigns a positive value to this sense of emotion, partly because she is far too simple and uneducated to think in so abstract a fashion, but also because the focus of her thoughts is not upon herself, but upon Bessy, and to suggest that the compassion she feels for Bessy is not good would be a betrayal of the sick woman's need. Because Dolly's religion is thus so deeply rooted in her life, it is, for herself at least, wholly reliable and wholly practical in its applications.

The next step in Dolly's thinking - although her faith is arrived at, not by logical processes of deduction, but as a whole awareness, deeply rooted in who Dolly is - is the full and passionate realisation that God is her Creator and that she is made in His image, so that anything good which she discovers in herself must have its origin in "Them above". Because God is in every way so much greater than a human being, every good human quality found in His worshippers must exist on an infinitely greater scale in the nature of God Himself. Dolly finds much assurance and comfort in her awareness of her own ignorance, and, curiously, this simple admission of simplicity becomes the force which brings her thinking in many ways very close to that of the learned Medieval theologian and philosopher, St Anselm. There seems to be an irony in George Eliot's attributing the ability to reinvest Anselm's "ontological argument" for the existence of God with meaning for the nineteenth century to an ignorant English countrywoman. But her point is, of course, that only on the lips of such a figure as Dolly can the argument still make sense, for it had been finally discredited among intellectuals, along with all the other "proofs" of God's existence

which formed the basis of "Natural Theology", back in the eighteenth century, by Immanuel Kant:

Kant reviewed in detail the arguments for the existence of God, showing their fatal defects. The ontological argument fails because the proof rests on a confusion between the logical necessity of thought and the ontological necessity of existence, and because existence is never a predicate in the sense that it can alter the idea of a thing (the idea of a nonexistent hundred dollars is just as perfect as an actual hundred dollars).

373

Anselm writes in his "Proslogion":

Something than which nothing greater can be thought so truly exists that it is not possible to think of it as not existing. This being is yourself, our Lord and God.

Lord my God, you so truly are, that it is not possible to think of you as not existing. And rightly so.

For if someone's mind could think of something better than you, the creature would rise higher than its creator; which is clearly absurd.

374

Both Anselm and Dolly frequently repeat key words - "think" and its cognates, "exist", and "you" are all reiterated several times in the quotation from Anselm; and "know", and first

³⁷³ Welch, pp.45-6.

³⁷⁴ St Anselm, *The Prayers and Meditations of St Anselm*, translated and with an introduction by Sister Benedicta Ward, S.L.G., (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1973), p.245.

person pronouns in Dolly's speech. Each of their expressions of belief has an inherent circularity, which is signalled by this repetition.

Both also contain an important personal element. On one level, Anselm reaches his conclusions through the processes of abstract reasoning and syllogism, but the object of his thought is too real and personal to him, and too great - greater than the thinker - which is the very basis upon which the whole argument rests - to remain merely an object. When he arrives at the conclusion of his premises, Anselm turns and looks at it, and it comes to life, and he addresses it: "This being is yourself, our Lord and God." This is the point at which theology touches religion and faith. Anselm's work is founded upon a complex intertwining of faith and knowledge. In the prayer with which the "Proslogion" opens, he expresses the means by which he attains consciousness of religious truths as follows:

I confess, Lord, with thanksgiving, that you have made me in your image, so that I can remember you, think of you, and love you.

But that image is so worn and blotted out by faults, so darkened by the smoke of sin, that it cannot do that for which it was made, unless you renew and refashion it.

Lord, I am not trying to make my way to your height, for my understanding is in no way equal to that, but I do desire to understand a little of your truth which my heart already believes and loves.

I do not seek to understand so that I may believe, but I believe so that I may understand; and what is more, I believe that unless I do believe I shall not understand.

375

This is a powerful account of the place of the human intellect in Christian belief, which is an issue which inevitably arises in the process of considering the faith of such a simple,

³⁷⁵ St Anselm, pp.243-4.

uneducated, inarticulate figure as Dolly Winthrop. For Anselm, the possession of any consciousness of God whatsoever is possible solely because man is made in the Divine image. And God's purpose in making humanity in such a way is that human beings may come to a knowledge of God which is not merely intellectual, but personal - that they may respond to Him in love. Sin, however, has so "worn" and "darkened" the image, the Divine affinity within man, that it can no longer fulfil its purpose, for it has become faded and stained. Its bright visibility is almost entirely obscured, and so, likewise, is the visibility of God to the sinner. At this point, the sinner can do nothing but wait for God to "renew and refashion" the spoiled image. His intimate knowledge of the image within himself is replaced either by an entire loss and repudiation of all sense of God's presence, or, alternatively, by a trust that, although He can no longer be seen, God is still there, somewhere in the darkness, just the same as He ever was. Any reliance upon one's own understanding is at this point a fatal error, because the sinner must "believe so that [he] may understand".

Such belief cannot depend upon any kind of logically argued basis for belief, since then it would become a belief not in "the entire fulness of Christ",³⁷⁶ but in one's own ability to discern truth from falsehood. This kind of circularity turns faith into an endless, internalised self-questioning, which can never arrive at honest certainty, for true Christian belief must circle not around self, but around Christ. For Christ is the one Being who requires no external validation of His truth: "Lord my God, you so truly are, that it is not possible to think of you as not existing". In the nineteenth century, Newman takes up the same theme, passionately asserting the objective reality of Christ as the ultimate basis for Christian belief:

Here, then, is One who is *not* a mere name, who is not a mere fiction, who is a reality. He is dead and gone - but still He lives, - lives as a living, energetic thought of successive generations, as the awful motive power of a thousand great events. ... Can He be less than

³⁷⁶ cf above p.185.

Divine? Who is He but the Creator Himself; who is sovereign over His own works, towards whom our hearts turn instinctively, because He is our Father and our God?

377

Christ is known "instinctively", because He is the Creator, the author of all existence. If one believes in God at all, Anselm claims, then God's existence will fully validate that belief. Anselm believes that he can only understand truths about God because his "heart already believes and loves" Divine truth.

Perhaps the most significant difference between Anselm's utterance of faith and Dolly's is that Anselm addresses God directly as "you", whereas Dolly speaks of the Deity only in the third person, as "Them above". The narrator of *Silas Marner* explains that this plural pronoun used by Dolly is "no heresy ... but only [Dolly's] way of avoiding a presumptuous familiarity".³⁷⁸ The strength of Dolly's religion is also, potentially at least, its weakness, for, while it is by her powerful awareness of the vast gulf between herself and that which is "bigger nor what we can know"³⁷⁹ that she is enabled to avoid the trap of making God in her own image, she is at the same time placed in a position from which she cannot directly thank God "that you have made me in your image, so that I can remember you, think of you, and love you". Dolly never says that she loves God, and it would seem entirely out of character were she to do so. There is however, a close relationship between love and trust - Margaret's attitude towards her father in *David Elginbrod* exemplifies it powerfully:

³⁷⁷ John Henry Cardinal Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, (London and New York, 1889), p.491.

³⁷⁸ *Silas Marner*, p.138.

³⁷⁹ cf above p.200.

Margaret's eyes were fixed on her father with a look which I can only call faithfulness, as if every word he spoke was truth, whether she could understand it or not.

380

Is this what Dolly means, when she says "all as we've got to do is trusten"³⁷⁹ There does seem to be one important difference, in that Margaret Elginbrod knows her father; it is because he is her father that she can be so utterly at peace in his presence. Dolly Winthrop's God has some of the characteristics of a father - He is "Them as made me" - but not all. The problem with Dolly's faith, as well as its power, is that it begins at the point of her own ignorance. And this means that such faith is put beyond the reach of the educated, articulate reader of *Silas Marner* - as maybe George Eliot, sadly, finds necessary. Dolly's acceptance of the truthfulness of the object of her trust is based not upon a relationship with her Deity, but upon an unshakable sense simply that the universe is ordered in such a way that humanity's only positive response to the vicissitudes of life is "to do the right thing as fur as we know, and to trusten".³⁷⁹ "Truth", for Dolly, lies in the act of trusting; she has no conception of some set of abstract propositions to be either believed or disbelieved. The only sort of understanding which has any meaning is that which changes a human life.

And it is for this reason that, while Dolly's faith is, in itself, indisputably genuine, it is difficult to think of her specifically as a Christian. Although she reads the Bible and attends church, she never mentions Christ Himself as the object of trust. In this respect she seems similar to Janet's mother in "Janet's Repentance":

I fear most of Mr Tryan's hearers would have considered her destitute of saving knowledge, and I am quite sure she had no well-defined views on justification. Nevertheless, she read her Bible a great deal, and thought she found divine lessons there - how to bear the cross

³⁸⁰ *Elginbrod*, vol.1, p.36.

meekly, and be merciful. Let us hope that there is a saving ignorance, and that Mrs Raynor was justified without knowing exactly how.

381

It will be helpful to compare this description with a comment on the issue of ignorance from the autobiography of the Baptist preacher, C.H.Spurgeon. Many villagers and peasants, according to Spurgeon:

... seemed, somehow, to have got into their heads the notion that they could not be saved because they could not read, and did not know much. ... 'Oh sir, I never had any learning!' ... was supposed to be a sufficient excuse for not having repented of sin and trusted in the Saviour.

382

The question that arises out of all this is, first and foremost, what does it mean to be "saved"? One reply would be that of "Mr Tryan's hearers": that "justification" is the crux of the matter. The problem here is that there seems to be only a very short step from a belief in the necessity of "justification" to a demand for "well-defined views on justification", which brings us back to William Dane, replete with certainty, "imperativeness", and "contradiction".³⁸³ Similarly, "saving knowledge" can be used either to describe an experience and an awakened awareness involving the whole person, or it can be narrowed to mean the

³⁸¹ *Scenes*, p.291.

³⁸² Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, originally compiled by Susannah Spurgeon and Joseph Harrauld, revised edition in two volumes, (Edinburgh, 1962), I, p.231.

³⁸³ cf above p.180.

possession and control, by the intellect, of certain pieces of information. Bunyan's Faithful instructs Talkative:

There is therefore knowledge, and knowledge. Knowledge that resteth in the bare speculation of things, and knowledge that is accompanied with the grace of faith and love, which puts a man upon doing even the will of God from the heart; the first of these will serve the Talker, but without the other the true Christian is not content.

384

The language of religion is far more slippery than some religious people - and irreligious people also - are ready to admit. Spurgeon is clear in his mind about the manner in which the individual enters into salvation, for each person has, in his view, a duty - the word "excuse" leaves no room for individual preferences or ideas - to "repent ... of sin, and trust ... in the Saviour". Spurgeon describes the villagers' relation to "the way of salvation" as one of "gross ignorance". Yet he goes on to assert that:

... the unlearned need not stay away from Christ. It was said of an old Greek philosopher that he wrote over his door, "None but the learned may enter here"; but Christ, on the contrary, writes over his door, "He that is simple, let him turn in hither". I can testify that great numbers of these humble country folk accepted the Saviour's invitation, and it was delightful to see what a firm grip they afterwards had of the verities of the faith; many of them became perfect masters in divinity ... there is often more divinity in the little finger of a ploughman than there is in the whole body of some of our modern divines.

385

³⁸⁴ *Pilgrim's Progress*, p.89.

³⁸⁵ Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, I, p.264.

Spurgeon seems to afford his "humble country folk" both more and less dignity than they are given in Eliot's novel. On the one hand, Spurgeon stresses Christ's particular invitation to the "simple" and sets up the unlearned "ploughman" as the spiritual superior of the intellectually arrogant "modern divines", thus continuing in the tradition upheld by Tyndale, who told a learned "divine" of his own day that, "I will cause a boy that driveth the plough to know more of the Scripture than thou dost",³⁸⁶ and authorised by Christ, when He proclaimed: "Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God ... But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation".³⁸⁷ On the other hand, Spurgeon finds it "delightful" to see these villagers, once converted, becoming "perfect masters in divinity", and it seems to be by their knowledge, combined with humility, and not by their ignorance that they surpass the "modern divines" in spiritual stature. It is entry through the "door" of Christ which is for the "simple"; those inside are, it seems, expected to attain that "learning" whose lack was no "excuse" for their not having repented. Spurgeon, then, while he is convinced that the "unlearned" and the "simple" "need not stay away from Christ", understands true simplicity to be not so much ignorance, but rather unsophistication, childlike humility, and an absence of trust in one's own intellect. He could accept the concept of "saving ignorance" only if it were understood in these terms. For the uneducated, Spurgeon believes, must, like everybody else, repent and put their faith in Christ; just as their lack of learning cannot prevent them from being able to do this, nor does it exclude them from the universal responsibility so to do.

"Well yes, Master Marnier ... ", says Dolly, at the end of the penultimate chapter in *Silas Marner*:

³⁸⁶ Quoted in D.E.Nineham (ed.), *The Church's Use of the Bible, Past and Present*, (London, 1963), p.76.

³⁸⁷ *Luke* 6 vv.20,24.

"It's the will o' Them above as a many things should be dark to us; but there's some things as I've never felt i'the dark about, and they're mostly what comes i'the day's work. You were hard done by that once, Master Marner, and it seems as you'll never know the rights of it; but that doesn't hinder there being a rights, Master Marner, for all it's dark to you and me."

"No", said Silas, "no; that doesn't hinder. Since the time the child was sent to me and I've come to love her as myself, I've had light enough to trusten by; and now she says she'll never leave me, I think I shall trusten till I die."

388

There is, as I have shown in my discussion of *The Pilgrim's Progress*,³⁸⁹ an important gap between that which can be known to any individual human being, and that which exists beyond human knowledge; "a rights" can still be trusted and relied upon even if it can in no way be experienced - indeed, its very distance from human knowledge may even be a guarantee of its truth. It is that which "comes i'the day's work" - the human duties which lead one to love other people "as myself" - which provides "light enough to trusten by". Love brings with it certain knowledge, for it unites the self with someone entirely outside the self in a bond which dissolves all notions of the self as uniquely valuable or knowledgeable. Many things may be "dark to you and me", but light - or at least the sure promise of light - dawns when the individual embraces the reality and truth of perspectives other than his or her own.

³⁸⁸ *Silas Marner*, p.241.

³⁸⁹ cf above, Chapter Two.

Silas has come to believe wholeheartedly in agencies beyond his powers of thought - "exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think"³⁹⁰ - who have "sent" Eppie to him, and, with her, "light enough to trusten by". These almighty forces still remain largely unknown, mysterious and virtually nameless; Silas and Dolly have little or no direct communication with them, and do not expect to understand them, but they continue steadfastly to "trusten". And Silas's declaration that, "I think I shall trusten till I die" contains at least a faint suggestion of a future hope - that beyond death, trust may no longer be necessary, for:

... now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face; now I know in part; but then I shall know even as also I am known.

391

Although *Silas Marner* deals almost exclusively with the things of this world, there is, at this point, at least a slight glimmer of another order, an infinitely larger universe, in which faith will give place to sight. For the certain existence of "a rights" and of "the will o' Them above" combines with the idea of death as a completion of human, this-worldly consciousness to convey Silas's quiet, calm acceptance of his own death as an integral part of the Divine plan. His "trust" - it is perhaps significant that it is not called "faith", since this would imply a future hope of heaven far more explicitly, whereas "trust" suggests a child resting contentedly in its parent's arms, unconcerned about anything beyond the present peaceful moment - has a great deal to do with passivity and acceptance, but it remains also as an unshakable belief, if not in times and places other than the present one, at least in powers other than those known to himself, in sight and in knowledge which is "face to

³⁹⁰ *Ephesians* 3 v.20.

³⁹¹ *1 Corinthians* 13 v.12.

face", entire, whole and blinding in its brilliance and clarity, even if he himself is never directly to experience such truth.

Silas Marner, then, portrays the discovery of lasting peace and security in the consciousness of a small self, since the very insignificance of the individual is made the basis for belief in a vast, immeasurable metaphysical reality, which becomes a guarantee of meaning for every human life. One cannot help noting, however, that *Silas Marner* is set in the past, in a sleepy, backward village, inhabited by illiterate peasants - an environment primarily notable for its distance from George Eliot's own society. The application of Silas Marner's experience to the lives of Eliot's readers remains problematic, for the innocent trust of such figures as Dolly Winthrop, once lost, buried deep under huge masses of education and urban sophistication, is not easily regained. This sense of the need somehow to counter excessive self-consciousness by re-establishing links with the past runs through much later nineteenth century thought, and is clearly demonstrated in many Victorian responses to the Bible, and, in particular, to the book of *Job*.

It is no mere coincidence that Jude the Obscure dies mouthing words from the book of *Job*, and that *Mark Rutherford's Deliverance* is, in both the first and second editions (most later editions published during Hale White's lifetime being based on the second edition),³⁹² followed immediately by an essay entitled "Notes on the Book of Job". For the book of *Job* contains expressions of difficulties and needs of peculiar relevance to the many Victorian thinkers, of whom both Hardy and Rutherford are strongly representative figures, who found themselves ambivalently disposed towards the religious orthodoxy of their day. Such thinkers were sometimes cynical and embittered with regard to the cruel and crushing narrowness of vision they perceived within the formal structures of Christianity, yet often filled with deep admiration, yearning and tenderness towards many aspects of belief.

³⁹² cf "Bibliographical Note", by J.L.Madden, in Mark Rutherford, *Autobiography and Deliverance*, Victorian Library edition, (Leicester and New York, 1969), p. < 21 > .

George Granville Bradley, the Dean of Westminster in the 1880s, in his introduction to a series of lectures on *Job*, delivered in 1885 and 1886 (1885 being the year of publication of *Mark Rutherford's Deliverance* and ten years before the publication of *Jude the Obscure* in 1895), demonstrates, despite the fact that he is himself speaking from within the Church, an acute consciousness of the appropriateness of *Job* to the problems of the age:

You will find that room is made [in the book of Job] ... for doubts, misgivings, and questionings, which you may have felt stirring deep down in the secrecy of your own souls, but the dwelling for a moment on which you have supposed to be confined to those whom we call sceptics, infidels, atheists, or, in our milder moods, rationalists and neologians; or else to professedly anti-christian writers and speakers; or even to the enemies of all existing faiths and of the whole framework of social order. And you will find that he who puts forward so vehemently, and feels so keenly, the very selfsame difficulties and problems which have perhaps vexed you, is no enemy of the faith once delivered to God's people, but a Patriarch dear to God and honoured in all the churches.

393

Job is, in other words, "a man subject to like passions as we are",³⁹⁴ and yet his doubts and questionings with regard to widely held religious doctrines do not, in spite of all appearances, make him an "enemy" of that which is socially, historically and Divinely sanctioned. Instead, amazingly, he is a friend, and not only a friend, but a father, a "Patriarch" of "the faith once delivered to God's people".

Clearly something very odd is going on here. Whose side, after all, is the Dean of Westminster on? He was a liberal with regard to theology, and had in 1882 accepted Darwin for burial in Westminster Abbey, yet he is at least sensitive to the feelings of those

³⁹³ George Granville Bradley, *Lectures on the Book of Job* (Oxford, 1887), pp.16-17.

³⁹⁴ *James* 5 v.17.

who perceive in assaults on conservative religious belief a threat to “the whole framework of social order”, and he acknowledges, albeit with a touch of irony, the sense of insecurity and the anxiety for the maintaining of the true faith which leads Christians to call those who openly question historic doctrines “sceptics, infidels, atheists” and so on. It is of great importance, he suggests, to hold onto the ancient faith of the Church, since to lose touch with one’s own past and with the continuity of religious belief may well be to embrace anarchy. He is prepared to support those who believe that faith cannot be changed, for its boundaries and contents are to be found within the unaltering, eternal Scriptures, which Bradley is now seeking to expound. And the fathers of the faith are recognised as being worthy of the highest honour, for they laid the foundations of that which has been “once delivered to God’s people”, and for which those people are exhorted “earnestly [to] contend” in the face of all attacks upon it.³⁹⁵

But Bradley seems also to be displaying a remarkable degree of sympathy with those whom one might expect, in the light of his zeal for the upholding of historic doctrine, that he would at last seek to some degree to warn against the possible tendencies of their doubts. He lays particular stress upon the similarity between Job, the “Patriarch dear to God and honoured in all the churches”, and “you”, the secret Victorian doubter, “vexed” by the “selfsame difficulties and problems” which so torture Job. By his use of the phrase “you have supposed”, Bradley implies that those who confine their misgivings with regard to religious orthodoxy to “the secrecy of [their] own souls” are perhaps mistaken in viewing conscious doubt, admitted openly to the self, as a symptom of a tendency, willing or otherwise, to attack and to undermine the historic faith of the Church. The Dean is, in effect, telling his hearers not to be afraid to admit their doubts, to “dwell ... for a moment” upon their problems with belief, for Job does so, “vehemently and keenly”. All this begs the question how the Dean and his audience, along with Job and all those who love and uphold the Christian faith while openly declaring their difficulties with regard to it, can be

³⁹⁵ cf *Jude* (New Testament), v.3.

distinguished from that other group of people described as "sceptics, infidels, atheists ... , rationalists and neologians" along with the self-confessed enemies of Christianity, and even of all religions. Given that one entertains some doubts respecting orthodox doctrine, how can one know to which group one belongs?

The book of *Job* can be viewed as consisting of a curious paradox of modernist, anti-orthodox experience set within a formal, historically sanctioned framework. J.A.Froude, writing on *Job* in 1853, is particularly keen to stress the book's theme of the struggle for progress in a world which clings to the past, and to point out the direct relevance of this theme for the Victorian age:

Let [the book of *Job*] have been written when it would, it marks a period in which the religious convictions of men were passing through a vast crisis. ... no system of law or articles of belief were or could be complete and exhaustive for all time. Experience accumulates; new facts are observed, new forces display themselves, and all such formulæ must necessarily be from period to period broken up and moulded afresh. And yet the steps already gained are a treasure so sacred ... that the better part of mankind have at all times practically regarded their creed as a sacred total to which nothing may be added, and from which nothing may be taken away. ... Periods of religious transition, therefore, when the advance has been a real one, always have been violent, and probably will always continue to be so.

396

Job argues "vehemently" and feels "keenly, the selfsame difficulties and problems" which trouble many nineteenth century thinkers struggling to be honest both with regard to the experiences, ideas and discoveries of recent times, and also with regard to their Christian beliefs. He voices uncertainty, confusion, and even anger and that which comes very close to despair in relation to his understanding of God and of His government of the world, and yet he does all this within the covers of that most historically sanctioned and orthodox of

³⁹⁶ J.A.Froude, "The Book of *Job*", *Westminster Review*, vol. 4, 1853, pp.419,421.

all books within Christian culture - the Bible. Like the writer of *Ecclesiastes* - another Biblical book of peculiar relevance to Victorian anxieties about orthodoxy - whose words Hardy's Jude quotes in his speech to the crowd in Christminster on the University's Remembrance Day,³⁹⁷ with his cries of "Who knoweth...?" and "Who can tell?"; like Jude, who perceives "something wrong somewhere",³⁹⁷ but who has no idea where to begin looking for answers, and yet who expresses it all in the form of a sermon - so Job declares that anarchy is inherent in human life, and that God, the judge of the earth, appears to have no concern for justice, and yet Job speaks in formal Hebrew poetry, and his words are enshrined within a highly ordered and patterned book.

Speaking of God, whose presence he never doubts, Job says:

He slayeth the perfect and the wicked. If the scourge slay suddenly, he will laugh at the trial of the wicked: he covereth the faces of the judges thereof; if not, where, and who is he? ...

If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean; Yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me.

For he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgement. Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both.

Let him take his rod away from me, and let not his fear terrify me: Then would I speak, and not fear him; but it is not so with me.

³⁹⁸

³⁹⁷ Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, The Macmillan Students' Hardy edition, (London, 1975), p.436.

³⁹⁸ *Job* 9 vv.22-24,30-35.

Job's great difficulty - the significance of which he is not fully to realise until God Himself speaks from heaven - is that he cannot understand or communicate with God on a human level. Nothing of Job's making - no order, or structure, or beauty - not even complete self-cleansing "with snow water", can appeal to God in His own terms, His own language, for Job, knowing he must hold onto his own convictions of right and wrong, of justice and truth, is yet painfully aware that the Divine "judgement" looks to him like cruelty, mockery, and a complete perversion of all moral order. There is no means of matching Job's understanding of the world against God's in fair debate - which appears to be the medium of the book with its formal succession of speeches - for Job does not share an equal footing with God, but is trembling beneath His "rod". Job is in possession of a language that is of no help to him in the situation in which he finds himself, for it can never place him on the level upon which he could "answer" God and "speak, and not fear him", comprehending the Divine purposes while still retaining his own sense and understanding of the condition of the world.

Job, in his quest for a "daysman [i.e. umpire, arbitrator or mediator (OED)] betwixt us", seeks to bridge the gap between God and himself with words, only to discover, finally, that the gap is unbridgeable, and that not speech, but silence is the only valid response to the mystery of the Divine transcendence. The book of *Job*, made up as it is largely of lengthy and intricate orations, ends, not with some great declaration by Job of the new truths which he has discovered through his ordeal, but rather with his silence in the face of God's transcendent and incomprehensible power. In reply to God's repeated questioning of Job's understanding and might in the light of Divine wisdom, Job can only confess:

Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once I have spoken; but I will not answer: twice; but I will proceed no further. ...

I know that thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. ...

I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

399

Job has nothing more to say, for he now "know[s]" that his words have been "without knowledge". In the light of the certain awareness that "thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from thee", all Job's declarations and arguments are shown to consist of that which he "understood not" and "knew not".

He is not so much saying that his words were untrue; his emphasis is rather placed upon the confession of his own unworthiness to speak of such matters at all. The mysteries of God's justice and government are "things too wonderful for me", for Job is "vile", a creature of the earth, of "dust and ashes", made by God, and wholly subject to His omnipotence. By naming the parts of his body - "hand", "mouth", "ear", and "eye", Job lays stress upon his limited, mortal nature, in contrast with God, who is in no sense dependent upon physical faculties, but who can "do everything" simply because He is who He is, and to whom not only each sound and sight, but also every "thought" is inevitably known. The one thing that Job can "know" about God is that He is utterly beyond Job's comprehension because He transcends all that He has made, and Job is merely a part of His creation. And so Job is silenced, for there is no other human response possible, it seems, to God's revelation of Himself. One dare not attempt to add to it in any way whatsoever. The language of faith is very simple, very sparse: "I repent in dust and ashes". Christ tells His disciples not to use "vain repetitions" when they pray; it is "the heathen" who do this, for "they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking". The Christian is characterised instead by his quiet trust that his "Father knoweth what things [he has] need of before [he] ask[s]

³⁹⁹ Job 40 vv.4,5; 42 vv.2,3,5,6.

him".⁴⁰⁰ Divine knowledge renders human speech almost obsolete, so that it is the inarticulate - figures like Dolly Winthrop - whose use of language brings them closest to Divine truth.

The reader's final and lasting impression of the book of *Job* is of this infinite gulf between the greatness of God and the littleness of man. And yet because God's power is so vast, the quest to reach Him elevates man also. God, after all, is the Creator of the entire world experienced by human beings, and, as the creation of such an unknowably great God, the world and all that is in it takes on a glory and a significance of real and lasting value. And yet God utterly transcends all that He has made, and the human mind can never comprehend Him:

When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou are mindful of him,[?] and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet.

⁴⁰¹

Gazing up at the stars is, within a Judaeo-Christian culture, an experience which is both terrifying and deeply comforting. It is terrifying because the vastness of the heavens emphasises unbearably the smallness and insignificance of any individual human being - of the gazer himself - within the context of the universe, and it seems incomprehensible that anyone at all, let alone God, should be "mindful" of the solitary speck of matter which calls

⁴⁰⁰ *Matthew* 6 vv.7,8.

⁴⁰¹ *Psalms* 8 vv.3-6.

itself "I". On the other hand, the faith that God has in fact "crowned ... with glory and honour" this tiny, apparently meaningless "son of man" becomes no longer merely an assent to a creed, but a glorious realisation of an amazing truth when, contemplating the moon and the stars, the believer discovers something of the greatness of the God who is, miraculously and incomprehensibly, "mindful of him". Man's place in God's order both vastly exalts and crushingly diminishes man's own customary views regarding his personal significance.

So how far can the book of *Job* illuminate our understanding of "Mark Rutherford's" *Autobiography* and *Deliverance*, and Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*? To what extent can they be viewed as Victorian re-workings of *Job*, presenting the Biblical book, or at least the main, poetic, central section of it, in such a way as to make its message immediately relevant to the nineteenth century? It is interesting that the prose sections with which *Job* begins and ends, which, since they are made up of straightforward narrative rather than debate and oratory, might well be viewed as the most novelistic parts of the book, are omitted from the novelists' interpretations. These sections contain explanations of Job's experience which might easily be seen as running counter to the picture of Job as the archetypal honest doubter, holding onto an increasingly inarticulate faith in an almost entirely unexplained universe.

But when can a doubter call him or herself "honest"? Mark Rutherford finds himself struggling with precisely this question repeatedly throughout the course of his life, and, repeatedly, his perplexities as to how he should regard his own position in relation to "the faith once delivered to God's people"⁴⁰² surface in the form of practical difficulties in such areas as employment and friendship. Mardon, for example, a valued acquaintance of Rutherford's, holds an atheist position based largely upon logical thought and argument. Although Rutherford has, specifically in the area of his attitude towards orthodox belief,

⁴⁰² cf above p.214.

much in common with Mardon, he nevertheless shrinks from him under the force of an emotion closely akin to terror:

I did not see Mardon often, for I rather dreaded him. I could not resist him, and I shrank from what I saw to be inevitably true when I talked to him. I can hardly say it was cowardice. Those may call it cowardice to whom all associations are nothing, and to whom beliefs are no more than matters of indifferent research; but as for me, Mardon's talk darkened my days and nights.

403

Although Rutherford, while in Mardon's presence, considers his views to be "inevitably true", beyond any doubt whatsoever, this does not mean that he is ready or able to believe Mardon's beliefs for himself. On the contrary, it is from precisely these certain, proven propositions that Rutherford shrinks in dread. This would seem to suggest an attitude of mind which warms towards and feels at home with difficulties and doubts, while experiencing a powerful dislike and mistrust of all forms of theological certainty. Rutherford here links this mistrust with the personal nature of belief. Because religious commitments are to him (are they to Mardon?) far more than "matters of indifferent research", he experiences a deep sense of oppression when confronted with a scientific language which purposely excludes from discussion all subjective impressions in order to gain a clear, objective view of the truth with regard to religion. As I have shown, Angel Clare in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is similarly dangerous because he places too much reliance upon proven fact and objective "scientific" reality.⁴⁰⁴ Central to Rutherford's difficulties is the question whether faith is best understood and evaluated from the standpoint of externalised logic,

⁴⁰³ Mark Rutherford, *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford/Mark Rutherford's Deliverance*, Garland "Novels of Faith and Doubt" series, reprints of 1881 and 1885 editions respectively, (New York and London, 1976), "Autobiography", p.69.

⁴⁰⁴ cf above, Chapter Three, p.120.

freed from all personal "associations" and desires, or from that of individual consciousness and need. His problem is precisely that which Richard Holt Hutton sees as lying at the heart of Victorian struggles with regard to religious belief:

And I do not hesitate to say that, quite apart from the intrinsic difficulties of religious questions, one of the chief bewilderments of modern life in relation to religion is this, - that men have learnt most of their tests of certainty in a region which is not spiritual at all, and in which certainty hardly involves the inward judgement of the true man, but only, at most, a kind of shadow of the man.

405

After leaving his Independent congregation, Mark Rutherford, unsure whether or not he should seek to become a Unitarian preacher, goes to Mardon for advice. Mardon tells him, "You have no right to be preaching anything doubtful",⁴⁰⁶ and goes on to challenge him:

"You are aware what my creed is. I profess no belief in God, and no belief in what hangs upon it. Try and name, now, any earnest conviction you possess, and see whether you have a single one which I have not got."

"I do believe in God."

"There is nothing in that statement. What do you believe about Him - that is the point. You will find that you believe nothing, in truth, which I do not also believe of the laws which govern the universe and man."

407

⁴⁰⁵ Holt Hutton, p.30.

⁴⁰⁶ *Autobiography*, p.111.

Mardon goes on quite convincingly to argue his case, but Rutherford finally turns to face him on a different ground altogether:

"You and I have talked this matter over before, and I have never gained a logical victory over you. Often I have felt thoroughly prostrated by you, and yet when I have left you the old superstition has arisen unsubdued. I do not know how it is, but I always feel that upon this as upon many other subjects, I can never really speak myself. 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."

407

Rutherford, too, then, can be "certain", but his certainty is closely linked with inarticulateness, whereas the kind of knowledge which Mardon asserts is founded almost entirely upon verbal constructs. The phrase, "I can never really speak myself" suggests that putting belief into words is essentially a reflexive act. The one thing Rutherford can say about the unnamed "something" of which he is certain is that it has a "presence ... in me" - it is a part of himself. This is not to say that it is necessarily solely subjective, for it is also experienced as a "thought" which "presents itself" to Rutherford, coming inexplicably from something or somewhere outside himself. As I have demonstrated in my discussion of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, that which is experienced purely through the medium of the individual consciousness does not for this reason lack objective reality.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁷ *Autobiography*, pp.113-4.

⁴⁰⁸ cf above, Chapter Two.

Mardon claims to have a "creed", which he can repeat upon any occasion, and which summarises his beliefs. He connects preaching - another verbal activity - with the concept of a creed, and therefore views the preaching of "anything doubtful" as a contradiction in terms. He tests Rutherford by asking him to "name" his convictions, and rejects his declaration of belief in God with the words: "There is nothing in that statement". "I do believe in God" is, Mardon claims, at least on Rutherford's lips, semantically empty, for "God" is a sound without any meaning of its own, fully replaceable by "the laws which govern the universe and man". When he says, "I profess no belief in God", Mardon means that the word "God" has ceased, for him, to signify anything. He does not say, "I don't believe in God", for this would imply a personal decision to sever all relations with and to place no reliance upon the entity known as "God". Mardon places the emphasis not upon belief, which is a subjective response to external realities, but rather upon profession, which defines reality by naming it. But for Rutherford, belief in God is, as he readily admits, an "old superstition". "God" is a word replete with historic associations; it is, for Rutherford, above all a word which he can say virtually nothing "about" - which is Mardon's requirement - because it stands for precisely that which is beyond the reach of his ability to "give it body and expression". The first and foremost - almost the only - thing which Rutherford can be sure of with regard to God is that he believes in Him - whoever or whatever He may turn out to be. His most earnest conviction centres around "something" about which he can say scarcely anything at all. This inarticulateness is strikingly similar to Job's silence in the face of his final realisation of God's transcendent power and knowledge.⁴⁰⁹ The language of faith seems to consist almost entirely of that which cannot be said - that which a human being "cannot lift to the light".

Yet the believer is still exhorted to pray using words, albeit few and simple ones, the Bible is scarcely a non-verbal production, and many Christian traditions place a high value upon preaching and liturgy. What role, then, does human language have to play in the life

⁴⁰⁹ cf above p.219.

of faith? This is, interestingly, a question which Hardy approaches in *Jude the Obscure*, for one highly significant aspect of that which makes Jude different from those around him and which, ironically, leads to his "obscurity" is his high degree of articulateness. In the opening scene of the novel, Jude is discovered holding a book and saying a tearful goodbye to his beloved schoolmaster, and not long afterwards he is battling his way over enormous obstacles in order to learn Latin and Greek. To "acquire languages"⁴¹⁰ - the languages of Christminster - becomes his primary goal in life, for he imagines that this must be the route of entry into his Celestial City. The terrible inadequacy, however, of the words which Jude learns to help him in his quest is demonstrated and explored in two major scenes of disillusionment and failure. The first, towards the beginning of the novel, centres around Jude's recitation of the Latin Nicene Creed in an "obscure and low-ceiled tavern"⁴¹¹ in Christminster; the second, which occurs, like a mirror-image of the first of these scenes, at approximately the same distance from the end of the novel as the first is from the beginning, takes place during the celebrations of the University's "Remembrance Day", also called "Humiliation Day"⁴¹² by Jude, and "the Judgement Day"⁴¹³ by Little Father Time, when Jude makes an eloquent speech to the gathered crowds giving an account of his aspirations and his failure. On both these occasions, Jude publicly proves himself to possess linguistic abilities at least equal to those which Christminster seeks and nurtures in her sons. The undergraduates who listen to Jude's Latin Creed in the tavern possess "not the slightest conception of a single word"⁴¹⁴ of the recitation. Yet his dream: "Christminster shall be

⁴¹⁰ *Jude*, p.71.

⁴¹¹ *Jude*, p.181.

⁴¹² *Jude*, p.432.

⁴¹³ *Jude*, p.433.

⁴¹⁴ *Jude*, p.183.

my Alma Mater, and I'll be her beloved son, in whom she shall be well pleased",⁴¹⁵ is never to be fulfilled.

There is in Jude, along with this visionary idealism, also a mood of black and bitter cynicism, in which he violently embraces his humiliation and acts as the fool he believes circumstances have made of him. He has a strong sense of dramatic effect, and, in the scene in the tavern, having spent many hours drinking, he half-deliberately makes a mockery of all his aspirations:

Somebody threw down threepence, the glass was handed, Jude stretched out his arm for it without looking, and having swallowed the liquor, went on in a moment in a revived voice, raising it as he neared the end with the manner of a priest leading a congregation:

"Et in Spiritum Sanctum, Dominum et vivificantem, qui ex Patre Filioque procedit. Qui cum Patre et Filio simul adoratur et conglorificatur. Qui locutus est per prophetas.

"Et unam Catholicam et Apostolicam Ecclesiam. Confiteor unum Baptisma in remissionem peccatorum. Et exspecto Resurrectionem mortuorum. Et vitam venturi saeculi. Amen."

"Well done!" said several, enjoying the last word, as being the first and only one they recognised. Then Jude seemed to shake the fumes from his brain, as he stared round upon them.

"You pack of fools!" he cried. "Which one of you knows whether I have said it or no? It might have been the Ratcatcher's Daughter in double Dutch for all that your besotted heads can tell! See what I have brought myself to - the crew I have come among!"

⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁵ *Jude*, p.79.

⁴¹⁶ *Jude*, pp.184-186.

Jude can pronounce a great many words, but, instead of communicating with those around him, his use of language isolates him. In realising the meaninglessness of the Latin Creed to his listeners, Jude realises also the futility of his own knowledge, so that when he calls the crowd a "pack of fools", he is labelling himself as a fool as well. For his mistake is the same as theirs: he has been impressed by something which he is in no position to judge. Latin has no more real meaning for him than for the drinkers in the public house, and it is here, Jude recognises bitterly, and not in college or cathedral, that the people among whom he belongs are to be found. "See what I have brought myself to!", he cries, " - the crew I have come among!". His head is, like theirs, "besotted" with alcohol, and he has, like them, been taken in by a performance which is a mere mockery of that which it purports to represent. By desiring to hear people say, "Well done!" in response to his use of the language of an educated, Christminster man, he has put himself in a position in which he must become a fool in order to win the praise of fools. He cannot hope to maintain self-respect in any form whatsoever. Jude's problem is that past words no longer mean anything in present circumstances; the big language of the Christian past and of Christminster has become a dead language, and yet the living languages seem too small for that to which Jude aspires. Hardy was acutely aware of the way in which the speech of the present so often ironically frames that of the past, mocking its aspirations to grandeur:

At the Temperance Hotel. The people who stay here appear to include religious enthusiasts of all sorts. They talk the old faiths with such new fervours and original aspects that such faiths again seem arresting. ... In the street outside I heard a man coaxing money from a prostitute in slang language, his arm round her waist. The outside was a commentary on the inside.

417

⁴¹⁷ F.E.Hardy, *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1891* (London, 1928), p.271.

Jude, like Hardy, is left with a choice between a religious language which has no longer any meaning in relation to the real problems of life, or a secular language which is cruel, mercenary and debased. He feels that his life ought to mean more, to matter more, yet he is endlessly frustrated by the unavailability of any framework within he might discover such significance for himself.

To be a fool is not, however, within a Christian world-view, entirely to be without positive precedents. St Paul writes:

God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise ... And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen... That no flesh should glory in his presence.

418

Christ Himself (if one accepts a conservative Evangelical interpretation of *Isaiah* 53) is described as being, "despised and rejected of men ... despised, and we esteemed him not".⁴¹⁹ There is a clear strand within Biblical thought which suggests that the weak and the foolish, those mocked and laughed at by the established and respected powers of their day, are in some sense especially close to God. Job presents a particularly clear example of this situation. All the respect which people once had for him has utterly vanished:

But now they that are younger than I have me in derision, whose fathers I would have disdained to have set with the dogs of my flock. ...

⁴¹⁸ *1 Corinthians* 1 vv.27-29.

⁴¹⁹ *Isaiah* 53 v.3.

They were children of fools, yea, children of base men; they were viler than the earth. And now I am their song, yea, I am their byword. They abhor me, they flee far from me, and spare not to spit in my face.

420

None of the values in Job's world seem to be fixed any longer, for it seems absurd that a man who is "perfect and upright"⁴²¹ should be made a laughing-stock, not even by people of judgement and discernment, but by mere children with no knowledge or experience of life, whose fathers seemed to Job to be sub-human in their moral and spiritual existence. There is no order left in the world, it appears, for the natural hierarchy of virtue and just honour has been reversed, resulting in a chaotic and incomprehensible morass of pain. The young mock the old, and the vile spit upon the righteous, just as the pagan soldiers are to spit upon Christ, the Son of God.⁴²²

Jude, in his Remembrance Day speech, tells the crowd: "I am in a chaos of principles - groping in the dark - acting by instinct and not after example".⁴²³ He is without the words of light. All his struggles have got him nowhere because, it seems, there is nowhere for him to get to. Like Job, Jude discovers that there is no simple rule by which one can be sure of achieving honour by pursuing honourable paths, any more than one can be confident that suffering comes only to those who deserve it. Jude is driven, he says, by "instinct", for

⁴²⁰ *Job* 30 vv.1,8-10.

⁴²¹ *Job* 1 v.1.

⁴²² cf *Matthew* 27 vv.27-31.

⁴²³ *Jude*, p.436.

there is no reliable set of principles by which he can live. J.A Froude's description of the moral pioneers of whom Job is a potent example fits Jude perfectly:

... great men whose moral sense *had* raised them beyond their time and country, and who, feeling the necessity of a real creed, with an effort and with indifferent success, endeavoured to express, under the systems which they found, emotions which had no proper place there.

424

Jude fits into no "system" available to him whatsoever. He can stand up and intone Latin "with the manner of a priest leading a congregation", and in doing this he is acting "after example", adopting for himself the language, words and style of pronunciation used traditionally by the Church. The problem is that merely copying the speech and behaviour of a priest can never make Jude a priest - on the contrary it is "blaspheming, or next door to it". Like the Mass in Wagner's *Parsifal*, condemned by Monsignor Mostyn in Moore's *Evelyn Innes*,⁴²⁵ it is an imitation of a religious reality which parodies rather than expresses the truth it purports to represent. The "example" is worse than insufficient, for, just as Christminster appears as "a city of light"⁴²⁶ to the young Jude, and yet when he arrives there he finds himself "groping in the dark", so Jude finds that the more closely he attempts to approximate his own life and actions to the image of his dreams, the greater does the gulf appear between that which is possible for him and that which he desires.

Mark Rutherford seeks to deal with the problem of a chaotic, inexplicable world full of disappointments by taking refuge in personal and individual visions of hope and beauty.

⁴²⁴ Froude, "The Book of Job", p.422.

⁴²⁵ cf below, Chapter Six, p.354.

⁴²⁶ *Jude*, p.63.

And, on this basis, he sees the life of Jesus as an example to be followed. While he is still an Independent preacher, he tells his congregation:

Jesus was a poor solitary thinker, confronted by two enormous and overpowering organisations, the Jewish hierarchy and the Roman state. He taught the doctrine of the kingdom of heaven; He trained Himself to have faith in the absolute monarchy of the soul, the absolute monarchy of His own; He tells us that each man should learn to find peace in his own thoughts, his own visions. It is a most difficult thing to do; most difficult to believe that my highest happiness consists in my perception of whatever is beautiful. If I by myself watch the sun rise, or the stars come out in the evening, or feel the love of man or woman, I ought to say to myself, "There is nothing beyond this". But people will not rest there; they are not content, and they are for ever chasing a shadow which flies before them, a something external which never brings what it promises. ... Christianity [is] ... essentially the religion of the unknown and of the lonely; of those who [are] not a success.

427

In order to find any sort of peace or contentment in the world, Rutherford suggests, an individual must first accept that he is entirely on his own. Any sort of progress or success can be hoped for only within the confines of a person's "own thoughts, his own visions", for any attempt to achieve anything relative to the illusory standards of "something external" is bound to end in failure.

This seems to be a philosophy, or a religion, which is founded upon a profound sense of despair. To say, "There is nothing beyond this" may be the gateway to lasting rest and peace, but it is also an acknowledgement of complete aloneness and of a complete failure meaningfully to communicate with any other being. Christianity, Rutherford suggests, is for "those who [are] not a success", and he implies that Jesus Himself was "not a success", externally speaking, for He was powerless to defeat the political and religious establish-

⁴²⁷ *Autobiography*, pp.44-5.

ments of His day on their own terms. The difficulty with this approach is that it looks very much like an apology or an excuse. It is difficult to see how one could tell it apart from a compensation for disappointment. Jude, in the depths of "the hell of conscious failure" sits down beside a well "thinking as he did so what a poor Christ he made".⁴²⁸ If he were instead to affirm his faith in "the absolute monarchy of the soul", to find peace in meditating on the sunrise and to reject his aspirations as a mere "shadow", he would seem far less like Christ, for he would not be suffering the reality of his own misery. Job has traditionally been compared with Christ in his endurance of totally undeserved agony,⁴²⁹ and Job is characterised by his refusal to accept any form of consolation which might imply a denial of that which he is "for ever chasing" - his belief both in Divine justice and in his own righteousness - even though he repeatedly finds himself clinging to something which apparently "never brings what it promises". He is, above all, a man of integrity:

Wherefore do I take my flesh in my teeth, and put my life in mine hand?

Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him; but I will maintain mine own ways before him.

He also shall be my salvation: for an hypocrite shall not come before him.

430

The avoidance of hypocrisy, the complete refusal to deny one's "own ways" may cost Job everything that he has, even his life, but he is prepared to pay that price.

In his "Notes on the Book of Job", "Rutherford", commenting on the twenty-first chapter of *Job*, describes Job's account of the death of the wicked:

⁴²⁸ *Jude*, p.187.

⁴²⁹ cf eg Bradley pp.125-4;176-7.

⁴³⁰ *Job* 13 vv.14-16.

Once more Job takes his stand on actual eyesight. He relies, too, on the testimony of those who have travelled. ... Job demands of his opponents that they should come out into the open universe. If they will but lift up their eyes across the horizon which hitherto has hemmed them in, what enlargement will not thereby be given to them. ... Inexpressibly touching is the last verse but one. It is a revelation of the inmost heart striving to be at peace with death. Not one grain of comfort is sought outside, and it is this which makes it so precious. There is not even a hint of a hope. All is drawn from within, and is solid and real.

431

Here we see Rutherford's principles put vividly into practice. Job's arguments are based firmly upon his knowledge of the world, whereas his opponents found their views largely upon traditional wisdom and religion. Job's comforters have failed to face up to the reality of human experience in maintaining their understanding of good and evil, whereas Job is determined to be true to the testimony of "actual eyesight", of "those who have travelled", and of all that is to be seen in "the open universe". And this passionate honesty with regard to all that is to be seen in the world here goes hand in hand with the solitary struggles of "the inmost heart". The central, linking idea here is that of human experience. One must first be aware, not of theories and philosophies, but of all that is taking place in the lives of men and women, and one will then learn the real value of one's own, personal awareness of the world as one discovers that, "We do but go the path which the poorest, the weakest, the most timid have all trodden."⁴³² The individual must die alone because this is the destiny of the whole of humanity. Everything that one sees around oneself offers an example, and yet it is an example which teaches that one must simply be human, be what one is, seeking comfort in "the inmost heart", "within", and not "outside", for it is in the lonely, frightened, limited individual heart that one draws closest to "the poorest, the weakest, and the most

⁴³¹ *Mark Rutherford's Deliverance*, "Notes on the Book of Job", pp.183-4.

⁴³² "Notes on Job", p.184.

timid”, whose path and whose example one is to follow. It is in “striving” and in hopelessness that all that is “solid and real” is to be discovered, for it is “those who [are] not a success” who are closest to “the kingdom of heaven”.

Rutherford’s main criticism of the religious establishments of his day centres around the belief that the churches and chapels fail to recognise and accept the individuality of those people with whom they come into contact. His account of his acceptance into membership of the church in which he was brought up draws attention, above all, to the lack of real discernment or of a true sense of spiritual values on the part of those accepting him as a fellow Christian:

I knew that I had to be “a child of God”, and after a time professed myself to be one, but I cannot call to mind that I was anything else than I always had been, save that I was perhaps a little more hypocritical; not in the sense that I professed to others what I knew I did not believe, but in the sense that I professed it to myself. I was obliged to declare myself convinced of sin; convinced of the efficacy of the atonement; convinced that I was forgiven; convinced that the Holy Ghost was shed abroad in my heart; and convinced of a great many other things which were the merest phrases. ... It was the custom to demand of each candidate a statement of his or her experience. I had no experience to give; and I was excused on the grounds that I had been the child of pious parents, and consequently had not undergone that convulsion which those, not favoured like myself, necessarily underwent when they were called.

433

As a “child of pious parents”, Rutherford grows up knowing that he has to be “a child of God”. Like Jude, he knows the language of the community to which he is seeking admission all too well - phrases like “the efficacy of the atonement”, and “the Holy Ghost was shed abroad in my heart” roll easily off his tongue, and nothing more is required of him.

⁴³³ *Autobiography*, pp.13-14.

Like Jude, he finds himself a fool amongst fools, repeating words whose real significance is utterly closed to him, and being applauded for doing so. His profession does not make him an Independent, any more than Jude's recital of the Latin Creed makes him a son of Christminster, for mere "phrases", divorced from their true context of belief and experience, of proper motivation and of the fitting place, time and speaker, are more than simply empty - they are "hypocritical". And "an hypocrite", says Job, "shall not come before [God]"⁴³⁴; the irony of Rutherford's position is that he perceives his description of himself as "a child of God" as being the one thing which, above all else, cuts him off from a genuine knowledge of God. Rutherford is supposed to have undergone some great change, and yet he feels that he is not "anything else than [he] always had been", except that he is perhaps "a little more hypocritical". In other words, he has succeeded neither in adopting a new self, nor in retaining the former one, for continuity with the past is maintained only at the price of disguising that continuity from himself. Rutherford has little identity of his own, for, being "the child of pious parents", he is not expected to undergo any personal "experience". He seems to be trapped whatever happens, for if he is converted by means of a "convulsion" which dramatically alters his past nature, then he is doing no more than is expected of him. The thrill of becoming "a new creature"⁴³⁵ is completely negated by the fact that his conversion could only be his entry into that which he has always known "that [he] had to be". On the other hand, if he undergoes no "experience", he does not escape any more easily, for his parents' expectations regarding him carry far more weight than Rutherford's personal beliefs or activities. Nothing he does can surprise them, which means that nothing is expected of him other than an external conformity to the labels "child of pious parents" and "child of God". With regard to his inner life of personal, perhaps inarticulate, beliefs and feelings, no one in the church displays any interest whatsoever.

⁴³⁴ cf above p.233.

⁴³⁵ 2 *Corinthians* 5 v.17.

Like Rutherford, Jude is acutely and painfully aware of the inadequacy of any external framework which the circumstances of his birth and upbringing make available to him to express and make real in the world beyond the self his truest inner self. It is for this reason that he persists in pursuing his dream of Christminster with such desperate perseverance. From the hills above Marygreen, Christminster appears as a New Jerusalem to the young Jude - a Celestial City which seems to offer the answer to his deepest yearnings:

He suddenly grew older. It had been the yearning of his heart to find something to anchor on, to cling to - for some place which he could call admirable. Should he find that place in this city if he could get there? Would it be a spot in which, without fear of farmers, or hindrance, or ridicule, he could watch and wait, and set himself to some mighty undertaking like the men of old of whom he had heard? ...

"It is a city of light", he said to himself.

"The tree of knowledge grows there", he added a few steps further on.

"It is a place that teachers of men spring from and go to."

"It is what you may call a castle, manned by scholarship and religion."

After this figure he was silent for a long while, till he added:

"It would just suit me."

436

Jude is uttering fragments of the big language which he so desperately desires, for there is something in him which is horrified by the drab emptiness of all that he has so far experienced, and which feels that there must be something more; something greater than himself, to which he could look up, which would give his life significance; something "ad-

⁴³⁶ *Jude*, pp.62-3.

mirable". Jude sees in Christminster a nucleus and haven of authority - of culture, history, religion and literature. Each "figure" which he uses to describe it - and the use of "figures" in itself is highly significant, since it points clearly to Jude's deep need to identify himself with external, socially shared linguistic constructs - lays emphasis upon learning, authority, and the idea of a sacred place. The references to "a city of light", with its echoes of *Revelation* and of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, and to "a castle" suggest a walled and strongly defended bastion of truth, set apart from the darkness and barbarism of all that lies outside it - of Marygreen, for example. Jude is forced to take refuge in personified abstractions - "scholarship and religions" - and in the metaphorical use of the names of physical phenomena, such as "light", because the material world of his experience is so disappointing that he can only hope to find that for which he longs by retreating into a realm of books and ideas. Much of his phraseology is deliberately archaic and Biblical - "the tree of knowledge" is an obvious example, but, equally, such expressions as "teachers of men" and "It is what you may call" would sound distinctly out of place in the context of the style of speech customarily used by the characters in the novel. Jude's pronouncement that, "The tree of knowledge grows there" is particularly telling, because this reference, of course, recalls the opening chapters of *Genesis*, in which two special trees are named: "the tree of life", and "the tree of knowledge of good and evil".⁴³⁷ And one cannot help suspecting that Jude has chosen the wrong tree, for it is the tree of knowledge from which Adam and Eve are forbidden to eat. When they do eat its fruit, they are cursed and banished from Eden, and God places, "at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life".⁴³⁸

⁴³⁷ *Genesis* 2 v.9.

⁴³⁸ *Genesis* 3 v.24.

It is worth comparing Jude's desire to identify himself with the "mighty undertaking[s]" of "the men of old of whom he had heard" with Matthew Arnold's idea of "culture". In the "Preface" to *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold writes:

The whole scope of the essay is to recommend culture as the great help out of our present difficulties; culture being a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world; and through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically.

439

To Arnold, culture is, first and foremost, a "pursuit"; it is a means of progress towards a goal and ideal - "our total perfection" - which enables individuals and society as a whole to move forwards positively into the future by means of maintaining alive and intelligent connections with the past. Its spirit is that of lively, organic movement - "following a stream of fresh and free thought" - as opposed to the dull, predictable and mindless grinding of a machine which turns "staunchly but mechanically". Culture, then, can be achieved only by free and strong minds, capable first of discerning and becoming familiar with "the best" of all past thoughts and words, and secondly of applying this knowledge, not automatically, through the dogged repetition of an externally agreed algorithm, but in a "fresh and free" manner, allowing the ideas from the past to work with their own energy and inherent vitality upon the problems, assumptions and preoccupations of the present.

Jude the Obscure, however, has at its heart the fear that free thought is no longer enough, and that nothing has yet emerged to stand in its place. Jude lacks Arnold's degree of confidence. The best he can hope for is "a spot in which, without fear of farmers, or hindrance, or ridicule, he could watch and wait". It is as if help is out of reach somewhere

⁴³⁹ *Culture and Anarchy*, p.6.

in the future, and the best that anyone can do is to stay still and hold on, waiting for things to change. Jude does not follow any set of "stock notions", "staunchly and mechanically", but neither does he achieve any secure faith in "fresh and free thought". His experiences serve only to destroy his reliance upon one belief after another, so that, towards the end of the novel and of his life, Jude tells the crowd in Christminster:

"Eight or nine years ago when I came here first, I had a neat stock of fixed opinions, but they dropped away one by one; and the further I get the less sure I am. I doubt if I have anything more for my present rule of life than following inclinations which do me and nobody else any harm, and actually give pleasure to those I love best.... I perceive there is something wrong somewhere in our social formulas: what it is can only be discovered by men or women with greater insight than mine, - if, indeed, they ever discover it - at least in our time. For who knoweth what is good for man in this life? - and who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?"

"Hear, hear", said the populace.

"Well preached!" said Tinker Taylor.

440

Despite his loss of "fixed opinions", Jude still retains his old habit of quoting from the Bible. He has never lost his awareness of his desperate need for a language on that scale; "culture" is simply not big enough. Like Arnold, Jude - and Hardy - recognises that there is something wrong with the society in which he lives, but he is unable to recommend any "great help out of our present difficulties". Arnold's optimism is made to appear glib in the light of this intense, agonised sense that nothing seems to be big enough; that the words which ought to give life meaning have lost their ability to do so; that man's need is so much greater than his power, at least as far as Jude can see, to help himself. As Tinker Taylor's

⁴⁴⁰ *Jude*, p.436.

cry of "Well preached!" and the crowd's "Hear, hear" bear witness, Jude's style of address remains firmly within the time-honoured traditions of oratory, and in particular, of preaching. The content of his speech may be uncertainty and the loss of contact with anything outside personal "inclinations" and emotions, but the speech itself communicates clearly and straightforwardly to ordinary, uneducated people, and carries a considerable weight of conviction. Jude is still clinging doggedly onto that which, although it appears absurdly out of place in the spiritual emptiness of the world in which he lives, he sees as the only possible means of trying to express the vastness of his need.

This same problem - the apparently unbridgeable gulf between man's insignificance in the world and his sense that there ought to be much, much more to life - is expressed in the poem which the fictional editor of Mark Rutherford's *Autobiography and Deliverance*, Reuben Shapcott, offers as a preface to the *Autobiography*. Like Job after he has heard God speak, the speaker in the poem is acutely aware of his own smallness in relation to the universe which surrounds him:

This is the night when I must die,
And great Orion walketh high
In silent glory overhead:
He'll set just after I am dead.

A week this night, I'm in my grave:
Orion walketh o'er the wave:
Down in the dark damp earth I lie,
While he doth march in majesty....

Thus, moaning at the break of day,
A man upon his death bed lay;
A moment more and all was still;
The Morning Star came o'er the hill.

But when the dawn lay on his face,
It kindled an immortal grace;
As if in death that Life were shown
Which lives not in the great alone.

Orion sank down in the west
Just as he sank into his rest;
I closed in solitude his eyes,
And watched him till the sun's uprise.

441

The poem, like the *Autobiography* and *Deliverance* as a whole, presents, in effect, two views of a man dwelling always in the shadow of his own death. On the one hand, the man bemoans his own insignificance in the face of a universe which is utterly indifferent to his fate; on the other hand, an onlooker - Reuben Shapcott, perhaps, or the reader whom he represents - sees in the dying man and in his agonised relation to powers infinitely greater than himself an "immortal grace", a real and permanent value, representative, perhaps, of some great hope for humanity as a whole.

In the first two stanzas, the man emphasises the entirely negative and final nature of his own death as he understands it. He uses only the brutally direct words "die" and "dead" to refer to that which he is soon to undergo. And there is no hint of any hope for the future beyond death; the man will be "in [his] grave," buried "in the dark damp earth" within the short, easily imaginable time of a week. Physical decay and the loss of all contact with life and light is all that he has to expect. "Great Orion" offers no consolation, but on the contrary adds a bitter counterpoint to the man's despairingly matter of fact pronouncements of his own imminent end. There is little, if any, sense of the stars as "the

⁴⁴¹ *Autobiography*, pp.ix,xi.

work of thy fingers".⁴⁴² The poem's first rhyme - "die" and "high" immediately brings to the reader's attention the vast empty space between the "great" expanses of the universe and the tiny, earthly nature of man, a creature of dust and ashes, destined to lie low beneath the ground while the planets move unthinkable distances above it. "Overhead" and "dead" have a similar effect, with the word "overhead" in particular suggesting that even man's pinnacle of height and glory - his "head" - is, like the rest of him, mortal, and lies far below the stars. By saying that Orion will set "just after" his death, the man implies that he is out of step with the rhythms of the skies, having only an arbitrary relationship with them, so that he will, in his death, just miss coinciding with Orion's setting, just as, all his life, he has just missed everything which might have afforded him some lasting significance.

The onlooker's view, however, in the final three stanzas of the poem, is strikingly different. Death is no longer a blank ending, without hope, but is instead described in terms of stillness and of "rest", and there are strong suggestions of a greater "Life" which is "known" only "in death". The heavens are no longer an ironical commentary upon the dying man's worthlessness; instead, the "Morning Star", the "dawn" and even "Orion" all seem to bear witness that there is something in the universe which is eternally "mindful of" each individual. Instead of being divorced from the movements of the heavenly bodies, the man's death is now seen as being perfectly in tune with them; just as "all was still", so does the "Morning Star", symbol of a new day and thus a new life, symbol of Christ Himself,⁴⁴³ rise over the hill. And Orion sinks "just as" the man himself sinks "into his rest". It is significant that the same verb, "sank", is used of both man and star, thus indicating their harmony with one another - almost their shared nature. This world, it appears, is "the great alone", and the onlooker finds himself, still on this side of death, "in solitude" as he quietly closes the dead man's eyes. Since throughout the poem up until this point the dying man

⁴⁴² cf above p.220.

⁴⁴³ cf *Revelation* 22 v.16.

has been bewailing his solitary, unloved life, empty of real friendships, so that the indifference of the planets is to be expected as the natural extension of his earthly experience, this hint that real "Life", "lives not in the great alone" suggests that the man's death may even mean that he can at last make contact with all that he has longed for but been denied in his mortal life. It is the devotion of the onlooker who sits and watches the dead man "till the sun's uprise" which enables the "immortal grace" which appears when the light of dawn falls upon the man's fact to be seen. Watching - even watching a man without hope - the poem suggests, is, like reading, an activity of far greater worth than may at first appear. Perhaps this is why Jude's great wish is that he might "watch and wait".⁴⁴⁴

The question whether a man - whether Mark Rutherford himself - is big or small, of eternal value or utterly insignificant, is central to the reader's experience of Mark Rutherford's *Autobiography* and *Deliverance*, and also, although perhaps to a lesser extent, to his or her experience of *Jude the Obscure*. "Deliverance", as the poem about the dying man indicates, is brought about, not by the individual consciousness, but by the agency of an external onlooker, and Mark Rutherford's "Deliverance" is not something which he achieves, nor even, primarily, something which he experiences, but is brought about when, quite outside his own powers or desires, value is assigned to him by another. In the emphasis it places upon the lost individual's total inability to contribute in any way to his own deliverance and his entire dependence upon the undeserved grace bestowed by something or someone utterly beyond his control, this salvation bears a curious resemblance to the Calvinism which Rutherford was taught as a child. Salvation lies not in self-knowledge, but in being known by God:

There is no wrong in a man turning and looking upon himself - only there is danger. ... The effect is that self gets into what ought to be the most genuine experience of life, makes the most perfect imitation of it, and transforms the greatest opportunities for recovery into the basest ministry to pride. The true experience, on the other hand, is a touching lesson in

⁴⁴⁴ cf above p.237.

human helplessness; teaching how God has come to man's relief at every turn of his life, and how the same Hand which provides his pardon has actually to draw him to the place of penitence. It is God looking into the sinner's face that has introduced a Christian element into human sorrow.

445

At theological college, the young Rutherford is taught that:

... mankind was absolutely in God's power. He was our maker, and we had no legal claim whatever to any consideration from Him.

446

And, in a sense, Rutherford believes this for the whole of his life, for, towards the close of the *Deliverance*, he comments as follows upon his wife's love for him, to which, he feels, he has "no legal claim whatever":

I cannot write poetry, but if I could, no theme would tempt me like that of love to such a person as I was - not love as I say again to the hero, but love to the Helot. Over and over again, when I have thought about it, I have felt my poor heart swell with a kind of uncontrollable fervour. ... The love of woman to man [is] a revelation of the relationship in which God stands to him - of what ought to be, in fact. In the love of a woman to the man who is of no account God has provided us with a true testimony of what is in His own heart. I often felt this when looking at myself and at Ellen. "What is there in me?" I have asked; "is she not the victim of some self-created deception?" and I was wretched till I considered that in her I saw the Divine Nature itself, and that her passion was a stream straight from the Highest.

⁴⁴⁵ Drummond, pp.206-7.

⁴⁴⁶ *Autobiography*, p.18.

Rutherford displays a curious lack of faith in the value of human personality, for not only does he dismiss the idea that anything in himself could be the source of his wife's love, but he is equally unable to accept that his wife's own desire or need to love him could be a valid basis for happiness. If Ellen were, of herself, to love a husband who is "of no account" - for Rutherford sees his own worthlessness not merely as subjective, but as an objective reality - then she would be "the victim of some self-created deception", and Rutherford, contemplating this possibility, is "wretched". An ordinary, human acceptance of and willing blindness to weakness and imperfection are worse than insufficient for Rutherford, and he rejects it as a feeble running from the truth. To be of any value at all, his wife's love must be miraculous, a Divine revelation - and then it becomes of immense value. Rutherford cannot accept the mediocre: either an experience must be of eternal significance or it is completely meaningless. As a result, Rutherford seems to display a disturbing lack of interest in his wife as an individual; her love for him is universalised, divorced from her personality. It is "love to such a person as I was"; "love to the Helot"; "the love of woman to man"; "a revelation" of God's love; "a true testimony" of God's heart; "the Divine Nature itself"; and "a stream straight from the Highest". The focus is placed repeatedly upon Rutherford as the unworthy recipient of love, and upon God as the source of all that is revealed and given in this love. Ellen herself seems little more than a vehicle, a symbol representing a reality infinitely greater than herself.

One feels that Rutherford really wants to write a poem like George Herbert's "Love (III)":

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
 Guiltie of dust and sinne.
 But quick-eye'd Love, observing me grow slack

⁴⁴⁷ *Deliverance*, pp.137-8.

From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
If I lack'd any thing.

A guest, I answer'd, worthy to be here:
Love said, You shall be he.
I the unkinde, ungratefull? Ah my deare,
I cannot look on thee.
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
Who made the eyes but I?

448

"Love" here requires no explanation, no other name, no embodiment; it is "the Divine Nature itself" and "a stream straight from the Highest" without the need for any human mediator to break the direct intimacy between pure, perfect "Love" and the beloved. This is "what ought to be" - "I the unkinde, ungratefull" receiving the love which transforms the sinner into "A guest ... worthy to be here". This is the miracle, the power which transcends all human limitations by making the "unkinde" not only "welcome" but "worthy"; by giving "recovery of sight to the blind",⁴⁴⁹ in granting vision to that which "cannot look on" the truly beautiful. "Who made the eyes but I?" brilliantly encapsulates Love's assimilation of the beloved to itself, while still allowing "eyes" to remain separate from "I", able to gaze upon it, having reached the point at which "I shall know even as also I am known".⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁸ George Herbert, "Love (III)", *The English Poems of George Herbert*, edited by C.A.Patrides (London, 1974), p.192.

⁴⁴⁹ *Luke 4 v.18.*

⁴⁵⁰ *I Corinthians 13 v.12.*

"Love", as the transcendent Creator, can make not only acceptable but intimately close to itself that which is, by its very nature, opposed to "Love" - the "I"s of egotism, sin and fear.

Now this is a profoundly religious, Christian "Love" which Herbert is describing; it lies far beyond the scope of humanism, which accepts another person in spite of his or her failings, on the basis of the compassionate recognition of the other person's similarity to oneself. George Eliot's Dorothea seeks to conduct her relationships with others precisely on this basis:

She was no longer struggling against the perception of facts, but adjusting herself to their clearest perception; and now when she looked steadily at her husband's failure, still more at his possible consciousness of failure, she seemed to be looking along the one track where duty became tenderness.

451

For George Eliot, "tenderness" and the ability to find some degree of love for others in difficult situations is inextricably bound up with the "clearest perception" of "facts". If one looks "steadily" at "failure", one will, Eliot suggests, discover a means positively of coping with it. But for Rutherford - and for Hardy - this is not enough. Rutherford wants George Herbert's faith in "Love's" complete "welcome" of the unworthy self as "worthy to be here"; he wants the Christian miracle under the power of which love is not "some self-created deception", but "what ought to be". And in his "Deliverance", in Ellen's love for him and all that he understands this to mean, Mark Rutherford finally finds joy in the sense of a salvation which is, in its essential character, not merely the fruit of human sympathy, but an encounter with the transcendent, deeply religious "Love" which George Herbert, as a seventeenth century Christian believer, knew so well.

⁴⁵¹ *Middlemarch*, p.401.

Jude, on the other hand, seems to find very little "Deliverance". He dies as, in many ways, he has lived - alone, with words from the book of *Job* on his lips:

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.

While he remained, his face changing, shouts and hurrahs came from somewhere in the direction of the river.

"Ah - yes! The Remembrance games", he murmured. "And I here. And Sue defiled!"

The hurrahs were repeated, drowning the faint organ notes. Jude's face changed more: he whispered slowly, his parched lips scarcely moving:

"Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived."

("Hurrah!")

"Let that day be darkness; let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it. Lo, let that night be solitary, let no joyful voice come therein."

("Hurrah!")

"Why died I not from the womb? Why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly?... For now should I have lain still and been quiet. I should have slept: then had I been at rest!"

Jude speaks in two languages here: first he uses the confused, fragmentary diction of a sick and dying man, uttering broken phrases into the unlistening silence of a deserted room. This is, perhaps, his very last attempt to achieve something, his final struggle with the world, pleading helplessly for something he desperately needs, but which he will not be given. The blank, sparse phrase, "no water came" recalls the similar comment made by the narrator at the outset of Jude's attempts to achieve something, when he is in need of someone to come and help and encourage him in learning Latin and Greek: "but nobody did come, because nobody does".⁴⁵³ Nothing has changed for Jude; he remains alone, regardless of the extremity of his need. There is no compassion for him anywhere. And, under the despair of this endlessly repeated realisation, he is finally sinking into inarticulacy, unable any longer to frame a coherent sentence. His language, like his body, like all his hope, seems to be falling apart.

But then Jude hears the sound of a college organ, followed by the shouts and cheers of the undergraduates at the Remembrance games, and the bitterness and hopeless irony of his situation - "And I here. And Sue defiled" - is finally brought home to him. Arabella has gone to take part in the festivities; she seems in every way far less worthy than Jude to share in the celebrations of Christminster, but it is precisely because such participation does not mean to her what it would mean to Jude that she can share in it and enjoy it, whereas Jude cannot. Jude remains, as always, with a language which is, and yet is not, the language of Christminster. And, for the first time, the tables are, in a sense, turned, for these words from the book of *Job* seem to have nothing to do with Christminster and everything to do with Jude. The sons of Christminster cannot understand *Job* - and perhaps cannot understand Christ, despite the name of their city - for they have never known what it is to

⁴⁵² *Jude*, pp.530-531 (omitting the misprint in this edition - p.531, ll.11-13.).

⁴⁵³ *Jude*, p.70.

be despised and rejected, mocked to such an extent that the cry breaks out: "Let the day perish wherein I was born!" In his defeat, Jude is at last mouthing words which are not blasphemous or pretentious on his lips, but which belong to him far more than to any priest or scholar depicted in the novel. The cry of despair is both authentic and Biblical, both deeply personal, and expressed in a historic, poetic language - the language of "a Patriarch dear to God, and honoured in all the churches".⁴⁵⁴ In his full, terrible realisation of the wish that he had never been born, and having lost his Christian faith, Jude at last makes a personal contact with that which he has been pursuing all his life, for the external, universal language of the Church and of the past has become his own. It is too late, perhaps, but it has happened. And so the cheers of the undergraduates are both ironic and celebratory, for in the very lowest depths of his misery, Jude has finally - although not in the way he had hoped, and not in a way that is able to bring him any happiness or even any sort of salvation - achieved his dream.

The ending of *Jude* could not exactly be said to offer any sort of hope, but there is, at least, a painful and bitter fulfilment. And there is, perhaps, some consolation here, if only in the completion of a pattern, just as there is in the quotation from *Job* in the service for the Burial of the Dead in the *Prayer Book*:

Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He cometh up, and is cut down, like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth long in one stay.

455

⁴⁵⁴ cf above p.214.

⁴⁵⁵ *The Book of Common Prayer*, (1662), "The Order for the Burial of the Dead".

The power of these words - the power of their archaic, endlessly repeated form - lies in the discovery made available to each and every individual facing the reality of death that this is a universal experience. There is no glimmer of a hope here, no hint of a resurrection, and, because the focus is thus held so strongly upon the experience of every human being, the impact is profoundly "solid and real".⁴⁵⁶ In making the language of the past, of orthodoxy, of the Church and the Bible one's own, one discovers that one's moments of deepest pain and most terrible aloneness are also the moments in which one comes closest both to the rest of humanity and to one's religious heritage - even, perhaps, to God. And there is surely some "revelation", something "precious"⁴⁵⁶ to be found here.

⁴⁵⁶ cf above p.234.

Chapter Five - Sin in Social and Historical

Context

I intend in this chapter to look at the concept of sin as presented in a number of Victorian novels, placing particular emphasis on the relation between the eternal significance of wrongdoing and its social and historical consequences within the lives of individual human beings. For the natural province of the realist novel is the latter area of enquiry, yet any text which to some degree acknowledges the idea of sin as an offence against a transcendent moral order must inevitably grapple with problems of considerable complexity in the attempt fully to portray both the causes and the results of sin. Sin specifically is that conduct which erects a barrier between man and God, but religious traditions frequently seek to describe it in terms of rigid codes of behaviour, such as the seven deadly sins, or the ten commandments. Jesus Himself attacked the Jewish religious leaders of His day for their failure to perceive and obey the spirit behind the laws they so zealously taught, as well as the laws themselves.⁴⁵⁷ The humanist ethic of the Victorian novel goes even further in this direction, stressing the need for free self-expression and natural development to such an extent that a fixed and rigid analysis of human behaviour itself becomes the offence. In Mrs Gaskell's *Cousin Phillis* (1863-4), for example, where traditional evaluations might have laid the responsibility for what goes wrong in the Holman family on Paul, the narrator's, deception, or on Phillis's tacit disobedience to her parents, the *nouvelle* itself

⁴⁵⁷ cf eg *Matthew* 23.

works through to a conclusion that might well be surprising to the orthodoxly Christian reader.

Phillis, recovering slowly from a "brain fever", expresses her desire to leave, for a month or two, her beloved home and caring parents:

She blushed a little as she faltered out her wish for change of thought and scene. "Only for a short time, Paul. Then - we will go back to the peace of the old days. I know we shall; I can, and I will!"

458

Several aspects of Phillis's "wish" seem to run disturbingly counter to the initial impressions of confidence and recovery evoked by her words. Her blushing and faltering are surely symptomatic of guilt at leaving her parental home - the same guilt as caused Phillis's collapse when her father reproached her for wishing to "[leave] your father and your mother, and [go] far away with this stranger, wandering over the world".⁴⁵⁹ The words, "only for a short time" become in this light a nervous apology for the need to go away at all, and this need is expressed only to Paul, a member of Phillis's own generation.

Paul and Phillis to some extent share the same problems as the children of "Independents" whose personal "independence" is threatened by the powerful convictions of their parents. Phillis first suggests that one solution to their difficulties would be wholly to identify themselves with the values of former generations - to find, perhaps, the self through its deliberate loss. But Paul is in many ways unlike Phillis. His father is a mechanic and inventor, actively committed to new things, whereas Phillis's father is a farmer, engaged in

⁴⁵⁸ Elizabeth Gaskell, *Cranford/Cousin Phillis* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1976), p.317.

⁴⁵⁹ *Cousin Phillis*, p.309.

the oldest and most traditional form of secular work. Paul works in connection with the railways, the very symbol of the modern age, and he sees the religion of his fathers as outmoded:

On Sundays I went twice to chapel, up a dark narrow entry, to hear droning hymns, and long prayers, and a still longer sermon, preached to a small congregation, of which I was, by nearly a score of years, the youngest member.

460

The chapel is for old people; Paul only attends it because of the influence of his parents. His impression is of a lifeless and decaying corpse of belief, entombed and enclosed in darkness, droning out its creed in words which lack energy and which seem to contain no vitality to justify their length. Even such a conservative Christian as C.H.Spurgeon was aware of the threat to the nineteenth-century church of an excessive adherence to ritualistic practices long since outdated:

Do you not think that Christian men are apt to be stereotyped in their ways? You must always sing so many verses and no more; you must pray a certain time, and go right round Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, before you close your petitions. Certain people must always do what they have done, even though they fall asleep in the doing of it. This kind of routine forbids enlarged usefulness, prevents our getting at out-of-the-way people, and puts a damper upon all zeal.

461

⁴⁶⁰ *Cousin Phillis*, p.221.

⁴⁶¹ *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 31, p.95.

The twenty year age gap between himself and the rest of the congregation clearly marks Paul as being outside his own time, cut off by the chapel from his own generation, his own progress, his own life. To him, "the peace of the old days" seems already irrevocably to have disappeared. He is amazed, then, to discover that it still persists in honest good health in the Holman household, where religion and everyday life remain intimately interlinked.

Phillis, however, finds it impossible to remain happy and fulfilled within this "peace", but seems rather to be crushed and almost killed by it. In her desire to marry Holdsworth, Phillis attempts to move forwards and to leave her childhood behind, but the attempt proves abortive. This is because Holdsworth is in every respect a product of the new age, the railway age, in which all traditional sense of distance and time is telescoped. He is not interested in moving forwards through time, but seeks rather to be freed from the restraints of time altogether. A nineteenth century theological paradigm for his position is probably found most readily in the ideas of Feuerbach, who:

... had, of course, no interest in the historical element in the story of Christ. ... It is "a complete misunderstanding of religion to trace religious facts back to historical facts". The incarnation is "nothing else than the practical, material manifestation of the human nature of God."

Just as Feuerbach posed "an internal threat to theology" for the Victorians⁴⁶² so Holdsworth endangers the values upon which the Holman family life is founded from within the heart of the family itself.

Phillis's father describes Holdsworth as follows:

⁴⁶² Feuerbach, quoted in Welch, p.176.

"He makes Horace and Virgil living, instead of dead. ... But it is like dram-drinking. I listen to him till I forget my duties, and am carried off my feet. Last Sabbath evening he led us away into talk on profane subjects ill befitting the day."

463

Holdsworth is a conjurer, able to perform magic tricks with time. He can bring dead poets to life, and later he himself disappears half way across the world at a moment's notice. He cannot be trusted to be faithful to Phillis because the concept of waiting has no meaning for him. The regular round of "duty" is no part of his life, any more than is the observance of special days. And it is this carefree, unfettered ability to play games with time which is the source both of his fascination and of the sense of danger he evokes. Time and human beings for him neither progress nor develop in any ordered way, but are wholly unpredictable. His speech is full of "random assertions and exaggerated expressions",⁴⁶⁴ fitting no form, nor ordered according to value, but simply uttered as they occur to him. He is not even a seducer, since he lacks the concentration of effort or purpose to seek any particular goal. He merely scatters his charm around, careless of the effect, with the result that Phillis falls in love with him before he is very much attracted to her, and her love is far more enduring than his.

Phillis's greatest difficulty, however, is not Holdsworth's marriage to another woman, but rather Mr Holman's emotional barriers which trap her within her parental home. Phillis is essentially accused of ingratitude - the charge which threatens to paralyse the personal development of David Copperfield, Jane Eyre, and so many of the orphans of Victorian fiction. But for Phillis the knife cuts far deeper because the home she is seeking to leave is that of her true mother and father, who love her and whom she loves. It is not

⁴⁶³ *Cousin Phillis*, p.266.

⁴⁶⁴ *Cousin Phillis*, p.264.

so much a religious as a natural problem - the age-old conflict between father and potential husband for a young girl's love, similar in many ways to the struggle depicted in Mark Rutherford's short story, "Michael Trevanion", in which a father's love for his son is tested to the limits when the son falls in love with a young woman.⁴⁶⁵ In both stories, the father figure is a deeply religious man, in the Puritan tradition, and it is worth asking if there is any correspondence between these men's attitudes to their children and their faith and hope in God.

Phyllis's fit is finally brought on by her father's accusation that she does not value her home highly enough:

"And yet you would have left us, left your home, left your father and your mother, and gone away with this stranger, wandering over the world."

⁴⁶⁶

Worryingly, Mr Holman's words are strongly reminiscent of a number of Biblical injunctions, to which he would surely adhere. People of faith are described as "strangers and pilgrims on the earth",⁴⁶⁷ and Christ teaches that "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me",⁴⁶⁸ and that:

⁴⁶⁵ cf below p.302.

⁴⁶⁶ *Cousin Phyllis*, p.309.

⁴⁶⁷ *Hebrews* 11 v.13.

⁴⁶⁸ *Matthew* 10 v.37.

"There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting".

469

It is not, of course, the case, as far as one can see, that Phillis's desire to leave home is "for the kingdom of God's sake", but one would then have to go on to ask what sort of theological values she has been taught. It is at least clear that leaving one's parental home should not be, to the Christian, self-evidently a bad thing. The question lies in the extent to which Christians should seek to be pioneers, always moving ahead of their present position, and how far they ought to work for the preservation and contemplation of that which they already in some sense possess. This issue was particularly problematic for the Victorians, for whom neither progress nor conservatism in theology could be straightforwardly what it appeared to be:

During the Victorian period in England, the basic sense was that of living in an age of transition.... Though the traditional forms of thought were breaking down, nothing had emerged in the intellectual world to match the coming of bourgeois industrial society. Everywhere, the revival of traditional Christianity was related to a new sort of awareness of the tenuous situation of Christianity in the modern world. ... Whether the moods of conservatism and revival in the mid-nineteenth century were confident movements to restate the classical truth in the face of merely new forms of the age-old attack of the world upon Christianity, or whether they were themselves functions of doubt and thus a new kind of quest for "certainty" as a deliberate recoil to authority, is a question that naturally arises.

470

⁴⁶⁹ *Luke 18 vv.29-30.*

⁴⁷⁰ *Welch, pp.190-191.*

Holman's home is quite dramatically old fashioned, as are the sterner aspects of his Christianity, such as his dislike of adornments for women, and the language in which he expresses such sentiments is strikingly dated:

"... the women are apt to tarry before coming to me, to put on ribbons and gauds ... Phillis, I am thankful thou dost not care for the vanities of dress!"

471

His language is that of a man accustomed to reading the Authorised Version; it is rooted in the natural historical growth of English culture, and contrasts sharply with the Evangelical jargon of the other ministers. For these much more dogmatic Independents, words express one's adherence to a certain, narrowly defined set of ideas:

Presently I was asked to "engage in prayer", and we all knelt down, Brother Robinson "leading".

472

Paul's quotation marks emphasise the exclusive nature of Brother Robinson's phrases, which belong, not to a national and historic language, but to a limited group of people, all sharing one strict creed. For Holman, this idea of an impersonally correct form of words runs counter to the higher ideal of individual integrity, and when asked by the other ministers to express resignation to Phillis's fate, he replies:

⁴⁷¹ *Cousin Phillis*, p.245.

⁴⁷² *Cousin Phillis*, p.312.

"Brethren, God will strengthen me when the time comes, when such resignation as you speak of is needed. Till then I cannot feel it; and what I do not feel I will not express; using words as if they were a charm."

473

Holman believes, fundamentally, that language should vary with time. If he speaks in the language of the Authorised Version, it is because those words are still true. But he differs completely from the other ministers in his refusal to accept that there is any one form of words that will be right for all occasions. In this, Holman shares the view of Matthew Arnold, who sees "Puritan" rigidity with regard to language, and particularly the language of religion, as containing many dangers:

Nowhere so much as in the writings of St Paul, and in that great apostle's greatest work, the Epistle to the Romans, has Puritanism found what seemed to furnish it with the one thing needful, and to give it canons of truth absolute and final. Now all writings, as has been already said, even the most precious writings and the most fruitful, must inevitably, from the very nature of things, be but contributions to human thought and human development, which extend wider than they do.

474

"When the time comes", then the words Holman is being asked to say will be true; but "until then", their use would be, in his view, mere superstition. He refuses to separate language from life - he sees it as wrong to pray for his animals without also checking to make sure that they have had their mash, for he will not "ask ... a blessing and neglect ...

⁴⁷³ *Cousin Phillis*, p.313.

⁴⁷⁴ Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, edited by Dover Wilson, paperback edition, (Cambridge, 1960), p.51.

the means, which is a mockery."⁴⁷⁵ In this, he is the complete opposite of George Eliot's Mr Bulstrode in *Middlemarch*, who, as I shall demonstrate,⁴⁷⁶ allows his actions to become wholly separated from his religious words, with disastrous results. If the spirit of dogma is that which demands constant assent to a fixed form of words, then Holman is no dogmatist. By the end of the nouvelle, he has changed so far as to break his constant habit of praying aloud with his household, for one night at least, and to give his daughter a set of blue ribbons. This is because he has decided, as a result of a process of experience, that his emotions and Phillis's happiness are of greater value than any fixed doctrinal principles. Because of his constant awareness of the need to connect words with feelings and actions, he is able to grow and develop in response to life's demands.

For Mrs Gaskell, the doctrinally rigid approach to religion fails to take sufficient account of the ways in which people change through time, and this failure leads in turn to a breakdown of sympathy. The problem with the Independents seems to be their preoccupation with unalterable situations:

The Puritan, like every rational type of asceticism tried to enable a man to maintain and act upon his constant motives, especially those which it taught him itself, against the emotions. In this formal psychological sense of the term it tried to make him into a personality.

477

⁴⁷⁵ *Cousin Phillis*, p.239.

⁴⁷⁶ cf below p.293.

⁴⁷⁷ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Talcott Parsons, second edition, (London, 1976), p.119.

Many Victorians saw this insistence upon the finished product as dangerous, because it encouraged people to think of themselves as completed "personalities" far too soon, thus preventing all possibilities of further growth and development. Arnold, again, is adamant on this point:

Nothing is more striking than to observe in how many ways a limited conception of human nature, the notion of a one thing needful, a one side in us to be made uppermost, the disregard of a full and harmonious development of ourselves, tells injuriously on our thinking and acting.

478

Perhaps part of the reason why Holman is so afraid of his daughter's growing up is that he is afraid of such men as Holdsworth, who, far from holding onto that which is worth keeping, fly to the opposite extreme, replacing the natural processes of growth and development with an anarchic and destructive libertarianism. Life in the railway age seems to have lost all sense of value:

As a people, it is clear we are living too fast. Ours is the rush of railway life. We see nothing by the way. Health, comfort, affections, intellectual culture, reflection, devotion, - they scarcely fill a more important space in our plans, scarcely detain our attention longer, than the trees and churches, the homesteads and meadows, which seem to dance past us as we gaze through the window of a carriage in an "express train". ... We are whirled along from early youth in most cases to the hour of death, with no other pause or break than the weariness of exhausted nature absolutely requires. ... "Can such speed as this be safe?".

⁴⁷⁸ *Culture and Anarchy*, p.151.

And so Holman keeps Phillis in pinafores, as if "unaware of her progress towards womanhood",⁴⁸⁰ in a desperate attempt to protect her from growing up into an age devoid of respect for the past. But in so doing, he inevitably damages her, for by the end of the story she has lost all healthy desire for change and yearns only for "the peace of the old days", having given up on the quest for an ever-increasing awareness of all that is good and worthwhile in the world.

The other Independent ministers cannot console Holman in his grief when Phillis lies ill because their belief in the value of the right words regardless of the occasion renders them hopelessly tactless and insensitive. To his cries of agony, they can only question suspiciously "Is that orthodox?".⁴⁸¹ They bring only impersonal language, sharing no feeling at all of the process through which the sufferer is passing. Because time stands still for them, they have no memories of their own experience through which they might be enabled to understand Holman as a fellow human being:

If we have any power to console the weary, it is the result of our remembrance of what we once suffered - for here lies our power to sympathise.

⁴⁷⁹ Edward Miall, *The British Churches in Relation to the British People* (1849), in *Evangelical and Oxford Movements*, p.100.

⁴⁸⁰ *Cousin Phillis*, p.307.

⁴⁸¹ *Cousin Phillis*, p.313.

⁴⁸² C.H.Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, revised edition, in two volumes, (Edinburgh, 1962), I, p.53.

These words come not from the pen of George Eliot, but from that of C.H.Spurgeon, writing about conviction of sin. Even this most orthodox of Calvinist Victorian Nonconformists, even this "Hebraist",⁴⁸³ acknowledges that the "power to sympathise" comes not from a set form of words, but from personally recalled experience - that without a mature understanding of time, the worth of doctrinal belief is seriously diminished.

* * * * *

In *Cousin Phillis*, the reader is encouraged to view the characters' difficulties not so much as the outcome of deliberate and punishable wrongdoing, but rather as the inevitable sorrows felt when the forces of natural growth are under severe threat. In other novels, however, the primary source of an offence is not so ambiguously handled, and the novelist confronts the idea of sin more directly. The two crucial types of sin formulated in the novel are basically those of hypocrisy, as exemplified by Mr Bulstrode in *Middlemarch*, and the "fallen woman", such as Mrs Gaskell's Ruth. I include some comments relating to other texts, in particular, Mrs Gaskell's short story, "Lizzie Lee" (1855), and Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* in order to present a fuller discussion of the theme of the fallen woman in nineteenth century fiction.

The Victorian novel follows the Gospels in juxtaposing two very different types of sinner. St Luke's account of the immoral woman who weeps over the feet of Jesus and anoints them with precious ointment in the house of a Pharisee powerfully encapsulates

⁴⁸³ cf *Culture and Anarchy*, pp.20,168.

this contrast.⁴⁸⁴ The Pharisee is shocked by Jesus's acceptance of the woman's ministrations, concluding that Jesus cannot be a prophet since, had He known that the woman is "a sinner", He would never have allowed her to touch Him. In reply to this, Jesus tells a short parable, describing two debtors, one owing a very large, and the other a small sum, to their creditor. Both are "forgiven" their debt, and Jesus then asks the Pharisee which of them will love the creditor most. Receiving the reply: "he, to whom he forgave most", Jesus goes on to apply the lesson:

And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon [the Pharisee], Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet, but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss; but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint; but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.

485

Christ's teaching contains an inherent circularity, for forgiveness both precedes and follows love. The sinful woman is forgiven much "for she loved much", while, in the Pharisee's case, he "loveth little" because "little is forgiven". The woman's forgiveness is there before she acts, as well as being the reward for her actions. The failure to respond to God's forgiving love is itself a sin, so that the Pharisee is charged with the coldness and inadequacy of his welcome, and has the woman whom he defines as "a sinner" held up to him as an example. Jesus does not use the word "sin" in relation to the Pharisee's behaviour, for the very essence of this man's moral condition is that it is unnamed, and that it expresses itself through negations and failures to act. Being called "a sinner" is the beginning of the

⁴⁸⁴ cf *Luke 7 vv.36-50.*

⁴⁸⁵ *Luke 7 vv.44-47.*

woman's salvation, for it opens up a much larger scale of experience to her, enabling her to respond passionately to a huge and desperate sense of need. Christian's adventures in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* begin when, in his awareness of his sin, he enters onto a far higher level of emotional experience than anything known to his fellow inhabitants of the City of Destruction:

At this his Relations were sore amazed; not for that they believed, that what he said to them was true, but because they thought, that some frenzy distemper had got into his head: therefore, it drawing towards night, and they hoping that sleep might settle his brains, with all hast they got him to bed; but the night was as troublesome to him as the day: wherefore instead of sleeping, he spent it in sighs and tears.

486

It is only by giving rein to such emotion, instead of stifling it in sleep or labelling it disease, that progress can be made. The Pharisee, considering himself to be virtually self-sufficient, seeks merely to maintain his own control over his home and life, excluding "sinners" from his house and refusing to indulge in any embarrassing extravagances of emotion.

Now the interest of such writers as Mrs Gaskell and George Eliot in relation to the concept of sin focuses upon precisely these two types of character: the immoral, "fallen" woman, a stain upon society, and the eminently respectable but inwardly mean and cold-hearted man of high public standing. Both novelists also display an interest in figures who stand, to some degree, in the place of Christ, offering free forgiveness and love to outcast sinners. Mr Benson in *Ruth* is such a figure. On her first encounter with him, Ruth is initially struck by his physical deformity and ugliness, and then by a related spiritual quality:

⁴⁸⁶ *Pilgrim's Progress*, pp.9-10.

She looked up and saw a man, who was apparently long past middle life, and of the stature of a dwarf; a second glance accounted for the low height of the speaker, for then she saw he was deformed. ... When they had passed out of the wood into the pastureland beyond, Ruth once more turned to mark him. She was struck afresh with the mild beauty of the face, though there was something in the countenance which told of the body's deformity, something more and beyond the pallor of habitual ill-health, something of a quick spiritual light in the deep-set eyes, a sensibility about the mouth; but altogether, though a peculiar, it was a most attractive face.

487

The word "dwarf" immediately suggests mysterious, other-worldly qualities in this figure who appears so suddenly and unexpectedly before Ruth on her solitary walk in the wild countryside of Wales. He could almost be a druid or sprite, belonging more to the Welsh landscape than to any human world, and his appearance recalls tales in which aged and deformed creatures request a compassionate response of some sort from a character, thus testing his or her inward moral quality.⁴⁸⁸ There is also perhaps some hint of a link between Mr Benson's dwarf-like body and the idea of illegitimate children as being in some way sub- or extra-human, changelings, belonging to another world, being placed outside human society by the circumstances of their birth. Pearl, in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, for example, puzzles her mother endlessly, for:

Hester could not help questioning ... whether Pearl was a human child. She seemed rather an airy sprite, which, after playing its fantastic sports for a little while upon the cottage-floor, would flit away with a mocking smile. ... Pearl was a born outcast of the infantile world. An imp of evil, emblem and product of sin, she had no right among christened infants.

⁴⁸⁷ Mrs Gaskell, *The Works of Mrs Gaskell*, 8 vols., (London, 1906), vol. III, "Ruth, and other tales etc.", pp.66-7.

⁴⁸⁸ cf eg Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale*.

Ruth's child, Leonard, is, by contrast, strikingly ordinary, and it seems that, to some degree, he is redeemed by Mr Benson's vicarious acceptance of the life of an outcast.

Ruth's acceptance of his protection on her walk⁴⁹⁰ is contrasted with her earlier yielding of herself into the hands of Mr Bellingham, who has also promised her protection,⁴⁹¹ but whose most striking attributes are his youth, good looks, and physical vigour.⁴⁹² It is interesting that both Mr Benson and Mr Bellingham rescue someone from drowning early in the novel, but in entirely different ways. Mr Bellingham saves an over-confident child by his personal force, which is superior even to that of nature:

... louder and sharper than the sullen roar of the stream that was ceaselessly and unrelentingly flowing on, came the splash of a horse galloping through the water in which [Ruth] was standing. Past her like lightning - down in the stream, swimming along with the current - a stooping rider - an outstretched arm - a little life redeemed, and a child saved to those who loved it.

493

⁴⁸⁹ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, Penguin American Library edition (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1983), pp.116-7.

⁴⁹⁰ cf *Ruth*, p.67.

⁴⁹¹ cf *Ruth*, pp.56-7.

⁴⁹² cf *Ruth*, pp.15, 21-22.

⁴⁹³ *Ruth*, pp.21-2.

It is not until all this activity is over that Ruth recognises Mr Bellingham. Her impression is of immense power - "like lightning". Mr Bellingham and his galloping horse become one sweeping rush of redeeming might, triumphantly defeating the dogged, ceaseless movement of the river by an almost godlike intervention. The words, "life redeemed", "saved", and perhaps even "outstretched ... arm" all have Judaeo-Christian overtones. Moses tells the Israelites, for example, that "the LORD brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm".⁴⁹⁴ Divine might and Divine compassion seem to meet in Mr Bellingham's rescue.

Mr Benson, on the other hand, saves Ruth from drowning herself in despair not by strength, but by weakness. He is a man of prayer - a man deeply dependent upon others and upon God - and his first response when he finds Ruth in the depths of her misery after Mr Bellingham has left her is to pray: "Oh, my God! for Christ's sake, pity her!".⁴⁹⁵ By invoking the name of Christ and asking God to "pity" Ruth, Mr Benson is already displaying his reliance upon the Divine weakness and sacrifice which is expressed in the person of Christ, whom Mr Benson himself, in his deformity and suffering, so closely resembles:

... he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; ...

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

496

⁴⁹⁴ *Deuteronomy* 26 v.8.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ruth*, p.95.

⁴⁹⁶ *Isaiah* 53 vv.2,3,5.

Mr Bellingham saves a child who does not want to die; Ruth, when Mr Benson finds her, wishes to end her own life, and no force would ultimately be able to prevent her in this. It is not merely her body which needs to be rescued, but her heart also. Mr Benson pursues Ruth towards the river, perceiving her intention:

He could not move as quickly as most men, but he put forth his utmost speed. He followed across the road, onto the rocky common; but, as he went along, with his uncertain gait, in the dusk gloaming, he stumbled, and fell over some sharp projecting stone. The acute pain which shot up his back forced a short cry from him. ... Ruth, speeding on in her despair, heard the sharp utterance, and stopped short. It did what no remonstrance could have done; it called her out of herself. ... In the old days she could never bear to hear or see bodily suffering in any of God's meanest creatures, without trying to succour them; and now, in her rush to the awful death of the suicide, she stayed her wild steps, and turned to find from whom that sharp sound of anguish had issued.

497

"When I am weak, then am I strong".⁴⁹⁸ The salvation of this "fallen woman" is begun by something which looks very much like failure. Mr Benson did not intend to arouse Ruth's sympathy in this way; he wanted to catch up with her, and then, presumably, to persuade her, either by force or by remonstrance, not to throw herself into the river. After his fall, he lies on the stones, "with an agony in his mind far keener than any bodily pain"⁴⁹⁷ because he thinks that "by his unfortunate fall, he [has] lost all chance of saving [Ruth]".⁴⁹⁷ It is significant that a physically "fallen" man is enabled to reach the heart of a metaphorically "fallen" woman. "Unfortunate fall" recalls the theological concept of the fortunate fall, the *felix culpa*, reminding the reader that sin and salvation are far more closely interconnected than they may often appear. Mr Benson's "short cry" on falling re-

⁴⁹⁷ *Ruth*, p.96.

⁴⁹⁸ 2 *Corinthians* 12 v.10.

aches Ruth in the form of "a high-pitched sound, like the voice of pain".⁴⁹⁷ It is disembodied and de-humanised, translated into an almost abstract and universal cry of suffering. And Ruth can respond to it because she knows what suffering is through intense personal experience, and is now enabled to move beyond the limitations of her own pain, into the human and universal misery, back into that sympathy with pain which, "in the old days" was habitual.

It would be misleading, however, to offer the idea of Mr Benson's redemptive and vicariously suffering role as the key to a complete reading of *Ruth*. The manner in which the novel deals with sin is extremely complex, for Ruth is a sinner in one sense, in that she gives birth to a child conceived outside marriage, and yet she is presented by the novelist as being entirely pure and innocent in relation to her seduction by Mr Bellingham. In addition, while Ruth and her child seem to escape or transcend many of the possible consequences of her sin, she is still portrayed, throughout the novel, as being engaged in a lifelong penance, expiating her guilt through her own sorrows. Yet Mr Benson, while he is deformed, and, at times, undergoes much pain, both physical and mental, on Ruth's account, seems nevertheless for much of his life to be cheerful and content. There is also the role of Mr Bradshaw to be considered, for he introduces, both into the novel and into Ruth's life the other, Pharisaical, form of sin, thus further complicating the themes of guilt, forgiveness and expiation which run through the novel.

Despite St Paul's assertion that, "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God",⁴⁹⁹ the term "sinner" is frequently used in the Victorian novel to denote a special condition, an impersonal role whose power transcends all the individual strengths and weaknesses, failings and virtues, hopes and fears of the man or woman - usually woman - to whom the term is applied. So Hardy's Tess, pleading with the Vicar to give her baby a

⁴⁹⁹ *Romans* 3 v.23.

Christian burial, or at least to say that it will be "just the same" to the child if he is buried without the blessing of the Church, appeals to him by saying:

"Don't for God's sake speak as saint to sinner, but as you yourself to me myself - poor me!"

500

Hardy calls Tess, "A Pure Woman", and this title seems to challenge and parody the idea that a woman can be summed up by one adjective of an absolute moral nature - either "sinful" or "fallen", or "pure" - since Tess is, above all, "me myself", an individual who transcends all classification. The title also, however, conveys the idea of Tess as "pure woman", whole and unadulterated in her essential nature, all her sufferings and experiences serving only to confirm and strengthen that which is "Tess of the D'Urbervilles". Tess is aware, when talking to the Vicar, that the stereotyped labels "saint" and "sinner" evoke stereotyped reactions by discarding the concept of selfhood, of the individual who cries, "poor me!". As "me myself", Tess is both inside and outside her own situation, her own sin, able both to experience it, suffering as a victim, and also to look upon herself and pity herself. The appellation "sinner" implies that the person so named is entirely absorbed within her own sin, unable to evaluate her own actions by means of any thought processes other than sinful ones, and incapable of being anything other than a sinner.

Tess faces the full horror of this being labelled as a "sinner" and therefore ceasing to be viewed as "me myself" when Angel Clare rejects her. She expects him to forgive her for what took place with Alec D'Urberville, but Angel tells her:

"O Tess, forgiveness does not apply to the case! You were one person; now you are another.

My God - how can forgiveness meet such a grotesque - prestidigitation as that!"

⁵⁰⁰ Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Macmillan Students' Hardy edition, (London, 1975), p.160.

Angel's declaration that Tess is "another" person curiously reverses St Paul's description of the Christian believer:

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

Sin, in Angel Clare's eyes, has achieved in Tess that which Christian redemption claims to achieve for those who adhere to his father's creed. By using a word that Tess cannot possibly understand - "prestidigitation" - Angel declares the gulf that lies between them - between his education and her simplicity, his acquaintance with a world of abstract thought and metaphysics, which can apply a whole range of different meanings to the same object, and Tess's simple, direct self-awareness. Tess's transformation may be "grotesque", but, while "prestidigitation" expresses Angel's view of the change as some sort of conjuring trick, some gross aberration from the natural order, as if Tess were some kind of mutant, yet there is also a stark dignity about the simple declaration: "You were one person; now you are another". What has happened is momentous and mysterious; an entirely new being has entered the bodily form of Angel's bride. And, to Angel, the situation has nothing whatsoever to do with simple, individual morality - "forgiveness does not apply to the case!". For whom could Angel forgive? - the former Tess, who was "a fresh and virginal daughter of Nature",⁵⁰³ or the present one, who is a "sinner"? This sense that forgiveness may not, in itself, be enough, is also found in the writings of Edward Pusey, who, while

⁵⁰¹ *Tess*, p.327.

⁵⁰² *2 Corinthians* 5 v.17.

⁵⁰³ *Tess*, p.192.

allowing that genuine penitence is the only necessary prerequisite for God's pardon, sees the damage done by sin to the individual as something which cannot be altered by mere forgiveness:

David was forgiven. ... And yet, thus pardoned in the name of God, he still prays for himself as injured by his sin, his grace impaired, the genuine presence of God's Holy Spirit diminished, the stain of sin in part remaining, the "free, noble, willing, generous, princely" spirit, wherein he had, as "the man after God's own heart", done devoted service to God, dimmed.

504

Sin, it appears, changes people, and more than forgiveness is needed to restore the sinner to his or her former state.

Mrs Gaskell's short story "Lizzie Lee" has as its focus the idea of forgiveness. The opening paragraph of the story ends with the last words of Lizzie's dying father, who says, speaking of his daughter, who has become a "fallen woman", "I forgive her, Anne! May God forgive me!"⁵⁰⁵ This recalls the Lord's Prayer, in which Christians are to pray: "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors",⁵⁰⁶ this position being explained by Christ as follows:

"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

⁵⁰⁴ Edward Bouverie Pusey, *Selections from the writings of Edward Bouverie Pusey, DD*, second edition, (London, 1885), pp.310-311.

⁵⁰⁵ Mrs Gaskell, *Lizzie Lee, The Grey Woman and Other Tales*, with an introduction by Clement Shorter, World's Classics edition, (Oxford, 1913), p.3.

⁵⁰⁶ *Matthew 6 v.12.*

Forgiveness begins with the recognition that one is oneself in need of forgiveness. James Lee, on his deathbed, perceives that he also has "come short of the glory of God", and that there is, in God's eyes, "no difference" between himself and his erring daughter. For Mr Lee can be linked with the hypocritical, Pharisaical character that I am going to examine, exemplified in the novel by such figures as Mr Bulstrode, Mr Bradshaw, and perhaps even the Reverend Mr Dimmesdale in *The Scarlet Letter*, in that, until his dying moments, he seeks to maintain a distinction between his own inner and outer lives, and thus between himself and those whom he would think of as "sinners".

Lizzie's mother, however, never accepts any real basis for separation from her child. She does not deny her daughter's sin, but instead she takes that very sin as a reason for greater love and compassion. She tells her son, Will, with majestic dignity and prophetic power, to act lovingly towards his sister, should she return:

"I am your mother, and I dare to command you, because I know I am in the right and that God is on my side. If He should lead the poor wandering lassie to Susan's door, and she comes back crying and sorrowful, led by that good angel to us once more, thou shalt never say a casting-up word to her about her sin, but be tender and helpful towards one 'who was lost and is found' ... I may be dead and gone, - but all the same, - thou wilt take home the wandering sinner, and heal up her sorrows, and lead her to her Father's house."

Mrs Lee finds a precedent for her attitude towards her daughter in Christ's parable of the Prodigal Son, which she asks her own son to read to her immediately following her hus-

⁵⁰⁷ *Matthew* 6 vv.14,15.

⁵⁰⁸ "Lizzie Lee", pp.26-7.

band's death, before she sets out to seek Lizzie, and from which she quotes here, describing Lizzie as "one 'who was lost and is found'". It is interesting to compare the use of this parable in "Lizzie Lee" with its similarly important role in Mark Rutherford's short story, "Michael Trevanion".⁵⁰⁹

Like George Eliot in *Adam Bede*, Mrs Gaskell here presents a figure who sees a very close relationship between sin and sorrow. Dinah Morris tells Hetty in Eliot's novel:

"While you cling to one sin, and will not part with it, it must drag you down to misery after death, as it has dragged you to misery here in this world, my poor, poor Hetty. It is sin that brings dread and darkness, and despair; there is light and blessedness for us as soon as we cast it off; God enters our soul then, and teaches us, and brings us strength and peace."

510

The sinner is a "poor, poor" person, just as Tess calls herself "poor me",⁵¹¹ to be pitied and wept over, for she lives in "misery", in "dread and darkness and despair". Sin shuts out God, the bringer of "light and blessedness" from the soul, leaving the sinner in the depths of sorrow. This view of sin minimises the idea of guilt and individual responsibility, viewing sin less as an act of the will deserving punishment, than as a disease. Dinah does believe that it is within Hetty's power, aided by God, to "cast off" her sin, and that she "cling[s]" to that which is destroying her, but she still views Hetty very much as a victim, in the grip of a force which "must drag" her into misery. Hetty's failings are nevertheless closely bound up with her weakness and childishness. She cannot face the consequences

⁵⁰⁹ cf below p.315.

⁵¹⁰ George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, Every Age Library edition (London, undated), pp.514-5.

⁵¹¹ cf above p.273.

of giving birth to a baby, because she is little more than a baby herself. Her beauty - the beauty which so attracts both Adam Bede and Arthur Donnithorne - is:

... a beauty like that of kittens, or very small downy ducks making gentle rippling noises with their soft bills, or babies just beginning to toddle and to engage in conscious mischief - a beauty with which you can never be angry, but that you feel ready to crush for inability to comprehend the state of mind into which it throws you.

512

Hetty is like a baby animal - pretty, mischievous, and maddeningly mindless. Her beauty creates a love in men - not women - which itself has in it something childish. There is not a large difference between the unsteady gait of the child "just beginning to toddle", and the lost, aimless "wandering" of Lizzie Lee. Female sin is connected with the idea of uncertain journeying, the result less of deliberate malevolence than of folly, inexperience and ignorance. Lizzie Lee is viewed always from a parental point of view - it is her mother, her "Father" in heaven, and Susan, the substitute mother of her child (it is significant that she is, like Hetty, unable actively to be a mother herself) who pity Lizzie, while her earthly father and her elder brother, who seeks to take the place of the dead Mr Lee, feel some degree of need to cast Lizzie off as a daughter.

Mrs Lee never seriously doubts that Lizzie, when she finds her, will be "crying and sorrowful"⁵¹³ with regard to her sin, and is adamant that she must be accepted with compassion and not judged for what she has done. She takes enormous confidence and authority from her role as mother, telling her strong-minded son:

⁵¹² *Adam Bede*, p.93.

⁵¹³ cf above p.276.

"I am your mother, and I dare to command you, because I know I am in the right and that God is on my side."

513

It is extremely rare for a character in Victorian fiction to speak with such dogmatic force and to make such stupendous claims, and yet to be presented as a good, loving, compassionate figure. Normally, the assertion that "God is on my side" would be made only by those characterised by the most damning arrogance - both Mr Bulstrode and Mr Bradshaw, for example, have leanings in this direction, as I shall demonstrate. Mrs Lee, however, uses this extraordinary claim to enforce not harsh, punitive measures but the most tender acts of forbearance. The language of the Old Testament joins hands with that of the New, as Mrs Lee applies "commands" - "thou shalt never" and "thou wilt" - the language of the Decalogue - to injunctions to treat a "poor" "wandering sinner" as one "who was lost and is found", which is the language of Christ in the gospels.

"Sinner" is a word which seems to be handled significantly differently in the New Testament from its usage in the Old Testament. The Old Testament contains a number of such phrases as: "Go and utterly destroy the sinners"⁵¹⁴; "Let the sinners be consumed out of the earth"⁵¹⁵; "Let not thine heart envy sinners"⁵¹⁶; and "he shall destroy the sinners",⁵¹⁷ (although there are also, of course, Old Testament examples of repentant and

⁵¹⁴ *1 Samuel* 15 v.18.

⁵¹⁵ *Psalms* 104 v.35.

⁵¹⁶ *Proverbs* 23 v.17.

⁵¹⁷ *Isaiah* 13 v.9.

forgiven sinners within the nation of Israel, such as King David himself).⁵¹⁸ The New Testament, however, and in particular the Gospels, presents in general another viewpoint in such comments and utterances as: "joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth"⁵¹⁹; "God be merciful to me a sinner"⁵²⁰; "a friend of publicans and sinners"⁵²¹; "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"⁵²²; and "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners".⁵²³ Old Testament "sinners" are frequently other people, "them", often non-Jews, whom the believer is not to "envy"; in the New Testament, sinners are "we" and "me", and the acknowledgement that one is oneself a sinner opens the door to salvation.

Now in *Ruth*, as in "Lizzie Lee", both these meanings are employed, so that Ruth is on the one hand an outcast, defiled and fit only for destruction, but on the other hand a special object of Divine love, mercy and rejoicing. Speaking of Ruth's child, and seeking to explain to his sister his positive attitude towards Ruth's pregnancy, Mr Benson says:

"I can imagine that if the present occasion be taken rightly, and used well, all that is good in her may be raised to a height unmeasured but by God; while all that is evil and dark may, by His blessing, fade and disappear in the pure light of her child's presence. - Oh, Father! listen to my prayer, that her redemption may date from this time. Help us to speak to her in the loving spirit of thy Holy Son! ... She must strengthen her child to look to God, rather

⁵¹⁸ cf *Psalms* 51.

⁵¹⁹ *Luke* 15 v.4.

⁵²⁰ *Luke* 18 v.13.

⁵²¹ *Matthew* 11 v.19.

⁵²² *Romans* 5 v.8.

⁵²³ *1 Timothy* 1 v.15.

than to man's opinion. It will be the discipline, the penance, she has incurred. She must teach it to be (humanly speaking) self-dependent."

524

The education of her child is to be both Ruth's "penance" and the means of her "redemption". "Penance", with its strong Roman Catholic implications, is scarcely a word which one would expect to find in the mouth of a Dissenting preacher, and Mr Benson appears, on one level at least, to be advocating some sort of salvation by good works and self-punishment for Ruth. The problem lies in the fact that, although God may forgive Ruth immediately and completely so far as her personal responsibility for her relation with Mr Bellingham is concerned yet, nevertheless, Ruth's sinful actions have taken place in history and in society, and nothing can blot out that reality. The child, the physical consequence of Ruth's sin, confirms the ongoing and inescapable truth of that sin within the human world:

History is an undying monument of human sin. The most prominent thing on its pages are the stains - the stains of sin which time has not rubbed out. ... And the stain does not stop with our lives. ... "I am a part," says Tennyson, "of all that I have met." A hundred years hence we must all live again - in thoughts, in tendencies, in influences, perhaps in sins and stains in other lives. The sins of the father shall be visited on the children. The blight on the vicious parent shall be visited on the insane offspring. ... For God Himself has made the law, that the curse must follow the breach; and even He who healeth our diseases may never interfere with the necessary stain of a sinful life.

525

⁵²⁴ *Ruth*, p.120.

⁵²⁵ Henry Drummond, *The Ideal Life and other Unpublished Addresses*, second edition (London, 1898), pp.155,161.

The power of history, it seems, is even in some sense greater than God's power to remedy sin, for God Himself is bound by history.

At the end of Mrs Oliphant's novel, *Hester* (1883), Captain Morgan prophesies that, faced with the treachery of her protege, Edward, Catherine Vernon, the matriarch of the novel, must suffer "that from which neither heaven nor earth can deliver her." Hester is horrified at the idea of such absolute and inescapable sorrow:

"Oh Captain Morgan, do not say so. Cannot Heaven, cannot God, deliver from everything?", cried Hester with a sense of horror.

"Ay, in a way that He uses always at the end - by death. ... How otherwise? ... What is done cannot be undone. If the boy were to be touched with compunction too late and come back, even that would not restore the past."

"Why not?", she said, "why not? We could forgive him." ...

"Forgive him! You speak as if that could change anything. What is your forgiveness? You seem to think it is a thing, not so many words. ... A man wants not forgiveness, but to make up for his sins. ... Forgiveness may save a man's soul, but it does not save his honour or his life."

526

Sin makes a mark upon history which is permanent; the problem with forgiveness is that it operates on a different level from that on which the consequences of the sin are immediately experienced. It is in danger of becoming something of an abstraction - merely "so many words" - existing on a linguistic, spiritual plane which has no connection with the real "thing[s]" which make up "life". And it is in the novel, which deals so powerfully with the day to day experiences of life, that this sense of the unreality of forgiveness - its becoming

⁵²⁶ Mrs Oliphant, *Hester*, Virago edition (London, 1984), p.471.

no more than a metaphor - is most inescapably encountered. This brief interchange in *Hester* could be read as a gloss on *Ruth*, explaining the need for Ruth to undergo "discipline" and "penance" as a means of linking the past with the present and future. The novel is concerned at least as much with Ruth's "honour" and her "life" as with her "soul", and these can begin to be re-established only as Ruth accepts that she can never again be innocent as once she was; forgiveness must change her life as much as - or more than - sin has done, and this sort of forgiveness works not by immediately restoring a sense of self-satisfaction but instead by enabling the sinner to face her own sin and to build a future upon the reality of what she has done.

Ruth's story effectively begins and ends with Ruth in a hotel bedroom with Mr Bellingham - the first time as his mistress, the last as his nurse. And it is only after this final return to what is, in essence, the scene of her sin, still acting out of love for Mr Bellingham, but her sinful love now transmuted into pure, penitent love, that Ruth can die. And death is, according to Mrs Oliphant's Captain Morgan, the "way that He uses always to the end" to "deliver from everything". The sinner, these novels suggest, must always be a sinner, in spite of all forgiveness, all repentance, all sorrow, while she lives in this world, for her innocence lies in "the past", which only death can restore. And death, as I have shown in my examination of *The Heir of Redclyffe*, takes characters outside the realm of the novel altogether. It is on her deathbed that Ruth is finally able to return to the innocence of her own past, her own childhood, but, even as she does so, the novel moves away from its realist base:

There she lay in the attic-room in which her baby had been born, her watch over him kept, her confession to him made; and now she was stretched on the bed on utter helplessness, softly gazing in vacancy with her open, unconscious eyes, from which all the depth of their meaning had fled, and all they told of was of a sweet child-like insanity within. The watchers could not touch her with their sympathy, or come near her in her dim world; so ... they took a poor comfort from the one evident fact that, though lost and gone astray, she was happy and at peace. They had never heard her sing; indeed, the simple art which her mother had taught her, had died, with her early joyousness, at that dear mother's death. But now she

sang continually, very slow and low. She went from one old childish ditty to another without let or pause ... She never looked at anyone with the slightest glimpse of memory or intelligence in her face; no, not even Leonard.

527

Ruth has ceased to be a mother; she has herself become like a newborn child. Her responsibilities to Leonard are all past now - "her watch over him kept, her confession to him made" - all the depths of humiliation involved in confessing her sins to her own child are eternally forgotten now. She has the "utter helplessness" of a very small baby, and has returned to her "early joyousness" before the death of her mother, which left her defenceless and ready to fall prey to Mr Bellingham. Central to this description are the words: "though lost and gone astray, she was happy and at peace". The paradox of sin and forgiveness has finally become a reality for Ruth, for it is only in being "lost", in the sense that she has entered into "a sweet child-like insanity", that she is able to regain her "lost" innocence, "lost" through sin. She is "a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new",⁵²⁸ because she has now "lost and gone astray" from her sin and all its consequences. The Christian believer, according to St Paul, is "dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord", for "he that is dead is freed from sin".⁵²⁹ And, with regard to the whole of her life and experience since her mother's death, Ruth is

⁵²⁷ *Ruth*, pp.443-4.

⁵²⁸ cf above p.274.

⁵²⁹ *Romans* 6 vv.11,7.

dead. She cries out in rapture as she dies: "I see the Light coming",⁵³⁰ and she dies like a saint, embraced by "the true Light, which lighteth every man".⁵³¹

The problem here is the need to present spiritual truth in naturalistic terms - the effect is simultaneously exaggerated and under-analysed. The death of Nicholas in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, by contrast, is described in a manner which never loses touch with the human, physical experiences involved, so that the reader is deeply impressed by the sense of the paradoxical meeting of the concerns of this world with those of eternity:

He was sitting up with his long back bent, leaning his elbows on the bed and hanging his head.

"What do you feel?" asked Levin in a whisper, after a pause.

"I feel I am departing," uttered Nicholas with an effort, but very distinctly, as if he were pressing the words out of his body. He did not lift his head but only turned up his eyes, failing to reach his brother's face. ...

Mary Nikolavna approached. "You had better lie down, you would feel easier," she said.

"I'll soon be lying," he said softly. "Dead!" he added cynically and angrily. "Well, lay me down if you like." Levin laid his brother on his back, sat down beside him, and holding his breath gazed at his face. The dying man lay with closed eyes, but at intervals the muscles of his forehead worked as if he were thinking deeply and intently. ... "Yes, yes! That's so!" Slowly pausing between the words, the dying man murmured, "Wait a bit". He was silent again. "That's so!" he drawled in a tone of relief, as if he had found a solution. "Oh God!" he muttered with a heavy sigh.

Mary Nikolavna felt his feet. "Growing cold," she whispered.

⁵³⁰ *Ruth*, p.444.

⁵³¹ *John* 1 v.9.

This is a fully novelistic account of death, both narrating "the life in time", in terms of bodily movements, sufferings, and feelings, and a whole range of conflicting human emotions, and also including "the life by values as well"⁵³³ - the life in which man grapples with his relation with transcendent levels of reality. The *Ruth* passage, on the other hand, functions more like lyric poetry, describing primarily only one mode of being for Ruth, who is "happy and at peace", but who has achieved this, like Guy in *The Heir of Redclyffe*, by moving outside the province of the novel. She is, so far as the novel is concerned, not dying, but already dead, for she has passed beyond the shared and common experiences of humanity in this life.

Ruth's dying cry of glory is followed immediately by the cry of the forsaken:

"Mother! mother! mother! You have not left me alone! You will not leave me alone! You are not dead! Mother! Mother!"

The world of realism is re-entered painfully. Leonard's cries can be interpreted either as sobs of broken misery and despairing incomprehension, or, alternatively, as declarations of faith that, despite all appearances, his mother will, indeed, never leave him nor die. The first meaning, however, is the obvious and unavoidable, the realist one; the second merely a hopeful possibility, and Leonard's "passionate cries" are succeeded by "a stupor of grief"

⁵³² Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, translated by Louise and Aylmer Maude, (Oxford, 1980), p.498-9.

⁵³³ E.M.Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), chapter ii, in Allott, pp.253-4.

⁵³⁴ *Ruth*, pp.444-5.

in which he is "much depressed, physically as well as mentally".⁵³⁵ It is as if the suffering has been passed on from Ruth to her son - as if Leonard must now become what Ruth was after her mother's death. Sorrow, however, is of great value in a sinful world - this belief lies at the heart of the novel - and Leonard's agony, in all its real emptiness and horror, is made part of the ongoing process of "redemption" which is now completed in Ruth, but which continues in her son. For the other sinner of the novel, the Pharisee, Mr Bradshaw, distraught by the recent discovery of his own son's gross dishonesty, finds Leonard weeping over his mother's grave:

[Leonard's] face was swollen with weeping; but, when he saw Mr Bradshaw, he calmed himself, and checked his sobs, and, as an explanation of being where he was when thus surprised, he could find nothing to say but the simple words - "My mother is dead, sir." His eyes sought those of Mr Bradshaw with a wild look of agony, as if to find comfort for that great loss in human sympathy; and at the first word - the first touch of Mr Bradshaw's hand on his shoulder, he burst out afresh.

"Come, come! My boy! ... Let me take you home, my poor fellow. Come, my lad, come!" 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.

536

Mr Bradshaw, who has throughout the novel spoken too loudly and too much,⁵³⁷ is finally unable to utter a sound, because "sympathy" has taken the place of words. And the

⁵³⁵ *Ruth*, p.445.

⁵³⁶ *Ruth*, pp.453-4.

⁵³⁷ cf eg *Ruth*, pp.152-3,334-6.

few, broken utterances that Mr Bradshaw does make here - "Come, come! my boy! ... Come, my lad, come!" - are characterised by their extreme simplicity and repetitiveness. Very few words, in the end, are needed to communicate the amazing revolution which takes place when the "very child and heir of shame ... stained and marked with sin from [his] birth"⁵³⁸ becomes "my boy" and "my lad", and when "a man who has deluded himself into considering falsehood right" and who is thus no longer to be regarded as a "fitting exponent of the will of God"⁵³⁹ becomes an "old friend"; for verbosity draws attention to the speaker, whereas silence and tears, and few, simple words illuminate feelings which lie beyond the deliberate projection of a self-image. When he talks about Ruth and Leonard as defiled deceivers, Mr Bradshaw is really talking about himself as a pillar of virtuous society, but when he touches Leonard's shoulder and leads him gently "home", he is, unselfconsciously, taking on a role which is both the most personal and the most impersonal available to humanity, acting as an agent of God, obeying the Divine command mercifully to succour the sinner:

"... thou wilt take home the wandering sinner, and heal up [his] sorrows, and lead [him] to [his] Father's house".

⁵⁴⁰

For it is not important to Leonard that it is Mr Bradshaw who is comforting him. There is but one overwhelming reality in Leonard's world at this moment - the knowledge that "My mother is dead". Realising, however, that he must move beyond this point, he seeks the gaze of another person - of whoever is available - with a "wild look of agony", indicating

⁵³⁸ *Ruth*, pp.336-7.

⁵³⁹ *Ruth*, p.348.

⁵⁴⁰ cf above p.276.

that he has no thought-out plans or projects, nothing to direct him but his pain, looking for "comfort for that great loss in human sympathy". Mr Bradshaw's personal feelings and difficulties are not relevant to Leonard at this moment; any "human sympathy" will do. The fact that it is Mr Bradshaw who is enabled to offer this sympathy is deeply moving for the reader, and perhaps for Mr Benson, but it means very little to Leonard - as indeed it must, if Mr Bradshaw's career of self-aggrandising patronage is effectively to be ended. *Ruth* ends, then, not with Ruth's salvation, but with that of Mr Bradshaw.

This meeting between Leonard and Mr Bradshaw signifies the healing of the pain of those watchers around Ruth's deathbed, who "could not touch her with their sympathy".⁵⁴¹ Ruth finally escapes sympathy, transcending the role of sinner, in which she is at best, a "poor, poor"⁵⁴² object of pity. By moving beyond sympathy - and thus beyond the scope of the realist novel - she reaches a place of peace and happiness which lies altogether outside human society. And it is in this awareness of a salvation beyond that offered by human sympathy that Mrs Gaskell's novel becomes both bigger and smaller than George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, for on the one hand Mrs Gaskell's readers are made conscious of wider horizons and vaster hopes and dreams than George Eliot ever dares to indulge in, but, on the other hand, her novel shows signs of strain and shapelessness, and loses at times the tightness of control and credibility that Eliot never relinquishes. This is exemplified nowhere more powerfully than in the scene towards the end of *Middlemarch* in which Mrs Bulstrode demonstrates her love and fidelity towards her disgraced husband who has, by his public downfall and humiliation, brought his wife to the point where she must either repudiate and despise him. or accept the "bitter" pain of "the sharing of a merited dishonour".⁵⁴³ Mr Bulstrode sits alone, in the despair of "unpitied misery", while his wife

⁵⁴¹ cf above p.283.

⁵⁴² cf above p.277.

⁵⁴³ George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1965), p.807.

quietly gathers the strength to begin "a new life in which she embraced humiliation".⁵⁴³ Then she dresses herself plainly in black, and goes down to join her husband:

It was eight o' clock in the evening before the door opened and his wife entered. He dared not look up at her. He sat with his eyes bent down, and as she went towards him she thought he looked smaller - he seemed so withered and shrunken. A movement of new compassion and old tenderness went through her like a great wave, and putting one hand on his which rested on the arm of the chair, and the other on his shoulder, she said, solemnly but kindly - "Look up, Nicholas." He raised his eyes with a little start and looked at her half amazed for a moment: her pale face, her changed, mourning dress, the trembling about her mouth, all said, "I know"; and her hands and eyes rested gently on him. He burst out crying, and they cried together, she sitting at his side. They could not yet speak to each other of the shame which she was bearing with him, or of the acts which had brought it down on them. His confession was silent, and her promise of faithfulness was silent. Open-minded as she was, she nevertheless shrank from the words which would have expressed their mutual consciousness as she would have shrunk from flakes of fire. She could not say, "How much is only slander and false suspicion?", and he did not say, "I am innocent".

544

George Eliot portrays great acts of sympathy as going hand in hand with the most painful limitations. This scene is only partially one of triumph, and the silence here is both the essential only means by which that which is achieved can be achieved, and also a failure to communicate a fuller degree of mutual understanding. This moment is similar to the closing paragraphs of *Ruth* in that it centres around a new awareness that sin and shame, while in one sense unalterable, yet need not - indeed cannot - stand in the way of human relations based upon something prior to sin. Mr Bradshaw's entry into Mr Benson's house is very much a return, to a place which can once again be acknowledged as "home", and to an "old friend". The patterns of time involved are very complex, for Mr Bradshaw comes

⁵⁴⁴ *Middlemarch*, pp.807-8.

into the house for "the first time, for years", and he comes leading "her son", the representative of a new generation, belonging not to the past, but to the future. He is looking simultaneously both backwards and forwards in time, while living intensely within a "moment" of sympathy which halts and freezes all speech, all expression. Mr Bradshaw cannot "speak to his old friend", and thus renew his connections with the past in the present, until he has lived through the "moment" which silently acknowledges the past - Ruth's past and her sin - as an acceptable foundation upon which to base both past and future.

Similarly, Mrs Bulstrode dresses "like an early Methodist"⁵⁴⁴ in order to begin "a new life" of humiliation. A moment of great change is intimately bound up with both the past and the future, binding them together. A "confession", albeit silent, takes place simultaneously with a "promise of faithfulness", and Mrs Bulstrode is drawn into sympathy with her husband by "a movement of new compassion and old tenderness". Her fidelity is rooted in the many years of marriage which she has shared with her husband - in all her memories of "the man whose prosperity she had shared through nearly half a life, and who had unvaryingly cherished her".⁵⁴³ In one important sense, Mr Bulstrode is still this man, and Mrs Bulstrode is deeply joined with him in this past. But he is also a different man altogether. His most prominent characteristics - power, self-confidence, religiosity - have been replaced by helplessness, tearfulness and despairing misery. He even looks different - "smaller - he seemed so withered and shrunken" - and so Mrs Bulstrode changes her appearance also. For this "smaller", changed husband, she finds a "new compassion", using her hold upon the past, not as a reason to reject him, but as a source from which to draw the changed life which she must embrace if she is to continue to share her husband's life.

Eyes, and, to some extent, hands, are important in this scene, just as they are in Mr Bradshaw's meeting with Leonard. The meeting of the eyes of two estranged individuals marks the moment of their rediscovered ability to help one another. Mr Bradshaw is enabled to touch Leonard's shoulder when he sees the boy's eyes desperately seeking his own. It is, it seems the eyes blinded by tears which see the most clearly, for Leonard's tears enable him to accept Mr Bradshaw's sympathy as the response to his need, and it is through

eyes filled with tears that Mr Bradshaw once again meets the gaze of his "old friend". In the *Middlemarch* scene, the dramatic change in Mr Bulstrode is marked by the information that he "dared not look up" at his wife. This man, who has attempted to manipulate many facets of the world in which he lives, is at last reduced to introspection, or at least to guilt, for he has lost the confident old identity into which he so consistently and fatally failed to look. He fears every face in the world - even, or perhaps especially, that of his wife - because he is, for the first time, aware of his dependence upon others. Ironically, it is only when he is forced to consider the possibility that he might "never see his wife's face with affection in it again" that he is enabled to realise how much he values her affection.

As in *Ruth*, a touch by the wounded comforter upon the shoulder of the person in need of comfort marks the turning point in the encounter. Mrs Bulstrode accompanies this action with the words, "Look up, Nicholas", and her words seem to take on a metaphorical, almost spiritual significance in addition to their literal meaning, so that this exhortation is reminiscent of that of St Paul to the Colossian believers, that they should: "Set [their] affection on things above, not on things on the earth".⁵⁴⁵ Mr Bulstrode is, at least, told to look up to something other than himself - his wife, in this case - who presents him with a "changed" appearance which mirrors his own, and yet which exists outside and separately from himself. He looks up, not at God, but at a suffering human being, characterised by "mourning". "Her hands and eyes rested gently on him" because she is like himself; she is a living representation of the simple phrase: "I know". Of all the eyes in the world, hers are the ones that Mr Bulstrode can safely meet, for they are "at his side", crying with him, not only knowing the worst accounts of all that he has done and all the consequences of his actions, but embracing those actions and that shame as if it all belonged to Mrs Bulstrode herself.

⁵⁴⁵ *Colossians* 3 v.2.

Touch and sight, tears, clothes and postures take the place of words in this encounter, but the narrator does not see these non-verbal gestures as a fully adequate means of "express[ing]" the Bulstrodes' "mutual consciousness". Words such as "yet" and "nevertheless" convey the idea of an incomplete achievement, and the implication is that explicit speech would somehow enable the Bulstrodes' relationship to progress onwards from this point. Mr Bulstrode cannot tell his wife what he has done, for:

... the acts which he had washed and diluted with inward argument and motive, and for which it seemed comparatively easy to win invisible pardon - what name would she call them by? That she should ever silently call his acts Murder was what he could not bear. ... Some time, perhaps - when he was dying - he would tell her all: in the deep shadow of that time, when she held his hand in the gathering darkness, she might listen without recoiling from his touch. Perhaps: but concealment had been the habit of his life, and the impulse to confession had no power against the dread of a deeper humiliation.

546

Mr Bulstrode feels secure only in his own silent world of "inward argument and motive", of "invisible" morality, of "concealment" within "deep shadow" and "gathering darkness". In this, he is interestingly similar to Charlotte Brontë's Lucy Snowe, whose sense of the need to conceal her identity will be examined in Chapter Six below. The link between death and Mr Bulstrode's secret inner world is significant, for he has sought to place everything relating to morality in another world, to be entered only after death; he has not sufficiently considered the moral and spiritual aspects of his actions in the context of the world in which he now lives. And he is terrified of his wife's inner world, for he cannot bear the thought that she might ever "silently call his acts Murder".

Mr Bulstrode is, in his way, at least by this point in the novel, deeply aware that:

⁵⁴⁶ *Middlemarch*, p.882.

If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence.

547

Bulstrode knows that death and revelation of the secrets of "ordinary human life" go hand in hand. And so he does everything in his power to maintain the "silence" which protects him from the killing "roar". And God becomes for him actually the means by which the "roar" is neutralised, for he believes, on one level, at least, in God's omniscience, and, at the same time, he thinks of God and His dealings with himself as being entirely "invisible". He will not face up to the reality of death - to the fact that:

Such as we are in life, such we shall almost surely be in death; and what we are in death, such we shall certainly be in all eternity.

548

Mr Bulstrode's concealed activities are simultaneously entirely known and entirely unknown. And yet he claims in his own mind to understand God's attitude towards him and his life. And so "it seemed comparatively easy to win invisible pardon", as against the pardon of Mrs Bulstrode, for Mr Bulstrode assumes that God accepts at face value the language which he himself uses to account for what he does; Mrs Bulstrode, on the other hand, may, he fears, apply different words - like "Murder" - to that which he has so painstakingly named as acceptable in the "invisible" realm which he believes God to inhabit.

⁵⁴⁷ *Middlemarch*, p.226.

⁵⁴⁸ Pusey, *Selections*, pp.88-89.

Hypocrisy - the major sin attributed to men in the Victorian novel, as against the image of the fallen woman - is frequently characterised by the manipulation of language and the omission of actions. Simon the Pharisee is good at speaking "within himself", labelling a woman a "sinner", but he fails to perform the loving actions of foot-washing, greeting with a kiss, and anointing with oil which the prostitute is so ready to offer.⁵⁴⁹ Mr Bulstrode's first compromising of the direct truth and clarity of words takes place when, in his youth, he accepts a partnership in a business whose wealth is built upon somewhat morally questionable foundations:

He remembered his first moments of shrinking. They were private, and were filled with arguments; some of these taking the form of prayer. The business was established and had old roots; is it not one thing to set up a new gin-palace and another to accept an investment in an old one? The profits made out of lost souls - where can the line be drawn at which they begin in human transactions? Was it not even God's way of saving His chosen? "Thou knowest ... how loose my soul sits from these things - how I view them all as implements for tilling Thy garden rescued here and there from the wilderness." Metaphors and precedents were not wanting; peculiar spiritual experiences were not wanting which at last made the retention of his position seem a service demanded of him: the vista of a fortune had already opened itself, and Bulstrode's shrinking remained private. ... Bulstrode found himself carrying on two distinct lives; his religious activity could not be incompatible with his business as soon as he had argued himself into not feeling it incompatible.

550

Antinomianism is, as is here made clear, closely bound up with the abuse of metaphor. Bulstrode is an intelligent man - he possesses the intellectual and verbal facility to manipulate "arguments" and to find "metaphors and precedents" in accordance with his own

⁵⁴⁹ cf above p.266.

⁵⁵⁰ *Middlemarch*, pp.664-5.

wishes - yet he lacks the breadth of vision, the power to move beyond logical processes, which would enable him to perceive the role of his own self-interest in the means by which he reaches his conclusions. He is, as a "young banker's clerk", "as clever in figures as he [is] fluent in speech and fond of theological definition", and he has also had "striking experience in conviction of sin and sense of pardon".⁵⁵¹ Here lie the foundations of his future downfall, for he relies heavily on a view of language which sees words as a variety of coinage, to be organised in as "clever" a fashion as possible in order to yield the greatest profit, while at the same time accepting very readily a public language, shared by an admiring group, and labelling things in accordance with the preconceptions and beliefs of that group, as the language which defines his own experiences. He is, in effect, a classic Arnoldian Puritan and Hebraist, using words:

... not in the connected and fluid way in which St Paul employs them, and for which alone words are really meant, but in an isolated, fixed and mechanical way, as if they were talismans.

552

A less clever man would simply have become a typical London dissenter, unquestioningly accepting the account of his life provided by the chapel and conforming himself to that language - somewhat, maybe, in the manner of Silas Marner before his expulsion from Lantern Yard. A more imaginative and individualistic man, on the other hand, would have found a whole range of different analogies for or explanations of his inner experience, and thus would have become less preoccupied with the group's view of himself. Mr Bulstrode, however, like most, if not all, of the characters in *Middlemarch*, is caught between two

⁵⁵¹ *Middlemarch*, p.663.

⁵⁵² *Culture and Anarchy*, p.152.

possibilities, either of which, had he been able to yield himself to it fully, could have prevented the immense difficulties into which he falls.

It is worth noting that Bulstrode opens his prayer, his address to God, with the words: "Thou knowest". This looks like an expression of humility, acknowledging the Divine omniscience, but "knowest" here also carries the meaning "accepts", or at least, "condones". By prefacing his own thoughts and opinions with "Thou knowest", Bulstrode effectively turns them into God's view of the situation. He is not seeking to know God's understanding of the matter, but rather attempting to put ideas into His mind. Bulstrode also makes the mistake of viewing the dilemma facing him solely in the light of larger examples and purposes; he fixes all of his attention upon "metaphors and precedents" and upon "peculiar spiritual experiences", thus avoiding any close examination of the actual matter in hand. The question is transmuted from whether Nicholas Bulstrode should actively seek to make money through this particular business into considerations regarding new and old concerns, abstract ideas about "profits" and "lost souls" and drawing lines, theological thoughts regarding the elect, and pretty pictures of gardens in a desert. Bulstrode has lost touch with the individual case and with his own, personal responsibility, and so he falls into the depths of something closely akin to the "godless philosophy" described by Henry Longueville Mansel:

If there is one dream of a godless philosophy to which, beyond all others, every moment of our consciousness gives the lie, it is that which subordinates the individual to the universal, the person to the species; which deifies kinds and realises classifications; which sees Being in generalisation and Appearance in limitation; which regards the living and conscious man as a wave on the ocean of the unconscious infinite; his life, a momentary tossing to and fro on the shifting tide; his destiny, to be swallowed up in the formless and boundless universe.

Mansel is here describing not Evangelicalism, but the German philosophy of Transcendentalism, and it is interesting to see how these two opposed beliefs meet at this point of failure. Generalisation of this nature, Mansel argues, is atheistic in character, since it denies the very "consciousness" by which anything at all which is known - about God or anything else - must be known. It is exactly this "godless philosophy" against which Tess is crying out when she appeals to the Vicar: "Don't, for God's sake, speak as saint to sinner, but as you yourself to me myself - poor me!"⁵⁵⁴

In claiming Divine understanding of "how loose my soul sits from these things", Bulstrode is, effectively, beginning his "two distinct lives". He must "argue himself" into an impression of wholeness and unity, making his inner peace, ironically, the fruit of inner conflict, so that it is only by setting up his own reason against his "feeling" that he can reach the position of "not" feeling the two halves of his life to be "incompatible". The double negative indicates the weakness of this position, based, as it is, solely on Bulstrode's internal processes of logic and argument. Essentially, Bulstrode lacks respect for himself as an individual; instead, he "regards the living and conscious man as a wave on the ocean of the unconscious infinite", for he separates "my soul" from his idea of himself as a set of mechanical processes, a manipulator of "implements", a pawn to be used in the game called "God's way of saving His chosen", and a recipient of "peculiar spiritual experiences" having nothing to do with personal morality or responsibility. In order that such "limitation" may become acceptable in the world of "Appearance", "Being" is pushed into the realm of "generalisation". Bulstrode's "soul" has nothing to do with his day-to-day working life; in labelling it "saint", Bulstrode prevents it from remaining as "me myself", leaving "me my-

⁵⁵³ Henry Longueville Mansel, *The Limits of Religious Thought, examined in eight lectures* - Bampton Lectures for 1858, fourth edition (London, 1859), pp.58-9.

⁵⁵⁴ cf above p.273.

self" free to lead a life which is far from holy. And this means, although Bulstrode does not acknowledge it, that his depersonalised, universalised "soul" can have no meaningful understanding of or relationship with a personal God. It means - and this, ironically, is exactly what Bulstrode wanted, although without realising it - that what he does has nothing whatsoever to do with what he is, so that his existence is finally, despite all his activities, good and bad, without purpose and without a sense of time: "a momentary tossing to and fro on the shifting tide".

* * * * *

"Sin", writes Matthew Arnold in *St Paul and Protestantism*, "is not a monster to be mused on, but an impotence to be got rid of."⁵⁵⁵ Bulstrode's problem is that he takes his sin both too seriously and not seriously enough. Both George Eliot and Arnold support Hebraism to the extent that it offers the only means by which an individual can assert some control over the "shifting tide" of time, making some shape for his own life:

To walk staunchly by the best light one has, to be strict and sincere with oneself, not to be of the number of those who say and do not, to be in earnest, - this is the discipline by which alone man is enabled to rescue his life from thralldom to the passing moment and to his bodily senses, to ennoble it and to make it eternal.

⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁵ Matthew Arnold, "St Paul and Protestantism", in *Dissent and Dogma*, edited by R.H.Super (Michigan, 1968), p.35.

⁵⁵⁶ *Culture and Anarchy*, p.37.

The difficulty lies in establishing a right balance between self-control and the freedom honestly to grow in relation to the world in which one finds oneself. In *Middlemarch*, I have looked at sin as a splitting and negation of selfhood which leads to a breakdown of the sinner's personal sense of time, destroying his sense of living in day to day realities, his sense of integrated time. The hero of Mark Rutherford's short story, "Michael Trevanion" (1890), is both like and unlike Bulstrode in that he attempts to use deception in order to maintain an old image of integrated time beyond the reach of change. And the threat of a new order which confronts Michael Trevanion is his son's love for a girl who does not hold a Christian faith in the old-fashioned manner which alone is acknowledged by Michael to be genuine - the same problem as that which tortures Holman and his daughter in *Cousin Phillis*.

Sin, as Arnold acknowledges by his repudiation of its monstrous nature, has had, throughout the history of Christian thought and experience, a powerful grip upon the imaginations of countless believers and seekers after faith. St Paul describes his own propensity to evil as:

another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

557

Sin is seen as a huge destructive force, giving rise to desperate battles, slavery, and death, leading the sinner into a "wretched" state from which he is wholly unable to extricate himself. Similarly, St Augustine in his *Confessions* ponders at length the damage done by sin, describing the ways in which sinners:

⁵⁵⁷ *Romans 7 vv.23-4.*

... corrupt and pervert their own nature, which you [ie God] made and for which you shaped the rules, either by making wrong use of the things which you allow, or by becoming inflamed with passion to make unnatural use of things which you do not allow.

558

In other words, sin turns a human being, made in God's image, into a monster, in defiance of the natural order, wildly "inflamed" with perverse desires - a creature to whom reason and limitation are meaningless.

John Bunyan in *Grace Abounding* is tormented by this sense of the uncontrollable nature of sin as he endlessly recalls the sentence from Francis Spira:

Man knows the beginning of sin, but who bounds the issues thereof?

559

The sinner can never feel himself safe from this terrible force of spiritual destruction, and, as a result, he thinks of himself as some loathsome animal, a beast, helplessly pursuing the immediate satisfaction of its own foul desires.

I was more loathsome in my own eyes than was a toad; and I thought I was so in God's eyes too. Sin and corruption, I said, would as naturally bubble out of my heart as water would bubble out of a fountain.

⁵⁵⁸ St Augustine, *Confessions*, translated by R.S.Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1961), p.66.

⁵⁵⁹ John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1978), Reprint of American Tract Society edition, p.63.

To these writers, and many others, sin is precisely "a monster to be mused on". Apollyon is, of course, the monster of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and he is:

... hideous to behold, he was cloathed with scales like a Fish (and they are his pride) he had Wings like a Dragon, and out of his belly came Fire and Smoak, and his mouth was as the mouth of a Lion.

In Apollyon, Christian's animal nature, his inner guilt and self-disgust rears up and confronts him with fascinating ugliness. The monster is so spectacularly "hideous to behold" that he demands to be looked at. His is the power of sin which:

By the grace of God we may subdue, keep it chained, restrain its outbreaks, but it is there still. It is not dead, but lives within us, ever anew lifting up its head and hissing at us.

Sin is "to be got rid of", yet its presence is far more real and positive, and, often, far more imaginatively compelling than that of a mere "impotence". Sin is not a negation - it is power.

⁵⁶⁰ John Bunyan, quoted in William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James, paperback edition, (Glasgow, 1960), p.164.

⁵⁶¹ *Pilgrim's Progress*, p.61.

⁵⁶² Pusey, *Selections*, p.308.

Mark Rutherford in "Michael Trevanion" develops this tradition in a particularly interesting manner, paying close attention to the social and historical context of his characters' experience. Faced with his beloved son, Robert's, attachment to a girl whom Michael believes to be "not the Lord's",⁵⁶³ Michael Trevanion looks for help, not to the beliefs and philosophies of his own age - "the beginning of the latter half of the present [ie nineteenth] century"⁵⁶⁴ - but to the past, to the Bible, where he reads the words of St Paul in the *Epistle to the Romans*:

Michael read in the ninth chapter, "I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh". What did Paul mean? Accursed from Christ! What could he mean save that he was willing to be damned to save those whom he loved. Why not? Why should not a man be willing to be damned for others? The damnation of a single soul is shut up in itself, and may be the means of saving not only others, but their children and a whole race. Damnation! It is awful, horrible: millions of years, with no relief, with no light from the Most High, and in subjection to His Enemy. "And yet, if it is to save - if it is to save Robert", thought Michael, "God give me strength - I could endure it."

565

⁵⁶³ Mark Rutherford, "Michael Trevanion", in *The Revolution in Tanners Lane and Miriam's Schooling*, Garland "Novels of Faith and Doubt" series, reprints of 1887 and 1890 editions respectively, (New York and London, 1975), *Miriam's Schooling*, p.172.

⁵⁶⁴ "Michael Trevanion", p.161.

⁵⁶⁵ "Michael Trevanion", pp.175-6.

Damnation is the greatest force of which Michael can conceive over which he believes himself to have some degree of control. Because "the wages of sin is death",⁵⁶⁶ Michael views damnation as an automatic, earned result of wrongdoing. Salvation, the fruit of Divine grace, appears, especially to Calvinist eyes like Michael's, to lie wholly outside human power or comprehension; no man can win eternal life for himself, but he can choose his own eternal death. According to Calvin:

"If we sin, it does not happen from compulsion, as though we were constrained to do so by an alien power; but all sin results from our own will and inclination." This does not mean to say that we have indeterminate freedom of choice as between good and evil. If we were able to effect anything against God we would not be able to attain full salvation through the grace of Christ. Redemption would then become in part self-salvation. But it does mean that our perverse decisions take place with our full consent.

567

Free will in a Calvinist world view, at least so far as the unbeliever is concerned (and Michael Trevanion seems considerably confused with regard to either his own state before God or to the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, or both, since he views his own damnation as a genuine possibility - no more, and no less) exists solely in the realm of sin and disobedience. The unregenerate man always chooses, with his own "full consent" to do that which is wrong, but he cannot choose to do right.

It is easy to see how, from this position, the image of the heroic sinner, the glorious rebel, arises - Milton's Satan is, of course, the obvious example. And there can be little doubt that Michael Trevanion's thinking is tending in this direction. "God give me

⁵⁶⁶ *Romans* 6 v.23.

⁵⁶⁷ Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, translated by Harold Knight, (London, 1956), pp.86-7.

strength", he says, as he contemplates Hell, " - I could endure it". He is already thinking of the struggle he is to undertake in terms of the language of the *Psalms*, praying, paradoxically, to God as the sustainer of mighty warriors and the source of all victories, as if his damnation were an exploit comparable to the battles of the Israelite kings. "In God is my salvation and my glory", writes the Psalmist, "the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God"⁵⁶⁸ And the phrase "I could endure it" implies that Hell, instead of being a punishment, is some sort of test of spiritual strength. Michael knows that God could never pardon him and so release him from Hell,⁵⁶⁹ but there is nevertheless in his conception of damnation a feeling that the inhabitants of Hell are not lost and hopeless creatures, crushed for ever by the justice of God, but rather brave fighters for a cause, pursuing some end for which they are willing to sacrifice everything.

Michael goes on to compare himself with Christ:

"Did not the Son Himself venture to risk the wrath of the Father that He might redeem man?

What am I? what is my poor self?"

570

He reasons that, since he is of so little value and importance compared to Christ, he should be far less concerned to hold onto his own life and happiness than Christ was. Christ, he recalls, made no attempt whatsoever to retain His rightful status. He:

⁵⁶⁸ *Psalms* 62 v.7.

⁵⁶⁹ cf "Michael Trevanion", p.177.

⁵⁷⁰ "Michael Trevanion", p.176.

... being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

571

St Paul precedes this account with the injunction: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus",⁵⁷² and Michael seems admirably willing to obey. He appears to forget, however, one crucial point, which is that one aspect of Christ's vast superiority over ordinary men and women is that He "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin".⁵⁷³ Christ's heroism in "ventur[ing] to risk the wrath of the Father that He might redeem man" involves a free choice different in quality from that of the sinner choosing sin and thus damnation, for He has proved Himself to be equally free to live "without sin". He is on the one hand "obedient unto death" and on the other hand "made to be sin for us";⁵⁷⁴ He is not damned in the sense that He receives the necessary retribution for sins committed out of His own, enslaved "will and inclination". Michael hopes to be like Christ, not merely in self-sacrifice for the sake of others, but also in undergoing "the wrath of the Father" with an attitude of personal "venture" and "risk", choosing his own damnation as an essentially positive and creative act. He desires to purchase from God his son's salvation at the price of his own eternal condemnation; the problem is that, unlike Christ, he has no valid currency with which to pay. Precisely because his sin and damnation is, in some sense, within Michael's control, it cannot "effect anything against God", for Michael is at-

⁵⁷¹ *Philippians 2 vv.6-8.*

⁵⁷² *Philippians 2 v.5.*

⁵⁷³ *Hebrews 4 v.15.*

⁵⁷⁴ *2 Corinthians 5 v.21.*

tempting to use the humanly manipulable system of "wages" to obtain that which is always a "gift":⁵⁷⁵

5

It is with clear intent to teach us the doctrine of the grace of God that the apostle altered the word here from wages to gift. ... he wished to show us that life comes upon quite a different principle from that upon which death comes. In salvation all is of free gift: in damnation everything is of justice and desert. When a man is lost, he has earned it; when a man is saved, it is given him.

576

Michael believes that "the damnation of a single soul is shut up in itself", by which he presumably means that nobody except the damned individual suffers as a result of his or her condemnation. It is significant that Michael is an extremely isolated figure, his son being almost his only link with the human world:

It was a peculiar misfortune for a man of Michael's temperament that he had nobody save his son who could assist him in the shaping of his resolves or in the correction of his conclusions. Brought up in a narrow sect, self-centred, moody, he needed continually that wholesome twist to another point of the compass which intercourse with equals gives. He was continually prone to subjection under the rigorous domination of a single thought, from which he deduced inference after inference, ending in absurdity, which would have been dissipated in an instant by discussion. ... He did seek counsel at the throne of heavenly grace that night, but the answer given by the oracle was framed by himself. ... His sorrow clothed itself, even at its uttermost, with no words of his own, but always in those of the Book. "Oh my son Absalom!" he cried, "my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

⁵⁷⁵ cf *Romans* 6 v.23.

⁵⁷⁶ *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 31, p.608.

Seeking after his own damnation is a real possibility to Michael precisely because he is already "shut up in [him]self", for damnation, even damnation "for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" is in no sense a social activity, but rather an agonisingly secretive and lonely one:

Once ye must at least be alone, and lonely indeed is that journey if He be not by thee who first trod it for thee, that in it thou mightest "fear no evil". ... Alone must each give up his spirit unto Him Who gave it. Oh may it not be alone, but in union with Him Whose words were, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit;" and Who, with His Own, commended ours!

Damnation means "millions of years ... with no light from the Most High, and in subjection to His Enemy"; similarly, Michael is "continually prone to subjection under the rigorous domination of a single thought". "Light" is the outcome of fellowship with God or with human "equals" which dissipates the shadows of the "self-created" and "moody" broodings of the solitary individual. "Subjection" implies rule by an external and probably hostile force, and Michael's unrelenting "single thought" becomes, in his isolation, as alien to himself and to his deepest needs as is the "Enemy" of that which is to him the "Most High".

Michael needs desperately to see himself, but he has no light by which to do so; he cannot see things from "another point of the compass", but can perceive the world only by thinking along the narrowest and most unbending of straight lines, "ending in absurdity"

⁵⁷⁷ "Michael Trevanion", pp.172-3.

⁵⁷⁸ Pusey, *Selections*, pp.265-7.

because they are so far out of touch with dynamic human speech or experience. He can, to some extent, be thought of as:

... a victim of Hebraism, of the tendency to cultivate strictness of conscience rather than spontaneity of consciousness. And what he wants is a larger conception of human nature, showing him the number of other points at which his nature must come to its best, besides the points which he himself knows and thinks of.

579

Michael is not repellently self-satisfied, but he does lack a breadth of consciousness, being wholly taken up by the "rigorous" nature of his austerely determined and single-minded pursuit of abstract ideas. Michael's only points of contact with other minds are to be found in prayer and the Bible, and in his son Robert. Robert, however, has become the very centre of his problem, and so cannot contribute to its solution so far as Michael can understand. Michael ought to be able to share such difficulties with his wife, but he cannot⁵⁸⁰ and much of his agony over Robert's situation is rooted in Michael's fear that his son is about to repeat his own mistake in marrying an essentially unsympathetic woman.

Robert is "his father intensified",⁵⁸¹ and yet:

Something seemed to have interposed itself between him and Robert, and when, instead of the old unveiled frankness, Robert was reticent and even suspicious, Michael's heart almost broke.

⁵⁷⁹ *Culture and Anarchy*, p.150.

⁵⁸⁰ cf "Michael Trevanion", p.157.

⁵⁸¹ cf "Michael Trevanion", p.158.

The relationship between father and son is one of extremes, so that the agony of their estrangement is already present in embryonic form in their intense likeness to one another and in the "unveiled frankness" between them. Robert is Michael's only investment in the human world, and, as such, has to bear the full weight of an emotion which would normally be spread over a much "larger conception of human nature". Michael pleads with Robert to leave Susan, the girl he loves, saying, "You don't know what I have gone through for you", but Robert refuses to act as if there were anything unusual in his relationship with his father:

But Robert, usually docile and tender, was hard and obdurate. The image of Susan rose before his eyes with her head on his shoulder, and he thought to himself that it was necessary at once to make matters quite plain and stop all further trespass on his prerogative. So it is, and so it ever has been. For this cause shall a man leave father and mother and cleave to his wife. There comes a time when the father and mother find that they must withdraw; but it is the order of the world, and has to be accepted, like sickness or death.

Robert can no longer offer his father an image of himself because he is now wholly taken up with "the image of Susan". He is concerned, like Michael, with absolutes: "it was necessary"; "at once"; "quite plain"; "stop all further trespass"; "his prerogative". Michael's problem lies in the need to realise the full implications of this all-or-nothing attitude to life: "rigorous domination" and "subjection" must always go hand in hand, so that the man who thinks always in terms of laws and rules, of complete necessity and immutable order, must come to accept that he will be confronted by situations, perhaps painful to himself, which

⁵⁸² "Michael Trevanion", p.173.

⁵⁸³ "Michael Trevanion", p.178.

are "the order of the world" and which must "be accepted"; of which one can only say, "so it is, and so it ever has been". Robert is stubborn, but he is also normal; Michael is like all parents in that he must make the bitter discovery that he needs his child more than his child needs him, and that this reality is as terrible and as inescapable as "sickness or death".

It is significant that the words of Scripture lie at the heart of this deepest blow to Michael's joy: "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother and cleave to his wife";⁵⁸⁴ while it is also the language of "the Book" which is the only vehicle Michael finds adequate for the expression of his most intense emotions. Michael's experience is constantly being "framed", both "by himself" and by the Bible, for, while he is unable to escape the logical conclusions of his own preconceptions, yet, at the same time, he speaks "with no words of his own". His understanding of revelation is shaped by his previously held beliefs and desires, but the expression of these same beliefs and desires is achieved solely through the medium of Scripture. As a result, there is no space, no barrier left between conscience and consciousness; conviction and perception have no protection from one another. The words of "the Book", instead of offering a means of externalising experience and of seeing the self in a new context, create for Michael a deterministic universe, in which he is forced to be whatever the language in which his feelings are voiced makes him. So, because the lament of King David over Absalom expresses Michael's grief over his own son, Michael adopts David's situation as his own, coming rapidly to view Robert as an erring rebel, soon to meet a tragic end, because this is Absalom's fate. Moreover, the phrase used by David - "Would God I had died for thee" - is the first indication in the story of the idea of a father's self-sacrifice for his son. It seems that it is this very process by which "[Michael's] sorrow clothed itself ... with no words of his own, but always in those of the Book" which plants the seed of Michael's plan for Robert's salvation, soon to be nurtured by more Biblical language, in Michael's mind.

⁵⁸⁴ cf *Genesis* 2 v.24.

Michael's great mistake lies in his belief that, by carrying out his plan of self-damnation, he will to some degree exert control over events. He fails to appreciate the extent to which he is himself being controlled - by his own ruthless trains of thought, by his reading of Scripture, and, above all, by the inexorable forces of life which his knowledge of the Bible should enable him to understand. Nevertheless, there remains, in spite of or perhaps because of his pride and his blindness, something admirable and something with which the reader can feel sympathy in Michael's mad, outrageous plan:

He pictured himself as a second Christ. ... He was a little exalted by his resolve, and spiritual pride began to show itself; so utterly impossible is it that the purest self-devotion should be, if we may use the word, chemically pure. It is very doubtful if he ever fully realised what he was doing, just as it is doubtful whether in the time of liveliest conviction there has been a perfect realisation of the world to come. Had he really appreciated the words "torment" and "infinite"; had he really put into "torment" the pangs of a cancer or a death through thirst; had he really put twenty years into "infinity" he would perhaps have recoiled. Nevertheless the fact remains that this man by some means or other had educated himself into complete self-obliteration for the sake of his child.

585

The phrase "chemically pure", along with the narrator's apparently, perhaps ironically, cautious introductory aside - "if we may use the word" - suggests that it is unreasonable - or perhaps excessively reasonable, and, as a result, inhuman - to expect human emotions to function in an exact, scientific fashion.

There is a similar comment in *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford*. Rutherford, describing his love for Mary, admits that, despite the fact that she has already refused his proposal of marriage on the grounds of her wish to remain with her father, he still longs to be with her:

⁵⁸⁵ "Michael Trevanion", pp.180-181.

This, I know, was not pure love for her; it was a selfish passion for relief. But I have never known what is meant by a perfectly pure love.

586

He goes on to describe Christian's desperate plea to God for deliverance in the Valley of the Shadow of Death in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. When at last day breaks, Christian sings:

'O world of wonders! (I can say no less)
That I should be preserved in that distress
That I have met with here! Oh, blessed be
That hand that from it hath delivered me!'

This was Christian's love for God, and for God as his helper. Was that perfectly pure?

586

All human love, Rutherford suggests, is in some degree selfish. Indeed, one might even go further and suggest that some degree of selfishness is essential if a person is to love. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour", teaches Christ, "as thyself".⁵⁸⁷ It is Christian's sense of himself - "I" and "me" are used four times in the stanza quoted above, whereas God is referred to only once, obliquely, as a delivering "hand" and His presence is implied, again indirectly, in the phrase "world of wonders" - which enables him to appreciate God's goodness, and thus to praise Him. His love for God finds its focus less in the character and attributes of God than in the personal difficulties and dangers in which Divine help becomes a real and

⁵⁸⁶ Mark Rutherford, *Autobiography and Deliverance*, Victorian Library edition, (Leicester and New York, 1969), p.117.

⁵⁸⁷ *Matthew* 19 v.19.

valued experience. A "perfectly pure" love, it appears, would be something "chemical", sterile, existing only in laboratory conditions, outside the complexities of the individual human consciousness with all its incomplete needs and contaminating desires. Because human life is full of "distress", the strongest emotions cannot detach themselves from the struggle for survival, both physical and spiritual, but must rather be born out of it, with all the imperfections which such origins necessarily imply.

This is, of course, Darwinian language, and there is in "Michael Trevanion", as in Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, a strong sense of the necessary and inevitable progress of time and of the difficulties experienced by individuals in locating their own needs and desires within the limitations and demands of the age in which they live. Michael is in many ways an outdated figure, seeking to regulate his life and the lives of those around him according to beliefs already virtually obsolete:

Robert Trevanion, although brought up in the same school of philosophy as his father, belonged to another generation. The time of my history is the beginning of the latter half of the present century, and Michael was already considered somewhat of a fossil. The main difference between Michael and Robert was not any distinct divergence, but that truths believed by Michael, and admitted by Robert, failed to impress Robert with that depth and sharpness of cut with which they were wrought into his father.

588

Darwin's *Origin of Species* was published in 1859 - "the beginning of the latter half of the present century" - and the use of the word "fossil" to describe the outmoded nature of Michael's ideas and attitudes recalls the entire vocabulary of evolutionary theory. The narrator of Michael's story, although sympathetic to Michael's difficulties and hopes, is in possession of a language and a set of criteria for evaluating human behaviour which is

⁵⁸⁸ "Michael Trevanion", p.161.

completely alien to Michael himself. Michael does not belong in the age of Darwin; his activities and thought processes can be analysed, as they are in Rutherford's story, in terms of the positive and negative aspects of the psychological effects of religious belief and of the need to preserve the identity of the self in order to perpetuate meaningful relationships with the external world. But if Michael were to write his own story, he would not see his actions in these terms at all.

It is significant that Michael dies at the end of the story - he dies when he realises that his time is past, that the world has developed beyond anything which he can understand or take part in. He comes to Robert, saying, "I have sinned",⁵⁸⁹ and the scene is a reversal of the parable of the Prodigal Son upon which Michael muses earlier in the story,⁵⁹⁰ considering how he should respond if his son were to beg his forgiveness:

The father humbled himself before the son, but in his humiliation became majestic, and in after years, when he was dead and gone, there was no scene in the long intercourse with him which lived with a brighter and fairer light in the son's memory.

589

This could be thought of simply as a victory for progress, for evolution, symbolising the triumph of the new over the old and the superiority of all that looks to the future over all that dwells in the past, were it not for the crucially important admission: "but [Michael] in his humiliation became majestic". Just as Michael previously recognised the "magnificent repentance" of the Prodigal Son,⁵⁹⁰ so now the moment which marks the end of the father's role as a father - the end of his authority, of his continuing primacy, and thus, effectively, of his life - is also the moment which, after Michael's death, "lived with a brighter and fairer

⁵⁸⁹ "Michael Trevanion", p.192.

⁵⁹⁰ "Michael Trevanion", p.168.

light in the son's memory" than any other. He is "majestic", kingly, even patriarchal, not by virtue of that which is "wrought into" him with a "depth and sharpness of cut" wholly lacking in his son, but rather by virtue of his acceptance of his own ignorance and insignificance and his realisation that his most clearly perceived convictions are worthless if they do not follow the direction of the inscrutable will of God, which has mysteriously ordained that the new generation shall move onwards by paths beyond the understanding of the old.

Mark Rutherford is far from being an unequivocal supporter of progress in the crude sense, in that he is often severely critical of modern attitudes and tendencies as opposed to much older ones. A modern thinker of Rutherford's day would, he suggests, condemn Michael Trevanion out of hand, because:

The present time is disposed to over-rate the intellectual virtues. No matter how unselfish a woman may be, if she cannot discuss the new music or the new metaphysical poetry, she is nothing and nobody cares for her. Centuries ago our standard was different, and it will have to be different again.

591

Genuine fruitful development consists not in rejecting the past in order to replace it with something entirely different, but rather in learning more accurately and truthfully to evaluate all possible positions, past and present, and in choosing neither the newest because it is newest, nor the oldest because it is oldest, but the best. This is very much the aim of Mr Holman in *Cousin Phillis*. And once again we are brought back to Matthew Arnold, with his assertion that man's, and in particular, the Hebraist's, real need is for "a larger conception of human nature", in order that he may understand where and how his own

⁵⁹¹ "Michael Trevanion", p.181.

nature "must come to its best".⁵⁹² In the character of Michael Trevanion, however, Rutherford is partly answering Arnold, by demonstrating in a Hebraist figure a depth of passion and a personal strength which has nothing to do with careful evaluation of knowledge, but which is rather rooted in a profound commitment to that which he loves. Rutherford's hope for the future is that it may be able to appreciate the true worth of such men as Michael Trevanion:

We shall, it is to be hoped, spend ourselves not in criticism of the record of the saints who sat by the sepulchre, but we shall love as they loved.

591

For an age which places excessive emphasis on "the intellectual virtues", it is easy to see where Michael goes wrong, and the true inhabitant of "the latter half of the [nineteenth] century" cannot help seeing it. The difficult and the valuable achievement is to find in oneself the humility which will enable one to learn from Michael, just as Michael is finally prepared to learn from his son, from Susan, and from an entire world order which seems to fly in the face of many of his most firmly held beliefs.

Michael's self-sacrifice can interestingly be compared with that of Scobie, the central character in Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* (1948), who, like Michael, decides to undergo damnation in order in some sense to rescue two women from misery which he cannot bear to watch them suffer. Many readers feel that Scobie's faith lacks credibility, and the novel certainly carries less force of emotional conviction than "Michael Trevanion", perhaps because Scobie is a better educated man, living in a later age, so that both he and his author are excessively self-conscious with regard to his somewhat eccentric religious beliefs. The problem is perhaps that *The Heart of the Matter*, still more than "Michael Trevanion", is written in an age "disposed to over-rate the intellectual virtues", with the

⁵⁹² cf above p.309.

result that religious feeling has no language left except that of abstract reason, and so has come to appear brittle and self-centred. George Orwell claims that Scobie's acts are incredible and that the novel to a great extent fails because:

If [Scobie] really believed in Hell, he would not risk going there merely to spare the feelings of a couple of neurotic women.

593

In other words, the Christian Hell, with all that going there implies, is, or at least ought to be to a Christian, far more terrible than any earthly, human unhappiness, which becomes trivial by comparison. This criticism is perhaps accurate in the the context which the novel itself sets up, since Greene's problem is that he is writing in and about a world which has lost touch with the level of belief in Hell and of language to describe Hell which was in the past capable of transcending the language of this-worldly, human unhappiness. Orwell's assumption - and an assumption which many readers might claim that the novel itself supports - is that a person will always think out the logical implications of his or her beliefs and act consistently with these implications.

Roger Sharrock, however, in a recent book on Greene's novels,⁵⁹⁴ takes a different line on *The Heart of The Matter*. Sharrock's interest is focused not so much upon the inconsistencies between twentieth century modes of thought and the profession of Christian belief, as upon the power of genuine belief, in any age, to bridge such gaps, and the increasingly impressive and apparently eccentric nature of the bridges thus constructed as

⁵⁹³ George Orwell, quoted in Roger Sharrock, *Saints, Sinners and Comedians: The Novels of Graham Greene* (Tunbridge Wells, Kent and Notre Dame, Indiana, 1984), p.145.

⁵⁹⁴ ie *Saints, Sinners and Comedians*, as above.

society becomes increasingly distanced from faith. For these reasons, Sharrock finds Orwell's reading inadequate:

Orwell's last point is a shrewd one, but it fails to take account of the impossible position into which Scobie has manoeuvred himself, any more than it recognises the charity which drives Scobie into accepting risks, in regard to his wife, and then on behalf of the dying child, long before he resigns himself to damnation. Orwell's reading, though perverse, does at any rate bring before us the full strain of the paradox by which virtuous intention commits sin and sin demonstrates saving love. In fact Scobie is a man of good will who sins; it is not that he is unbelievable that upsets us; it is the extent of his goodness and of his sin that we ... find alarming: he is indeed a moral monster, but then, in Greene's view Christian morality, losing life to save it, is a monstrous form of behaviour.

595

We have, then, in Graham Greene, another in the long succession of figures throughout Christian history who perceive sin as "a monster to be mused on".⁵⁹⁶ There is, at the heart of "Christian morality", a "nevertheless", an inevitable recognition of the paradoxical, outrageous fact that good men sin and that sinners can offer up their "complete self-obliteration"⁵⁹⁷ for the sake of another person; that "virtuous intention commits sin and sin demonstrates saving love". People, particularly within religious contexts, often act in ways which are alarmingly inconsistent with their stated beliefs, yet which are also, for this very reason, enormously impressive. Extremes are constantly meeting, so that "Christian morality" centres around "losing life to save it". Scobie and Michael Trevanion are both "moral monster[s]" - on the one hand deeply enmeshed in an "impossible position" of

⁵⁹⁵ Sharrock, pp.145-6.

⁵⁹⁶ cf above p.299.

⁵⁹⁷ cf above p.312.

confusion, guilt, spiritual pride and isolation from their neighbours, yet, on the other hand outstandingly capable of "lov[ing] as [the saints] loved",⁵⁹⁸ overflowing with a "charity" far outstretching that of more cautious men.

Kierkegaard lays considerable emphasis upon this paradoxical aspect of religion:

The paradox of faith has lost the intermediate term, ie the universal. On the one side it has the expression for the extremest egoism (doing the dreadful thing it does for one's own sake); on the other side the expression for the most absolute self-sacrifice (doing it for God's sake). Faith is this paradox, and the individual absolutely cannot make himself intelligible to anybody.

599

Faith commits a "dreadful thing"; it is shocking and wholly unintelligible to everyone except the believer himself. And within faith, "the extremest egoism" and "the most absolute self-sacrifice" become two sides of the same terrible action, the same inexplicable choice - the choice, perhaps, of one's own damnation. The self is either wholly present and central to everything, or completely obliterated, and, as a result, unable to exist in the "intermediate" form in which it can be conscious both of itself and of other people, and is thus able to communicate with other selves. Is it, then, success or failure, strength or weakness, to be in possession of a faith of this nature? Kierkegaard's use of the word "lost" suggests that faith is not now what it once was, and the impression created by his account of faith is of a vastly powerful and glorious state of being which is, however, to be obtained only at an alarmingly high price.

⁵⁹⁸ cf above p.317.

⁵⁹⁹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling - A Dialectical Lyric*, translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton, 1945), p.107.

Michael Trevanion's death marks and signifies both his reunion with and his final departure from the human world. His faith is at the same time profoundly altered and entirely unshaken, for God appears to him, as the result of his experiences, not as smaller, but as far bigger than He ever seemed to be before:

His faith remained unchanged, but it presented itself to him in a different shape. A new and hitherto unnoticed article in his creed forced itself before him. God's hand - for it was God's hand - had plucked him out of the sea and brought him back to life. What did that mean? Ah! what was he? - a worm of the earth! ... "The hawk flies not by my wisdom", murmured Michael to himself, "nor doth the eagle at my command make her nest on high. ... I see it - I see it all now. 'I have uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.'" ... He knelt down and prayed, and although he was much given to extempore prayer, he did not, in this his most intense moment, go beyond the prayer of our Lord, which, moreover, expressed what he wanted better than any words of his own. "Thy will", he repeated, "Thy will."

600

As before, Michael, more than ever now, uses not his own words, but the words of the Bible to voice that which he discovers in "his most intense moment". This time, however, the Scriptural language, taken from the book of *Job*, as it declares the ignorance of man in relation to God's infinite knowledge and power, and the need of man to submit to the Divine will, is also, in a way it was never before, a deeply personal utterance, offered up by Michael to God as the first speech of a man who was previously dumb, "with no words of his own".⁶⁰¹ As I have already demonstrated in Chapter Four, the book of *Job* is peculiarly appropriate for the late Victorian age because of its emphasis upon the silence and speechlessness of the person who has truly discovered something of the nature of God. It

⁶⁰⁰ "Michael Trevanion", pp.189-90.

⁶⁰¹ cf above p.307.

celebrates the power of not knowing, of dwelling in profound ignorance of Divine realities. Michael Trevanion has, in the past, prayed "extempore" in an attempt to say something to God which comes from himself, from the heart, and which is not merely part of an externally imposed ritual. Now, however, it is "the prayer of our Lord" which comes more directly from Michael's heart than any form of words he could ever invent for himself. The self and the Scriptures have come together, not in a manner which excludes any breadth of consciousness or development of understanding, but rather in a fashion which enables Michael to perceive that which was "hitherto unnoticed", to "see it all now", and to meet with his son in a simple humility which is "majestic".⁶⁰² And this is strikingly similar to Hardy's Jude's discovery, as he lies dying, that the words of the book of *Job* - the big language he has always craved - has at last become his own.⁶⁰³

Certainly Michael's relationships with other human beings have changed. He is able to see Susan, his rescuer from the sea, as "God's hand", accepting her as his daughter, for he sees Divine Providence at work in the events which have led up to this moment. Always acutely aware of logic, order and pattern, Michael believes wholeheartedly that the neat patterning of his rescue from the sea by Susan preceded by Susan's rescue by Robert is a token of God's hand controlling events. The question, however, which inevitably arises at this point is whether or not Michael is still in possession of "the paradox of faith"; whether his new liberality towards Susan and his humbling of himself before his son mean that he has lost the isolation which gives power to his belief. His death seems central to any attempt to find an answer to this question, for it appears, at least, to prevent any continuation of human intercourse and leaves Michael eternally alone with God as the direct outcome of his new awareness both of the vast distance between himself and God, and

⁶⁰² cf above p.315.

⁶⁰³ cf above Chapter Four.

also of the tremendous intimacy with God in prayer and in daily life which he has discovered to be possible through the Divine revelation:

But now he was dazed and in doubt. He was convinced that his rescue by Susan was an interposition of Providence, and if so, then all his former conclusions were wrong. What was he to do? How was he henceforth to know the mind of his Maker? Oh, how he wished he had lived in the days when the oracle was not darkened - in the days of Moses, when God spoke from the Mount, when there was the continual burnt-offering at the door of the tabernacle, "where I will meet you, to speak there unto thee". ... "If righteousness and judgement", he cried, inverting the Psalm, "are the habitation of His throne, clouds and darkness are round about Him." ...

In the evening he said he would go out and breathe a little fresh air before bedtime. It was a perfectly unsullied night, with no moon, but brilliant stars. Father and son sat upon a bench facing the sea, and the lighthouse from the rock sent its bright beam across the water. There is consolation and hope in those vivid rays. They speak of something superior to the darkness or storm - something which has been raised by human intelligence and human effort. Robert turned round to his father. "Look at the light, father, fourteen miles away." But his father did not see any light, or, if he did, it was not the Eddystone light - he was dead!

604

The word "dazed" is remarkably powerful and accurate in describing Michael's state of mind, for, although he seems overwhelmed by a sense of "darkness" with regard to the will of God, this near-despair of ever attaining spiritual knowledge is the direct result of a certainty different in quality from anything Michael has ever known - his absolute conviction that "his rescue by Susan was an interposition of Providence". The "darkness" which Michael experiences is created by an excess of light. His new vivid awareness of God's intervention means, he realises, that "all his former conclusions were wrong". He has to

⁶⁰⁴ "Michael Trevanion", pp.193-4.

start again, and he cannot see how he will be able to continue to know God on this new level, for he will now be utterly dissatisfied with the understanding of "the mind of his Master" with which he was formerly content. It is significant that God, speaking to Moses "from the Mount", "in the days when the oracle was not darkened", speaks "out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice".⁶⁰⁵ Revelation and "thick darkness" go together, for the closer God comes to humanity, the more inscrutable and terrifyingly distant from man, infinitely above and beyond him, does He appear. The brightness of "fire" is inseparable from "cloud and "thick darkness" in all human perceptions of that which is Divine and therefore utterly transcendent.

The Psalm whose words Michael "inverts" functions in a similar way:

The LORD reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof.

Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgement are the habitation of his throne.

A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about. His lightnings enlightened the world: the earth saw, and trembled.

606

These are words of praise and rejoicing; Michael turns them into something which hints, at least, at a certain degree of hopelessness, even bitterness; but the Psalmist has no difficulty in seeing the "clouds and darkness" surrounding God as simply another indication of His majestic power and holiness in exactly the same way as the "fire" and "lightnings" which God sends into the world display His glorious reign at which the whole world should be

⁶⁰⁵ *Deuteronomy* 5 v.22.

⁶⁰⁶ *Psalms* 97 vv.1-4.

glad. Michael's problem, then - "How was he henceforth to know the mind of his Master?" - contains within itself its own solution, for the most overwhelming consciousness of God goes hand in hand with a sense of the "clouds and darkness" which eternally hide Him from human eyes. And this is not far from "the paradox of faith", for there is no "intermediate term" here;⁶⁰⁷ on the one hand, the believer is completely isolated, lost in the darkness, while, on the other hand, his vision of God is so intense that he is dazzled by it. Conviction becomes inseparable from confusion, and God is both everywhere and nowhere.

Michael dies gazing at the beams shining out from the Eddystone lighthouse - but does he see this light at all? This man-made light would seem perhaps to furnish an answer to Michael's doubts and turmoil, for it offers "consolation and hope" and speaks of "something superior to the darkness or storm" - superior, maybe to the "clouds and darkness". Yet Michael, "did not see any light, or, if he did, it was not the Eddystone light", because, in the end, it is not he, but Robert who is in need of such "consolation". For Michael's faith is outdated, a "fossil";⁶⁰⁸ it belongs, like Michael, to a past generation, and it dies with him. A new Eddystone lighthouse, a new step forward in humanity's battle against the "darkness" and the "storm" was completed in 1882,⁶⁰⁹ eight years before the publication of the *Miriam's Schooling* volume. Robert belongs to the generation which saw this great achievement of engineering; Michael does not. Michael stares into the deep darkness, for it is there that he has met with God, and it is only there, even in the darkness of death, that he can hope to do so again. Robert looks at the Eddystone light, a symbol of "something which has been raised by human intelligence and effort", and discovers and reaffirms there, not an isolated and transcendent, paradoxical faith, but instead the "hope" which will ena-

⁶⁰⁷ cf above p.320.

⁶⁰⁸ cf above p.314.

⁶⁰⁹ cf Douglas B.Hague and Rosemary Christie, *Lighthouses, their Architecture, History and Archaeology* (Llandysul, Dyfed, 1975), pp.117-128.

ble him to make a happy marriage with Susan and to retain and foster the "bright" and "fair" "light" of his father's majestic self-humiliation in his memory.⁶¹⁰

⁶¹⁰ cf above p.314.

Chapter Six - Speech or Silence?

I sometimes hold it half a sin
To put in words the grief I feel;
For words, like Nature, half reveal
And half conceal the soul within.

611

This chapter looks directly at the extent to which Victorian writers consider the articulation of the world of "the soul" to be desirable, or even possible. The expression, in human language and art forms, of the spiritual, other-worldly aspects of reality, presents a great challenge to the creative artist, yet there is frequently a feeling that to attempt such a feat is at least "half a sin", since only a partial, and thus a distorted version of the truth to be communicated can ever be conveyed by human means. It is interesting to ask which "half" of Tennyson's achievement he considers sinful - the concealment, or the revelation? I will pursue this enquiry, particularly as it relates to the novel, first by looking at two novelists' views on the dangers and limitations of artistic modes of expression, especially expression of religious experience, and the threats posed by such attempts to art, religion and to the individual. I then offer an examination of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* as an example of the use of words in the novel as a means at least as much for the concealment as for the reve-

⁶¹¹ Alfred Lord Tennyson, *Poetical Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson*, The Albion Edition (London, 1902), *In Memoriam*, v, p.248.

lation of experience. It seems that it is often in that which remains unspoken that the truly important realities are to be found.

Walter Pater's Marius discerns through Christian worship, "the most touching image he had ever beheld". It is "the image of a young man, giving up one by one, for the greatest of ends, the greatest gifts".⁶¹² In seeing this, Marius sees something which affects him more deeply than any other aesthetic experience of his life - and he is a man whose life centres around his aesthetic experiences. Viewed from certain angles, however, Marius's "touching image" is extremely worrying. The sort of anxiety it arouses is expressed in *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford* by an atheist, Mardon. Rutherford is arguing that it does "not matter whether Christ actually existed or not":

What the four evangelists recorded was eternally true, and the Christ-idea was true whether it was ever incarnated or not in a being bearing His name.

"Pardon me", said Mardon, "but it does very much matter. It is all the matter whether we are dealing with a dream or with reality. I can dream about a man's dying on the cross in homage to what he believed, but I would not perhaps die there myself; ... To know that somebody has poetically imagined that it is possible, and has very likely been altogether incapable of its achievement, is no help".

613

Mardon, if presented with Marius's "touching image" would demand to know whether it were "dream" or "reality". For him, the mere fact that something has been "poetically im-

⁶¹² Walter Pater, *Marius the Epicurean*, Garland "Novels of Faith and Doubt" series, reprint of 1885 edition, two vols. in one, (New York and London, 1975), II, p.155.

⁶¹³ Mark Rutherford, *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford and Mark Rutherford's Deliverance* (New York and London, 1976), pp.65-6.

agined" does not turn it into "reality". Christ, if He is to have sufficient meaning for Mardon to in any way affect the way in which he lives, must be not only "eternally true", but historically true also. As I have demonstrated in Chapter Five, religious experience as presented in the novel must always have an important historical, as well as an eternal dimension, and the historical sometimes comes close to entirely displacing the eternal. Mardon believes that a human being can imagine that which has never taken place and may well never take place. As a result, a "Christ-idea", unless "incarnated", is of no use to those hesitating over self-sacrifice, and may indeed be harmful, drawing those who meditate upon it away from reality into a fantasy world.

Rutherford, however, believes that an idea can be "true", in and of itself, because for him the imagination is an extension of the realm of human experience, at least as real as the physical, historical zone of activity. This view finds expression in the writings of Coleridge:

The "primary imagination" is "the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition of the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM". ... Further, imagination has the power to identify with the reality beyond the senses, and thus to bring together the opposites of subject and object. In particular the knowledge of other selves and of God cannot take place through the abstraction and measurement of the understanding, but only through an imaginative act in which there is creative interchange.

614

The texts created by "the four evangelists" have their own value, as literature, irrespective of whether or not the characters and events which they describe "actually existed", just as a novel's worth depends upon something other than its accuracy as a historical document,

⁶¹⁴ Welch, p.117.

although its relationship with the world which it claims to represent is clearly of great importance:

Imitation cannot serve as a standard of the value of art, ... It is just as strange to value the production of art by the degree of its realism and truthfulness of details communicated, as it is to judge of the nutritive value of food by its appearance. When we define the value of a production by its realism, we merely show by this that we are not speaking of a production of art, but of an imitation of it.

615

A similar debate upon the truth of imagination is rehearsed in Mark Rutherford's novel, *Catharine Furze*. Cardew, who lives largely in a world of his own mind's making, is fascinated, above all else, by Catharine's ability to form and to articulate images. He says to her:

"I should like to see the picture you have formed of the man for whom you would care. I do not remember" - speaking slowly and dreamily - "ever to have seen a woman who would frame a loftier ideal." He unconsciously came nearer to her; his arm moved into hers, and she did not resist.

"What is the use of painting pictures when reality is unattainable?"

"Unattainable! Yes, just what I imagined: you paint something unattainable to ordinary mortality."

616

⁶¹⁵ Leo Tolstoy, "What is Art?" (1897), *Complete Works* (1904), Vol.xxii, translated by Leo Werner, in Allott, pp.74-5.

⁶¹⁶ Mark Rutherford, *Catharine Furze* (London, 1985), pp.164-5.

Cardew misunderstands Catharine; when she says "reality is unattainable", she means simply that she loves Cardew but cannot have him, and that this real loss makes all imaginary visions worthless. "Painting pictures", she implies, is either a children's game, for those who have not yet seen that which can give their life meaning, or a pursuit for fulfilled lovers who can, at their leisure, form fixed icons representing that which they possess. Cardew interprets Catharine's words to mean that she "paint[s] something unattainable"; her point, however, is that anything one can paint is attainable, as a painting, but only as a painting, and this is not enough. Catharine's "reality" is Cardew himself, and he is "unattainable" personally to her because he has already been "attained" by his wife. Cardew thinks that Catharine is linking "painting" with "reality", when in fact she is lamenting the hopeless separation between them. His phrase, "just what I imagined", gives him away; he has not listened to Catharine as a separate being, existing in a world beyond himself, but has instead formed a representation of her in his own mind, and it is to this that he listens. He thinks he has found somebody who thinks as he does.

There is something very odd about Cardew's means of expressing the attraction he feels towards Catharine. His body works directly enough, moving closer to her and placing his arm in hers, but all this takes place "unconsciously", although for Catharine it is the "reality" for the lack of which she is dying. It is unconscious for Cardew because his mind scarcely works at all upon the level of "reality", which is also why he is - unconsciously of course - so cruel to his wife, who lives almost entirely on that level. His hope is that Catharine, unlike his wife, will see the world in the same manner as he does: that she will see "just what [she] imagine[s]", merging "pictures" with "reality", so that the man for whom [she] would care" - and this is a very ordinary wooer's phrase - will be united with her lofty ideal. He is asking her to love him by loving an idealised image of perfect manhood because it is the image in her mind which alone is of importance. This, he believes, is the highest and best form of love. Like the young John Ruskin, he evaluates human beings and human relationships solely by artistic criteria:

I am amused, as I look back, in now perceiving what an aesthetic view I had of all my tutors and companions, - how consistently they took to me the aspect of pictures, and how I from the first declined giving any attention to those which were not well painted enough.

617

What, one wonders, are the dangers inherent in this approach?

Catharine is similar to Cardew in many ways, and it is only, ironically, her love for him which changes her. Both Catharine and Cardew have, in their upbringing, "lacked that wholesome influence which is exercised by healthy companionship with those who differ from us and are not afraid to oppose us".⁶¹⁸ Partly because of their isolation in a society that has no conception of artistic values, neither has encountered any mode of reading the world, other than his or her own, which seems at all convincing:

A real work of art destroys in the consciousness of the recipient the separation between himself and the artist, and not that alone, but also between himself and all whose minds receive this work of art. In this freeing of our personality from its separation and isolation, in this uniting of it with others, lies the chief characteristic and the great attractive force of art.

619

⁶¹⁷ John Ruskin, *Praeterita*, introduction by Kenneth Clark, (Oxford, 1949), p.190.

⁶¹⁸ *Catharine Furze*, p.91.

⁶¹⁹ Leo Tolstoy, *What is Art? and Essays on Art*, translated by Aylmer Maude, World's Classics Edition (Oxford,1930), p.228.

The great problem, however, according to Tolstoy, is that so much that passes as art in the nineteenth century fails to achieve this goal. It is only in their love for one another that Catharine and Cardew discover the need for self-denial for the sake of something higher than the self, and it is for this reason that, finally, each can say to the other, "you have saved me".⁶²⁰ Catharine is in desperate need of a meaning for her life beyond her own being, and Cardew seems to offer this:

A book would have turned much that was vague in her into definite shape; it would have enabled her to recognise herself; it would have given an orthodox expression to cloudy singularity; and she would have seen that she was a part of humanity in her most extravagant and personal emotions. As it was, her position was critical because she stood by herself, an individual belonging to no species, so far as she knew. Then she met Mr Cardew. It was through him the word was spoken to her, and he was the interpreter of the new world to her.

621

Most religions have their sacred books, because a book enables the individual believer to "recognise herself". A story or series of stories is offered, in which the reader to some extent places herself in the role of a character or characters and thus sees herself within a divinely given context:

The Scripture gives a truthful reflection of man's nature: it lets the man see himself, not as others see him, for others make mistakes, nor as he would see himself, for he is very apt to be partial to his own soul; but the Scripture makes him see himself as God sees him.

⁶²⁰ *Catharine Furze*, p.183.

⁶²¹ *Catharine Furze*, pp.94-5.

In order to "recognise herself", Catharine Furze needs to see herself as "belonging" to a larger group so that she can learn what other people call those experiences which are to her, "her most extravagant and personal emotions". This process is described as a movement from the "vague" and "cloudy" to the "definite" and "orthodox" because it is a means of placing limits upon one's conception of self. The price of self-knowledge is the acceptance of the book - the willingness to see oneself as a character in somebody else's story and thus to admit that one is under the control of an author.

Now Cardew is, in some sense, an artist and author. He has written a story, which he gives to Catharine to read because he is seeking "a pupil or a friend whose world is my world".⁶²³ It is the account of Charmides, a young sculptor living in Rome around 300 AD, who encounters a group of Christians, falls in love with one of them, and dies a death which may or may not be that of a martyr. Charmides, a Greek, lives for the glimmers of transcendent realities which he perceives in art and philosophy, but he is aware that these revelatory powers are seriously damaged by moral corruption. After spending a night with a prostitute, he sees his work as "a mockery ... a mere toy, a dilettante dissipation, the embroidery of corruption".⁶²⁴ Art, he believes, has no value in an immoral society:

The love of the beautiful is itself moral - that is to say, what we love in it is virtue. A perfect form or a delicate colour are the expression of something which is destroyed in us by subjugation to the baser desires or meanness, and he who has been unjust to man or woman misses the true interpretation of a cloud or falling wave.

⁶²² *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit 31*, p.363.

⁶²³ *Catharine Furze*, p.70.

⁶²⁴ *Catharine Furze*, p.74,

Charmides believes his sculpture should be more than decoration - that it should express the ideal, the wholly virtuous state of the world and of humanity. A statue may have "perfect form", but it will be "a mere toy", of no real value, to anyone "who has been unjust to man or woman" because such a person has destroyed in himself that alone which is capable of responding to the beauty of the statue - the consciousness of levels of reality beyond the mere satisfaction of self-seeking, bodily desires. A society that loves art is a society in excellent moral health, and the best art critic will be the man or woman whose life is most pure.

The difficulty with such a view, which is, according to Tolstoy, incomplete because pre-Christian, is that it is easily perverted into a stifflingly narrow elevation of beauty for beauty's sake:

From the time that people of the upper classes lost faith in Church-Christianity, beauty (that is to say, the pleasure received from art) became their standard of good and bad art. And in accordance with that view an aesthetic theory naturally sprang up among those upper classes, justifying such a conception - a theory according to which the aim of art is to exhibit beauty. The partisans of this aesthetic theory, in confirmation of its truth, affirmed that it was no invention of their own, but existed in the nature of things and was recognised even by the ancient Greeks. But this assertion was quite arbitrary, and had no foundation other than the fact that among the ancient Greeks, in consequence of the low level of their moral idea as compared with the Christian, the conception of what is good, το αγαθον, was not yet sharply divided from their conception of the beautiful, το καλον. The highest perfection of goodness (not only identical with beauty but for the most part contrasting with it) discerned by the Jews even in the times of Isaiah, and fully expressed by Christianity, was quite unknown to the Greeks. They supposed that the beautiful must necessarily also be the good.

This awareness of "the highest perfection of goodness", which is beautiful, but which is more than beauty, lies at the heart of St Augustine's understanding of his beliefs regarding beauty before his conversion:

I was in love with beauty of a lower order and it was dragging me down. I used to ask my friends, "Do we love anything unless it is beautiful? What, then, is beauty and in what does it exist? What is it that attracts us and wins us over to the things we love? Unless there were beauty and grace in them, they would be powerless to win our hearts."

The unconverted Augustine's claim is that there is something in a person's heart which is drawn irresistibly to beauty, and to nothing else. The capacity to love and the capacity to discern beauty are, in fact, one and the same. But, looking back on his former self, Augustine, while denying the genuine nature of neither the "love" nor the "beauty" in his earlier experience as a Platonist, says that this love was "dragging [him] down", increasingly separating him from God. Augustine appeals to the "great ones of the world" to "come down from those heights, for then you may climb and, this time, climb to God. To climb against him was your fall."⁶²⁶ The beauty that the pagan understands is "beauty of a lower order" - so much lower that its highest peaks are in reality far, far below the standards required by God. Moreover, the pride involved in valuing so highly something of such little worth in the eyes of God drags the aesthete still further down. It is of no use at all - indeed, quite the opposite - to climb, unless one climbs to God.

⁶²⁵ *What is Art?*, p.135.

⁶²⁶ St Augustine, *Confessions*, translated with an introduction by R.S.Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1961), p.83.

This is similar to the belief of Demariste, the Christian woman whom Charmides comes to love:

"I saw that all art, all learning, everything which men value, were as straw compared with God's commands, and that it would be well to destroy all our temples, and statues, and all that we have which is beautiful, if we could thereby establish the kingdom of God within us, and so become heirs of the life everlasting."

627

"God's commands" are here clearly opposed to "all that we have which is beautiful"; "the kingdom of God" comes very closer to being defined as that which is not beautiful. The problem is that beauty is that which "men value"; it is an end, a goal for them, and so displaces "God's commands" from the primary position. God says to Jerusalem:

And thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty: for it was perfect through my comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the LORD God. But thou didst trust in thine own beauty, and playdest the harlot because of thy renown, and pouredst out thy fornications on every one that passed by; his it was.

628

Beauty comes directly from God; it is "my comeliness, which I had put upon thee". She to whom this beauty is given, however, sees it as her "own beauty", and places her trust in this, rather than in its source. The solution suggested by Demariste is, in effect, iconoclasm. George Eliot in *Romola* expresses a certain degree of sympathy with this approach through her description of Romola's response to Savonarola's bonfire of vanities:

⁶²⁷ *Catharine Furze*, p.78.

⁶²⁸ *Ezekiel* 16 vv.14.15.

For herself, she was conscious of no inward collision with the strict and sombre view of pleasure which tended to repress poetry in the attempt to repress vice. Sorrow and joy have each their peculiar narrowness; and a religious enthusiasm like Savonarola's which ultimately blesses mankind by giving the soul a strong propulsion towards sympathy with pain, indignation against wrong and the subjugation of sensual desire, must always incur the reproach of a great negation. ... That subtle result of culture which we call taste was subdued by the need for deeper motive; just as the nicer demands of the palate are annihilated by urgent hunger.

629

The difficulty, however, is that this means of approaching God, in itself, seems entirely negative, particularly within the context of the novel - and this is a problem which is repeatedly encountered in *Romola*, where "the reproach of a great negation" seems to be the only credible alternative to patterns of poetic imagery and this-worldly power and beauty which constantly trick and deceive those who are allured by them. Demariste's goal is not that which appeals to the senses, but rather a kingdom "within us" and a "life everlasting", beyond this present life, and thus beyond the scope of the novel. That which is outside the self but readily available to it is to be sacrificed in order to gain two invisible realms: one hidden by its proximity to the self and the other by its distance from it.

For Charmides, of course, the suggestion that humanity should "destroy all [its] statues" in order to establish God's kingdom strikes at the very centre of his life. Everything that he, personally, values and counts as beautiful must be considered to be "as straw compared with God's commands". The problem in the latter part of the story lies in determining how far Charmides has understood and followed this precept. For his profession of faith is

⁶²⁹ George Eliot, *Romola*, edited with an introduction by Andrew Sanders (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1980), p.502.

greatly complicated by the fact that he loves Demariste, who is "not beautiful, but [has] a peculiar expression on her face very rare in Rome at that time".⁶³⁰

Charmides had fallen in love with this slave, but it was love so different from any love which he had felt before for a woman, that it ought to have had some other name. It was love of the soul, of that which was immortal, of God in her; it was a love too, of no mere temporary phenomenon, but of reality outlasting death into eternity. ... It was the new love with which men were henceforth to love women - the love of Dante for Beatrice.

631

Previously we have seen the word, "reality" used by Rutherford to denote that which is physically present, here and now, available to the senses;⁶³² it is the opposite of "dreams" and "pictures",⁶³³ existing wholly independently of the person experiencing it, created by something beyond his or her mind. The prostitute offers Charmides a certain sort of "reality", in comparison with which his art appears "unreal to him"⁶³⁴ for a time, because he is living on a merely physical, animal plane, valuing only the experiences of the moment. His love for Demariste is different because it is "the love of Dante for Beatrice" - the love of a poet, extending beyond time into eternity. This "reality", then, which art portrays, gives humanity a sense of permanent meaning for itself. The danger is that the art itself will displace the meaning contained within it, and this temptation is, at least for the artist,

⁶³⁰ *Catharine Furze*, p.76.

⁶³¹ *Catharine Furze*, p.81.

⁶³² cf above p.328.

⁶³³ cf above p.330.

⁶³⁴ *Catharine Furze*, p.74.

far more subtle than that extended by prostitutes and the life of the body. Art, and the novel in particular, vastly elevates the value of human experience, but in so doing, it threatens, by its very existence, the source of that human value, which must always be something bigger than the work of art. Thus:

It was a constant source of anxiety to [George Eliot], whether her strenuous realism was, finally, unreal when compared to the story of a real life.

635

And, in *The Pilgrim's Progress*:

God has been removed from his superior heaven and placed familiarly in the authorial consciousness and in a text which demands to be read, not as a statement of Truth, but as a representation of experience, a fiction. The reader is given the option, whether he likes it or not, of seeing the author himself as the only true agency behind the events, and of seeing God as existing only within the structural design and dream-vision of the artist-creator. ... To fictionalise is to secularise, and an incentive to doubt; those of Bunyan's pious contemporaries who objected to his use of wit, fancy and "romance" were more than humourless prigs - they knew in their bones that *The Pilgrim's Progress* was dangerous stuff.

636

It is not only "the soul" which is commonly thought of as "outlasting death into eternity", but also art. One of the main themes of Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is the idea that the urn freezes and holds one moment throughout all time:

⁶³⁵ Philip Davis, *Memory and Writing from Wordsworth to Lawrence*, (Liverpool, 1983), p.293.

⁶³⁶ Vincent Newey, in *The Pilgrim's Progress - Critical and Historical Views*, edited by Vincent Newey (Liverpool, 1980), p.27.

Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal - yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

637

Charmides' experience in loving Demariste is strikingly similar to that of this "Bold Lover" on the urn; because he loves "reality", "God in her", he loves that which "cannot fade", but he can never have his "bliss" because she is not, to him, a "temporary phenomenon". The love that is consummated dies: this is a large part of the message of the eternally beautiful "unravish'd bride of quietness".⁶³⁸ There is a price to be paid for a love that can "outlast death into eternity". It is, in effect, as if Charmides were in love with Keats's urn; he cannot possess the object of his love, but it is this very inaccessibility that he loves, because it is immortal. The object of this love is "unattainable"⁶³⁹ because it is an artistic expression of an eternal idea. Charmides' final vision as he dies is of "nothing but Demariste" because Demariste is the visible representation of God for him. Does the "reality" which Charmides loves exist solely as a work of art, or does it have a life of its own which transcends even the perfection of form and beauty? This is, in fact, a formulation of the question which the Church, uncertain whether to consider Charmides a martyr, is unable to answer. It is the

⁶³⁷ John Keats, *Selected Poems and Letters of Keats*, selected by Robert Gittings, (London, 1966), p.127, "Ode on a Grecian Urn", ll.15-20.

⁶³⁸ "Ode on a Grecian Urn", l.1.

⁶³⁹ cf above p.330.

question posed by the title of the story: "Did he Believe?".⁶⁴⁰ In order for him to die a Christian death, that which Charmides loves "in" Demariste must be not a creation of his own imagination, but the objective, self-defined God who is the focus of Christian worship.

At this point we need to return to Mr Cardew, the author of the story, in order to seek some answers. It will be helpful to do so in the light of a comment by C.S.Lewis on the subject of Christian and Pagan writers:

The Christian will take literature a little less seriously than the cultured Pagan ... the unbeliever is always apt to make a kind of religion of his aesthetic experiences. ... And a posteriori it is not hard to argue that all the greatest poems have been made by men who valued something else much more than poetry - even if that something else were only cutting down enemies in a cattle-raid or tumbling a girl in a bed. The real frivolity, the solemn vacuity, is with those who make literature a self-existent thing to be valued for its own sake.

641

Those who value literature "for its own sake", are, Lewis suggests, both as comical and as terrifying as a group of people anxiously and carefully cleaning blood off a beautiful carpet while, lying in the centre of that carpet, a man is bleeding to death. They have, in effect, missed the point. They have failed to see anything beyond the intoxication of pattern and colour, and, as a result, pattern and colour will in the end be less pleasing to them than to those who see artistic form as conveying an idea about something that is not art, and that is, perhaps, ugly. For the bleeding man is ugly, but those who seek to help him are also perhaps without realising it, pursuing the best possible method of saving the carpet. They are healing the wound itself instead of merely dealing with its secondary effects. The kind

⁶⁴⁰ Catharine Furze, p.72.

⁶⁴¹ C.S.Lewis, *Rehabilitations and Other Essays* (Oxford, 1939), pp.195-6.

of poet whom Lewis prefers is not self-consciously working towards beauty as an end in itself, although he will be delighted if beauty becomes, by some mysterious process, one of the qualities of his achievement. Like humility, beauty is never given to those who pursue it in order to possess and control it for their own ends, their own glorification. Anyone seeking to use it for himself abuses it in much the same manner as that of the early Christians in their use of spiritual gifts, as described by Richard Church in a sermon of 1866:

The purpose was lost sight of in their keen appreciation of the instrument, and in the personal satisfaction of possessing and using it; and St Paul's words disclose a state of feeling more absorbed by the interest of a new and strange endowment than impressed by the awfulness of its immediate source and the responsibilities of having been called to hold it. Side by side with gifts from heaven and "powers of the world to come", were the levity and frivolity of man, surprised and dazzled, measuring them by his own scale, pressing them into the service of his vanity.

642

Art is not to be "valued for its own sake", but is rather to be taken "a little less seriously" than something else - something which makes it meaningful. This, Lewis claims, is the approach to literature that one would expect to find in a Christian, because a Christian does not need to look for a "kind of religion" in his or her "aesthetic experiences". Literature and art cannot be "self-existent" to the Christian, because God, as Creator of the universe, is alone self-existent. He alone is to be "valued for [His] own sake".

Cardew's limitation is very similar to this "Pagan" approach to art, for he revels in language for its own sake, being more interested in describing problems - the problem, for

⁶⁴² Richard William Church, *The Gifts of Civilisation and other sermons and lectures* (London and New York, 1903), p.4.

example, of whether or not Charmides becomes a Christian - than in solving them. Words mean more to him than do simple experiences, so that Mrs Cardew is forced to complain:

"He says I do not properly enjoy a thing if I cannot in some measure describe my enjoyment - articulate it, to use his own words." He had inwardly taunted her, even when she was suffering, and had said to himself that her trouble must be insignificant, for there was no colour or vivacity in her description of it.

643

Cardew's demand here is that everything should be placed outside the self and shared with others before it can claim any real significance. This is precisely the same mistake as he makes when, talking to Catharine, he assumes that the "unattainable" exists in the realm of the imagination and not in the external world, because he identifies a physical encounter with something with a full possession of it as a form of "reality", but a "reality" which is not worth possessing.⁶⁴⁴ If his wife could talk with "colour" and "vivacity" - surely a most inappropriate style for the description of pain - about her troubles, Cardew would in some sense see her problem as "significant", but he would not be interested in helping her. To do so would, after all, remove the source of "colour" and "vivacity" - his wife's unhappy emotional state. He is also placing increasing pressure on his wife "to use his own words", since he believes he will only respect her if she learns to speak his language. But her "trouble" is, to a large extent, her very inability to speak that language. If she found the words, she would lose that which she was being asked to say with them. The ability to speak is worthless if there is nothing to say. And this is exactly why Catharine has little

⁶⁴³ *Catharine Furze*, p.65.

⁶⁴⁴ cf above p.330.

time for "painting pictures".⁶⁴⁵ The value of eloquence is, at best, questionable. Isaac Williams, in *Tract No.87* (1840), writes:

The great teacher of the Gentiles, in whom we would most of all have expected to find [eloquence], was "weak in bodily presence, and in speech contemptible;" and rendered so, it is supposed, by "a thorn in the flesh". Whereas, it would be thought by many now, that the great requisites for a successful minister are a powerful bodily presence and eloquent speech. Indeed, St Paul says, that the effect of words of men's wisdom would be to render the Cross of Christ of none effect.

646

Professor H.R.Rookmaaker, a twentieth-century Evangelical art critic, describes this difficulty with regard to the depiction of Judaeo-Christian stories:

This problem is always present in one way or another in the portrayal of Biblical narrative. The picture can be made historically exact ... attempting to reconstruct what a camera would have recorded. But that would reduce the event to something of no more than historical interest. Or it can give the true, timeless message, but often only by losing the historical truth of the fact. And true Christianity is firmly based on historical facts.

647

⁶⁴⁵ cf above p.330.

⁶⁴⁶ Isaac Williams, *Tract No.87 On Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge* (1840), in *Evangelical and Oxford Movements*, p.123.

⁶⁴⁷ H.R.Rookmaaker, *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture*, second edition, (Leicester, 1973), p.16.

All too often, human expressions of important realities succeed only in conveying either the "timeless" or the "historical" aspect of their subject matter, at the expense of the other. In Biblical narratives, however, and particularly in accounts of the Incarnation, this paradox is fully realised. Christ, the eternal God, becomes a man, limited by time and space. It is, to the orthodox believer, of crucial importance that Christ's life, death and resurrection are "historical facts" - particularly in an age of liberal theology, when the historicity of many of the events recorded in the Bible is under attack - but it is equally important that these facts also carry a "true, timeless message" which transcends history and which cannot be described merely in terms of physical, historical events:

Christ is the most gigantic figure of history. To take in His full proportions one must be both near and away. The same is true of all greatness. Of all great poets, philosophers, politicians, men of science, it is said that their generation never knew them. They dawn upon us as time rolls past. Then their life comes out in its true perspective, and the symmetry of their work is revealed.

648

Charmides' statue, in which he "realise[s] a Divine idea which [is] immortal, no matter what might become of its embodiment",⁶⁴⁹ has nothing to do with history. It contains only "the true, timeless message", which is why art of this nature is viewed by St Augustine as being "of a lower order".⁶⁵⁰

⁶⁴⁸ Henry Drummond, *The Ideal Life and othe Unpublished Addresses*, second edition (London, 1898), p.69.

⁶⁴⁹ cf *Catharine Furze*, p.73.

⁶⁵⁰ cf above p.336.

On the other hand, a solely historical approach is demonstrated by Catharine Furze's parents' view of art:

Over the mantelpiece was a portrait of His Majesty King George the Fourth in his robes, and exactly opposite was a picture of the Virgin Mary, which was old and valuable. Mr Furze bought it at a sale with some other things, and did not quite like it. It savoured of Popery, which he could not abide; but the parson one day saw it and told Mrs Furze it was worth something; whereupon she put it in a new maple frame, and had it hung in a place of honour.

651

This is what both Cardew and Catharine are reacting against, but they are pushed towards the opposite extreme by the very force of their need to react. The belief that the picture "savoured of Popery" is, however crude, a response to the "timeless message" of the painting. This, however, has in the end to make way for a new evaluation of the picture as a physical and commercial object. The "event" commemorated by the hanging of the picture is nothing to do with the life of the Virgin, but is rather the painting of the picture itself, a long time ago, by a good artist, with the result that it is now "old and valuable", along with the occasion of the parson's telling Mrs Furze of its value. Art which is in this way seen as being "of no more than historical interest" is wholly secularised. It is completely cut off from art's traditional task of "revealing ... 'eternal truth', that which is more than the eye can see"⁶⁵² because it has been stripped of its eternal dimension. The "embodiment" is everything. The alternatives, then, seem pretty grim: sterile eternity or materialistic history.

⁶⁵¹ *Catharine Furze*, p.9.

⁶⁵² Rookmaaker, pp.110-111.

Catharine Furze, however, does not end upon quite such a depressing note. Both Catharine and Cardew are, after all, deeply altered by their relationship with one another and its attendant circumstances, and each of them claims, in the end, to have been "saved" by the other.⁶⁵³ In looking at Catharine's dying face, Cardew finally has revealed to him "more than the eye can see" in a form which is more than a beautiful creation of the imagination:

Some men are determined by principles, and others are drawn and directed by a vision or a face. 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.

654

Here a precise historical time and location - "at Chapel Farm that May Sunday morning" - contains something that also takes place "for evermore". Catharine's death, like Christ's, happens, for Mr Cardew at least, and perhaps, to a lesser extent, for the readers of *Catharine Furze*, both once, in history, and also now and forever, eternally and timelessly. It is significant, however, that the effect on Mr Cardew takes place beyond the limits of the novel - his response to Catharine's dead face can only be understood in terms of the reader's response to the text of the novel, for Cardew is "controlled" and "moulded" by the face precisely to the extent that the reader's imagination is controlled and moulded by that which he reads. The novel does not describe this final revelation directly, for Catharine's face is conveyed solely as it affects Cardew, and it seems that eternal meanings can only have a place in the novel at the expense of temporal experience, and vice versa.

⁶⁵³ cf above p.333.

⁶⁵⁴ *Catharine Furze*, p.183.

The "white and saintly" face is not a passive thing, nor is it possessed by Cardew in the way in which Mrs Furze owns and frames her painting, and neither is it preserved forever just out of reach, like the girl on the Grecian Urn. It is "set for evermore" "before" Mr Cardew, not, as far as one can tell, by his conscious choice, but rather as an inevitable condition of his continuing existence. Because of what has happened, Catharine will always be "before" him, leading him on, "controll[ing] and mould[ing]" him with immense power. The vision is greater than the seer; this is not a creation of Cardew's imagination, nor is it static, for Cardew is constantly being changed.

This might all seem rather sinister, were it not for the word "saintly" which introduces an orthodox Christian element into what would otherwise seem very much like a haunting - similar, perhaps, to Heathcliff's being haunted by Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*. The name, "Chapel Farm", too, hints at Christian influences, united with natural forces of growth and sustenance. Cardew, a Protestant minister, is "saved", paradoxically, by the image of a saint. "Theology or ethics", the narrator claims, could have, for Cardew, no power equal to that of this vision which he sees both with his physical and with his spiritual eyes. He is not "determined" by Catharine's face, but rather "drawn and directed". In other words, he is not taught a principle or law which he can then set himself to obey, but he is instead led through life by the face itself. It draws him ever towards itself so that he is not fixed, but rather moving towards a goal. The word "saintly" suggests that the face may come from God, but, whether or not this is the case, one thing is certain: it is not one of Cardew's self-projections upon the universe - it is rather an aspect of the universe being projected onto Cardew's consciousness. It is neither mere reality, nor mere representation, but both, combined into one, potent, fertile life-changing whole.

* * * * *

The expression of religious feeling - and so much of the religious belief in the Victorian novel is presented in terms of feeling - constantly risks displacing the experience upon which it relies for its authenticity. Two novels by George Moore, a writer nearly contemporary with Rutherford, - *Evelyn Innes* and its sequel, *Sister Teresa* - explore this problem from within the culture of Roman Catholic aestheticism. This pair of novels looks, largely through the eyes of an opera singer who has been brought up as a Catholic, at music as a medium for both sensual indulgence and Christian worship. The singer expresses something passionately whether she is in the opera house or in church, and passion, of some sort, is as necessary for the Christian as for the artist, the prima donna. Evelyn Innes, however, struggles throughout both novels to find a mode of expression which does not torture her with guilt. The Catholic Church positively encourages certain kinds of music, and yet Evelyn is unable simultaneously to follow its teaching and to be an opera singer. Her problem is not simply that her music is opposed to her religion - the renunciation of one does not result easily in the achievement of the other, or at least not without a deep sense of personal fragmentation and moral confusion - but rather that the life of a nun is surprisingly similar to the life of a prima donna, and vice versa.

The Roman Catholic view of the role of music in worship is explained as follows:

The practice of singing in church proceeds from the idea that, in the exaltation of prayer, the soul, having reached the last limit obtainable by mere words, demands an extended expression, and finds it in song.

655

⁶⁵⁵ George Moore, *Evelyn Innes* and *Sister Teresa*, Garland "Novels of Faith and Doubt" series, reprints of 1898 and 1901 editions respectively, (New York and London, 1975), *Evelyn Innes*, p.227.

It is as if the soul, in prayer, is climbing a ladder, which is, from one point of view, a measure of its ever increasing proximity to God, but which is also an upward progression in the soul's "expression" of something. It is prayer itself, not music, that causes "exaltation"; song does not in itself lift the worshipper into the Divine presence. It does, however, provide a means of going beyond the "last limit" of speech, into an "extended" language which operates on the same level as the "exaltation of prayer", and is therefore appropriate to it:

Psalms and hymns are the voice of the religious emotions, the religious affections, it may be the religious passions. They urge what a prayer urges, but they do it under more vivid impressions of the power addressed, from the larger and more inspiring aspect given by an awakened imagination or a heart deeply stirred. They carry to the highest point whatever there is in a religion; they mark the level to which in idea and faith, in aspiration and hope, it can rise.

656

Expression, and particularly powerful, emotive expression in song is, however, a big problem for Evelyn, because it is something she is very good at. Precisely because she has no difficulty whatsoever in externalising whatever is within her at a high pitch of intensity, Evelyn suffers increasing doubts regarding her own sincerity. Her fear is not that she will arrive dumb in God's presence, but rather that she will arrive, with a beautiful song on her lips, in Hell - that she is like those of Mr Tryan's hearers described in "Janet's Repentance" as having "gained a religious vocabulary rather than religious experience".⁶⁵⁷ As a prima donna, Evelyn acts as well as sings, and the combination of these two art forms means that her song, intended by the Church to function as an "extended expression" of some aspect

⁶⁵⁶ *Gifts of Civilisation*, pp.255-6.

⁶⁵⁷ *Scenes*, p.319.

of the soul's most real experience, is used to express the feelings of fictitious characters. As a result, the line dividing her own life from that of the Wagnerian figures she becomes on stage is, for Evelyn, increasingly blurred. When, having made her name as a singer, Evelyn returns to her father, from whom she has run away in order to pursue her career, and kneels at his feet in repentance, she cannot distinguish this moment from a scene in her operatic repertoire:

She knew she was expressing all that was most deep in her nature, and yet she had acted all that she now believed to be reality on the stage many times. It seemed as true then as it did now - more true; for she was less self-conscious in the fictitious than in the real scene. She knelt at her father's or at Wotan's feet - she could not distinguish; all limitations had been razed. She was the daughter at the father's feet.

658

Evelyn is "expressing all that [is] most deep in her nature" - she is certain of this - but it is this very certainty that is the problem. She ought to come to her father as an amateur repentant daughter, whereas she is a professional. If, paradoxically, she failed to "express all that was most deep in her nature", her repentance might be better, because less of a personal achievement.

Repentance is an admission of failure, but Evelyn repents successfully. W.H.Auden, as I shall demonstrate,⁶⁵⁹ perceives major difficulties for the artist attempting to portray his or her own experience as a sinner before God. The word "reality" occurs again here. This moment with her father is what Evelyn "believe[s] to be reality", but it seems less "true" than when done on the stage. This is because Evelyn identifies truth with personal spon-

⁶⁵⁸ *Evelyn Innes*, p.210.

⁶⁵⁹ cf below, Chapter Seven.

taneity, and also because the larger and further detached from herself her audience is, the more her existence and her actions seem to be authorised and validated. The only truth that she can believe in for this moment is its "true, timeless message"; she is unable to grasp "the historical truth of the fact".⁶⁶⁰ Evelyn's problem is, in a sense, that she is doing things in the wrong order. If she had first come to her own father in repentance and had then taken on the role of Brunnhilde, the performances on stage could have been commemorative representations of a historical event. She would then, in becoming "the daughter at the father's feet", be able to offer her audiences a generalised and thus universalised picture of a "real scene". But if she is "the daughter" at her own father's feet, she will be unable, looking back, to remember which of her many performances of the repentant daughter was the "real" one. If the event is eternal only, and not historical, there is no focus for the personal memory, and so it will be impossible for Evelyn to say that this moment has happened in her life, but only that it happens always, in every daughter's life.

The removal of "all limitations" means that the only form of sincerity Evelyn is able to offer her father is the sincerity of self-expression. She genuinely expresses "all that [is] most deep in her nature", but this is both more and less than her father desires. He wants Evelyn to leave the stage, and Wagner's music, and Owen, her lover, and to return to himself and his medieval Church music. She, however, uses a submissive role in order to evade real submission to her father's wishes. She turns him into Wotan, and as Wotan he has to forgive her, because that is what Wotan does in the fictional scene. In this she resembles Mr Cardew, and also Rutherford's Michael Trevanion⁶⁶¹ in her expectation that other people should play their allotted roles in the fiction she has imagined. Evelyn is sincere in expressing her own "nature", but wholly insincere in that she forces her father into acting the part her imagination has created for him.

⁶⁶⁰ cf above p.345.

⁶⁶¹ cf above Chapter Four..

It is not only the sincerity of an artist's life that is at issue in *Evelyn Innes*, but also the sincerity of art itself. Monsignor Mostyn, an important Catholic prelate who arranges for the sponsorship of Evelyn's father's music, has firm views on this. He is shocked by Wagner's *Parsifal* which contains "a parody of the Mass":

He had read the book and knew the music, and could not understand how a great work of art could contain scenes from real life. Whether these be religious ceremonies or social functions, the artistic sin is the same.

662

The "real life" with which Monsignor Mostyn is concerned is that part of life which many people in a secular age would think of as being least "real": rituals, ceremonies, traditionally ordered occasions - all that is furthest removed from the ideals of individualism and spontaneity which emerge as the authority of the Church recedes. This view goes hand in hand with that of C.S.Lewis, who, writing on the relationship between Christianity and literature, reminds his readers:

In the New Testament the art of life itself is an art of imitation: can we, believing this, believe that literature, which must derive from real life, is to aim at being "creative", "original", and "spontaneous"?

663

"Real life", then, is not something that the individual makes for him or herself; it is rather a copying of the original "real life", which is for the Christian the life of God, as expressed in the life of Christ. For the Catholic, "real life" is found primarily in the sacraments, which

⁶⁶² *Evelyn Innes*, p.331.

⁶⁶³ *Rehabilitations*, p.191.

are "an art of imitation" in that, through them, the believer adopts a role which has eternal significance as he or she acts out parts in the story taught by the Church. To be "creative", would mean, in this context, to be sinful, since it would involve setting up an image of one's own making as being more worthy of imitation than the image offered by God. It is, quite simply the sin of pride.

Monsignor Mostyn cannot understand "how a great work of art could contain scenes from real life" precisely because "real life" is, to him, so much like art. The Oberammergau Passion Play is acceptable to him⁶⁶² because it is not a fictitious story but rather a religious occasion. As a direct representation of the sufferings of Christ, it is, in itself, "real life". *Parsifal*, on the other hand, is, the Monsignor acknowledges, "a great work of art". The problem lies in deciding what he means by this. To the reader accustomed to the conventions of the nineteenth century novel, the idea that art should not "contain scenes from real life" is as bewilderingly unexpected as the opposite view seems to be for Monsignor Mostyn. What can this "art" be, which is not to represent something immediately related to the day-to-day experience of its audience - for this is what one tends to think of as "real life". Thackeray said of Dickens:

I quarrel with his art in many respects: which I don't think represents Nature duly ... The Art of Novels is to represent Nature: to convey as strongly as possible the sentiment of reality.

664

The Mass, however, is "real life" to the Monsignor, and it is already a re-presentation of Christ's sacrifice. If one attempts to represent a representation, the outcome will be a "parody". The Mass is only a true representation when it is celebrated by an ordained priest; if an actor takes this role, one has something which may look exactly like the most

⁶⁶⁴ W.M.Thackeray, Letter to David Masson (6 May 1851), *Letters* (1945), in Allott, p.67.

real moment of the whole of "real life", but from which the essential truth, the central reality, is missing. As a "parody" is always subordinate to its original, so a stage version of the Mass adds nothing to its source, but rather takes the meaning out of it. A parody sets out to frame its source within that which it considers to be a larger context; *Parsifal* is "a great work of art", but it sins as soon as it attempts to "contain" scenes from real life, making them smaller than art, whereas they are, in truth, far larger than it.

Ulick Dean, who in many ways differs vastly from Monsignor Mostyn, and who is far from being an orthodox Roman Catholic, agrees with him in his censure of *Parsifal*. Ulick expresses his response to the opera's distortions as follows:

But the vulgarly vaunted Good Friday music did not deceive him; at the second or third time of hearing he had perceived its insincerity. It was very beautiful music, but in such a situation sincerity was essential. ... But the obtusely religious could not fail to be moved; the appeal of the chaste kiss, with little sexual cries all the while in the orchestra, could not but stir the vulgar heart to infinite delight, and the art was so dexterously beautiful that the intelligent were deceived.

665

Two groups of people are, apparently, vulnerable to the lure of *Parsifal*: the "vulgar" and the "intelligent". The former group are "obtusely religious"; they are "moved" and "stirred" when an appeal is made to their feelings regarding certain subjects - in this case religion and sex - because they respond uncritically to fixed, simple stimuli. The intelligent are similarly blinded, paradoxically, by their very ability to perceive that which is beautiful and skilful. They are delighted on an intellectual and aesthetic rather than on an emotional level, but

⁶⁶⁵ Evelyn Innes, pp.192-3.

it is still pleasure which deceives. It is possible for a "stuffed Christ"⁶⁶⁶ to delight both the mind and the body, but as long as he is "stuffed", the experience remains essentially false. The problem is that this scene is written for its human audience, whereas its subject matter is saying that something matters more than temporal pleasure, and that there is another audience beyond the human:

The great misfortune of the upper classes of our time is not so much that they are without a religious art as that, instead of a supreme religious art chosen from all the rest as being specially important and valuable, they have chosen a most insignificant and, usually, harmful art, which aims at pleasing certain people and which therefore, if only by its exclusive nature, stands in contradiction to that Christian principle of universal union which forms the religious perception of our time.

667

Beauty, then, is not enough; it is deceptive. So how can art which is a genuine expression of truth be distinguished? Evelyn considers this question, particularly when she is in the convent, listening to the nuns singing:

She listened, touched by the plaintive voices, so feeble in the ears of man, but beautiful in God's ears. God heard beyond the mere notes; the music of the intention was what reached God's ears. The music of these poor voices was more favourable in his ears than her voice. Months she had spent seeking the exact rhythm of a phrase intended to depict and rouse a sinful desire. Though the hymns were ugly - and they were very ugly - she would have done better to sing them; and she sought to press herself into the admission that art which does not tend to the glory of God is vain and harmful.

⁶⁶⁶ *Evelyn Innes*, p.193.

⁶⁶⁷ *What is Art?*, p.236.

There is a split here, not between what the music means, if it is honest about itself, and what it persuades its audience to hear, but rather between the perceptions of two separate audiences. And this convent music is only interested in one of these two audiences; its meaning is that which it intends God to hear. The music is, in fact, "the music of the intention", while the physical sounds which the nuns are producing exist to provide "an extended expression"⁶⁶⁹ of this intention. Just as human speech, in prayer, becomes in the end "mere words",⁶⁶⁹ so, now, that which the human ear perceives in music is "mere notes". These noises are not the music which God hears; they merely express it. The "ears of man" are in a situation comparable to that of a reader of a poem who concerns himself solely with the pattern made on the page before him by the arrangement of the ink marks on it. It would be possible to devise very beautiful and pleasing ink mark patterns, but for anyone who enjoyed these to claim that he appreciated poetry would be both false and foolish. And it might be that a very poor and ugly ink mark design could be the representation of a particularly beautiful poem.

Evelyn's personal response to the nuns' singing, however, while perceptive in these respects, is also a little worrying. She believes that "she would have done better to sing" the ugly convent hymns, as if the "intention" sought by God were simply the willingness to sing ugly music instead of beautiful. Her idea seems to be to exchange the music of "sinful desire" for another form of music. But if you have nothing to say to God, why sing to Him? Evelyn is "touched" by the weakness of the nuns' singing - she has a powerful emotional response to it. It is :

⁶⁶⁸ *Evelyn Innes*, pp.432-3.

⁶⁶⁹ cf above p.350.

... almost interesting through its very feebleness. ... Tears trembled in her eyes, and she listened to the poor voices rising and falling, breaking forth spasmodically in the lamentable hymn. "Desolate" and "forgotten" were the words that came up in her mind.

670

There is a pathos in this music which fascinates Evelyn. The sounds she hears, characterised by "feebleness", poverty and spasmodic motion, offer an image of the "desolate", hidden life of a nun which brings tears to Evelyn's eyes. This response is natural and unforced; she does not have to seek to "press herself into" it. It must, therefore, be something other than "the admission that art which does not tend to the glory of God is vain and harmful". Evelyn is unable wholly to accept this view, and this is precisely because her response to the nuns' singing is, first and foremost, an aesthetic one. There are undeniable similarities between Evelyn's feelings on this occasion and the reaction of the *Parsifal* audience to the Good Friday scene. In both cases, the hearer or hearers is deceived into thinking they have understood something hidden from the great majority of mankind. The *Parsifal* audience, according to Ulick Dean, "gasp a mutual wonder at their own perception and their unsuspected nobility of soul"⁶⁷¹ because they believe their response to the scene is something special, whereas it is, in fact wholly predictable. Because what they see and hear is both beautiful and religious, they assume that they must have within them corresponding qualities in order to recognise these things in the opera.

Evelyn, while being moved to tears by the nuns' voices, at the same time tells herself that this music is beautiful only "in God's ears". She puts herself somewhere between man, to whom the music is merely "feeble", and God, to whom it is "beautiful". She is deceiving herself, because she, at least on one level, experiences this music as being beautiful, and yet

⁶⁷⁰ Evelyn Innes, pp.431-2.

⁶⁷¹ Evelyn Innes, p.193.

she, as a human being, cannot possibly hear "the music of the intention", which is the beauty that God hears. Unless she can know what is passing through the nuns' minds, she cannot tell whether that which reaches God's ears is indeed beautiful, or whether it is as replete with "sinful desire" as her own singing. She makes the mistake of assuming that the aesthetic appeal of pathos which she herself perceives, is a type of beauty of which, by definition, God is particularly fond, and in which human beings find little pleasure. She is merely exchanging one aesthetic for another, and believing that, in so doing, she is becoming religious. Evelyn becomes a nun because she admires in the convent that which is the reverse side of Wagnerian beauty, and believes that, since its relation to the life of the senses is the opposite to that approach which she has hitherto taken, she will, having found unhappiness as a prima donna, find happiness as a nun.

As a result, her problem is that life in the convent is not so different from life on the stage as she had anticipated; both raise exactly the same difficulties in knowing when one is being sincere. The Prioress tells Evelyn:

"My dear Evelyn, you have hardly any perception of what our life is, you know it only from the outside, you are still an actress, you are acting on a different stage, that is all" ... The Prioress did not suspect how true her remark was, and I did not tell her that in the first week I was deliberately late for dinner in order to test the sensation of kneeling before the entire community on the bare refectory floor.

672

The penance of kneeling on the floor is intended to humiliate Evelyn; it does nothing of the sort, because, as an actress, she is not sufficiently aware of the externality of her audience. This is another version of the scene in which she has knelt as Brunnhilde before Wotan and as Evelyn Innes before her father. The "entire community" are, to her, an au-

⁶⁷² *Sister Teresa*, pp.104,105.

dience, whom she can control by her performance; their sensations will depend upon her acting. She fails to think of them as her sisters, who are ashamed by her shame and affected by her every action, because, preoccupied with her own experience, she cannot commit herself to someone external to that. The nuns cannot escape her imaginative control, because they are a part of a picture Evelyn is painting around herself. She is an adept in playing the roles of penitents and victims, and in doing so with enormous power. "When I am weak, then am I strong".⁶⁷³ But if the weakness is unreal, so, equally, must be the strength. Evelyn knows what it is to kneel and plead for forgiveness, but she knows it "only from the outside". And it is precisely this outside knowledge which makes it so difficult to learn what humility means inside the convent. It is one thing to kneel on a bare floor, but another to have a humble heart, just as it is one thing to sing feeble and ugly music, but another to express an "intention" which is acceptable to God.

The figure in *Evelyn Innes* and *Sister Teresa* of whose salvation the reader feels most certain is a thin, deformed, poverty-stricken woman who always wears the same battered, black bonnet. She worships in the church which Evelyn attended as a child, and in which her father's music is performed. Seeing her there, at prayer in a building now regularly filled with wealthy and fashionable seekers after the latest cultural experience, Evelyn realises that this woman is living in an entirely different world:

Evelyn wondered if the poor lady could distinguish between her father's music and Father Gordon's. The only music she heard was the ceaseless music of her devout soul. ... The Gospel ended, the little congregation sat down, and Evelyn reflected how much more difficult belief was to her than to the slightly-deformed woman in front of her.

⁶⁷⁴

⁶⁷³ 2 *Corinthians* 12 v.10.

⁶⁷⁴ *Evelyn Innes*, p.172.

Neither beauty, nor artistic taste enable Evelyn to do more than to "distinguish". She, like Marius, might recognise Christ as "the most touching image [s]he had ever beheld"⁶⁷⁵ because she has a range of alternative sources of aesthetic pleasure with which to compare Him. The poor woman, however, can believe easily in Christ, not merely as an image, but as reality, because she does not understand the concept of artistic merit:

God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise ... And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.

676

The poor lady lives in a state of unending exalted prayer, and music is, for her, the expression of "her devout soul". All the music she ever hears has its source within her, in her communion with God, which it exists to perpetuate. It would be meaningless, therefore, for her to distinguish between the work of various human composers and performers, because the work of God within her produces music which is of a different kind altogether, infinitely beyond human conceptions of what music ought to be in a way which is wholly outside Evelyn's comprehension.

* * * * *

If we are inclined to say that in George Moore's novel there is a silence at the centre of religious experience which is at odds with the novel's expressiveness, the opposite claim,

⁶⁷⁵ cf above p.328.

⁶⁷⁶ *1 Corinthians* 1 vv.27, 28-9.

that experience must somehow find a voice for itself, justifies a religious art, as a kind of confession. One of Evelyn Innes' lovers reflects on the human urge to confess:

He wondered at the survival of such a belief [Roman Catholicism] in the nineteenth century, and asked himself if confession were not inveterate in man. The artist in his studio, the writer in his study, strive to tell their soul's secret; the peasant throws himself at the feet of the priest, for, like them, he would unburden himself of that terrible weight of inwardness which is man.

677

As I have shown, however, the stress laid upon the significance of the human individual in the Victorian age made it increasingly difficult thus to "unburden" oneself of one's "inwardness" since the self feels its integrity to be threatened if it is made too public. And so Mr Holman, in Mrs Gaskell's *Cousin Phillis*, finds himself unable to confess to his fellow ministers:

"They will want me to lay bare my heart. I cannot do it. Paul, stay with me. They mean well; but as for spiritual help at such a time - it is God only, God only, who can give it."

678

The spiritual life is seen as being intensely private, its reality coming under severe attack as soon as other human beings are involved. And it is for this reason that Lucy Snowe's "confession" to Père Silas in *Villette* is, paradoxically, a confession of her refusal to confess - of her Protestantism. This scene can be viewed as a microcosm of the whole novel, which

⁶⁷⁷ Evelyn Innes, p.65.

⁶⁷⁸ *Cousin Phillis*, p.312.

deals on many levels with the need for a form of communication which preserves human individuality, and the extreme difficulty of achieving it.

When Lucy "confesses" her despair to Père Silas⁶⁷⁹, the priest replies that there are serious religious barriers lying between Lucy and her recovery. Her state is, he implies, directly linked to the very first "sin" she has confessed: "je suis Protestante"⁶⁸⁰:

"Were you of our faith, I should know what to say - a mind so tossed can find repose but in the bosom of retreat, and the punctual practice of piety. The world, it is well known, has no satisfaction for that class of natures. Holy men have bidden penitents like you to hasten their path upward by penance, self-denial, and difficult good works. Tears are given them here for meat and drink - bread of affliction and waters of affliction - their recompense comes hereafter. It is my own conviction that these impressions under which you are smarting are messengers from God to bring you back to the true church. You were made for our faith: depend upon it our faith alone could heal and help you - Protestantism is altogether too dry, cold and prosaic for you."

681

An interesting connection is made here between Protestantism and worldliness: neither is capable of giving Lucy the "satisfaction" she needs, and, as a result, she is being parched to death, left out in the cold, shut out from all poetry, beauty and truth. On one level it would appear that the Roman Catholic medicine of "penance, self-denial and difficult good works" is likely to amount to an existence far more "dry, cold and prosaic" than anything Lucy has yet suffered. But Père Silas does not offer her this, but instead describes it as a

⁶⁷⁹ cf Charlotte Bronte, *Villette* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1979), p.231-2.

⁶⁸⁰ *Villette*, p.233.

⁶⁸¹ *Villette*, p.234.

remedy for "penitents like you". Like Lucy herself, he repeatedly talks in language that is strongly figurative and metaphorical, functioning at several removes from that which it denotes, so that words and experience are greatly distanced from one another. Whether Lucy herself can be classed as a "penitent" is a difficult question. Père Silas says that he would know how to help Lucy only if she were a Catholic, suggesting that "that class of natures" (speaking always in the third person) to which she belongs is not suited to life in this world at all, and that such people are best advised to "hasten their path upward" through pious hardship and suffering. Then, however, addressing Lucy directly, as a potential convert, Père Silas hints at solace, comfort and refreshment awaiting her in the maternal "bosom" of the "true church", whose succour can amply "heal" in Lucy the damage done by the "dry, cold and prosaic" nature of Protestantism.

There are two apparently contradictory sides to Père Silas's religion: painful asceticism, and the warm pleasure of a mother's care. Similarly, Lucy is seen as being enslaved on the one hand by the spiritual and imaginative poverty of the Protestant faith, and on the other by her inordinate desire for "satisfaction" from "the world". Père Silas's claim is not that his church can offer Lucy discipline whereas she has only self-indulgence, nor that Catholicism is warm and fulfilling while all that is outside Catholicism is cold and barren. He does not offer merely the missing half of an equation, but an entire range of experience, a separate universe which contains both joy and pain, but joy and pain that are real, God-given, and life-giving, in contrast to the delusive counterfeit versions of the non-Catholic world. Burdened by the horror that "Fate was of stone, and Hope a false idol - blind, bloodless, and of granite core"⁶⁸², Lucy is met by Père Silas with a positive destiny - "You were made for our faith". Her life, he suggests, has a purpose, and all her sufferings, far from indicating the lifelessness and meaninglessness of "Fate" and "Hope", are, in fact, "messengers from God to bring [her] back to the true church". He replaces Lucy's somewhat pagan and abstract personifications of "Fate" and "Hope" with the Christian and

⁶⁸² *Villette*, p.231.

personal "God", the loss of the former merely making way for the latter. The path to Lucy's true destiny, as well as that to satisfaction, both spiritual and sensual, lies, Père Silas claims, in accepting and embracing the Catholic faith.

But Lucy will have nothing to do with it. She does not even give it serious consideration, and is scornful of the reader's entertainment of the mere possibility:

Did I, do you suppose, reader, contemplate venturing again within that worthy priest's reach? As soon should I have thought of walking into a Babylonish furnace.

683

Lucy resists the pull of Catholicism, not simply because she is convinced, on a theological level, that it is wrong, but because she knows that to enter "that worthy priest's reach" would be like entering a "furnace" controlled by an alien and hostile people. It would utterly destroy her, as fire must always destroy snow. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the Biblical story to which Lucy is alluding⁶⁸⁴ fear no one but God. They tell Nebuchadnezzar:

"... our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

685

⁶⁸³ *Villette*, p.235.

⁶⁸⁴ cf *Daniel*, Chapter Three.

⁶⁸⁵ *Daniel* 3 vv.17,18.

These men are quite ready to walk into the "Babylonish furnace"; even if they are to die there, that is insignificant compared to their determination not to worship foreign gods. Their concern is solely with the religious issue; because of "our God whom we serve", these men "will not serve [Nebuchadnezzar's] gods". The furnace is almost irrelevant. Its agonies are "not worthy to be compared"⁶⁸⁶ with the evil of idolatry. Lucy Snowe, however, places a furnace and the Catholic faith on the same level; she would "as soon" suffer one as the other.

It is worth noting, in this context, M.Paul's use of the same Biblical allusion, a little later in the novel, when, having discovered Lucy ironically and coolly contemplating the portrait entitled "Cleopatra", he tells her:

"You nurslings of Protestantism astonish me. You unguarded Englishwomen walk calmly amidst red-hot plough-shares and escape burning. I believe, if some of you were thrown into Nebuchadnezzar's hottest furnace, you would issue forth untraversed by the smell of fire."

⁶⁸⁷

Here again, emphasis is shifted from the furnace as the price of purity to the furnace as temptation and trial. Instead of being the horror which Lucy must unflinchingly face if she is to maintain her integrity by defiantly carrying out some pious act, the furnace is made to represent a world of moral depravity, wholly destructive of all but the most exceptional souls. She must, in fact, neither give herself up to the flames, nor evade them, but must take on the far more difficult task of "walk[ing] calmly amidst red-hot plough-shares and escap[ing] burning". It is, according to M.Paul, Protestant women who are best equipped for this feat. He offers this analysis, however, not as a compliment, but rather, it appears,

⁶⁸⁶ *Romans* 8 v.18.

⁶⁸⁷ *Villette*, p.280.

in outrage and horror, for this sort of trial seems to him to be something to be avoided, not deliberately undertaken. And this brings us directly to one of the central conflicts of the novel: that between "unguarded" and guarded styles of living; between reliance upon the individual or upon the environment; between "the world" and "the bosom of retreat";⁶⁸⁸ between sexual liberty and monasticism; between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. Lucy can "walk calmly" through "Nebuchadnezzar's hottest furnace" so long as she remains a Protestant "unguarded Englishwoman". To become a Catholic, however, would be to walk "into a Babylonish furnace"⁶⁸⁹ willingly, thus desiring its power over her. Lucy Snowe can walk "amidst" the fire, because she belongs to a different world, a different level of reality, from it. She is not of the same nature. But to walk "into" the fire would constitute a self-offering to all that is not oneself and a willing union with a will utterly opposed to one's own.

Lucy's Protestantism places her in a unique position within Madame Beck's establishment, as is clearly illustrated in the first part of the chapter entitled "A Sneeze out of Season". To begin with, Lucy finds the reading aloud of Catholic saints' lives, which takes place each evening in the school, intolerable:

I sat out this "lecture pieuse" for some nights as well as I could, and as quietly too; only once breaking off the points of my scissors by involuntarily sticking them somewhat deep in the worm-eaten board of the table before me. But, at last, it made me so burning hot, and my temples and my heart and my wrist throbbled so fast, and my sleep afterwards was so broken with excitement, that I could sit no longer.

⁶⁸⁸ cf above p.364.

⁶⁸⁹ cf above p.366.

⁶⁹⁰ *Villette*, p.184.

To be subjected to Catholic accounts of "moral martyrdom"⁶⁹⁰ makes Lucy Snowe "burning hot". She feels herself to be in a furnace of passion, stimulated to an intense degree of excitement, somewhat akin to sexual arousal, whose only outlet is in destruction. Both her scissors and her sleep are broken - the domestic industry and quiet rest of the celibate female are violently ripped apart by Lucy's reaction to the "lecture pieuse". She is required to "sit", and to do so "quietly", but this very requirement, along with the reading designed to assure her of the value of such self-effacing behaviour creates in her an energy which, even against Lucy's conscious will, for she breaks her scissors "involuntarily", opposes itself to every instrument of restraint. Lucy's great temptation is to engage in open conflict with the Catholicism against which she finds in herself so huge a protest. To do so, however, would be to destroy herself along, perhaps, with her enemy.

Realising this, she leaves the room in which the reading takes place, only to discover, in the otherwise empty house, Madame Beck searching through Lucy's possessions. For a few moments Lucy watches Madame Beck, fascinated by the thoroughness of her "surveillance". Were she a Catholic, Lucy would have remained listening to the "lecture pieuse", and would thus have remained, like the other Catholics in the school, unknowingly under the watchful eye of Madame Beck, controlled and part of the system. But as a Protestant, Lucy finds herself in a curious position of omniscience - the unseen watcher of the unseen watcher. The "burning hot" reaction to the Catholic reading - her awareness of being in a fiery furnace - turns Lucy, curiously, into a creature who appears in many ways more Catholic than the Catholics themselves. She is more powerfully aroused by the lives of the saints than anyone else in the school - albeit to dissent, not "la pitié"; and she possesses secret knowledge, obtained by silent watching, which is in some sense superior to that held by the woman whom she says "ought to have been [named] Ignacia". Père Silas's declaration that Lucy is "made for our faith" seems, in these circumstances, wholly appropriate.

Discovering Madame Beck at her Jesuitical work, Lucy chooses not to confront her:

I stood ... fascinated; but it was necessary to make an effort to break this spell: a retreat must be beaten. The searcher might have turned and caught me; there would have been nothing for it then but a scene, and she and I would have had to come all at once, with a sudden clash, to a thorough knowledge of each other: down would have gone conventionalities, away swept disguises, and I should have looked into her eyes, and she into mine - we should have known that we could work together no more, and parted in this life for ever.

691

Now Madame Beck employs Lucy precisely because she knows that they can work together. Lucy instinctively avoids confrontation, just as Madame Beck would have done had the choice been hers⁶⁹² - indeed, Lucy cannot know whether or not Mme. Beck is, in fact, aware of her presence. Both women see an immense value in "conventionalities" and in "disguises", for, as Lucy experiences when M.Paul makes her act in the play at Mme. Beck's fête,⁶⁹³ the assumption of a role - even a role which others know to be a role - can free the individual to express that which must otherwise remain buried. Patrick Brontë's account of his means of discovering his children's true opinions offers another example of this use of disguise:

"When my children were very young ... thinking that they knew more than I had yet discovered, in order to make them speak with less timidity, I deemed that if they were put under

⁶⁹¹ *Villette*, p.186.

⁶⁹² cf eg *Villette*, p.193.

⁶⁹³ cf *Villette*, pp.204-211.

a sort of cover I might gain my end; and happening to have a mask in the house, I told them all to stand and speak boldly from under the cover of the mask."

694

It appears that the Bronte children, as they grew up, replaced this mask with literary forms, and in particular the novel, as a means of speaking "boldly". There is here a curious paradox, which I have already encountered in other shapes in the course of my discussions and especially in my comments on Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*: truth is revealed far more readily from "under a sort of cover" than in direct, face to face confrontations. Isaac Williams, arguing in favour of "reserve" in the communication of Christian truth, suggests that even God's self-revelation is closely bound up with His self-concealment:

To refer to figurative language, it is said, does not God "deck Himself with light, like as with a garment?" Whereas ... does not a garment veil that which it clothes? is not the very light concealment? The revelations of God must ever be to mankind in one sense mysteries; whatever He makes known opens to view far more which we know not. Not light only, but the "cloud" also, is the especial emblem of the Spirit's presence. "God is light", but "clouds and darkness," also "are round about Him;" "His pavilion is in dark waters, with thick clouds to cover Him."

695

The problem with looking straight into the eyes of the person who looks into your own eyes is that it actually introduces falsity into the relationship. To come suddenly to "a thorough knowledge of each other" is simultaneously to know "that we could work together no more"; collaboration depends not so much upon mutual understanding as upon a sus-

⁶⁹⁴ Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Bronte*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1975), p.94.

⁶⁹⁵ Isaac Williams, *On Reserve, in Evangelical and Oxford Movements*, p.110.

picious structure of trust. The suggestion is that one must always keep some aspect of oneself hidden from the person to whom one reveals one's darkest secrets in order that the revelation may continue to have some meaning, some value. Relationships need structure; it is important that Patrick Bronte is able to "think ... that [his children] knew more than [he] had yet discovered" - important both for himself and for his children, since both parties are thus able to consider themselves as being at the same time independent of and dependent upon the other.

The Victorian novel, including its expression of religious experience and belief, and Patrick Bronte's mask function in ways which are in some aspects similar. As fiction, the novel offers a cover, a disguise, which allows the exposure of truths which must otherwise either remain hidden or else be annihilated on contact with a world which will absorb all their separate identity. There are problems with this claim, though it has plausibility. It is, at least, is the view of the anonymous critic of 1853, whose comment, which I looked at in Chapter One,⁶⁹⁶ is central to the problems discussed in this dissertation:

All genuine fiction, however, is the idealised transcript of actual experience; and as the architects of old built their souls into the stately minsters, whose storied aisles embody the aspirations of a by-gone age, so the heart of humanity has enshrined itself in the glowing pages of romance, where stand revealed those hidden passages of experience, which in actual life are witnessed only by the eye of Him who seeth in secret; and as we listen to the wail of sorrow or the tones of joy, uttered, it may be, in a foreign language, and coming to us from a distant time, our heart responds to the sympathetic touch, and we recognise the deep truth of the poet's words, "that we have all of us one human heart".

⁶⁹⁷

⁶⁹⁶ cf above, Chapter One, p.28.

⁶⁹⁷ Anonymous, from "Recent Works of Fiction", in *Victorian Criticism of the Novel*, p.85.

"Actual experience" and "actual life" are, it seems, severely limited compared to the vast communicative and sympathetic potential of the novel. There is, apparently, such a thing as "genuine fiction", which somewhat begs the question what "false fiction" would be - perhaps the outcome of the writer's eye being fixed too much on his audience. Presumably "genuine" is linked with "actual", being a higher, "idealised" form of the same human experience. The role of this "genuine fiction" is to offer a temple, a shrine, a sacred book whose pages are "glowing" as with some heavenly illumination, within which secret "experience" may be "revealed":

The novel is the book of life. In this sense, the Bible is a great, confused novel. You may say, it is about God. But it is really about man alive.

698

D.H.Lawrence takes this idea of the novel as revelatory scripture so far as to reverse the comparison, claiming not merely that the novel is like the Bible, but that the Bible is a novel, and that the supreme purpose of the most sacred writings is to declare the truth about "man alive".

That which occurs in time, to one individual, and is witnessed "only by the eye of Him who seeth in secret", is, in "genuine fiction", put on public display in such a form that it presents a "sympathetic touch" to the responsive "heart", evoking a declaration of faith in the universality of all "hidden passages of experience", for "we have all of us one human heart". There is here a clear sense of the superiority of "genuine fiction" over "actual life", and thus of "the heart of humanity" over "the eye of Him who seeth in secret". Unfictionalised lives are witnessed "only" by God, with the implication being that such "hidden passages of experience", if they remain enclosed within the drab and dark environs of "actual life", are, in every sense that really matters, lost and wasted. A life is redeemed,

⁶⁹⁸ D.H.Lawrence, *Selected Literary Criticism*, edited by Anthony Beal (London, 1956), p.105.

not by God's knowledge of it, but by becoming "enshrined" in a beautiful man-made structure and thus by being offered to humanity as a revelation of the "human heart", able intimately to "touch" every other heart.

The Divine eye remains, however, fundamentally necessary to this view of fiction, for its presence makes and defines "actual life", giving substance to those "hidden passages of experience" which might otherwise be said not to exist at all. God becomes something akin to an opaque packing case within which human joy and sorrow is stored, awaiting the arrival of the artist, the poet and the novelist to erect the cathedrals and illuminate the manuscripts within which it may be displayed. The danger, then, is that the novelist's project may appear to be blasphemous, for the novelist claims the power to reveal to the world that which, "in actual life", is known only to God. God-given realities and their fictional representations may be fatally confused. T.S.Eliot, writing from a Christian standpoint, complains:

It is simply not true that works of fiction, prose or verse, that is to say works depicting the actions, thoughts and words and passions of imaginary human beings, *directly* extend our knowledge of life. ... Knowledge of life obtained through fiction ... can only be a knowledge of other people's knowledge of life, not of life itself. So far as we are taken up with the happenings in any novel in the same way in which we are taken up with what happens under our eyes, we are acquiring at least as much falsehood as truth.

699

This view of fiction is rooted in a Christian understanding of truth, expressed by St Augustine as follows:

⁶⁹⁹ T.S.Eliot, *Selected Prose*, edited by John Hayward (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1953), pp.38-9.

But my hunger and thirst were not even for the greatest of your works, but for you, my God, because you are Truth itself ... The food we dream of is very like the food we eat when we are awake, but it does not nourish because it is only a dream. Yet the things [my companions] gave me to eat were not in the least like you, as now I know since you have spoken to me. They were dream substances, mock realities, far less true than the real things which we see with the sight of our eyes in the sky or on the earth. These things are seen by bird and beast as well as by ourselves, and they are far more certain than any image we conceive of them.

700

The experiences described in the novel cannot be those of "actual life" itself, since these would be humanly inaccessible, but they are presented as its "idealised transcript", embodying, in a more lovely and comprehensible form, the essential facts of experience which remain forever unchanged, for, "we have all of us one human heart". The world of "genuine fiction", created by man, is, it seems, in every respect similar to God's world except that it has far more power to communicate to the individual the "heart" of "actual life". Through fiction and through sympathy, "your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil".⁷⁰¹

It is in *Villette*, more than in perhaps any other nineteenth century novel, that the reader is made most aware of the limitations placed upon the serpent's promise. The reader of *Villette* is forced to admit, again and again, that her eyes are not fully "opened", that she does not have the omniscience of a "god", and that there is a great deal about which she knows very little indeed. By this consistent refusal to tell the reader everything, the novel is able to reveal something of the human struggles which Lucy undergoes while still reserving large parts of her experience as being known to God, and to Him alone. As in

⁷⁰⁰ *Confessions*, p.61.

⁷⁰¹ *Genesis* 3 v.5.

Catharine Furze, silence is made a necessary part of the transcript of religious experience. Lucy's "hidden passages of experience" "stand revealed" only to a very limited degree. Lucy's story, although it is written in the first person, does not take the form of a confession; it is something quite different. Her narrative does not offer up her life to be judged by the reader (as, for example, *Great Expectations* does); it is, instead, much more interested in the presentation of a surface, in the shaping of appearances, and in concealment. For there are many aspects of Lucy's life which are intensely private, including much of her religious faith.

Writing about her relationship with Graham Bretton, Lucy describes her battles to allow "Reason" to predominate over "Feeling" in governing her actions. Such victories, she says, are worthwhile, because:

... they certainly make a difference in the general tenor of a life, and enable it to be better regulated, more equable, quieter on the surface; and it is on the surface only the common gaze will fall. As to what lies below, leave that with God. Man, your equal, weak as you, and not fit to be your judge, may be shut out thence: take it to your Maker - show Him the secrets of the spirit He gave - ask Him how you are to bear the pains He has appointed - kneel in His presence, and pray for light in darkness, for strength in piteous weakness, for patience in extreme need. Certainly, at some hour, though not perhaps your hour, the waiting waters will stir; in some shape, though not perhaps the shape you dreamed, which your heart loved, and for which it bled, the healing herald will descend.

702

Here the essential equality of all human beings is used, not to stress humanity's capacity for mutual sympathy and understanding, but rather to support privacy and self-enclosure. "Man" (and the word here surely carries connotations of maleness, in view of the stress placed upon the need to refuse to see him as a superior and a judge) is as "weak as you",

⁷⁰² *Villette*, p.252.

and therefore, "not fit to be your judge"; it is precisely because he is no different that he "may be shut out" of the individual's inner life. This "man" really has nothing to offer, for he is "weak as you", and Lucy owes him no responsibility whatsoever, for he is no better than she is. He might as well, in fact, be ignored. Sharing one's heart with a fellow human being will be of no help, and may well be harmful. It is in many ways the "surface" of one's life to which one must pay most attention, for this is where "the common gaze will fall".

In direct contrast to the anonymous critic cited above,⁷⁰³ Lucy Snowe has very little love or respect for this "common gaze". Far from being redemptive, to her it is a prying nuisance; she must, she believes, take care that her "surface" be well regulated, equable and quiet - all qualities which will attract as little attention as possible and thus prevent anyone from wishing to look beneath the dull exterior. That which "lies below" requires, in a sense, no care at all: "leave that with God", she says. To Lucy, there is no gulf greater than that between God - who made her and understands her, who knows all about her and is infinitely greater than her, who is worthy to judge her and who is able to help her - and the "common gaze", which is stupid, irritating and easily deceived. The real communication takes place between the individual and God. Lucy urges the need for complete openness and self-revelation before the "Maker" - "show Him ... ask Him ... kneel in His presence and pray ...". The most important quality is a tough passivity, for one must be prepared to "leave" one's deepest hopes and sorrows with God, exposing all one's "secrets" to Him, not knowing how He will deal with them. There is a tremendous vulnerability in the faith that help will come, "at some hour, though not perhaps your hour", and "in some shape, though not perhaps the shape you dreamed". In order to accept this, one must relinquish the whole of one's self apart from one's need, one's suffering, one's weakness, for it is here, and here alone, that God meets with "the secrets of the spirit He gave". Desires, dreams and plans for the future are worse than useless, for one can only "pray with faith for light" if one prays "in darkness". The writer of "Recent Works of Fiction",⁷⁰³ uses the word "only"

⁷⁰³ cf above p.372.

in connection with the eye of God; Lucy Snowe speaks of "only the common gaze", for the insignificant onlooker is the one who can change nothing in what he sees. The one who counts offers a transformation, an apotheosis of an empty life, "healing" the secret wounds:

For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then
I shall know even as also I am known.

⁷⁰⁴

As both Lucy and Madame Beck realise,⁷⁰⁵ seeing face to face is a very dangerous business. But concealment also has its price, which Lucy finds to be a very heavy one, since, in order to maintain her quiet "surface", she must continually repress "Feeling" with "Reason", with the result that she cannot directly evoke in others feelings for herself. She may "never express"⁷⁰⁶ any emotion which might render her vulnerable - any need, desire or hunger - to anyone but "God", and this restriction is a "hard word"⁷⁰⁶ to her. In particular, Lucy suffers acutely due to Graham Bretton's facile assumption that the whole of her being consists of the surface she presents to the world. His insensitivity is displayed at its height when he asks Lucy, in effect, to carry out the donkey-work of his courtship of Polly for him, whispering his memories of Polly's childhood in her ear and leaving Graham simply to sit back and enjoy watching Polly's reaction:

"Could you manage that, think you, Lucy", Graham asks, "and make me ever grateful?"

"Could I manage to make you ever grateful?" said I. "No *I could not.*" And I felt my fingers work and my hands interlock: I felt, too, an inward courage, warm and resistant. In this

⁷⁰⁴ *1 Corinthians* 13 v.12.

⁷⁰⁵ cf above p.370.

⁷⁰⁶ *Villette*, p.307.

matter I was not disposed to gratify Dr John: not at all. With now welcome force, I realised his entire misapprehension of my character and nature. He wanted always to give me a role not mine. Nature and I opposed him. He did not at all guess what I felt: he did not read my eyes, or face, or gestures; though, I doubt not, all spoke.

Leaning towards me coaxingly, he said, softly, "*Do* content me, Lucy." And I would have contented him, or, at least, I would clearly have enlightened him, and taught him well enough never again to expect of me the part of officious soubrette in a love drama; when, following his soft, eager murmur, meeting almost his pleading, mellow - "*Do* content me, Lucy!" - a sharp hiss pierced my ear on the other side.

"*Petite chatte, doucerette, coquette!*" sibilated the sudden boa-constrictor; *vous avez l'air bien triste, soumise, rêveuse, mais vous ne l'êtes pas; c'est moi qui vous le dis: Sauvage! La flamme à l'âme, l'éclair aux yeux!*"

"*Oui; j'ai la flamme à l'âme, et je dois l'avoir!*" retorted I, turning in just wrath; but Professor Emmanuel had hissed his insult and was gone.

707

Typically, for this novel, this passage is about whispering - about private, concealed conversations and secret communication. Lucy, having been requested to whisper to Polly on Graham's behalf, is now met on one side with Graham's "soft", "coaxing" tones, and on the other with M.Paul's "sharp hiss". It is difficult to say which voice is the more serpent-like. M.Paul is called a "boa-constrictor", and his whisper is described as a "hiss", and his "sudden" materialisation out of nothing as what seems to be no more than a disembodied voice would appear to hint that he might have something of the supernatural about him. But a boa-constrictor is not a poisonous snake; it kills its victims by crushing them to death; it is not "more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had

⁷⁰⁷ *Villette*, pp.403-4.

made",⁷⁰⁸ but instead works by direct force. It is not clever or deceptive, but "sudden" and violent in its attacks. The *Genesis* serpent, on the other hand, is characterised by charm and reasonableness, offering great rewards to those who give themselves into his power. His tones are "pleading" and "mellow"; in a "soft, eager murmur", he "coaxingly" suggests that he will be "ever grateful" for the kind offices of those to whom he addresses his temptations. For Graham here appears to be offering Lucy that for which she longs: an opportunity to meet his need, and thus to attain lasting significance in his sight - to cease to be "a being inoffensive as a shadow".⁷⁰⁹ His repeated use of her name, "Lucy", seems to underline the impression that he is at last thinking of her as an individual - but then he always calls her "Lucy" - so much so that she calls herself "Lucy" with a mocking degree of frequency when describing herself as Graham sees her.⁷¹⁰ He is over-familiar, intrusively "leaning towards" her, yet without effecting the kind of forceful and determined intrusion which would convert his familiarity into intimacy.

The problem, as Lucy rightly perceives, is that Graham is, in fact, making an impossible demand. To his request that Lucy should "manage to make [him] ever grateful", the only true and correct answer is the one he receives: "No, I could not". For Graham is using language with a deceptive looseness; "ever grateful" is a sloppy, romantic hyperbole, which ought, in all honesty, to be replaced by "momentarily gratified". Again, when Graham pleads, "*Do* content me, Lucy", the word "content" appears to imply a filling up and a satisfying of his real need. He means, however, nothing of the kind; "content me" here is equivalent to "do what I want". Lucy is particularly vulnerable to this misuse of language, because she does not want Graham to be kind to her, but to need her. The danger is that

⁷⁰⁸ *Genesis* 3 v.1.

⁷⁰⁹ *Villette*, p.403.

⁷¹⁰ cf eg *Villette*, pp.401,555.

she will find herself forced to adopt "a role not mine" in order to be able to offer Graham something which no one else will give him.

Charlotte Bronte was very much aware of this temptation, to women in particular, to sacrifice personal integrity in order to gain some degree of security in one's relationships:

"And besides, in the matter of friendship, I have observed that disappointment here arises chiefly, *not* from liking our friends too well, or thinking of them too highly, but rather from an over-estimate of *their* liking for and opinion of *us*."

She rejected one offer of marriage on the grounds that:

"Moreover, I was aware that he knew so little of me that he could hardly be conscious to whom he was writing. Why! It would startle him to see me in my natural home character ... I could not sit all day long making a grave face before my husband. I would laugh and satirize, and say whatever came into my head first."

⁷¹¹

Lucy finds herself siding with "Nature" - a "force" within herself, yet not, it seems, under the control of her will, which makes her "fingers work" and her "hands interlock" involuntarily, and which fills her with warm "courage". This force is far more fundamental to Lucy's being than the attraction she feels towards Graham: it is closely linked to her personal integrity and will not permit her to "gratify Dr John: not at all". For to please him is to acquiesce in his "entire misapprehension of [her] character and nature"; it would involve sharing in Graham's illiterate failure to "read" Lucy's "eyes, or face, or gestures", and thus abdicating all control over or comprehension of the relationship between the inner self

⁷¹¹ Mrs Gaskell, *Life*, pp.454,183-4.

and the self as perceived by other people. Communication, in effect, would become meaningless.

"And I would have contented ... him", says Lucy, with what looks like weakness at first, but turns out to be tough irony. If Graham wants her to tell secrets, then secrets she will tell; if he wants what Lucy has to offer, then he will get it! It is unclear exactly what Lucy is hinting at doing. Perhaps she is suggesting that she will be an "officious soubrette" to a degree far beyond Graham's reckoning, whispering to Polly as an independent person, telling her own ideas, and not merely acting as Graham's mouthpiece. The suggestion that Lucy is being asked to play a part in a "love drama" recalls the earlier account of Lucy's acting in the play organised by M.Paul.⁷¹² By acknowledging that by acting in compliance with Graham's wishes she would be playing "a role not [her] own", Lucy steps into a realm in which the usual restrictions of "[her]self and [her] ordinary life"⁷¹³ are laid aside and in which she can possess her "own strength" and "please [her]self".⁷¹³ By taking on the fictional "surface" of a character in a drama, protection is obtained for the free expression of "what lies below".⁷¹⁴

It is surely no coincidence that the one French word in this section of the passage - "soubrette" - is echoed in M.Paul's description of Lucy as "doucelette" and "coquette". Lucy is "pierced" by M.Paul's "insult"; it is not kindness that can penetrate within her, but cruelty, and she responds to M. Paul, not with irony, disguises and multiple layers of meaning, but instead with a direct "retort" frankly describing herself and protesting her right to be that which she most fundamentally is. Lucy functions best in situations of conflict; and this is precisely what M.Paul offers her. The use of the French language offers some

⁷¹² cf *Villette*, Ch.14.

⁷¹³ *Villette*, p.211.

⁷¹⁴ cf above p.376.

degree of cover - like Patrick Bronte's mask -⁷¹⁵ but its primary significance here is to emphasise the contrast between the two worlds "meeting" in Lucy of Graham and of M.Paul, the one denying the "fiery furnace"⁷¹⁶ aspects of Lucy's experience, the other acknowledging it. French becomes for her the language of passion and of true intimacy, and this use is continued when, on desiring Lucy to forgive him for this "insult", M.Paul asks her to say, "Mon ami, je vous pardonne".⁷¹⁷ She replaces "mon ami" with "Monsieur Paul", but M.Paul persists in requiring a more intimate address. He offers, however, as an alternative to "mon ami", the English "my friend", assuming that the precise meanings of the two phrases are identical. For Lucy, however, this is not so:

Now, "my friend" had rather another sound and significancy than "mon ami"; it did not breathe the same sense of domestic and intimate affection: "Mon ami" I could not say to M.Paul; "My friend", I could, and did say without difficulty.

717

Lucy persistently inhabits the gap between two languages and two worlds, finding there a region of liberty. Whoever she is talking to, there is always some aspect of herself and some knowledge possessed by her which remains a mystery to the other person. That which Lucy does "say", throughout the text of *Villette*, is always uttered in the awareness that it is not that which she "could not say", and the reader of the novel is uneasily conscious of this. The substitution of one language, one idiom, one level of understanding for another is Lucy Snowe's favourite strategy, and the result of this is that, reading her narrative, one always feels that one has somehow missed the point - that there ought to be

⁷¹⁵ cf above p.371.

⁷¹⁶ cf above p.366.

⁷¹⁷ *Villette*, p.407.

something very big somewhere at the centre of all these words, but it never quite becomes visible. The big thing is, surely, passion - 'la flamme à l'âme, l'éclair aux yeux!' - but passion whose place in the world is never entirely established. Passion lies in the gaps, between repression and vulgarity; between the cold, narrow limitations of the paintings of "La vie d'une femme" and the fleshy, animal, gross sexuality of the "Cleopatra";⁷¹⁸ between Polly's precocious, babyish, doll-like charm, and Ginevra's greedy, flirtatious vivacity.

Celibacy is an important theme in the novel, since one of the costs of passion seems to be the association of sexual activity with the forbidden, with evil, and with sin. Half-way through the novel, the reader is presented with "Vashti", an icon of female passion. This woman fascinates Lucy, and also deeply shocks her, for Lucy perceives her to be demon-possessed.

I found upon her something neither of woman nor of man: in each of her eyes sat a devil. These evil forces bore her through the tragedy, kept up her feeble strength; - for she was but a frail creature; and as the action rose and the stir deepened, how wildly they shook her with their passions of the pit! They wrote HELL upon her straight, haughty brow. They tuned her voice to the note of torment. They writhed her regal face to a demoniac mask. Hate and Murder and Madness incarnate, she stood. It was a marvellous sight: a mighty revelation. It was a spectacle low, horrible, immoral.

719

This woman is the antithesis of the nun figure who haunts the novel in various shapes: as the legendary ghost of the Rue Fossette - "a girl whom a monkish conclave of the drear

⁷¹⁸ cf *Villette*, pp.275-278.

⁷¹⁹ *Villette*, p.339.

middle ages had here buried alive, for some sin against her vow⁷²⁰ - and as the disguised de Hamal who appears repeatedly to Lucy at moments of crisis in her experience, and as the dead Justine Marie, M.Paul's "angel-bride".⁷²¹ These three all merge to form one image of the celibate, religious, Catholic female - pious, and deeply threatening to Lucy, while at the same time having a certain affinity with her. Vashti, by contrast, represents a rebellious and atheistic womanhood. Her Biblical namesake, in the book of *Esther*, revolts against her husband, the king's, authority, and thus threatens the entire patriarchal base of her nation's government.⁷²² Physically "but a frail creature", Vashti finds strength in that which is "neither of woman nor of man". She turns to the spiritual realm, transcending all differences of sex by her surrender of her body to those forces which, by inhabiting it, transform it into "Hate and Murder and Madness incarnate". Vashti presents a clear and entire reversal of Christian values. She is indwelt, not by the Holy Spirit, but by demons; there is no sign of the cross on her brow, but instead "the mark of the beast",⁷²³ the word "HELL" written across her forehead. She has attained to both the highest and the lowest extremes of existence available to humanity; she is both "magnificent" and "mighty", and "low" and "horrible". A witch, an evil queen, standing tall in the power of her own damnation, she suffers agonies of "torment", the "passions of the pit" as the terrible price of her "regal" stature.

M.Paul's deepest fear in relation to Lucy, is that she, as a Protestant, is essentially another Vashti, her soul sold to the devil in return for some supernaturally potent force which enables her, like a witch, to "walk calmly amidst red-hot plough-shares and escape burn-

⁷²⁰ *Villette*, p.172.

⁷²¹ *Villette*, p.486.

⁷²² cf *Esther*, Chapter One.

⁷²³ cf *Revelation* 19 v.20; 14 v.19ff.

ing".⁷²⁴ In her independent strength and her cool detachment from so many of the concerns of the women and girls who surround her (on the surface, at least), Lucy seems to M.Paul to have contact with some power which is neither of this world, nor of God:

"It is your religion, your strange, self-reliant invulnerable creed, whose influence seems to clothe you in, I know not what, unblest panoply. You are good - Père Silas calls you good, and loves you - but your terrible, proud, earnest Protestantism, there is the danger. It expresses itself by your eye at times; and again, it gives you certain tones and certain gestures that make my flesh creep. You are not demonstrative, and yet, just now - when you handled that tract - my God! I thought Lucifer smiled."

⁷²⁵

Like Vashti, Lucy seems to have some evil force "upon her" as a clothing and a "panoply", arming her against the common assaults upon humanity, and expressed in her "eye", her "tones" and her "gestures". Both Vashti⁷²⁶ and Lucy are likened to Lucifer, the fallen angel, characterised by supreme pride and supreme evil. Lucy makes M.Paul's "flesh creep" by her display of the "unblest" "influence" which he perceives to surround her. He separates Lucy herself, whom he here addresses as "you", from the unholy "influence", which he calls "it". He can thus say, "You are good", and "You are not demonstrative", claiming an innate piety and Christian submissiveness for the woman he loves while decrying the evil effects upon her of her religion. Père Silas's declaration to Lucy that she is "made for our faith"⁷²⁷

⁷²⁴ cf above p.367.

⁷²⁵ *Villette*, p.512.

⁷²⁶ cf *Villette*, p.340.

⁷²⁷ cf above p.364.

is here taken up by M.Paul in his implications that her Protestantism is essentially external to herself, and not only should, but could be repudiated by her.

Lucy is not Vashti, but nor is she Justine Marie dressed in foreign clothing. She is, above all else, herself, and this is the central meaning of her Protestantism. What M.Paul finds so difficult to comprehend is that Lucy does not simply hold different beliefs from those of the Catholic Church; she is religious in an entirely different way from that to which he is accustomed. Her loyalty is not attached to some external structure, but lies deep within herself:

Père Silas, it seems, had closely watched me, had ascertained that I went by turns, and indiscriminately, to the three Protestant Chapels of Villette - the French, German and English - *id est*, the Presbyterian, Lutheran, Episcopalian. Such liberality argued in the Father's eyes profound indifference - who tolerates all, he reasoned, can be attached to none. Now, it happened that I had often secretly wondered at the minute and unimportant character of the differences between these three sects - at the unity and identity of their vital doctrines: I saw nothing to hinder them from being one day fused into one grand Holy Alliance, and I respected them all, though I thought that in each there were faults of form; incumbrances, and trivialities ... my own last appeal, the guide to which I looked, must always be the Bible itself, rather than any sect, of whatever name or nation.

728

Lucy sees herself, as a reader of the Bible, as, effectively, not so much a child, but rather a judge of all human churches. In this, she is following the example of many eminent Victorian Protestants, such as Edward Miall, who endorsed wholeheartedly, in a lecture of

⁷²⁸ *Villette*, pp.513-4.

1849, the view that "the Church of England destroys more souls than she saves".⁷²⁹ It is, Lucy believes, her personal responsibility to follow her "own" source of guidance rather than looking to the teaching of "sects". She goes to the three chapels "indiscriminately" because the only thing that really matters for her is that she, Lucy Snowe, is worshipping God. Père Silas is, in a sense, correct to diagnose her attitude to the chapels as one of "profound indifference".

Lucy is self-conscious to a degree which is, to a Catholic, quite incomprehensible. She, in her turn, is deeply shocked by the lack of personal integrity she finds in Villette:

Not a soul in Madame Beck's house, from the scullion to the directress herself, but was above being ashamed of a lie; they thought nothing of it; ... "J'ai menti plusieurs fois" formed an item of every girl's and woman's monthly confession: the priest heard unshocked and absolved unreluctant. If they had missed going to mass, or read a chapter of a novel, that was another thing: these were crimes whereof rebuke and penance were the unfailing meed.

⁷³⁰

A lie does not distort the surface of existence; a discrepancy between that which a person knows inwardly and that which she expresses outwardly is not seen as being of much importance, for the Catholic mind of Villette perceives little if any connection between "Nature and I",⁷³¹ between the essential being of the individual and her active will. The phrase, "Be true to yourself" declares a doctrine which is wholly Protestant in its implications. The ubiquitous "surveillance" of Madame Beck's system, enthusiastically adopted also by

⁷²⁹ Edward Miall, "The British Churches in Relation to the British People" (1849), in *Evangelical and Oxford Movements*, p.105.

⁷³⁰ *Villette*, pp.145-6.

⁷³¹ cf above p.378.

M.Paul, Père Silas, and the entire structure of Catholic power in the novel, is closely related to this failure of individual coherence and of responsibility towards the self. Lucy tells M.Paul, when he describes to her the means by which he secretly watches activities in the garden of the Pensionnat, that he is damaging himself by such spying

“Monsieur, I tell you that every glance you cast from that lattice is a wrong done to the best part of your own nature. To study the human heart thus, is to banquet secretly and sacrilegiously on Eve’s apples. I wish you were a Protestant.”

32

“Eve’s apples” are the means by which knowledge is obtained at too high a cost. M.Paul cannot comprehend Lucy’s need scrupulously to obey “my own last appeal, the guide to which I looked and the teacher which I owned” - the need, in other words, to set standards for oneself which accord with “the best part of [one’s] own nature”, and then to live by them. The Protestant sees no value in “surveillance”, since she believes that the most important truths concerning a human being are hidden far below the penetration of the “common gaze” and are visible only to God.³² She sees other human beings as incapable of genuine understanding of her real and complete nature, and therefore unfit to judge her.³³ The rite of confession to a human priest, Lucy is well aware, can deal only with those matters which “surveillance” has the power to uncover - the failure to attend mass, for example, or the reading of novels. Père Silas is fully capable of “closely watch[ing]” Lucy, and by such means discovering her, to him, eccentric attitude towards church attendance. But Lucy does not feel herself to have been caught out, on the contrary she would doubtless, if the opportunity arose, tell Père Silas, just as she tells M.Paul, that it is “the best part of [his] own nature” which is damaged by his watching her, while she herself remains un-

³² *Villette*, pp.455-6.

³³ cf above p.376.

touched. For Père Silas sees only Lucy's external infidelity - "who tolerates all, he reasoned, can be attached to none" - and not her internal fidelity - "my own last appeal ... must always be the Bible itself, rather than any sect, of whatever name or nation". Attachment as Père Silas sees it is simply not the issue for Lucy.

As in so many Victorian novels which handle some aspects of the Christian faith, there is a marked absence from the pages of *Villette* of the figure of Christ Himself. God is presented almost exclusively as the Creator and ruler of the world, mighty in power and providence and to some extent concerned with the lives of human beings. But He is not Himself human. Presumably the reasons for this centre largely upon the fact that, as man, as well as God, Christ might easily and perhaps unwittingly be turned into a character in a novel, and the implications then arising for the writer already anxious about the extent to which fiction involves blasphemy are truly alarming. Lucy Snowe describes the God she worships as "Him whose home is Infinity and his being - Eternity"⁷³⁴; it is the transcendent nature of the Deity which she stresses, and His remoteness from human comprehension. Moreover, the heart of her religion seems to consist of a stoical fatalism, for Lucy's Christian experience seems to be a battle against all odds. She expects to suffer, and sees the task of her life to be primarily one of endurance:

His will be done, as done it surely will be, whether we humble ourselves to resignation or not. The impulse of creation forwards it; the strength of powers, seen and unseen, has its fulfilment in charge.... Dark through the wilderness of this world stretches the way for most of us: equal and steady be our tread; be our cross our banner. For staff we have His promise, whose "word is tried, whose way perfect"; for present hope His providence, "who gives the shield of salvation, whose gentleness makes great"; for final home His bosom, who "dwells in the height of Heaven"; for crowning prize a glory, exceeding and eternal. Let us so run that we may obtain; let us endure hardness as good soldiers; let us finish our course,

⁷³⁴ *Villette*, p.516.

and keep the faith, reliant in the issue to come off more than conquerors: "Art thou not from everlasting mine Holy One? WE SHALL NOT DIE!"

⁷³⁵

Lucy is in possession of a whole range of devices by which she can shield herself against other people, but, in the end, God is the power that she is really up against. She would endorse wholeheartedly the words of the hymn which declares:

Fear him, ye saints, and you will then
Have nothing else to fear.

⁷³⁶

It is at this point that Lucy differs from Vashti, for she does not believe that any "evil forces" can be strong enough to carry her through the only conflict that finally matters.⁷³⁷ M. Paul talks about a "panoply" and about invulnerability,⁷³⁸ but the only armour that can protect Lucy against God's designs upon her is that which He Himself provides. Lucy's religion consists primarily in her consciousness of her own smallness and weakness relative to "the strength of powers, seen and unseen", which work the unalterable will of God. Her own will has no part to play at all with regard to these "powers", for God's will "surely will be" done, either in accordance with human wishes, or in spite of them. There is, for Lucy,

⁷³⁵ *Villette*, p.534.

⁷³⁶ John Wesley, *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People called Methodists*, with a new supplement (London, 1889), no.562, p.520.

⁷³⁷ cf above p.384.

⁷³⁸ cf above p.386.

no question of altering her destiny, however "dark" the way ahead for her may be; all she can do is set herself to "finish [her] course and keep the faith". And by faith she surely means the integrity which accepts honestly the person she is becoming, the "equal and steady ... tread" which continues across what ever harsh wilderness may be set before her without flinching, and, above all, the ability, in any and every situation, to proclaim: "Art thou not from everlasting mine Holy One? WE SHALL NOT DIE!". The crucial, central article of theological belief is God's eternal and infinite being, which, in turn, guarantees the final endurance of those who believe in Him.

The paragraph ending "WE SHALL NOT DIE!" is immediately followed by the announcement to Lucy and her pupils of M.Paul's imminent departure for the West Indies - news which plunges Lucy into the final and most intense crisis of the novel. It is made clear at this point that all Lucy's agonies over M.Paul are perceived by her as a part of her share of the "dark" workings of the Divine will. Yet Lucy does not call God cruel - He is scarcely envisaged as being personal enough for such an epithet to be meaningful - but rather accepts her fate as both terrible and inexorable, looking to the Bible for comfort. She quotes, however, rather too many Biblical phrases in this short passage, with the result that the reader tends to skim across all these pious words as somewhat abstract and meaningless. Biblical language becomes for Lucy talismanic language. It is difficult to feel that Lucy can have assimilated all these concepts into her experience, since she seems to have no language of her own for them. The whole sentence beginning, "For staff we have ... " is very difficult to read, since there are, among so many words, very few ideas of which one can form a concrete image. It is hard to tell to what extent one is supposed to read it as metaphor, and, if so, what the metaphor is supposed to represent.

There is a lack of contrast between two sets of words which appear to be in some sense set up against one another: "staff ... present hope ... final home ... [and] crowning prize", and "His promise ... His providence .. His bosom ... [and] a glory". The first set suggests some kind of journey - a pilgrimage - and the second focuses upon God's self-giving to the traveller, but the first set contains three concrete ideas (staff, home and crowning prize) and

one abstract one (hope), while the second comprises two decidedly abstract concepts (promise and providence) and two which contain elements of both the abstract and the concrete (glory, and God's bosom). This absence of a clear distinction between idea and expression, between reality and image, experience and verbalisation confuses the reader, for it fails to offer any solid base from whose standpoint the remainder of the sentence may be interpreted. And this is so often a problem in *Villette*, particularly when Lucy is offering some sort of description of her private religious life. There are too many images and not enough concrete experiences. But this huge lack of real experience, of personal event, is, of course, Lucy's own problem too, with which she is wrestling throughout the novel.

It is, curiously, M.Paul who finally offers some sort of link between Lucy's beliefs about God and destiny, and the human world in which she lives. It would probably be an exaggeration to call him a Christ-figure, but he certainly acquires many of the qualities of a saint. In the chapter entitled "M.Paul keeps his promise", the Professor takes the school on a pastoral excursion into the nearby countryside. When the group stops to rest, in a green, wooded place:

... we were ordered to be seated, monsieur taking his place in our midst, and suffering us to gather in a host around him. Those who liked him, more than they feared, came close, and these were chiefly little ones ... He began to tell us a story. Well could he narrate: in such a diction as children love, and learned men emulate; a diction simple in its strength, and strong in its simplicity. There were beautiful touches in that little tale; sweet glimpses of feeling and hues of description that, while I listened, sunk into my mind, and since have never faded ... I used to think what a delight it would be for one who loved him better than he loved himself, to gather and store up those handfuls of gold-dust, so recklessly flung to heaven's restless winds.

739

⁷³⁹ *Villette*, pp.471-2.

M.Paul then buys generous quantities of food - fresh bread and butter, coffee and chocolate, cream and new-laid eggs - from a farm, and feeds his followers. He is described as "our shepherd", who, at the end of the day, "collected his sheep from the pasture, and proceeded to lead us all softly home".⁷⁴⁰ There can be no doubt that the reader is at this point intended to make some sort of imaginative link between M.Paul and Jesus, who said, "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me"⁷⁴¹; whose teaching, simply told in the form of stories accessible to ordinary people, drew large crowds eager to listen⁷⁴²; who, out of compassion for their hunger, fed great multitudes with physical food as well as spiritual⁷⁴³; whose words were written down and treasured by those who loved Him; who called Himself "the good shepherd"⁷⁴⁴; and upon whom Christians focus their thoughts when they read the Twenty-third Psalm:

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures,

he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul. ...

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.

⁷⁴⁵

⁷⁴⁰ *Villette*, p.475.

⁷⁴¹ *Matthew* 19 v.14.

⁷⁴² cf eg *Matthew* 13 v.2.

⁷⁴³ cf *Matthew* 14 vv.15-21; 15 vv.32-39.

⁷⁴⁴ *John* 10 v.14.

⁷⁴⁵ *Psalms* 23 vv.1-3, 5.

This use of dramatic allusion is far more powerful in arousing the reader's imaginative sympathy and understanding than the long listing of direct Biblical quotations examined above. John Keble, following the Medieval Church Fathers, taught that the material world was replete with God-given analogies through which Christian truth was revealed:

... the works of God in creation and providence, besides their immediate uses in this life appeared to the old writers as so many intended tokens from the Almighty, to assure us of some spiritual fact or other, which it concerns us in some way to know. So far, therefore, they fulfilled half at least of the nature of sacraments, according to the strict definition of our Catechism: they were pledges to assure us of some spiritual thing, if they were not means to convey it to us. They were, in a very sufficient sense, *Verba visibilia*.

⁷⁴⁶

Charlotte Brontë is, to some extent, working within this tradition, drawing upon the reader's own consciousness of Christian imagery and thus endowing M.Paul with something of the divine gentleness and humility, the giving of precious and holy words, the tender feeding and guidance, and the healing compassion associated with Christ in the Biblical passages to which the novel alludes. Just as Jesus was able to say to His disciples: "he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst",⁷⁴⁷ so Lucy, having seen M.Paul in this light, is enabled to trust M.Paul, in the hope that he will provide for her "real food that nourished, living water that refreshed".⁷⁴⁸ Lucy's "staff" and "present

⁷⁴⁶ John Keble, *Tract No.89, On the Mysticism attributed to the Early Fathers of the Church*, (1840), in *Evangelical and Oxford Movements*, p.144.

⁷⁴⁷ *John 6 v.35*.

⁷⁴⁸ *Villette*, p.594.

hope", her "final home" and "crowning glory",⁷⁴⁹ do seem to be, to a great extent, incarnated in M.Paul. And, described in these terms, they can begin to become a part of her personal life. It is, in the end, M.Paul, whose piety Lucy increasingly admires, whom she comes to see as her "Christian hero", for she finds in herself a deep respect for Paul's faithfulness to Madame Walravens and her family, despite her strong distaste for the Catholic repression and manipulation involved in the situation.⁷⁵⁰

Interestingly, Lucy makes a connection between the Medieval, Catholic image of the chivalric, knightly hero - an image utilised with comparative ease in *The Heir of Redclyffe* in the character of Guy since, despite all the dislocations within that novel, its theological focus remains Anglo-Catholic throughout - and a source of allegorical meanings which fits far more comfortably into this "heretic narrative":⁷⁵¹ Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Trapped within Madame Beck's house, surrounded by the will of those who would keep her from him, Lucy desperately awaits a last interview with M.Paul before he sails for the West Indies:

... the schemers seemed so watchful, so active, so hostile; the way of access appeared strait as a gully, deep as a chasm - Apollyon straddled across it, breathing flames. Could my Greatheart overcome? Could my guide reach me? ... I waited my champion. Apollyon came trailing his hell behind him.

⁷⁵¹

⁷⁴⁹ cf above p.391.

⁷⁵⁰ cf *Villette*, pp.488-9,491,514,560.

⁷⁵¹ cf *Villette*, p.235.

In order to reach her, Lucy's "champion" has to travel through a deep and narrow valley, guarded by "Apollyon". This recalls, of course, the "valley of the shadow of death" - part of the landscape of both the *Pilgrim's Progress* and the Twenty-third Psalm:

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; for thou art with me;
thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

752

Here is yet another fiery furnace - another picture of the "flames" and the narrow place set apart for torment through which Lucy must pass if she is to live in an alien land, continually tempted by the claims of an alien religion, and yet maintain her personal right to passion. Now, however, she is no longer seeking to achieve this on her own, but is instead looking to her "shepherd" to come in and "reach" her. The great threat to this salvation is "Apollyon" - a figure surely standing for something more terrible than simply Madame Beck and her accomplices. He is the force which Lucy's representative, her guide and redeemer, must "overcome" - the ultimate assault upon her individual life, upon her soul:

Then Apollyon strodled quite over the whole breadth of the way, and said, I am void of fear in this matter, prepare thyself to dye, for I swear thou shalt go no further, here will I spill thy soul; and with that, he threw a flaming dart at his brest.

753

"Apollyon" is the barrier, who declares, "thou shalt go no further". Ferociously, he stands guard over the one "way of access", deep and dangerous though it be, by which real spiritual

⁷⁵² *Psalms* 23 v.4.

⁷⁵³ *Pilgrim's Progress*, pp.63-4.

progress may be made. This dreadful ravine, which can be traversed only by someone with a power greater than that of Apollyon, is the only possible link between Catholicism and Protestantism, between Paul and Lucy. It appears much more like a division than a meeting place, for it is described as a "gully" or "chasm" - a treacherous "great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence"⁷⁵⁴.

There is hope, however, precisely in the fact that M.Paul can be called both Greatheart - the guide of women and of children in the Protestant *Pilgrim's Progress* - and "my champion", a phrase which recalls the Medieval, Roman Catholic world of chivalry, in which Christ can be thought of as the perfect hero-knight. Once again, that which separates - the "gully", the "chasm" - is transformed into that which unites. For the use of allegory occurs in what is both the greatest gulf and the closest meeting point between Protestant and Catholic modes of thought. As C.S.Lewis explains, during his discussion of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* in his book, *The Allegory of Love*:

It would appear that all allegories whatever are likely to seem Catholic to the general reader, and this phenomenon is worth investigation. ... No Christian doubts that those who have offered themselves to God are cut off as if by a wall from the World ... but when the wall becomes one of real bricks and mortar ... then we have reached that sort of actuality which Catholics aim at and which Protestants deliberately avoid. Indeed, this difference is the root out of which all other differences between the two religions grow. ... In the world of matter, Catholics and Protestants disagree as to the kind and degree of incarnation or embodiment which we can safely try to give to the spiritual; but in the world of imagination, where allegory exists, unlimited embodiment is equally approved by both.

⁷⁵⁵

⁷⁵⁴ *Luke* 16 v.26.

⁷⁵⁵ C.S.Lewis, *The Allegory of Love - a study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford, 1936), pp.322-3.

It is in this "world of imagination, where allegory exists", that Lucy's best hope for union with M.Paul lies. The passage through the fiery furnace is achieved by drawing upon one's inner, hidden resources and using them to defy the divisions of the external world. Lucy's problem is that, while she is starving and thirsting for "real food that nourished, living water that refreshed",⁷⁵⁶ - spiritual nourishment for her soul - Madame Beck offers her physical food and drink in an attempt to feed the body and, by satisfying Lucy in the realm of "actuality", stifling the aspirations of "what lies below"⁷⁵⁷:

"... eat your supper, drink your wine, oubliez les anges, les bossues, et surtout, les Professeurs
- et bon soir!".

⁷⁵⁸

On the spiritual level, Lucy and M.Paul are finally united. Outside time and space, there lie no barriers, no disagreements as to "incarnation or embodiment"; that which "no Christian doubts" they may share completely. And it is when they become most fully aware of this, discovering that, "one prayer, at least, we have in common",⁷⁵⁹ then Paul can make what is probably the biggest religious statement in the entire novel:

How seem in the eyes of that God who made all firmaments, from whose nostrils issued whatever of life is here, or in the stars shining yonder - how seem the differences of man?
But as Time is not for God, nor Space, so neither is Measure, nor Comparison. We abuse ourselves in our littleness, and we do right; yet it may be that the constancy of one heart, the

⁷⁵⁶ cf above p.395.

⁷⁵⁷ cf above p.376.

⁷⁵⁸ *Villette*, p.489.

⁷⁵⁹ *Villette*, p.517.

truth and faith of one mind according to the light He has appointed, import as much to Him as the just motion of satellites about their planets, of planets about their suns, of suns around that mighty unseen centre incomprehensible, irrealizable, with strange mental effort only divined.

"God guide us all! God bless you, Lucy!"

759

Lucy's prayer is, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!"; Paul's is "O Dieu, sois appaisé envers moi qui suis pécheur!".⁷⁵⁹ In the ears of man, these two prayers are different: the sounds, the number of words, the time and space required by each sentence all differ; on the purely physical, sensory level, there are very few similarities. It is not the ear, but a faculty very closely related to the ability to understand an allegory which decides that the two prayers "mean" the same as one another. From being a mere collection of sounds, belonging in "the world of matter", the utterances are given symbolic value, so that in "the world of imagination" they can become something which Paul and Lucy have "in common". M.Paul then takes this allegorical level of comprehension and attributes it to God, who, as Creator and Lord over the entire physical world, has His own existence above and beyond "Time" and "Space", and must therefore possess some ordering principle or power which is not located within the material creation. God is seen to exist where allegory, according to C.S Lewis, exists: "in that region ... where the bifurcation [of Catholic and Protestant thinking] has not yet occurred; for it occurs only when we reach the material world".⁷⁶⁰

And this links us back to the idea of the revelatory power of fiction. The viewpoint of God is similar to that of the imaginative writer in that it is only from a perspective which

⁷⁶⁰ *Allegory of Love*, p.323.

lies outside "actual life"⁷⁶¹ that one can achieve the level of understanding where "Measure" and "Comparison" lose their meaning. It becomes no longer the external events which count - nothing capable of being measured, fixed, or defined - but only the "hidden passages of experience".⁷⁶¹ It is not the big things - the planets - with which the mind of the Creator concerns itself, so much as the invisible things: "the constancy of one heart, the truth and faith of one mind according to the light He has appointed". And there is, at the very heart of the physical universe, a great mystery: "that mighty unseen centre incomprehensible, unrealizable, with strange mental effort only divined". Here lie the limitations of direct human perception, for here, in what might be thought of as a prophetic glimpse of twentieth century physics, the world of human experience and the world which lies beyond the ordinary operations of sense, knowable only through some power which does not originate in the external world, meet:

It seems that the human mind has first to construct forms independently before we can find them in things. ... Knowledge cannot spring from experience alone but only from the comparison of the inventions of the intellect with observed fact.

⁷⁶²

Einstein looks to the independent human mind as the missing link necessary to connect experience with truth; M. Paul, as a religious believer, looks beyond this independent intellect to the mystery of its source, and, in the face of this, can say no more than: "God guide us all! God bless you, Lucy!". Both as a race and as individuals, humanity must acknowledge its need of Divine guidance and blessing in a universe which, while offering continual challenges to the human intellect, centres around something "irrealizable".

⁷⁶¹ cf above p.372.

⁷⁶² Albert Einstein, *Ideas and Opinions*, based on *Mein Weltbild*, edited by Carl Seelig, and other sources. New translations and revisions by Sonja Bargmann (London, 1954), p.266.

In the end, then, no concrete divisions can be made between asceticism and sensuality, between reason and feeling, between the church and the world; the church lies at the centre of the world, and the world lies at the centre of the church. The ending of the novel - M.Paul's death at sea - is not an unnatural disaster, nor a denial of the achievements which have preceded it; it is simply an expression of the way that things are:

That storm roared frenzied for seven days. It did not cease till the Atlantic was strewn with wrecks: it did not lull till the deeps had gorged their full sustenance. Not till the destroying angel of tempest had achieved his perfect work, would he fold the wings whose waft was thunder - the tremor of whose plumes was storm.

⁷⁶³

Seven days is the time taken by God in *Genesis* to create the world. The "work" of the storm is "perfect" and "full", entirely according to the plan of some mysterious agency. Nothing happens by chance, nor does anything occur outside an order which is "unseen ... incomprehensible, irrealizable" to humanity, but which is never violated. This is Lucy's faith, and it remains unshaken to the end. The "destroying angel" in the Bible is clearly an agent of God, not of Satan,⁷⁶⁴ and the only being with the power utterly to destroy is the Creator:

And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth.

⁷⁶⁵

⁷⁶³ *Villette*, p.596.

⁷⁶⁴ cf eg *1 Chronicles* 21 v.9ff.

⁷⁶⁵ *Genesis* 6 v.7.

The only point at which Protestant and Catholic can find true union is fundamentally unstable in terms of time and space; to attempt to possess it or to hold onto it would be to lose it altogether. And so the only appropriate response to such experience, the only means of having any part at all in the liberation from "Measure" and "Comparison" which lies in the "mighty unseen centre incomprehensible", is to adopt, as Lucy is constantly seeking to do, the words and the spirit of Job:

The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.

⁷⁶⁶

⁷⁶⁶ *Job* 1 v.21.

Chapter Seven - Conclusion

James Fitzjames Stephen, writing in 1855, was quite clear in his own mind as to the central question to be asked concerning the novel:

What adjustments and allowances must we make before the suggestions of novels can be accepted as additions to our experience?

⁷⁶⁷

The novel claims to offer an opportunity to attain greater personal maturity through the extension of one's experience. It is a substitute for living, a sort of literary vitamin pill, designed to boost one's perhaps rather meagre direct intake of the mental nourishment to be obtained from awareness of the world around oneself. There is, however, as I have shown, a significant current of nineteenth-century opinion, often going hand in hand with a religious understanding of reality, which questions the validity of the novel as a means of expressing and discovering truth. To place these objections in a larger context, I now look at some examples of Victorian religious poetry, including hymns, asking where this much older literary form stands in relation to the novel, bearing in mind the fact that poetry, like the novel, traditionally claims to make contact with levels of reality outside its reader's own immediate experience, and yet relevant to it. Poets are:

⁷⁶⁷ J.F.Stephen, "The Relation of Novels to Life", in *Victorian Criticism of the Novel*, p.100.

... they which most properly do imitate to teach and delight, and to imitate borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be; but range, only reined with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may and should be.

768

This tension between the historical fact and the transcendent ideal lies at the very heart of my argument in this dissertation.

Most lyric poems, and nearly all hymns, offer something rather different from direct "additions to our experience". Instead of informing their reader, they rather affirm that which he or she in some sense already knows, moving this prior knowledge onto new levels of consciousness. The hymn is to be sung by its reader, and sung with the consciousness that God is listening. The words:

There is a green hill far away,
Without a city wall,
Where the dear LORD was crucified,
Who died to save us all.

769

appear simply to be imparting information, until one recalls that the role of the reader is not merely to receive these words, but to utter them. To "accept" the hymn as an "addition" to one's "experience" would be to place oneself above it, whereas the Christian should

⁷⁶⁸ Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry* (1595), edited by Geoffrey Shepherd (Manchester, 1973), p.102.

⁷⁶⁹ W.H.Monk and C.Steggall (ed.), *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, Old edition, (London, 1889), no.332.

take it as an opportunity to worship the "dear LORD" of whom it speaks, presenting, as he sings, an offering of his own belief and a sacrifice of the pride which seeks always to know more and to experience more, as he dwells upon this childishly simple, and, in one sense at least, widely understood, expression of doctrine. One might perhaps tentatively suggest that the singing of the hymn is accepted by God as an addition to His "experience" if the singer believes the hymn, since He receives the experience which the Christian denies himself in accepting the overwhelming importance of the green hill and the city wall.

Mrs Alexander's hymn begins by establishing a great distance between the interior world of the person singing it and the place of crucifixion. "There is ... far away, Without" moves the worshipper out and away from the known, the controlled and the civilised. It is here, in this alien and depersonalised landscape, "Where the dear LORD was crucified"; "dear" is the first word which admits a relationship between the singer and the subject matter of the song, and its intense emotional implications retrospectively cast new significance onto the first two lines of the stanza. The distant "green hill" matters, and matters tremendously, because of its identification with the "dear LORD". It becomes, in effect, a symbol for the crucified Christ in the mind of the person singing. There is no complexity of thought or pride of paraded skill in this hymn to obscure the simple reality that "the dear LORD", "died to save us all". The singing self is merged into a corporate identity - "us all" - as it comes to perceive the insignificance of its individual opinions in the face of truths which were enacted long ago and "far away". "There is a green hill" - whether any given individual believes it or not; in singing these words one acknowledges the existence of realities bigger than one's own mind.

This hymn achieves much of its simplicity by avoiding the use of any imagery, apart from the imagistic resonances of such central and commonplace Christian concepts as the "green hill", "his precious Blood", "the price of sin" and "the gate/of heaven". It lies at the furthest possible remove from the "metaphysical" style of forging new and imaginatively challenging links between previously wholly disparate ideas. Indeed, the hymn depends for its effect upon the recognition, by its singers, that the pictures it presents are so profound

that there is nothing worthy to be compared with them. Simile and metaphor could only trivialise the simple truth of the "green hill", and the charge of frivolity with regard to serious matters is always a risk for the Christian poet. George Herbert, despite all his poetic skill, claims that "A true Hymne" consists in something which has little to do with such skill:

The fineness which a hymne or psalme affords,
Is, when the soul unto the lines accords.

He who craves all the minde,
And all the soul, and strength, and time,
If the words onely ryme,
Justly complains, that somewhat is behinde,
To make his verse, or write a hymne in kinde.

Whereas if th'heart be moved,
Although the verse be somewhat scant,
God doth supplie the want.
As when th'heart sayes (sighing to be approved)
O, could I love! and stops: God writeth, Loved.

770

The literary critic takes an active approach to a hymn, "crav[ing]" predetermined virtues, beginning with a fixed concept of an ideal "hymne in kinde" and testing all individual hymns against this standard. Alternatively, one can be far more passive, beginning with the "lines" which one is reading, and, instead of taking one's own heart or intellect as the fixed point against which to test the verse, looking to see whether "th'heart be moved". A hymn

⁷⁷⁰ George Herbert, "A true Hymne", in *The English Poems of George Herbert*, edited by C.A.Patrides (London, 1974), p.174.

which is full of poetic "strength" is all very well, but, when viewed in such a manner, it is not necessarily endowed with the "finesse" which characterises a "true Hymne"; this is achieved only when "the soul unto the lines accords". The chiming together of "soul" and "lines" in harmonious agreement creates a rhyme, a wholeness and a unity of experience which far surpasses the highest aesthetic standards of the literary critic.

W.H.Auden feels that the Christian poet, particularly the writer of penitential verse, is faced with very real difficulties in attempting to create this kind of wholeness:

A poet must intend his poem to be a good one, that is to say, an enduring object for other people to admire. Is there not something a little odd, to say the least, about making an admirable public object out of one's feelings of guilt and penitence before God?

771

It is difficult to see how the attempt to create something of which one can feel proud out of the very substance of one's deepest shame can result in a situation where "the soul unto the lines accords". This difficulty leads onto another question: whether a "good" poem, when its subject matter is human weakness or failure, is not, in reality, a bad poem, since its style is so far removed from its content. For the Christian, grief and sin are, when acknowledged, the beginning of salvation; it is to the heart which cries, "O, could I love!" that God replies "Loved". And if it is out of need and desire that the "finesse" of poetry is born, then it is the humblest penitent, more aware than anyone else of his own spiritual poverty, who will write the greatest poem. "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven".⁷⁷²

⁷⁷¹ W.H.Auden, *The Dyers Hand and other essays* (London, 1963), p.458.

⁷⁷² *Matthew 5 v.3.*

Christina Rossetti's Christmas carol, "In the bleak mid-winter" concludes by asking what the "poor" worshipper can possibly have to offer God. Can she bring a poem?

What can I give him
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man
I would do my part;
Yet what can I give him -
Give my heart.

773

"A poet must intend his poem to be a good one" - but if he lives in "the bleak mid-winter", where all life is turned to "stone" and becomes as "hard as iron" - where water and earth, the basic elements of fertility, are frozen and buried beneath layer upon layer of snow - where the only sound is the chilling "moan" of the wind - where can he possibly expect to find the sources of creativity? If his "heart" is cold and sterile, is he still to offer it, although it is as mockingly unsuitable as a gift to the Creator of all life as a "stable place" is hopelessly inadequate as a home for the "Lord God Almighty"? He must, for he has nothing else, trusting that, by the same miraculous love which allows the stable to "suffice" the God whom "heaven cannot hold", his heart and his poem may similarly "suffice". That "my heart" can be "Enough for him, whom Cherubim/ Worship night and day",⁷⁷⁴ is the stupendous wonder, the amazing truth around which the singer of this carol focuses her praise of God. And so language's inadequacy becomes the source of its adequacy - art is defeated by art.

⁷⁷³ Quoted in Samuel Carr (ed.), *Hymns as Poetry*, (London, 1980), p.111.

⁷⁷⁴ *Hymns as Poetry*, p.110.

This is, to begin with, the account of an individual soul and a private experience, taking place in the company of specific "walls, altar and hour and night" known only to the soul and to God. It is also, however, the opening of a long poem written to commemorate a public event - the death of the five Franciscan nuns in the wreck of the *Deutschland* - and it is important to the poet that the God who masters "me" is also the "World's strand" and the "Lord of living and dead", controlling the entire world, visible and invisible. He is described as the "sway of the sea" right at the outset of a poem about the sea's destruction of five believers, and the irony here is actively embraced by the poet as he shows God to be, mysteriously, a God of "dread" and "terror", whose tender provision for His children includes destructive, as well as creative elements. "Thou hast bound bones and veins in me, fastened me flesh,/And after it almost unmade". The same power can make and unmake, and the "sway of the sea" governs shipwrecks as well as peaceful passages. One cannot accept one aspect of God's being without the rest; anyone who says "yes" to Him includes within that affirmation a "yes" to "lightning and lashed rod" - to the storms which both strain the tossed heart to its limits, and fire it with the passionate "stress" of the Divine presence.

In contrast to the extremely simple sentence structure of "There is a green hill" and the almost monosyllabic diction of the final stanza of "In the bleak mid-winter", Hopkins's verse is highly unpredictable and complex, and sometimes difficult to understand. Verbs, for example, are used as nouns and adjectives to create a feeling of vigorous action, movement and volition which is constantly building up tension in the writing. Thus, the opening phrase: "THOU mastering me /God!", conveys the idea that God's "mastering" of the poet is an ever-present ongoing activity, and a - if not the - major attribute of God Himself as the poet perceives Him. This structure also places "me" between "God" and the word which describes His character - "mastering" - thus emphasising the idea of God as the "World's strand" who has "bound" and "fastened" the poet's body, for the small syllable "me" is entirely enclosed within words naming God. One can also link "THOU" with "God", and think of "mastering me", joined by alliteration, as a unit, so that within "THOU ... God", as a subset of His being, is an energy devoted to "mastering me". One could ar-

beholder

Wanting; which two when once they meet,
The heart rears wings bold and bolder
And hurls for him, O half curls earth for him off
under his feet.

776

Hopkins's verse is a "Hurrahing in Harvest" - a joyous, although not always obviously cheerful response of extreme enthusiasm to having "glean[ed]" the Saviour. It begins with a "heart" and "eyes" which are lifted up, above the level of the self, although not separated from it, to meet "replies" which are "realer" and "rounder" than anything previously experienced. The heart and eyes find a "greeting" - something far more personal than an automatic revelation of existence - for they are encountering not merely a metaphysical essence, but a person, capable of "Rapturous love". Nor does the fact that "our Saviour" is to be "glean[ed]" from the landscape mean that the landscape has no reality of its own. It is not an empty device for religious instruction, as a book about God might be - it is no mere showcase for the Divine attributes. "These things, these things were here", and it is the "things" with which the "beholder" meets. The poet sees the hills, and sees in them both immense power, the strength which can carry worlds on its shoulders - "as a stallion stalwart" - , and lovely sweetness, like violets, softened by "azurous" mists. And it is in God that these two qualities, majestic might and gentle beauty, are supremely brought together. The great achievement of the poem is that it actually enacts the meeting of God in the poet's surroundings, thus avoiding both the heresy of pantheism and the abuse of the landscape as mere metaphor. For it is not merging, but meeting, which is the source of Hopkins's creativity. The line: "Majestic - as a stallion stalwart, very-violet-sweet! - " is both about the hills and about God's "world-wielding shoulder". The hills "are" the

⁷⁷⁶ Hopkins, p.31.

shoulder, and yet each retains an entirely separate identity, paradoxically, by virtue of this total equation of the one with the other.

"Hurrahing in Harvest" deals with one moment of discovery, out of which is born a tremendous motive power; the movement which takes place is not through time, but through some other dimension. This dwelling on a moment is, of course, one of the major ways in which the lyric poem differs from the novel. It is, it seems, largely for this reason that the poem offers itself more naturally than the novel as a vehicle for the expression of religious belief, since Christian faith is, in many ways, characterised by the absence of narrative progression. Belief is the end of the story. As I have demonstrated in, say, *The Heir of Redclyffe* and "Janet's Repentance", a character's life in a novel has a problematic tendency to come to an end when she or he has achieved peace with God. Narrative is ideal for the portrayal of struggle, but it has great difficulties in dealing with arrival. John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* - one of the most powerful Christian autobiographies in English literature - is all about Bunyan's temptations, fears and sins before he came to know "the sweet and blessed comfort that I met with afterwards".⁷⁷⁷ Regarding this comfort, he can scarcely find a thing to say, and it is only when writing of his imprisonment that he feels able to devote half a paragraph to his having received "sweet sights of the forgiveness of my sins in this place, and of my being with Jesus in another world".⁷⁷⁸ And a prison is, above all, a place of stasis.

Christina Rossetti is a poet who is particularly aware of this identification of Christian contentment with a fixed, unchanging mode of being. For her, the less one experiences, the better, and her work has a strong and at times disturbing tendency towards a motionlessness which seems sometimes indistinguishable from the annihilation of all con-

⁷⁷⁷ John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1978), p.94.

⁷⁷⁸ *Grace Abounding*, p.121.

sciousness, all desire. It is impossible to imagine Rossetti as a novelist, although she did, in her teens, write one short story entitled *Maude, A Story for Girls*.⁷⁷⁹ Even this, however, is largely related as a series of short, often fairly static scenes, and several poems and letters interrupt the narrative. Most significantly, the story is brought fairly rapidly to a permanent halt by the taking of the veil by one character quickly followed by the death of the heroine, Maude, both of these girls being less than twenty years old. Agnes, their mutual friend, is left to remember them:

Agnes cut one long tress from Maude's head; and on her return home laid it in the same paper with the lock of Magdalen's hair. These she treasured greatly, and gazing on them, would long and pray for the hastening of that eternal morning which shall reunite in God those who in Him, or for His sake, have parted here.

Amen for us all.

THE END.

780

This is, in many ways, the end, not only of *Maude*, but of the nineteenth-century novel as a whole whenever it attempts to portray Christian faith from an orthodox standpoint. For the believer waits patiently, "gazing" at the symbols which remind her of her hope, and longing for "the hastening of that eternal morning". Progress in this life becomes meaningless, for no earthly goals are visible to someone whose entire gaze is fixed elsewhere. The two locks of hair signify parting from the things of the world, Maude's "in Him", and Magdalen, the nun's, "for His sake"; they are all that remains visible of two believing lives. And to write a novel about such lives would be to attempt to write a story about two locks

⁷⁷⁹ cf Christina Rossetti, *Selected Poems*, edited by C.H.Sisson (Manchester, 1984), p.136ff.

⁷⁸⁰ Rossetti, *Selected Poems*, p.161.

of hair. But the locks can have no plot, no alteration, for they are for contemplation, not action. They would make a very bad novel - at least as the Victorians thought of the novel - but, potentially, a very good poem.

Poetry concerns itself far more readily than the novel with that which lies beyond this-worldly human experience:

Lastly, both in Poetry and in Religion, an indefinitely tender and keen feeling for what is past or out of sight or yet to come, will ever assert and claim a high place of honour for itself. For those who, from their very heart, either burst into poetry, or seek the Deity in prayer, must needs ever cherish with their whole spirit the vision of something more beautiful, greater and more lovable, than all that mortal eye can see.

781

What is so odd about the poems of Christina Rossetti - and this is perhaps symptomatic of a major nineteenth century dysfunction with regard to the expression of individual religious experience - is that, instead of describing the Christian's glorious vision, the immortal beauties of the life to come, they are accounts of life in the world as seen, looking backwards, from the viewpoint of a future heavenly rest. The emphasis is constantly laid upon the present unattainability, rather than the future attainment, of heavenly joys. There is an, at times, overwhelming sense of the sterility and hopelessness of the visible world; it is full of disappointments, never satisfying:

This life is full of numbness and of balk,
Of haltingness and baffled shortcoming,
Of promise unfulfilled, of everything
That is puffed vanity and empty talk:
Its very bud hangs cankered on the stalk.

⁷⁸¹ Keble, *Lectures on Poetry*, in *Evangelical and Oxford Movements*, p.151.

Its very song-bird trails a broken wing,
 Its very Spring is not indeed like Spring,
 But sighs like Autumn round an aimless walk.
 This life we live is dead for all its breath;
 Death's self it is, set off on pilgrimage,
 Travelling with tottering steps the first short stage;
 The second stage is one mere desert dust
 Where Death sits veiled amid creation's rust: -
 Unveil thy face, O Death who art not Death.

782

Processes are begun which repeatedly fail to reach satisfactory conclusions, but which instead end in "baffled shortcoming". This idea is echoed in the sounds of the poem through the very large proportion of end-stopped lines. When read aloud, the verse fails to flow, but instead sounds more or less like a series of single, isolated statements. Except for lines three and four, and possibly lines thirteen and fourteen, every line starts and finishes within its own confines, and this effect builds up a sense of frustration in the reader as the effort required to begin a new train of thought at the outset of each line is not repaid by the feeling that these thoughts are going anywhere. The contrast with the "sweep" and "hurl" of Hopkins's verse is striking.⁷⁸³ Rossetti's sonnet is also very repetitive, especially in the first four lines, which seem to do little more than list a selection of words all signifying more or less the same thing. The reader thus experiences, on a small scale, something similar to the problem which the poem is describing; reading these first four lines is rather like listening to a record that has got stuck and is continually repeating one short phrase. "Haltingness" and "balk" describe it perfectly.

⁷⁸² Christina Rossetti, *The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti*, (London, 1928), "Later Life", no.26, p.81.

⁷⁸³ cf above p.410.

The sonnet presents a series of images of sterility and decay, pictures of "promise unfulfilled". The use of repetition is carried on by the words "Its very", which open three lines in succession. The very essence of "Life" is not what it would seem to lead one to hope for, although it is like "Spring", characterised by flower buds and singing birds, the bud "hangs cankered on the stalk", so that, despite the fact that it is still attached to the plant, the source of life, it will never open up into a flower, and never produce seeds from which new plants might grow. Similarly, the "song-bird" is wounded, and will die before summer comes; it sings to herald something which will not arrive. For "Spring" is more like "Autumn" than "Spring", only worse, in that instead of looking back to a summer now ended, it looks forward to a summer which will never begin. This "tottering" spring is the "first short stage of life", when the song-bird limps feebly and the bud rots; that which follows is "one mere desert dust", a world of utter barrenness, littered with "creation's rust", the corpses of promise in the last stages of decay. There is, however, a faint glimmer of hope in the word "pilgrimage", since, although one might fear that such a journey is purposeful in exactly the same way - here handled with deep irony - as buds and song-birds are purposeful, a "pilgrimage" is nevertheless a specifically religious journey, involving some degree of self-denial and difficulty as the price to be paid for other-worldly rewards. One might well expect a pilgrim to find himself travelling through deserts and across wastelands, the archetypal Judaco-Christian pilgrimage being the Exodus of Israel, who spent forty years wandering in the desert before reaching the Promised Land. It is here, in the wilderness, that the poet meets "Death, who art not Death", the counterpart of the "Spring which is "not indeed like Spring". Hope depends upon a kind of symmetry, which is one reason why poetry, and in particular this sonnet, with its symmetrical rhyme scheme,⁷⁸⁴ is well adapted to the expression of concepts of this sort. Because "This life we live is dead for all its breath", one can reasonably expect to find the other side of the equation elsewhere, in the discovery of "Death", which, when unveiled, turns out to be "not Death", but life.

⁷⁸⁴ ie abbaabbacddecc

While it is difficult, or perhaps impossible, to pin a clear charge of heresy onto Rossetti's poem, it is evident that her beliefs are, in relation to Biblical teaching, somewhat eccentric. The problem is that the nineteenth-century poet who attempts to describe what it feels like to be a Christian believer while living in this world, is, like the novelist, constantly in danger of being trapped between the merely human and the inhumanly other, and she therefore experiences a powerful temptation to escape this tension, which is at best excitingly creative, by flying either to one extreme or to the other. The Victorian writer of imaginative literature, prose or verse, with a religious content, is intensely aware of St Paul's sense of being "in a strait betwixt two".

Sue Bridehead, in her condition of renunciation at the end of *Jude the Obscure*, wills upon herself a death state similar to that described in Rossetti's sonnet as a protracted self-torture:

"Self-renunciation - that's everything! I cannot humiliate myself too much. I should like to prick myself all over with pins and bleed out all the badness that's in me!"

785

"Do violence!" seems to be Sue's guiding principle; violence directed against herself has become the only response she feels able to offer to all the cruelty and violence she has met with in the world, culminating in the death of her children:

"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!'" .

⁷⁸⁵ *Jude*, p.459.

Jude the Obscure is filled with this increasing awareness of being overpowered by an unknown "something" which flatly denies all human aspirations. This "something" is "external to us", existing absolutely beyond human sympathies; no communication with it is possible. It is a completely negative force, resulting in "haltingness and baffled shortcoming ... [and] promise unfulfilled".⁷⁸⁷ Both expectation and desire are made to consume themselves in the absence of anything external to feed upon, for the entire external world is under the control of laws quite alien to any human sense of need. Humanity is a race of unwanted children in a self-sufficient universe. Sue's response is that, "We must conform!".⁷⁸⁸ If the governing powers of the world are cruel to her, then she, also, must be cruel to herself; if fate has decreed that Sue must suffer, then she will take an active hand in her own torture. "Self-resignation" has become "everything" to her, for she perceives that only by denying her own desires can she avoid the repeated agony of clashing with the immovable object which says, "You shan't!". She wishes to bleed, not, like Christ, from large, dramatic wounds, but from a thousand pin-pricks, masochistically self-inflicted, because this sort of bleeding represents a greater humiliation. Sue feels herself to be too insignificant, too obscure, to merit death by some military weapon; a pin - cheap and commonplace - is good enough for her.

Late one evening, Jude finds her in St Silas's church, alone:

High overhead, above the chancel steps, Jude could discern a huge, solidly constructed Latin cross - as large, probably, as the original it was designed to commemorate. It seemed to

⁷⁸⁶ *Jude*, p.449.

⁷⁸⁷ cf above p.416.

⁷⁸⁸ *Jude*, p.455.

be suspended in the air by invisible wires; it was set with large jewels, which faintly glimmered in some weak ray caught from outside, as the cross swayed to and fro in a silent and scarcely perceptible motion. Underneath, upon the floor, lay what appeared to be a heap of black clothes, and from this was repeated the sobbing that he had heard before. It was his Sue's form, prostrate on the paving.

789

Everything in this scene is sick and half-hearted, "faint" and "weak"; the light does not belong in the church, but cannot be fully excluded from it either - it is "caught from outside". And the cross seems neither dead nor alive, for it neither stays still in one position, nor moves with any real energy, but it "swayed to and fro in a silent and scarcely perceptible motion". It is going nowhere - merely oscillating backwards and forwards, purposelessly. Sue herself looks like an empty "heap of black clothes", a mere "form", yet she is sobbing. It is as if her soul yearns and aches to leave her body, but cannot. The large, rather sinister cross governs her, holding sway over her, but it can do nothing to help her, nothing to save her. The cross, the symbol of Christianity, is here presiding over a world in which, despite all Sue's tears, nothing but symbols count for anything at all. The spirit behind them is dead, but not at rest. And this triumph of the signifier over the signified looks very much like the funeral of the novel as the Victorians knew it.

Calm, sad, secure; behind high convent walls,
These watch the sacred lamp, these watch and pray:
And it is one with them when evening falls,
And one with them the cold return of day. ...

Outside, the world is wild and passionate;
Man's weary laughter and his sick despair

⁷⁸⁹ *Jude*, p.464.

Entreat at their impenetrable gate:

They heed no voices in their dream of prayer.

790

Here we have something entirely different. We have moved outside time and space into another world. "Watch ... watch, pray ... prayer" - this is the very essence of changelessness. These nuns exist only as "they" - as a group. There is no such thing as an individual among them, for the focus of their consciousness is fixed unwaveringly not on one another, but on the object of their unending vigil. So what can a poem about them - a poem which they would find completely meaningless - do for the wild world "Outside", to which it inevitably belongs? There is no way through the nuns' gate, and "no voices", no poetry within their walls. And if one suggests that help comes simply from knowing that the nuns are there, one has then to face the question whether a "dream" of such a haven might not be just as valuable as the knowledge of its real, historical existence. Time and place, after all, do not matter to the nuns; they do not judge reality by such crude criteria. The convent is the ideal subject for lyric poetry, and yet, because of this, it reveals all the deceptions, all the insincerities, in the relationships between poet, poem and reader. The "dream of prayer" is perhaps, at the same time, the closest a writer of imaginative literature can ever approach to, and the furthest he can ever depart from a Christian poem, a Christian literature.

⁷⁹⁰ Ernest Dowson, "Nuns of the Perpetual Adoration", in *The Poems of Ernest Dowson*, edited by Mark Longaker (Philadelphia, 1962), p.42.

Bibliography

1. Primary Source Texts

Charlotte BRONTE, *Jane Eyre*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1966).

Charlotte BRONTE, *Villette*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1979).

John BUNYAN, *The Pilgrim's Progress, from this world to that which is to come*, (London, 1926).

Samuel BUTLER, *The Way of All Flesh*, (London, 1966).

Samuel CARR (ed.), *Hymns as Poetry* (London, 1980).

Charles DICKENS, *David Copperfield*, Collins Clear Type Press edition, (London and Glasgow, undated).

Charles DICKENS, *Little Dorrit*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1967).

Ernest DOWSON, *The Poems of Ernest Dowson*, edited by Mark Longaker, (Philadelphia, 1962).

George ELIOT, *Adam Bede*, Every Age Library edition, (London, undated).

George ELIOT, *Adam Bede* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1980).

George ELIOT, *Middlemarch*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1965).

George ELIOT, *Scenes of Clerical Life* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1973).

George ELIOT, *Silas Marner*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1967).

Elizabeth GASKELL, *Cranford/Cousin Phillis* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1976).

Elizabeth GASKELL, *The Works of Mrs Gaskell*, eight volumes, (London, 1906).

Elizabeth GASKELL, *Lizzie Lee, The Grey Woman and other tales*, with an introduction by Clement Shorter, World's Classics, (Oxford, 1913).

Thomas HARDY, *Jude the Obscure*, Macmillan Students' Hardy edition, (London, 1975).

Thomas HARDY, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Macmillan Students' Hardy edition, (London, 1975).

Nathaniel HAWTHORNE, *The Scarlet Letter*, Penguin American Library edition (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1983).

George HERBERT, *The English Poems of George Herbert*, edited by C.A.Patrides (London, 1974).

Gerard Manley HOPKINS, *Poems and Prose*, selected and edited by W.H.Gardner (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1953).

W.H.MONK and C.STEGGALL(ed.), *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, Old Edition, (London, 1889).

George MACBETH (ed.), *The Penguin Book of Victorian Verse*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1969).

George MACDONALD, *David Elginbrod*, Garland "Novels of Faith and Doubt" series, reprint of 1863 edition, three volumes in one, (New York and London, 1975).

James MARTINEAU, *Hymns of Praise and Prayer*, (London, 1874).

George MOORE, *Evelyn Innes and Sister Teresa*, Garland "Novels of Faith and Doubt" series, reprints of 1898 and 1901 editions respectively, (New York and London, 1975).

Christina ROSSETTI, *The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti*, with memoir and notes etc. by William Michael Rossetti (London, 1928).

Mark RUTHERFORD (William Hale White), *Catharine Furze*, (London, 1985).

Mark RUTHERFORD, *Autobiography and Deliverance*, Victorian Library Edition, (Leicester and New York, 1969).

Mark RUTHERFORD, *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford and Mark Rutherford's Deliverance*, Garland "Novels of Faith and Doubt" series, reprints of 1881 and 1885 editions respectively, (New York and London, 1976).

Mark RUTHERFORD, *The Revolution in Tanner's Lane and Miriam's Schooling*, Garland "Novels of Faith and Doubt" series, reprints of 1887 and 1890 editions respectively, (New York and London, 1975).

Leo TOLSTOY, *Anna Karenina*, translated by Louise and Aylmer Maude, (Oxford, 1980).

Charlotte YONGE, *The Heir of Redclyffe*, Garland "Novels of Faith and Doubt" series, reprint of 1853 edition, (New York and London, 1975).

2. Other Primary Material

William BLAKE, *Poems and Prophecies*, edited by Max Plowman, (London, 1927).

Elizabeth Barrett BROWNING, *The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (Oxford, 1913).

Charles DICKENS, "A Christmas Carol", in *The Christmas Books, Volume One*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1971).

Charles DICKENS, *Bleak House*, (London, 1976).

George ELIOT, *Daniel Deronda*, edited by Graham Handley, (Oxford, 1984).

George ELIOT, *Romola*, edited with an introduction by Andrew Sanders, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1980).

George ELIOT, *The Mill on the Floss*, (Glasgow, 1979).

T.S.ELIOT, *Collected Poems 1909-62*, (London, 1974).

Graham GREENE, *The Heart of the Matter*, William Heinemann, Library edition, (London, Melbourne and Toronto, 1959).

Thomas HARDY, *The Complete Poems*, edited by James Gibson, (London, 1976).

Thomas HARDY, *The Well-Beloved*, (Oxford, 1986).

John KEATS, *Letters of John Keats*, edited by Robert Gittings, (Oxford, 1970).

John KEATS, *Selected Poems and Letters of Keats*, edited by Robert Gittings, (London, 1966).

Charles KINGSLEY, *Alton Locke*, (Oxford, 1983).

Charles KINGSLEY, *Yeast*, (London, 1881).

Thomas MALORY, *Works*, edited by Eugène Vinaver, (Oxford, 1971).

Mrs OLIPHANT, *Hester*, Virago edition, (London, 1984).

Mrs OLIPHANT, *Salem Chapel*, Virago edition, (London, 1986).

Walter PATER, *Marius the Epicurean*, Garland "Novels of Faith and Doubt" series, reprint of 1885 edition, two volumes in one, (New York and London, 1975).

John D. ROSENBERG (ed.), *The Genius of John Ruskin - Selections from his writings*, paperback edition, (Boston, Mass. and London, 1980).

John RUSKIN, *Praeterita*, introduction by Kenneth Clark, (Oxford, 1949).

Mark RUTHERFORD (William Hale White), *Clara Hopgood*, (London, 1924).

Jonathan SCOTT (ed.), *The Arabian Nights Entertainment*, translated, edited and introduced by Jonathan Scott, four volumes, (London, 1883).

William SHAKESPEARE, *Hamlet*, edited by G.R.Hibbard, The Oxford Shakespeare, (Oxford, 1987).

Edmund SPENSER, *Poetical Works*, edited by J.C.Smith and E.De Selincourt, (Oxford, 1970).

Anthony TROLLOPE, *The Warden*, Minster Classics edition, (London, 1968).

Alfred Lord TENNYSON, *Poetical Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson*, The Albion Edition, (London, 1902).

Mrs Humphrey WARD, *Helbeck of Bannisdale*, Garland "Novels of Faith and Doubt" series, (New York and London, 1975).

Mrs Humphrey WARD, *Robert Elsmere*, World's Classics edition, (Oxford, 1987).

William WORDSWORTH, *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, edited by Thomas Hutchinson, (Oxford, 1923).

3. Literary Critical Works

Walter ALLEN, *The English Novel* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1958).

Miriam ALLOTT, *Novelists on the Novel* (London, 1959).

Nina AUERBACH, *Woman and the Demon*, (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1982).

Charles W. BAIRD, *John Bunyan: a study in narrative technique*, (Port Washington, New York, and London, 1977).

William BAKER, *George Eliot and Judaism*, Salzburg Studies in English Literature, no.45, (Salzburg, Austria, 1975).

David BARRATT and Roger POOLEY (ed.), *Reading Literature: Some Christian Approaches*, UCCF Literary Studies Group publication, (Leicester, undated).

Gillian BEER, *Darwin's Plots - Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (London, 1983).

Richard Allen CAVE, *A Study of the Novels of George Moore*, Irish Literary Studies - 3, (Gerrards Cross, Bucks, 1978).

Valentine CUNNINGHAM, *Everywhere Spoken Against - Dissent in the Victorian Novel* (Oxford, 1975).

Philip DAVIS, *Memory and Writing from Wordsworth to Lawrence*, (Liverpool, 1983).

Andrew L.DRUMMOND, *The Churches in English Fiction*, (Leicester, 1950).

Edwin MEIGNER and George J.WORTH, *Victorian Criticism of the Novel*, (Cambridge, 1985).

Eva FIGES, *Sex and Subterfuge - women writers to 1850*, (London, 1982).

Sandra M.GILBERT and Susan GUBAR, *The Madwoman in the Attic: the woman writer and the nineteenth century imagination*, (New Haven, Conn., 1979).

Jennifer GRIBBLE, *The Lady of Shalott in the Victorian Novel*, (London, 1983).

A.J.HARTLEY, *The Novels of Charles Kingsley - A Christian Social Interpretation* (Folkestone, 1977).

Elizabeth JAY, *The Religion of the Heart* (Oxford, 1979).

U.C.KNOEPLMACHER, *Religious Humanism and the Victorian Novel*, (Princeton, 1965).

George P.LANDOW, *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows - Biblical typology in Victorian literature, art and thought*, (Boston, Mass., and London, 1980).

D.H.LAWRENCE, *Selected Literary Criticism*, edited by Anthony Beal, (London, 1956).

F.R.LEAVIS, *The Great Tradition*, second edition, (London, 1960).

C.S.LEWIS, *The Allegory of Love*, (Oxford, 1936).

C.S.LEWIS, *Rehabilitations and other essays*, (Oxford, 1939).

Cynthia A.LINDER, *Romantic Imagery in the Novels of Charlotte Bronte*, (London, 1978).

Margaret M.MAISON, *Search your Soul, Eustace*, (London, 1961).

John MAYNARD, *Charlotte Bronte and Sexuality*, (Cambridge, 1984).

William MYERS, *The Teaching of George Eliot*, (Leicester, 1984).

Vincent NEWAY (ed.), *The Pilgrim's Progress - Critical and Historical Views*, (Liverpool, 1980).

Ieland RYKEN, *Triumphs of the Imagination - Literature in Christian Perspective*, (Downers Grove, Illinois, 1979).

Catherine SANDBACH-DAHLSTRÖM, *Be Good Sweet Maid: Charlotte Yonge's Domestic Fiction: A Study in Dogmatic Purpose and Fictional Form*, doctoral dissertation at the University of Stockholm, (Stockholm, 1984).

Roger SHARROCK, *Saints, Sinners and Comedians: The Novels of Graham Greene*, (Tunbridge Wells, Kent and Notre Dame, Indiana, 1984).

Martin J.SVAGLIC, "Religion in the Novels of George Eliot", *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol.53 (1954), p.145ff.

George WATT, *The Fallen Woman in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel*, (London and Canberra, 1984).

Ian WATT, *The Rise of the Novel, Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, (London, 1963).

Tom WINNIFRITH, *The Brontes and their Background - Romance and Reality*, (London, 1973).

Robert Lee WOLFF, *Gains and Losses: Novels of Faith and Doubt in Victorian England*, (London and New York, 1977).

Robert Lee WOLFF, *The Golden Key: a study of the fiction of George MacDonald*, (New Haven, Yale, 1961).

4. Religious Writings and Related Secondary Material

St.ANSELM, *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm*, translated and with an introduction by Sister Benedicta Ward, S.L.G., (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1973).

Matthew ARNOLD, *Culture and Anarchy*, edited by Dover Wilson, paperback edition, (Cambridge, 1960).

Matthew ARNOLD, *Dissent and Dogma*, edited by R.H.Super, (Michigan, 1968).

Matthew ARNOLD, *God and the Bible*, edited by R.H.Super, (Michigan, 1970).

W.H.AUDEN, *The Dyer's Hand and other essays*, (London, 1963).

St.AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, translated by R.S.Pine-Coffin, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1961).

Albert BARNES, *Notes on the Old Testament - Job*, reprint of 1847 edition, two volumes in one, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1983).

Henry BETTENSON (ed.), *Documents of the Christian Church*, second edition, (Oxford, 1963).

Robert BICKERSTETH, *A Memoir of the Rev. John Newton*, (London, 1865).

George Granville BRADLEY, *Lectures on the Book of Job*, (Oxford, 1887).

Ian BRADLEY, *The Call to Seriousness - The Evangelical Impact on the Victorians*, (London, 1976).

Hilde BRUCH, *The Golden Cage - The Enigma of Anorexia Nervosa*, paperback edition, (Shepton Mallet, Somerset, 1980).

John BUNYAN, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1978).

CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY, *The Teaching of the Catholic Church: A New Catechism of Christian Doctrine*, (London, 1985).

Richard William CHURCH, *The Gifts of Civilisation, and other sermons and lectures*, third edition, (London and New York, 1903).

A.O.J.COCKSHUT (ed.), *Religious Controversies of the Nineteenth Century: Selected Documents*, (London, 1966).

A.O.J.COCKSHUT, *The Unbelievers - English Agnostic Thought, 1840-1890*, (London, 1964).

THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, (1662).

Tess COSSLETT, *Science and Religion in the Nineteenth Century*, (Cambridge, 1984).

J.W.CROSS, *George Eliot's Life, as related in her letters and journals*, arranged and edited by her husband, two volumes, (London, 1902).

Alexander CRUDEN, *Cruden's Complete Concordance to the Bible*, edited by C.H.Irwin, A.D.Adams, and S.A.Waters, revised edition, (Cambridge, 1977).

Henry DRUMMOND, *The Ideal Life and other Unpublished Addresses*, with Memorial Sketches by W.Robertson Nicholl and Ian Maclaren, second edition, (London, 1898).

Albert EINSTEIN, *Ideas and Opinions*, based on *Mein Weltbild*, edited by Carl Seelig, and other sources. New translations and revisions by Sonja Bargmann. (London, 1954).

George ELIOT, *A George Eliot Miscellany*, edited by F.B.Pinion, (London, 1982).

George ELIOT, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such, Essays and Leaves from a Notebook*, William Blackwood & Sons, (Edinburgh and London, undated).

T.S.ELIOT, *Selected Prose*, edited by John Hayward, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1953).

Ludwig FEUERBACH, *The Essence of Christianity*, translated from the second German edition by Marian Evans, (New York, 1855).

John FLAVEL, *The Mystery of Providence*, (Edinburgh, 1963).

J.A.FROUDE, "The Book of Job", *Westminster Review*, volume 4, 1853, p.417ff.

Elizabeth GASKELL, *The Life of Charlotte Bronte*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1975).

- Charles George GORDON, *Reflections in Palestine* (London, 1884).
- Edmund GOSSE, *Father and Son*, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1983).
- Douglas B.HAGUE and Rosemary CHRISTIE, *Lighthouses - their Architecture, History and Archaeology*, (Llandysul, Dyfed, 1975).
- Florence Emily HARDY, *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1891*, (London, 1928).
- Florence Emily HARDY, *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, 1892-1928*, (London, 1930).
- Paul HELM, *The Divine Revelation*, (London and Illinois, 1982).
- Michael HENNELL, *Sons of the Prophets - Evangelical Leaders of the Victorian Church*, (London, 1979).
- John HICK, *Evil and the God of Love*, second edition, (London, 1977).
- Pat HOLDEN (ed.), *Women's Religious Experience*, (London and Canberra, 1983).
- Richard Holt HUTTON, *Aspects of Religious and Scientific Thought*, selected from the *Spectator*, and edited by his niece, Elizabeth M. Roscoe, reprint of 1899 edition, (Westmead, Farnborough, 1971).
- William JAMES, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, (Glasgow, 1960).
- Elizabeth JAY, *The Evangelical and Oxford Movements*, (Cambridge, 1983).
- John KEBLE, *Letters of Spiritual Counsel and Guidance*, edited by R.F. Wilson, (Oxford, 1870).

Thomas à KEMPIS, *Of the Imitation of Jesus Christ*, translated by T.F. Dibdin, (London, 1851).

Thomas à KEMPIS, *The Imitation of Christ*, translated and with an introduction by Leo Sherley-Price, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1952).

Søren KIERKEGAARD, *Fear and Trembling - a dialectical lyric*, translated by Walter Lowrie, (Princeton, 1945).

C.S. LEWIS, *The Screwtape Letters*, (Glasgow, 1955).

Gail MALMGREEN (ed.), *Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760-1930*, (London and Sydney, 1986).

Henry Longueville MANSEL, *The Limits of Religious Thought, examined in eight lectures*, Bampton Lectures for 1858, fourth edition, (London, 1859).

Edward MIALL, *Views of the Voluntary Principle. In Four Series.*, second edition, (London, 1850).

John Stuart MILL, *The Subjection of Women*, (Massachusetts, 1970).

John Stuart MILL, *Utilitarianism*, edited by Mary Warnock, (Glasgow, 1962).

John Henry Cardinal NEWMAN, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1979).

John Henry Cardinal NEWMAN, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, (London and New York, 1889).

John Henry Cardinal NEWMAN, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, (New York, 1947).

John Henry Cardinal NEWMAN, *University Sermons*, with introductory essays by D.M.MacKinnon and J.D.Holmes, (London, 1979).

John Henry Cardinal NEWMAN, *Newman: Prose and Poetry*, selected by Geoffrey Tillotson, (London, 1957).

Wilhelm NIESEI., *The Theology of Calvin*, translated by Harold Knight, (London, 1956).

Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Beyond Good and Evil*, translated by R.J.Hollingdale, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1973).

D.E.NINEHAM (ed.), *The Church's Use of the Bible, Past and Present*, (London, 1963).

Matthew POOLE, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, three volumes, (Edinburgh and Carlisle, Pennsylvania, 1963).

Edward Bouverie PUSEY, *Selections from the writings of Edward Bouverie Pusey, DD*, second edition, (London, 1885).

Bernard M.G.REARDON, *Religious Thought in the Victorian Age - A Survey from Coleridge to Gore*, paperback edition, (New York, 1980).

Bernard M.G.REARDON, *Religious Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, illustrated from writers of the period (Cambridge, 1966).

Legh RICHMOND, *The Dairyman's Daughter*, Religious tract society edition, (London, undated).

H.R.ROOKMAAKER, *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture*, second edition, (Leicester, 1973).

John RUSKIN, *Sesame and Lilies, Unto This Last, and The Political Economy of Art*, (London, undated).

J.C.RYLE, *Holiness: its nature, hindrances, difficulties and roots*, (Welwyn, Herts, 1979).

John SARGENT, *The Life and Letters of Henry Martyn*, reprint of 1862 edition, (Edinburgh, 1985).

Sir Philip SIDNEY, *An Apology for Poetry*, (1595), edited by Geoffrey Shepherd, (Manchester, 1973).

George SMITH, *The Life of William Carey, DD, Shoemaker and Missionary*, (London, 1885).

Charles Haddon SPURGEON, *Autobiography*, four volumes, (London, 1897).

Charles Haddon SPURGEON, *Autobiography*, originally compiled by Susannah Spurgeon and Joseph Harrald, revised edition in two volumes, (Edinburgh, 1962).

Charles Haddon SPURGEON, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, volume 31 - sermons preached and revised in 1885*, reprint of Passmore and Alabaster edition of 1886, (London, 1971).

I.D.E.THOMAS, *The Golden Treasury of Puritan Quotations*, (Edinburgh, 1977).

Leo TOLSTOY, *What is Art? and Essays on Art*, translated by Aylmer Maude, World's Classics edition, (Oxford, 1930).

William TYNDALE, *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon*,(1527), in W.Tyndale, *Doctrinal Treatises*, edited by H.Walker, Parker Society, (Cambridge, 1848).

Max WEBER, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Talcott Parsons, second edition, (London, 1976).

Claude WELCH, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century, volume one, 1799-1870*, (New Haven and London, 1972).

John WESLEY, *A Collection of Hymns, for the use of the people called Methodists, with a New Supplement*, (London, 1889).

Jeremy TAYLOR, *The Rules and Exercises of Holy Living and Dying*, (Oxford, 1869).