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1974

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by

LYNN SUKENICK

A dissertation submitted to the
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1974

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Abstract

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY IN WOMEN'S FICTION: STUDIES IN THE NOVELS OF GEORGE ELIOT, VIRGINIA WOOLF, ANAÏS NIN, AND DORIS LESSING

by

Lynn Sukenick

Adviser: Professor Marvin Magalaner

The subject of sense and sensibility in women's fiction emerges from the cultural generalizations about women's special capacity for emotion and from the evidence that a number of women writers have paid self-conscious attention to this generalization, either capitalizing on their allegedly innate predisposition toward feeling or, firmly, and with particular effort, denying it. The contrast between sense and sensibility was made sharply by Jane Austen in _Sense and Sensibility_, a novel written in satirical response to the literature and manners of sensibility in the eighteenth century. The age of sensibility in England was coincident with the rise of the novel, the only major genre at whose inception women participated in significant numbers.

The concept of sensibility has altered in meaning throughout the last two centuries, connoting to contemporaries not so much the moral sympathy of the eighteenth

century as a general emotional sensitivity. Throughout the changes in meaning there has been a congruence between sensibility and those features of consciousness which are customarily designated as innate in or particular to the female sex, qualities of sympathy, intuition, and non-verbal perception of and attunement to the world. Whether or not these cliches about gender are accurate, they have entered into the work of a number of women writers, sometimes as inspiration, more often, it appears, as obstacle. The principle of special consciousness posited here might be extended fruitfully to the work of women writers other than those studied, but it is especially salient in and integral to the fiction of Eliot, Woolf, Nin, and Lessing.

George Eliot, closest to the age of sensibility, has a strong consciousness of the value of enthusiasm and sympathetic responsiveness, and in her work emotion keeps the moral component that it had for Shaftesbury, functioning as the cement of human community and as a principle of moral education. Woolf, closer to contemporary definitions of sensibility, pursues emotion for its own sake in her fiction, and regards it as a determinant of form. In her emphasis on the sublime she bears a relation to the eighteenth century, during which the ideas of Longinus and their modifications were in vogue. For Anais Nin, sensitive emotional response is an absolute positive value, and of the four authors she least questions its connection

with feminine identity. For Doris Lessing, feeling is also connected with the feminine, but it is suspect, and sometimes even perilous.

The four writers discussed approach feeling and sensibility with an awareness and self-consciousness which makes emotion not a cultural given but a subject in itself, a subject that has a special resonance because of its inevitable affiliation with the gender these writers represent. An understanding of the meaning that sensibility, emotion, intuition, and sympathy have for Eliot, Woolf, Nin and Lessing brings forward themes and concerns which clarify the proportion and intensities of their novels.

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But one could perhaps go a little deeper
into the question of novel-writing and
the effect of sex upon the novelist.

Virginia Woolf, A Room
of One's Own

INTRODUCTION

In The Subjection of Women John Stuart Mill wrote, protesting the status quo, that "women who read, much more women who write, are, in the existing constitution of things, a contradiction and a disturbing element."[1] Mill, sympathetic to the women's cause that burgeoned in England in the 1870's and 1880's, was pointing to the disparity between the dependency fostered by the laws pertaining to women and the independence that was shown by women who wrote books. The study that follows is based on the intuition that even accomplished women authors have had an awareness of the disparity between their literary endeavors and what is expected of the female sex. In the works of George Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Anais Nin, and Doris Lessing, widely diverse and successful authors, there is a confrontation with and self-consciousness about womanhood that is important to their vision of the world and to their esthetic choices. Their concern with gender, far from being a remedial digression, is central to their work; their talent does not transcend or discard it.

The writing woman has always been a more modest exception when she was writing "as a woman," that is to say, with a point of view, style, and subject that could be regarded as "feminine"--whether or not this was to be praised or condemned. It is easy to call up those feminine features, however obsolete they may be considered at

present: the personal, the diminutive, and most of all, the emotional, have been understood to be woman's particular province. Sympathy, sensitivity, acute feeling, and "pathos, which is the whining of an unmanly spirit,"[2] according to Peacock, are the offerings which convention expects women to bestow, or, as Hazlitt puts it, "Effeminacy of character arises from a prevalence of the sensibility over the will."[3] Sensibility--that quality which the following chapter will define and explore--has been the woman writer's _forte_ in the English language ever since she began writing fiction more than two centuries ago.

Because of the superior capacity to indulge feeling which women traditionally are supposed to have, rationality in the novels of women has taken on a different meaning and a different weight from rationality in the novels of men. For a woman, the novel of reason may represent an achievement that surpasses expectation, or a greater degree of strain, or a regrettable suppression of gifts--or perhaps, simply, and rarely, a confident equality of mind unspotted by consciousness of gender. Of the great women novelists writing in English, perhaps only the early Jane Austen occurs to us as an example of the latter category. Although contemporary with Mary Wollstonecraft, Austen was writing almost a century before the issue of women's rights began to take political shape; her novels are coolly apart from the kinds of inner hubbub that feminism created later in many women. As Chesterton remarks, Austen is "that most

exasperating thing, an ideal unachieved. It is like leaving an unconquered fortress in the rear. No woman later has captured the complete common sense of Jane Austen. She could keep her head, while all the after women went about looking for their brains. . . . But she belongs to a vanished world before the great progressive [Victorian] age."[4]

Yet Austen, for all her perfect balance, had her areas of impatience, and "sensibility" was one of them. In Love and Freindship, Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice, and Northanger Abbey, she wielded her amiable but satirical pen over the stock properties of the gothic and sentimental novels of her time, countering the cult of sensibility with dry wit and small fervor.[5] Her most sustained and serious treatment of sensibility occurs in Sense and Sensibility, a novel published in 1811 "By a Lady," according to the title page, in which two sisters of contrasting temperaments move through a plot constructed to show that romantic enthusiasm must be regulated by common sense if it is not to sink into gullibility, selfishness, and bad taste. The contrast between sense and sensibility was common in the novels of Austen's day, and the distinction between the two kinds of temperament, although no longer a literary convention, remains very much alive. Mary McCarthy, for instance, has stated her dislike of women writers, especially "that whole sensibility school. I am for the ones who represent sense, and so was Jane Austen."[6]

The distinction between the intuitions of the heart and the knowledge of the head is not, of course, limited to women's consciousness. We tend to associate the former with the Romantic movement and with the idea that the intellect is inimical to our native spirit and to a selfhood that is at bottom emotional. Certainly there is a good deal of overlap between the Romantic temperament and the qualities and characteristics that are generally associated with women's nature. The self-annihilation of a Keats and the doctrine of empathy which lies at the heart of his notion of negative capability is, for example, uncomfortably close to the routine selflessness with which women have been trained to observe and participate in the world. Yet the introduction of women's concerns lends a different coloring to the Romantic option. For when a man chooses the Romantic, it is a rebellion against the rational competence with which he has been charged; for a woman it is a reiteration of her specialty: women are, in the common view, "romantic."

To see the dichotomy between reason and feeling, Classic and Romantic, then, as one between sense and sensibility, is to shift the terms just enough to keep out the staler connotations and to properly mark the point of departure as belonging to the eighteenth century, the age of sensibility, when women in significant numbers began to write novels. The birth of the novel in English, the development of sensibility, and the rise to eminence of

women writers happened more or less simultaneously. Women experienced an increase in leisure and, excluded from the customary masculine pursuits, they became ardent readers of and prolific writers of fiction. The fact that novels, at least until the time of Richardson, and even after, were considered an inferior form of literature also made them a suitable occupation for the sex that was given inferior education and, for the most part, regarded as "weaker." Aside from religious books, what was left to a woman not trained to deal with the classics or works in a learned tradition was the "lighter reading" which fiction represented. And although the first woman novelist, Aphra Behn, predates Richardson, it was with Richardson's introduction of the psychological novel that there came a chance for women to do what they were supposed to do well--that is, to watch people interact, to have feelings about it, and to discuss it.

After the year 1800 there were more female novelists than male novelists, and indeed, for some the novel is a particularly feminine form, and the one literary form in which women seem to have attained an equal footing with men. Chesterton asserted,

> When we come to the novelists, the women have, on the whole, equality; and certainly, in some points, superiority. . . . This is the first fact about the novel, that it is the introduction of a new and rather curious kind of art; and it has been found to be peculiarly feminine. . . . It is a hearty and exhaustive overhauling of that part of human existence which has always been the woman's province, or rather kingdom;

> the play of personalities in private. . . . What the novel deals with is what women have to deal with. . . . The key of this new form of art, which we call fiction, is sympathy. . . . Unfortunately another idea, the idea of imitating men's cuffs and collars and documents, cut across this purely female discovery and destroyed it.[7]

This chivalrous passage poses the problem, or part of the problem, which those women writing in English after 1850 were to face. They might devote themselves to the perfection of feeling which had been required of the perfect lady since the eighteenth century[8] or they might strike out for wider regions, to write, as is said of George Eliot, "like a man." The growth of feminism, the suggestion that there were freedoms as yet unknown and disabilities that had been inflicted arbitrarily, gave women a greater awareness of the choices open to them. This awareness of how things might be otherwise, of alternate opportunities, also enforced a dualism between the feminine <u>status quo</u> and the newly opened masculine vistas, engendering a conflict that might be enacted between males and females or played out between opposing elements in a woman's character. Even Jane Austen, at the end of her short life and in her most "romantic" novel, <u>Persuasion</u>, anticipated the consciousness of grievance that would spread like a benign microbe in the latter half of the nineteenth century.[9]

It was this sense of grievance which Virginia Woolf felt as a taint in the work of Charlotte Bronte and as a danger for all women writers. To write as a woman but as a

woman who has forgotten she is a woman, is Woolf's recommendation in A Room of One's Own, along with a possibly contradictory injunction to reconcile opposing elements into an androgyny of the imagination. Far from being grateful for the role that women have played in the development of the novel genre, Woolf makes clear that she is starved for a tradition of strong women writers: "For we think back through our mothers if we are women. It is useless to go to the great men writers for help, however much one may go to them for pleasure. . . . The book has somehow to be adapted to the body."[10]

Woolf's hunger is not an unreasonable greed, for if large numbers of women produced novels in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this is more a contribution to literary history than to the storehouse of great literature, and the number of major women novelists writing in English remains small. The degree to which women have been disabled as writers by the prejudice against women in general is a subject that Woolf takes up in A Room of One's Own and is one that might be debated endlessly. More interesting perhaps, and more verifiable, is the degree to which those women who have written successfully have regarded female existence as problematic.

The four writers whose works are studied here have made a durable contribution to the tradition of women's fiction. Each is consciously determined to write from a

woman's point of view, though their definitions of it are different from one another's. In differing proportions gender is seen as burden and advantage; none see it as negligible. And all perceive in the idea that women are feeling creatures a precedent to be reinforced or rejected and with full attention. Feeling, in their works, becomes a <u>subject</u>: for Eliot it is what teaches, and it functions as the cement of human community; for Woolf feeling is the determinant behind innovations in form, and the spur of an ecstasy that is the sum of moments of being; for Nin feeling, whether sympathy or physical desire, is an absolute surety, and something to be elicited by any means necessary; for Lessing feeling is at times an intruder, at times an efficient form of cognition. In the works of Woolf and Nin feeling is pursued for its own sake; in Eliot's and Lessing's fiction feeling serves larger social purposes.

These four writers are not alike, nor does an examination of parallel subjects in each make them seem so. Nin and Lessing have, in fact, been chosen not only as contemporaries who are important to women seeking a new consciousness but because of their differences. It is unlikely that Nin--in her glass slippers--and Lessing--in her low-heeled shoes--would find one another interesting. Yet both are preoccupied with "free women" in their fiction. Eliot and Woolf are the best female writers of their respective centuries, a valuation that is taken for granted

here rather than argued.

Though these authors are not in a neatly developmental relation to one another, there are connections and dependencies among them which belie their apparent disparateness. Virginia Woolf has written an essay,[11] and her father (Sir Leslie Stephen), a book, on George Eliot.[12] Doris Lessing asserts that she has been influenced less by the English novel than by the Russian, though her style has been thought by one critic to resemble George Eliot's.[13] Anais Nin's sources are largely Continental, with the one, and the most significant, exception of D. H. Lawrence (who was influenced by George Eliot) about whom she wrote her first book.[14] Doris Lessing says, perhaps predictably, that Virginia Woolf's experience must have been too limited because "there's always a point in her novels when I think, 'Fine, but look at what you've left out.'"[15] Nin, on the other hand, praises Woolf as a valuable innovator "who sought to restore to the novel not its familiar character structure, but the visionary insight of the poet."[16] Yet Nin appreciates the realist Eliot as well, as a "pattern-maker," a woman who as an "artist-builder" broke all the old molds and emerged as a self-created individual.[17]

The bulk of this study is a discussion of feeling and reason in the work of four women novelists. The first chapter is a summary of the background of sensibility in the

eighteenth century, a period and concept that determined and originated the treatment of feeling in the novel, a period in which women's susceptibilities to feeling were most approved and pronounced and in which a weakness was transformed into a virtue, succinctly caricatured in the two young ladies in Love and Freindship who faint "alternately on a sofa." The second chapter provides in microcosm the cultural context which embraces us and what it says about women and feeling, both before and after the age of sensibility.

The impulse to generalize about women and women writers is so persistently indulged--as the second chapter will show--that one is tempted to dissolve the categories once and for all and not to embark on even further generalizations. Yet to understand inadequate commonplaces is not to enforce them, and to suppress them deprives those who read women writers of an accurate picture of the context in which their work germinated. If the dichotomy between sense and sensibility seems crude, it is not because these writers have not succumbed to the binary thinking that consciousness of gender implies, but because their best efforts are ones that unify these aspects or make the conflict so meaningful that it no longer seems a practical problem. Finally, the new perspective that a study of feeling in the fiction of the four writers will, it is hoped, create, will perhaps encourage not only an enhanced opinion of their work, but

an awareness of feeling as an important element of tone, structure, and theme in the works of other writers as well.

Footnotes

[1] John Stuart Mill, The Subjection of Women (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1929), p. 245.

[2] Thomas Love Peacock, The Four Ages of Poetry (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1923), pp. 16-17.

[3] The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, ed. P. P. Howe (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1931), VIII, 248.

[4] G. K. Chesterton, The Victorian Age in Literature (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1961), p. 66.

[5] "There was in her . . . none of the morbid sensibility or exaggeration of feeling, which not unfrequently accompanies great talents, to be worked up into a picture. Hers was a mind well-balanced on a basis of good sense." James Edward Austen-Leigh, Memoir of Jane Austen (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1926), p. 208.

[6] Quoted by Doris Grumbach in The Company She Kept (New York: Coward-McCann, 1967), p. 213.

[7] Chesterton, pp. 59-60.

[8] Cf. C. Willett Cunnington, Feminine Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1936), p. 106.

[9] Anne Elliot, the heroine, tells Captain Harville,

"We certainly do not forget you, so soon as you forget us. It is, perhaps our fate rather than our merit. We cannot help ourselves. We live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us. You are forced on exertion. You have always a profession, pursuits, business of some sort or other, to take you back into the world immediately, and continual occupation and change soon weaken impressions." Persuasion (New York: W. W. Norton, 1958), p. 232.

[10] Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929), pp. 132-135.

[11] Virginia Woolf, "George Eliot," The Common Reader (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925), pp. 166-176.

[12] Leslie Stephen, George Eliot (London: Macmillan, 1902).

[13] Dorothy Brewster, Doris Lessing (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1965), p. 159.

[14] Nin, D. H. Lawrence (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1964).

[15] Brewster, p. 158.

[16] Nin, The Novel of the Future (New York: Macmillan, 1968).

[17] Nin, D. H. Lawrence, p. 50.

CHAPTER I

SENSIBILITY: BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

Despite the longevity of the concept, the word "sensibility" does not have a sharp definition at present; in its long history it has accumulated numerous meanings, yet a synonym for contemporary usage is not easy to fix. Although the dictionary offers a series of possibilities,[1] the expression "sensibility" appears to exist somewhere in the spaces between those meanings, as mercurial and elusive as it is irreplaceable.

In general, we think of "sensibility" as the texture of responsiveness in an individual, a fundamental capacity whose type or quality the word does not specify; a sensibility may be "rich" or "impoverished," "grim" or "sparkling," "opaque" or "transparent"; certainly it is never "good" or "evil," "just" or "unjust"; it is an area of consciousness on which reason or morality may work--but not necessarily.

Yet what the word sensibility evokes is not entirely neutral; it is not the equivalent of "sight" or "hearing," a faculty everyone possesses. We do not speak of the "sensibility" of a government official, or a businessman, or a cabbie; the bias of the word is that it favors those who live in the imagination. And whereas it can mean an initial capacity for responsiveness, it often suggests a _special_ capacity for responsiveness, even an over(s)training

of responsiveness. To use the word is to imply that one is dealing with an expressive, often "artistic" being, or an area of experience that involves the imagination.

There is a great variety of connotation in contemporary usage of the word "sensibility," ranging between its meaning a raw material on the one hand and its meaning a special talent, on the other. Thus when Q. D. Leavis speaks of Emily Bronte as having "a sensibility that has triumphed over starvation and is not at its mercy," she uses the word in such a way that it needs a descriptive phrase to complete it, whereas another critic's description --of Tennyson's heroines as being "full of sensibility"[3]--suggests that the noun itself has come to function, in some cases, as an adjective.

A continuum of evaluation, too, crosses the range of connotation. "Sensibility," for the critic Ralph Freedman, is "the most cultivated form of human awareness."[4] When Yvor Winters, however, called Ezra Pound "a sensibility without a mind" he intended a denigration, and one which, Frank Kermode says, is "if nothing else, a very just punishment upon abusers of the word 'sensibility.'"[5] Neither of these critics uses the word as Leavis does above--to mean simply a characteristic kind of responsiveness--what they refer to is more complex, a definite capacity, specific enough to be praised or scorned.

Whether the term "sensibility" is employed in a context of neutrality, skepticism, or praise, it would

seem that the critic is reluctant to do without it. When the need to indicate an algebraic x occurs, when it is necessary to call on the ineffable within a more solid discourse, "sensibility" is employed. Its frequent use suggests that there is an area of experience which has a dearth of terminology, and which eludes our customary vocabulary. Discursive English tends to dichotomize the cognitive and emotive, and to ignore the area between them. If we try to give "sensibility" a more imaginative definition than the contemporary dictionary allows, we might come up with such provisional, working definitions as "thinking without thinking"; "intelligent feeling"; or "bodily intellection." All of these are, of course, as elusive as the word itself, but perhaps it is more useful not to establish a synonym or a series of synonyms, stalking the word in linear fashion, but to corral "sensibility" within all its possible definitions, assuming that by the stakes in the fence surrounding it an area can be described. If it emerges that this is a portion of consciousness which can have no one name, then it will have, at least, a map, and a history. To plunge into its working history, in fact, is to begin to fill in the substance of the word, so that the precise density of its past and present use can be understood.

The term "sensibility" has undergone striking changes of fortune since its first usage. Its early, common,

definition was neutral and descriptive: Chaucer, for example, used the word to indicate, "Sensible species; the emanations from bodies, which were supposed to be the cause of sensation."[6] Later, in the early fifteenth century, the word took on a meaning which began to approach our modern definitions: the OED lists it, in a usage which continues through the nineteenth century, as the "power of sensation or perception . . . Now often, the (greater or less) readiness of an organ or tissue to respond to sensory stimuli; sensitiveness." The capacity for readiness, though in this case a biological readiness rather than a psychological readiness, foreshadows the later uses of the word.

Although there was, concurrent with the above definitions, and in use as early as 1412, a description of "sensibility" as "mental perception, awareness of something," this emphasis on literal consciousness was, by the seventeenth century, subsumed under the aspect of emotional consciousness. The OED lists as a definition for that period, "Emotional capacities; instincts of liking or aversion." The example given, dated 1634, pits reason against sensibility, a distinction which becomes as ingrained and traditional as that of body and soul: "It is fitting that reason convince our Sensibilities, causing us to agree to what is otherwise distasteful unto us."

In 1711, Addison used the word to mean "Quickness and acuteness of apprehension or feeling; the quality of being easily and strongly affected by emotional influences." The meaning here is still one-dimensional and mechanistic: one thing reacts to or influences another thing; there is an undifferentiated readiness of feeling. But by the mid-eighteenth century "sensibility" had come to represent a rather varied emotional consciousness: "glad or sorrowful, grateful or resentful recognition of a person's conduct, or a fact or a condition of things," as well as "liability to feel offended or hurt by unkindness or lack of respect; susceptibilities."

It is mentioned in the OED that sensibility is a word which is "rare until the middle of the eighteenth century," and it is in the eighteenth century that we see a proliferation of, and gradually deteriorating connotation of, meanings. During that period, sensibility, along with its first cousin, sentiment,[7] came to represent and to be the signal for a complex body of ideas and practices expressed in literature and social behavior. Its connotations were marked by a trajectory, however; and what at first described a neutral state of being and then, to many people, an eminently desirable one came finally to function as a word of opprobrium. From its apex in Sterne's "Dear sensibility! source unexhausted of all that's precious in our joys, or costly in our sorrows!" to its zenith in Byron's

"Where affectation holds her seat, and sickly Sensibility," is a matter of only forty years. Crushed by overuse and by the literary events of the eighteenth century, the extremely fashionable mode of sensibility declined, though the word remained to indicate a possibility of consciousness which had never before been developed to such a degree.

Though if we are attentive, we have the feeling, as Northrop Frye says, "that a new kind of sensibility comes into all Western literature around the later part of the eighteenth century."[8] That new kind of "sensibility" was Sensibility, a quality of exaggerated and cultivated feeling that came from paying unqualified attention to all of the conceivable emotional possibilities in a situation. The word continued to function in its more generic sense, as in the phrase "moral sensibility," so that it could mean the overall quality of an individual's responses; but more often it was employed as a personification of what came to be regarded as a correct emotional response, both in literature and in life.

What emerges clearly from the various definitions of sensibility is one common element: sensibility is a way of reacting to experience which tends to exclude or diminish rational analysis. Although the continuum between body feeling--or pure sensory response--and emotional engagement is acknowledged, this continuum appears to stop short of intellection. At its most important historical moment--the latter part of the eighteenth century--the word

"sensibility" evoked an emotional ability, rather than a power of thought or insight. As a category of behavior and as a literary attitude it is seen predominantly as a "capacity for refined emotion; delicate sensitiveness of taste; also readiness to feel compassion for suffering, and to be moved by the pathetic in literature or art." Thus its meaning at the height of the word's popularity and specialization deals with an attitude of the emotions rather than with a form of intellectual comprehension.[9]

Such a bifurcation--between reason and emotion--is not artificial. The division between the emotions and the reason was a division of great importance to eighteenth century philosophers and critics, and in England in particular. The causes of the split, and the energetic interest in the dichotomy are too extensive to elaborate on here. Whether as a result of Cartesian rationalism, the burgeoning industrial revolution, a Neo-Platonic revival of the classic conflict between Plato's horses, or a straining at the bonds of the Age of Reason, there was in fact a prevailing feeling that reason and emotion were antithetical,[10] and this dualism was expressed both in the formal polemics and the more casual written exchanges of the time.

In discussions of esthetic judgment, for example, the question of whether literary response comes under the patronage of reason or of emotion was paramount. Those who argued for "taste" as an arbiter of excellence were more

likely to maintain that it was based on esthetic pleasure, on feeling; those, on the other hand, who wished to extend individual esthetic reaction to the realm of universal judgment claimed that reason was the necessary guide. In Blair's Lectures on Rhetoric and Belle-Lettres, indicating that taste is a capacity quite separate from reason, he remarks, "the faculty by which we relish . . . beauties seems more a-kin to a feeling of sense [i.e., sensation, sensibility], than to a process of the understanding."[11] And Brett maintains that "it is not too much to say that the development of critical theory throughout the eighteenth century was determined by this question of whether the faculty of aesthetic judgment is the reason or the feelings."[12]

Even more significant in its immediate effects was the opposition of thought and feeling posed in works of philosophy, poetry, and fiction. Now that critics have begun to right the balance, we can cease regarding the eighteenth century as the age of prose and reason, can see that it was as much, to its contemporaries, the age of Shaftesbury, as it was the age of Dr. Johnson. Yet if we do see it as an age of sensibility--to whose "fashionable whine" Dr. Johnson objected--if we do realize that "more tears were probably shed both in literature and in real life in that century than in the nineteenth,"[13] we must also see that this drift was in opposition to a respectably entrenched rationalism. The highly articulated straining

between the two provided the dynamics of the period and no doubt enlarged the excesses of both.

The drift of the age, in England above all,[14] was out of rationalism and into an emotional comprehension of esthetics, religion, ethics, and what we would now call "personal relations." Secular thinkers such as Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Hume, and Adam Smith, stressed warmth of feeling and strength of sympathy as a source of virtue and as a guide to ethical action, and Wesley considered emotion the source of religiosity and good conduct. The rule, for many, was the open heart rather than the prudent mind, and benevolence and fellow feeling were the means, by way of virtuous response and responsive virtue, to human happiness. At its best, or most thoughtful, of course, the emphasis on emotion did not preclude rational action, but reason was regarded as the reliable last car in a train of emotion.

It is difficult, as some have observed, to realize how much of a turning point the epoch of Sensibility was, because so many of its assumptions are ours as well. The cult of Sensibility seems to have gathered momentum from several sources. The earliest recognizable source was the medieval doctrine of courtly love which still survives in various forms. The idea that love could function as a school of virtue was the credo that underlay the exaggerated cultivation of feeling engaged in by supplicant knights. Feeling was regarded as a moral resource, love was a means of moral development, and this emotion was expected to

supplant, in the ardent suitor, every other aspect of his intention or his being. This exaggeration of feeling and a somewhat mannerist enlargement of the forms of feeling were carried on by the cult of Sensibility at its most mediocre; the emphasis on the teaching power of the emotions and their capacity to induce a spiritual alignment in the individual, was a feature of the more serious writings, such as those of Shaftesbury and his followers.

Shaftesbury is usually considered the prime mover of the ethics of feeling which came to be called, in its manifestations in the plays, poems, and novels appearing between the 1730's and the 1790's, Sensibility. In opposition to the idea, put forth most prominently by Hobbes, that human nature is selfish and that compassion indicates weakness, Shaftesbury insisted that men are innately benevolent and compassionate and that to express this bent is the highest good. His popularity at the middle of the century in England is made clear by the fact that his Characteristics went into its fourth English edition in 1727, its fifth in 1732, and its eleventh by 1790.[15] After 1760 his influence was compounded by the more radical but parallel ideas of Rousseau; his doctrine of moral sense was gradually augmented by the writings of Hutcheson, Smith, and Hume. As Humphreys explains, Shaftesbury "brought it about that English ethics largely abandoned argument from abstract rational principles, in

favor of the introspective study of the mind, and that benevolence based itself on the heart rather than the head."[16]

R. S. Crane locates the origins of the cult of sensibility in a period earlier than Shaftesbury's, in the lessons of the Latitudinarian divines who preached from the Restoration into the eighteenth century and upheld a doctrine of ethics similar to Shaftesbury's. These divines rebelled against the inflated reverence for man's rationality which they associated with the Stoics. Whereas the Stoics stressed the impurity and impermanence of the fleshly realm, and the eternality and virtue of the ideal and the spiritual, these divines urged their congregations to a benevolence which rested on charitable actions and tender feelings. The good man's philanthropy was to be prompted by a compassion and affection which also functioned as his immediate reward.

These divines, like Shaftesbury, were in rebellion against Hobbes and supported an optimistic view of human nature. They posed, Crane says,

> what they insisted was the true Christian idea of a charity which derives both its force and value from the fact that the good man does permit himself to be "inwardly disturbed." There can be no effective benevolence, they declared again and again, that does not spring from the tender emotions of pity and compassion, and so far from suppressing these emotions we ought rather to look upon them as the marks which distinguish men of genuine goodness from those who are merely righteous or just.[17]

Parallel to and connected with the distinction between reason and emotion was this distinction between justice and mercy; the relative virtues of each was a religious issue which was later melted into secular texts. Thus George Stephens, an Anglican divine and the author of _The Amiable Quality of Goodness as Compared with Righteousness, Considered_ (1731) wrote, "Will not he, that is only guided by Justice, be led to many hard and cruel Things? And is not Extremity of Justice proverbially called the utmost Injury? Let us then learn indeed, and study to be just; but let us at the same time _love Mercy_, and hearken to the softer Dictates and Whispers of Humanity."[18] Similarly, the hero of Mackenzie's popular _Man of Feeling_ (1771) feels that natural impulses should take precedence over the intellect, and that justice, a product of reason, is inferior to merciful generosity. Thus mercy, allied with philanthropy, came to be regarded as an emotional response, superior to the more intellectual regulations of justice.

There was little in eighteenth-century England that was not aligned under the heading of intellect vs. feeling, and although the debate remained active, many realms of experience which had previously been seen as properly functioning under the auspices of the intellect came to be regarded as operating within the province of the emotions. In particular, the belief that judgment is essential to conscience diminished as the century wore on. Both Adam

Smith, in The Theory of the Moral Sentiments (1759), and David Hume, in his essays on human nature and understanding, asserted that one must trust the feelings as a guide to ethics. For Hume, logic and moral law were determined by the natural course of the passions. He assured his readers that "morality is more properly felt than judged of,"[19] and confessed that, "when I give the preference to one set of arguments above another, I do nothing but decide from my feeling concerning the superiority of their influence."[20]

To turn toward emotion as a source of ethics implies that man's nature is thought to be predisposed to good; if he can depend on those elements in himself which are not under conscious control to lead him to virtue, then this non-rational source of self-governance must be predominantly benign. The predisposition of human nature became a question which tended to set the rationalists on the one side and the emotionalists on another. Boswell reports that Lady McLeod once asked Dr. Johnson if man's feelings "were not of themselves directed generally to the good." "No, Madam," Dr. Johnson replied, "no more than a wolf."[21]

Put more gently, Dr. Johnson believed that even an inclination to virtue needed the prompting of obligation and ethical judgment, and that man's animal nature could be willfully superseded by his intellectual or spiritual capacities. This idea was not, of course, new to the eighteenth century. But in the writings of men like Shaftesbury,

such intercession was not necessary; man's "animal" nature was conceived of as closer to that of the dove than to that of the wolf. Thus the instincts of man were more acceptable and less threatening than in the pessimistic or skeptical world-views of the rationalists, and the strain between innate bodily impulse and rational check was eased.

It is clear that bodily impulse and unrestrained feeling are frequently identical; spontaneous crying, for example, demonstrates that the bridge between the two is imperceptible. Moreover, the common, if simplified, idea of sensibility as a condition of quivering nerves reminds us that feeling is a body state and that emotional responsiveness cannot be anything but organically experienced, however intellectually it is expressed. Contemporary medical specialization, which forces mind and body apart, obscures the connections between the emotions and physical behavior, and is strongly affected by a Cartesian split which the proponents of sensibility succeeded in part in healing.

The recovery of feeling in the eighteenth century involved a recovery of the body, however elaborately clothed the concept of sensibility became. It is evident that the division between thought and feeling which preoccupied thinkers of that time rested in part upon the division between body and soul--a Christian dualism to which Descartes had given new philosophical authenticity--the body being the expressive medium of feeling, and the soul

the model for an abstract existence like that of intellect. Descartes had identified the intellect and the soul, and made thinking the index of one's own existence, the single clue, and proof, of being.

Descartes' rationalism needs no description here, though it is pertinent to recall that he had said that those "who desire to meditate seriously with me" must "detach their minds from affairs of sense."[22] This was clearly not the "common sense" which Jane Austen posed against sensibility, but rather the "sense" of "sensation" and its kin, "sensibility." For Descartes, the reason, as one critic says, "no longer comprehends, in the radical sense; instead, it becomes an exclusive faculty, and the definition is accepted by the Cartesians, who defend it, and also by its attackers who take the other side."[23]

To take the other side meant to include the body in a definition of being, whether it was a question of establishing rudimentary identity, or naming the highest conceivable benefits man could bestow on his own existence. The remark that Descartes had cut the throat of poetry[24] was apt in its metaphor: by separating the head--the home of the brain--from the body, Descartes curtailed the imagination, which feeds, at least in part, on feeling. Bate explains one of the consequences of this split: "Cartesian rationalism, in its emphasis upon the mathematically demonstrative, may be said to have inculcated into

extremer neo-classic criticism a rigid distinction between whatever imaginative and emotional response a human being may have and what one should think as a strictly rational creature."[25]

One can understand the need for a strict legislation of literary response, given that the reader wishes to suppress emotionality, if only one remembers Milton and the surprising freedoms of feeling which that Puritan inspired.[26] As Kermode reminds us, "Milton. . . . allowed his insistence on the inseparability of form and matter to lead him into heresy; and believed that poetry took precedence over other activities of the soul because it was simple (undissociated by intellect), sensuous and passionate."[27] The inseparability of emotion and intellect was a Cartesian heresy, as the inseparability of form and matter was a Christian heresy. If feeling was stressed by some writers and thinkers as a means of achieving unity of response or unity of character it was because the rational had prevailed in the past.

The matrices of emotions which at different times and among different writers made up the complex condition called "sensibility" were not only simple, sensuous and passionate, but pathetic, benevolent and tender as well. And the intensity and quality of the emotionality of the time ranged from a feverish enthusiasm (which had, perhaps, its most extreme manifestations in Wesleyanism) to an

evident debility which characterized the heroes and heroines of the novels of sensibility, and had as its culmination the Romantic lapse of consciousness, as in Wordsworth and Keats, and the neuresthenic hypersensitivity of Proust.

Enthusiasm was seen by some as objectionable, by others as requisite. Beattie, for example, said that the true poet must possess sensibility "to enter with ardent enthusiasm into every part of his subject, so as to transfuse into his work a pathos and energy sufficient to raise corresponding emotions in his reader. Indeed, it is sensibility and enthusiastic delight which make fruitful and even possible the knowledge won from experience; enthusiasm rivets the attention."[28]

At the same time that enthusiasm was emphasized, so too was the paradoxical idea that physical debility certifies strength of feeling. By the blossoming of the Romantic period the notion that "the bodily infirmities that destroy the mind often give it luster"[29] was in full press. Not all advocates of sensibility practiced the optimism which Shaftesbury and his followers put forward. The "English malady," that complex of afflictions which went under the heading of melancholy, affected sentimental writers like Richardson, as well as the more skeptical rationalists like Dr. Johnson.[30] The difference was that the rationalists were less inclined to regard their depressed feelings as an indication of delicate sentiments.

Even the medical men of the time permitted themselves to see frayed nerves and talent as consanguinous. Dr. Delany, Moore tells us,

> knowing that nothing pleased Richardson so much as praise of himself unless it was abuse of Henry Fielding, framed the perfect eulogy by combining the two themes: "I am extremely sorry you should have such impediments, but the misfortune is, those who are fit to write delicately, must think so; those who can form a distress must be able to feel it; and as the mind and body are so united to influence one another, the delicacy is communicated, and one too often finds softness and tenderness of mind in a body equally remarkable for those qualities."[31]

"Seldom," says Moore, "has an author had so marked an influence on the course of English prose literature as Richardson, and no one, not even Sterne, has more plainly owed his reputation to a defective nervous system."[32]

But it was not only the artist, whose job it was to "form a distress" whose feelings marked themselves on his nervous system. And it was not only melancholy which worked itself into (and from) the nerves, but virtue as well. Madame de Stael describes a more optimistic version of feeling-ethic as body-state when she writes, "Virtue is a spontaneous impulsion, a motive which passes into the blood, and which carries you along irresistibly like the most imperious passions."[33] Diderot too was outspoken about bringing morals closer to the nervous system. He wrote to Sophie Valland that

> such a sight fills me with sweetness or kindness, kindles in me a heat and an enthusiasm in which life itself, if I had to lose it, would mean nothing to me; then it seems as if my heart were distended even

> beyond my body, as if it were swimming; a delicious and sudden sensation of I know not what passes over my whole body; I can hardly breathe; it quickens over the whole surface of my body like a shudder; I feel it most of all at the top of my brow, and at the roots of my hair; and after that the indications of admiration and pleasure appear in my face mingled with those of joy, and my eyes fill with tears![34]

Perhaps, of all Englishmen, only Sterne depended on physiology as a basis for morality as much as Diderot did; yet it was acknowledged by many that empathy was, at bottom, physical. Joseph Priestley, for example, wrote, "What person, if he saw another upon a precipice and in danger of falling could help starting back, and throwing himself into the same posture as he would do if he himself were going to fall?"[35] Thus the basis of empathy is gesture; we perceive and absorb the _kinesis_ of others, discover it to be congruent with our own, and know thereby what the other is feeling. Or, as Adam Smith put it, "By the imagination _we place_ ourselves in his situation, _we conceive_ ourselves enduring all the same torments, _we enter_ as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him!"[36]

It is perhaps the wholehearted engagement of the body in the distress of others, a form of physiological fantasy, which accounts for the eventual bloodlessness of figures of sensibility in literature who went about "drizzling," as Frye puts it, "like a Scotch mist and fainting at every crisis."[37] One can regard this as the malady _a la mode_ that it was, helped into fashion no doubt by

Queen Anne's predisposition, earlier in the century, to fainting. Yet it was not a sign of simple weakness by any means, and the fact that it was acceptable for men, as well as women, of feeling, to swoon, suggests that there was a more complex rationalization behind it.

In fact, the withdrawal from feeling which came to be expressed in the literary iconography of fainting was the result of an excess of feeling, rather than a lack of it. Fainting represented that margin between the strength of the individual and the strength of his/her feeling. It meant, in many cases, not only that the individual was weak but that his/her feelings were excessively strong.[38] Fainting was an index of excitability, a close relative of enthusiasm, and of the ability to be overwhelmed.

The concept of excitability was present in the medical writings of the time as well. John Brown, one of the more prominent men of medicine of the eighteenth century, wrote at length about fever (which in the eighteenth century accounted for eight out of ten deaths and often accompanied emotional reactions in fiction), and began with a basic concept of excitability. It was excitability that distinguished the living from the dead: if one had it in the right proportion one was healthy; if one had too much or too little, one was ill; if one had none at all, one was dead. Excitability's seat was in the nervous system and was affected by stimuli. "Too little stimulation (deficient

excitement)" King writes of Brown's ideas, "was bad, constituting <u>direct</u> debility from defect of stimulus. On the other hand, excessive excitement would over-stimulate. This was also bad, since it might cause debility by exhausting the excitability. Such a state was <u>indirect</u> debility."[39]

The kind of exhaustion and the type of feverishness most often depicted in the literature of sensibility was the latter kind, the notion of excitability being closely allied to the quantitative view of emotion which served as a standard for many of the writers of the time. For in the emotional policy that evolved, intensity of reaction came to be a stand-in for virtue. As sympathy gathered momentum and eventually blended into feelings of a more sensational kind--as in the Gothic novel--the evaluation of feeling became as crude as a fever chart.

Within the eighteenth century--from the time of Shaftesbury's <u>Characteristics</u> to the horror novel of the 80's and 90's--the concept of sensibility underwent a decline. Its original direction was toward sympathy and fellow-feeling, based on a conception of human nature as fundamentally benevolent. As the century progressed the element of ethics and that of personal feeling separated from one another, however. Feeling, in much of the literature of the time, was pursued for its own sake, and what began as noble ethical theory ended as somewhat exhibitionistic

self-indulgence. Dr. Johnson, Bredvold informs us, had remarked that the love of virtue and the enthusiasm over virtue must not be accepted as a substitute for virtue itself.[40] Others voiced the same concern as the century progressed. Robert Bage in Barham Downs (1784) wrote, "to feel imaginary distress and to relieve real may . . . be very different things. The first is become a pleasure itself. Now I strongly suspect that too much familiarity with this sensation may, in time, render all distresses imaginary except one's own."[41] Such cautioning could come from the authors of sensibility themselves: Mackenzie, and even Shaftesbury had expressed a similar concern.

The idea that there was pleasure in empathy and therefore, logically, pleasure in other people's sorrows as well as their joys, was not simply a sophistical formula. The narcissistic and self-indulgent direction which sensibility took was not entirely at odds with its origins. For if we accept Crane's assertion that the teaching of the Latitudinarian divines was what initiated the ethics of benevolence that developed into sensibility then we must keep in mind "their frequent exhortations to their hearers and readers to consider how enjoyable the benevolent emotions may be to the individual who allows himself to feel them."[42] Crane quotes the Scottish moralist David Fordyce: "It is true [the benevolent man's] friendly Sympathy with others subjects him to some Pains which the

hard-hearted wretch does not feel; yet to give a loose to it [sic] is a kind of agreeable Discharge: It is such a Sorrow as he loves to indulge; a sort of pleasing anguish, that sweetly meets the Mind, and terminates in Self-approving Joy."[43]

The physical foundation of empathy, its rootedness in Energy ("a kind of agreeable Discharge") suggests a mechanical model of pleasure which reminds us of Freud's principle of libido. Starobinski, speaking of the latter part of the century says, "We may venture to affirm that terror itself, for this sensibility in search of stimulation, came to be yearned for nostalgically. . . . The mind sought refuge in a perilous sublimity, in a fearful experience, simultaneously natural and religious, a center of irresistible energy which could re-charge the bodily machine."[44]

Both terror and the form of benevolence which gradually took precedence--pity--were seen as a form of blameless pleasure. Wordsworth took up this theme, later, in the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads: "We have no sympathy but what is propagated by pleasure; I would not be misunderstood; but whenever we sympathize with pain, it will be found that the sympathy is produced and carried on by subtle combinations with pleasure."[45] The pleasure was not only, moreover, at the sensual end of the continuum of

emotion. A "higher" enjoyment than that of "discharge" could be found in the pleasure that people took in imitation, so that entering into the sorrows of others became one of the more intense gratifications of the imagination.

That sorrow was the predominant tendency of empathy in the major part of the eighteenth century, there can be no doubt. Nor was this preoccupation with grief simply an outgrowth of the English habit of melancholy or of Richardson's fiction, for it was Rousseau, according to Emile Faguet, who made the capacity for tears into a kind of religious vocation. The endowment of tears, if not, perhaps, a religious vocation for all, was seen by many as a requisite to effective virtue. An anonymous essayist of the 1750's wrote, "Moral weeping is the sign of so noble a passion, that it may be questioned whether those are properly men, who never weep upon any occasion. . . . What can be more nobly human than to have a tender sentimental feeling of our own and other's [<u>sic</u>] misfortunes. This degree of sensibility every man ought to wish to have for his own sake, as it disposes him to, and renders him more capable of practicing all the virtues that promote his own welfare and happiness."[46]

If weeping separated man from the other animals, who do not weep, it also at times, in spite of its function as a sign of his humanity, tended to separate him from other humans. Around the kernel of humanitarian pity there

formed a tenacious sense of aristocracy. A minor novelist like Regina Roche stressed the contrast between persons of sensibility and others. She felt that individuals of sensibility could recognize kindred souls by their sadness. "Mrs. Roche went so far as to make tears the primary means of communion between persons of feeling."[47] In Mackenzie's _The Man of Feeling_, not only pity, but other intense feelings are regarded as available to the few rather than to the many: the hero says: "There are some feelings which perhaps are too tender to be suffered by the world. The world is in general selfish, interested, and unthinking, and throws the imputation of romance or melancholy on every temper more susceptible than its own."[48]

This mere specialness of feeling later blossomed into an even greater rarity, the passion of romantic genius, and permanently set aside a place, of varying esteem, for the sensitive individual; along with the narrowing of sensibility into a nouveau-elitist property there came a codification of feeling that took on an automatism much like that which Jane Austen describes in _Love and Freindship_. The single tear that the man of feeling sheds in Mackenzie's classic of sensibility is a distillation of all those that had been shed before his. The experience of crying, like that of fainting, became iconography rather than event, a dependable index to the occasion which those who were initiated into the prevailing policies of emotion

could understand. Yet the very dependability of these conventions to the point of formula, led to a dimming of feeling which then required an escalation of feeling in order for anything to be felt; and what began as an ethical quest for noble emotion melted into an epicurean search for sensation.

In a number of ways the deep indulgence in melancholy, the luxuriating in sorrow, which was so prevalent, paved the way for the horror novel which, at first only a variation on the novel of sensibility, came to replace it. From welcoming the shudder of catastrophe as a prelude to and opportunity for tears it was a short step to embracing it as a pleasure in itself--a participation in that "awe" which was regarded as a necessary ingredient of the sublime. Melancholy and terror moreover were not necessarily incompatible categories: Milton's Il Penseroso, a poem which was highly influential, was full of frightening shapes and shrieks as well as of sadness. And it might be argued that a true commitment to one emotion leaves one open to an abundance of other emotions. As Bate says, "The emotions of man have common ground: the intensity set up by one provides easy access for the admission of a further emotion; and grief, love, anger, hate, and fear may all easily pass into each other. The border line between feelings, indeed, is so thin as to be almost hypothetical."[49]

To demarcate historically the border lines among the feelings which attached to one concept of sensibility, is fairly difficult. Wright says that between Richardson's time and 1780, sensibility implied, primarily, a susceptibility to the gentler affections.[50] Bredvold maintains that the pleasure of horror was added to that of melancholy by 1750,[51] and that the requisite shudder was so familiar in poetry by 1763 that it was being parodied. It was not until 1765, however, that Walpole's The Castle of Otranto, which made even Thomas Gray afraid to go to bed, was published and not till the 90's that the novel of terror, and its most popular practitioner, Mrs. Radcliffe, appeared.

Yet even at this point, the emotion of terror was allied with the workings of sensibility. Wright tells us that Mrs. Radcliffe "feeling that special susceptibility to terror was, like the writing of sonnets, a manifestation of delicate sensibility . . . caused her heroines to experience innumerable apprehensions and to become thoroughly frightened almost daily."[52]

If the movement toward horror came from an ever-increasing appetite for affective stimulation, it was also accompanied by a more high-flown justification in the form of ideas about the sublime. The sublime, originally a concept about rhetoric, came to be associated increasingly with subjective and emotional literary taste, and by the middle of the century the word called to mind extreme

sensibility and the highest possible emotion. Boileau had translated Longinus' On the Sublime in 1674. By the time Shaftesbury came to write Characteristics Longinus' treatise was well known, but it was not until after Shaftesbury that the sublime began to denote not style, but rather "a specific sort of feeling in the face of the awful and great."[53] Burke, believing that terror was the strongest possible emotion, made it the foundation for sublimity, and took that concept of sublimity as a feeling of awe in the face of greatness, a step further to its kin, terror. The sublimity which Burke and Shaftesbury saw as an experience of the awesome and overwhelming in nature became in the work of Walpole, and his successors, a feeling "not of philosophic awe but of superstitious fear."[54] When The Monk appeared in 1796, it conveyed not a tragic view of life but a thrilling morbidity.

Thus the decline of sensibility splayed at its end into the morbidity of the Gothic novel and into the excessive sentiment which Sir Leslie Stephen described as "a kind of mildew which spreads over the surface of literature at this period to denote a sickly constitution."[55] Moore suggests, as well, a practical reason for the termination of sensibility's preeminence: Rousseau, he explains,

> was indirectly responsible also for the sudden termination of Shaftesbury's long ascendancy: when the English perceived the revolutionary possibilities of sentimental benevolence which had escaped Shaftesbury to be fully expounded by Rousseau and applied by the Revolutionists, their distrust extended to the

> comparatively innocuous doctrine of the Characteristics. After 1790 no new edition appeared for a century."[56]

Between eighteenth century sensibility and nineteenth century Victorian sentimentality there occurred a hiatus, in which the open forms of extreme feeling were in disrepute. In a woman's magazine of the very early nineteenth century

> the exaggerated sentimentality shown by the Victorians is wholly absent; we find, in 1807, a girl remarking "Sentiment is now considered completely Gothic and canaillish." Indeed, the expression "Gothic" is used as a term of contempt. The sentimental young woman is held up to ridicule, as one perceives in Sense and Sensibility. At that time, of course, the word "sensibility" means our word "sensitiveness," and was a subject for ironical satire.

On the other hand, only a year earlier, advertisements still appeared that read like the following:

> This day is published PATHETIC, SENTIMENTAL, and MORAL NARRATIVES in twelve Monthly numbers, each embellished with highly finished Engraving. . . . Each number to contain several complete stories. Every attention will be paid to the strictest principles of Morality and Virtue. . . . To excite the pure tear of sensibility, to foster the best feelings of humanity and to amend the heart, will be the unvaried attempts of the Editor.[57]

From the elevation of goodness to the elevation of terror and the proliferation of mediocrity--what occurred? Among other things, an enormous number of novels, most of them novels of "sensibility." Along with the increased number of people who were able to read, an increase notable from the 1720's to the 1780's, there arose an expansion of the number of circulating libraries and a profusion of novels designed to fill those libraries. The increased importance

of the emotions was, it would seem, a double-edged sword. For if it is true that, as Moore reminds us, "whatever criticism may say about the strictly 'literary' influences and changes, the fact of human moment in literature of the eighteenth century is that it became genuinely sympathetic,"[58] it is also true that, as Leavis says, "the history of popular taste is largely bound up with the discovery by the writing profession of the techniques for exploiting emotional responses."[59]

So intense was the eagerness for fiction, and so poor the fiction itself, that Coleridge's harshest tone seemed just: "Where the reading of novels prevails as a habit, it occasions in time the entire destruction of the powers of the mind; . . . it produces no improvement of the intellect, but fills the mind with a mawkish and morbid sensibility, which is directly hostile to the cultivation . . . of the nobler faculties of the understanding."[60] Leavis points out that the novel of sensibility underwent a change: "While the popular novel was bleaching the diction of the age a corresponding change was inevitably taking place in sensibility. The robust, clear-headed reader of Sterne and Fielding became and ever after remained prudish and romantic."[61] Between the years 1770 and 1800 some 1300 novels were recognized by periodicals; of these, only a few, Castle Rackrent and Humphrey Clinker among them, have survived. Even a novelist as popular as Mackenzie, Sterne's imitator,

seems to have weathered poorly. In 1826 Lady Louisa Stuart wrote to Sir Walter Scott that one evening Mackenzie's Man of Feeling was read aloud, and "I am afraid I perceived a sad change in it, or myself--which was worse; and the effect altogether failed. Nobody cried, and at some of the passages, the touches I used to think so exquisite--Oh Dear! They laughed. . . . Yet I remember so well. . . . when I read it, as I was a girl of fourteen not yet versed in sentiment, I had a secret dread I should not cry enough to gain the credit of proper sensibility."[62]

The majority of the novels of sensibility form a subspecies of the idea itself: they are less important than the concept that feeling is as legitimate an heir to human concerns and serious writings as is reason. The exceptions to this mediocrity--Richardson and Sterne, mainly--have not survived as novelists of sensibility so much as novelists of, respectively, an exemplary psychological authenticity and a stunning tour de force of novelistic expectations. How far Mackenzie, Sterne's "imitator," was from Sterne's quality as a writer can be gleaned from a statement of his purpose. He wrote to a cousin:

> You must know, then, that I have seldom been in use to write any prose, except what consisted of observations (such as I could make) on men and matters. The way of introducing these by narrative [sic], I had fallen into in some detached essays, from the notion of its interesting both the memory and the affections deeper than mere argument or moral reasoning. In this way I was somehow led to think of introducing a man of sensibility into different scenes where his feelings might be seen in their effects, and his sentiments occasionally delivered without the stiffness of regular deduction.[63]

Such clumsiness of narrative purpose, however, is not out of line with the tenor of at least one portion of belief about sensibility in that century, for the imagination was often regarded as the handmaiden of sympathy just as sympathy was considered the handmaiden of virtue. James Arbuckle, a disciple of Shaftesbury, wrote that we may "see the wisdom of our creator in giving us this imagining Faculty, and such a Facility of placing ourselves in circumstances different from those we are really in, to enforce our Duty upon us, not only by Reason, but by Passion and powerful Inclination."[64]

Indeed, literature helps us to imagine what others feel, and to feel with them. Diderot admired the novels of Abbe Prévost and Richardson because they aroused his sympathy for virtue. "The afflictions by which they soften my heart are imaginary, I agree," he admitted, "but they do soften my heart."[65]

The ideology of sensibility worked hand in hand with the promotion of works of the imagination. Brett makes this clear: "What Shaftesbury sought to establish was the position that the symbolism of the poetic imagination can be as true as conceptual statement. His aim was to provide the arts with a philosophy that would answer the attacks of scientific thought."[66] If his philosophy did not quite answer the attacks of scientific thought, it at least gave esthetic purpose a moral weight. "The imagination is a

'sympathetic' faculty as Hazlitt called it, allied to love, in contrast to the reason, which is often aggressive and analytical,"[67] says Frye. The respect accorded the Imagination in the eighteenth century was in part formed by Shaftesbury and his followers.

And it was the novel which gave greatest rein to the empathetic imagination, and which could concentrate, if it wished, solely on the establishment of felt connection between readers and characters. The extreme limits of this possibility are noted by Watt:

> The novel . . . was inherently devoid of the elements which restricted indentification, and this more absolute power over the reader's consciousness does much to account for the peculiar triumphs and degradations of the novel form in general. On the one hand it is capable of the unrivalled subtlety in the exploration of personality and personal relationships which is found in the work of the greatest novelists. . . . On the other hand, it is the same power over the consciousness which, far from extending psychological and moral awareness, makes possible the novel's role as a popular purveyor of vicarious sexual experience and adolescent wish-fulfillment.[68]

It is for this reason, perhaps, that Dr. Johnson was not sympathetic to the novel as a form.

The novels of sensibility and the concept of sensibility have left a legacy which branches out in a number of different ways. Initially connected with social and ethical questions, sensibility has come to mean in the present, something "purer" than that, a condition of mind and/or feeling which is susceptible to stimuli unattached to moral responsibility. Some of the purpose served by the

word "sensibility" has been taken up by "sensitivity" and the idea of the "uniquely sensitive individual" which emerged during the Romantic period is with us still. The intense, perhaps eccentric, urgent, responsiveness to experience which had often before the age of Sensibility been channeled into a religious form, as in the lives of saints and prophets, became the province of the artist or the artistic type. The heritage of the age of Sensibility was an intensity of response for its own sake.

One of the primary susceptibilities of that kind of response is an excessive refinement, though the judgment of what is "excessive" is a relative one. The unchecked proliferation and miniaturization of sensitivities is what often gives procedures of sensibility a bad name among more robust critics and readers as well as rationalists. Voltaire, long ago, said of Marivaux that he was a man who spent his life weighing fly-eggs on a spider-web scale, a remark not unlike H. G. Wells' that the writing of Henry James was like a hippopotamus picking up a pea. And Coleridge noted that in the "so-called German drama . . . the loaded sensibility, the minute detail, the morbid consciousness of every thought and feeling in the whole flux and reflux of the mind, in short the self-involution and dream-like continuity of Richardson . . . is English in its origin, English in its materials, and English by re-adaption."[69]

Coleridge may have been correct about the national character of Sensibility, though the cult of feeling was formidably present in France as well. There is no doubt, however, that the English novel was a prime vehicle of sensibility in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and the birth of the novel and of sensibility occurred at the same time in England. United to these two developments was a third factor, which was the unprecedented participation of women in the creation of literary works and the sharing of literary profits. The reasons for this are complex and perhaps circumstantial, yet it is impossible not to relate this phenomena to the fact that women are traditionally depicted as creatures of feeling, allegedly having an authority in this realm which they might be conceded in no other.

The criticisms of the tail end of the movement of sensibility are not, in fact, unlike those generally levelled at the fiction of women in the present century: even a writer as successful and sophisticated as Virginia Woolf knew that it was more dangerous, damning, and predictable for a woman to be called sentimental in her work than to be called anything else. In our century--unlike the eighteenth--men in tears are exceptional, whereas women in tears are not. Thus a good deal of the responsibility for spontaneous feeling, and in particular for sympathy, has devolved onto women. In the following chapter

I shall discuss the background of this heritage of feeling in relation to women and to women writers who follow the age of Sensibility by half a century, or more.

Footnotes

[1] The American College Dictionary (New York: Random House, 1966) gives the following meanings: 1. capacity for sensation or feeling; responsiveness to sensory stimuli. 2. mental susceptibility or responsiveness; quickness and acuteness of apprehension or feeling. 3. keen consciousness or appreciation. 4. (pl.) emotional capacities. 5. (sing. or pl.) liability to feel hurt or offended; sensitive feelings. 6. capacity for the higher or more refined feelings; delicate sensitiveness of taste. 7. the property, as in plants or instruments, of being readily affected by external influences.

[2] Q. D. Leavis, Fiction and the Reading Public (London: Chatto and Windus, 1932), p. 238.

[3] Kate Millett, Sexual Politics (New York: Doubleday, 1970), p. 148.

[4] Ralph Freedman, The Lyrical Novel (New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963), p. 206.

[5] Frank Kermode, Romantic Image (New York: Vintage, 1964), p. 151.

[6] James Murray, Henry Bradley, W. A. Craigie, C. T. Onions, The Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), p. 461. The OED, p. 461, is the

source of subsequent definitions quoted in the text.

7 M. H. Abrams in A Glossary of Literary Terms (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), p. 87, points out that when "it became a commonplace in popular morality that the ability to shed a sympathetic tear is the sign both of polite breeding and of a virtuous heart[,] Sensibility . . . became sentimentalism: an excessive and self-conscious indulgence in the tender emotions of pity and sympathy."

8 Northrop Frye, A Study of English Romanticism (New York: Peter Smith, 1968), p. 4.

9 The OED says that this meaning is used after the early nineteenth century (as it was before it) somewhat rarely.

10 "The trouble for the eighteenth century was that reason and emotion had become antithetical, two parts of a dualism which could not be resolved." R. H. Brett, The Third Earl of Shaftesbury: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Literary Theory (London: Hutchinson's Universal Library, 1951), p. 217.

11 Ibid., p. 133.

12 Ibid., p. 136.

13 Louis I. Bredvold, The Natural History of Sensibility (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1962), p. 5.

Bredvold points out that we no longer accept Matthew Arnold's dictum that the eighteenth century was the age of prose and reason, and that "more tears were probably shed both in literature and in real life in that century than in the nineteenth."

[14] But in France as well. As Edith Birkhead points out in "Sentiment and Sensibility in the Eighteenth Century Novel," in Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association, Oxford, XI (1925), 96.

[15]Cecil Moore, Backgrounds of English Literature 1700-1760 (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1953), p. 12.

[16] A. R. Humphreys, "Friend of Mankind," Review of English Studies, XXIV (July 1948), 209.

[17] R. S. Crane, Suggestions Toward a Genealogy of the 'Man of Feeling,'" ELH, I (1934), 217.

[18] Ibid., p. 213.

[19] Bredvold, p. 23. Quoted from Treatise on Human Nature, Book III, Parts I and II, section 1.

[20] R. F. Brissenden, Studies in the Eighteenth Century (Canberra: Australian National Univ. Press, 1968), p. 92. Quoted from Treatise on Human Nature, Book II, Part III, section iii.

[21] Walter Jackson Bate. From Classic to Romantic. (New York: Harper, 1946), p. 71.

[22] Kenneth Fields, "Postures of the Nerves: Reflections of the Nineteenth Century in the Poetry of Wallace Stevens," The Southern Review, VII (July 1971), 802. No source of quote.

[23] Ibid., p. 802.

[24] Bate (p. 32) attributes the remark to Boileau, Brett (p. 14) to Rousseau.

[25] Bate, p. 35.

[26] Bredvold (p. 77) points out the elements of Gothic horror--the horrid shapes and shrieks and sights unholy--in Il Penseroso.

[27] Kermode, p. 150.

[28] Bate, p. 136.

[29] Moore, p. 228.

[30] Ibid., p. 231.

[31] Ibid., p. 229.

[32] Ibid., p. 230.

[33] Quoted from De la littérature: Discours

preliminaire by Bredvold, p. 25.

[34] Bredvold, p. 32. No source.

[35] Bate, p. 138. Quoted from *Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism* (1777).

[36] A. O. Aldridge, "The Pleasures of Pity," *ELH*, XVI (1949), 76-87. Quoted from *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Chapter I, Book I.

[37] Frye, p. 29.

[38] Ian Watt, in *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1965), p. 161, gives the economic reasons for the newly-evolving weakness of women in the eighteenth century: "Since middle-class wives tended to be increasingly regarded as leisure exhibits engaging in no heavier economic tasks than the more delicate and supervisory operations of housewifery, a conspicuously weak constitution was both an assertion of a delicately nurtured past and a presumptive claim to a similar future."

[39] Lester S. King, *The Medical World of the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 144.

[40] Bredvold, p. 72.

[41] Quoted by Walter Francis Wright, *Sensibility in English Prose Fiction, 1760-1814*. Illinois Studies in

Language and Literature. Urbana, Ill., XXII (1937), p. 140.

[42] Crane, p. 227.

[43] Ibid., p. 205. Quoted from The Elements of Moral Philosophy, 1754.

[44] Jean Starobinski, The Invention of Liberty 1700-1789 (Geneva: Skira, 1964), p. 188.

[45] Aldridge, p. 86n.

[46] Crane, p. 206.

[47] Wright, p. 94.

[48] Mackenzie, p. 128.

[49] Bate, p. 153.

[50] Wright, p. 45.

[51] Bredvold, p. 78.

[52] Wright, p. 105.

[53] Brett, p. 146.

[54] Wright, p. 96.

[55] Moore, p. 51.

[56] Ibid., p. 50.

[57] C. Willett Cunnington, Feminine Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century (London: W. Heinemann, 1935), p. 30.

[58] Ibid., p. 307.

[59] Leavis, p. 90.

[60] Ibid., p. 137.

[61] Ibid., p. 141.

[62] Ibid., p. 155.

[63] Henry Mackenzie, The Man of Feeling (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967), p. xii.

[64] Bate, p. 133. Quoted from Collection of Letters and Essays (1722), I, 4.

[65] Bredvold, p. 31.

[66] Brett, p. 28.

[67] Frye, p. 23.

[68] Watt, p. 202.

[69] Bredvold, p. 89.

CHAPTER II

WOMEN AND SENSIBILITY

There is a special consciousness with which women setting out to write have been automatically confronted--a consciousness of gender. Whether this comes as a result of social restriction, literary isolation, critical attack, or privileged consideration, and whether it issues in anonymity, self-censorship, flawed artistry, or enhanced pride--the fact is that the awareness of gender is almost consistently present in female writers. Georg Simmel put the problem in these terms:

> If we express the historic relation between the sexes crudely in terms of master and slave, it is part of the master's privileges not to have to think continuously of the fact that he is the master, while the position of the slave carries with it the constant reminder of his being a slave. It cannot be overlooked that the woman forgets far less often the fact of being a woman than the man of being a man. Innumerable times the man seems to think purely objectively, without his masculinity entering his consciousness at all.[1]

Like the minority writer--in America these have been most visibly Blacks or Jews--the female writer exists within an inescapable condition of identity which, historically, has separated her from the mainstream of the culture and forced her either to stress her separation from the masculine literary tradition or to pursue her resemblance to it. In either case, like the writers who belong to ethnic or racial minorities, she carries with her a special self-consciousness. Mary Ellmann raises this point: "Commentary

upon themselves may be easy for women to disbelieve, but it carries the obligation of notice. . . . Their self-consciousness grows with their reading. . . . They are not allowed to escape the sense of species, they are like giraffes reading Lamarck every morning before they stretch their necks."[2]

The nature of this awareness of species has varied, of course, from writer to writer. George Eliot confronted the fact that she was not--as a writer--of neuter gender, asserted that it is "an immense mistake to maintain that there is no sex in literature," and concluded that "a woman has something specific to contribute"[3]--at the same time that she maintained her masculine pseudonym. Anais Nin enlarged the sense of species into a positive credo, urging that "the woman artist . . . fuse creation and life in her own way. . . . She has to create something different from man. . . . She has to sever herself from the myth man creates, from being created by him; she has to struggle with her own cycles, storms, terrors which man does not understand."[4]

But not all awareness of gender in women writers has been positive. Sarah Fielding, in the preface to David Simple, apologized for being a woman.[5] Charlotte Bronte raged against her limitations as a female and marred the balance and proportion of her work.[6] Virginia Woolf wrote two full-length feminist tracts[7] in order to exorcise, without distorting her fiction, the sense of injustice she

felt, and believed that women had been inordinately crippled in their contribution to literature by the discouragement and hostility they had faced over the centuries.

Although it would be false to say that women have received no support and encouragement, gender has often been an important and negative factor in critical points of view. The female author cannot anticipate with any certainty that her sex will be held against her, but neither can she assume that it will be left out of any appraisal of her work. This seems so prevalent to one critic that she is driven to state that "with a kind of inverted fidelity, the discussion of women's books by men will arrive punctually at the point of preoccupation, which is the fact of femininity."[8]

As sensitive a critic as Hazlitt, for example, wrote of Fanny Burney:

> Madame d'Arblay is a mere common observer of manners and also a very woman. It is this last circumstance, which forms the peculiarity of her writings and distinguishes them from . . . masterpieces. . . . She is a quick lively and accurate observer of persons and things; but she always looks at them with a consciousness of her sex, and in that point of view in which it is the particular business and interest of women to observe them. . . . The difficulties in which she involves her heroines are too much "Female Difficulties"; they are difficulties created out of nothing.[9]

A contemporary critic, intending to give a more favorable estimate of the same writer, remarks that "the talk of

Miss Burney's cads and eccentrics [bears] no painfully feminine stamp."[10] In both cases, the references to gender are meant to speak for themselves: one censures the female author for yielding to her own interests and her own point of view; the other commends her for resisting them; but in both cases "female" and "feminine" are pejorative.

In some instances, the fact of female gender is a disqualification in the eyes of the male critic. Anthony Burgess writes, "But now having formed my sensibility a different way, I recognize that I can gain no pleasure from serious reading (I would evidently have to take Jane Austen seriously) that lacks a strong male thrust, an almost pedantic allusiveness, and a brutal intellectual content."[11] Hugh Kenner makes no generalization about his tastes, but in his scrutiny of a novel by the late Susan Taubes in The New York Times Book Review,[12] he uses her gender as a weapon against her. "Lady novelists," he states, "have always claimed the privilege of transcending mere plausibilities. It's up to men to arrange such things. . . . Your bag is sensitivity, which means, knowing what to put into this year's novels." Kenner, ending the review with the phrase, "the with-it cat's cradling of lady novelists," suggests further that the author's sex is relevant to her failure.

The fact that ephemeral reviews seem most susceptible to sexual pejoratives shows, perhaps, that denigration of the feminine is commonplace enough to function as a standby or substitute for more thoughtful evaluation. An early review of Anais Nin's Ladders to Fire in a Saturday Review of Literature may represent only the usual insignificant irritations of a book reviewer, but the form his irritation takes is instructive: "Actually, after serious critical appraisal, this novel seems no more surrealist, imagist, or 'modern,' than any woman in a permanent tantrum, from the Middle Ages, or from the Renaissance, or any other period; any woman in fact who had grown up and had lived too long in the art colonies of the world; and had too little to do with children, cooking, and the garden in the backyard."[13] If the silliness of this appraisal tends to disqualify it from being what one can consider an "intellectual climate" surrounding the female writer, still, it suffices as an example of the degree to which the critic is tempted to see a woman's work through the grid of gender, or through whatever aspect of that gender is most prominent for him.

Yet it is not necessary to rely only on the negative statements of male critics to show that the female writer is affected by a consciousness of gender. Praise, too, has come in the package of sexual terminology, and female critics have also used the parameter of gender to convey their

impressions of other female writers. Mrs. Gaskell, for example, saw the Brontes in the light of sex: "They did everything they knew how to do in order to throw the color of masculinity into their writing. They were spiritually sincere, but on account of this desire to appear male, technically false. It makes their writing squint."[14] On the other hand, Kate Millett, a feminist critic who ordinarily insists on minimizing sexual differences, finds in the very same Brontes a femininity that is praiseworthy: "Mill had remarked that most of what women produced when they began to write was but sycophancy to male attitude and ego. . . . Yet, inasmuch as the first phase made possible the emergence of a truly feminine sensibility, one can find in the Brontes the real thing."[15]

It would appear that the idea that the mind has gender is, if not inescapable, at least habitual, and that even critics who are intent on collapsing generalizations about gender return to them. The assumption which informs the comments quoted above is that there <u>is</u> a feminine sensibility, or at least something called feminine interest, or at the very least certain qualities which can assuredly be described as feminine. It is not the purpose here to defend or condemn the idea of feminine sensibility, but to see the nature of the burden or advantage it places on women writers, to examine the elements that contribute to a shared definition of it and to understand the connotations that

have attached themselves to the word "feminine" when it is applied to the minds and accomplishments of women.

Before attempting to clarify briefly the nature of the word "feminine" it is necessary to note the obvious: the ascription of femininity to a person or thing represents a tendency toward or effort of dualization. The existence of two genders constitutes the first appearance of dualism in the world, and these genders have come to stand as analogies for other, more lately constructed dualities. Thus, if we posit an opposition between soul and body, feeling and reason, our metaphorical thinking tends to make one the masculine and one the feminine counterpart. Leslie Stephen, for example, defined a whole train of literary activity in terms of gender: "The modern sentimentalism may, perhaps, be defined as the effeminate element of Christianity. The true sentimentalist accepts all that appears to be graceful, tender, and pretty in the Gospels, and turns away from the sterner or more masculine teaching."[16] And if sentiment is "effeminate," then "sense" is masculine. Bate lumps the latter two qualities together when he writes of Dr. Johnson that "upon almost all occasions Johnson both informed and reminded with a masculine honesty and with an inimitable and trenchant good sense."[17]

The preceding passages draw on one of the most ubiquitous commonplaces with respect to gender, the notion that sentiment is feminine and sense masculine. Variations on this particular duality abound: intuition is feminine and intellect masculine, feeling is feminine, reason is masculine, sensibility is feminine and sense, again, is masculine. The expectation that women will be more likely to present the nerves, rather than the mind, of experience, that women tend to be the custodians of feelings rather than of facts or ideas, is perhaps so careless a notion that it would seem to have no place in a serious study of literature. We may perhaps dismiss Diana Trilling's statement that "in our own century certainly, from the time of Dorothy Richardson right down to our present-day women writers for _The New Yorker_, the female self has been the locus of all the sensibility presumed to have been left us by modern life,"[18] as easily as we pass over Ashley Montagu's bland assertion that "women are more emotional than men. It is an incontestable fact."[19] But whatever the quality of this notion itself--and it is not our intention to attempt to determine the accuracy of the generalization--it has been a sociological and literary given with which women authors have, by their own admission, been forced to deal.

Mary Wollstonecraft, for example, in writing one of the first defenses of women's rights, argued that a better education for women would eliminate those tendencies which

prejudice men against them. The tendency which she cited repeatedly as most characteristically "feminine" was that of "sensibility," which she defined variously as susceptibility to "enervation,"[20] susceptibility to "sensation," (p. 105) a predilection for extremes(p. 115), a predilection for love (p. 147), a disposition to "flights of feeling" (p. 196), and finally, in Dr. Johnson's words, a "quickness of sensation; quickness of perception; delicacy" (p. 108). None of these manifestations of sensibility was, as she put it, "to be confounded with the slow, orderly walk of reason"(p. 196).

George Eliot later took a parallel position. Implicitly echoing the lines from Meredith's Modern Love,

> Their sense is with their senses all mixed in,
> Destroyed by subtleties these women are!
> More brain, O lord, more brain!

she wrote: "Women have not to prove that they can be emotional, and rhapsodic, and spiritualistic; every one believes that already. They have to prove that they are capable of accurate thought, severe study, and continuous self-command."[21]

Eliot's plea for remedial intellect was not so much a defense of her own intellectual disposition as it was a plea that women begin to rebut the generalizations which had encouraged their one-sidedness. Her remark was founded on centuries of dismissal of women's intellect, a dismissal in which some of the best and most important minds had participated. For a number of thinkers, the word "feminine"

evoked a creature who could not--and should not--think.

One can recreate the argument against woman's intellect by cutting into the history of literature, philosophy, and even science, at random points. Milton's influential version of the Fall, for instance, was based on the idea that Adam represents Reason, Eve Passion, Passion theoretically subservient but actually subversive, Reason rightfully sovereign. The notion that man is the contemplative animal, woman the irrational, persists even in the twentieth century. As a character in an essay of Ortega y Gasset says, "The more of a man one is, the more he is filled to the brim with rationality. Everything he does and achieves he does and achieves for a reason, especially for a practical reason." Lest we assume that Ortega means by "man," "humanity," he continues, "a woman's love, that divine surrender of her ultra-inner being which the impassioned woman makes, is perhaps the only thing which is not achieved by reasoning. The core of the feminine mind, no matter how intelligent the woman may be, is occupied by an irrational power. If the male is the rational being, the woman is the irrational being."[22]

This sort of distinction became ripe, at the end of the nineteenth century, for "scientific" support; the belief in male intellectual superiority was freshly perpetuated by the observation that man's brain had a

greater physical weight than woman's. Viola Klein explains, "It was emphasized by brain anatomists that the frontal lobes--believed to be the seat of logical thought and of all higher intellectual processes--were distinctly more developed in men than in women."[23] Just how much such scientific observation was coloured by sexual prejudice was acknowledged by Havelock Ellis: "It was firmly believed that the frontal region is the seat of all highest and most abstract intellectual processes, and if on examining a dozen or two brains an anatomist found himself landed in the conclusion that the frontal region is relatively large in women, the probability is that he would feel he had reached a conclusion that was absurd."[24] Even that ardent and persuasive defender of women's rights, John Stuart Mill, had admitted that "a woman seldom runs wild after an abstraction."[25] And Ashley Montagu notes that "the tradition that women are unable to do as well as men in anything requiring the use of the mind is a very ancient one."[26]

If it is true that women have been regarded for centuries as creatures who have no relation to the rational, it is also true that they have often been endowed with complementary and opposite gifts. Thus, women, considered inferior in intellect, have been regarded frequently as superior in feeling. The allegedly larger capacity of women for an emotional life has been viewed in different ways, ranging from reverence for its power to inspire, to apprehension at its potential excess.

Love, empathy, pity, or simply the absence of analytic intellect--often replaced by intuition--have been cited as women's particular strengths. Intuition has, in some quarters, been respected as an alternate manner of perception; and women's sympathy has traditionally been regarded as a mollifying and spiritually nourishing factor. In Montagu's view, "women . . . are more interested in human relationships, in which they can creatively love or be loved. As long as this remains," he continues, "the true genius of women, the world will be safe for humanity."[27] But the virtues attributed to women can be a disadvantage as well as an opportunity.

The derivative of feeling most commonly esteemed as both creditable and innate in women is intuition. Generally thought of as an immediate perception made without preliminary reasoning, and defined by Bergson as "intellectual sympathy," intuition is at once a feeling and a mode of cognition. Helene Deutsch, the Freudian analyst, thought that "the most striking feminine characteristic, intuition," made woman an "ideal life companion." She explained, "What we see in intuition is . . . the other person's mental state . . . emotionally and unconsciously 're-experienced,' that is, felt as one's own. The ability to do this will naturally depend on one's sympathy and love for and spiritual affinity with the other person . . . for which the German language has the term

<u>Einfühlung</u>."[28] John Stuart Mill thought of it as a means of original and freshened vision. He wrote:

> What is meant by woman's capacity of intuitive perception? It means, a rapid and correct insight into present fact. It has nothing to do with general principles. Nobody ever perceived a scientific law of nature by intuition, nor arrived at a general rule of duty or prudence by it. . . . Men who have been much taught are apt to be deficient in the sense of present fact; they do not see, in the facts which they are called upon to deal with, what is really there, but what they have been taught to expect. This is seldom the case with women of any ability. Their capacity of "intuition" preserves them from it. With equality of experience and of general faculties, a woman usually sees much more than a man of what is immediately before her. Now this sensibility to the present, is the main quality on which the capacity for practice, as distinguished from theory, depends. To discover general principles, belongs to the speculative faculty: to discern and discriminate the particular cases in which they are and are not applicable, constitutes practical talent: and for this, women as they now are have a peculiar aptitude.[29]

Intuition, then, is a mode of knowing which is pre-conceptual. Whereas feeling may be self-generating and self-gratifying, intuition is an insight, not necessarily verbal, into something outside itself; it is a means of knowing.

Feeling as a means of knowing has been, particularly since the decline of religion and the rise of science, a subsidiary mode of cognition in Western culture. In a culture where the rationalism of science and technology prevails, the mode of intuition is likely to be less influential and less acceptable. Bergson has most notably been willing to award the non-rational a respectable place in

our perception of the world. Philosophers, he said, tend to agree

> in distinguishing two profoundly different ways of knowing a thing. The first implies that we move round the object; the second that we enter into it. . . . The first kind of knowledge may be said to stop at the relative; the second, in those cases where it is possible, to attain the absolute. . . . It follows . . . that an absolute could only be given in an intuition, whilst everything else falls within the province of analysis. By intuition is meant the kind of intellectual sympathy by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible. Analysis, on the contrary, is the operation which reduces the object to elements already known, that is to elements common both to it and other objects.

Analysis, then, must forever multiply its points in order to perfect the reduction, but "intuition, if intuition is possible, is a simple act."[30]

Karl Stern makes the same bifurcation. For him, the division is between the poetic and the scientific, which parallel the intuitive and the rational, the absolute and the relative, spoken of by Bergson. "The poetic relation to nature," he explains, "is one of imbeddedness, the scientific one is that of confrontation."[31] The poetic relation, intuition, intellectual sympathy--all are a function of entering into and feeling with the object. The fact that intuition depends on union with the object brings it close to the feeling of love. As in the mode of knowing which Herbert Feigl characterizes as "internalization,"[32] sympathy is a means of knowing; it is a feeling with, a union with the knowable. Its contrary

is "externalization," or the knowable experienced as object, outside of the self. To "comprehend" means to "take into": the intuitive form of knowing brings things closer together rather than creating distances between them ("detachment").

Stern tells us that Georg Simmel had remarked that for woman "'being and idea are indivisibly one'. . . . This creates the impression, so often expressed in popular psychology, that women have no logic. This popular view expresses, according to Simmel, a lack in man: for him the idea can be conceived only as an outside and an above; it is not immanent. . . ."[33] Germaine Greer takes up this thread as it passes, more negatively through Otto Weininger's thought, and reminds us that "women today might well find that what Weininger describes as defects may be in fact freedoms which they might do well to promote. For example [and she quotes Weininger]:

> With women thinking and feeling are identical, for man they are in opposition. The woman has many of her mental experiences as henids (undifferentiated perceptions) whilst in man these have passed through a process of clarification.[34]

What Weininger is describing--were it held to be more respectable--might be viewed as the prefiguring of the unified sensibility, the loss of which T. S. Eliot so influentially mourned.

In a study which touches on the dissociation of sensibility, Frank Kermode describes Yeats' quest for images and his related conception of women, a conception

in which body, thought, and feeling are indistinguishable and inseparable. Yeats, he says, sought images which were:

> unyielding to philosophers, dichotomies like soul and body; an organic, irreducible beauty, of which female beauty, the beauty of a perfectly proportioned human body, is the type. . . . She must have no intellectual content that is not appropriate to her form, and expressed by her form; there must be no division of soul and body, but an "uncomposite blessedness." . . . In women, as in poems, the body as a whole must be expressive; there should be no question of the mind operating independently of the whole body. In a sense the body does the thinking.[35]

Not just "sheer being," but in this case, beauty, is the proper activity of woman. Intellect, a divisive faculty, sullies it.

Whereas, for Yeats, woman's value lies in her "sheer being" and her beauty, that is, in the simple radiance of her bodily presence, for others, the value of woman's bodily presence has been linked with one of her biological functions; it is often remarked that woman's creativity lies in her body, that because of her capacity to give birth, to deliver by virtue of her labor a completely new thing into the world, she is innately a creative being. Stern affirms this ancient and contemporary view: "woman's _specific_ form of creativeness, that of motherhood, is tied up with the life of nature, with a _non-reflective_ bios." The rhythms of woman's biology tie her more deeply "to the life of nature, to the pulse beat of the Cosmos. What Goethe calls the law of _systole_ and _diastole_ enters more into her life than into man's."[36]

The description of woman as non-reflective bios is the far--though not necessarily inevitable--end of the continuum which begins with woman as the receptacle of feeling. From being a non-analytic, intuitive, and empathetic being, but presumably still with the powers of speech, woman becomes all body, undivided by the particulars of language. She may express a wisdom <u>through</u> her body, but she is not, since she is non-reflective (cannot, in effect, mirror herself) capable of perceiving that wisdom. Because she is an uncomposite being, any imaginative rearrangement of self--i.e., composition--has to be accomplished from outside. If woman's essential nature is one in which being and idea are one, her creation is ephemeral, a power which only the immediate witness can appreciate; it is, in effect, outside culture and its texts. Indeed, the desire to keep woman free of the educational mill has sometimes been based on a wish to preserve her as pure being.

If woman functions as pure being she will necessarily be relegated, in the written evidence of a culture, to object, and her point of view will not be recorded except insofar as man can imagine it. Women authors, by definition, by the very fact that they engage in the occupation of writing escape this limitation; yet the picture is attractive and common enough in some respects to catch their attention. For the image of woman as pure

being carries with it the glamor of the archetypal, the gratifying harmonies of a mind-body unity, a feeling of immediacy and surety of identity, and the connotation of positive affect. As Norman O. Brown puts it, "Eros is the instinct that makes for union, or unification, and Thanatos, the death instinct, is the instinct that makes for separation or division.[37] To venture into the analytic, then, is to make (gentle) partnership with the death instinct; to rest with non-reflective bios is to assure oneself of a closer connection with Eros.

The statements of Yeats, Stern, and Weininger, the first two in praise, the last in denigration, are extreme in that they locate woman's core in an area which is untranslatable. The role of woman as intuitive being, as opposed to "pure being," is a more moderate one, yet it presents its own problems. For instance, Bergson's description of the two modes of knowing suggests that the analytic mode will have more to say; intuition is a simple and absolute experience which will have, presumably, little to relate, particularly of a sequential nature. Schlegel stresses the simultaneous and unitary nature of the mode of feeling when he says, "Conception can only comprise each object separately, but nothing in truth can ever exist separately and by itself; Feeling perceives all in all at one and the same time."[38] It is enough to suggest here that the advantages which have been ascribed

to feminine sensibility, in themselves engender possible obstacles to creative effort, and make a closely-woven combination of attractions and impediments which the female writer must untangle in order to find her point of view.

The passages above have dealt with descriptive generalizations about women, in an attempt to emulate a climate, or create a microcosm, of those opinions which have accumulated around the female sex. The general direction of these opinions is that the female is the feeling gender, the non-reflective and non-analytic gender, the sex most susceptible to excesses of emotion, and the sex most in possession of a mind-body-feeling unity.

The premise accompanying many of the generalizations about women is that women's tendencies are innate--the easier to make a generalization--and, as a result, whether constructive or destructive, resistant to change. Two thinkers who took a position against the innateness of women's attributes--Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill--took exception to that doctrine precisely in order to stimulate the hope of change in women and to encourage improvements in their social and legal status. The possibility that women possess a special capacity for intuition suggests that there is already a knowledge within women which does not have to be instructed; this particular virtue, like Shaftesbury's conception of benevolence, is innate. Whether for good or for ill, she

allegedly possesses a form of knowing which precedes reason, a form of knowing which is not necessarily susceptible to further education. Her "non-reflective bios" equips her to know things through her sympathy with them, and offers an excuse to those who think women's education unnecessary.

The argument about whether the human personality is formed by inborn traits or acquired experience has had particular relevance to the fate of women, insofar as women were rarely regarded as innately possessing reason--most especially when they were seen as the polar opposites of men. It was only when their <u>sameness</u> was stressed, often to emphasize the bonds between all man (and woman) -kind, that reason was seen as a principle present in both sexes, a faculty universal to all. But the idea of similarity of mind did not take exclusive hold in the general consciousness, and Havelock Ellis, the first crusader for sexual data, wrote, in the late nineteenth century, "So long as women are unlike in the primary sexual characters [sic] and in reproductive function they can never be absolutely alike even in the highest psychic processes."[39]

The debate about whether women are the same as men in their mental and spiritual functions despite their physical differences continues into the present. The relevance of this argument to a literary study of women authors lies not in the truth of one assertion or the other

but in the fact that the two sides of the debate form a Scylla and Charybdis which flank every female writer; a choice, though it need not be an extreme one, is almost inescapable. For wherever the female author establishes her voice, her point of view, it is bound to be somewhere along the continuum between sameness of mind and polarity of mind. Such a choice is, no doubt, not always willed; but it will set off a series of literary choices which can, in fact, be studied in retrospect and in light of the clichés and criticism which have helped to determine it.

It might be argued that the male writer's identity will also fall at some point in a sexual continuum and examples easily come to mind: Fielding, Kipling, and Hemingway are "masculine"; Richardson, James, and Proust are "feminine." The difference, however, between the male literary tradition and the female (as opposed to the "masculine" and the "feminine") is that the female tradition has been far more vexed by notice of its sex than the male. Rarely has a male writer received criticism which describes "masculine interest" as inherently incriminating; for women writers, on the other hand, there exists always the risk that their work will be considered "feminine" in the negative sense.

If this indicates a social imbalance between the sexes, it also reinforces the hunch that the female writer will have a sense of obstacle, as well as, perhaps, a

temptation to transcend those characteristically "feminine" traits which seem to make her vulnerable to attack or categorization. As a result, particularly in fiction, a form which has been regarded by many as congruent with women's particular talents,[40] some women writers have taken pains to show that their gifts are different from what is expected. For example, one of Doris Lessing's female characters in The Golden Notebook comments that the heroine is not "someone who writes little novels about the emotions," but writes about "what's real."[41] Virginia Woolf, who outlined the constraints on the female imagination in A Room of One's Own, was at least partly correct when she hypothesized a contemporary woman novelist as writing with a self-conscious terseness which "might mean that she was afraid of something, of being called 'sentimental' perhaps."[42]

Even Jane Austen's fiction demonstrates a firm dissociation from the faculty of emotionality which was often attributed to women of her day. Though she was more eager to delineate the differences between moral stupidity and moral excellence than the differences between the sexes, Austen made as pungent an attack on the behavior of sensibility in Sense and Sensibility and Northanger Abbey as did her contemporary Mary Wollstonecraft in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. Indeed, Austen's cool and balanced style might have been praised in just the way Wollstonecraft

praised Catherine Macaulay's work, when she remarked, "In her style of writing, indeed, no sex appears, for it is like the sense it conveys, strong and clear."[43]

It was precisely Austen's cool skillfulness that irritated her first serious successor. Charlotte Bronte wrote with vehemence, "the Passions are perfectly unknown to her; she rejects even a speaking acquaintance with that stormy Sisterhood. . . . Miss Austen being . . . without 'sentiment,' without poetry . . . cannot be great."[44] In her own work Bronte recruited from a life as secluded as Austen's a great deal of passion, and the surface of her novels is as chafed as Austen's was smooth. Yet Bronte, skeptical enough about the common valuation of women writers to take a pseudonym, was attempting, in spite of her open presentation of intense emotion, to present more than a woman's point of view. "I wish you did not think me a woman," she wrote to G. H. Lewes after his review of Shirley; "You will, I know, keep measuring me by some standard of what you deem becoming to my sex. . . . It is not on those terms, or with such ideas, I ever took pen in hand."[45] Yet those terms were forced on her: intending to stand in the middle of that continuum of gender which would make the author's sex irrelevant, she had to face more conventional conditions of acceptance.

Unlike Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, who also, cautiously, adopted a pseudonym, lived to see a full

political crystallization of feminism in England, though her attitude to feminism was fairly conservative. Her ideology of feeling orbits primarily around her heroines, and she held closely for a time to the Comteian view that women are the prime receptacles of feeling in the culture. At the same time, she urged upon women greater self-command through intellectual development. Although her rational style has prompted critics to view her writings as commendably masculine, her characterizations and manipulations of plot depend for their significance on the value of feeling. As opposed to Bronte's spurting alternations between obedient restraint and anarchic ecstasy, exemplified in Villette, Eliot's wide canvas is one in which thought and feeling are woven evenly into a uniformly moral texture.

With respect to women and writing, the twentieth century has not been as different from the nineteenth as one might imagine. Feminism, which could have been expected to remove the burden of reform from the serious writer, in some cases exacerbated it, most notably in the case of Virginia Woolf. In A Room of One's Own, gracious and anecdotal compared to the bitterly ironic Three Guineas, she made passionately clear how the practical obstacles faced by women writers combined with the absence of a feminine tradition constituted a deprivation and a temptation to embrace a false identity. Explaining in

A Room of One's Own that not to think specially or separately of sex is "much harder . . . now than ever before," she declared that "it would be a thousand pities if women wrote like men,"[46] envisioning an ideal in which a woman wrote as a woman but as a woman who had forgotten that she was a woman, writing without grudges or apologies.

This same ideal, put to different but not completely dissimilar fictive uses has been espoused in more recent years by Anais Nin. In contrast to those women writers who defy the clichés about women's emotionality and disinterest in the abstract, Nin transforms these generalizations into constructive guidelines for personal development. In a critical book on D. H. Lawrence she quotes a passage from a story of his which serves as a formulation of her own attitude: "Women are not fools. . . . they have their own logic. A woman may spend years living up to a masculine pattern. But in the end the strange and terrible logic of emotion will work out the smashing of the pattern, if it has not been emotionally satisfactory."[47]

It was Lawrence who named the two basic possibilities for women the hensure and the cocksure. The former is close to the undifferentiated non-reflective bios whose wisdom is immanent and passive; the latter is more aggressive, differentiated, and intellectual. Lawrence, a rebel in matters other than this one, preferred

the former. Such a distinction is alive in the minds of many women writers, too, as their diaries, letters and fiction show, and few women can escape a knowledge of what is generally considered feminine, since they are so often reminded of it. That at times it is best to resist such reminders is made clear by the early example of Charlotte Bronte, to whom Robert Southey wrote, "Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure will she have for it, even as an accomplishment and a recreation."[48]

This chapter has attempted to condense some of the attitudes towards women which have formed women's ideas about themselves and to explain in part why women are, if not perpetually, then habitually, conscious of their gender. The pejoratives offhandedly applied to their intellectual capacities and the praise of their ability to love are woven into the texture of the culture, and suggest that women are supposed to do best what they need not express. A woman declaring herself not significantly different from men tends to make a special plea for her own rationality and ability to speak. A woman accepting the designated polarities is more likely to turn toward emotion as a rule of response, and to stress the difficulties of utterance, the virtue of speechlessness. Women writers like Woolf and Nin have found a style or styles

which accomplish this, and it might be argued that intuition is no disability in the works of, say, Keats, or the French Symbolists, all of whom sing of speechlessness with unhampered articulation. Yet for the male writers these wrestling matches with silence come out of a tradition of verbal strength; they are metaphors that emerge from a context of sophistication, metaphors enacted to make a dent in a tradition of speech which is considered rightfully theirs. For women writers silence has a different relevance, for it is congruent with their alleged destiny.

An awareness of a special consciousness in women is not a substitute for but a prologue to literary study, a soil and context for the works themselves. The following chapters will explore the fiction of George Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Anais Nin and Doris Lessing in relation to the attitudes these authors express toward the condition of womanhood and toward the function and value of feeling and sensibility, in order to understand more completely what and how they write.

Footnotes

[1] Georg Simmel, "Das Relative und das Absolute in Geschechterproblem," Philosophische Kultur. Quoted by Viola Klein in Feminine Character: A Study of Ideology (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1946), p. 82.

[2] Mary Ellmann, Thinking About Women (New York: Harcourt, 1968), p. 187.

[3] George Eliot, "Woman in France: Madame de Sable," in Essays of George Eliot, ed. Thomas Pinney (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 53.

[4] Anais Nin, The Diary of Anais Nin, II, 1934-1939, ed. Gunther Stuhlmann (New York: The Swallow Press, 1967), p. 234.

[5] Joyce Horner, The English Women Novelists and Their Connection with the Feminist Movement, 1688-1797 (Northampton: Smith College Studies in Modern Languages, XI, 1, 2, 3 Oct. 1929, Jan, Apr., 1930), 37.

[6] As Virginia Woolf points out in A Room of One's Own (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929), p. 127.

[7] A Room of One's Own, and Three Guineas (London: The Hogarth Press, 1952), first published 1938.

[8] Ellmann, p. 29.

[9] William Hazlitt, Works, VIII (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1903), 123-124.

[10] Oliver Elton, A Survey of English Literature, 1780-1830 (London: Edward Arnold, 1912), p. 174.

[11] Quoted by Ellmann, p. 23.

[12] Hugh Kenner, rev. of Divorcing, by Susan Taubes, The New York Times Book Review, 2 Nov. 1969, p. 4.

[13] Harrison Smith, rev. of Ladders to Fire, by Anais Nin, Saturday Review, 30 Nov. 1946, p. 66.

[14] Quoted by Margaret Lawrence in The School of Femininity (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1936), p. 63.

[15] Kate Millett, Sexual Politics (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), p. 139.

[16] Sir Leslie Stephen, History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, 3rd ed. (New York: Peter Smith, 1949), p. 442.

[17] Walter Jackson Bate, From Classic to Romantic (New York: Harper, 1946), p. 60.

[18] Diana Trilling, "The Image of Women in Contemporary Literature," in The Woman in America, ed. Robert J. Lifton (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 66.

[19] Ashley Montagu, The Natural Superiority of Women (New York: Macmillan, 1957), p. 83.

[20] Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (New York: Norton,1957), p. 83. Pages for succeeding quotes given in the body of the paper.

[21] George Eliot, Essays, p. 334.

[22] Ortega y Gasset, "Landscape with a Deer in the Background," in On Love: Aspects of a Single Theme (New York: Meridian, 1957), p. 155.

[23] Klein, p. 42.

[24] Havelock Ellis, Man and Woman (London: Walter Scott, 1896), p. 28.

[25] John Stuart Mill, The Subjection of Women (London: J. M. Dent, 1929), p. 275.

[26] Montagu, p. 122.

[27] Ibid., p. 140.

[28] Helene Deutsch, The Psychology of Women, I (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1944-1945), pp. 192, 136.

[29] Mill, p. 273.

[30] Henry Bergson, An Introduction to Metaphysics. Quoted by Karl Stern in The Flight from Woman (New York:

Farrar, Straus, 1965), p. 43.

[31] Stern, p. 86.

[32] Ibid., p. 42.

[33] Ibid., p. 26.

[34] Weininger, Sex and Character. Quoted by Germaine Greer in The Female Eunuch (New York: McGraw Hill, 1970), p. 100.

[35] Kermode, pp. 50, 53.

[36] Stern, p. 21.

[37] Norman O. Brown, Love's Body (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 80.

[38] August Wilhelm von Schlegel, Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature, Lect. xxii. Quoted by Bate, p. 31.

[39] Ellis, p. 17.

[40] Cf. G. K. Chesterton in The Victorian Age in Literature (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 58.

[41] Doris Lessing, The Golden Notebook (New York: Ballantine Books, 1968), p. 42.

[42] A Room of One's Own, p. 140.

[43] Wollstonecraft, p. 164.

[44] T. J. Wise and J. A. Symington, ed., The Brontes: Their Lives, Friendships and Correspondence in Four Volumes (Oxford, 1932), III, 99 and II, 180-181.

[45] Ibid., III, 31.

[46] A Room of One's Own, pp. 152, 181.

[47] Anais Nin, D. H. Lawrence: An Unprofessional Study (Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1964), pp. 49-50.

[48] Mrs. Gaskell, The Life of Charlotte Bronte (New York: Harper Brothers, 1901), p. 160.

CHAPTER III

GEORGE ELIOT: THE WORK OF SYMPATHY

Jane Austen, George Eliot's predecessor in the great tradition of moral seriousness,[1] and the only female predecessor in fiction to equal her, repeatedly encouraged the triumph of sense over sensibility in her characters. Writing of a pre-industrial and socially limited world where morality, sanity, and manners were congruent, and in a style of economy and detachment which reflected the discipline she valued in her characters, she portrayed conflicts between impulse and convention, passion and good sense, in which ultimately the head tended to regulate and instruct the heart, without however, dominating it.

The works of George Eliot represent, in large part, a similar attempt to bring the requirements of head and heart into a smooth alliance, with the difference that in Eliot, the head tends to stand for the operations of the analytic intellect rather than for the reassuring patterns of universal reason, and the heart is a means to social understanding rather than a lure to an excess which must be mended if it is to fit into the social fabric.

Although we cannot with final certainty gauge Eliot's susceptibility to the influence of Austen, her intense familiarity with the latter's works and the reverence in which G. H. Lewes held Austen, suggest the degree of Eliot's openness to the earlier author's work. In their shared

emphasis on the need for moral intelligence, in their use of irony and wit to express their moral judgments, even in the fact that they both wrote about the clergy--not a popular topic--a kinship between them can be traced. And if the two authors are dissimilar in the scope of their social concerns, in the degree of distance from their characters, and in their historical placement, they are related in their preoccupation with the adjustments of sense to sensibility, or sensibility to sense.

George Eliot wrote at a safe historical distance from the prevailing excesses of Sensibility which Jane Austen satirized so caustically in _Love and Freindship_, _Sense and Sensibility_, and _Northanger Abbey_. In Eliot's novels, sensibility is reinstated and allied with moral stability so that it more closely resembles Shaftesbury's original guidelines for moral feeling than it does the sentimental encrustations on ethical doctrine which Austen burlesqued. In her belief in the strong moral effectiveness of feeling, George Eliot was a direct inheritor of Shaftesbury's idea that feeling was the mainspring of virtue, and in her working out of the relation between feeling and social purpose in her novels, she reinforces the message of the earlier writings on sensibility which stress the social efficacy of emotion rather than its function as purely personal pleasurable release.

For Jane Austen, as for Mary Wollstonecraft, pride in sensibility tended to ally itself with an indulged indolence, and Austen's portraits of society show how leisure leaves plenty of room for the mushrooming of useless excesses of feeling. In the fiction of George Eliot, on the other hand, work plays an important part, and the presence of sensibility indicates the potential for aspiration to high goals. For her heroines such high goals do not always materially exist, and there is often a tragic discrepancy between the gifts of her female characters and their opportunities. Society is ultimately the limiting factor, and the identity between public and private which exists in Jane Austen (where the virtuous characters work into a social norm which supersedes random stupidities) is in the novels of Eliot torn asunder. This is not to say that her characters are happily divorced from society and content to investigate their sensibilities; although Eliot permits Dorothea to be reprimanded by Mr. Brooke for her fervor,[2] the final emphasis is on the moral stability which goes with that fervor and makes Dorothea's emotions a durable asset--however limited her outlets for transforming feeling into work.

The concern with feeling in George Eliot's work is embedded in a watchful and evenly balanced prose texture. Her style is a rational style, the scope of her reading and reach of her intellect formidable and unabashedly evident

in her fiction. Her essays and reviews show a discriminating mind taking pleasure in fine intellectual points and displaying a tartness and irony which is backed up by a painstaking lucidity. In short, Eliot's style, her mental equipment, her image as it has been embroidered by readers and critics over the years, suggest a woman of intellect who respects rationality and who is at home with abstractions. Like Jane Austen, she has a rational style; unlike Jane Austen she preserves feeling as a pivotal point in the resolution of individual moral problems and in the improvement of society. In her fiction it is not intellect or the workings of the mind which succours and redeems individuals, but the workings of the heart. If there is any one element of human character that is seen as the salvation of people and the key to kind and responsible social behavior it is feeling.

The place of feeling, sensibility, and emotion in the writings of George Eliot is highly important and fairly complex. Historically, her conception of sensibility falls somewhere between its modern incarnation as quivering sensitivity and the earlier eighteenth century notion of ethical responsiveness. Her work harks back to Shaftesbury, whose ideas she often parallels, and forward to Proust, that archetype of modern sensibility who had been much taken with _The Mill on the Floss_. Eliot is a bridge, albeit an unexpected one, from sensibility's overtly moral and

socially obliging origins to its more coolly conscientious and subtler investigations into the self in the twentieth century.

Like Shaftesbury, Eliot believes that the most important ethical experience is that of sympathy and fellow-feeling, a keen responsiveness to the joys and distresses of others. She, like Shaftesbury, believes that emotional susceptibility evolves into social responsibility. She did not believe, as Shaftesbury did, that humans were innately benevolent, but she substituted for this the view that they were deeply educable. Her attitude is sharply opposite to that of Dickens, whose sentimental benevolence, like Fielding's, held that good nature was unconscious and innocent. Eliot's characters are educated by their experience and by one another into virtue; they (l)earn their way.

If Dickens resembles the later works of sensibility in his scenes of excess and his iconography of tears, Eliot is closer to the earlier and more vigorous mode of sensibility, where the allegiance was to enthusiasm rather than pathos. One of her deep roots may have been in the stern and gloomy watchfulness of Puritanism, a ponderous consciousness which sometimes overwhelms her prose, but offsetting this was her attraction to the evangelical mode,[3] with its emphasis on the surprises of feeling rather than on the strict management of intellect.[4]

Shaftesbury was one of the first in England to defend enthusiasm in a period of cool classicism, and his doctrine of moral sense succeeded in displacing Puritanism to a great degree in the eighteenth century and in paving the way for evangelical preachers like Wesley who was himself influenced by Shaftesbury's ideas. By the mid-nineteenth century the doctrine of enthusiasm was more widespread, the Shaftesburian influence having been absorbed by the Romantics and passed on to the Victorians. In an atmosphere generally tolerant of this doctrine, George Eliot was one of its more noticeable adherents. Her first novel, Adam Bede, had as its heroine a Methodist preacher, a disciple of Wesley well versed in the enthusiasm of passionate sermonizing. Her last novel, Daniel Deronda, has at its negative pole the figure of Grandcourt, who brings the quality of inertia to the point of genuine evil. Her heroines are characteristically defined by their "ardour," which is, in Eliot's vocabulary, a synonym for enthusiasm, and which carries Maggie, Romola and Dorothea to heights of noble action which are limited only by social circumstance.

One particular should be noted to indicate Eliot's awareness of the doctrine of enthusiasm in its pre-Victorian context, and that is the name that she gave to Dorothea's scholar-husband in Middlemarch. For Dr. Edward Casaubon was undoubtedly derived from the writer Meric Casaubon,

author of the first book ever published against enthusiasm. His Treatise Concerning Enthusiasme, as it is an Effect of Nature: but is mistaken by many for either Divine Inspiration, or Diabolical Possession, was published in 1655, and he too used the word ardour, commenting disapprovingly that "natural ardor or fervency" is the principal cause of enthusiasm.[5]

"Ardour," "Sympathy," "fellow-Feeling," all are words which recur frequently in one's impressionistic concordance of George Eliot's works, and which pluck the Shaftesburian string in the complex chord of eighteenth century sensibility. The frequency of these words in Eliot's works indicates to how great an extent these aspects of sensibility are discussed. They are discussed, in fact, as much as they are enacted, for the emotions of Eliot's characters come to us through a filter of educative approval. For Eliot, feeling is a moral policy and an ideology; she nods reassuringly at its presence as she treads a narrow path between charity and judgment, and she is tirelessly epigrammatic in its defense. When in Middlemarch (p. 601) she asserts typically that morality depends not on doctrine but on fellow feeling her stress is on feeling in order to offset a prevailing emphasis on doctrine. But if we begin with feeling and go backward we find that, invariably, the end point is morality. Like Shaftesbury, she regards feeling as the only true machinery for the disciplining of character;

"responsive" and "responsible" are two sides of the same coin of virtue.

Eliot's resurrection of sympathy as a unit of moral behavior is grounded in the attempts of eighteenth century writers to make the emotions socially useful and morally typical. She had read Richardson, Rousseau, and Sterne, among other writers supportive of sensibility, with great sympathy, and so evident was her affinity with the eighteenth century philosophers of feeling, that W. E. Henley once remarked, albeit not flatteringly, that her works read as if they were dictated to "a plain woman of genius by the ghost of David Hume."[6]

Her most marked affinities with nineteenth-century thought were also with writers of the heart, thinkers who gave equal or superior place to the feelings as opposed to the intellect. A close friend and early influence, Charles Bray, published in 1860 "The Education of the Feelings," a title which could stand as the nominal heading of all of Eliot's novels. Her translation of Feuerbach and her interest in Comte bore out her predisposition toward writers who honored the emotions. As Willey notes, "Comte and Feuerbach, with their exaltation of love and their apotheosis of humanity, ministered to those heart's affections which in her were even stronger than the intellect."[7]

Of all her contemporary supports for the ethic of feeling, Comte was the strongest. Brought to the attention

of the English public in part by the writings of G. H. Lewes, Comte shared with Shaftesbury a belief in the moral efficacy of feeling, though he substituted for Shaftesbury's emphasis on intuitive gentility an authoritarian utopia of orderly social models. Still, the main tendency of Comte's doctrine of Positivism was to encourage sympathy and thereby to achieve a victory of social feeling over self-love--a purpose to which both public and private life were consecrated. The major condition of right action was, according to Positivism, the benevolent impulse; in this view both private happiness and public welfare were more dependent on the heart than on the intellect, and the intellect was not thwarted but, rather, elevated, by the supremacy of the heart.

Eliot's interest in Comte waned, eventually, from an initial enthusiasm, but in 1861 she would still say, in a letter to Sara Hennell, "I quite agree with you--so far as I am able to form a judgment--in regarding Positivism as one-sided; but Comte was a great thinker, nevertheless, and ought to be treated with a reverence by all smaller fry."[8]

Her affection for Wordsworth, on the other hand, never diminished. In 1839 she wrote of him to Maria Lewis, "I never before met with so many of my own feelings expressed just as I could [wish] like them."[9] In 1858, writing to Sara Hennell, she compared Ruskin to "the sublimest part

of Wordsworth, whom, by the bye, we are reading now with fresh admiration for his beauties and tolerance for his faults."[10] And in 1880 she noted in her diary that she was reading "Myers' Wordsworth."[11] She used epigraphs from his work to preface Adam Bede and Silas Marner, and regarded all of Silas Marner as a testament to his influence. In 1861 she wrote to her publisher, of that book, "I don't wonder at your finding my story, as far as you have read it, rather sombre: indeed, I should not have believed that any one would have been interested in it but myself (since William Wordsworth is dead). . . . it . . . is intended to set--in a strong light the remedial influence of pure, natural human relations."[12] In 1873 she still jokingly paid deference to the poet's hold on her: writing to Elma Stuart that "The lovely shawl is come in safety," she mused, "I suppose that Wordsworth would have rebuked me for calling a shawl 'lovely.'"[13] And in 1880 she wrote to Frederic Harrison supplying quotes from Wordsworth to support his investigations into Positivism, recommending the best edition and criticizing others.[14]

John Stuart Mill recorded in his autobiography that it was Wordsworth who, figuratively, rescued him from the nervous collapse brought on by an overdose of the senior Mill's utilitarianism.[15] At the heart of this rescue was the permission which Wordsworth's work gave to those very feelings regarded as superfluous by the Benthamites.

Wordsworth's desire to rectify man's feelings, to introduce a rhetoric of affection which would appeal to the common sympathies of men, without heroism or flamboyance, to bathe nature in the light reflected from a contemplative mind--all combined in a power that had at its core a healing effect and a belief in the virtuous person.

Wordsworth's healing effect, his emphasis on emotion, and his revaluation of the wholesome and the ordinary all left their mark on George Eliot. Although influenced by Shaftesbury, Wordsworth set himself apart from the later excesses of sensibility by stressing the importance of emotion recollected in tranquility, and thereby laid down the lines--by dwelling on feelings remembered and landscape invested with past emotion--for Eliot's seriously considered nostalgia and Proust's deeply sensuous treatment of memory. Like Shaftesbury, Wordsworth believed that nature was the origin of the affections; art was not, as Ruskin had seen it, created by men in a state of enthusiasm, but rather created in a state of serenity that could reinvest landscape with feeling and recall feeling by means of landscape.

Wordsworth's spiritual transformation of the smallest elements of daily life, and Comte's intense interest in observing and ritualizing these same elements, were channeled into Eliot's particular brand of realism, in which she invested objects with all the warm affection of her

notice. As Pinney puts it, she has "a Wordsworthian sense of the sacredness and significance of fact."[16] Her remark on her removal from Griff early in her life reads like a naive anticipation of Proust, in its awareness of the subtle interplay between one's sense of self and the objects surrounding one. She complained, "I find . . . a considerable disturbance of the usual flow of thought and feeling on being severed from the objects so long accustomed to call it forth."[17] She is that link between Wordsworth's sublime sense of place and the sense of reality evident in modern writers of sensibility like Proust and Woolf. As Praz points out, "Daniel Deronda belongs to 1876; in 1878 Walter Pater wrote The Child in the House, and the way in which he dwells upon this attachment to the place of childhood's first impressions has by this time acquired an 'inward' or spiritual quality."[18]

George Eliot was decidedly indebted to Wordsworth for her attitudes toward feeling and its role in literature. But some summary of her exclusive purpose is necessary if her particular sensibility is not to be blurred by parallels. Eliot's insistence on feeling, for example, was to a great degree a remedial tactic, a rebuttal against the cramped rectitude of religion and the encroaching moral emptiness of science. In her eyes the morally educated human being was not one who had learned codes of behavior or the specifications of dogma, but one who was capable of a lively

altruistic responsiveness. This was very similar to a Richardsonian ethic of sensibility, and in this view morality depended more on the texture of an individual's awareness than on the biography of his or her isolated moral acts. Only feeling could truly secure morality in the individual, for, as Eliot wrote in Middlemarch (p. 601), "There is no general doctrine which is not capable of eating out our morality if unchecked by the deep-seated habit of direct fellow-feeling with individual fellow-men." Or, as Sir James Chettam puts it, in the same book, "a man may wish to do what is right, and yet be a sort of parchment code" (p. 70).

Argument, opinion, and the more pretentious intellectual pursuits were placed low in Eliot's hierarchy of values. In her devastating portrait of Casaubon his shallow feeling is inseparable from the tautological pointlessness of his scholarly endeavour. Formal knowledge with no resultant happiness or social good was an abomination to Eliot. As she wrote in 1857 to Charles Bray, using the word that Diderot preferred to the word virtue, "Happiness means all sorts of love and good feeling, and that is the best result that can ever come out of science."[19] Feeling, moreover, was not only a superior end to knowledge but a more persuasive means; in Janet's Repentance Eliot assures us, "There is a power in the direct glance of a sincere and loving human soul, which will do more to dissipate prejudice

and kindle charity than the most elaborate arguments."[20]

The repeated thrust of Eliot's statements about feeling and morality is toward a Wordsworthian healing and making-whole. She stated in a letter to Sara Hennell that "speculative truth begins to appear but a shadow of individual minds. Agreement between intellects seems unattainable, and we turn to the truth of feeling as the only universal bond of union."[21] And she put it in the same way to Charles Bray: "I have had heart-cutting experience that opinions are a poor cement between human souls."[22]

It was in her art that Eliot attempted this healing power direct. In the same letter to Bray she explained, "If Art does not enlarge men's sympathies, it does nothing morally. . . . the only effect I ardently long to produce by my writings is that those who read them should be better able to _imagine_ and to _feel_ the pains and the joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling, erring human creatures."

To teach the enlargement of sympathy was not simply to set down statements which indirectly urge the reader to temper justice with mercy--though Eliot herself does this--rather it was to convey that the author's voice itself was deeply reliable. Eliot's concern with the _texture_ of awareness is far from the narrow Victorian latitude with which her doctrines of morality would sometimes seem

to ally her. She wrote of Kingsley, for instance, "If he would confine himself to his true sphere, he might be a teacher in the sense in which every great artist is a teacher--namely, by giving us his higher sensibility as a medium, a delicate acoustic or optical instrument, bringing home to our coarser senses what would otherwise be unperceived by us."[23] This perhaps casts a slightly different light on her intrusions into her own narrative: she is building up her authorial voice through particulars, and we are expected ultimately, not to trust the particulars she speaks of so much as the voice itself.

Indeed, Eliot spoke against precisely the brand of moralizing of which she is often considered guilty when she wrote of the poet Young,

> Another indication of Young's deficiency in moral, i.e., in sympathetic emotion, is his unintermitting habit of pedagogic moralizing. . . . the presence of genius or innate prompting is directly opposed to the perpetual consciousness of a rule . . . in proportion as morality is emotional (i.e., has affinity with Art,) it will exhibit itself in direct sympathetic feeling and action, and not as the recognition of a rule. . . . we think experience, both in literature and life, has shown that the minds which are [pre-eminently didactic--which insist on a "lesson," and despise everything that will not convey a moral], are deficient in sympathetic emotion. . . . [a man who is perpetually thinking in apothegms, who has an unintermittent flux of admonition, can have little energy left for simple emotion.]" [Brackets in original][24]

Eliot's emphasis on feeling as a measuring stick of virtue is fairly consistent throughout her fiction, essays, and letters. Her belief is put well by Caleb Garth in Middlemarch, a minor character but one who comes closest to

Eliot's moral sense at its simplest. Caleb points the right direction like a compass: the clearest morality comes through feeling. He says with abrupt certainty, "*It's the feeling*. The child feels in that way, and I feel with her. You don't mean your horse to tread on a dog when you're backing out of the way, but it goes through you when it's done" (Italics mine) (p. 395). For Caleb, feeling is a way of preserving his individualism: "That signifies nothing--what other men would think, I've got a clear feeling inside me, and that I shall follow" (p. 547).

Caleb's assertions about feeling, put in the mouth of a woman, might be construed as praise of intuition. But Eliot's views about feeling are not so unbordered and undefined: they are yoked to morality, duty, and last, but far from least, intellect. Morality, she had said, is "dependent on the regulation of feeling by intellect."[25] With a characteristic tropism toward unifying, she wished to heal the divisiveness of the eighteenth century conflict between emotion and intellect, and to aim at what moderns would call a unified sensibility. As Kermode says,

> George Eliot . . . assumes like her master Wordsworth that the true voice comes from artists of higher organic sensibility than other men, but can write in [*Middlemarch*]--doubtless unconscious of her role as critical pioneer--that the poet is "quick to discern" but also "quick to feel" because he possesses "a soul in which knowledge passes instantaneously into feeling, and feeling flashes back as a new organ of knowledge."[26]

Eliot asserted in this passage that such a reciprocal transmutation came to the poet only in "fits." Elsewhere, however, she made it a kind of homely truth: Dinah says, in Adam Bede, "Feeling's a sort o' knowledge,"[27] and Eliot wishes that Dorothea could "conceive with that distinctness which is no longer reflection but feeling--an idea wrought back to the directness of sense, like the solidity of objects" (Mid. p. 208) of the differences between herself and Casaubon. Thus her view at times is close to the intuitionist's in that it posits emotion as a form of cognition, but she never forgets the other side--that thought itself can become feeling by virtue of its intensity.

In either case, Eliot rejected a mutually excluding dualism of thought and feeling. She did not, however, confuse the terms of the two; she still spoke the language of rationalism in making statements about the necessity of both, seeing them as two separate entities that had to be brought together. G. H. Lewes put it in a way that no doubt appealed to her in Problems of Life and Mind: "If, as Wordsworth says, the attempt is vain

> To parcel out
> The intellect by geometric rules,
> split like a province into round and square:

equally vain must be the attempt to separate Feeling and its laws from Thought and its laws."[28]

Eliot stressed the value of understanding "the great part played by the emotions in the formation of opinion."[29] In Middlemarch she stated with characteristic maternal forgiveness that "there is no human being who having both passions and thoughts does not think in consequence of his passions" (p. 454). Emotion, then, with its forceful sweep, might undermine the rational, but it might also, with a softening effect, enhance it. For example, it is because Will is "a creature who entered into everyone's feelings" that he "could take the pressure of their thought instead of urging his own with iron resistance" (Mid. p. 482). Empathy leads to a lack of egotism that results in understanding.

Eliot's reverence for feeling is particularly noteworthy in light of the fact that she was a leading intellectual of her day and probably the most learned female of her time in England. Her books are steeped in both special knowledge (as in her description of Lydgate's medical interests) and a background of general reading that would be evident from her epigraphs alone. As Daiches points out, "George Eliot was the first English novelist consciously to bring all the resources of a well-stocked mind, and a large part of the knowledge available to the best minds of her generation, to the writing of works of fiction . . . [she managed] to put her ideas and her knowledge at the service of her fiction, she was able to let them enter the fabric of her imagination."[30] It was

this knowledge residing in her fiction, perhaps, that led Herbert Spencer to include her novels when he excluded all fiction from the London Library.[31]

Noel Annan marvels at Eliot's ability to unify her creative and intellectual impulses; he remarks that "it was her astonishing ability to combine these two methods of illuminating reality which led her contemporaries to talk of her 'masculine' frame of mind and contrast it with her 'feminine' grasp of character."[32] Certainly, it is a cliché of George Eliot criticism that she "writes like a man," and it is perhaps unfair to cavil at this easy classification if only because her masculine pseudonym brings to our attention her desire to conceal her gender. She pointed out to her close friend, feminist Barbara Bodichon, that the point of the anonymity was to keep her work from being judged as the work of a woman, and in fact, very few of her contemporaries (with the notable exception of Dickens) saw through the mask of her pseudonym to her true gender.[33]

It is Eliot's preponderant intellect and abundant learning, of course, which make readers regard her as masculine. Her magnanimity too, which Germaine Greer describes as generally a masculine virtue,[34] is often stressed. In Eliot's day her intellectual accomplishments were not common to women; when Dorothea wishes to know Latin and Greek it is because "those provinces of masculine knowledge

seemed to her a standing ground from which all truth could be seen more truly" (Mid. p. 64). A woman of intellect was anomalous enough to run the risk of disqualification from feminine--or simply human--pleasures, too, a risk of which Eliot was aware. She wrote to Mrs. Taylor in 1852 that when feeling sad it was "a help to read such a life as Margaret Fuller's. How inexpressibly touching that passage from her journal--'I shall always reign through the intellect, but the life! the life! O my God! shall that never be sweet!' I am thankful, as if for myself, that it was sweet at last."[35]

For Eliot, the use of the intellect was not only the usual disinterested one; for women, intellect was necessary as a guard on the too vulnerable heart. In a letter to Mrs. Lytton she confessed:

> We women are always in danger of living too exclusively in the affections; and though our affections are perhaps the best gifts we have, we ought also to have our share of the more independent life--some joy in things for their own sake. It is piteous to see the helplessness of some sweet women when their affections are disappointed--because all their teaching has been, that they can only delight in study of any kind for the sake of a personal love. They have never contemplated an independent delight in ideas as an experience which they could confess without being laughed at. Yet surely women need this sort of defence against passionate affliction even more than men.[36]

Mary Wollstonecraft, a century before, had made the same argument, asserting "I wish to guard the female heart by exercising the understanding."[37] Doris Lessing, a century

later than Eliot, continues in this effort.

Eliot, like Wollstonecraft, was often severe in her attitude to what she saw as the failings of her own sex. When her sympathy with women thinned it was precisely because of their intellectual deficiencies, whose penalties she might have to suffer more immediately than she wished. She wrote to Sara Hennell from Munich that there "it is quite an exception to meet with a woman who seems to expect any sort of companionship from the men, and I shudder at the sight of a woman in society, for I know I shall have to sit on the sofa with her all evening listening to her stupidities, while the men on the other side of the table are discussing all the subjects I care to hear about."[38] With regard to women Eliot was pledged to a nonpartisan accuracy of feeling, asserting that women's condition was a subject she cared too much about to speak anything less than the truth concerning it.[39]

Although many of Eliot's remarks have the balance of a nonpartisan, or even the irritation of a non-sympathizer, her interest in her own sex was strong--her fiction, reviews, and letters testify to that. As early as 1840, when she was not quite twenty-one, she recommended to her regular correspondent, for her "married friends," a book called "'Woman's Mission' . . . and one you would like to read; the most philosophical and masterly on the subject I ever read or glanced over."[40] She had a ready awareness

of legal discriminations against women, reminding John Chapman that "in Greece, as in England, the position of women was practically ameliorated and her power practically increased without any corresponding advance in legislation."[41] She often gave sympathetic support to those who wanted to "help to raise the position and character of women," though typically she added that this "is one round of a long ladder stretching far beyond our lives."[42] Outright feminism would have been for her an expression of that self-interest which she consistently regarded with disapproval and with some disdain. Her lack of support for the enfranchisement of women must be seen in this context of positive, larger, human goals.

Eliot's mixed views on women correspond to the complex relationship between feeling and intellect which characteristically assails the enlightened members of her sex. Whereas Eliot was strongly in favor of the improvement of women's minds through education[43] and insistent that intellectual development act as insurance against emotional helplessness, whereas she was impatient with women on account of their inferior intellectual development and spoke with jocular condescension of their prerogatives of irrationality,[44] she still maintained, as Comte did, that women's greatest strength lay in their feelings and that they tended to excel in affection. There is no reason to doubt that the words that Esther speaks in Felix Holt are

Eliot's own sentiments exactly, since they are echoed elsewhere in her fiction: "When a woman _feels_ purely and nobly, that _ardour_ of hers which breaks through formulas too rigorously urged on men by daily practical needs makes one of her most precious influences. She is the added impulse that shatters the stiffening crust of cautious experience."[45] Eliot speaks of Dorothea, her most favored heroine, in the same terms: "She disliked that cautious weighing of consequences instead of an ardent faith in efforts of justice and mercy, which would conquer by their emotional force" (_Mid_. p. 712).

In Eliot's view, women were creatures of feeling; feeling was the basis of morality; consequently women were a potentially superior moral influence.[46] Eliot wrote at length to Emily Davies in 1868 her opinions about this matter. She believed that the differences between men and women "are deep roots of psychological development" and that women had a "peculiar constitution for a 'special moral' influence." She asserted that history has demonstrated that and that, moreover,

> there lies just that kernel of truth in the vulgar alarm of men lest women should be "unsexed." We can no more afford to part with that exquisite type of gentleness, tenderness, possible maternity suffusing a woman's being with affectionateness, which makes what we mean by the feminine character, than we can afford to part with the human love, the mutual subjection of soul between a man and a woman--which is also a growth and revelation beginning before all history.[47]

In spite of her awareness that the education of women might involve penalties, Eliot felt that their education was necessary. She continued:

> The answer to those alarms of men about education is, to admit fully that the mutual delight of the sexes in each other must enter into the perfection of life, but to point out that complete union and sympathy can only come by women having opened to them the same store of acquired truth or beliefs as men have, so that their grounds of judgment may be as far as possible the same.

Eliot's view that women were creatures of feeling did not prevent her from believing that women should be more independent. Wollstonecraft had seen those excesses of feeling which she called sensibility as detrimental to women's independence, but for Eliot, feeling was not the morbidly quarantined sensibility of Wollstonecraft's time, the same sensibility that Austen had so dryly satirized. For whereas the sensibility Austen and Wollstonecraft described and descried was of the passive and swooning kind, the feeling that Eliot respected was an energetic and enthusiastic feeling that issued in social acts; it was feeling with a purpose. Like Comte, Eliot wanted a synthesis of affection and action.

Eliot had a Victorian, Puritan dislike of idleness, which combined with a belief in the soul's yearning for noble pursuits. Her respect for the dignity of work was absorbed into the texture of her novels; Daiches points out that no English novelist before George Eliot took men's daily occupations seriously.[48] Holloway too observes

that "for George Eliot every character has his distinctive occupational niche, and it is this which determines his nature and gives him what leverage he has upon the course of the action."[49]

It is significant that both Daiches and Holloway refer to the occupations of men in Eliot's books; her female characters have no such niche, and it is their lack of such a niche that determines the condition and fate of Maggie, Romola, Dorothea, and Gwendolen. Maggie has a "blind, unconscious yearning for something that would link together the wonderful impressions of this mysterious life, and give her soul a sense of home in it. No wonder, when there is this contrast between the outward and the inward, that painful collisions come of it."[50] It is precisely in that margin of emptiness between longing and genuine work in the world that Eliot's heroines experience their suffering.

This feminine disability--the yearning for a noble pursuit with little possibility of following it up--is most undiluted in Middlemarch, in the person of Dorothea. Though not an intellectual like Eliot, Dorothea is a woman of greater proportion and consequence than her situation permits, and her need to have something to do is reiterated throughout the book. As a newlywed, for instance, Dorothea is subjected to an oppressive gentlewoman's boredom: "'What shall I do?'" she asks Casaubon. "'Whatever

you please, my dear,'" he answers. Dorothea's predicament is touching, and meant to be, but Eliot's awareness of women's idleness is not attached to her sympathetic characters only. Rosamond too is afflicted with nothing to do; but whereas Dorothea's lack of defined purpose bottles up her aspiration and makes her more intense, Rosamond's idleness releases her more poisonous side: "She was oppressed by ennui and by that dissatisfaction which in women's minds is continually turning into a trivial jealousy, referring to no real claims, springing from no deeper passion than the vague exactingness of egoism, and yet capable of impelling action as well as speech" (Mid. p. 583).

Eliot's Middlemarch, however, is not so much a treatise on social amelioration, on the need for change in the woman's sphere, as it is a story of aspiration, a romance of work. Real work like Caleb Garth's is afforded Eliot's greatest respect, false work like Casaubon's earns her sharpest comment. Dorothea's ardor has no outlet except her "cottages," philanthropic work which was considered appropriate for women in the nineteenth century because it depended on sympathy rather than intellect, yet her aspiration does not lose any of its fervor, and is in fact the greater for having no channel.

Intellect is the channel through which Dorothea wants to drive her feeling, and lacking learning herself

she seeks to serve a scholarly husband. Her wifely devotion is disappointed because of Casaubon's withered nature and the preposterousness of his task. Although Casaubon turns out to be unworthy of her aspiration, it is rather ambiguous as to how much it is the fault of Casaubon, and how much the fault of Dorothea's aspiration. For whereas Dorothea, at a youthful peak of promise, does not wish to have a wise husband but "to be wise herself" (Mid. p. 64), her position clearly changes and she eventually lives her life through Will Ladislaw. Eliot is wary enough of the dangers of living through another's ego, and remarks with compassionate criticism: "it had been easier for her to imagine how she would devote herself to Mr. Casaubon and become wise and strong in his strength and wisdom than to conceive with that distinctness which is no longer reflection but feeling. . . . that he had an equivalent center of self whence the lights and shadows must always fall with a certain difference" (Mid. p. 208). There is no such qualification and complexity in the depiction of Dorothea's relation with Will, which is clearly meant to be a sunnier enterprise. And yet Eliot returns to this concern in the final pages of the book, as if wanting to be careful to cover this point. With a mixture of pity and irony, with an implicit hint that one cannot do much more than the society allows, she writes, "Many who knew her thought it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another and be only known

in a certain circle as a wife and mother. But no one stated exactly what else that was in her power she ought rather to have done" (Mid. p. 809).

Eliot's attitude toward women is difficult to sum up. For example it becomes apparent that despite all the qualifications of her sympathy with women, which she is careful to make in her letters and essays, her tone in her fiction is more militant and tart, emerging in full ironical force when she shows the ways in which men speak stupidly of women. Their lack of respect for women might come under the larger heading of the egoism which Eliot consistently castigated, but there is a particular pique in her rendering of it that indicates a special awareness of gender and of the commonly alleged inferior status of women. The seemingly harmless and chivalrous Sir James Chettam, for instance, is unlike the common run of men in not minding Dorothea's emanations of "intellectual consequence" because, he feels, "A man's mind--what there is of it--has always the advantage of being masculine, as the smallest birch tree is of a higher kind than the most soaring palm, and even his ignorance is of a sounder quality." Eliot excused this in this likable minor character --after having shrunk his pretensions with her humor--and takes the opportunity to show how generalized this stupidity was: "Sir James might not have originated this estimate; but a kind of Providence furnishes the limpest

personality with a little gum or starch in the form of tradition" (Mid. p. 23). To drive her point home further, Eliot has Sir James bring Dorothea a tiny Maltese puppy which, he says, "ladies are usually fond of." Dorothea responds with a little lecture that applies to dogs and women both: "It is painful for me to see these creatures that are bred merely as pets. . . . all the petting that is given them does not make them happy. They are too helpless; their lives are too frail. A weasel or a mouse that gets its own living is more interesting. . . . These creatures are parasitic" (Mid. pp. 31-32).

In Middlemarch it is not only the men who are unsympathetic toward independent women. Mrs. Garth, hearing from Mr. Garth about Dorothea's insightfulness, says, "'But womanly, I hope' . . . half suspecting that Mrs. Casaubon might not hold the true principle of subordination" (Mid. p. 553). Celia and Rosamond are also women of a very different kind from Dorothea, and they insist on it, but beneath their docility and domesticity lie strongly manipulative natures. Or as Celia puts it, "of course men know best about everything, except what women know better" (Mid. p. 714). Rosamond, whose charm takes her a long way, has "that victorious obstinacy which never wastes its energy in impetuous resistance. What she liked to do was to her the right thing, and all her cleverness was directed to getting the means of doing it" (Mid. p. 566).

Eliot was extremely sharp-tongued in her portrayal of pretty women (as if from a Puritan suspicion of the lure of the ornamental), so much so that at times the calm authority of her tone is weakened. Lydgate's attraction to pretty women only and his belief that they should function primarily as adornment is reprehensible to Eliot, and as a result the punishments he endures in his marriage to Rosamond are somewhat deserved. In the moral scheme of Middlemarch it is the great flaw of egoism not to recognize other human beings in the fullness of their personalities and natures. In one passage Eliot speaks of this directly, her humaneness dovetailing with a special concern of contemporary feminists:

> We are not afraid of telling over and over again how a man comes to fall in love with a woman and be wedded to her, or else be fatally parted from her. Is it due to excess of poetry or of stupidity that we are never weary of describing what King James called a woman's "makdom and her fairnesse," never weary of listening to the twanging of the old troubadour strings, and are comparatively uninterested in that other kind of "makdom and fairnesse" which must be wooed with industrious thought and patient renunciation of small desires? (Mid. p. 143).

Yet there are other things wrong with Rosamond beside her prettiness, and it is her dominance of will and her deficiency of feeling that are her most galling attributes. Rosamond sins against her womanhood and her humanity by not fulfilling her function as a vessel of feeling; she is, in fact, a brake on Lydgate's ardor. Though indeed his expectations are bred in a medium of male egoism, he

eventually looks with less illusion at the "blank, unreflecting surface her mind presented to his ardour for the more impersonal ends of his profession and his scientific study, an ardour which he had fancied that the ideal wife must somehow worship as sublime, though not in the least knowing why (Mid. p. 568)." Celia too has a neutrality of manner, far less troublesome than Rosamond's yet also a bit chilling: "Celia was not impulsive: what she had to say could wait and came from her always with the same quiet, staccato evenness. When people talked with energy and emphasis she watched their faces and features merely" (Mid. p. 34). Celia functions in relation to Dorothea much as Elinor behaves with Marianne: "She had an indirect mode of making her negative wisdom tell upon Dorothea and calling her down from her rhapsodic mood by reminding her that people were staring, not listening" (Mid. p. 34). The difference between Austen and Eliot is, of course, that in the latter's portrait of sisters of sense and sensibility, the scheme of values is reversed.

It is Dorothea's feeling that makes her nobler than those around her, and which makes life with the emotionally desiccated Casaubon so difficult. Eliot unmistakably conveys that Dorothea's emotional capacity is a function of her femininity. In a remarkable passage, Eliot explains that Dorothea would have seen her first husband's rigidity

less quickly if he had encouraged her

> to pour forth her girlish and womanly feeling [and listened] with the delight of tenderness and understanding to all the little histories which made up her experience. . . . or if she could have fed her affection with those childlike caresses which are the bent of every sweet woman who has begun by showering kisses on the hard pate of her bald doll, creating a happy soul within that woodenness from the wealth of her own love. . . . With all her yearning to know what was afar from her and to be widely benignant, she had ardour enough for what was near to have kissed Mr. Casaubon's coat-sleeve or to have caressed his shoe-latchet if he would have made any other sign of acceptance than pronouncing her, with his unfailing propriety, to be of a most affectionate and truly feminine nature, indicating at the same time by politely reaching a chair for her that he regarded these manifestations as rather crude and startling (Mid. p. 195).

Whereas the excesses of feeling she manifests are highly disturbing to Casaubon, it is her emotional quality that endears Will Ladislaw to her: "She was not coldly clever and indirectly satirical, but adorably simple and full of feeling" (Mid. p. 205).

Dorothea's feeling is both her weakness and her strength; it makes her vulnerable yet influential. Faced with Casaubon she responds much as a Doris Lessing character, one hundred years later, might: "She was humiliated to find herself a mere victim of feeling, as if she could know nothing except through that medium: all her strength was scattered in fits of agitation, of struggle, of despondency, and then again in visions of more complete renunciation, transforming all hard conditions into duty" (Mid. p. 195). Yet the vulnerability that makes her

resonant with feeling is transformed as she matures into an almost sanctifying emanation like that of Woolf's Mrs. Ramsay: "There are natures in which, if they love us, we are conscious of having a sort of baptism and consecration. . . . Dorothea's nature was of that kind; her own passionate faults lay along the easily counted open channels of her ardent character. . . . That simplicity of hers, holding up an ideal for others in her believing conception of them, was one of the great powers of her womanhood" (Mid. p. 748). Lydgate himself, after a conversation with her, feels that "this young creature has a heart large enough for the Virgin Mary." He marvels, "She seems to have what I never saw in any woman before--a fountain of friendship towards men, a man can make a friend of her" (Mid. pp. 745-746).

The possibility of a woman being a friend of men in a novel is an important departure from the usual romantic devices of nineteenth-century fiction in which the heroine is significant only in her exclusive relation with a lover or husband. Dorothea too is subject to this pairing device, yet Eliot resists the pairing with Lydgate which our most ordinary and banal reading habits wish would occur, and allows Dorothea to function on her own, at least for a time. It is clear that Dorothea is set apart from all the other women in Middlemarch, and she was recognized by at least one contemporary reader as the Coming Woman.[51]

Eliot's last two novels were written at a time when feminism was becoming formalized, emerging from individualized protests into the campaigns of the 1860's and 70's. Although Eliot's attitude towards women's rights was conservative enough for her to doubt that women should have the vote, her sympathies were often parallel with those of the feminists, and _Middlemarch_ and _Daniel Deronda_ show a sharpened consciousness of women's difficulties. These novels explore the problem of women's aspirations and the enforced narrowness of their concerns with a tenacity not evident in the earlier books, and Gwendolen, Eliot's last heroine, is issued a fate far harsher, and to modern readers, more probable, than the melodramatic demise of Maggie or the compromising finale of _Middlemarch_.

Daniel Deronda is not, of course, a book about feminism. Its title character is not a woman, and if there is an equivalent in _Daniel Deronda_ to Dorothea it is Deronda, with his similar name, and not Gwendolen. Yet Eliot's last novel, her finest next to _Middlemarch_, bears out her concern with women and with the doctrine of sympathy which had its root in Shaftesburian sensibility.

Daniel Deronda has as its underlying scheme an agon between enthusiasm and inertia. Eliot takes the terms of antagonism set up in _Middlemarch_ between Dorothea and Casaubon, Lydgate and Rosamond--the forces of ardor versus the emotional blankness of restraint--and turns them into

cultural characteristics. In Deronda the Jews, who look forward to their Messiah and to the resettlement of their homeland, are in Eliot's words, the "heirs of enthusiasm." The English, living out the slow demise of aristocratic attitudes, are noticably torpid in comparison. This contrast is set up so assiduously and so frequently that it supersedes all the other thematic aspects and subjects in the novel. Zionism itself is a minor and specialized theme compared to the reiteration of the importance of strong feeling.

Comparison between the English and Jewish worlds is meant to inspire in the reader a preference for ardor over indifference and understatement and to promote an awareness of feeling as an index and component of moral health. England--depicted as a culture whose strenth is running out and whose quality of feeling is flabby in texture--can be injected with vitality not by any specific political reform but by embracing the example of other cultures whose concerns are more invigorating and sublime.

The sharpest figures in this contrast are the aristocratic Grandcourt and the messianic Mordecai. They are not brought into conflict but exist as what were clearly to Eliot negative and positive extremes. Grandcourt is perhaps Eliot's only truly evil character, that "antipode of enthusiasm called a man of the world," inferior even to Richardson's infernal gentleman, Lovelace, in that

he does not extend any energy comparable to the latter's plotting. Grandcourt's ingenuities are sly and deep, but sluggish, and they are not impeded by any virtuous heroine like Clarissa or reformed by the magnanimity of a Dorothea. Instead he meets Gwendolen, whose consciousness is at times, if more amateurishly, as clandestine as his own.

Just how apocalyptic Eliot's scheme of social feeling was in Daniel Deronda is indicated by the fact that Grandcourt is envisioned by her as the devil. His coolness, which in the century before might have betokened a classical skepticism, is seen as Mephistophelean. As Houghton explains, writing of Carlyle's hatred of Voltaire:

> . . . the Romantic reaction meant the reaffirmation of those solemn and noble and worthy elements in human nature . . . which were denied by the critical intellect but affirmed by the responsive heart and the sympathetic imagination.
>
> Mephistopheles . . . had the "shrewd, all-informed intellect" of an attorney; it could contradict but it could not affirm. The need for positive and constructive attitudes, and intellectual earnestness united with enthusiasm to form a common front against negativism--and specifically, in many cases, against dilettantism, since the man of the world (Mephistopheles "has the manners of a gentleman" and "knows the world") is at once indifferent to truth and cynical about human nature.[52]

Eliot's association of a negative attitude toward feeling with the devil himself as a man of the world is epitomized in Grandcourt, yet her mistrust of urbanity in Deronda is not resolved in a return to the humble folk of Adam Bede. Rather she turns toward the specially endowed Deronda, a Cambridge gentleman with a special mission, who finds

himself a member of a people even more chosen than the English gentry, and whose mentor is Mordecai, a figure whose dialogue is of such sublime enthusiasm that he burns the brush as Eliot paints him.

In Daniel Deronda extreme feeling is not as tightly harnessed to aspiration and social consequence as it is in Middlemarch. There is in Mordecai an excess of feeling that seems to blur and devour Eliot's characterization of him, and in Deronda himself there is a lack of focus, an aura of contradictory feeling. Like Mackenzie's Man of Feeling (whose last name matches Dorothea's maiden name), he is responsive, and like his close cousin Dorothea he is full of ardor and yearning; like Dorothea, he is maternally overpraised and petted by the author. Yet his actions belie the author's comments about him. Alleged to be full of warmth, sympathy, and fellow-feeling, he holds himself rigid, does not like to be touched, and evinces a snobbishness which may serve to make his acceptance of his Jewish destiny a greater surprise to the reader but which only drains our belief in his virtue.

The bridge between Deronda's English background and his ultimate Zionist mission is meant to be his capacity for sympathy. He is the Shaftesburian benevolent gentleman, open to all. As Carroll points out, he has a "disease of sympathy."[53] Like Dorothea, the strength of his feeling verges on excess; like her, his capacity to

enter into other people's feelings, and his influence, above all on Gwendolen, are supreme. As representative of the apex of Eliot's scheme of virtue, Deronda is insistently idealized by his creator. Sherbo tells us that "in a sentimental play it is usually sufficient for the dramatist to state enough times that a particular character is really good at heart for the audience to accept him as basically good, despite visual evidence to the contrary."[54] This is precisely the method, though it is perhaps less than a method, which Eliot uses in Daniel Deronda. Deronda's scruples, his excellence, the claims for his sensibilities are so worried by Eliot that he becomes threadbare, as impalpable as Felix Holt.

Although Eliot's position is still essentially a philanthropic one, one in which the social affections are paramount, she allows into her last novel a greater degree of negative emotion than in any of her previous novels, and she dips more deeply into the subconscious. There are still the pedagogic gestures, of the kind that Dorothea makes toward Rosamond at the end of Middlemarch and that Deronda makes toward Gwendolen, yet there is new awareness of and fascination with emotion and influence of a destructive sort.

Set against the idealized simplicity of Deronda himself is the psychological complexity of Gwendolen. She, like Romola, is tyrannized by her husband, but unlike Romola

she is not merely a virtuous victim but a partial collaborator in her own captivity. Yet her pride is cut down by her husband's ability to outwit her; her helplessness in the face of his domination is abetted by society, which provides her with nothing plausible to do in order to escape him. Gwendolen is a continuation of the Richardsonian tradition of the woman as social underdog--though she starts out with a hubris that doesn't suggest this--a tradition which in Richardson's time was based on the hardships undergone by eighteenth-century women in a changing social order.[55]

Daniel Deronda is, like Middlemarch, a romance of aspiration. This romance is, however, lined with a realistic portrait of the pathology of leisure. Gwendolen is subject to the flights and swervings of her consciousness because she is not otherwise employed; she is like a nightmarish paradigm of the idle women both Wollstonecraft and Eliot deplored. Neither, however, is she sentimentally employed: she is not the Comteian heroine whose virtuous influence substitutes for her shrunken public role. Because she lacks this large and un-self-conscious influence she must try to wield power directly, to be manipulative, as the minor, pretty women of Middlemarch are. In this way she transgresses against what both Wollstonecraft and Eliot would have seen as the modesty of her womanhood. She also fails at her manipulations and is left to live in

a limbo of anxiety.

It is Gwendolen's anxiety, the morbid slant to her consciousness, that makes her a modern heroine. In her slight recoiling from men she resembles Hardy's Sue Bridehead, and the recoiling is noticeable only because she is distant enough from the prescribed Victorian attitudes to make them seem unnatural. The anonymity of her fears and uncertainties has the taint of the modern consciousness. Like Clarissa Harlowe, whose namesake she almost is, she has a substratum of morbidity and melancholy. But Eliot's psychological method with regard to Gwendolen is sophisticated and agnostic; the irregularities of Gwendolen's consciousness cannot be attributed to or absorbed in Christian transcendence; what Gwendolen needs is a home on earth.

Thomson writes that in the Westminster Review of 1864 there appeared an article which remarked, "The great social difficulty in England today is the relation between men and women. The principal difference between ourselves and our ancestors is that they took society as they found it while we are self-conscious and perplexed. We see the difficulties and dangers but we do not see the way out of them. The institution of marriage might almost seem just now to be upon its trial."[56] In the 1860's there emerged, along with the changing consciousness of women, complications of the old order which Gwendolen is the first heroine

of Eliot's to represent. Evidence of this complication is the fact of Gwendolen's denouement: she is not taken by sudden death, or given a merciful if melodramatic exit, as Maggie is. Nor, even more important is she permitted to live through her husband in a mellowing compromise, as Dorothea is. She is deprived of the two possibilities, marriage and meaningful work, which would give her a place, and she is consigned to a limbo which only Deronda's rectitude illuminates. With regard to women Daniel Deronda is a more radical statement than Middlemarch: Eliot is enough of a feminist sympathizer to want to highlight, through Gwendolen, the fact that women have few social roles available, that those available may be unsatisfactory, and that women can be made irremediably unhappy by this betrayal of the fulfillment promised to them when they are members of the middle and upper middle class.

Gwendolen, like Dorothea, makes a marriage with coldness, but she is not rewarded by a second relationship of ardor. Indeed, Gwendolen's own emotional make-up has the frigidity and tonelessness of feeling which emerges in characters in the nineteenth-century novel.[57] Gwendolen's sensibility is complex: she is cold, yet susceptible, fearful, and sensitive. She works through from mere Gothic susceptibility to true moral feeling, in a reverse of the evolution of sensibility that took place in the eighteenth century. In this, in fact, resides her virtue: for Eliot,

the minimum requirement of a potentially morally sound person is that he/she be educable, and Gwendolen submits to the teaching of Deronda, who is her mentor, and her moral superior. Austen's Emma is also brought from selfishness to maturity with the aid of a male mentor whom she eventually marries. The world of Deronda is more fragmented than this, and Gwendolen is deprived of this completion and reward, a deprivation we experience all the more sharply for knowing Emma's good fortune.

In the psychological novel, character is destiny, and Gwendolen is destined for a conclusion which seems appropriate, if harsh. Deronda, on the other hand, is placed in a world of old-fashioned melodrama, mystery, and romance, and the theme of mother-discovered, religion-recovered embroils him in another sort of narrative altogether. The rewards he receives, like the preferred male child in Eliot's family of characters, seem undeserved and unearned. His aspiration, typical of men in the nineteenth century as well as women, finds an unlikely goal: like all the virtuous men in Eliot's novels, and unlike the women, virtuous or not, he finds a niche--his Zionism--and it is a niche reserved for a man. Deronda resembles Eliot's heroines in many ways, with the notable exception that he has a vocation to match his alleged enthusiasm. For the Zionist role Eliot needed a hero, though it is possible to feel when reading Deronda that she would have been more

comfortable with a heroine.

In her letters Eliot referred to Romola as a romance,[58] and it is, just as Silas Marner is a fable. In Daniel Deronda Eliot embarked on a new approach, mixing a moral romance with psychological realism. It is not true that, as Virginia Woolf remarks, the only romance Eliot allowed herself was with the past, for Deronda is a romance of futurity, of great--nay, sublime--expectations. It is this sublimity for which Eliot had to invent a language, and it is a sublimity that rises to the top of her rational style with an excess of richness.

There had been precedents for a mixed style by Eliot's time, though one can also speculate on how Eliot would have profited by separating devices such as Lessing used in The Golden Notebook. In The Fool of Quality, for example, a novel used by Wesley as a text of instruction, realism was combined with sentimental idealism, along the same unintended lines that Milton had combined them in Paradise Lost--by being accurate about evil but sentimentalizing the good. Similarly, in Daniel Deronda, in the side of the novel that reveres feeling--the Jewish romance--Eliot shows a thrust for completeness, an unwillingness to allow the reader to make up her own mind. Enthused about the Jews, and apprehensive perhaps about how they would be received by the public, Eliot's intellectual competence, her distancing by means of wit and irony, slackens under

the pressure of her vested emotional interest.

Eliot's style of clarification and explanation was at odds with that obscurity which Burke had recommended as a condition of the sublime. Her ethical insights have a closure which requires a language only plain enough to make them clear. Yet Eliot attempts to escape the rational, and the coldness of intellect, in Daniel Deronda, in a number of ways. For Mordecai she invents a strained, distorted, apocalyptic lexicon to fit the rare, specialized, and passionate nature of his commitment and the invisible nature of his goals. Eliot also tries to include the unconscious in this book--as in Gwendolen's guilt about Grandcourt's drowning--and hints at dark sexuality, illicitness, and the seamier side of things. Furthermore, many of the Jewish characters whom she favors (as well as Miss Arrowpoint) are musical; this is a fidelity to cultural fact, perhaps, but it is also an elaboration of Eliot's assertion that music is the quickest way to feeling, a means of bypassing the intellect.

The discord between the realistic and romantic modes in Daniel Deronda shows a straining between Eliot's rational style and her philosophy of feeling. We cannot divide Daniel Deronda into two novels as F. R. Leavis once suggested[59]--if only because Deronda stands with a foot in both worlds like the muscle uniting Siamese twins--but we cannot pretend that the parts of the book do not strain against one another.

Eliot takes into account the social changes around her, and uses her nostalgia in the service of a utopian Zionist future rather than to capture a more palatable English past. In her optimistic desire to unite ardor and action she created a hero with the emotional features of a heroine but with a man's license to move in the world. Gwendolen, the potential heroine, is thus displaced from her level in the sexual hierarchy of emotion and becomes an embodiment of Eliot's pessimism about the present. Gwendolen occupies her own plane of reality: there is a precision in the psychology of her characterization that sets her forward, both in time and in novelistic dimension, more modern than Deronda because of her anxiety, her loneliness, her mixed character. She cannot find herself outside of society--as no Eliot character can--but she can lose herself there, replete with _anomie_; her society is not as intricate and reciprocal a webbing as that of Middlemarch. How much Eliot, in her pessimism, saw her as the Coming Woman, we cannot know, but Gwendolen is a prefiguration of the twentieth-century anxious heroine, as well as a direct and literal ancestor of the tyrannized Isabel Archer and a precursor of Wharton's lonely Lily Bart.

In her essay on George Eliot Virginia Woolf claimed that Eliot lacked romantic intensity,[104] and it is true that the unyielding and obsessive voice which marks that quality is not one which we readily associate with the

careful moral adjustments and nuances of Eliot's fiction. Eliot did value fervor and intensity in her characters, and moderation is, in fact, in her scheme of values, a sign of bad faith or an excuse for comedy. Yet the fact that there is nothing, in Eliot's view, that does not have moral significance, makes for a closed system in which feeling is included as social ethic rather than as--as it tends to be in the Romantics--a definition of individual freedom and an escape from socialization.

The enlargement of the sympathies was, for Eliot, a form of moral education, and in this she is in the Shaftesburian tradition and also of her time. As Houghton observes, in the nineteenth century "the cult of enthusiasm appears in a number of related forms. The central one is a theory of moral education."[60] For Eliot, ardor is imbued with efficacy: "One can hardly insist too much, in the present stage of thinking, on the efficacy of feeling in stimulating to ardent co-operation," she wrote.[61] Feeling, moreover, is a clarifying mode: Eliot believes with Hume that morality is perceived most clearly through feeling, and the heart is for her a means to understanding, of making known and familiar what cannot be comprehended otherwise. The efficacy of feeling comes about not only through understanding but by the influence it carries, for it can effect a moral sensitizing in others which is more noble, subtle, and successful than a program of instruction, a parchment code.

The idea of influence was important to Eliot, for it was a living proof that even our smallest acts have consequences. It was, moreover, a province suited to women, who were prohibited from implementing their social desires in more direct ways, but who were seen, in the nineteenth century, as emanating a force that could be very persuasive in the private sphere. The power of influence, perhaps as a direct inheritance from Eliot, appears in post-Victorian fiction as a pivot for whole novels, most notably in Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway and Mrs. Ramsay (both Victorian women) and Forster's Mrs. Wilcox and Mrs. Moore.

It is likely that Eliot formulated or sensed her relation to her readers in terms of the moral influence she exercised over them, obligating her to a fullness of human personality in her narrative role that includes not only magnanimity and tenderness but irony and relentless insight. She is exemplary in showing real feeling for her characters as she would have her readers, no doubt, show for real persons in the world. But further, she implies a feeling for her readers as well, in her caring instructiveness, in her clarity of moral evaluation, as if she takes an interest in the reader's salvation and well-being, a quality that in a lesser Victorian writer would seem insipid and redundant, a quality that is, on the other hand, entirely missing in the permissive objectivity of modern writing.

Eliot saw that sympathy, particularly for women, was not enough, that feeling unattached to the larger demands of the intellect, was dangerous and debilitating. But she did not, on that account, underestimate the value of sympathy, or ambivalently regard it as the concern of laggards, as did Virginia Woolf.[62] Her defense of feeling, her case for sensibility, is all the more telling because she, as an unusual woman, had other options, could live otherwise. Her preference for a "look of sincerity" over an elaborate argument was all the more forceful because she herself was capable of the elaborate argument.

It is impossible to speak of Eliot without referring to her head <u>and</u> heart, and the richness of both and the conceptual balance which she managed between them is one of her most extraordinary features. Mary Wollstonecraft's words about one of her own female contemporaries are suitable enough to Eliot to form a conclusion: "I will not call hers a masculine understanding because I admit of no such an arrogant assumption of reason; but I contend that it was a sound one, and that her judgment, the matured fruit of a profound thinking, was a proof that a woman can acquire judgment, in the full extent of the word. . . . Yet sympathy and benevolence give an interest to her sentiments, and that vital heat to arguments, which forces the reader to weigh them."[63]

Footnotes

[1] Defined by F. R. Leavis in The Great Tradition (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1954).

[2] Middlemarch (New York: New American Library, 1964), p. 66. Dorothea remembers, "When we were coming home from Lausanne my uncle took us to hear the great organ at Freiberg, and it made me sob." Her uncle interjects, "That kind of thing is not healthy, my dear." All subsequent references to Middlemarch (Mid.) will be included in the text.

[3] Basil Willey, Nineteenth Century Studies (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1950), p. 241. Willey points out that "it was George Eliot's constant objection to evangelicalism, that in its emphasis upon the will and acts of an implacable Deity it extinguished human love and service. . . . On the other hand, George Eliot admires the evangelical awakener if his gospel is really constructive, if it is informed with the spirit of love."

[4] Gordon Haight, ed., The George Eliot Letters (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1954), xlii. Haight writes, "Without her intimate knowledge of the Evangelical mind George Eliot would have lacked part of the experience on which her wide sympathy was founded."

[5] George Williamson, Seventeenth Century Contexts (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 217.

[6] Haight, Letters, I, ix.

[7] Willey, p. 228.

[8] Haight, Letters, III, 439.

[9] Haight, Letters, I, 34.

[10] Haight, Letters, II, 423.

[11] Haight, Letters, VII, 342.

[12] Haight, Letters, III, 382.

[13] Haight, Letters, V, 437.

[14] Haight, Letters, VII, 261.

[15] One wonders whether it is appropriate to connect Mill's crucial conversion to feeling with his later sympathy for the condition of women, as expressed in On the Subjection of Women.

[16] Thomas Pinney, ed. Essays of George Eliot (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1963), p. 9.

[17] Haight, Letters, I, 93.

[18] Mario Praz, The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1956), p. 374.

[19] Haight, Letters, II, 404.

[20] Quoted by Ella Adams Moore in A Moment Each Day with George Eliot (Chicago: The Madison Book Co., 1903), July 23rd entry.

[21] Haight, Letters, I, 92.

[22] Haight, Letters, III, 111.

[23] Pinney, Essays, p. 126.

[24] Ibid., p. 379.

[25] Ibid., p. 166.

[26] Frank Kermode, Romantic Image (New York: Random House, 1964), p. 148.

[27] Adam Bede (Edinburgh and London: Blackwood and Sons, No date), p. 320.

[28] N. N. Feltes, "George Eliot and the Unified Sensibility," PMLA, 79 (1964), 134.

[29] Pinney, Essays, p. 412.

[30] David Daiches, "The Return of George Eliot," The Nation, June 9, 1962, p. 518.

[31] Virginia Woolf, "George Eliot," The Common Reader (New York: Harcourt, 1953), p. 166.

[32] Noel Annan, "Heroine," The New York Review of Books, January 2, 1969, p. 4.

[33] Haight, Letters, III, 106.

[34] Germaine Greer, The Female Eunuch (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), p. 328.

[35] Haight, Letters, II, 15.

[36] Haight, Letters, III, 167.

[37] Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1967), p. 124.

[38] Haight, Letters, II, 454.

[39] Ibid., 174.

[40] Haight, Letters, I, 66.

[41] Haight, Letters II, 207.

[42] Ibid., 227.

[43] Haight, Letters, IV, 39. "The better education of women is one of the objects about which I have no doubt, and I shall rejoice if this idea of a college can be carried out."

[44] Haight, <u>Letters</u>, I, 65, 89.

[45] <u>Felix Holt</u>, (Edinburgh and London, William Blackwood, no date), p. 313.

[46] When Dorothea tells Will of her personal belief in unselfishness, Eliot places in her mouth a metaphor which is perhaps not accidentally feminine: "by desiring what is perfectly good, even when we don't quite know what it is and cannot do what we would, we are part of the Divine Power against evil--widening the skirts of light and making the struggle with darkness narrower" (<u>Mid</u>. p. 381).

[47] Haight, <u>Letters</u>, IV, 468.

[48] David Daiches, <u>A Critical History of English Literature</u> (New York: The Ronald Press Co.), p. 1068.

[49] John Holloway, <u>The Victorian Sage</u> (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1962), p. 118.

[50] <u>The Mill on the Floss</u> (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood, no date), p. 369.

[51] Haight, <u>Letters</u>, V, 388n.

[52] Walter Houghton, <u>The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870</u> (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1957), p. 298.

[53] David Carroll, "The Unity of Daniel Deronda," Essays in Criticism, IX, p. 378.

[54] Arthur Sherbo, English Sentimental Drama (East Lansing: Michigan State Univ. Press, 1957), p. 32.

[55] As Ian Watt points out in The Rise of the Novel (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1965), p. 148.

[56] Patricia Thomson, The Victorian Heroine, A Changing Ideal: 1837-1873 (London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1956), p. 89.

[57] See Mary McCarthy, "One Touch of Nature," The New Yorker, January 24, 1970, p. 49.

[58] Haight, Letters, IV, 17.

[59] Leavis, The Great Tradition, p. 150.

[60] Houghton, p. 265.

[61] Pinney, Essays, p. 450.

[62] Woolf, p. 170.

[63] Wollstonecraft, p. 164.

CHAPTER IV

VIRGINIA WOOLF: SENSIBILITY AND THE SUBLIME

When Jane Austen wrote Sense and Sensibility she reversed the values which women, in the general mind, were supposed to represent. Ranging herself on the side of reason in her ethically secure parody of eighteenth-century sensibility, Austen firmly exempted herself from the kind of sentimental literature which ladies, being creatures of feeling, were supposed to produce. The bifurcation between sense and sensibility and between reason and feeling which Austen delineated so vividly in her novel, has bedeviled a good number of women writers in subsequent centuries precisely because of their awareness that women are regarded as especially susceptible to feeling and supposedly fitted to perpetuate emotion, whether in life or in art.

Because Austen was the only major female novelist in England before 1850, later women writers have, not surprisingly, seen themselves in relation to her with the kind of feeling, whether of affection or irritation, that is often reserved for members of one's own family. Charlotte Bronte's well-known objections were based on a dissatisfaction with Austen's common sense and its predictable limitations. "The passions," she wrote of her predecessor, "are perfectly unknown to her; she rejects even a speaking

acquaintance with that stormy sisterhood. Even to the feelings she vouchsafes no more than an occasional graceful but distant recognition. . . . Jane Austen was a complete and most sensible lady, but a very incomplete and rather insensible (not senseless) woman."[1]

Virginia Woolf, who regarded Charlotte Bronte, along with Austen, Emily Bronte, and George Eliot, as one of the four great women writers who preceded her, tended toward the same end of the continuum as Charlotte Bronte, though her estimate of Austen is more tempered by objectivity, or perhaps softened by an admiration which she makes clear in her essay on that author.[2] Still, Woolf's nonfiction is spotted by allusions to Austen which, added up, thicken into a broad band of resistance. Woolf writes, for instance, in the Writer's Diary, "I had rather write in my own way . . . than be . . . Jane Austen over again."[3] Austen might at times be a model for realism,[4] but Woolf's basic affinities lay elsewhere: in an essay in The Moment Woolf calls her predecessor "a great writer . . . but . . . I would rather not find myself alone in the room with her. . . . On the other hand Charlotte Bronte . . . so vehement, irrational, and caustic, would be far easier to know, easier, it seems to me, to love."[5]

Even a novelist of sensibility as mannerist as Mrs. Radcliffe had an appeal which Austen did not have: Woolf wrote to Lytton Strachey that "Jane Austen might have

done worse than take a leaf from Radcliffe's book,"[6] and she asserted elsewhere that Austen did not have "the impulses of a poet."[7] Austen even makes her way into Woolf's first novel in which she is described by the sympathetic heroine as "well, so like a tight plait,"[8] and is admired by an unsympathetic male character as "incomparably the greatest female writer we possess. . . . and for this reason: she does not attempt to write like a man. Every other woman does; on that account, I don't read 'em."[9]

The vexing question of whether or not a woman did or should write like a man was one which Woolf addressed with clarity and passion in A Room of One's Own and in several shorter essays. Worried at times that her own work would be considered sentimental, insubstantial, feminine in the worst sense, she nevertheless made a point of saying that one must not bend one's work to such considerations--either to resist or to realize critical expectations that were determined by gender. Aware of how small the women's tradition in fiction was, she was not willing to jettison any of the possibilities. Her writing emerged from a determination to be herself, and to face whatever that entailed.

Woolf's intentions are not, of course, to be confused with the effect of her writing, and her work has been seen, with varying degrees of appreciation, as "feminine" and

even as "imprisoned in the feminine," whether or not she meant it to be.[10] A more specific literary counterpart of this is the view of her as a writer of sensibility, a category traditionally congruent with the allegedly feminine gifts of intuition, delicate feeling, and fine awareness of nuance and atmosphere. The fact that she sought an androgynous vision which would not be muddled by considerations of gender does not mean that she rejected those gifts of hers which others regarded as feminine, nor does it alter the degree to which she is a novelist of sensibility, a novelist for whom finely nuanced and intense feeling was the only natural and certain criterion for evaluating experience.

Many critics refer casually to her capacity for sensibility,her ability to capture moments of sensibility, the way in which she produces in readers an extension of sensibility, but it was William Troy who most insistently defined her as a writer of this category, and to her disadvantage. In an essay that is as punitive as it is outdated he observes that Woolf's characters "are unable to <u>function</u> anywhere but on the single plane of the sensibility."[11] Troy poses a dichotomy between "real" experience and experience received through intuition and emotion, and faults Woolf's characters for attending only to the latter, an irresponsibility in his view, and one that is elitist and uncondonable. There is no need to dispute his classification

of Woolf; the present essay, on the other hand, is an implicit refutation of the values he attaches to that classification.

In her person, Woolf was markedly appropriate as a writer of sensibility. Somewhat frail as a child, she was, in her adulthood, subject to a physical and emotional vulnerability that was a breeding ground for her bouts of madness. Leonard Woolf, she wrote in her diary, accused her "of sensibility verging on insanity."[12] She embodied, periodically, that image which rationalists often fear, of feeling become so intense that it turns into uncontrollable irrationality. As Foucault put it, there is a point of view for which "the possibility of madness is . . . implicit in the very phenomenon of passion."[13] She herself was aware of that view, mocking in Orlando the philosopher who draws the conclusion that "all extremes of feeling are allied to madness."[14] Apart from her extreme and well-defined periods of madness, Woolf manifested a melancholy that was not unlike that of her predecessor in sensibility, Samuel Richardson, and at other times she succumbed to a debility that recalls the invalidism of Proust, whose work she valued deeply. She was not an invalid, however, and Quentin Bell, in his biography, makes a point of her personal vigor in order to correct the misconceptions that unintentionally characterized her as one in her lifetime.[15] She was, rather,

more like her description of Proust's work than like Proust himself: "The thing about Proust is his combination of the utmost sensibility with the utmost tenacity. He searches out these butterfly shades to the last grain. He is tough as catgut and as evanescent as a butterfly's bloom."[16]

The style of Woolf's susceptibility was not socially dictated as it might have been in the latter part of the eighteenth century--her fainting was frightening and hardly fashionable--[17] nor was she bedridden in the passive Victorian manner, though she at times had to take to her bed with the "amphibious headache" that foreshadowed more serious psychic symptoms. Sensibility at the time she wrote was no longer a fashion of personality or a means to virtue as it was when Shaftesbury was casting his influence over England; Proust and James and Woolf herself had lifted sensitivity out of the foolish accoutrements that had eventually come to surround its display in fiction, and made finesse of feeling, extreme emotional awareness, and the ability to be overwhelmed by experience into a serious engagement with life.

The private emotions of Virginia Woolf which have been made common knowledge as a result of the publication of part of her diary are characterized by an intensity and extremeness--of joy, and more often of suffering--which reveal the "notorious fault" she confessed to Lytton Strachey,

with an irony made more apologetic, no doubt, for the benefit of his skepticism--"my unfortunate romanticism--I can't help it."[18] Her process of writing was characterized by an excitement which sometimes heralded psychic disaster but which seems more often like a rapture that is noble, authentic, and inspiring to anyone who reads of it. In 1923 she wrote, "Often now I have to control my excitement--as if I were pushing through a screen; or as if something beat fiercely close to me. . . . It is a general sense of the poetry of existence that overcomes me."[19] Her awareness that in these extreme states lay the poetry of existence as well as the dangers of madness led her to mock, with a savagery unmatched elsewhere in her work (except perhaps in Three Guineas) the inadequate and consequently destructive common sense of the kinds of doctors who, according to Leonard Woolf, urged her to practice "equanimity."[20] In Mrs. Dalloway she shows an antipathy to such doctors which undoubtedly derived from her own experience. Later, she made the distinction, in speaking of the psychological novel, between the "truth of the psychoanalyst" and "the truth of imagination."[21] Though she emphasized repeatedly the role of the unconscious in her own process of composition, she was not interested in the science, then in its infancy, that took a tool to it and of necessity separated it from the faculty of imagination.

Woolf, in her writings, used the word "sensibility" fairly often, with much of the same variety that characterizes it in the modern lexicon. "When I write I'm merely a sensibility," she said of herself in her diary in 1922;[22] and she saw others in the same terms: "Writers," she wrote, "are infinitely sensitive; each writer has a different sensibility."[23] Captain Marryat "for all his sturdiness, had that verbal sensibility which at the touch of a congenial thought lets fly a rocket";[24] and Mme. de Sevigné inevitably, her admiration for her daughter being curbed, "with her exacerbated sensibility, should feel hurt."[25]

Woolf thought of sensibility as a quality of receptivity, responsiveness, extreme sensitivity, and, in at least one instance, a form of sympathy leading to the good of society which allies it with the earlier meaning it had for Shaftesbury. Woolf wrote "the practice of art, far from making the artist out of touch with his kind, rather increases his sensibility. It breeds in him a feeling for the passions and needs of mankind in the mass which the citizen whose duty it is to work for a particular country or for a particular party has no time and perhaps no need to cultivate."[26] Woolf was also aware of the exaggerated form of sensibility developed in the eighteenth century, when sensibility grew from an ethical responsiveness to others into an empathy mingled with self-indulgence. Woolf wrote of Horace Walpole in <u>The Death of the Moth</u>

that "at the mere threat of Conway's death, Horace was all of a twitter--his nerves were 'so aspen.' . . . Cole replies. . . . 'It is a misfortune to have so much sensibility in one's nature as you are endued with: sufficient are one's own distresses without the additional encumbrance of those of one's friends.'"[27]

Because Woolf was endowed with a sense of humor she was aware not only of the serious disadvantages of being 'so aspen' but of the point at which such sensitivity became ludicrous. The man who can "feel a rose leaf through his mattress" is, in Orlando, a figure of fun,[28] and in The Voyage Out, Mrs. Dalloway is not meant to be much admired for the precious and picayune sensitivity which drives her to say things like "I'd rather have my head cut off than wear flannel next the skin."[29]

Not so humorous, however, was the amplified danger when "abounding sensibility, that unquenchable sympathy," was attached to a woman's life. Reviewing the letters of Lady Augusta Stanley, Woolf asserted:

> inevitably the power of sympathy, when so highly developed and discharged solely upon personal relations, tends to produce a hothouse atmosphere in which domestic details assume prodigious proportions and the mind feeds upon every detail of death and disease with a gluttonous relish. The space devoted in this volume to illness and marriage entirely outweighs any reference to art, literature, or politics. It is all personal, emotional, and detailed as one of the novels which were written so inevitably by women.[30]

Woolf herself had written marvelously about illness in

"On Being Ill," and it is in her essay on the subject that she speaks with acid frankness about the low place of sympathy in the modern hierarchy of emotions: "Sympathy nowadays is dispensed chiefly by the laggards and failures, women for the most part . . . who, having dropped out of the race, have time to spend upon fantastic and unprofitable excursions."[31] In spite of her criticism of the denigration of sympathy, Woolf in the same essay separates herself from this aspect of sensibility: "about sympathy . . . we can do without it. We do not know our own souls, let alone the souls of others,"[32] she says, protecting, in a characteristic gesture, the soul's privacy. Worried that a policy of tenderness might disregard essential human loneliness, she continues: "Human beings do not go hand in hand the whole stretch of the way. There is a virgin forest in each; a snowfield where even the print of birds' feet is unknown."

Woolf was not immune to the attractions of sympathy; her portrait of Mrs. Ramsay shows both repulsion and attraction to it. In her stated aversion to sympathy she is perhaps protesting too much, bearing out her own idea that a woman cannot but be influenced by invidious considerations of gender. "She liked women," says Virginia Woolf of Rachel Vinrace in A Voyage Out, "but where emotion was concerned they were as flies to sugar."[33] And where women are not attracted to feeling, to sympathy, as to a magnet,

they instead sponge it up, or have it dumped on them. Woolf, without barring emotion and sympathy, was watchful about them, and imagined the penalties attached to their presence all too easily. Fretting about Flush, her playful biography of "that creature of sensibility," as she called him, she wrote in her diary, "I must not let myself believe that I'm simply a ladylike prattler: for one thing it's not true. But they'll all say so."[34]

In spite of Woolf's understanding that the feeling portrayed by women authors could be used against them, she did not deny that emotion might be a feminine propensity or that the sexes might, in fact, have very different interests and styles.[35] Dorothy Richardson, she asserted, wrote "a woman's sentence,"[36] and regardless of the fact that Woolf believed that the best imagination was androgynous, was a mind that had consumed all impediments, she referred to "the supreme difficulty of transferring the mind of one sex into that of the other."[37] She was sensitive to distinctions, whether economic, visual, or sexual, and in her feminism she did not flatten differences of gender into a unisexuality but rather hoped to reconcile their opposite natures in fortuitous moments of androgyny.

Bernard, in The Waves, achieves something of this androgyny, although he puts it to himself jokingly: "But 'joined to the sensibility of a woman' (I am here quoting

my own biographer) 'Bernard possessed the logical sobriety of a man.'"[38] Yet this androgynous reconciliation, more of a mental possibility than a behavioral one, seems pale in comparison with the force with which Woolf presents the differences between men and women, the vigor with which she depicts the surfacing of primitive struggles between men and women. In Night and Day Woolf shows Katherine Hilbery in a mood "perhaps not uncommon with either sex, when the other becomes very clearly distinguished, and of contemptible baseness, so that the necessity of association is degrading. . . . William's exacting demands and his jealousy had pulled her down into some horrible swamp of her nature where the primeval struggle still rages."[39] And in the last words of Between the Acts: "Left alone together for the first time that day, they were silent. Alone, enmity was bared; also love. Before they slept, they must fight; after they had fought, they would embrace. From that embrace another life might be born. But first they must fight, as the dog fox fights with the vixen, in the heart of darkness, in the fields of night."[40] Woolf's sense of a savage alienation between the sexes was in part an extension of the consciousness of human loneliness that pervades her work, but it also shows the tenacity with which conflict and opposition took hold in her mind.

The fiction and nonfiction of Virginia Woolf is filled with a sense of the bifurcations in experience; her

awareness of binary elements in life was perhaps--though such speculations should be made with hesitation--enhanced by the nature of her madness, which appears to have been characterized by strongly differentiated manic and depressive turns. Leonard Woolf also notes the sharp swings Woolf took between rational and emotional states, those oppositions which in his view were necessary to the creative artist.[41] More reliably, Woolf's own writing demonstrates an awareness of dualities, of conflicts of opposing forces. She wrote in her diary, for example, that she was torn between the critical and the creative.[42] This was not a mere conceptual matter since she had to divide her time between these activities, yet it is typical of the arrangement of her temperament that she should be divided, should perceive things first in their opposing rather than their complementary purposes.

The opposition between reason and feeling which Leonard Woolf mentioned was one of the most salient polarities to interest Woolf. Herbert Marder notes that the "lack of wholeness in the modern world was an implicit theme in almost everything she wrote. In her books she attempted to reconcile fact and imagination, masculine reason and feminine intuition."[43] Blackstone too reminds us that an important feature of Woolf's novels is "the antithesis of intuition and reason, to put it in its simplest and crudest form."[44] And Woolf herself saw these poles as difficult of reconciliation. She wrote of Roger

Fry that his esthetic knowledge was achieved "by the union of . . . two different qualities--his reason and his sensibility. Many people have one; many people have the other. But few have both, and fewer still are able to make them both work in harmony."[45]

Virginia Woolf's echo of Katherine Mansfield's statement that "nothing worthwhile can come from a disunited being," resounds through her work.[46] Her diary reflects her preoccupation with making harmony out of the dissenting elements of her personality. Is life solid or shifting, she asks--"I am haunted by the two contradictions."[47] Or she expresses the longing to "raise up the magic world all round me and live strongly and quietly there for six weeks. The difficulty is the usual one--how to adjust the two worlds."[48]

The disjunction of fact and imagination, reason and feeling, sense and sensibility, scientific knowledge and poetic knowledge, is a traditional one that is given new life and practical urgency in Woolf's work. Facts, she commented, have "another kind of interest, and as much out of harmony with imagination as a bedroom cupboard is with the dream of someone waking from sleep."[49] She herself attempted the novel of fact and realism, first in <u>Night and Day</u> and later in <u>The Years</u>. During the composition of the latter she found that she was delighting in facts for a change, and resisting the impulse toward a more visionary

stance. This delight did not last, however, and Leonard Woolf described in detail the instability and anguish that plagued her during the writing of The Years. It is this inability to connect the prosaic and the passionate which dogs Miss La Trobe in Between the Acts; she is far less successful than Woolf herself, and is a partial parody of the author conceived in the pessimism general to the book.

Woolf was tremendously aware of the degree to which reason and fact were ascribed to men and feeling and intuition to women. She puts into Hewet's mouth, in The Voyage Out, a partial jest directed at the heroine: "You've no respect for facts, Rachel; you're essentially feminine."[50] Woolf issues a rejoinder to it in the characterization of the heroine of her next novel, Night and Day. Katherine Hilbery is a young woman who studies mathematics, watches for the snares of romance with a cold eye, and makes a point of her good sense ("Your sense has been our undoing," her fiancé groans) in contrast to the fluttering sensibility of her mother.[51] In this novel the expected epithets--romantic female and rational man--are reversed with such emphasis that they intensify our awareness of the fact that reason and feeling are traditionally linked with gender. Although Woolf easily reverses these affiliations, she does not blur distinctions, and two novels later the conventional affiliations reappear--dictated by her biography--in the persons of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay in To the Lighthouse.

Sir Leslie Stephen, Woolf's father and the model for Mr. Ramsay, was himself a forceful proponent of distinctions of gender, fond of ascribing a masculine nature to those things he liked. For Sir Leslie, Noel Annan informs us, "the opposite of masculine is not feminine but morbid," and Maitland records Sir Leslie as having said, "Every man ought to be feminine, i.e., to have quick and delicate feelings; but no man ought to be effeminate, i.e., to let the feelings get the better of his intellect and produce a cowardly view of life and the world."[52] In contrast, Leonard Woolf, having altered an earlier view that the minds of women are more gentle, sensitive and civilized than the minds of men,[53] stated firmly that "one of the most inveterate and gross vulgar errors is that women are more emotional than men and more flighty. Ten minutes with the 650 women [of the Women's Guild] would have proved to anyone how untrue this old error is."[54]

Although Woolf would have disliked the sexual determinism that underlies a good deal of criticism dealing with her work, her fiction is so imbued with emotion and committed to feeling, and her statements about womanhood are so frequent and pronounced, that it is difficult for critics not to speak about her in this way. "She sees life from a woman's point of view," says Blackstone "She relies more on intuition than on reason."[55] He continues, "However much she may understand and admire the masculine virtues of

hard thinking and scientific precision, she could never be mistaken for anything but a woman writer. This is not a criticism. Mrs. Woolf's intuition goes deeper, it seems to me, than the reasoning detachment of most masculine writers. . . . her own approach was clearly through sensibility and intuition."[56]

Woolf would not have denied this--though surely she would have hedged on the predictability and assurance with which it is uttered--for her commitment to emotion was conscious and deep. Marder does not exaggerate when he says that "in Virginia Woolf's view, being true to one's feelings is a high moral obligation."[57] Feeling is not in itself ethical, as fellow-feeling is in George Eliot, but the tropism toward feeling, the promise that it will always be attended to, is. In Night and Day Woolf wrote, "To seek a true feeling among the chaos of the unfeelings or half-feelings of life, to recognize it when found, and to accept the consequences of the discovery, draws lines upon the smoothest brow, while it quickens the light of the eyes; it is a pursuit which is alternately bewildering, debasing, and exalting."[58] It is, in short, the wholeness and fullness of life itself; and that there is an obligation to that fullness is a basic premise in Virginia Woolf's work.

While writing Mrs. Dalloway, Woolf confided to her diary that Katherine Mansfield "said a good deal about feeling things deeply. . . . One must write from deep feeling,

said Dostoevsky. And do I? Or do I fabricate with words, loving them as I do? No, I think not."[59] In criticizing the work of others she always gave the fabrication of words a lower priority than one would expect from a stylist as superb and as conscious as Woolf. She wrote of George Moore, a supple stylist, that "literature has wound itself about him like a veil, forbidding him the free use of his limbs; the phrase comes to him before the emotion."[60] In another essay Woolf makes clear that in relation to workmanship, "it is the emotion that must come first."[61]

For Woolf, form is defined by emotion or, more indivisibly, as Woolf herself had said, the novel is not so much a form which one sees, as emotion which one feels. Coherence, unity, significance, are sensed; the reader must be emotionally engaged in the book to perceive its true form. Moreover, the stress and interaction in Woolf's novels are guided by probability of feeling, exactness of emotion, and standards of resonance and intensity, rather than by probability of setting and motivation or exactness of material detail. It is not that these latter elements are lacking in Woolf's fiction but that they are made deliberately subsidiary to and dependent on considerations of feeling. Plot, as Isa mutters in Between the Acts, is there to beget emotion, and the chains of events in Woolf's fiction are a matter of people thinking of one another with present emotion or memories of past emotion; how they

feel is stronger and more vivid than how they behave.

Virginia Woolf was fully acquainted with her native gifts and limitations. In her diary she wrote, in 1923, "I daresay it's true . . . that I haven't that 'reality' gift. I insubstantise, willfully to some extent, distrusting reality--its cheapness."[62] As Roger Fry had commented, in a Jamesian phrase, she liked the overtone to sound more than the main note. But five years later she was assured of the necessity of her method: "Waste, deadness, come from the inclusion of things that don't belong to the moment; this appalling narrative business of the realist: getting on from lunch to dinner: it is false, unreal, merely conventional. Why admit anything to literature that is not poetry by which I mean saturated?"[63]

Woolf's case against realism is clear enough in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown"; what becomes clear elsewhere is that Woolf's "choice" of unconventional form, that is to say of the non-realistic novel, was deeply connected to the fact that she was a woman. In an essay entitled "Women and Fiction" she wrote:

> It is probable . . . that both in life and in art the values of a woman are not the values of a man. Thus, when a woman comes to write a novel, she will find that she is perpetually wishing to alter the established values--to make serious what appears insignificant to a man, and trivial what is to him important. And for that, of course, she will be criticized: for the critic of the opposite sex will be genuinely puzzled and surprised by an attempt to alter the current scale of values, and will see in it not merely a difference of view, but a view that is weak, or trivial, or sentimental,

because it differs from his own.[64]

The opposing angle on the novel was typified, perhaps, by Dickens, who, Woolf wrote, "has to perfection the virtues conventionally ascribed to the male. . . . His message . . . is plain and forcible." But when "it is necessary to stand still and search into things and penetrate to the depths of what is there . . . he fails grotesquely."[65] It was necessary, according to Woolf, to "stand still," to drowse, to suspend the will and allow a deeper consciousness to surface, for the act of writing to take on seriousness.

Woolf managed to keep her outspoken feminism, that part of her thinking which E. M. Forster found "peculiar"[66] and Elizabeth Bowen regarded as "a bleak quality, an aggressive streak,"[67] within the confines of her nonfiction; even there, she wanted to avoid what was "patently feminist."[68] Yet if only from the necessity that "each sex describes itself"[69] the fact of gender had to touch on her novel writing, and in her essays she describes the soil in which the novels grew, a soil that had been made potentially less fertile by the absence of tradition and the presence of self-censorship in the minds of women writers. "The effect of these [Victorian] repressions is still clearly to be traced in women's work," she wrote, "and the effect is wholly to the bad."[70] Most important, women who were self-conscious about what they wrote lost the most precious creative leverage that, in Woolf's eyes, one could

have--the condition of unconsciousness. In "Professions for Women," Woolf described a hypothetical woman author and her difficulties and concluded, "The consciousness of what men will say of a woman who speaks the truth about her passions had roused her from her artist's state of unconsciousness. . . . Her imagination would work no longer."[71] Women who could not write as freely as men about sexual matters would not only be bowdlerizing their minds but would further lose the footing, the fragile assurance they had to begin with. What occurs is that "they adopt a view in deference to authority. The vision becomes too masculine or too feminine; it loses its perfect integrity."[72]

Woolf was wary of both extremes. In an entry in her diary in 1932 she wrote, about an article that had attacked her: "Now I think the thing to do is to note the pith of what is said--that I don't think--then to use the little kick of energy which opposition supplies to be more vigorously oneself. . . . On no account to retaliate by going to the other extreme--thinking too much."[73] Three years later she questioned herself (a habitual mode of self-address in the diary) about the problem of intellect: "What is really the woman's angle? . . . Do I instinctively keep my mind from analyzing, which would impair its creativeness? I think there's something in that."[74] Although rare enough to be always welcome, intelligence "with its tendency to

acquire views and its impatience with the passive attitude of impartial observation, may be a source of danger in fiction should it get the upper hand."[75] Intellect, as she put it in Orlando, is a cannibal, devouring the other faculties.[76] Yet Woolf did not advocate a Dionysian indifference to humanist forms, as, for example, did Lawrence. She was extremely well-read and civilized, with a scrupulous desire to keep alive that literature which she thought worth preserving and with a sense of literary history that is manifested vividly in Orlando and in her voluminous essay writing. Still, in spite of her respect for qualities of mind, there was a point at which her patience with reason and abstraction thinned, and she criticized Lawrence himself for being "airless, confined. . . . the repetition of one idea. . . . I don't want a 'philosophy' in the least."[77] In an essay entitled "Moments of Vision" she asserted, "moments of vision are of an unaccountable nature; leave them alone and they persist for years; try to explain them and they disappear; write them down and they die beneath the pen."[78]

If Woolf resisted the impulse to think too much in her fiction she also resisted the impulse to think too little in her critical writing. With a fortunate awareness of her own psychology she explains in "Professions for Women,"

> I discovered that if I were going to review books I should need to do battle with a certain phantom.

> And the phantom was a woman, and when I came to know her better I called her after the heroine of [Coventry Patmore's] famous poem, The Angel in the House. . . . She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. . . . she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all--I need not say it--she was pure.[79]

This was not Woolf's problem alone, she reminded us, "it was an experience that was bound to befall all women writers at that time. Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer."[80]

With small revision the description of the Angel in the House might be a picture of Mrs. Ramsay, and it is a paradox that Woolf, a feminist, has as her most celebrated characters Mrs. Ramsay and Mrs. Dalloway, essentially Victorian women. Intuitive of others, quiet catalysts, they are the embodiment of the unifying principle that is traditionally associated with the eternal feminine. Their gift, as one critic has pointed out, is to be, to exist, to sum it all up as they pass through life's moments.[81] "For there she was," Woolf wrote of Clarissa in the last line of Mrs. Dalloway, and that was to be enough.

Mrs. Ramsay is a Victorian heroine whose talent for nurture is at odds with but also appeasing of her husband's patriarchal and intellectual tyranny. Mrs. Ramsay is the very model of the kind of woman who was the object of the woman worship that prevailed in England in

the 1850's and 1860's, the period of Julia Stephen's girlhood. She is not, however, a period piece; she embodies that organic and intuitive consciousness which many have regarded as an innate and typical characteristic of women. She lives with unconscious wholeness, with highly delicate and at times manipulative sympathy, and in an atmosphere of dignified reverie which Woolf excels at portraying, a drowsing of the upper mind which her husband with his competitive and analytic temperament cannot achieve.[82] The first part of To the Lighthouse concentrates almost solely on atmosphere, which Woolf regarded as a reservoir of emotion; events here are buried in atmosphere and melt before our eyes. Mrs. Ramsay, even in death, is the mistress of this atmosphere, and its tone is rich, resonant, and implicit. The climax of Part I is a marvelous instance of implicitness in which, knowing what her husband wants--the words "I love you," which she cannot speak--Mrs. Ramsay conveys them silently, with the precise amount of feeling she can afford; without conceding anything to the hard lineaments of language, she triumphs, keeps things intact.

Mrs. Ramsay is the perfect figure of what has been called the non-reflective bios, a kind of womanhood which Woolf repudiated for herself but which fascinated her in her fiction. This type of character, however, begins to lose its bloom as Woolf moves closer to the modern era. In The Waves Susan is finally sick of her natural happiness,

and the possessive nature of the maternal impulse is stressed. In Between the Acts, Isa, the young mother, loathes the domestic, and there is only Lucy, partly senile, to carry on as the last of the unifiers.[83]

Mrs. Ramsay's virtues have nothing to do with language; she is, as innumerable critics have pointed out, an artist of personal relations, but this is not an artistry that achieves permanent form. Even the letters she writes are blown out to sea.[84] For a Mrs. Ramsay to survive into permanence, there must be a brisk and virginal Lily Briscoe to preserve her in a painting, or a Virginia Woolf to preserve her in fiction: the essential nature of the non-reflective female principle is its anonymity and its silence.[85]

Although in order to write, Woolf had to break this silence and to break it adamantly, she remained permanently preoccupied with the creative possibility of silence along with its hampering aspects, and attempted to make its presence felt in her fiction. Several critics have noticed it in her work, and Woolf herself saw a sense of silence as an attractive feature in other writers.[86] Harvena Richter points out that in Woolf's work silence is a means of transferring our interest from outer reality to inner reality.[87] In Between the Acts, for example, the dose of present day reality which Miss La Trobe gives the audience depends on the emptiness of the stage and the

absence of speech; just as one would empty one's mind of verbiage in order to meditate and turn inward, she empties their world of scripted sounds so that they may feel the present moment with all the fullness of their senses. Silence is the means not only to interiority, but into the present, an undifferentiated state without past, future, or personality. "As silence falls," says Bernard in The Waves, "I am dissolved utterly and become featureless and scarcely to be distinguished from another." And, says Jinny, it is "as if the miracle had happened . . and life were stayed here and now."[88]

Silence was, for Woolf, associated with the kind of organic grounding which women had traditionally provided without the concomitant reward of representing themselves verbally. It is the unifiers like Lucy, for example, who insist, "We haven't the words--we haven't the words. . . . Behind the eyes; not on the lips; that's all," and the separatists, like her brother, who respond, "Thoughts without words. . . . Can that be?"[89] In The Voyage Out Hewet wonders as he walks along streets full of houses, "What on earth the women were doing inside. . . . Just consider: it's the beginning of the twentieth century, and until a few years ago no woman had ever come out by herself and said things at all. There it was going on in the background, for all those thousands of years, this curious silent unrepresented life."[90] The other side of Woolf's

protest against this deprivation, voiced so gracefully in A Room of One's Own, is her understanding that women in this way accomplish something that may not be seen but which can be felt. Rachel thinks of her aunts, of their unselfish acts like grains of sand falling through innumerable days "making an atmosphere and building up a solid mass, a background."[91] And in a reaction against the unrepresentative unhappiness of those who write, Woolf says in her diary, in September 1940, less than two years before her death, "The wordless are the happy: women in cottage gardens."[92]

Mrs. Ramsay wants "to be silent, to be alone. . . ."[93] The Waves ends on a crest of silence, with Bernard's proclamation that he has "done with phrases":

> How much better is silence; the coffee-cup, the table. How much better to sit by myself like the solitary sea-bird that opens its wings on the stake. Let me sit here for ever with bare things, this coffee-cup, this knife, this fork, things in themselves, myself being myself. . . . I would willingly give all my money that you should not disturb me but let me sit on and on, silent, alone.[94]

And the narrator of Between the Acts regards the interpretive clergyman with exasperation: "He opened his mouth. O Lord, protect and preserve us from words the defilers, from words the impure! What need have we of words to remind us? Must I be Thomas, you Jane?"[95]

Woolf's desire for a respite from language is apparent in the particular way she chooses to characterize

Flush. He has--not surprisingly, for he, like a Victorian woman, is ultimately subject to the mastery of others--many of the characteristics generally associated with the woman of sensibility. At times this slender fiction reads like an analogue in code: "Upon such a dog the atmosphere of the bedroom told with peculiar force. We cannot blame him if his sensibility was cultivated rather to the detriment of his sterner qualities. . . . he came to prefer the silence of the cat to the robustness of the dog; and human sympathy to either."[96] Then, in a richly ambiguous phrasing, Woolf continues, "Flush paid the full price of long years of accumulated sensibility lying couched on cushions at Miss Barrett's feet. He could read signs that nobdy else could even see." Living in the senses of touch and smell, Flush "knew Florence as no human being has ever known it; as Ruskin never knew it or George Eliot either. He knew it as only the dumb know. Not a single one of his myriad sensations ever submitted itself to the deformity of words."[97]

No writer can avoid the "deformity of words," though a good number of writers since the Romantic period have wrestled with the problem of reproducing the ineffable in language, of finding the self-destroying style or phrase, of subordinating language to vision. Woolf approaches this most obviously by her use of interior monologue, by representing people in a state of socially unarticulated

meditation which is a modification of stream of consciousness, that term invented by William James, the first person to write with scientific seriousness about the emotions. Perfecting this technique in Mrs. Dalloway and To the Lighthouse, Woolf uses it at its most silent in The Waves, where the characters, who do not speak to one another, engage in alternating and soundless recitatives, using the style of the spoken word as the medium of a content that is deep and unspeakable. This is, in effect, the novel that Hewet in The Voyage Out wanted to write, the "novel about Silence . . . the things people don't say."[98] That the novel is about what is unsaid is made more pointed by its use of the phrase "he said" or "she said" transposing the decorum of speech into a world of silent interiority and giving the world of silence the prestige and formality that goes with actual articulation. The interludes, scenes in which the only speech is non-human, weigh heavily, with their silence, on the sections that follow them, and in composing The Years Woolf wrote, "I think I see how I can bring in interludes--I mean spaces of silence."[99]

For a number of writers silence has been associated with the falling away of complexity, division, and the fragmenting demands of intellect, and with an inrush of revelatory awareness--the moment when, in Hassan's words, "vision penetrates the perplexities of the moment to the heart of light."[100] In Woolf's fiction this does not

happen with apocalyptic force but with a gradualness or gentle suddenness. Vision is not a leap beyond the barrier that ordinary reality imposes, but rather a quality of perception that is woven into the very texture of life itself. Woolf is not a "mystic"; the very word insults her belief in the ability of the imagination to penetrate and transform everyday life into the transparency which is just beneath its opaque surface. Her yearning for unity is not a desire for transcendence but a human longing for wholeness. Moments of vision are identified with unity of being and they reinforce that unity; Bernard stubbornly pursues this vision; Septimus and Rhoda are too fragmented to attain it; Percival, permanent and mute as a figure on the Elgin Marbles, embodies it. Bernard is too robust a figure to be knocked down by gusts of epiphany, and Percival is supremely ordinary in his un-self-consciousness: there is about them an atmosphere of the practical, rather than the hallucinatory flickerings which surround the incomplete vision of a Septimus.

It is clear that Virginia Woolf's fiction is characterized by its commitment to feeling; it is a distinct kind of feeling, one that differs as much from the gothic and narcissistic passion of Charlotte Bronte as from the fellow-feeling of George Eliot. Critics have spoken of Woolf's "controlled ecstasy,"[101] her "mental and emotional intoxication,"[102] and her characters are again and again

described or given to speaking unembarrassedly in terms of rapture, ecstasy, and delirium.

Woolf's own desire for rapture led her to prefer Dostoevsky, whose work, she said, "sweeps me away,"[103] to Henry James, whose incomparable shadings of perception she should have enjoyed, and throughout her diary her expression of positive feeling is couched in a language of elation and rhapsody. Rantavaara notices Woolf's use of hyperbole in The Waves and sees it as "not only a sign of excitement and of heightened sensibility" but also as "a very feminine feature."[104] While its "femininity" is not quite so easily explainable, hyperbole is surely a property of sensibility --one which sense tends to diminish and belittle. Emotion makes greater claims than reason; it is a dilating rather than a restricting process. Reason restores proportion. As Bishop Lowth states in an eighteenth-century lecture, "the passions are naturally inclined to amplification; they wonderfully magnify and exaggerate whatever dwells upon the mind, and labour to express it in animated, bold, and magnificent terms."[105]

Woolf's subtle fiction is not so much bold and magnificent as it is intense and magnificent, and in the magnificence that derives from emotion she demonstrates a kinship with the tradition of the sublime. Rantavaara notes, "Aristotle's Poetics and, especially, Longinus' Peri Hupsous could have been her manuals, for both . . .

had lifted up for special consideration the metaphor, the ambiguity of words, and the importance of rhythm with its perpetual beat, its opening and shutting."[106] Yet the influence of Longinus--as it was transmitted through the eighteenth century, when the sublime was an esthetic concept of great importance, and later in subtler form through the Romantics--these accretions can be seen in Woolf not so much in the particulars of her eloquence as in her belief in the esthetic value of emotion, her intensity of expression, her subjectivism, her intuitional method, her sense of limitlessness, her emphasis on suggestion and atmosphere, and her love of original genius.

The sublime was a favorite taste and even pastime of the Blue Stockings, that group of eighteenth-century women which has come to represent the first example of mutual mental activity among women in many centuries. Like Mrs. Radcliffe's heroines they enjoyed "being thoroughly frightened almost daily."[107] Anna Seward wrote of a walk on the beach: "As I passed along the sands, the tide twice left its white surf upon my feet; and the vast curve of those fierce waves, that burst down with deafening roar, scarce three yards from me, sufficiently gratified my rage for the terrific."[108] The state of mind induced, the emotion, was more important than the fact of the scene itself and the state generally sought was fear, a shudder at the presence of the vast and the dangerous.

The sea was one of those objects of contemplation considered ideal for producing feelings of sublimity. Addison articulated a notion that was shared by many when he wrote: "of all Objects that I have ever seen, there is none which affects my Imagination so much as the Sea or Ocean. I cannot see the Heavings of this prodigious Bulk of Waters, even in a calm, without a very pleasing Astonishment."[109] For Burke the ocean was sublime because it was associated with danger: the sea is associated in our minds with the perils of wrecks and drownings. The sea has also, in the last several hundred years, come to be connected with madness. A model of irrationality in itself, in the chaos of its storms and the unauthored force of its constant and relentless motion, the sea had been the exile of the mad for many years, when the ships of fools made their passage across the ocean.[110]

The sea is so perpetually present in Woolf's work it is as if it is the oxygen for her fiction. Her relationship to it is not voyeuristic and pictorial; her ocean is as essential and natural a background as air or sky. When it is at its most formidable, as in The Waves, we do not gaze at it but are immersed in it, as our lives are immersed in time and therefore in death. There is no flirting with the sea, as if to tease out a Gothic thrill; we are all, eventually, swallowed up.

Woolf's awareness of the sublime was not restricted to the formidable; she was capable of using the word in a manifestly domestic way: "With one foot raised on the rung of a chair, and her elbow out in the attitude for sewing, her own figure possessed the sublimity of a woman's of the early world, spinning the thread of fate--the sublimity possessed by many women of the present day who fall into the attitude required by scrubbing or sewing."[111] Thus Woolf redeems the small gestures of feminine concerns, tiring, perhaps, along with Neville, of the kinds of "sublimities" that accompany "vastitudes."

In Woolf there is none of the thrill and thunder of the craggy picturesque that there is in the Gothic sublimity of Mrs. Radcliffe and the Blue Stockings. Yet there is perhaps a parallel in their "epicurean pursuit of sensation,"[112] though we think of the earlier pursuit as inconsequential and of Woolf's, coming after the Romantics, and at times resembling Keats's, as significant. Forster has pointed out that Woolf loved sensation, and her works are filled with an exacerbated sensitivity to physical environment, to atmosphere, which makes that environment shimmer and radiate.[113] In this she was in the line of Burke, who was, in Boulton's words, "the first writer in English to take up the uncompromising sensationist viewpoint," relegating reason to a minor place.[114] "Do we ever reason," Burke had said--giving an example

that would have pleased the author of the boeuf en daube in To the Lighthouse, the author who gave as the Gypsy language for beautiful "how good to eat," in Orlando--"in order to know whether a ragoo be good or bad?"[115]

Although the sublime had been regarded as irrational in nature ever since its inception in the essay by Longinus, it was in Burke's popular Enquiry that, as Monk points out, irrationality was given almost a scientific basis and helped to edge out what Wordsworth later called the "meddling intellect."[116] Burke did not admire clarity; he praised the obscure, mysterious, and suggestive, believing that there was an "essential pettiness [to] ideas that the reason can grasp."[117] The business of poetry and rhetoric, he said, was "to affect rather by sympathy than imitation; to display rather the effect of things on the mind of the speaker, or of others, than to present a clear idea of the things themselves."[118] Such obscurity was of course conducive to the mystery of the Gothic novel; in a more contemporary form, and divorced from the Gothic junkshop of terror, it has its incarnation in the suggestive atmosphere and subjective focus of Woolf's novels.

Burke's idea of the sublime as a function of sympathy rather than imitation was, moreover, a wedge against naturalism, against the certainly known and, in Hurd's phrase, "cautious rules of credibility."[119] The fact that nothing could be certain, that outlines were always shifting,

meant that contemplative literature could earn respect and produce awe and wonder. Repeated in eighteenth-century theories of the sublime was, according to Monk, "the aspiration of the imagination to grasp the object; the preordained failure, and the consequent feeling of bafflement; and the sense of awe and wonder."[120] Usher, in an essay on taste, disagreed with the materialist psychology of sensation, yet also ended up with a theory of mystery and the inability of the beholder to lay hold of the perceived:

> It is to meet the sublime impression undisturbed, that the poet retires to the solitary walks of the country; that he seeks for vales hid from the common eye, where silence seems to take up her dwelling; . . . there he feels with all the <u>certainty of intuition</u> [Monk's italics] the presence of the universal genius. . . . It is the beauty of a being, indistinct, and hid as it were in light, which the imagination in vain seems to lay hold of: whence you may conceive the distress, that obliges the poet to fly from image to image, to express what he finds.[121]

Woolf, in "Evening Over Sussex: Reflections in a Motor Car," expresses beautifully the aspiration of the imagination to grasp the object:

> there is always some sediment of irritation when the moment is as beautiful as it is now. . . . I cannot hold this--I cannot express this--I am overcome by it--I am mastered. Somewhere in that region one's discontent lay; and it was allied with the idea that one's nature demands mastery over all that it received; and mastery here meant the power to convey what one saw now . . . so that another person could share it. And further . . . one was wasting one's chance; for beauty . . . was escaping all the time.[122]

The distress that "obliges the poet to fly from image to image, to express what he finds," was perhaps alleviated by the doctrine of association which was important to theories of the sublime.[123] Associations could enhance sublimity by broadening and widening the flow of emotion. As one eighteenth-century essayist on taste put it, "'the object itself, appears only to serve as a hint, to waken the imagination, and to lead it through every analogous idea that has place in the memory.'"[124] This anticipates, of course, the procedures of Woolf, or Proust, and when the writer goes on to say that the happiest esthetic condition is a "powerless state of reverie," he captures a mood that typifies Woolf's fiction. It is not difficult to see the connection between associationism, a horizontal form of metaphor in which significance occurs in a random (though psychologically comprehensible) flow, and the processes of stream of consciousness, ranging from its early form in that ambivalent tribute to Locke, _Tristram Shandy_, to the middle novels of Virginia Woolf, in which the elevation of sublimity takes on subliminal power, as it races slightly below the threshold of consciousness.

According to Lange, a colleague of William James, "Emotions . . . are . . . the most powerful forces of nature known to us."[125] The sublime was considered to be productive of the strongest emotion the mind was capable of feeling. For different writers different emotions were held

to be most sublime, but in the latter part of the eighteenth century, because of Burke's influence, and in contradiction to Longinus, fear came to be regarded as essential to sublimity. Fear, Burke believed, had the greatest success in depriving the mind of its reasoning powers.[126] As Hassan puts it, "the human tongue is speechless in fright and ecstasy."[127]

In Woolf's work fear is most apparent in those figures who are embedded in madness--indeed, fear deprives them of their reasoning powers in a permanent way. Her own madness had given her a stark vantage point from which everything else could be compared. "This is not all," she might say, looking around her, knowing that the birds could speak Greek in the trees, and that the social affections could be replaced by rage and disconnectedness. It is through madness and an atmosphere of melancholy that she engages in the "contemplation of death"[128] which was seen as an activity leading to a state of sublimity. "Madness is the _déjà-là_ of death," says Foucault,[129] and death and madness are associated in Woolf's work: both Rhoda and Septimus are suicides, and Woolf's own suicide was inspired by her fear of oncoming madness. The elegaic, too, is a strong and disturbing note in her work--she had called _To the Lighthouse_ an elegy,[130] and it is death, not the Alps, that elicits the greatest awe.

The shadow of death plays over all Woolf's fiction, and even the titles of her essay collections (The Captain's Death Bed, The Death of the Moth) reveal its presence. Leonard Woolf has pointed out that for Woolf death was always near, and Woolf had experience the death of loved ones at an earlier age and more simultaneously than is usual.[131] Death is frightening and sad in Woolf's books, as it is in life, but it is also, at times, affiliated with a condition of ecstasy. As Bernard puts it, in The Waves, in a paratactic equation of death and rapture, "All had their rapture; their common feeling with death; something that stood them in stead."[132] Both Mrs. Dalloway and Bernard contemplate death and experience exhilaration. They both, for a moment, and in different ways, tame the fearsome chaos of death and bring composure to themselves. The fear which those who pursued the sublime experienced was not the real fear that makes one flee, but an imitation of fear in which one knows one is safe. Regarding an awesome scene, Gray said, "You have death perpetually before your eyes, only so far removed, as to compose the mind without frightening it."[133] In Woolf's work, death may frighten but it also composes. Percival's death organizes the six survivors into a tighter design than existed among them before. Mrs. Ramsay's death forces Lily into the literal composition of her painting and the composure she feels when she completes it.

"The communication of the dead, "as Woolf's friend T. S. Eliot said, "is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living." After death the rest is not silence, for Woolf, for the posthumous influences of Percival, Septimus, and Mrs. Ramsay speak with great clarity. As Mrs. Dalloway puts it to herself, she has "a transcendental theory which, with her horror of death, allowed her be believe, or say that she believed (for all her scepticism), that since our apparitions, the part of us which appears, are so momentary compared with the other, the unseen part of us, which spreads wide, the unseen might survive, be recovered somehow attached to this person or that, or even haunting certain places after death . . . perhaps--perhaps."[134] The only influence the dead can have is a silent one. To write of the dead, to give their absence a presence, is to bring forth the unspoken along with the unseen, to introduce more silence into a form and genre that depends on speech.

Those who did not agree that fear was an important element of the sublime felt that it could not be so because it was too painful. Rather the sublime "tends to fix the attention, and to keep the mind in a kind of <u>awful stillness</u>,"as Priestley put it.[135] It is this stillness that Woolf tries to capture in her "moments." "Life stand still here," says Mrs. Ramsay, and it is out of this "profound stillness" that there is "a coherence in things, a stability. . . . Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that endures."[136] In spite of all Woolf's acknowledgements

of Heraclitean flux, the moment is, for her, a stay against death, one in which the pressure of chronos is temporarily alleviated, so that one can reap with full and patient attention the beauty of present life. Often this moment is accompanied by the Romantic desire to be overwhelmed, extinguished, quenched; life is so beautiful in its stillness that it brims over, becomes a falling away of self, a self-obliteration resembling death.

Bernard's challenge to death in The Waves occurs because in his falling away from self he frees himself of impeding and even cowardly trappings. By sinking into a wise passiveness he is able to rouse himself to the challenge in a purer way. Wordsworth's doctrine of wise passiveness has its place in Woolf's work, as does Keats's notion of negative capability. Unquestionably the power to be in doubt and uncertainty, as Keats puts it, has its immediate ancestry in the doctrine of the vague and uncertain that was part of the sublime, an uncertainty that was not unrelated to the suspense involved in the Gothic novel. Negative capability also derives from the sympathetic imagination, from the emphasis on identification and empathy with the outer world, which was part of the definition of sensibility as the eighteenth century saw it. At least one critic has announced that Virginia Woolf possesses negative capability,[137] and it was Woolf's temperament to be doubting, speculative, questioning, and indirect--subject to, rather than authoritative. She was not, as she put it,

convinced of the truth of any one thing, and she disliked preaching, not because it was moral but because it invoked closure.[138] She criticized Lawrence for always needing to prove something, and wrote in her diary, "never systematise --not till you're seventy: and have been supple and sympathetic and creative and tried out all your nerves and scopes."[139] She did not live to be seventy, and her last novel is a tribute to the inconclusive. "How difficult to come to any conclusion!" thinks one of the villagers in the audience in Between the Acts, her plaint meant to be beside the point, for only the naïve ask for conclusions.

For Woolf it is the things that are not in our power that are the most attractive and which define themselves as most believable. The idea that we cannot really know other persons, a fact which mitigates against the omniscient narrator, is one which may cause some writers despair, but for Woolf it is part of the evanescent and unreachable which makes life mysterious, complex, and properly elusive and precious. The absence of sureness of definition of outline, whether of people or of physical objects is, for Woolf, a virtue, a relativism of vision which is exhilarating in its difference from the sober absoluteness of Victorian morés. Her ability to be in uncertainty is at the heart of her descriptions of physical objects whose borders do not remain stable but are defined, like the subjects of the Impressionists, by the aspect of the light at a given moment, light to which Woolf with her physiological irritability was no

doubt extremely sensitive. Further, the harsh outline of self, that self that functions in the general exchange and appraisal of selves in society, that which is called personality, is not important to Woolf. The outline of the self wavers with mood, as do the outlines of Lawrence's characters, and this is what she records. Woolf's risks consist among others of a willingness to represent normal vision jeopardized, and normal sodality made insecure. Those criticisms of her which have accused her of lacking spine, bolts of iron, and solid realism, could better take into account the courage and strength of imagination that lies behind her powers of indirectness, suggestion, and rapture.

M. C. Bradbrook, in an essay written in the early thirties, complained about The Waves: "there are no solid characters, no clearly defined situations and no structure of feelings: merely sensations in the void. . . . Emotions are reduced to a description of their physical accompaniments: the attention is wholly peripheral . . . Physical sensations, which are immediately present, and have no relation to any schema of values, are all that Mrs. Woolf dares to assume in her readers."[140] Those who criticize Woolf for her lack of definition do not usually give such clear though backhanded credit to the importance of the body in her work. Yet for all her alleged ethereality and her commitment to things of the spirit, one of Woolf's gifts is her ability to recreate the body state,

not that "accompanies" emotions, but that are the emotions themselves. Anyone as sensitive to atmosphere as Woolf was would understand that the emotions have physical presence, and anyone familiar with the writings of William James would easily recall, if nothing else prompted her to, that he had said that emotion without bodily symptoms is not emotion but a "cold and neutral state of intellectual perception."[141]

It is appropriate that a writer of sensibility be concerned with the body, for as Burke pointed out, the sensibility is organic, the judgment cultivated. It is the body that makes the difference between intellectual perception and affective response, and it is through the body that empathy is often achieved. Mrs. Dalloway hears of the death of Septimus and wonders how he killed himself: "Always her body went through it first, when she was told, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt. He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness."[142]

Woolf wrote a great deal about her own body. She spoke of "the delicious society of my own body,"[143] and recorded more difficult moments faithfully, particularly in her masterpiece, "On Being Ill":

> literature does its best to maintain that its concern is with the mind; that the body is a sheet of plain glass through which the soul looks straight and clear, and save for one or two passions such as

> desire and greed, is null, and negligible and non-existent. On the contrary, the very opposite is true. All day, all night, the body intervenes; blunts or sharpens, colours or discolours, turns to wax in the warmth of June, hardens to tallow in the murk of February. The creature within can only gaze through the pane--smudged or rosy; it cannot separate off from the body like the sheath of a knife or the pod of a pea for a single instant. . . . But of all this daily drama there is no record. People write always of the doings of the mind.[144]

With tongue in cheek Woolf tells us, as Orlando yearns to marry, that "we write, not with the fingers, but with the whole person. The nerve which controls the pen winds itself about every fibre of our being, threads the heart, pierces the liver."[145] And more seriously, in A Room of One's Own, she maintains, "The book has somehow to be adapted to the body. . . . all this is part of the question of women and fiction."[146]

If we do not think of Woolf as writing of the doings of the body it is perhaps because they are subtle and solitary doings; her books lack any markedly erotic content, for example, a literary disposition which is supported and enhanced not only by the facts of her life as Quentin Bell reports them but by the degree of propriety urged on women of Woolf's time. She was far from evasive about this limitation in her work. Indeed, she wrote of Lawrence in 1920 that he has "an extraordinary sense of the physical world, of the colour and texture and shape of things[;] for [him] the body was alive and the problems of the body insistent and important. It was plain that sex

had for him a meaning which it was disquieting to think that we, too, might have to explore."[147] And she does explore it, to an extent and with a flavor that is somewhat surprising, in Jinny, in The Waves, whose imagination "is the body's." For the most part, however, the excitement in Woolf's works is sensuous and epistemological, rather than sensual--a rapture at knowing the world, at knowing oneself in the world, a rapture that reads the keenness of sensation as testimony to its own importance. It is a thinner, finer, more rapidly pulsating excitement than that of sexual suggestion or description.

It has been observed elsewhere that sensibility replaced seduction as an emotional occupation in the eighteenth century, and it is certainly easy to see in the terrors of the Gothic novel the sublimated sexuality, particularly in women, which today is set loose in other forms. In a sense this substitution continues in Woolf's work, in which she refines the emotions that accompany illness, for her an outpost of sensibility, with a carefulness unmatched in her descriptions of romantic or sexual attachment. Illness gives the power of uncertainty that was so important to her:

> Incomprehensibility has an enormous power over us in illness, more legitimately perhaps than the upright will allow. In health meaning has encroached upon sound. Our intelligence domineers over our senses. But in illness, with the police off duty, we creep beneath some obscure poem by Mallarmé or Donne, some phrase in Latin or Greek, and the words give out their scent and distil their flavour, and

> then, if at last we grasp the meaning, it is all the richer for having come to us sensually [sic] first, by way of the palate and the nostrils, like some queer odour."[148]

Even in health, Woolf thought of books in the organic terms used by the Romantics: she wanted, in The Waves, "to make the blood run like a torrent from end to end,"[149] and it made her books as vulnerable, in her view, as she herself was vulnerable to her own mortality.

Woolf's preoccupation with sensation, with the body state, gave her an exacerbated awareness of mortality, of death, as well as of life. Seeking a level of reality that was not susceptible to rearrangement by the intellect, a reality that began in the body, she was almost fatiguingly aware of her own responses. She recorded in her fiction oscillations of the nerves which many recognize as their own, but whose minutiae few before Woolf had recorded with beauty and a sense of importance. In attending to this tininess she ran the risk of writing like a woman, and indeed she herself saw a contemporary prototypal woman novelist as having certain "natural advantages": "She had a sensibility that was very wide, eager and free. It responded to an almost imperceptible touch on it. . . . it lighted on small things and showed that perhaps they were not small after all."[150]

We think back through our mothers, Woolf had said, as if similar genders were more deeply linked in genetic relationship. And indeed, if style was of the body one

had to think back to one's female predecessors in the novel. Yet Woolf could not quite think back through the "unperturbed" Austen, and her appreciation of the "resigned" George Eliot, whose ecstasy and consecration was a bit more utilitarian than Woolf could like, was understandably guarded.[151] One suspects that it is from the relatively silent and anonymous women who appear again and again in her essays that Woolf got her grounding in the past; in spite of her affection for Bronte and except for the rather dogged variations of sensitivity that appear in the work of Dorothy Richardson, there was no one preceding Woolf who bore any resemblance to her. This absence of precedent she might have felt as an almost biological deprivation, yet there were other traditions which she made to coalesce with her own sense of gender in order to fulfill her own ideal of writing "as a woman, but as a woman who has forgotten that she is a woman."[152]

Woolf's excitement in the poetry of existence, her manifest elation, is very great. The apex of feeling in her novels cannot be described accurately without ascribing it to the province of the sublime, and this sublimity is given to things not by virtue of their "objective" proportion but according to Woolf's own intensity. As Bernard says, as he takes upon himself the mystery of things, "I could worship my hand even, with its fan of bones laced by blue mysterious veins and its astonishing look of aptness,

suppleness and ability to curl softly or suddenly crush--its infinite sensibility."[153] It is the perishable in particular that Woolf, as a writer of sensibility, excelled at capturing, and in capturing it she makes its perishable quality, its preciousness, doubly evident. Devoting herself to the evanescent and the inconclusive, she dismantled the lie of the durable and replaced it with the uninterrupted if inconstant truth of feeling. She has renewed the status of the novel of sensibility in the present century and has returned us to the possibilities of the sublime. Only those who are unwilling to be swept away can deny her the major place she deserves in the history of literature.

Footnotes

[1] Clement Shorter, Charlotte Bronte and Her Circle (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1896), p. 399.

[2] "And it is significant that of the four great women novelists--Jane Austen, Emily Bronte, Charlotte Bronte, and George Eliot--not one had a child, and two were unmarried." "Women and Fiction," Granite and Rainbow: Essays (London: Hogarth Press, 1958), p. 78. Woolf's essay "Jane Austen" appears in The Common Reader (New York: Harcourt, 1953), pp. 137-149.

[3] Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary (New York: Harcourt, 1954), p. 21.

[4] Writing The Years, she confided in her diary, "I think the next lap ought to be objective, realistic, in the manner of Jane Austen: carrying the story on all the time." Ibid., p. 202.

[5] Virginia Woolf, "Personalities," in The Moment and Other Essays (London: Hogarth Press, 1952), p. 138.

[6] Leonard Woolf and James Strachey, eds. Virginia Woolf and Lytton Strachey: Letters (New York: Harcourt, 1956), p. 114.

[7] Virginia Woolf, "The Novels of E. M. Forster," in

The Death of the Moth and Other Essays (New York: Harcourt, 1942), p. 106.

[8] Virginia Woolf, The Voyage Out (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), p. 62.

[9] Ibid., p. 66. Austen seems to be on Woolf's mind in this, her first, novel. Even her characters show evidence of this: the chatterbox Evelyn Murgatroyd is a good deal like Lucy Steele in Sense and Sensibility.

[10] Elizabeth Hardwick, "Bloomsbury and Virginia Woolf," The New York Review of Books, February 8, 1973, p. 18: "The aestheticism of Bloomsbury. . . . imprisons her in femininity, as a writer at least."

[11] William Troy, "Virginia Woolf: The Novel of Sensibility," Literary Opinion in America, ed. Morton Dauwen Zabel (New York: Harper and Row, 1937), p. 29.

[12] Leonard Woolf, Downhill All the Way: An Autobiography of the Years 1919-1939 (New York: Harcourt, 1967), p. 152.

[13] Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965), p. 88.

[17] Virginia Woolf, Orlando (New York: New American Library, 1960), p. 28.

[15] Quentin Bell, Virginia Woolf: A Biography (New York: Harcourt, 1972), II, 169.

[16] A Writer's Diary, p. 71

[17] Ibid., p. 180: "I pulled myself up and staggered, with what infinite difficulty and alarm, now truly fainting and seeing the garden painfully lengthened and distorted, back, back, back--how long it seemed--could I drag myself? --to the house: and gained my room and fell on my bed. Then pain, as of childbirth; and then that too slowly faded; and I lay presiding, like a flickering light, like a most solicitous mother, over the shattered splintered fragments of my body. A very acute and unpleasant experience."

[18] Woolf and Strachey, Letters, p. 114.

[19] A Writer's Diary, p. 55.

[20] Downhill All the Way, p. 51.

[21] "Phases of Fiction," in Granite and Rainbow, p. 142.

[22] A Writer's Diary, p. 47.

[23] "The Leaning Tower," in The Moment, p. 106.

[24] "The Captain's Death Bed," in The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays (London: Hogarth Press, 1950), p. 42.

[25] "Madame de Sevigné," in The Death of the Moth, p. 38.

26 "The Artist and Politics," in The Moment, p. 184.

27 "Two Antiquaries: Walpole and Cole," in The Death of the Moth, p. 48.

28 Orlando, p. 57.

29 The Voyage Out, p. 48.

30 "Two Women," in The Moment, p. 164.

31 Ibid., p. 17.

32 Ibid., p. 17.

33 The Voyage Out, p. 378.

34 A Writer's Diary, p. 205.

35 Rev. of Revolving Light, by Dorothy Richardson, in Contemporary Writers (New York: Harcourt, 1966), p. 124.

36 Ibid., p. 103.

37 Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (New York: Harcourt, 1957), p. 91: "It would be a thousand pities if women wrote like men, or lived like men, or looked like men, for if two sexes are quite inadequate, considering the vastness and variety of the world, how should we manage with one only?"

38 Virginia Woolf, The Waves (New York: Harcourt, 1959), p. 227.

[39] Virginia Woolf, Night and Day (New York: Harcourt, 1931), p. 392.

[40] Virginia Woolf, Between the Acts (New York: Harcourt, 1969), p. 219.

[41] Downhill All the Way, p. 54.

[42] A Writer's Diary, p. 176: "I tried to analyse my depression; how my brain is jaded with the conflict within of two types of thought, the critical, the creative."

[43] Herbert Marder, Feminism and Art: A Study of Virginia Woolf (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 30.

[44] Bernard Blackstone, Virginia Woolf: A Commentary (London: Longmans, Green, 1956), p. 26.

[45] "Roger Fry," in The Moment, p. 85.

[46] "A Terribly Sensitive Mind," in Granite and Rainbow, p. 75.

[47] A Writer's Diary, p. 138.

[48] Ibid., p. 208.

[49] "The Captain's Death Bed," p. 44.

[50] The Voyage Out, p. 361.

[51] Night and Day, p. 344.

[52] Quoted by Marder, p. 14. Quoted by James Hafley, The Glass Roof: Virginia Woolf as Novelist (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1963), p. 25.

[53] Leonard Woolf, Growing: An Autobiography of the Years 1904-1911 (New York: Harcourt, 1962), p. 151.

[54] Leonard Woolf, Beginning Again: An Autobiography of the Years 1911-1918 (New York: Harcourt, 1964), p. 107.

[55] Blackstone, p. 248.

[56] Ibid., p. 212.

[57] Marder, p. 170.

[58] Night and Day, p. 331.

[59] A Writer's Diary, p. 56.

[60] "George Moore," in The Death of the Moth, p. 104.

[61] "On Re-reading Novels," in The Moment, p. 130.

[62] A Writer's Diary, p. 56.

[63] Ibid., p. 136.

[64] "Women and Fiction," in Granite and Rainbow, p. 81.

[65] "David Copperfield," in The Moment, p. 65.

66 E. M. Forster, Virginia Woolf (New York: Harcourt, 1942), p. 31.

67 Elizabeth Bowen, "The Achievement of Virginia Woolf," in Collected Impressions (New York: Knopf, 1950), p. 81.

68 A Writer's Diary, p. 174.

69 Rev. of The Women Novelist, by R. Brimley Johnson, in Contemporary Writers, p. 26.

70 Ibid., p. 25.

71 "Professions for Women," in The Death of the Moth, p. 152.

72 "Women and Fiction," p. 80.

73 A Writer's Diary, p. 174.

74 Ibid., p. 237.

75 "Philosophy in Fiction," Contemporary Writers, p. 67.

76 Orlando, p. 139.

77 A Writer's Diary, p. 159.

78 In Contemporary Writers, p. 75.

79 "Professions for Women," p. 150.

[80] Ibid., p. 151. And for a comic version of this, see *Orlando*, p. 173.

[81] Mary Kelsey, "Virginia Woolf and the She-Condition," *Sewanee Review* (Oct.-Dec. 1931), p. 428.

[82] The fact that Mrs. Ramsay cannot finish George Eliot is a poke at Sir Leslie Stephen, who had written a book on Eliot. Woolf liked tucking private jokes into her fiction, and did so with immense gusto in *Orlando*.

[83] *Between the Acts*, p. 118.

[84] Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (New York: Harcourt, 1955), p. 239.

[85] "Women and Fiction," p. 82: A woman's life has an anonymous character which is baffling and puzzling in the extreme."

[86] Virginia Woolf, *The Second Common Reader* (New York: Harcourt, 1960). In her essay "The 'Sentimental Journey,'" Woolf says, "Sterne is singularly of our own age. In this interest in silence rather than in speech Sterne is the forerunner of the moderns." (p. 71)

[87] Harvena Richter, *The Inward Voyage* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1970), p. 229.

[88] *The Waves*, p. 332.

[89] Between the Acts, p. 55.

[90] The Voyage Out, p. 258.

[91] Ibid., p. 260.

[92] A Writer's Diary, p. 332.

[93] To the Lighthouse, p. 95.

[94] The Waves, p. 382.

[95] Between the Acts, p. 190.

[96] Virginia Woolf, Flush: A Biography (New York: Harcourt, 1933), p. 55.

[97] Ibid., p. 140.

[98] The Voyage Out, p. 262.

[99] A Writer's Diary, p. 73.

[100] Ihab Hassan, The Literature of Silence (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), p. 7.

[101] Blackstone, p. 152.

[102] Irma Rantavaara, Virginia Woolf's The Waves (Port Washington, N. Y.: Kennikat Press, 1969), p. 48.

[103] Woolf and Strachey: Letters, p. 54.

[104] Rantavaara, p. 50.

[105] Samuel Monk, The Sublime (Ann Arbor: The Univ. of Michigan Press, 1960), p. 81.

[106] Rantavaara, p. 45.

[107] Walter Francis Wright, Sensibility in English Prose Fiction, 1760-1814. Illinois Studies in Language and Literature, XXII, Nos. 3-4 (Urbana, Ill.: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1937), p. 105.

[108] Monk, p. 214.

[109] Ibid., p. 58.

[110] Foucault, p. 11.

[111] The Voyage Out, p. 245.

[112] Monk, p. 214.

[113] Forster, p. 26.

[114] Edmund Burke, A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful, ed. J. T. Boulton (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1958), p. xxxvi.

[115] Ibid., p. 24.

[116] Monk, p. 93.

[117] Ibid., p. 94.

[118] Burke, p. lxxx n.

[119] Monk, p. 105.

[120] Ibid., p. 58.

[121] Ibid., p. 143.

[122] "Evening Over Sussex: Reflections in a Motor Car," in The Death of the Moth, p. 12.

[123] Monk, p. 117.

[124] Ibid., p. 149.

[125] Carl Georg Lange and William James, The Emotions (New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1967), p. 34.

[126] Monk, p. 92.

[127] Hassan, p. 8.

[128] Monk, p. 61.

[129] Foucault, p. 76.

[130] A Writer's Diary, p. 78.

[131] Leonard Woolf, The Journey Not the Arrival Matters: An Autobiography of the Years 1939-1969 (New York: Harcourt, 1969), p. 73.

[132] The Waves, p. 361.

[133] Monk, p. 211.

[134] Mrs. Dalloway (New York: Harcourt, 1953), p. 232.

[135] Monk, p. 119.

[136] To the Lighthouse, pp. 241, 158.

[137] Joan Bennett, Virginia Woolf: Her Art as a Novelist (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1964), p. 71.

[138] A Writer's Diary, p. 134: "That is my temperament, I think, to be very little persuaded of the truth of anything. . . ."

[139] Ibid., p. 182.

[140] M. C. Bradbrook, "Notes on the Style of Mrs. Woolf," Scrutiny, I (1932), 35.

[141] Lange and James, p. 17.

[142] Mrs. Dalloway, p. 280.

[143] "Evening Over Sussex: Reflections in a Motor Car," p. 14.

[144] "On Being Ill," in The Moment, p. 14.

[145] Orlando, p. 159.

[146] A Room of One's Own, p. 81.

147 Rev. of The Lost Girl, by D. H. Lawrence, in Contemporary Writers, p. 158.

148 "On Being Ill," p. 21.

149 A Writer's Diary, p. 160.

150 A Room of One's Own, p. 96.

151 "Women and Fiction," p. 80.

152 A Room of One's Own, p. 96.

153 The Waves, p. 378.

CHAPTER V

ANAÏS NIN: A WORLD OF FEELING

When Edmund Wilson sent Anais Nin the collected works of Jane Austen, presumably to instruct her in the balanced and classic prose style of that author, Nin averted the gesture.[1] Certainly no female writer of the twentieth century could have values more distinct from Austen's than Anais Nin. It is likely that Nin would have agreed with D. H. Lawrence--about whom she wrote her first book--when he criticized the author of Sense and Sensibility for her "sharp knowing in apartness," her desecration of the unitary.[2]

It is in Nin that several traditions of sensibility converge: the influence of Lawrence's vitalism carries with it the presence of George Eliot and her mentor Wordsworth, essentially a didactic, therapeutic, and healing tradition. There is, as well, the sensibility of Proust (also influenced by George Eliot) and Virginia Woolf, the former of whom Nin names as her favorite author, a tradition that is more concerned with the esthetic, with a dramatization of the psychology of beauty.

Although Nin admired George Eliot, a writer who had influenced Lawrence, as a mold-breaker,[3] nothing could seem farther from Nin's slender and contained fictions than the magnanimous bulk of Middlemarch or the moralized melodrama of The Mill on the Floss. And indeed, Nin is radically

different from Eliot. Anti-puritanical(even more so than Lawrence), European, engaged in all the freedoms that New York or Paris allowed, Nin lacked Lawrence's deep and crippling acquaintance with British seriousness and Victorian morals. Yet Nin, like Eliot, has a visionary sense of the healing power of feeling, and is even didactic about it. Both emphasize the tremendous and incalculable effect of personal influence, of the radiance that sympathetic persons possess. "The effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive," says Eliot of Dorothea Brooke, and it is no less true of Nin's most virtuous characters, or of Nin herself, as she portrays herself in her diary.

Both Eliot and Nin, have, in their lifetimes, come to qualify as sages,[4] authors who are sought out in person and through correspondence for more of the same wisdom their books offer. Although it is not the current style to bend and kiss an author's hem in public, as did at least one admirer of Eliot, still, Nin has evoked in her readers a response that is similar in its tenacity and its urgent sincerity.

Of her female predecessors writing in English, it would seem that Virginia Woolf, rather than George Eliot, is Nin's most compatible forebear. As Lawrence Ferlinghetti put it, Anais Nin is "Virginia Woolf under water,"[5] meaning that she is even more rippling, elusive, echoing, than

Woolf herself. Nin and Woolf are alike in perceiving the finest nuances of behavior and in investing those nuances with absolute existential authority and importance. And Woolf, like Nin and Eliot, is devoted to the idea that personal influence has a half-life and reverberates more crucially than we customarily expect. Sensibility is incarnate in Nin as it is in Proust and Woolf: all three consider the distillation and refinement of moments of feeling as the primary occupation of the novel; all of them allow the shape of the novel to redetermine itself on the basis of feeling. And if it was Lawrence who said that the novel was the best vehicle for sympathy,[6] it is Woolf, Proust, and Nin who not only make use of that vehicle but also redesign it.

Nin's contribution to literature has not been based on her novels only, and her reputation and status has emerged in two layers, one out of the responses of a small readership to her fiction, written from 1932 to 1964, and another based on the more massive and recent response to her diaries, which she began publishing in 1966. The diaries and fiction should be taken together in any general consideration of Nin's work, and the fact that the excellence of the diaries has created this imperative--that they be ranked equally with works of imagination--is a large part of Nin's achievement. For the hugeness of the original diaries (over 200 volumes) and the sheer stubbornness of the writing (continued for sixty years, and short by eleven years of a

doubling of Nin's life) suggests that they not be taken as the secondary literature autobiography is generally thought to be (nor as a Shandean enterprise, which they are not) but rather as a transformation of this genre into something major.

Of course, we do not read the complete diaries, which might be far less manageable as literature. What we do have is a tremendous compression and distillation of the original, placed in the frame of a hindsight that allegedly does not alter the particulars or the feelings invested in them at the time, but which choreographs a new arrangement and proportion for purposes of intensity and freshness. It is fashionable now to regard the diaries as novels, and indeed Nin has remarked that the novelist, that is the polished and knowing artificer, edited the diaries.[7] It may even become fashionable to regard all of Nin's work as one long novel, a bigger version of Cities of the Interior, with the fiction a mere interpolation, or the diaries a huge and engulfing marginalia, a novel perhaps like The Golden Notebook, with its appositions of the fictive "real" and the fictive fiction, (but without, of course, Lessing's ironic sense of the relation of art to life--irony is antithetical to Nin's cast of mind.)[8]

It is a kind of courtesy perhaps, to read the diaries as fiction, for it at least exempts them from the more obvious relation they might bear to Nin's novels, that of

fulfilling the vulgar function of verifying documents. It is, in fact, difficult to evade this qualifying aspect of the diaries, and their presence does several things to the novels. Most obviously, the diaries give the author of the novels a more compelling existence; we are eager to read the novels in order to get at this sensibility in another form; we are as predisposed and as curious as we might be toward the work of a friend. The diaries, too, are simpler than the fiction, more accessible, and they give more evidence of a familiar and recognizable social texture. We read them as if they are Nin's *dibujo*, her sketch, and we then come away from the novels with a fuller satisfaction, much as we might enhance our responsiveness to abstract painting once we were sure the artist could draw. Least valuably perhaps, or most dangerously, the diaries attest to the "truth" of the fiction. This forces the fiction to run the risk of seeming like the mere veil over the true face of the diary, its symbolic nature an act of camouflage rather than an act of imagination. Yet Nin herself gives us permission to look at the diaries in this way: "The *Diary* proves that the characters are drawn from life," she said in an interview with Daisy Aldan, "the source is life. . . . Every character appears twice in my life--first as a human being in my *Diary*, then as a metaphysical symbol in the novels."[9] We are not, ordinarily, supposed to care whether characters are drawn from life,

but only whether or not they have life on the page. Nin is unembarrassed about the implications her statement might have as to the deficiency of her imagination, not out of naiveté, but out of a radical revaluation of the relation of life and art.

Her statement gives leeway to the habit that readers have of examining novels which are admitted to have characterizations very close to their real models as _romans à clef_. Such novels are generally disguised criticisms; they frame the real character rather than repicturing him or her. Nin's novels are very definitely not of this genre, though the appearance of the diaries may seem to make them so. When Nin claims that her characters are drawn from life, it is the word "life" that stands out: she wants to honor the _livingness_ of things as much as the formal coherence they take on in art.

Nin is "good at" life, the way some people are good at sewing or dancing or drawing; her skills in human relationships and her acute capacity for sensation are made clear in the diary. And it would seem that the more she publishes of the diary, and the more she revises it, and gives it a shape adequate as art, the less the novel as genre seems adequate to carry this livingness. We want to know people better than we do in fiction, she says in a recent and very complete interview,[10] thereby committing a heresy against the craft she spent over thirty years practicing. And yet this is a logical and honest heresy, given the objects she pursues in the diaries--the elements of intimacy and Experience.

For it _is_ Experience that Nin, in the good American tradition, seeks, as she portrays her life in the diaries, and particularly in the first diary, storing intoxicating and liberating encounters like jewels to be examined later in the enchanted but semi-imprisoning atmosphere of Louveciennes. Philip Rahv has observed that the theme of experience is the _Leitmotif_ of the American writer, and that "at bottom it was the theme of the individual transplanted from an old culture taking inventory of himself and of his new surroundings."[11] Certainly, this is Nin's situation at the inception of the diary; it is common knowledge that she began this voluminous testimony as a letter to her father, estranged from him in a new country at the age of eleven. The human meaning of this communication was that it gave her a referent, someone to go to with her experience; might it not be tempting, also, to accumulate experience as an offering, something to give as well as to have? In any case, the diary served as inventory of unlimited capacity, as Nin re-established herself in Paris and then, again, in New York, and in the fourth and fifth diaries, in Mexico and California.

Nin's pursuit of experience is not carried on in order to exhibit obvious trophies, like, say, Miller's conquests of women or Hemingway's conquest of nature. She does not relate that experience straightforwardly but rather as material which her capacity for deep understanding and deep

feeling has transformed. In certain respects the diaries are as elusive as the father they were written to: the absence of her husband in their pages necessarily leaves a fissure which would make all other relationships undergo a geological shift. Yet Nin transforms this understandable limitation into a positive feature, or perhaps, more accurately, this legitimate discretion coincides with her strategies as a novelist, which revolve around a tendency toward, in fact a doctrine of, omission.

Virginia Woolf spoke in her diary of the "appalling narrative business of the realist: getting on from lunch to dinner," and insisted, "it is false, unreal, merely conventional. Why admit anything to literature that is not poetry by which I mean saturated? Is that not my grudge against novelists? that they select nothing?"[12] This is also Nin's complaint about realism, and she purges her own work of all but the high points, doing away with the excess baggage of narrative detail in order to give her novels a flow and a purity unimpeded by pedestrian fact, and in order to dissolve the certainties of realism that are, in her personal epistemology, a lie. Consequently her diaries stand as testimony to a method of her fiction: in them she weans us from the simple curiosity that a reader of diaries tends to bring to that kind of a work, a curiosity which is also the staple of the ordinary reader's hunger for narrative. And she weans us by depriving us of any pat sense

of outcome or consequence; indeed, at times, different parts of the diaries seem quite incommunicado with other parts.

What Nin gives us instead of narrative certitude, or sociological detail, is revelation. And it is revelation less in its sense of self-exposure than in its sense of truth revealed through an individual life. The most famous autobiographies in Western literature, those of St. Augustine and Rousseau, are confessions. Although the model for confession is Catholic--and Nin was a practicing Catholic until her teens--although such confession is imitated in the recuperative monologue of the analysand, and Nin was both analysand and analyst--her diaries are not confessional in the most common sense of the word. For she does not seek to unburden herself of material as if that material is her impediment to freedom, nor does she pay guilty attention to the more ignoble details of her life as if to absolve herself by virtue of her typicality or detestability.

On the contrary, Nin's drive in her diaries, at least as they are revised, is to make myth of herself (and others), to write herself large, not out of egotism but in order to transform her life by means of discipline and optimism into the most lovely and elevated existence possible. Schiller's statement, with a change in gender, applies: "Every individual human being, one may say, carries within him, potentially and prescriptively, an ideal man, the archetype

of a human being, and it is his life's task to be, through all his changing manifestations, in harmony with the unchanging unity of this ideal."[13] If this idea strikes us as a more noble concept of selfhood than we are accustomed to hearing among our contemporaries it shows us the great attraction and remedial effect of Nin's diaries.

Nin explains in yet another interview that in her novels "there was a myth, and I wanted that myth to raise the standards of our life a little bit, just above the ground, just a little bit above the daily facts and the things that oppress us and the heavy, daily contingencies."[14] She is here distinguishing her novels from her diaries, yet clearly her diaries partake of that desire to rise above things, to keep the standards high. It is perhaps this quality that gives the diaries their force, not as confessional but as diplomatically inspirational works; exemplary in their intensity of feeling and in their advocacy of courageous personal relationships which are closely meditated and gently engaged, they are guidebooks for readers who want to learn how to enlarge and be decent caretakers of their own potential. It is the apex of Nin's tact that she creates an atmosphere of intimacy in the diaries at the same time that she refrains from a policy of open disclosure; we feel, somehow, that the diaries reach into our own lives, that they are intimate about <u>us</u>, intimating to us our own latent potential, the latent life force in us.

To call the diaries novels is to give them status. But it might be more accurate to admit of their uniqueness, or to devise a poetics of autobiography that would include them, rather than to drown their distinctness in another genre and call them what they are not. Only in this way can the diaries keep the richness of the authentic life in which they are rooted; only in this way can a balanced criticism and a true description of them be achieved without evading the endemic problems of autobiography: sincerity, self-deception, self-hagiographic tendencies, and in Nin's diaries, obliqueness as a means of handling the tensions of existence and as esthetic enhancement.

One of the most important features in the elevation of the diary's status as a genre is the implication it has for women's writing and women's concerns. Women have written diaries, traditionally, and it is an occupation that became particularly common in the age of Sensibility, the eighteenth century. This kind of writing is suitable to persons prohibited from public lives, for it is private life that a diary (as opposed to, say, a memoir) records. Perhaps, too, women write diaries because they do not expect to be listened to. This may be borne out by the fact that the diaries of women writers have been for the most part an adjunct and not a central or publishable concern. Mansfield wanted hers destroyed, and Woolf's, pursued in order to help her loosen her writing and to keep her calm, was not

made suitable for publication by her in her lifetime. Nin dignifies the diary form, not only by her deep fidelity to it over the years, but by keeping it as the equivalent of Woolf's room of one's own, a place to enter into herself. The diary is her constant companion, but is not just a record, the slovenly outcome of the need to put things down; it is, very differently, her accomplice in an act of discipline, a sponsor of meditation. At times she readies herself to write in it as one might bathe and dress for a lover, or as one might poise one's brush to begin an action painting. The diary is not the shadow of her life, trailing behind like a subordinate document, but rather the ultimate glorious receptacle, the altar on which she places her life, savoring, examining, preserving. What this eventuates in is what women always need more of--pride of selfhood. The diary is invaluable because it attests to the strength of a form that has always been both minor and available to women, and because it provides patterns for the pursuit of experience to shut-in females whose only mobility has been in the imagination.

To speak of Nin's attitude toward women, and toward herself as a woman, separately from the other concerns of her work, would be to eviscerate that work, so inextricable is her feminine identity from her fiction and diaries. She wanted "to write as a woman, and as a woman only," she said in the first volume of the diary,[35] and Lawrence Durrell, among others, congratulated her for having done so.[16]

Nin's desire to write as a woman was grounded in a full acceptance of the traditional sexual polarities, a natural state of affairs given her Latin and Catholic upbringing, her love of Lawrence, her companionship with Henry Miller, her apprenticeship to Otto Rank, and her engagement as a patient in both Freudian and Jungian analysis.[17] Yet in recent interviews Nin has modified her emphasis on the distinctive character of men and women,[18] for against the background of contemporary feminism a defense of polarity stands out as a political statement--either a call to arms in the battle of the sexes or a more reactionary assertion that women are legitimately trapped in their archetypal natures--an aggressiveness or condemning limitation that Nin never meant her ideas to imply.

Nin makes clear throughout her writing that she associates masculinity with intellect, fact, and the realistic novel--and femininity with intuition, feeling, and poetic form.[19] Women are the repository of _being_, she believes, writing in the diary: "Waiting in the cafe, I write these words: 'On _being_ the womb.' And it unleashes a tremendous feminine universe, I am completely divorced from man's world of ideas. I swim in nature."[20] Women's special quality, just as generations have said, is that of the non-reflective _bios_: in a 1973 radio broadcast[21] she reiterated her much earlier statement: women had "never gone through separation of body, senses, heart and mind," she said.

Woman "still had a chance of being whole. . . . the natural self," with "more organic harmony between her body and her thinking." And again, to write like a woman is a total act of the senses, body, and heart: "I think the women [sic] are more total." It is precisely Nin's awareness of this gift of wholeness that makes her depict the fragmentation of her female characters as neurotic; although genuine multiplicity is regarded by Nin as a richness, a less fortunate fragmentation gives a pain that only those who have known wholeness can feel.

It would seem that Nin displays a more comfortable congruity between the general expectations of women's nature and the direction of her own personality than many women writers, yet although she has asserted that she was not so much aware of prejudice in those earlier years,[22] she has made eloquent reference to the problematic nature of women's lives, and speaks of her "problems as a woman writer."[23] Defending her emphasis on women characters, she explains:

> I spent more time on the women characters because I understood them better, because I felt they had more conflicts than men, and above all because I felt that a great part of woman was as yet inarticulate. Dr. Otto Rank confirmed this feeling when he said that we knew little about woman's psychology because a man had invented psychology, and because woman imitated man's intellectualizations and rationalizations and did not trust her way of perceiving which was related to the artist, rather than the intellectual.[24]

She puts it with even more poignancy and force in the third

diary, elucidating what she means by conflict as she intones the stresses engendered by feminine identity like beads on a private rosary:

> Creation and femininity seemed incompatible. The _aggressive act_ of creation.
>
> . . . .
>
> To create seemed such an assertion of the strongest part of me that I would no longer be able to give all those I love the feeling of their being stronger, and they would love me less.
>
> An act of independence would be punished by desertion. I would be abandoned by all those I loved.
>
> Men fear women's strength. I have been deeply aware of men's weakness, the need to guard them from my strength.
>
> I have made myself less powerful, have concealed my powers.
>
> . . . .
>
> I have crippled myself.
>
> Dreams of Chinese women with bound feet.[25]

Thus Nin's statements about women's special gifts have a double strength, for they are not uttered out of ignorance of friction and resistance but in spite of it.

The most consistent strength underlying the diary is Nin's female version of self-reliance. She recognizes no authority outside herself, insisting that her own feelings establish the center of her reality. The diary, written for her father, paradoxically records and serves as the resource of the strength she needs to pit herself against incarnations of parental authority, helping her to resist even such a formidable apotheosis of masculine intellect as Edmund Wilson.[26] Feeling is the final authority.

"Nothing that we do not discover emotionally will have the power to alter our vision," Nin says in _The Novel of_

the Future,[27] and this is the lesson her diaries and fiction teach over and over again. Indeed, Nin is a teacher, though her creation of a subtle and exotic environment is at odds with the dowdiness we associate with the didactic mode. But although she is didactic, she is not moral: she teaches sympathy, not judgment. And it may be that her didacticism is less evident at first glance because she is telling us what we want to learn, or what we already know and want to have spoken on our behalf.

Nin's teachings about the emotions are not the same as, say, Eliot's ideology of sympathy, though the two overlap in their didactic emphasis on the importance of influence and the salutary nature of the feelings. For Nin, feelings are not a means to an end, not a path to unselfish and interdependent community, though that may result; they are themselves the highest good. Her focus is on the mobility of feeling, not on the whole and proper states of emotional consciousness which for Eliot compose a moral being. For Nin, feeling need not have its issue in consistent acts: resonances are enough and radiance is the test.

Yet, although Nin is writing out of a modern tradition of sensibility, in which the ethical roots emphasized by Shaftesbury have almost entirely withered away, she is not without connection to the Shaftesburian ethic of sympathy and empathy. "What makes us human is empathy, sympathy," she says in The Novel of the Future,[28] and it is clearly

the opportunity to employ these qualities that drives her as a novelist:

> I did not describe women at greater length because I was a woman, but because I knew more about them, and because most of the women characters in literature are done by men. . . . I wrote out of empathy, identification, and mimicry, but that does not mean I am all of them, which would be quite a tour de force.
>
> . . . .
>
> Identification and empathy are the opposites of alienation and separation. They also achieve the opposite. They bring one inside a human being, in intimate contact with him so that one can understand his motivations, relate to him.[29]

Identification functions not just as a means of understanding motivation, but comes out of a habitual response to sentient experience: in the diaries Nin absorbs what is around her until subjective and objective lose their distinctness, and mingle in an undifferentiated global experience:

> Watching the fish swim in the turquoise waters of the aquarium I experienced a suffocation. I had watched so intently, I had been so absorbed by their breathing, I had forgotten to breathe for myself. I had been so breathlessly attentive to their breathing, to imagine what it felt to breathe through one's flanks, through one's own groin, to breathe through a slit behind one's ear, to breathe through a slit on each side of one's neck, through an opening in one's ribs, to breathe with a wing of flesh open, to breathe with a part of the flesh curling up like the antennae of a sea anemone, to breathe with arms, trunks, legs, that I had forgotten to breathe for myself as the woman who stood there watching the aquarium. I had passed into the water, into the body of the fish.[30]

This exalted passage is an extreme example of Nin's absorptive powers; the diaries are filled with these same absorptive powers brought to bear on personal relationships,

relationships in which she allows the other to pass into her as easily as she passes by means of empathy into others. Such a mutual seepage, although it closely resembles the reciprocal influence that enhances our humanness, and constitutes the merging which has traditionally been characteristic of romantic love, is clearly a danger, particularly for women, for it facilitates a loss of distinct identity.

Virginia Woolf, creator of the most sympathetic, or sympathizing, character in English fiction, Mrs. Ramsay, had claimed that sympathy was generally regarded as a concern of laggards and losers.[31] It is true that in this century sympathy is regarded as a minor and dated mode of human approach, and one best left to women, much as the literal dispensation of charity was left to women in the nineteenth century. One of the most radical features of Nin's diary is its unashamed documenting of the subtle charitable acts inspired by her own clairvoyant, diffusive, and sometimes paralyzing sympathy, and the consequent intimacies and disappointments that engage her energies. The diary is perhaps one of the few books in American literature since Huckleberry Finn to make friendship interesting, and it is so clear and emphatic in this respect that it is almost a manifesto of sympathy, a blueprint of human responsiveness.

In a recent radio interview Nin explained that it was her hypersensitivity that gave her empathy, and it is a

hypersensitivity that makes for vulnerability, both in the culture-at-large and in the exigencies of friendships.[32] The Novel of the Future is dedicated to "sensitive Americans. May they create a sensitive America," and Nin has spoken elsewhere of America's "cult of toughness, its hatred of sensitivity," prophesying with chilling accuracy that "someday it may have to pay a terrible price for this, because atrophy of feeling creates criminals."[33] The diaries record what it is like for a sensitive spirit to journey through a culture that is not respectful of the emotions, a culture in which the maximum gestures of feeling are rarely acceptable. Given this cultural consensus, Nin's values are subversive; her desire to increase sensitivity, feeling, and a capacity for sensation in those around her, or to advocate this kind of personality so strongly that she filters out those who fall short, creates a personal situation of a quietly rebellious shape.

Sensitivity is painful, not only because it cannot mesh with the values of the culture, but because of its own extremity, its inherent momentum, which takes it beyond a tolerable threshold--a problem and pleasure that is familiar to us from our readings in Romantic poetry. "Emotionalism and sensibility are my quicksands," Nin states in the first diary,[34] and in the second diary puts it with more desperation: "When I think of suicide I think of it only as a relief and an end to sensibility. That is my disease,

my only disease."[35] Nin is aware of the morbid extremes of sensitivity and of the dangers of speaking the language of the nerves, and she conveys them, inimical and surreal, in House of Incest, a novel which, as one critic points out,[36] bears a relationship to Poe's more simple Gothic horrors. Yet the penalty of sensitivity which the diary emphasizes, is not so much madness as sympathy, the extreme at the other end of the continuum.

For the most part, an excess of vision is regarded by Nin as a creative faculty and not a psychological difficulty. Sensibility is a source of pride and a locus of nourishment. In Nin's view, aliveness is the touchstone, and her struggle to intensify this quality and to resist at all costs the loss of it is the central concern of her writing. Her formulation of this derives from Lawrence's vitalism[37] and it is a distant and sensualized relative of Eliot's "fervor" and a close relative of Woolf's "ecstasy." "I want to live only for ecstasy," Nin proclaims in the first diary,[38] and her characters, some of them, seethe with it: Djuna and Lillian are, in Ladders to Fire, "primed for high living, primed for flight, for explosion, for ecstasy, for feeling, for all experience."[39] Yet like Eliot's characters, some of Nin's have feelings too great for the channels available. Stella, in Winter of Artifice, for example, gives off "such a brilliance in acting it was unbearable. Too great an exaltation for the role, which breaks like too small a vessel. Too great a warmth. . . . When she begged for the roles

which could contain this intensity they were denied her."[40] Djuna, in the same book, is permeated by the confessions of others in her role as therapist, and reverberates in response like the Romantics' aeolian harp:

> The resonance is so immense, resonance to wind, to lament, to pain, to desires, to every nuance of sensibility, so enormous the resonance. . . . Her being is brimming, spilling over, cannot contain its own knowledge. The music spills out, overflows, meets with the overfullness, and she cannot receive it. She is saturated. For in her it never dies. No days without music. She is like an instrument so tuned up, so exacerbated, that without hands, without players, without leadership, it responds, it breathes, it emits the continuous melody of sensibility.[41]

Lilith carries out the theme, with a scrap of information that would have intrigued Wordsworth, a proof that in Nin's world there is nothing that is not potentially capable of feeling: "She remembered at this moment that when she heard that stones had a heartbeat, a kind of faint pulse which had never before been registered, she had cried out angrily: 'how terrible, everything in the world feels. Exactly what I feared. That is why I am always so tender with everything. To think that even a stone can feel!'"[42]

A sentient world must be approached with tenderness, just as highly sentient beings must be protected from the harsh and the vulgar; Nin writes of Djuna's eyes:

> At the same time their vulnerability and sentience made them tremble like the delicate candlelight or like the eye of the finest camera lens which at too intense daylight will suddenly shut black. . . . The inner chamber in which sensitivity to daylight, to crudity and grossness would cause instantaneous annihilation of the image.[43]

One of the attributes of the sensitivity Nin espouses is refinement. Nin has described her fiction as being distilled writing, and it is clear that her work goes through a refining process in a double sense of the word: it is subjected to a threshing and sifting out not only of the stylistically unnecessary but of the esthetically unpalatable. The main role of the artist, says Nin is "to transform ugliness into beauty,"[44] and wherever she can she replaces ugliness with beauty, tactfully transforming the undesirable into the desirable. Nin has a utopian and paradisiacal[45] sense of the simple richness of things, an esthetic value that is perhaps most joyously celebrated in Jean Varda, a figure who appears in both her diaries and her fiction. She describes him in Collages:

> He often spoke of paradise. Paradise was a distillation of women panoplied with ephemeral qualities. His collages taught how to remain in a state of grace of love, extract only elixirs, transmute all life into lunisolar fiestas, and all women, by a process of cut-outs, to aphrodisiacs.
>
> He was the alchemist searching only for what he could transmute into gold. He never painted homely women, jealous women, or women with colds. He dipped his brushes in pollen, in muteness, in honeymoons, and his women were interchangeable and mobile.[46]

Alchemy is a word that recurs in Nin's work, and she too prefers what can be turned into gold, in her case by an optimism which sees in every form its potentially improved form. And where there is no change in substance possible she effects at least a transformation of the container,

just as Djuna in Children of the Albatross "poured medicines from ugly bottles into alchemist bottles, creating minor mysteries, minor transmutations."[47]

Nin is partial to physical beauty--exoticism, elegance, personal magic, simple glamour, flamboyance--as if she is resuscitating the medieval tendency to associate outer beauty and inner virtue. This vision releases us from the Puritan suspicion of beauty and the leaden Victorian doctrine of plainness and creates a deeply pleasurable world that gives off an aura of royalty, specialness and charm. Nin's appetite for surface is at times disturbing to our sense of democracy, yet it does not derive from a superficiality of temperament of the cardboard variety that all sensitive Americans mistrust. Rather her appreciation of visible attributes comes from an esthetic sense, an unremitting desire for beauty; because her deepest attachments are to the warm and the near, to personal relationships rather than to landscape or art objects, her esthetic sense nourishes itself on attractive men and women, clothing, domestic objects.

More importantly perhaps, her valuation of the physical derives from the deep eroticism present in all her work; this predisposition gives to the individuals she encounters or creates an erotic eligibility, and places them on a continuum of potential aliveness and sexual power. Beauty, like feeling, is essential to the erotic if it is not to

become pornography or caricature. "We have many direct anatomical sexual writers," says Nin, but "very few erotic." By erotic she means, "the totality of sexual experience, its atmosphere, mood, sensual flavors, mystery, vibrations, the state of ecstasy into which it may plunge us, the full range of the senses and emotions which accompany, surround it, and which the explicit flat clinical descriptions destroy."[48]

Nin herself wrote one thousand pages of erotica for a collector, an enterprise that was, she has said, a joke to her.[49] Yet excerpts from this material as it appears in the third diary show it to be of high quality and of a style not discontinuous with her more serious work. The explicit titles of her serious works--House of Incest, Seduction of the Minotaur, Spy in the House of Love attest to her willingness to deal with sexuality in a way that no well-known English-speaking writer before her except for Lawrence had undertaken. As Nin explains in a Vogue interview:

> D. H. Lawrence was the first to acknowledge that woman had a sexuality, a life of her own, and that lovemaking can originate with the woman. Eroticism is one of the basic means of self-knowledge, as indispensable as poetry. But if a woman writes openly about her need--for example, Violette Leduc or Catlin Thomas, the widow of Dylan Thomas--she is damned.
>
> I have always admitted the sexual appetite and given it a great place in my work.[50]

Virginia Woolf was disturbed, after reading Lawrence, about what she had left out of her own work;[51] Nin, who in every

other way expresses admiration of Woolf, feels the lack of the erotic in her predecessor's fiction: "There was a missing thing in her [though] I respected her . . . the absence of experience and passion."[52]

Woolf, like Nin, suggests repeatedly that women cannot write with full freedom in the forms men have devised, but Nin (in one instance at least) makes the difference specifically one of sexuality: "I have a feeling that Pandora's box is the mysteries of woman's sensuality, so different from man's and for which man's language is inadequate. The language of sex has yet to be invented."[53]

Nin, like Lawrence, was trying to correct what Germaine Greer calls "the insanity of pure intelligence,"[54] and what Lawrence called "that worst of male vices, the vice of abstraction and mechanization,"[55] by a devotion to an erotic and intuitive sense of reality. There is a powerful anti-intellectual bias in Nin's work, as there is in Lawrence's, and Nin insists on sinking her lines deeper than the level of intellect, as if logic, argument, all the voices of the head as opposed to the heart, are only translations, wrenched translations from an original emotional reality. For her, feeling and intellect are not different ends of a continuum but rather exist on separate planes, with the world of common sense and logic a thin crust which barely conceals the shiftings and turnings of the emotional meanings beneath it. The gentle tenacity with which

Nin attacks abstract intellect can be accounted for by her need to overcome the hostility to feeling in the culture around her without herself contributing to the noise of the polemical that tends to drown out the bodily and emotional responses and to interfere with the reception obtained by more sensitive antennae.

Nin upholds in her diaries, fiction, and criticism a means of cognition which she regards as far more effective than the intellectual--the mode of intuition. In The Novel of the Future she quotes Bergson:

> Bergson said there are two kinds of clarities. "The perception of the artist, of the intuitive mind will always seem obscure to those who prefer clear Cartesian perception."
>
> He spoke of "the fringe of nebulosity which surrounds the luminous core of intelligence, affirming by its presence that part of our existence so clearly perceived by our intelligence is not the essential or the most profound part. This penumbra is what must be penetrated if we would seek reality."[56]

It is this penumbra that Woolf's description of life as a semi-transparent envelope invokes, as does Nin's repeated statement of affection for everything transparent.

Through intuition Nin's characters make their ultimate discriminations about reality, distinguishing the true from the false, the authentic energies from the fake. The nameless heroine of Winter of Artifice tells her father, "I am saying only that you are false with me. I have too much intuition."[57] Everything changes; only intuition and feeling offer an incontrovertible truth: in Seduction of the Minotaur Lillian, in a state of enlightenment about her

marriage, realizes that "in losing this first intuitive knowledge she had of the bond between them, she had also lost a truth about herself."[58]

Intuition is associated with the feminine in Nin's view. In the chapter called "Abstraction" in The Novel of the Future Nin writes:

> Quite recently in a group of Freudian analysts it was the women who understood "intuition," that is an awareness arrived at without conscious knowledge of the steps by which it is reached. The women understood that you could arrive at a feeling about something without being able to describe the sequence of inductions, deductions, experience, memory which fused to make an intuitive opinion. . . . The man who proceeds like a woman, in leaps, is the artist, the creative scientist, and the inventor.[59]

Nin is here taking a fairly classic position on women's capacity and specialty, offering neither propaganda nor apology. In her earliest public statement of any kind, her book on Lawrence, she was emphatic about the intuitive nature of women, if only to specify how close Lawrence himself came to it: "Women have always done their reasoning from . . . trifles. It has been termed pettiness. Women are intuitive: the trifle is . . . the betraying ripple on the surface. Man's logic is against a priori deductions from isolated trifles. But that is the way women 'reason' and Lawrence employs the same method."[60] The intuitional quality, then, is what made Lawrence often write as a woman would write, with a combination of sensitivity and a suspicion of the intellect. At the end of a chapter called "Woman" in her study of Lawrence, Nin sums up:

> Biologically it has been observed that a man's emotions are concentrated, while women's are spread all over their bodies. Somers in Kangaroo speaks of "feeling sensitive all over," and it may be that quality in Lawrence which makes him do that very special kind of writing which sometimes looks crinkled up with sensitiveness, almost bristling with it--like a woman's.
>
> . . . .
>
> His suspicion of the intellect is of course, close to the feminine nature. He confides in the intuition. He battles for the clairvoyance of it. . . . And this is purely a feminine battle. . . .[61]

It is no secret that Lawrence suffered denigration and censorship for his presentation of the erotic nature of human beings; but Nin points out that in his "feminine battle" for the truth of intuition there is another, subtler discomfort:

> What a task--to make an instinct clear to the mind!
>
> People in the throes of an instinct are tormented by a peculiar distemper, restlessness, blackness. An intuition cannot be explained rationally either to others or even to one's self. Women know the despair. It is often the cause of hysterics, tears, unreasonableness. The instinct is there: sometimes even to justify it, in a frantic effort to give a rational explanation, one is invented, which adds to the confusion. Lawrence did not invent explanations. He stuck to the inarticulate instinct; but he suffered.
>
> . . . .
>
> There is nothing more discouraging, more ungrateful, than a truth perceived by intuition.[62]

Just as hypersensitivity brings with it a social and personal vulnerability, so does a faith in intuition engender a frustrating isolation. The penalty of sensibility, of this kind of insight, is the risk of being misunderstood by others, of being set apart. In Children of the Albatross Djuna awakens one morning feeling "the painful knowledge

that this was a day when she would be possessed by a mood which cut her off from fraternity:

> It was also at these moments that she would have the clearest intuitions, sudden contacts with the deepest selves of others, divine the most hidden sorrow.
>
> But if she spoke from this source, others would feel uneasy, not recognizing the truth of what she said. They always felt exposed and were quick to revenge themselves. . . . They blamed her for excess of imagination, for exaggeration.[63]

Nin herself found a path from intuition to coherent statement, to some sort of consensual language, through psychoanalysis, and most particularly through the theories of Otto Rank. For her, psychoanalysis was a certification of her divining powers, and it corroborated her impulse to chart the private self in her fiction. She has explained that when she was writing fiction "American literature suffered from two taboos: one Puritanism, the other inherited from England, a false shame about the self, about subjective reality. Fortunately Dr. Rank and a study of psychology supported my belief that this absence of the self was hypocritical, its denial dangerous, and that the so-called objective novel caused alienation."[64]

"Psychology is my utopia," Nin has said in conversation, assuring the listener that this discipline does not impede the imagination, that "there are always more mysteries," that in fact psychoanalysis proves that the unconscious works through symbols, justifying the symbolist imagination that Nin exercises in her novels.[65] Even her

renowned symbol of the labyrinth, with its mythic and ritualistic underpinnings, a symbol which Nin associates with the womb, with the mysterious corridors of her own body, has a correlative image in Rank's work.[66] For Nin, this science of healing, psychoanalysis, does not function as a clinical supplement to an incomplete life; it is, quite differently, her metaphysics. And the rescue it afforded her powers of intuition allowed her to continue to think like a woman. In the first diary she wrote, "The absence of muscular structure in woman's mind makes Henry suspicious. But just before June came back, he was beginning to trust my intuitions. It is this kind of feminine thinking which psychoanalysis makes clear, and I am better able now to explain what I feel."[67]

If there is a paradox in Nin turning to the rationalizations of psychoanalysis for assurance about her non-rational powers, it is only a superficial one. For it is not the terms of analysis, or its predictable categories, that are Nin's reductum; these terms and categories are retranslated into the features that compose feeling. Nin puts it as concisely as possible: "Psychoanalysis was my invaluable teacher in the study of motivation and interpretation. Understanding creates compassion, sympathy, and empathy."[68] The study of motivation does not place individuals in a verifiable scheme so much as it demonstrates to Nin the impossibility of "objectivity," and the boldness

with which the unconscious impresses its requirements on the subconscious; and it is this last consideration that is the bedrock of her characterization, and consequently of her novels, for her novels are novels of character.

In her characters Nin makes manifest the unconscious as it has been conceived of by the psychiatric thinkers of this century. Nin's characterizations are a departure from the techniques of conventional realism, and are most closely related to those of D. H. Lawrence. Lawrence dissolved the crystallized form of characterization that had existed in the nineteenth century novel and gave his characters emotions that were not necessarily hung on the correct coathangers of personality, but could pass through any character at any time like a current of electrical energy; he understood the weather of people and created a magnetic field of attractions and repulsions, of psychic flow, that did not keep to the moral consistency required by the Victorian novelists. Nin, even more than Lawrence, abolishes those novelistic cues which add up to personality, and substitutes personages that have a dreamlike anonymity compared to the richness of social types that can be found in the nineteenth-century novel. She allows her characters to move in the soil of their psychic lives without reference to ethical responsibilities, or the supposed social responsibility of consistent behavior, and the oscillations and swervings of their unhindered emotions have as a

standard the "plots of the unconscious,"[69] as Nin puts it.

So long as these plots of the unconscious impel dramatic action in Nin's work, they are a successful point of departure; it is when the process of insight is itself adumbrated that a weakened novelistic texture results. Nin's longueurs of psychological motivation bring her as close to an analytic style as her prose ever comes, and distinguishes her sharply from Lawrence, for whom the historical propulsions of personality are not so important as the waves they make in the present. Her discursive interpolations are often fascinating as information or psychological insight, yet they are the least successful areas of her prose, for they offer a narrative explanation, the dead wood of a finite solution, instead of the aliveness of things enacted before our eyes. It is passages like the following that lend a willed and retrospective quality to the characters that puts them at a greater remove from the reader, and contradicts the intimacy which is for Nin a touchstone of her poetic prose:

> Lillian had felt responsible for the Doctor's death, but now she knew it was not a personal responsibility; it was because she too had lived with only a part of Larry, and when you live with only a part of a person, you symbolically condemn the rest of it to indifference, to oblivion.
>
> . . . .
>
> She knew that by similar detours of the labyrinth, it was not the absence of love or the death of it which had estranged her from Larry, but the absence of communication between all the parts of themselves, the sides of their character which one feared to uncover in the other. (My italics)[70]

These are of course essentially didactic passages, passing on to us a hard-earned understanding. What saves them, if indeed they are saved, is that these direct statements are made precisely in order to drive the reader back into the province of the non-analytic which the rest of Nin's fiction, with its rich atmosphere and imagery, represents. Nin is overt in her persuasions, but her articles of faith, her wisdom, dwell not on intellectual or spiritual dogma but on a bodily involvement with the world by means of vivid and fluid feeling. She means her dogma not to be held in the mind like a rigid code, but melted back down into the flow of life. The passage above from Seduction of the Minotaur continues, "If they had been flowing together in life, they would not have created these areas of vacuum."

In psychoanalytic terms the novelistic dissolution of character amounts to a dissolution of ego. Bunyan and other allegorists avoid individualized characterization in favor of--again in psychoanalytic terms--the superego. Writers like Lawrence, Nin, Woolf, place the ego, the level of social characterization, below the unconscious, in their hierarchy of values. In this inversion of the commonly accepted hierarchy the intellect, or the consciousness which is associated with the ego, topples also. Once consciousness is abolished, derided, or put in a lower place, there is room for the expansion of the non-rational, and for the emotional and the physical to be given an

important place.

In her resistance to the intellect and her belief in the non-reflective and non-discursive as the best means of persuasion, the favorable medium for fiction, Nin comes to represent positively the condition of non-reflective _bios_ which has been deemed for so long the innate and appropriate gift of women, and which has been seen by many women writers as an obstacle. In _The Novel of the Future_ she wonders,

> Was it a feminine tendency, to relate, unite, connect, organically, cellularly, while the masculine mind wanted to separate, to become independent? If there are obscure moments in my novels, they must come from this attempt to describe a total, organic, multiformed expansion, rather than a separation which the intellect attempts, dividing one element from another, analyzing them as independent functions. Relationship is the outcome of growth, expansion, unification; alienation the result of separation.[71]

Much earlier, Nin defended in her book on Lawrence what she felt had been mistaken as antediluvian views, most particularly Lawrence's division of women into "cocksure"--the modern type--and the "hensure"--who is "sure as a hen is sure, that is, without knowing anything about it. . . . Her sureness was a physical condition. . . ."[72] Lawrence clearly prefers the woman who has an unconscious sureness of her bodily being over the woman with certitude of intellect, as his portrait of Katherine Mansfield as Gudrun in _Women in Love_ demonstrates. Nin takes pains to reconcile this aspect of Lawrence's thinking with the concept of the

"artist-builder" woman, as she phrases it, and although her defense in the book is not satisfying,[73] the fact of her writing it is more than adequate proof of her point; for in Nin's view in this study the traditional interpretation of woman-as-her-body wins out,[74] yet it wins out, ironically, within a work of literary criticism, which for all its looseness of development and personalism of insight, is an act of that critical intellect which Lawrence would have preferred women not to exercise.

To write as a woman when woman is non-reflective _bios_ is a problem, for how can one write and be sure beyond the self-consciousness of speech at the same time? Nin's value of organic wholeness, too, mitigates against speech: "The friction of words generated only pain and division," she writes in _Winter of Artifice_.[75] And the condition of ecstasy which Nin regards as a certain good, in which boundaries and identity are lost, is essentially a condition of speechlessness or of primitive utterance. Language is lost, too, in the sweep of intuition, for language is a step that can be skipped as a situation is swiftly grasped by the body, by the feelings, with no intervention of logical appraisal or analytic sequence.

In Nin's eyes, as in Wordsworth's, we murder to dissect. Words kill intuition, our only truth, because they make parts where there is potentially a wholeness, and a livingness. "To analyze is to dissect," she says, and

"to dissect means to work upon dead matter."[76] The state of intuition is one of undifferentiated unity, like the dream state which Nin sees as a rich source of understanding and of rich symbolic imagery. In _Winter of Artifice_ she vivifies the problem:

> _I was not altogether asleep. The night was like a very black silk curtain, but there was still a slit of daylight. I felt the approach of the dream. But while there was a slit of daylight there were words floating around her. They were sharp, they cut like knives into the feelings, they separated, they scalded, they uncovered the skin, they exposed, they killed the feelings. The moment words cut into the dream, into the feeling, they cut into the pulse and the pulse ceased to beat._[77]

It is to make language less killing that Nin turns away from realism, and she expressed this resolve in the first diary, putting a rhetorical question to Henry Miller: "What we analyze, will it die? . . . Sometimes I do feel your relentless analysis of June leaves something out. You go about it like a surgeon with a scalpel. And as you cut, you kill what you cut into. . . . I want to fight your realism with all the magic forces of poetry."[78] This proclamation of intention is essential to an understanding of Nin's fiction, and it is a promise that she fulfills, substituting for the cerebral and realistic (not necessarily the same thing) the language of incantation, the ritual(s) of immersion, the depiction(s) of words as sensuous objects, and a reverence for silence.

Like Woolf, and like the Symbolist poets, Nin takes silence to be a sign of the deepest encounter with the self

and experience. Hers is not the silence of astonishment, a speechlessness in the face of the surpassingly marvelous, but rather an opportunity for communion, unity, soundless immersion in an inarticulate, and anonymous, organic existence. Silence is associated with an ecstasy that is a restoration of power, a rechanneling of power through the senses, rather than a depletion and loss of power in the face of the overwhelming. She puts it clearly in one of the lyrical passages in The Four-Chambered Heart:

> She liked the silence most of all. The silence in which the body, the senses, the instincts, are more alert, more powerful, more sensitized, live a more richly perfumed and intoxicating life, instead of transmuting into thoughts, words, into exquisite abstractions, mathematics of emotion in place of the violent impact, the volcanic eruptions of fever, lust, and delight.[79]

This state--and it is repeated and enhanced elsewhere in her writing--is like a state of grace, a condition of the most fortunate apprehension; it is Nin's sensuous version of the Wordsworthian moment when time, place, and intimations of immortality intersect.

In Seduction of the Minotaur, the novel of Nin's which most gives permission to the sensuousness rarely treated in the American novel, the heroine finds in the tropical population of Mexico an opening into this state of grace which is essentially a recovery of the unity of the body and a bodily connection to the world on which the emotions depend. Her feelings, previously expelled by her, await her in this foreign setting:

> In the eyes of the Mexicans there were no questions, no probings.
>
> . . . .
>
> Lillian could feel as they did at times. There were states of being which resembled the time before the beginning of the world, unformed, undesigned, unseparated. . . . Dense, invisible, inaccessible to articulate people. She would live here, would be lost. At every moment of anxiety, of probing, she would slip into the sea for rebirth. Her body would be restored to her. . . . Her whole body would be restored to her, breasts relaxed, no longer compressed by the emotions of the chest, legs restored, smooth and gleaming. All of it cool, smooth, washed of thought.[80]

And so powerful is the atmosphere, the ambience of the book, that even words are converted, made benign by the rampant sensuousness:

> The sea's orchestration carried away half the spoken words and made talking and laughing seem a mere casual accompaniment, like the sound of birds. Words had no weight. The intensity of the colors made them float in space like balloons, and the velvet texture of the climate gave them a purely decorative quality like other flowers. They had no abstract meaning.[81]

Thus are things mental transmuted into objects that can be absorbed by the senses.

In her fiction Nin wants to channel meaning through the senses, and it is for this reason that she pursues poetic prose. "Poetry," she says, "is our relation to the senses,"[82] and "poetry has a subliminal influence. It influences by contagion, empathy, as music does."[83] Committed to the unconscious, to the realm of unregulated forces which the ego and intellect tend to resist and obfuscate, she wants to bypass the discursive and analytic: "The unconscious cannot express itself directly because it

is a composite of past, present, future, a timeless alchemy of many dimensions. A direct statement, as for an act, would deprive it of its effectiveness."[84]

In writing about Pierre-Jean Jouve Nin describes her own literary values and strategy: "The drug of poetry makes truth and lucidity more absorbent. The intellect cannot resist its invasion. Language becomes the magic potion. Rhythm becomes the instrument of contagion, and the fluidity of the images flows directly into the subconscious without interference."[85] What Nin is describing here, of course, is persuasion, and the subtle desire to persuade is an irresistible tendency of her sensibility. Even the diary was initiated to persuade her absent father to return[86] and all of the richness, exaltation, and enchantment of the fiction and diaries radiates with the indirect message "feel this, eat this, absorb, sharpen your senses, weep, laugh, be more alive." Nin's sumptuous descriptions exist not to fill out a clear and verifiable presentation of reality, but to whet our appetite for life. Throughout most of her fiction Nin substitutes the hypnotic for the mimetic.

Like her friend Artaud, Nin is interested in ritual, in a language of incantation, that will immerse her audience, immersion, of course, being a form of empathy, of unqualified union. She herself uses the word often, explaining that she wants her writing to sweep the reader

along like a ritual, a ritual to keep alive a certain state of mind. Rhythm is essential to this; she sees it as crucial to the life of a work of art and she is rare among prose writers in her insistence on this feature that is so basic it is usually either taken for granted or never considered. In The Novel of the Future she writes:

> The use of rhythm as magic in writing is similar to the drumming in jazz. Rituals, costumes, gestures at ceremonies are all intended to move and sweep us into experience. . . . we . . . have banished from our civilization the arts which have the power to move our sense and our emotions, to heighten our sense of life. . . . The importance of rhythm in my estimation is a measure of the difference between a live book and a dead one.[87]

Nin, keeping to a style of faith and not argument, understands how to handle the reader at the level of metabolic response, altering our ordinary rhythms so that we don't quibble with her style but either fall into step with it or fall away from it entirely. And rhythm is significant not only as a compelling beat that throws off our customary expectations of narrative information, but as an index of sensitivity and empathy in human encounters: "In describing relationships, rhythm is important."[88]

The staple of ritual is rhythm and the heart of rhythm is repetition. Nin's prose achieves the subliminal effects of her prose rhythms by a balance of repetition and omission. Omission is for her a virtue, a stripping away of particulars to get at essences. But there is a sense of space in her work that comes not just from the absence of

furniture, of quotidian activity, but from her syntactic adjustments. Nin's style of allowing a single sentence or a few short ones to stand as a paragraph gives them the effect of being suspended in a surrounding silence. Her sentences are often brief, hieroglyphic, telegraphic, without having the conclusive quality of epigrammatic brevity. Hers is a style of pauses and interstices, as if between each paragraph there must be a refocusing, a recomposing.

If Nin leaves out a great deal, and says some things not at all, there are many other things she says twice, and she evinces the desire to double her experience in her diaries and fiction. As she explained to Daisy Aldan, her characters appear twice, in her diaries and her fiction, and in her short story "The Labyrinth," she wrote, "I wanted to remember in order to be able to return. As I walked, I walked with the desire to see all things twice so as to find my way back into them again. . . . There was a definite feeling that their meaning could only be revealed the second time."[89] This is in part a wish for immortality, of course, yet it gives a deeper meaning to the repetitions in Nin's prose.

Nin's repetitions do not have the infantile quality of, for instance, Gertrude Stein's; they are more formal, hieratic, hypnotic. Her dwelling on phrases, words, by repeating them gives them a kind of consecration, a sacramental quality; they are the core of the ritualistic pattern

in her fiction and their recurrence frustrates progressive linear narrative and forces us into the present. In her repetition Nin combines her tenacity of viewpoint with the aura of ancient mysteries and divine rites, so that an element of persuasion lies within an atmosphere of formal composure.

It is against the formal composure of her fiction that Nin's diaries work, offering a warmth and ease of interest that contrasts with the ritualistic and slightly somnambulist posture in her fiction. Her novels, written with a respect for silence, imbued with the soundlessness characteristic of dreams, make gesture stand for a great deal, as it does in silent films, and at times they are as stilted, stately and cooly balletic as the earlier self-conscious forms of modern dance. In contrast to the self-mutilating ironies of much contemporary fiction, Nin's novels are anxious to declare their seriousness, sometimes with the innocence of an old-fashioned idea of the artistic.

Nin's fiction is unique in that it eschews the tension and oppositions present in most novels, preferring to emphasize synthesis over antithesis, muting conflicts in interpretation, keeping to a tone that holds everything in the same plane, often in the present tense, and neutralizing the distinction between figure and ground.[90] She substitutes for narrative energy a high intensity and enlargement of feeling, creating a world that is polychrome

and polymorphous, a world which colorfully involves all the senses in a heightened and eroticized environment. And as she restores to reality its emotional proportion her work is hyperbolic in the best sense, not as the evasive mania that sometimes passes for inventiveness, but as instructive exaggeration--an exaggeration that does not distort but restores the true flavor to things in a world that accepts dullness as the norm. Nin's liberating use of hyperbole is an index of her courage in writing as a woman, for hyperbole has its alliance with hysteria, and it is from this allegedly feminine attribute that women writers have fled in large numbers, preferring the safety of rationality, irony, and control. Without seeking the refuge of compensating antithesis, Nin has managed to write with discipline, yet with a discipline that never sacrifices the extremes but is used to pursue them all the more deeply.

It is to the deep places that Nin is committed; even her love of minerals[91] and of what is under the sea testifies to that. She would probably say that the symbols of the fiction take us deeper than the social texture of the diaries, yet the intimacy of the diaries has a greater resonance than much of her fiction. Releasing the diaries can be regarded as Nin's act of faith in the importance of human motivation, as if the final truth resides in the resources and deposits of feeling that underlie all formal

activity--even art. In one of the more beautiful passages in her fiction, Nin unites art, psychology, and nature--to use the abstractions just once before she dissolves them--with magical simplicity:

> In art, in history man fights his fears, he wants to live forever, he is afraid of death. . . . Such simple fears behind all the elaborate constructions. Such simple fears as hunger for light, warmth, love. Such simple fears behind the elaborate constructions of art. . . . There is always a human being lonely, a human being afraid, a human being lost, a human being confused. Concealing and disguising his dependence, his needs, ashamed to say: I am a simple human being in too vast and complex a world. Because of all we have discovered about a leaf . . . it is still a leaf. . . . Like the savage, let us look at the leaf wet or shining with sun, or white with fear of the storm, or silvery in the fog, or listless in too great heat, or falling in the autumn, drying, reborn each year anew. Learn from the leaf: simplicity. In spite of all we know about the leaf: its nerve structure phyllome cellular papilla parenchyma stomata venation. Keep a human relation--leaf, man, woman, child. In tenderness. No matter how immense the world, how elaborate, how contradictory, there is always man, woman, child, and the leaf. Humanity makes everything warm and simple. Humanity. Let the waters of humanity flow through the abstract city, through abstract art, weeping like rivulets cracking rocky mountains, melting icebergs. The frozen worlds in empty cages of mobiles where hearts lie exposed like wires in an electric bulb. Let them burst at the tender touch of a leaf.[92]

Nin has left to the lexicon of emotion a legacy of imagery and diction that rescues love and tenderness from the realm of the sentimental. In her belief that love is a means of rebirth and a way of seeing the self and others with an enhanced wholeness and acuity, in her conviction that the erotic is a means of self-knowledge, and a central

one, she has made feeling a condition of insight and transposed part of the province of Minerva to that of Venus, awakening readers to a new consideration of whatever in the world is pleasurable and alive.

Footnotes

[1] The Diary of Anais Nin: 1944-1947 (New York: Harcourt, 1971), p. 88.

[2] "In the old England, the curious blood-connection held the classes together. . . . And then, in the mean Jane Austen, it is gone. Already this old maid typifies 'personality' instead of character, the sharp knowing in apartness instead of knowing in togetherness, and she is, to my feeling, thoroughly unpleasant, English in the bad, mean snobbish sense of the word. . . ." In "A Propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover," in Sex, Literature, and Censorship, ed. Harry T. Moore (New York: Twayne, 1953), p. 119.

[3] Anais Nin, D. H. Lawrence: An Unprofessional Study (Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1964), p. 50

[4] John Holloway, The Victorian Sage (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1962), p. 6: "The disparagement of logic as not subtle enough, the emphasis on feelings and on reawakening dormant understanding to a new life, the use of a word like 'magnetism,' and the suggestion that this is proof of a higher kind, are all typical of the sage's notion of his own insights and how to communicate them."

[5] In The San Francisco Poets, ed. David Meltzer (New York: Ballantine Books, 1971), p. 158.

[6] "It is the way our sympathy flows and recoils that really determines our lives. And here lies the vast importance of the novel, properly handled. It can inform and lead into new places the flow of our sympathetic consciousness, and it can lead our sympathy away from things gone dead." Quoted from Lady Chatterley's Lover (no ref.) by Q. D. Leavis in Fiction and the Reading Public (London: Chatto and Windus, 1965), p. 329.

[7] The Novel of the Future (New York: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 153-154.

[8] Marianne Hauser, in "Thoughts on the Diary of Anais Nin," Journal of the Otto Rank Association, June 1970, p. 64, says "Nin's private history points up the symbiosis between her life and her art. The dependence of one on the other cannot escape the reader, and will at times strike that uncanny dream chord of deja vu. When I read her description of Luise Rainer's apartment I thought that I myself had been to that apartment at one time. And only after a while did I realize that I had read of it in one of Nin's novellas from Winter of Artifice." This correspondence of fiction and reality is lovely and fortuitous. But without the accidental failure of literal memory such a fortunate dissolving of two images into one could not occur. That is, for people reading Nin's diaries and fiction in close sequence, which their availability makes possible, this familiarity would not be surprising.

[9] "Anais Nin Interviewed by Daisy Aldan," Under the Sign of Pisces, Spring 1970, p. 7.

[10] "An Interview with Anais Nin," Second Wave, Summer 1971, p. 10.

[11] Philip Rahv, "The Cult of Experience in American Writing," in Image and Idea (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1957), p. 25.

[12] Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary (New York: Harcourt, 1954), p. 136.

[13] Quoted by Lionel Trilling in Sincerity and Authenticity (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1972), p. 5.

[14] Barbara Freeman, "A Dialogue with Anais Nin," Chicago Review, Winter 1972, p. 31.

[15] The Diary of Anais Nin: 1931-1934 (New York: Harcourt, 1966), p. 128.

[16] The Diary of Anais Nin: 1934-1939 (New York: Harcourt, 1967), p. 183.

[17] Although Nin has been in Jungian analysis she said in conversation with this writer in 1973 that she did not read Jung, that her need to be grounded, to seek the opposite of her own tendencies, kept her from investigating ideas that dealt so heavily with dream and myth.

[18] Susan Edmiston, "Portrait of Anais Nin," Mademoiselle, October, 1970, p. 225: "The problem is not to separate masculine or feminine traits. It is to find out who and what we are--our real temperature. We used to make black and white differences--man is active, woman is passive--but they are not true. . . . some men think irrationally, some women are combative."

[19] The Novel of the Future, p. 179: "The cult of direct description which has given our literature a false masculinity has made critics unaware of feminine writers."

[20] The Diary . . . 1934-1939, p. 188.

[21] KPFK, Los Angeles, February 10,1972.

[22] "New Woman Interviews a New Woman: Anais Nin," New Woman, December, 1971, p. 27: "But I wasn't too aware of that particular prejudice at the time; I don't think women are always conscious of it."

[23] The Novel of the Future, p. 146.

[24] Ibid., p. 75.

[25] The Diary of Anais Nin: 1939-1944 (New York: Harcourt, 1969), pp. 259-260.

[26] In The Diary . . . 1944-1947.

[27] The Novel of the Future, p. 27.

[28] Ibid., p. 72.

[29] Ibid., p. 70.

[30] The Diary . . . 1934-1939, p. 214.

[31] "Sympathy nowadays is dispensed chiefly by the laggards and failures, women for the most part. . . ." in The Moment and Other Essays (London: Hogarth Press, 1952) p. 17.

[32] KPFK, Los Angeles. February 10, 1972.

[33] The Diary . . . 1939-1944, p. 28.

[34] The Diary . . . 1931-1934, p. 11.

[35] The Diary . . . 1934-1939, p. 255.

[36] John Tytell, "Anais Nin and the Fall of the House of Usher," in Under the Sign of Pisces, Winter 1971, pp. 5-11.

[37] The Novel of the Future, p. 117.

[38] p. 174.

[39] Ladders to Fire (Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1959), p. 17.

[40] p. 45.

[41] p. 125.

[42] Ibid., p. 144.

[43] Ladders to Fire, p. 18.

[44] The Diary . . . 1944-1947, p. 217.

[45] This apt adjective I take from Wayne McEvilly, "The Bread of Tradition: Reflections on the Diary of Anais Nin," Prairie Schooner, Summer, 1971, p. 162: "this acute sensibility of the paradisiacal element of all experience is for Nin an abiding state."

[46] Collages (Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1964), p. 60.

[47] Children of the Albatross (Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1959), p. 32.

[48] The Novel of the Future, p. 178. In the Paris edition of Winter of Artifice (Obelisk Press, June 1939, UCLA, Special Collections), far more realistic in style than its successor, Nin faithfully reproduces Miller's vulgarity of speech in the dialogue of Hans, gives a more explicit eroticism to the relationship of Djuna and Joanna than is expressed in the diary's rendering of the parallel or "real" relationship between Anais and June, and in general includes more violent imagery and gamey vernacular than one is accustomed to finding in her books. Although it is understandable, in light of her later work, and perhaps in light of American censorship, that Nin should want to

revise this book into a novel with a more dreamlike and distanced quality, there is something exciting and refreshing about the original, if only because it represents a surprising extension of her talent and perception.

[49] As she mentioned in private conversation with this writer, February 1973.

[50] "Anais Nin," Vogue, October 15, 1971, p. 103.

[51] In Contemporary Writers (New York: Harcourt, 1966), p. 158.

[52] Private conversation with this writer, March 1971.

[53] The Diary . . . 1939-1944, p. 100.

[54] Germaine Greer, The Female Eunuch (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971), p. 105.

[55] Nin, D. H. Lawrence, p. 54.

[56] The Novel of the Future, p. 164.

[57] Winter of Artifice (Denver: The Swallow Press, 1948), p. 114.

[58] Seduction of the Minotaur (Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1961), p. 104.

[59] The Novel of the Future, p. 39.

[60] Nin, D. H. Lawrence, p. 23.

[61] Ibid., p. 59.

[62] Ibid., pp. 94-95.

[63] Children of the Albatross, p. 140.

[64] Anais Nin, "The Poetic Novel--Bridge Between Inner and Outer Reality," Journal of the Otto Rank Association, June 1970, p. 26.

[65] Private conversation with this writer, February 1973.

[66] Otto Rank, Art and Artist (New York: Knopf, 1932), pp. 147-157. Rank relates it to entrails and spirals, just as Nin relates it to her interior in The Diary . . . 1934-1939: "Writing as a woman, I am becoming more and more aware of this. All that happens in the real womb, not the womb fabricated by man as a substitute. . . . And it is this descending into the real womb, luring men into it, struggling to keep men there, and struggling to free him [sic] of woman to help him create another womb, which fascinates me. The diary ended in Fez, in a city, in a street, in a labyrinth for me, because that was the city which looked most deeply like the womb. . . . My self, woman, womb, with grilled windows, veiled eyes. Tortuous streets, secret cells, labyrinths and more labyrinths" (p. 184). Or as Norman O. Brown says in Love's Body (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 48: "The woman penetrated is a labyrinth.

You emerge into another world inside the woman."

[67] The Diary . . . 1931-1934, p. 152.

[68] The Novel of the Future, p. 151.

[69] Ibid., p. 7: "One learns the plots of the unconscious from psychoanalysis."

[70] Seduction of the Minotaur, p. 102.

[71] The Novel of the Future, p. 75.

[72] Nin, D. H. Lawrence, p. 50.

[73] Ibid., p. 51: "Let the cock call the sun out of bed with his own magnificence--if she be feminine in her ways--and to be feminine is to be like the hen, suitably impressed by the effectiveness of the cock's crowing--if she be feminine when the moment comes, he will also be magnificent with her. And she will have both the vote and the hatchable egg."

[74] Germaine Greer comments that Weininger remarked "with horror that if you ask a woman about herself, she understands it to be her body," in The Female Eunuch, p. 104.

[75] p. 164.

[76] The Novel of the Future, p. 14.

[77] Winter of Artifice, p. 174.

[78] The Diary . . . 1931-1934, p. 58.

[79] The Four-Chambered Heart (Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1959), p. 148.

[80] Seduction of the Minotaur, p. 83.

[81] Ibid., p. 16.

[82] The Novel of the Future, p. 93.

[83] Ibid., p. 12.

[84] Ibid., p. 11.

[85] The Diary . . . 1934-1939, p. 127.

[86] The Novel of the Future, p. 107.

[87] Ibid., p. 90.

[88] The Diary . . . 1944-1947, p. 55.

[89] Under a Glass Bell (Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1948), p. 63.

[90] Artaud's comments on Nin's personal style, as he saw it, bear out this description of her literary style: "You are the plumed serpent. . . . And your ecstasy, too, is strange and different. It does not come in spurts; it is continuous. You live continuously on one level, you use a certain tone and never depart from it." (The Diary . . . 1931-1934, p. 231).

[91] House of Incest (Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1958), p. 59: "Then she rushed out into the garden of dead trees, over the lava paths, over the micha schist, and all the minerals on her path burned, the muscovite like a bride, the pyrite, the hydrous silica, the cinnabar, the azurite like a fragment of benefic Jupiter, the malachite, all crushed together." The enumeration of minerals is here meant to build an atmosphere of fixity, of the immobility of fear, yet in the naming of them there is a lavishness of attention and particularity that demonstrates an attraction for them on the author's part.

[92] Children of the Albatross, p. 75.

CHAPTER VI

DORIS LESSING: THE BONDS OF REASON

The belief that women are creatures of feeling--and men creatures of reason--is one of the most ancient and persuasive clichés in Western thought. The extent of this belief has ranged from a mistrust of woman's irrationality to an ardent faith in the saving power of her emotional nature. As nonreflective _bios_, woman has been seen as the root, the source, and the touchstone; she gives the surety of the natural. In her functions as lifegiver woman is supposedly simple and whole; her power to give birth defies and makes unnecessary the complexities of self-consciousness.

The division between emotion and reason has been apportioned not only to men and women but among kinds of women. Jane Austen--whose freedom from inner conflicts about gender perhaps helped to supply that beautifully unruffled prose whose ironies we find so comforting--posed the terms in her novel _Sense and Sensibility_. Although there could indeed be a Man of Feeling, as Mackenzie showed in his novel of that name, it was primarily the women who enacted the iconography of tears and fainting as it appeared in novels of sensibility in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Such women were the target of Mary Wollstonecraft's _A Vindication of the Rights of Woman_, and living proof, for her, that women had to be educated out of the propensity toward exaggerated emotion which idleness

encouraged. Women of sensibility were the object, too, of Austen's indicting wit in Sense and Sensibility and Northanger Abbey. To Marianne's fit of nostalgia in the former book, Elinor, the sister of good sense, comments dryly, "It is not everyone who has your passion for dead leaves."[1]

The satire of the first great female novelist did not, however, kill off the novel of sensibility; refined away from the eighteenth-century potboilers of empathy, it has emerged full-blown and serious in our century in the sensitive and lyrical fiction of writers like James, Proust, Woolf, and Mansfield. In spite of the influence of male writers (and Proust was homosexual and James sexually ambiguous), the novel of sensibility has been associated insistently with the feminine. Whether it is correct or not, Diana Trilling's statement is fairly typical: "In our own century certainly, from the time of Dorothy Richardson right down to our present-day women writers for The New Yorker, the female self has been the locus of all the sensibility presumed to have been left us by modern life."[2] Women, although without perhaps the silliness of Austen's heroines or of Wollstonecraft's subjects, have maintained themselves as the caretakers of sensibility in this century as well.

Doris Lessing, whose position as one of the major women writers of the twentieth century would now seem assured, stands quite apart from the feminine tradition of sensibility. Her fiction is tough, clumsy, rational, con-

cerned with social roles, collective action and conscience, and unconcerned with niceties of style and subtlety of feeling for its own sake. She is, nevertheless, fully aware of the bifurcation between sense and sensibility and the meaning it presents to women, and it is with an awareness of the terms that she makes her choice. In the preface to African Stories she writes, "The Pig and The Trinket Box are two of my earliest. I see them as two forks of a road. The second--intense, careful, self-conscious, mannered--could have led to a kind of writing usually described as 'feminine.' The style of The Pig is straight, broad, direct; is much less beguiling, but is the highway to the kind of writing that has the freedom to develop as it likes."[3] The latter part of this statement is ambiguous enough; suffice it to mean that Lessing finds her freedom in a realm apart from the traditional feminine resource of sensibility.[4]

Sensibility comes in for mockery and worse in Lessing's work. In In Pursuit of the English, an Orwellian memoir, one of her first encounters is with an Australian lady:

> She was a woman of inveterate sensibility. Her name was Brenda. . . . She wore artistic clothes. She had been crying, and was still damp. Almost the first thing she said was, "I do hope your child is sensitive. My Daphne is very sensitive. A highly strung child." I knew then that the whole thing was doomed. . . . Then she said everything was too much for her, and so I went out and bought the rations and had some keys cut. While I did this, I reflected on the value of helplessness.[5]

Lessing indulges her grudge against sensibility elsewhere as well. In _The Golden Notebook_ she engages her heroine in a literary practical joke against a sensitive homosexual editor. Collaborating with a cynical young writer, she invents a journal supposedly "written by a lady author of early middle-age, who had spent some years in an African colony, and was afflicted with sensibility" (_GN_, p. 437). The "lady" writes, of a conversation at a cocktail party:

> He suggested I should do a play . . . which should take no sides but emphasise the essential tragedy of the colonial situation, the tragedy of the whites. It is true, of course . . . what is poverty, what are hunger, malnutrition, homelessness, the _pedestrian_ degradations (his word--how sensitive, how full of _true_ sensibility are a certain type of Englishman, far more intuitive than any woman!) compared to the reality, the human reality of the white dilemma? . . . I went home, nearer to reality I think than ever in my life . . . to my fresh narrow bed. (_GN_, p. 438)

Heavy-handed as the irony is in this passage, it points to a reason for the rejection of sensibility which is on Lessing's part not casual and temperamental but rather an aversion based on her commitment to something larger than private consciousness, or more precisely, a commitment to link private consciousness with historical event. She believes, in George Eliot's words, that there is no private life that has not been conditioned by a larger public life, and she is galled by those whose decorum or inclination excludes the troublingly unattractive by proclaiming it unworthy of attention. In a statement made in 1957

she chided Colin Wilson for finding starvation and illiteracy uninteresting and urged that "he and people like him should at least try and understand it exists and what a great and creative force it is, one which will affect us all."[6] Discussing Children of Violence, which she had planned in 1952, she said it is

> a study of the individual conscience in its relations with the collective. The fact that no critic has seen this does not, of course, surprise me. As long as critics are as "sensitive," subjective, and uncommitted to anything but their own private sensibilities, there will be no body of criticism worth taking seriously in this country. At the moment our critics remind me of a lot of Victorian ladies making out their library lists . . .[7]

Victorian ladies, lady authors of early middle age--the reversion to the image of a certain kind of lady as the repository of foolishness or hysteria is an instinctive cartooning which the contemporary, rigidly ideological feminist would check. Yet this sort of lady (to use the word "woman" would be inaccurate) is very much apparent in Lessing's fiction and serves as a key to the development of the women of the generation after her, those "free women" whom Lessing describes so well.

The most fully portrayed middle-aged woman in Lessing's fiction is Mrs. Quest, mother of the central figure of Children of Violence. It is against her mother's vapidity that Martha Quest forms her character; her self-respect is fashioned out of her sense of difference from the woman who hovers uselessly in the margins of her life. Although it is Martha's nature to behave sensibly, her common

sense is reinforced by her desire to avoid the manipulative histrionics, the mindless tabulations of inconsequential matters, the cruel helplessness, which seem to inform repeatedly the older woman's behavior.

Both Martha and her friends wage a battle against the pressing image of the older, lifeless, unfulfilled women around them. The lives of these women are suggestive, possibly prophetic, and the younger women bank their character building on their ability to outwit the future. Many succumb: in Landlocked, Marjorie, ashamed of her tears and her tension, says, "If I don't watch out I'll be having a nervous breakdown--imagine, I always used to despise women like me."[8] Although there are modern variations on the older women's powerlessness, still, the women, who at thirty-five are divorced, neurotic, alcoholic, are, Lessing takes paints to point out, those "who are at twenty the liveliest, the most intelligent, the most promising" (L, p. 205). It is women, not men, who are the enemy, and in defense against any alliance with the women who fail, who give in, Martha ranges herself with the men. Working against an admission of female resemblance is the mistrust of female irrationality, an irrationality which crops up in Lessing's fiction not only as eccentricity, or paralyzing neurosis, but, as in The Grass Is Singing, a foaming craziness.

Lessing's hostility to the literary attitude of sensibility is based upon her commitment to large issues and to the political. Martha Quest's avoidance of the emotions is in large part a result of her matrophobia. Both Martha and the heroine of The Golden Notebook, Anna Wulf, resist so powerfully the claims of emotion while at the same time deploring the numbness of the society around them that we are forced to regard this not as an inadvertent or supportive theme but as a dominant subject. Let us examine the kind of attention Lessing brings to emotion in The Golden Notebook, Children of Violence, and one or two shorter works.

It is necessary to be wary, but not too wary, of amalgamating the heroines in a study of Lessing's works. Just as some critics have confused Lessing with her heroines, to the author's just annoyance, so one may accidentally combine the traits of Martha and Anna, similar in many respects, into one prototype. There is, in fact a good deal of genuine overlapping among Lessing's characters, occurring in part from the fact that she is less interested in producing a fine, shapely, and unforgettable character than in conveying the angles and stresses of responsible consciousness, the roughened confrontations of conscience and culture, the attraction to certain ideas and the changes of mind that occur when an individual thinks, as a way of moving through life and plot. In the case of Martha,

moreover, there is a complete transformation by the fifth volume of Lessing's "continuous novel"; as history becomes increasingly the protagonist, Martha loses most of the personality that has earmarked her as Martha and dissolves into the lives of those around her like some sort of intellectual Mary Worth.

What strikes us first about Martha Quest, whom we meet initially as an adolescent, is her watchfulness, her care to perceive the world accurately and without the intervention of sentiment. One of the pivotal and most rewarding passages in Martha Quest is Martha's experience of what she calls "the moment," which is something like the sort of "moment" that appears in the fiction of Virginia Woolf, or for that matter in the poetry of Wordsworth. This moment is, for Martha, an experience which can be repeated but not willed, one where she feels "a slow integration" with the world around her in which "everything became one, shuddering together in a dissolution of dancing atoms," and in which "her flesh was the earth . . . and her eyes stared, fixed like the eye of the sun."[9] This moment of immersive trance soon becomes intolerable, but once out of it she tries to possess it by recollecting it. The memory changes, however, as the effort is being made, and "it was with nostalgia that she longed to 'try again.'" Martha watches herself, tempted to transform a moment of process into a keepsake of

well-being, and becomes irritable: "the wave of nostalgia made her angry. She knew it to be a falsity; for it was a longing for something that had never existed, an 'ecstasy,' in short. There had been no ecstasy, only a difficult knowledge. It was as if a beetle had sung. There should be a new word for illumination" (MQ, p. 53). The emblem of her transport, then, is the dry rasp of a Rhodesian beetle rather than, say, the liquid notes of the nightingale that accompany a Keatsian moment, and the texture of value in the experience is not the unleashing of spiralling emotion that is ecstasy, but a "difficult knowledge," a "message," the access of spiritual information.

Martha is as critical of her own emotions and of potentially false feeling in the later books of the Violence series; often the sentiment she has not freed herself from is a bait she dangles in front of her condemning intellect. In A Ripple from the Storm Lessing writes of her:

> Martha watched in herself the growth of an extraordinarily unpleasant and upsetting emotion, a self-mockery, a self-parody, as if she both allowed herself an emotion she did not approve of, allowed it and enjoyed it, but at the same time cancelled it out by mockery. ". . . It's as if somewhere inside me there was a big sack of greasy tears and if a pin were stuck into me they'd spill out. . . ."[10]

Hysteria is as unwelcome as sentiment. In The Four-Gated City a more extreme Martha Quest yields to hysteria as she educates herself in the psychic lore of insanity, and the

same inner division occurs: "Martha was crying out--sobbing, grovelling; she was being wracked by emotion. Then one of the voices detached itself and came close into her inner ear: it was loud, or it was soft; it was jaunty, or it was intimately jeering, but its abiding quality was an antagonism, a dislike of Martha."[11] This particular detachment from self is a demonized and externalized version of the rigors of watchfulness which Martha Quest puts herself through. Helped perhaps by the didactic Party meetings in which mutual criticism and self-criticism are part of the program (and whose organ is _The Watchdog_), Martha also has a talent for chastising herself into a self-dislike and self-punishment which might sit well on a Charlotte Brontë heroine but which in a twentieth-century character gives the impression of a pulverizing masochism.[12]

For many of Martha's emotions, and for Anna's as well, there is a countering intelligence, not always so devilish and punishing as this but one that insures detachment and a split between thinking and feeling. Habitually, Martha's intellect mocks her feelings. But in the deeper recesses of mental disturbance, the priority of the intellect is abolished: "She would discover herself uttering sloganlike phrases, or feeling emotions, which were the opposite of what she, the sane and rational Martha, believed. For instance, she would find herself using the

languages of anti-Semitism. . . . She floundered about in a total loss of her own personality . . ." (FGC, p. 538). Rationality is personality; for Lessing it is intelligence that gives one a sense of self and preserves some approximation of integration in the face of invading irrationalities. Anna Wulf sees it quite clearly: "She could . . . feel that intelligence there at work, defensive and efficient--a machine. And she thought: this intelligence, it's the only barrier between me and . . . cracking up" (GN, p. 395). Martha, too, in Landlocked, "was holding herself together--like everybody else. She was a lighthouse of watchfulness; she was a being totally on the defensive" (L, p. 14).

Lessing invokes the intellect as sanity's guardian, and emotion is an inimical and threatening suitor to both Martha and Anna. The former thinks, in A Ripple from the Storm:

> Now she wanted to cry. But she would not allow herself tears. Just as tenderness, moments of real emotion with William left her exposed . . . so did tears, even brief tears, open her to a feeling of deep, impersonal pain that seemed to be lying in wait for her moments of weakness like an enemy whose name she did not know. . . . (RS, p. 25)

In the same book, the only older woman of any stature, Mrs. Van (who, in her gentleness, sacrifice, and equilibrium, resembles Woolf's Mrs. Ramsay) decides early in her marriage that "it was emotion . . . she must ban from her life. Emotion was dangerous. It could destroy her" (RS, p. 194). And Martha, in a later volume, still refuses to weep:

"Anguish, the enemy, appeared: but no, she was not going to weep, feel pain, suffer" (L, p. 76). Anguish is the enemy, as is any other emotion that sets off an uncontrollable chain of feeling; any emotion has the power eventually to topple the lighthouse of watchfulness.

For Lessing's heroines, emotions disrupt the self as if they, the emotions are outside of the self. As a Puritan might be habitually militant against evil, the figures in Lessing's novels scan the landscape for the approach of the irrational. In Landlocked, Martha has a "lit space on to which, unless she was careful . . . emotions would walk like actors and begin to speak without (apparently) any prompting from her" (L, p. 28). Later, she thinks again of "the stage on to which might walk, at any time, the disembodied emotions she could not give soil and roots to within herself" (L, p. 113). When emotion has rooted in the self, Lessing's heroines try to expel the organ traditionally responsible for it. Martha, in The Four-Gated City, tells her heart "to be quiet. . . . Her heart as it were came to heel; and after that, the current of her ordinary thought switched off. Her body was a machine, reliable and safe for walking . . ." (FGC, p. 37). Lessing has, in fact, a whole story about the dislodgement of that troublesome organ. In "How I Finally Lost My Heart," a short, fanciful piece, the heroine explains, "It would be easy to say that I picked up a knife, slit

open my side, took my heart out, and threw it away; but unfortunately it wasn't as easy as that. Not that I, like everyone else, had not often wanted to do it."[13] After carrying her heart, "largish, lightish," around for awhile, the heroine passes it on to a mad young woman in the Underground as a reward for her suffering and a replacement for lost emotion. "No heart," she concludes, "no heart at all. What bliss. What freedom" (M, p. 95).

The resistance to emotion which appears so frequently in Children of Violence and The Golden Notebook is in part, of course, a resistance to pain. Yet it is not the avoidance of pain and pleasure, of the kind that numbs Tommy in The Golden Notebook; rather, what characterizes the emotional life of Lessing's heroines is a resistance to loss of personal will and consequent loss of freedom. Emotions, for them, are a swiftly flowing stream that can put a woman up the creek in no time at all. In The Four-Gated City, "Martha felt as if she were being swept fast over an edge, and by her own emotions; for the first time since she came to London, she was unfree" (FGC, p. 93). It is not only "sensibility" that incurs helplessness, then, but emotion itself.

Overwhelmed by or even touched by emotion, one is vulnerable, in Lessing's view, not only to the allurements of sentiment (and the attendant punishments by the intellect), or to a dangerous resemblance to the emotional women of the

older generation, but to love, the resulting betrayals by men, and the trappings (and traps) of domesticity. Anna explains, in The Golden Notebook, "Being so young . . . I suffered, like so many 'emancipated' girls, from a terror of being trapped and tamed by domesticity" (GN, p.128). Older, Anna is wry about her freedom (and would like to marry) but determinedly aware of her need to maintain it. It is no longer the image of failed older women or the temptation to convention that has to be fought against, but the yearning to fall in love, or stay in love, at the price of loss of self and a relinquishing of identity and will to a usurping male.

Lessing has little vindictiveness toward men, and her caution about men is no greater, and often far less great, than the traditional cautions of men about women. She is enormously sensitive to the ways men do not value women and to the adjustments women make in order to increase or preserve their portion of praise, love, and comfort. It is, in fact, because her heroines like men so much, and because they make such good Galateas of themselves, that they must be so careful. It is woman's vulnerability rather than man's culpability that is stressed; both sexes are caught in a labyrinth of expectation and motivation which, although it is often of their own making, has ample precedent.[14]

The Golden Notebook is an anatomy of woman's independence and the impediments to it, and it is in this novel that Lessing brilliantly dissects the nature of that freedom which is, paradoxically, incomplete without love, yet almost invariably undermined by it. There is, for example, the heroine of the novel-within-the-novel, Ella, and her husband George, who is a sort of Lovelace-Grandcourt-Osmond in his manipulative perversity: "The last few weeks with George were a nightmare of self-contempt and hysteria, until at last she left his house, to put an end to it, to put a distance between herself and the man who suffocated her, imprisoned her, apparently took away her will" (_GN_, p. 181). Anna later has Ella fall in love with Paul, and "from the moment Ella . . . used the word love, there is the birth of naivety. . . . Again and again he put her intelligence to sleep" (GN, p. 211). Such a state is, in a sense, a condition of faith, yet it is a faith that is invariably to be broken by the man, and Anna, the author-within-the-author, says of herself, "I would be incapable now of such trust" (_GN_, p. 212).

For Lessing, intelligence is at the heart of liberation, and a fall from intelligence is, for her heroines, a cause for self-denigration. Intelligence, however, is precarious and beset by an irrational attraction to happiness. When Anna Wulf, for example, trespasses on that common enough property, obtuseness, she chastises herself severely:

> As soon as I entered their flat I realised how much I had not been using my imagination, how stupid I had chosen to be. Sometimes I dislike women, I dislike us all, because of our capacity for not-thinking when it suits us; we choose not to think when we are reaching out for happiness. . . .I knew I had chosen not to think, and I was ashamed and humiliated. (GN, p. 485)

Far better then not to feel rather than not to think, since the first not only keeps one out of a stultifying dependency and consequent humiliation but better matches the capacities of men as Lessing describes them. For if there are only a few thinking women, there are even fewer "feeling" men. Each relationship in The Golden Notebook, whether part of the real novel or the novel within it, demonstrates the thinness of emotion on the man's part and the fuller feeling--and resulting demands--on the woman's. Ella thinks, "for the hundredth time that in their emotional life all these intelligent men use a level so much lower than anything they use for their work, that they might be different creatures" (GN, p. 457). This disparity creates a sense of loss, disappointment, and loneliness for the women, and antagonism and fearful evasiveness in the men.

The closely watched relationships in The Golden Notebook are not, however, designed to demonstrate a Lawrentian polarity and fundamental opposition of the sexes, but rather to show the difficulties of emotional life for both men and women. The difficulties are enhanced,

moreover, when the woman is a "free" woman, that is, an intelligent woman who supports herself, whose ideas are definite, reasoned, and earned, whose activity in the world is accomplished without the assistance or intervention of a man, and who, peripherally perhaps, but not insignificantly, is not too coy to excel at the art of the retort.

Anna is well aware of "the difficulties of being my kind of woman"; she regards her condition as one without much historical precedent or present company (GN, p. 406). She also recognizes, with some irony, that free women are both saved and burdened by their intelligence. Having undergone a scene with her lover, his casualness making their coming separation more painful, Anna remarks in her diary, "Afterwards I fought with a feeling that always takes hold of me after one of these exchanges: unreality, as if the substance of my self were thinning and dissolving. And then I thought how ironical it was that in order to recover myself I had to use precisely that Anna which Michael dislikes most: the critical and thinking Anna" (GN, p. 331). The new woman is both more and less vulnerable: less so because, in her victory over sexual apartheid, she has her work to resort to; more so because her intelligence is a threatening element in her relations with men and its full expression gives them a reason to abandon her.[15] Anna thinks to herself that in this new condition "is a fearful trap for women, but I don't yet

understand what it is. For there is no doubt of the new note women strike, the note of being betrayed. It's in the books they write, in how they speak, everywhere, all the time" (GN, p. 596).

The betrayal Anna speaks of is in part the sexual betrayal, the lack of loyalty, she describes in The Golden Notebook and even more single-mindedly in Play with a Tiger--but it is also the betrayal of the intelligent woman by the man who refuses to honor her claims to thinking. In a memorable episode in A Ripple from the Storm, Mr. Van goes up to his new wife, who is waiting in bed for her husband while he has been sitting up late to prepare a case, and finds her "reading Ingersoll. He had already taken her into his arms when he saw the title of the book lying beside her pillow. At this he had withdrawn his arms and turned away, remarking in his humorously dry voice, 'I see you have better company than me, my dear. Sleep well'" (RS, pp. 193-94). In a situation not parallel but of the same bolt of cloth, the psychiatrist in The Four-Gated City tells Martha, knowing it will anger her, "I think you are proud of your knowing--you are proud of that more than anything. It's your intelligence you are proud of. You are still fighting your mother with that--the masculine intelligence" (FGC, p. 241). The essential truth of this is overshadowed by the objectionable or questionable use of the word "masculine." Aside from insulting Martha with its

obvious prejudice against the likelihood of feminine intelligence, it severs her from the heart of her identity by assuming that it belongs to another gender and threatens the female intellectual at the point where she is weakest --the question of her femininity. In her attempt to get help as an individual Martha is betrayed by a generality.

Of what is commonly thought to be "feminine intelligence"--intuition--both Martha and Anna have little, and deliberately so. Anna confesses, "It frightens me that when I'm writing I seem to have some awful second sight, or something like it, an intuition of some kind; a kind of intelligence is at work that is much too painful to use in ordinary life; one couldn't live at all if one used it for living" (GN, p. 572). And the heroine of Play with a Tiger, also called Anna, says with indignant irritation, "Intuition!" at the suggestion that she might be engaging in a fit of this capacity.

In spite of, or perhaps because of, their vulnerability, both Martha and Anna err on the side of rigor rather than of laxity. Mrs. Van sees Martha as "too hard--almost," and Anna is described by others as "cold-brained," "too intelligent," and by herself as "over-critical and defensive." Martha, unable to respond to her father's illness with the expected emotions "thought miserably of her own lack of feeling. She only felt resentful that her father was ill. . . . She felt resentful that at any

moment it might be used as an emotional argument against her" (MQ, p. 123). Anna, on a first visit to her psychiatrist, explains that she has come "because I've had experiences that should have touched me and they haven't" (GN, p. 232). Looking at her daughter she thinks, "that's my child, my flesh and blood. But I couldn't feel it" (GN, p. 233). And an older and improbably different Martha visits the psychiatrist in The Four-Gated City and is "emotionless. She had had no emotions since she had sat there last, two days before" (FGC, p. 236).

It is when feeling, that guest which has so often been turned away, fails to call altogether, that both Martha and Anna feel the need to invite it back. Moving from I-won't-feel to I-can't-feel, they proceed from the luxury of caution to the crucial battle for a part of themselves that is lost. Martha's essentially elitist rebellion against the mawkish feeling of an older generation begins to resemble the general numbness of the current generation. Anna, unwilling to be caught up in the decade's paralysis, sees a psychiatrist and battles her emotional indifference as if she is fighting for her conscience. Sustained perhaps by vestiges of socialist optimism, she is unwilling to buckle under to the everlasting nay which has begun to cover the culture like a deep smog:

> But it isn't only the terror everywhere, and the fear of being conscious of it, that freezes people. It's more than that. People know they are in a society dead or dying. They are refusing emotion because at

> the end of every emotion are property, money, power. They work and despise their work, and so freeze themselves. They love but know that it's a half-love or a twisted love, and so they freeze themselves. (GN, p. 545)

For Lessing's heroines the refusal of emotion becomes worth considering and worth opposing when it becomes a general condition, for it is then that emotion becomes attached to meaning; the absence of tears or of the completeness of loving comes to signify a configuration, a situation, higher than itself, more abstract, more susceptible to rationalization, and therefore more likely to be appreciated and understood.

It is through the rationalizations of psychoanalysis rather than through the emotional surprises of a personal relationship that Anna manages to regain her feelings. "You have taught me how to cry," she tells her analyst, typically "not without dryness" (GN, p. 252). Yet in spite of the extrapolation of her personal cure into a scheme of values ("if what we feel is pain, then we must feel it, acknowledging that the alternative is death. Better anything than the shrewd, the calculated, the non-committal, the refusal of giving for fear of the consequences . . ." [GN, p. 546]), the narrative ripples with caution. The message is feeling; the medium is reason. Not dispassionate, for it is concerned, yet full of a care to understand and not to relinquish an issue or situation before it is understood, the style and point of view of The Golden Notebook

exemplify a tenacious, if fragmented, consciousness. Feeling is one of the subjects of the book, but it does not infuse the narrative.

Lessing's own predisposition, as it emerges from her statements in interviews, parallels the inclination of her heroines towards rationality. In a recent interview she describes herself as once "aggressively rational."[16] In a conversation conducted seven years ago she declared her annoyance with readers of The Golden Notebook in the following way:

> When The Golden Notebook came out, I was astonished that people got so emotional about that book, one way or another. They didn't bother to see, even to look at, how it was shaped. . . . What I'm trying to say is that it was a detached book. It was a failure, of course, for if it had been a success, then people wouldn't get so damned emotional when I didn't want them to be. . . .[17]

Lessing's meaning here is not clear. For although The Golden Notebook is experimental in shape, it is realistic and conventional in texture, syntax, and incident, and plays on the same responses a realistic novel might elicit. Lessing is no Joyce, detaching her work into a perfection of style, a distillation of language, a floating and self-sufficient condition. Furthermore, if one concentrates on the formal satisfactions of The Golden Notebook, as she would like, to the exclusion of those large themes that are scrutinized through domestic relationships, or to the exclusion of interest in the relationships themselves, then

one will find Lessing bulky, inconsistent, and disappointing, and be convinced that she has mistaken her gifts.

It is clear, in any case, that the response Lessing wished for was not an emotional one. In another and earlier interview, when asked for her favorite story in her collection, A Man and Two Women, she responded, "I like . . . 'One Off the Short List' because it's so extremely cold and detached--that one's a toughy."[18] Again her preference is for the unemotional and the detached. Writing about an incorrigible Romeo in the story mentioned, she is perhaps proud of her detachment not so much as a feat of form as of point of view; she triumphs over the obvious pitfalls of self-pity, bitter bias, and shrillness, and manages to write in a way that no one will pigeonhole as feminine.

In a recent piece of fiction, Lessing demonstrates a mistrust of emotion that reaches exaggerated proportions. "Not a Very Nice Story" is not a very good story, yet it is worthy of notice in that it marks her extremest statement of resistance to emotion. The tone of the omniscient narrator is surprisingly, and persuasively, cynical:

> because of all this they had enjoyed a decade of profoundly emotional experience. In joy or in pain, they could not complain about flatness, or absence of sensation. And after all, emotion is the thing, we can none of us get enough of it.
>
> . . . .
>
> The point was not the periods of making love . . . but . . . the spilling of emotion afterward, the anguish, the guilt. Emotion was the point. Great emotion had been felt, had been suffered.
>
> . . . .

> And since none of us feel as much as we have been trained to believe that we ought to feel in order to prove ourselves profound and sincere people, then luckily here is the television where we can see other people feeling for us. So tell me, madam, what did you _feel_ while you stood there believing that you were going to be burned to death? Meanwhile, the viewers will be chanting our creed: we feel, therefore we are.[19]

In a writer of Lessing's stature, the oily, accusatory tone of the excerpts is startling. One wonders why feeling should take the blame for media greed or for the desire of people to lead lives made more interesting by intensity. The bleating objections in this story are, paradoxically, out of control and of far less value than her wry criticism of sensibility in _In Pursuit of the English_. One thing is clear, however: her criteria for acceptable and unevasive emotions are insistently, perhaps impossibly, high.

Between Lessing's aversion to the attitudinizing of "sensibility" and her caution about feeling in general, there is not much contradiction. When one turns to _Briefing for a Descent into Hell_, however, and the light it sheds on preceding novels, one has to make room for a change of direction which would seem to mark an absolute inversion of the attitudes described above. For _Briefing_, published in 1971, is a defense of insanity which follows closely the lines and at times the style laid down by R. D. Laing in _Politics of Experience_.[20] Writing in an abstract and aqueous style, Lessing takes her hero on a

journey away from the customary responsibilities of his social role and into schizophrenia. Foreshadowed by the dull-but-combustible Martha's experiment with madness in The Four-Gated City, and by Thomas' journals in Landlocked, Lessing's novel makes her position clear, at least for the moment: it is not only the sane who are mad, as Thomas says (L, p. 116), but the mad who are sane.

Madness in Lessing's work--beginning with colonial eccentricity and ending with her ideological apprenticeship to Laing--deserves a study of its own. It is necessary to treat briefly, however, the question of Lessing's conversion to irrationalism, if only because an emphatic case has been made for her rationality. Although she is hardly the first to regard suffering, melancholy, and derangement as perquisites to enlightenment, she is one of the few anti-Romantics to do so. Rationalists--Dr. Johnson, for example--have been as afflicted with mental infirmity as Romantics but usually lack the condoling belief that it is a step into a higher state. Lessing's handling of irrationality, moreover, is, as is her attitude toward dreams, typically practical, rational, and even mechanical, in spite of her respect for the subconscious. For Lessing, "dreaming," as Brewster says, "seems to be something of a discipline,"[21] and Lessing confirms this in an interview:

> Dreams have always been important to me. The hidden domain of our mind communicates with us through dreams. I dream a great deal and I scrutinize my dreams. The more I scrutinize the more I dream. When I'm stuck in a book I deliberately dream. I knew a mathematician once who supplied his brain with information and worked it like a computer. I operate in a similar way. I fill my brain with the material for a new book, go to sleep, and I usually come up with a dream which resolves the dilemma.[22]

This deliberateness in dreaming, this encouragement of the unconscious to serve conscious, problematic purpose rather than to remain an alternative to the purposeful, is a model for Lessing's approach to madness, as Martha's pursuit of meaning in insanity testifies.

In The Four-Gated City, the commonsensical, rational Martha experiences a reversal of personality: "I've been turned inside out like a glove or a dress. I've been like the negative of a photograph. Or a mirror image. I've seen the underneath of myself" (FGC, p. 553). The obverse of rationality is irrationality, and in either case the root term for describing consciousness is rationality: rationality is either absent or present but never negligible. In this last of the Children of Violence series, outer violence moves in on the human personality, destroying once and for all the barrier intelligence has provided. Apocalypse and cataclysm replace skepticism, as if the implicit prophecy of doom that lurks within every act of caution has burst the watchful bonds of reason.

Yet Martha invites madness and wants her watchfulness to be wrecked on the jaggedness of insanity. Lessing

is not writing a tale of tragic naturalism like The Grass Is Singing, in which the environment presses the heroine toward madness, but rather a Bildungsroman in which the climax of education is insanity. Martha, down to the last grain of vision, battles received assumptions about reality. She works hard at it. Madness is a task, and she toils through it toward a higher condition of integrity, a deeper version of self. If that version is disastrous, it is because the world is, in Lessing's eyes, a disaster; Martha's new vision gains access, with great clarity and no intervening sentiment, to that terrible knowledge. Most important, madness is moralized into a condition of responsible consciousness--the extremes of emotion it involves are significant because they teach, not for the release they afford; emotions are a means, not an end.

Insanity has Lessing's sympathy and interest for reasons continuous with her past concerns. She engages madness as a subject not because its chaos may allow her to taste the rich peripheries of rationality but because it is "part of the mainstream"[23] at the center of contemporary life. Essentially a realist, she travels parallel to the culture and keeps her eye on its movements. Madness has, moreover, a political dimension and a radical one. Lessing is concerned with the poor treatment afforded the mentally ill, whose dissenting perceptions make them powerless, but her aim is not only liberal reform or social

amelioration. She wants, rather, an abolition of the traditional hierarchy of the sane and insane, and a recognition of the revolutionary nature of madness. "People who are classified as sick are becoming more and more important in England, the U.S.A., and in social countries too," she notes: "People who are called mentally ill are often those who say to the society, 'I'm not going to live according to your rules. I'm not going to conform.' Madness can be a form of rebellion."[24]

Finally, and curiously, the madness Lessing describes seems to circumvent the personal, an area of experience about which she has always been ambivalent. In the cool futurism of Briefing, Lessing is light years away from her nostalgia for the human warmth of the nineteenth-century novel expressed in "The Small Personal Voice," a lengthy statement of literary values written in 1957.[25] And although she mocks the doctrinal impersonality of socialist writing from time to time, her own "habit of mind," she tells us, is to see "socially, not personally."[26] Although she says in one interview that The Golden Notebook "is a social novel,"[27] in a later conversation she explains:

> Since writing The Golden Notebook I've become less personal. I've floated away from the personal. I've stopped saying, "This is mine, this is my experience." Ever since I started writing I've wondered why the artist himself has become a mirror of society. The first novelists didn't write about themselves, but now almost every novelist writes about himself. . . . Now, when I start writing, the first thing I ask is, "Who is thinking the same thought? Where are the other people who are

> like me?". I don't believe anymore that I have a thought. There is a thought around.[28]

The personal is, by definition, a private possession and may represent for the former communist a form of selfishness, a capitalist hoarding of emotional territory.

The quality of emotion expressed in the condition of madness that Lessing describes is unlike the emotions woven through our daily lives at the level of the ordinary which Lessing's earlier novels describe. It is not only much more violent and aberrant, but, most significantly, it is collective and impersonal, like the "thought" that is "around." Mark, husband of the mad Lynda in The Four-Gated City, says: "Sometimes it's as if . . . I don't know how to explain it . . . it's as if . . . not that she is mad, but there's madness. A kind of wavelength of madness--and she hooks into it and out, when she wants. I could hook into it just as easily. Or it could hook into me--it's in the air" (FGC, p. 398). Martha herself eventually becomes a vessel, a channel, for all the emotions seething around her, dissolving into their madness and participating in the collective psyche much as an earlier Martha had participated in the collective conscience of communism.

The appreciation and understanding which Lessing extends to insanity takes madness from the realm of the clinical, where it is domesticated and judged, confined, as it were, to an institutional attic, into the realm of

the cosmic. As a new plane of perception, a coming sixth sense, it is made metaphysical, impersonal. In Briefing, one of the characters asserts that Charles, the protagonist, "doesn't even pay lip service to ordinary feelings," and adds, "perhaps they aren't as important as we think."[29] Another character complains that he is "above every normal human emotion" (B, p. 232). Charles himself mentions his "new mode of feeling," and the "sympathetic knowledge" he experiences is not with other individuals but with the world itself, fused into a rhapsodic and egalitarian whole.

For Lessing to choose a male protagonist is not unusual, and Briefing may feature a man's consciousness simply as a preference of imagination. One suspects, however, that a man was chosen in order to give madness its fullest due and its deepest persuasion: the fact that women are more often considered irrational would give a conventional taint to a disordered female and rob madness of the novel authority it possesses in Briefing. In both Briefing for a Descent into Hell and The Four-Gated City, sexuality and gender begin to fade into a transcendent condition and are greatly reduced in stature under pressure of a higher androgynous knowledge. Things in general are too dire and sorrowful for the "sex war" to be important,[30] and women can abandon their caution as their center shifts from men, their reason no longer hostage to the chemistry of attraction. Sex is only one more of those personal

elements which are superseded by a greater impersonal force:

> Great forces as impersonal as thunder or lightning or sunlight or the movement of the oceans . . . swept through bodies, and now she knew quite well why Mark had come blindly upstairs to the nearest friendly body, being in the grip of this force--or a force, one of them. Not sex. Not necessarily. Not unless one chose to make it so. (FGC, p. 496)

Lessing is telling us what one of the Sufi tales she is so fond of tells us: "If you remain attached to the few things with which you are familiar, it will only make you miserable. . . ."[31] Always pained by narrowed horizons, Lessing gives her novels a broadness of scope which is one of their most striking and enriching features, a feature with which she contradicts the conventional idea that woman's excellence in the novel comes from her habitual acquaintance with the domestic, the ordinary, the small private corners and minor nuances of existence. Like George Eliot, the exception before her who is most often praised with the assertion that "she writes like a man," Lessing writes novels with irreducibly intellectual content, strong moral commitment, thorough social description, and large temporal and geographical range.

Unlike Eliot, and as a result of historical placement, Lessing cannot enjoy the comforts of equivocal feminism. Though she is nowhere nearly so bitter as Olive Schreiner, she possesses an enlightened consciousness that is full of flashing signals and loud warnings about conformity to an image that is often pressed on women like a

gift but which, when it does not fit them is no gift but a burden. Writing out of a context of twentieth-century numbness rather than nineteenth-century enthusiasm, she is chary of those attributes supposedly natural to women but of little value in dealing with the world. "Our strongest emotions are irrelevant to the time we live in," says Ella in The Golden Notebook (GN, p. 625). Without the congruence of morality and feeling which George Eliot carved out in her books and which her readers regarded as practical wisdom, intuition and affect seem superfluous and threatening, except when they have diminished to a fatally low level.

In her resistance to writing the feminine novel, in the choice Lessing made of "The Pig" over "The Trinket Box," she sacrifices suppleness and gratuitous beauty; there are few admirers of her work who would defend the careless homeliness of her style, far inferior to the style of George Eliot. Yet Lessing writes novels for grown-up people, to paraphrase Virginia Woolf's remark about Middlemarch,[32] and she offers an elusive quality called maturity which is far rarer than the quality of sensibility she so cheerfully ignores. Wary of being typically feminine, she becomes typically contemporary in her suspicion of emotion, and although this does not nourish our optimism, our sense of the real tells us that she is our most powerful interpreter of difficult times--past, present, and future.

Footnotes

[1] Jane Austen, Sense and Sensibility (New York: Harper, 1961), p. 53.

[2] Diana Trilling, "The Image of Women in Contemporary Literature," in The Woman in America, ed. Robert J. Lifton (Boston: Beacon, 1964), p. 66.

[3] Doris Lessing, African Stories (London: Michael Joseph, 1964), p. 9.

[4] Even her characters are averse to the kind of work customarily expected of women. Ella "had written half a dozen short stories which she herself described as 'sensitive and feminine,' and which both she and Julia said were the kind of stories they most disliked." The Golden Notebook (New York: Ballantine Books, 1968), p. 170. Parenthetical page references in the text, preceded by GN, are to this edition.

[5] Doris Lessing, In Pursuit of the English (New York: Ballantine Books, 1966), p. 37.

[6] Doris Lessing, "The Small Personal Voice," in Declaration, ed. Tom Maschler (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1959), p. 25.

[7] Ibid., p. 22.

[8] Doris Lessing, Landlocked (New York: New American Library, 1970), p. 273. Parenthetical page references in the text will be preceded by L.

[9] Doris Lessing, Martha Quest (New York: New American Library, 1970), p. 52. Parenthetical page references in the text will be preceded by MQ.

[10] Doris Lessing, A Ripple from the Storm (New York: New American Library, 1970), p. 226. Parenthetical page references in the text will be preceded by RS.

[11] Doris Lessing, The Four-Gated City (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), p. 518. Parenthetical page references in the text will be preceded by FGC.

[12] The narrator of The Golden Notebook says to herself: "I see I am falling into the self-punishing, cynical tone again. Yet how comforting this tone is, like a sort of poultice on a wound" (GN, p. 90).

[13] Doris Lessing, A Man and Two Women (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), p. 83. Parenthetical page references in the text will be preceded by M.

[14] Examples of this vulnerability and ready obedience abound in Lessing's fiction, beginning with Martha Quest: "Martha walked beside Binkie with the same gentle, submissive gesture that had until five minutes before been

Donovan's due; the mere fact that he had asked her to dine with him was as if her emotions had been gathered up, twisted together, by him" (MQ, p. 151).

[15] Martha, too, is made aware of the awkwardness a woman's intelligence can create: "She began talking to him, rather awkwardly, about a book she had just read. He answered reluctantly. When she persisted, he gave a public sigh. . . . Then he indicated Martha with an out-stretched thumb, and said, 'She's intelligent. This baby's got brains.' And he laughed and rolled up his eyes . . ." (MQ, p. 150).

[16] Jonah Raskin, "Doris Lessing at Stony Brook: An Interview," New American Review, 8 (Jan. 1970), 172.

[17] Florence Howe, "A Talk With Doris Lessing," Nation, March 6, 1967, p. 312.

[18] In Counterpoint, ed. Roy Newquist (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964), p. 420.

[19] In Ms., August 1972, pp. 80, 81, 118.

[20] (New York: Pantheon, 1967).

[21] Dorothy Brewster, Doris Lessing (New York: Twayne, 1965), p. 30.

[22] Raskin, p. 172.

[23] Ibid., p. 173.

[24] Ibid.

[25] In Declaration, ed. Maschler.

[26] Brewster, p. 145. Quoted from an interview conducted by Robert Rubens in The Queen, August 21, 1962.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Raskin, p. 173.

[29] Briefing for a Descent into Hell (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1971), p. 227. Parenthetical page references in the text will be preceded by B.

[30] Except for a playful poke in a mythological interlude in Briefing in which Minerva is described as "a bit of [sic] blue-stocking; her feeling of justice and fair play . . . usually led her to the question of women's rights, and men's vanity" (B, p. 132).

[31] Idries Shah, Tales of the Dervishes (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1969), p. 143.

[32] Virginia Woolf called Middlemarch "the magnificent book which with all its imperfections is one of the few English novels written for grown-up people," in "George Eliot," The Common Reader (New York: Harcourt, 1925), p. 172.

CONCLUSION

The term feminine sensibility, unlike the term sensibility, evokes not a specific historical period and its influences but rather a quality that is supposed to be a natural propensity of female consciousness. It incorporates the idea of sensibility, suggesting a heightened receptivity to emotion, an intuitive and immanent rather than an analytic or transcendent existence in the world. The term feminine sensibility attaches automatically to gender, and it implies that men and women typically have imaginations that are distinct from one another's. Whereas sensibility was, in the eighteenth century, a form of consciousness one could choose, and one that was chosen by men as well as women, feminine sensibility suggests qualities that being more "innate" are less available to choice.

It is not appropriate to debate here the value or truth of the concept of feminine sensibility and whether it is, in fact, innate, historical, or nonexistent. To what degree biology makes its meaning felt, whether this biological force is desirable or undesirable, whether the history of sexual oppression has in itself created a distinct sensibility on the part of women, are not questions that need to be agreed upon here. The fact is that the idea of feminine sensibility and the expectation that women will have more sensitivity, sympathy, intuition, capacity for love, and propensity for extremes of feeling, than men,

is an element in Western culture that has given a number of female writers a special consciousness about female identity and the characteristics that tend to be associated with it. For the writers discussed here this special consciousness of gender and its relation to feeling is central. None of them denies acquaintance with the features of feminine sensibility, but their acceptance of it varies. All by their own declaration want to write from a woman's point of view, but from a woman's point of view in which the conventional myths of feminine sensibility are regulated by their individual temperaments and literary intentions.

The writers discussed here are post-feminist writers: they lived their lives and wrote their books after feminism had become an organized movement in England and America. George Eliot's career as a novelist coincided with the gathering momentum of feminism in England; her earlier novels came out after individual feminists like her friend Barbara Bodichon had begun to make their statements, and her later novels were written in the beginning of the period that was marked by wider support for women's rights. Virginia Woolf's experience spanned and included agitation on behalf of women's suffrage, the English working women's groups, the bohemian and idiosyncratic liberations of women like Dora Carrington and Vita Sackville-West, and the deliberate affiliation, in her mind, of woman's nature and anti-war sentiment in the late thirties.

These four writers have available to them a crystallized point of view which questions a number of traditional ideas about women, including the innateness of feminine sensibility and their special capacity for feeling and intuition. The political thrust in feminism for the last hundred years in England and America has been to mitigate the differences between genders as a means of shrinking the discrepancies between the rights of men and women--although this has by no means been the exclusive approach to equality, and as ardent and influential a feminist as Virginia Woolf would have at least partly disputed this. But for the most part, and this continues in the present, acknowledgment of a feminine sensibility is thought to weaken the political thrust of feminism, not only because it emphasizes distinctions but because the appurtenances of feminine sensibility are in themselves "weaker," more susceptible, more capable of being moved (from a hard and fast position, for instance), in short, less useful in public battle. It is no accident that the most openly political of these writers, Doris Lessing, is the least happy with the notion of sensibility, and with those feelings ascribed to feminine sensibility.

Because European literature has provided a tradition of feeling that balances the influence of scientific rationalism, it would seem that there is enough evidence for passion and intuition having been presented as ennobled forms of consciousness rather than as embarrassments or

impediments. Hume, Rousseau, Wordsworth, Keats, Nietzsche, and Rilke, for example, honor that aspect of human consciousness that has been regarded as woman's province. It is entirely possible however, and Virginia Woolf makes the point in A Room of One's Own, that women writers need their own tradition, their own forebears of feeling. Women may serve as inspirational figures in the works of men yet fictional women cast in sympathetic roles do not contribute to the traditions of women authors writing works of their own. The subject of sensibility and feeling, moreover, hits women with a separate and special force, for it has been regarded not only as a natural female privilege but as a disqualifying factor, a tendency that hinders women's effectiveness in the public realm. Sensibility, because it sometimes figures as a vehicle of limitation, at other times as a cozy prerogative, cannot be as uncomplicated an inspiration for women as it has been for men.

The Western tradition of feeling has been largely a counter-tradition. Men have been regarded as rational beings, and in the predominantly male tradition feeling takes on a certain quality of rebellion, both against the presiding direction of thought and against the image of the male. For women writers the choice of feeling as content and as a determinant of style is congruent with the conventional estimate of their gifts; when they embrace feeling they rebel against a rational culture but not against their

supposed roles in that culture.

Women writers are likely to have another angle of vision when they consider the history of feeling, not because they are innately different (though they may be) but because cultural expectations offer or force upon them a special place in relation to feeling. The truth of the generalization that women possess sensibility in extra quantities, and by birthright too, may be questionable; but its influence should be studied as a formative element in the ways that women writers have of coming to understand the world and themselves. The writers under discussion here have not necessarily been thwarted by their awareness of feeling as a woman's subject. Indeed the fact that they are all important writers attests to success rather than failure, and Eliot, Woolf, Nin, and Lessing can hardly be used as case histories of sexual oppression. Yet each of these writers, in both her nonfiction and fiction, explicitly focuses on her identity as a woman and takes as part of her subject emotions generally associated with the feminine.

If, however, we regard feminine sensibility as something that is not innate but has a history of its own--since even our perceptions of innate qualities are of necessity historical--it is easy to understand how the varying attitudes of the four writers, ranging from full acceptance of feeling in Nin to cautious resistance to it

in Lessing, will reflect not only their own temperaments but the historical climate in which they wrote. In tracing a lineage of important women writers, it is necessary because there have been comparatively few, to skip epochs and decades, and to concentrate less on their relation to their contemporaries than on the notable female writers who precede and succeed them. However, each of these writers, with the exception perhaps of Nin, addresses and is involved in the social and political age in which she lives. Eliot was a central intellectual and literary figure in London through the fifties, sixties, and seventies. Her position, if not her inclination, obliged her to give her opinions on issues of the day, if only because funds and statements were solicited. The burgeoning feminism of the sixties and the movement toward women's higher education aroused both her sympathy and conservatism. Women's capacity to influence and inspire was, she felt, more important than their obtaining the vote. She worried, like Ruskin, that formal education might lessen women's influential gentleness, but she favored higher education for women, criticizing the enforced narrowness of women's concerns and the tragic discrepancy between their aspirations and their opportunities. The end of _Middlemarch_ hangs between a clear wish for something finer for Dorothea and a Comteian acceptance of Dorothea's genuine but diffused power as a morally radiant woman.

Eliot's ideology of feeling reflects the alliance of sentiment and moral stability in Victorian fiction. But her desire for thought regulated by feeling, intellect infused with warmth, is more complex than that, and she bears closer relation to Mill than to Dickens or Thackeray. Her advocacy of feeling carries with it, moreover, a caution about the vulnerability of women and the need for women to develop an intellect to guard their hearts (a feeling that is expressed more intensely in her private writings than in her public) which poignantly conveys a practical and worried concern that moves against the Victorian grain.

Eliot reasons us into right feeling, using a rational style to inculcate in us her belief that fine feeling is an obligation, and using the emotional scenes in her novels as one tactic of her moral strategy. For Virginia Woolf, by contrast, feeling is not a means to virtue but is itself virtuous; truth of feeling, rather than the right feeling, is obligatory. Her novels proceed by intersecting gusts of emotion; the dimensions of an event in the narrative are governed by the feelings of her characters rather than by the importance of incident. Whereas Eliot's style drives toward being clear, the better to reveal the values that are clothed by the narrative, Woolf's style moves toward suggestion, mystery, and resonance, as if to dissolve all remnants of a sober Victorian absoluteness.

Although Woolf's major novels shed the influence of the nineteenth century in their style, Woolf was not completely separated from the Victorian mores that the Bloomsbury group set out to crumble. Battling her father's patriarchal views and the self-censorship that occasionally descended on her writing when the Angel in the House hovered near, she still showed strong affection for her Victorian heroines, Mrs. Dalloway and Mrs. Ramsay, and mocked the modern masculinized female in the person of Miss Kilman. Woolf's appreciation of the radiant and influential woman diminished in her later novels, though her assertions about the necessary distinctions between the sexes did not.

In <u>A Room of One's Own</u> Woolf speaks of the need for a women's tradition in fiction, and asserts, with some contradiction, both the need for literary styles that suit the weight, pace, and stride of the female body, and for a higher androgyny that would characterize the imagination at its best. Although Woolf was worried about her writing being feminine in ways she did not respect, she was aware that her creative values meshed with what she thought of as feminine attributes to a considerable degree. Woolf saw women's capacity for intuition, for insight into the slightest nuances, for nonverbal expression, not as the moral influence it is in Eliot's work, but as a rewarding vulnerability, a potential for being overwhelmed by

experience that enhanced the possibilities for ecstasy and for a deeper attention than the willed or assertive mind could bestow. In her feminist writing Woolf takes a practical and correcting approach to the condition and consciousness of women; in her fiction she avails herself of the mythic opportunities which the idea of immanence and the non-reflective bios afford. In her feminist writings, on the one hand, she says women must speak; in her fiction, on the other, she makes use of their silence. Pulled in two directions, she indulged both and did not try to reconcile them into the equanimity that characterizes Eliot's sometimes uneasy but essentially stable regulation of head and heart.

More than the other writers discussed here, Anais Nin embraced sensibility and feminine sensibility. Like Eliot, she is didactic about her belief in the tremendous and incalculable effect of personal influence. Like Woolf, she emphasizes intensity and mobility of feeling for its own sake and not as a means to a complete and predetermined moral condition. It is through intuition, the feeling that is a sort of knowledge, as Eliot's characters would put it, that Nin's characters make discriminations about reality. Psychoanalysis, the discipline that Woolf did not find useful for her imaginative purposes, and which Nin, born twenty years after Woolf, made her utopia and metaphysics, is invoked in support of intuition. Nin, in her drive to

perfection and idealization, finds in the archetype of the intuitive woman a myth that suits her literary inclinations and serves as a resource and source of identity. In her interest in diving under the social personality and into the subconscious she values the archetype as an abiding certainty that is uninterrupted by social norms and changes.

Nevertheless, Nin, like Woolf, writes in the diaries of how she was disturbed by conflicts which she regarded as inevitably women's conflicts: the battle between the assertiveness of the writer and the submissiveness to which she as a female had been conditioned by her Latin upbringing in the earlier part of this century. Like Woolf she had to battle a version of the self-censoring Angel in the House, though hers threatened more with timidity than with prudery, and her work has an erotic quality prohibited to Woolf by her proximity to nineteenth century British mores. Not an intellectual like Woolf, Eliot, or Lessing, Nin placed feeling and intuition on a plane separate from and above intellect, thus avoiding the irreconcilable antitheses that Woolf felt between the two, and failing to make the harmonious connections between them that Eliot achieved.

Woolf wrote her fiction in the twenties and thirties, still close to the decades of agitation in England on behalf of women's suffrage. Between her and Eliot lay women's success in getting the vote, the novels of James and Proust,

post-war upheaval and Modernism. Nin wrote her two earliest novels in the thirties, the remainder in the forties and fifties, decades in which the vocal strength of feminism declined in the United States and England. When Woolf was writing Between the Acts and Three Guineas, books in which the historical situation of Europe is painfully central, Nin was living in Paris, her indifference to larger political events interrupted only once, according to the diaries, by her involvement in her lover's Spanish Civil War activities. The concurrent state of feminism was, at least until recently, somewhat irrelevant, for in Nin's view women are free only when in touch with the deepest parts of their womanhood. Both Nin and Woolf regard human intimacy as the source of the deepest truths, but Woolf was as sharply aware of the impact of historical events on private life as was Eliot, whereas Nin treats the historical and political like a muted background which at times of emergency showers its noise on private lives.

Doris Lessing is least patient with the idea of sensibility and feminine sensibility, precisely because she sees women's freedom as the result not of the playing out of archetypal tendencies and traditional feelings but of their possessing a voice in larger communal, political events. For Lessing, woman's freedom depends on her ability and opportunities to use her intellect and to be intelligent about her life: emotion, particularly the romantic love

which is Nin's utopia, is dangerous because it puts the intellect to sleep and threatens loss of identity and independence to a usurping male. Examination of the minutiae of feeling unfits the eye for observation of the larger action of people engaged in significant social roles and political events, so that the novel of sensibility, as practiced by Virginia Woolf, seems too narrow, too leisure-ridden, and too feminine for Lessing.

Although Lessing resembles Eliot in her respect for intellect and in her essentially realistic and rational style, she writes, one hundred years later--in The Golden Notebook and after--out of an England that no longer holds enthusiasm, aspiration, and reverence for women as central points in its social creed. Lessing, who, like Nin in America, is an exile from the soil of her childhood, writes instead out of a literal and figurative post-war wreckage, cold war tensions and troubled personal relations which the tradition of the novel that includes James, Proust and Woolf, does not seem, in her view, adequate to describe.

Lessing does not simply ignore the tradition of feminine sensibility and the qualities of feeling that comprise sensibility; she attacks them energetically, as if they threaten to drain energy from political action and to dilute issues of larger consequence. Whereas for Nin and Woolf feeling is a means of recovering the self--for selfhood is defined primarily by the personal, however much

the personal may be influenced by the public realm--for Lessing, feeling is an alien, a stranger that intrudes on the self. When Lessing turns to feeling as an answer in The Four-Gated City and Briefing for a Descent into Hell, in a Laingian conversion to irrationality, she goes all the way: it is not sympathy, intuition, or nuances of feeling that absorb her--nothing diminutive--but feeling at its most extreme, as if to prove her earlier hunch that feeling encourages loss of identity. She releases emotion in her characters in order to serve drastic apocalyptic ends, and the madness she describes as a conscientious pursuit of higher meaning is collective, violent, and impersonal. Distinctions of gender recede as irrationality becomes more trustworthy: feeling is not exalted as woman's prerogative but, on the contrary, as something that is so powerful that it erases the differences and inequities between the sexes which preoccupied Lessing in The Golden Notebook and the early Martha Quest novels.

This study of four women writers and their attitudes toward sensibility, toward feeling, and its relation to the feminine, is intended to clarify the content and style of their novels and to mark some important junctures in the lineage of women's fiction. To group these writers by sex is appropriate to and illuminating of their parallel, though distinctive, concerns about gender. In this and in their awareness of one another, when it is historically possible,

they are joined, if not in the tradition that Virginia Woolf found so lacking and so necessary, then at least in a continuity which, when underscored, discloses features in their work which might be barely visible without it.

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