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MORALITY IN THE NOVEL: A STUDY OF FIVE ENGLISH NOVELISTS,
HENRY FIELDING, JANE AUSTEN, GEORGE ELIOT, JOSEPH CONRAD
AND D. H. LAWRENCE

by

JOAN MELLEN

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Irving Kover
Chairman of Examining Committee

March 15, 1968
date

Helaine Kover
Executive Officer

Norman Friedman
Marvin Magalaner
Supervisory Committee

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Introduction

For the novelist writing in the modernist period, between 1890 and 1930, the relationship between art and morality becomes much more problematic than it was for earlier novelists like Fielding and Jane Austen. There seems to arise a loss of confidence in traditional moral responses. Such influential critics of the novel as Wayne Booth have attacked the writers in what Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson, Jr. have called "the modern tradition"¹ for failing, unlike earlier novelists, to provide the reader with a system of norms by which he could judge the characters in a novel and from which he could create an appropriate moral standard for his own life as well. According to Booth, the novelistic techniques employed by the modernist writer themselves preclude a coherent moral perspective. With only the "impersonal narration" and "inside views" characteristic of modernist fiction, Booth argues, an irresponsible novelist "can build sympathy even for the most vicious character."²

Booth's criterion for good fiction, that the artistic vision should also include moral evaluation of his characters by the author, a judgment of what he sees,³ is an important one. And his objection to Céline's Journey to the End of the Night on the ground that he often cannot

distinguish between the point of view of Ferdinand the hero and that of Céline himself,⁴ is probably accurate in the sense that the moral perspective of this novel as a whole seems blurred and not of a piece.

But is Booth accurate in his judgment that writers as concerned with moral questions as Conrad and Lawrence have "retreated to a private world of values,"⁵ that only a well-defined system of norms constitutes a moral perspective in fiction? It is true that there is a large consensus among the most influential critics of the novel that the moderns represent human existence from an amoral point of view. Lionel Trilling asserts that "nothing is more characteristic of modern literature than its discovery and canonization of the primal, non-ethical energies."⁶ And to Ortega as to Trilling it seems as if modern literature dehumanizes life by "upset[ting] the value pattern...and produc[ing] an art in which the small events of life appear in the foreground with monumental dimensions."⁷

Yet these critics seem personally out of sympathy with the world-view particular to the modernist period. Ortega may object to small events assuming an exaggerated importance in fiction, but it is precisely from his immersion in what William Blake, a forerunner of the modernist sensibility, called "minute particulars"⁸ that the modernist author will evolve his moral perspective. Large-scale generalizations about moral questions seem no longer useful.

What happens in the modernist period is not that novelists have retreated to a private world, but that while they, like Fielding or Jane Austen, can find moral values for their reliable characters to pursue, they can no longer suggest appropriate norms through which these values may be successfully realized. I propose to use the terms "norms" and "value" in the following way. By a "norm" is meant a socially determined and generally accepted form of behavior. It may take the form of what sociologists call either mores or folkways. Those who abide by the norms approved by their society usually believe that by so doing they are behaving morally. By a "value" is meant a presupposition which the author believes contains moral worth. A value may be described independently of the pattern of behavior or norm through which a character lives up to that value. Although it may be generally believed that in abiding by a norm, one is doing an act of moral worth, a norm that continues to be accepted may cease to embody values. Willingness to fight in a war may at one time to be a norm. Later it may degenerate into a norm no longer containing value; it may cease to express the patriotism defined as preserving the welfare of one's country.

The modernist writers, and this is true in varying degrees for Conrad, Lawrence, Joyce and James, find that it becomes increasingly more difficult to intrude norms upon the flux of experience. And once norms begin to collapse, values assume an added importance, making their realization

more tenuous than ever. With James, Joyce and Conrad one senses a self-consciousness about values; the idea of values becomes almost an obsession once morality begins to be defined merely as a receptivity to experience.

This loss of faith in predetermined moral responses, in manners as distinct from morals, is caused to a large extent, as Irving Howe points out, by the modernist's sense of "the hopelessness of the familiar social world, the pointlessness of trying to change it."⁹ If the modernist continues to believe in moral and social progress, he is no less certain that these will not come about through the medium of history. The disillusionment with social solutions that is the legacy of the first World War, although it perhaps begins as early as 1864 with Dostoevsky's Notes From Underground, results in a radical loss of faith in the possibility of sustained moral action.

But this is not to say that the modernist abstains from moral questions. Rather, he attempts to suggest how our possibilities for moral response have been limited by the nature of experience in the modern world. His task becomes to salvage what morality is possible. Howe's point, that while the moderns had given up "the hope of achieving a coherent and ordered moral perspective...they were still in search of a 'moral style',"¹⁰ is anticipated by Yvor Winters in an essay on Henry James which also explores the moral perspective accessible to the modernist. Winters distinguishes between morality, which is dependent upon obedience

to norms, or in his terminology, to "manners," and a moral sense, "a sense of decency, inherent in human character at its best."¹¹

Employing Mr. Winters' categories, one might say that Fielding and Jane Austen had "morality" while Conrad and D.H. Lawrence have only a "moral sense." And as Winters says, this moral sense, "being only a sense, exists precariously, and may become confused and even hysterical in a crisis."¹² The moral sense is frail; when and how it may be brought into play becomes extremely problematic. Morality even frequently becomes a neutral rather than a controlling element in the novel, another possibility for experience rather than the most important factor determining the conduct of a character.

This modernist substitution of the "moral sense" for "morality" is reflected as well in trends of literary criticism, particularly in James's theory of the novel. In his "Prefaces" to the New York edition of his novels James suggests that the function of the novel is totally descriptive, that "the dull dispute over the 'immoral' subject and the 'moral' "¹³ is irrelevant. James asks only that the critic judge the fullness with which the author's perception has been rendered. Reflecting his own substitution of the "moral sense" for "morality," he suggests that there is a "perfect dependence of the 'moral' sense of a work of art on the amount of felt life concerned in producing it."¹⁴

The criticism of James and his disciple Percy Lubbock is best suited to an examination of modernist fic-

tion itself where, as Lubbock prescribes, the novelist does employ a dramatic method, "plac[ing] the thing itself in view, instead of recalling and reflecting and picturing it."¹⁵ Modernists might well agree with Lubbock that the novel's "moral is in its design, and without design the scattered scenes will make no picture."¹⁶

But as a tool with which to study the realistic tradition in English fiction, the James-Lubbock approach to criticism seems to be inappropriate, not comprehensive enough. It implies that the effective novelist, like Joyce, must be "behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails."¹⁷ It posits the much too narrow and esoteric model of Flaubert. And worse, it does not encourage an examination of the relationship between a writer's norms, his values and his novelistic structure; it lends itself to such formalistic principles as Maurice Beebe's attack on what he calls "the argumentative fallacy" in literary criticism. Says Beebe:

Judging a writer's ideas or view of mankind may be justified as argument, debate, controversy, and philosophy. The danger is that too often we confuse it with literary criticism... a writer's ideas have as little to do with his artistic talent as his personal morals....¹⁸

Beebe's remarks exclude a discussion of novels in which a well-defined morality is present. Criticism of Tom Jones would seem to be dangerously shallow without a philosophic evaluation of the premises behind Fielding's treat-

ment of moral norms. It would seem that in order to deal with the question of morality in the English novel as it has developed since Tom Jones, one must bring into play a critical technique that examines the relationship between the structure and composition of the novel and the implied world-view expressed by the novel as a whole, a critical technique as concerned with the values and moral implications of the novel's content as with the purely literary question of how its structure renders the novel's meaning.

Indispensable for such a study is Ian Watt's The Rise Of The Novel in which he suggests that a particular philosophical Weltanschauung itself gave rise to the novel as a genre; his implication is that any particular author's Weltanschauung is at least in part responsible for his particular handling of the form.

According to Watt, it was the philosophical realism of Descartes, Locke, and Berkeley that made possible the novelist's devotion to depicting those particulars of experience which distinguish the novel from earlier forms of prose fiction such as the romance; a new view of the nature of experience produced a distinctive literary form. As Watt puts it, just as Descartes' Meditations "did much to bring about the modern assumption whereby the pursuit of truth is conceived of as a wholly individual matter, logically independent of the tradition of past thought, and indeed as more likely to be arrived at by a departure from

it...the novel is the form of literature which most reflects this individualist and innovating reorientation."¹⁹

Watt places both individual novels and the form in general within a historical context defined by the world-view shared by the author and the age in which he wrote. The assumption behind Watt's criticism, as well as behind this dissertation, is that one cannot appreciate a novel without considering the intellectual premises from which the author begins.

Much more than those of James and Lubbock, this dissertation shares the approach to the novel of Watt and European critics like Georg Lukács and Lucien Goldmann. Behind each of Lukács's essays is a search for the world-view expressed by the novel as a whole. Lukács asks that novelist show "the derivation of the individuality of characters from the historical peculiarity of their age."²⁰ His insistence that the novel "portray the kind of individual destiny that can directly and at the same time typically express the problems of an epoch"²¹ itself suggests the desirability of tracing the development of the English novel in terms of the relationship between literary problems and the author's philosophy of history. Lukács's premise of an "organic, indissoluble connection between man as a private individual and man as a social being, as a member of a community"²² seems to be indispensable for criticism of the novel. Only by putting man in relation

to his society and to history can either a writer of a critic comment on the subject of values. As the French critic Lucien Goldmann has said:

...si ces deux écrivains ont adopté une forme différente de celle des romanciers du xix^e siècle, c'est en premier lieu parce qu'ils avaient à décrire et à exprimer une réalité humaine différent de celle qu'avaient à décrire et à exprimer ces derniers.²³

Both Watt and Lukács suggest that the author's intellectual premises can best be isolated in the realistic tradition of fiction, and this dissertation will be confined to the development of the realistic novel in England, perhaps if only because moral questions are more explicitly dealt with in Fielding and George Eliot than in Sterne and Joyce.

But it seems that one must describe at least two traditions within this realistic tradition of the English novel: one in which Fielding and Jane Austen participate and one begun by George Eliot and developed by modernist writers like Conrad and Lawrence. The major critical work dealing with the possibility of isolating literary traditions, temporarily suspending the question of historical influence, has been Leavis's The Great Tradition. For Leavis a "great tradition" is manifest in the works of Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, Conrad and D.H. Lawrence, who belong together not only because they have influenced each other from a historical point of view, but primarily because they all write in the "spirit of the English novel."²⁴

This dissertation accepts Leavis's premise - that one can deal with the English novel not only in terms of an autonomous literary history, but also from the point of view of the values and moral qualities emanating from a literary work. Part of my task will be to examine by which criteria one can place into a tradition or traditions five major English novelists - Henry Fielding, Jane Austen, George Eliot, Joseph Conrad and D.H. Lawrence. Leavis says that Jane Austen, George Eliot, James, Conrad and Lawrence constitute one tradition because of their superior intellectual qualities: they all manifest "a profoundly serious interest in life."²⁵ But if only because seriousness of intention as a criterion obscures what are major differences between writers like Jane Austen and Joseph Conrad, one ought to search for more limiting standards by which to compare the points of view of these novelists.

Leavis's significance for the following discussion lies in his very raising of the question of a tradition into which writers of the English novel could be placed. I postulate, however, two traditions for these major English novelists because there seem to be more fundamental differences than there are similarities between the moral visions of Henry Fielding and Joseph Conrad, Jane Austen and D.H. Lawrence. If one uses both the author's world-view and his structural techniques as evidence for separating various

novelists, Henry Fielding and Jane Austen seem to belong to one tradition, and George Eliot, Conrad and Lawrence to another. And although Leavis accuses him of "the wrong kind of reaction against liberal idealism"²⁶ Joyce does belong to the same tradition as Lawrence. Like Lawrence, he rejects any absolute standard of right and wrong, calling for, as Ortega puts it, a "spontaneous system of valuations,"²⁷ an ethics that has lost much of its prescriptive power. And just as Lawrence wishes to become independent of "tradition and second-hand ideals,"²⁸ Joyce too rejects history and opposes to it a more vital mode of existence:

...it's no use, says he [Bloom]. Force, hatred, history, all that. That's not life for men and women, insult and hatred. And everybody knows that it's the very opposite of that that is really life.²⁹

What distinguishes Fielding and Jane Austen from George Eliot, Conrad and Lawrence is their confidence in the infallibility of absolute moral standards of conduct. Fielding believes in norms or models for human behavior; Lawrence doubts the viability of the norm.

Fielding does not view values apart from the norms through which they must be expressed. For Fielding "love" would be a value, "marriage" a norm, with the two at times used almost interchangeably. Lawrence is concerned more with values; he does not always have at his disposal the norms through which values may be carried out. Fielding's approach to norms and values differs from Lawrence's. While each presents his values as imperatives, Fielding also sug-

gests the appropriate norms through which these values must be expressed. "Prudence" as a value appears in the imperative that Tom Jones ought not engage in profligate sexual experiences. Lawrence does not always trust or have available preconceived norms.

Fielding objects to any undermining of the old absolutes, be they in the form of norms or values. When he wishes to describe the extreme of moral decadence in Joseph Andrews he has Mr. Wilson recount the tale of his participation in a group for whose members "there was nothing good or evil in itself...actions were denominated good or bad by the circumstances of the agent."³⁰ The rejection of the fixed absolute results in the breakdown of human relationships. One member leaves the group, "taking with him the wife of one of his most intimate friends," another departs "without remembering to take leave of his bail," and a third denies a loan Mr. Wilson had made to him.³¹ Without an absolute standard of conduct to restrain the inevitable vanities and hypocrisies of men, society itself, of which the club forms a microcosm, would dissolve.

Fidelity and marriage were absolutes for Fielding, and he concludes Tom Jones promising permanent happiness for his hero and heroine:

...as there are not to be found a worthier man and woman than this fond couple, so neither can any be imagined more happy. They preserve the purest and tenderest affection for each other, an affection daily increased and confirmed by mutual endearments and mutual esteem.³²

Lawrence, however, denies that love is an absolute, that one can feel love all of the time. "Love is one of the emotions like all the others," says Rupert Birkin in Women In Love, "and so it is all right whilst you feel it. But I can't see how it becomes an absolute...Love is an emotion you feel or don't feel according to circumstance."³³ And neither was Molly Bloom's choice of her husband, "and I thought well as well him as another,"³⁴ motivated by an absolute quality of "love":

...he said I was a flower of the mountain yes so we are flowers all a womans body yes that was one true thing he said in his life and the sun shines for you today yes that was why I liked him because I saw he understood or felt what a woman is and I knew I could always get round him...I wouldn't answer first only looked out over the sea and the sky I was thinking of so many things he didn't know of Mulvey and Mr. Stanhope and Hester and father and old captain Groves and the sailors playing...³⁵

Molly accepts Bloom because he understands her, because she will be able to bend his will to hers. And while he is calling her a "flower of the mountain," and proposing to her, she is thinking "of so many things he didn't know." Even at the beginning of their relationship there is distance as well as closeness and clearly nothing absolute about the love Molly feels.

Those novelists writing in the tradition begun for the English novel by George Eliot and represented most fully by Conrad and Lawrence, have lost confidence in the norm when it is viewed as an absolute. It is not necessarily that new

values have been substituted for the old or that norms in general have been judged impossible. But Conrad and Lawrence have become convinced that no norm, no value can be relevant all of the time. Fielding and Jane Austen were secure in their sense of the permanence of tradition. As they challenge the reliability of old norms, Conrad and Lawrence, obsessed by the idea of change, call their ethical tradition into question.

What happens in the new tradition is that writers are left with values, but they distrust the norms that have been the traditional vehicles through which these values are expressed. For just as norms are not possible without values, neither can values stand alone; values are dependent for their concrete existence on patterns of behavior, even on manners. Often the creation of new norms, less rigid or more applicable to the present than the old, depends for its content on the memory of old norms which have in part outlived their usefulness. And in some cases old norms can be modified. With the norm of marriage as it forms the resolution of novels like Tom Jones and Emma Lawrence has no patience:

...our system will collapse, and then marriage will be different - probably more tribal, men and women being a good deal apart, as in the old pueblo system, no little homes. It all works back to individual property, even marriage is an arrangement for the holding of property together, a bore!³⁶

But Lawrence does not reject the standard that one ought to marry; he seeks only to liberate the norm from being too narrowly defined:

...if a character in a novel wants two wives - or three - or thirty; well, that is true of that man, at that time, in that circumstance. It may be true of other men, elsewhere and elsewhen. But to infer that all men at all times want two, three, or thirty wives; or that the novelist himself is advocating furious polygamy; is just imbecility.³⁷

Since it is impossible to construct a standard applicable to "all men at all times," Lawrence, departing from the point of view of either Fielding or Jane Austen, concludes that the ethical tradition which has been accepted up to his own time may have to be abandoned and a new tradition created:

We must have the courage to cast off the old symbols, the old traditions: at least, put them aside...There is something beyond the past. The past is no justification.³⁸

The differences as well as the continuities between the two traditions may perhaps be seen through a comparison of the interplay of norms and values at work behind the good deeds of Fielding's Squire Allworthy and Joyce's Leopold Bloom. Both Allworthy and Bloom are good men because they do humane acts; they both seek to live by the values of charity. But in Fielding's novels the good character need only adhere to fixed principles -- circumstances never demand that he discover new ones. Allworthy pensions off Thwackum, provides an annuity for Blifil. His outlets for social action are traditional ones which can be recalled at any moment; he has continual recourse to established principles defining how to be kind to one's enemies. The pattern of noblesse oblige seems to have permanent applicability just as the

class structure of society for Fielding seems to have been irrevocably determined.

Bloom is as humane as Allworthy; his generosity, inspiring Nolan's half-grudging "I'll say there is much kindness in the Jew"³⁹ and resulting in his rescue of Stephen "in orthodox Samaritan fashion"⁴⁰ parallel Allworthy's acts of charity. But while Joyce seems to accept traditional norms of charity and good-will, he complicates his treatment of norms by revealing in minute detail the unpredictable manner in which ethical situations arise in the course of everyday life. In Bloom's encounter with the "blind stripling" Joyce juxtaposes a moral act, Bloom's helping the boy across the street, with the irrelevancies inspired by his curiosity that cross Bloom's mind: "What dreams would he have, not seeing. Life a dream for him."⁴¹ Bloom then almost unexpectedly makes a moral judgment: "Where is the justice being born that way."⁴²

While Joyce portrays his character fulfilling a moral norm, the act itself is buried amongst the physical details of everyday life. Allworthy's generosity is usually recognized and appreciated; the blind boy says nothing to gratify Bloom. And Bloom's goodness is intensified by the fact that he neither expects nor receives recognition for his act. Only Joyce's later description of how another character treats the boy makes it absolutely clear that a norm has been at stake:

As he [Cashel Boyle O'Connor Fitzmaurice Tisdall] strode past Mr. Bloom's dental windows the sway of his dustcoat brushed rudely from its angle a slender tapping cane and swept onwards, having buffeted a thewless body. The blind stripling turned his sickly face after the striding form.

- God's curse on you, he said sourly, whoever you are! You're blinder nor I am, you bitch's bastard!⁴³

Novelists writing in the new tradition do not discuss either norms or values apart from the physical details of everyday life. They do not recognize the validity of "a truth which requires the withdrawal of the vital stream before it can exist;"⁴⁴ they will not depend upon universal truths in the abstract. Norms recede to the background of consciousness and Bloom's feeding the gulls in the Liffey seems to be a spontaneous expression of the value of good will toward other living creatures, although it no doubt also reflects a norm expressing generosity. One does not feel with Bloom as one does with Allworthy the presence of norms meant to be acted upon as soon as an opportunity arises. Just as much as there is present in Bloom a humane ethical tradition, there is also, within the context of Ulysses, the substitution of "life...felt immediately" for "precise intellectual principles which would make human life work better" and which represent the "spiritual experience" of the past.⁴⁵

What caused a new tradition to arise from the old? What dimensions in George Eliot's world-view made it necessary for her to question absolutes and point to the fallibility

of predetermined codes of behavior? The changes in the structure of the English novel between Jane Austen and George Eliot cannot be explained solely by the gradual evolution of the literary genre, the inevitable growth of new techniques within an already existing form. For how could one then determine why Dickens or Trollope continued to use techniques begun by Fielding that George Eliot or Conrad did not? While it is true that many of George Eliot's narrative devices derive from Fielding's, and others from Jane Austen, and that literary historians can account for both their similarities and their differences, it is also true that the dissimilarity in their world-views may also contribute largely to how they handle the novel form. Virginia Woolf, asking "Mr. Bennett" to confront "Mrs. Brown" suggests that changes in "character" and in human relations produce changes "in religion, conduct, politics and literature."⁴⁶ Whether or not changes in the human being cause alterations in the external world or vice versa, the question remains that the changes in the structure of the novel from Henry Fielding to George Eliot cannot be explained by an analysis of literary relationships alone. How Mr. Bennett and the Edwardians looked at Mrs. Brown and why they looked "at factories, at Utopias, even at the decoration and upholstery of the [railway] carriage; but never at her"⁴⁷ also contributed to why Mr. Bennett wrote the kind of novel he did.

Between Jane Austen and George Eliot there seems to be, as Alain Robbe-Grillet puts it, the beginnings of the

loss of "the image of a stable, coherent, continuous, unequivocal, entirely decipherable universe."⁴⁸ And perhaps one possible answer to account for this change might be George Eliot's consciousness of history, influenced by the intellectual tradition of the French Revolution, that undermined her confidence in absolutes.

From the French Revolution evolved the belief that it was possible to make changes in what had been a fixed social structure. Georg Lukács attributes the origin of the new freedom from fixed norms to "the French Revolution, the revolutionary wars and the rise and fall of Napoleon which for the first time made history a mass experience."⁴⁹ What grew out of these events, according to Lukács, was the consciousness "that there is such a thing as history, that it has a direct effect upon the life of every individual."⁵⁰ And Wallace Stevens has made the same point with respect to the artistic imagination:

...if it is not possible to assert that the Napoleonic era was the end of one era in the history of the imagination and the beginning of another, one comes closer to the truth by making that assertion in respect to the French Revolution.⁵¹

Once the middle class saw itself as an active participant in history, the ordinary individual - - as distinct from Fielding's gentry, with whom he will now come into conflict - - could be concerned with his own expanding possibilities. He no longer had to live by the social norm that fixed his status in the old order. And once one of the old absolutes is dethroned, others seem to lose the privileged

quality of universality. In Brecht's play the teachings of Galileo must be suppressed because once one of the old truths describing the eternal order of things is proven false, people begin to challenge many traditionally accepted absolutes:

Good people, what will come to pass
If Galileo's teachings spread?
No altar boy will serve the mass
No servant girl will make the bed.
Now that is grave, my friends, it is no matter small:
For independent spirit spreads like foul diseases!⁵²

The very notion of history as a force of continuous change undermines the prescriptive effectiveness of any code of behavior that is meant to be universally valid. Subsequent changes in ethical standards produced changes in the demands novelists made of their "reliable" characters.

With George Eliot consciousness of history became synonymous with consciousness of "an uninterrupted process of changes." While it is true that several of the historical events of his time find mention in the novels of Fielding, and often in so dramatically relevant a context that, for example, at one point in Tom Jones, Sophia is thought to be "Madame Jenny Cameron herself,"⁵³ the mistress of the young Pretender, nevertheless, Fielding's meanings face no challenge from history: his norms are not dependent on the fluctuations of social change. In fact, they presuppose a social structure that is itself absolute and beyond change. As Ian Watt points out, for Fielding "the basis of society is and should be a system of classes each with their own capacities and responsibilities."⁵⁴ For the eighteenth-century novelist

"the contemporary world is portrayed with unusual plasticity and truth-to-life, but is accepted naively as something given; whence and how it has developed have not yet become problems for the writer."⁵⁵

The objection might be raised that while Fielding and George Eliot do not seem to belong to the same moral tradition, Cervantes, Sterne, and George Eliot do; for like George Eliot they too seem to challenge the viability of absolutes; they too suggest that history, or at least the passage of time, undermines any fixed definitions we may have of right and wrong. And it might perhaps even be said that fiction itself, by its very depiction of the encroachment of experience upon the individual challenges the viability of absolutes, which invariably crumble as circumstances change. And this would perhaps be true to some extent for Fielding as well as for Conrad.

Yet Don Quixote and Tristram Shandy do seem to partake of the historical sense that I have suggested is first expressed by George Eliot. For in Don Quixote the relationship between past and present, with the implication that an earlier period was better, does seem to be a product of a historical sense.

But Don Quixote, although it points to a disparity between the real and the ideal, does not treat history as a significant category. In this work historical changes do not account for the undermining of moral ideals. Don Quixote's adventures do not take place on a historical

stage; his discovery of a society laden with corruption and hypocrisy could have been made at any time in any place. Excluding Don Quixote from the realistic tradition of the novel, Watt points out that "Don Quixote is, after all, mad, and the distortions produced by romance issue in actions whose unreality is evident to everyone."⁵⁶ The madness and isolation of Don Quixote exclude for Cervantes the idea that history causes significant changes in moral outlook.

However, the disparity between moral intention and morality in Tristram Shandy might seem to award to Sterne the place here granted to George Eliot. But neither in Tristram Shandy do historical circumstances make good deeds unlikely; rather, ideals are not realized because of the perversity of the human mind, a condition as universal as Fielding's norms. And the failure of the human mind to proceed justly and reasonably is, according to Sterne, a permanent liability of the species:

Inconsistent soul that man is! languishing
under wounds, which he has the power to heal!
- his whole life a contradiction to his know-
ledge!⁵⁷

Like Don Quixote's, Tristram's is a static world. Intellectual relativism is not the same thing as a consciousness that history inevitably modifies our beliefs.

For George Eliot the changing state of society determines whether characters will be able to live by traditional norms or must seek meaningful new outlets for moral expression which emerge from and are perhaps limited to particular circumstances. Norms always form a part of human

experience, for George Eliot as for Fielding, and Daniel Deronda's decision to become a Zionist is an attempt to live by an absolute guide to behavior quite as prescriptive as Squire Allworthy's advice to Tom: "you have much goodness, generosity, and honour, in your temper: if you will add prudence and religion to these, you must be happy."⁵⁸ But George Eliot believes that norms cannot always be effective, and that therefore "it is idle to insist that action ought to be this or that, without considering how far the outward conditions of such change are present."⁵⁹

I propose to indicate the important changes in the structure of the novel that accompany the development of the tradition of the English novel started by George Eliot. Just as the rise of the novel as a genre was related to the new epistemology of Descartes and Locke, the changes in the structure of the novel in the nineteenth-century can be related to the intellectual implications of the new philosophy of history. These have been outlined by Hans Meyerhoff:

...confined to the dimension of history, time pressed more heavily upon man than when human life and history were also viewed sub specie aeterni. Time, historical time, became the only medium in which human life unfolded and revealed itself.⁶⁰

Instead of a single law of universal generality, a methodological historicism recognizes numerous laws of limited application; instead of a single direction it deals with multiple directions or no directions in history; instead of outlining a coherent, unified pattern of history in its totality, it is concerned with multiple, heterogeneous, and fragmentary "patterns of culture."⁶¹

These ideas have led to modifications in the structure of the English novel. When Conrad "liberates" the novel from the confines of the chronologically-ordered plot, he rejects a vision of history as "sub specie aeterni." For Conrad past and present partake of the same degree of immediacy because the past can offer no absolute laws to provide meaning and comfort to the present. The novels of Conrad do not always rise to a climax, followed by a resolution of tensions since no "eternal" laws exist that could unerringly replace chaos with order. The complexities of moral experience seem to be too easily transcended in novels like Tom Jones, which are structured around the return of the hero to a norm from which he has temporarily departed.

Since the pattern of history cannot be apprehended as a totality, but must be defined in terms of what Meyerhoff calls "multiple, heterogeneous, and fragmentary 'patterns of culture'," for Lawrence the novel breaks down into fragmentary episodes, often linked by no causal connections, each incapable of resolution. The hero in the novels of Conrad and Lawrence becomes much more passive in relation to his society once it seems as if men are caught up in a historical process which influences their daily lives almost against their wills. That history seems not to be progressing in a single direction, that its very progress seems incomprehensible, results in the displacement of the hero from the center of the action. History has robbed man of his omnipotence. Nostromo lacks a single hero upon whose fate the reader's interest is fixed, and as Northrop Frye suggests, the "sights and sounds and smells of Dublin," are as much the center of

attention in Ulysses as Bloom himself.⁶²

There is also a change in the attitude toward the reader by the novelist working in the tradition initiated by George Eliot. Both traditions, that represented by Fielding and that represented by Lawrence, have in common the novelist's belief in the moral purpose of art. But while Fielding presents himself as the sophisticated man-of-the-world who has lived fully enough to appreciate the virtues, and who now writes Tom Jones "to recommend goodness and innocence,"⁶³ Lawrence, to be able to share in any sustaining moral tradition, demands that his reader not only reject the past, but do so by transforming his own consciousness. While Fielding argued for accepted virtues that had temporarily fallen into disuse, Lawrence seeks to bring different values into prominence. He calls for both "a disintegrating and sloughing of the old consciousness," as well as "the forming of a new consciousness underneath."⁶⁴

This dissertation will deal with what effect the notion that "all truths are erroneous...today's truths become tomorrow's errors"⁶⁵ had on the structure of the novels and on the intellectual continuity of Leavis's "great tradition." It will seek to pose a possible answer to the question of what relationship there may be between the values of the author, his dependence upon absolute moral norms, and the kind of novelistic structure he employs. It will comment on the extent to which the structure of the English novel has been dependent upon the author's treatment of moral and social norms. And it will examine the relationship between the author's philo-

sophy of history as expressed in his attitude toward the society he represents and whether or not he believes in the viability of absolute standards of right and wrong. Finally, it will postulate, with F.R. Leavis, the existence of at least two moral traditions within the English novel and will examine how Fielding and Jane Austen differ from George Eliot, Conrad, and Lawrence, both in the structures of their novels and in the Weltanschauungen their novels as a whole express.

From each novelist will be chosen for discussion the novel, or in the case of Jane Austen and D.H. Lawrence, the novels which present the purest statement of the author's world-view. In Emma and Mansfield Park Jane Austen seems to resolve most coherently the conflict between the active sensibility and the need to submit to moral norms. And just as Tom Jones is Fielding's fullest exploration of the place of the individual in society, so too is Middlemarch for George Eliot. Conrad's Nostromo was chosen because more than any other of his novels it illustrates his concern over the undermining of ideals of conduct by historical circumstance. Lawrence is discussed primarily through Women In Love which is his most complete statement on the question of personal morality, although Sons And Lovers and The Rainbow are also brought into the discussion to illustrate the development of Lawrence's world-view.

Finally, although Joyce represents perhaps the fullest expression of this tradition in the English novel, he has been omitted from the following discussion, primarily because in this preliminary exploration of the relation between morality and the novel, the realistic tradition best serves to illustrate the distinctions in moral perspective between one literary epoch and another. For this same reason, the loss of faith in moral absolutes has been examined in fiction, although the history of English poetry or drama would perhaps embody a similar

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Henry Fielding: Norms And The Comic Novel

F.R. Leavis barred Henry Fielding from his "great tradition" because "to be important historically is not, of course, to be necessarily one of the significant few."¹ What determined Leavis's judgment was the inferiority of Fielding's world-view:

Fielding's attitudes, and his concern with human nature, are simple, and not such as to produce an effect of anything but monotony (on a mind, that is, demanding more than external action) when exhibited at the length of an "epic in prose."²

But are Fielding's attitudes so simple? To say, as Leavis does, that Fielding "opens the central tradition of English fiction,"³ and yet to dismiss him as irrelevant or too "simple" to be interesting, seems a contradiction. Fielding must be considered precisely because he "began the English novel,"⁴ and was perhaps up to the time of Charles Dickens the foremost novelist in England representing a tradition that was confident in the permanence and value of absolute standards of conduct.

Leavis refuses the implications of his own judgment. To say that Fielding is "important historically" is to suggest all the more that he should be considered in a discussion of the development of the English novel because the world-views of later writers reflect his. Even when she most vigorously attacks the kind of dependence upon absolutes that characterizes his moral perspective, George Eliot recalls Fielding. It would be pointless to infer a development of the world-views of

English novelists if one did not first examine that of the writer who "began the English novel."

"The following book," wrote Fielding in the "Dedication" to Amelia, "is sincerely designed to promote the cause of virtue."⁵ The novelist who in Tom Jones had proclaimed himself "the founder of the new province in writing ...at liberty to make what laws I please therein"⁶ wrote novels to dramatize the importance of moral standards for the social good of all men. "I cannot be supposed, by an intelligent person," Fielding said, "to have any other view, than to correct and reform the public."⁷

By illustrating the dire consequences of departing from the standards which "promote the cause of virtue," Fielding hoped to teach his reader how to live a life founded upon the values of justice and good sense. That for him moral problems can be resolved once individuals begin to approximate norms which are rigorously, if not rigidly, applied, profoundly influences the structure and composition of his novels, particularly that of Tom Jones. Tom's discovery of the appropriate norms to ensure prudence occurs simultaneously with his being extricated from a dilemma which threatened to exclude him from the privileges to which he is rightfully entitled by birth. Tom's having learned the value of correct moral principles, and how to apply them with restraint and realism, directly leads to his return to his appropriate social milieu.

By a "value" has been meant those biases and predispositions which motivate and condition outward behavior,

by a "norm" the behavior that embodies those values. Fielding is concerned both with pointing to important values and with suggesting the appropriate norms through which they are to be expressed.

What are these standards or norms by which Fielding seems to judge his characters? And what is their origin? For Fielding's standards seem to exist independently of the action of his novels; their existence seems to precede in time the experiences represented in Tom Jones; they are already fixed in Fielding's mind.

Fielding writes as if the laws of morality are generally known and accepted by all rational men. "Nothing can be plainer, or more known," he said, "than the general rules of morality."⁸ Fielding writes from the perspective of a moral tradition whose truth he takes for granted. For the origin of his standards Fielding implicitly points to the permanence of a moral code possessing universal validity. In effect, it has become irrelevant to ask for the origin of the moral norms approved by this Christian and humanistic tradition, so strongly does Fielding assume that his audience shares his unquestioning faith in them.

In his novels Fielding often points to actions inspired by the "good mind" as a way of locating his moral standards. As a magistrate his judgments had to involve a mediation between the reprehensible consequences of a man's act and perhaps the mitigating factor of his less-than-reprehensible motives. In his novels he solves this problem by representing moral acts in a context that mentions both a character's motiva-

ting passion as well as the objective outcome of his deed. Unless the consequences of his actions do irreparable damage to others, Fielding encourages us to forgive the transgressions of a character whose motives were just; Squire Allworthy is not to be wholly blamed for banishing Tom because, proceeding on the evidence he had, Tom seemed to have deliberately sacrificed the privilege of his protection. Strongly urging that the morality of an act be also judged by the motives behind it, Fielding points to "esteem and gratitude" as "the proper motives to love."⁹ Their origin is "a good mind" - the sensibility that has not been distracted from standards of right and wrong by the prevalent social evils of vanity and hypocrisy.

For Fielding "benevolence" has a value a priori - is a first principle which should have governed the everyday lives of his characters, as it did his own. Writing of how the charity he exercised as a magistrate resulted in his own poverty, Fielding almost seems to assume that the moral law urging generosity is a natural law which all men should accept, despite any material consequences:

...by composing, instead of inflaming, the quarrels of porters and beggars (which I blush when I say hath not been universally practiced), and by refusing to take a shilling from a man who most undoubtedly would not have had another left, I had reduced an income of about £500 a year of the dirtiest money upon earth to little more than £300, a considerable portion of which remained with my clerk....¹⁰

And no reader would question the origin of the values Squire Allworthy, supposedly on his deathbed, urges on Tom Jones:

I am convinced, my child, that you have much goodness, generosity, and honour in your temper: if you will add prudence and religion to these, you must be happy.¹¹

Tom must learn how to be prudent and religious by developing his good sense; "goodness," "generosity" and "honour" are the natural responses flowing from his "noble heart."

Accepting the social structure of his society as both right and good, Fielding chooses "prudence" and "benevolence" as the most necessary and the most desirable values. In a society whose order is already a rational one, there would be no need for values encouraging reform or change. "Prudence" and "benevolence" are needed, however, to maintain the stability of the existing order, "prudence" to restrain the individual who might be led by his passions to violate existing norms and "benevolence" to temper the harshness of some of those norms with awareness of the pain and suffering which are a part of life in even the most rational society.

That Fielding relied upon preconceived standards of right and wrong influenced the tone of Tom Jones, as Ian Watt points out:

Reading Tom Jones we do not imagine that we are eavesdropping on a new exploration of reality; the prose immediately informs us that exploratory operations have long since been accomplished, that we are to be spared that labour, and presented instead with a sifted and clarified report of the findings.¹²

Watt implies that Fielding's failure to make the reader feel that events are happening as he is reading about them suggests the similarity of his novels to earlier forms of prose fiction; for Watt, Richardson's greater immediacy makes him more important

for the rise of the novel. But Fielding assumes that the old values are both reasonable and correct, that "a new exploration of reality" would be gratuitous. It is these considerations that have partly determined his choice of form. And that Jane Austen will also be content to work within a predetermined moral tradition suggests that Watt ought not to have even implied a negative value judgment in his statement that Fielding does not engage in "a new exploration of reality." For both Fielding and Jane Austen "exploratory operations have long since been accomplished," yet neither has sacrificed either immediacy of action or the portrayal of the complexities of moral experience.

Albert Cook defines the "norm" in terms of society's acceptance of its workability:

Experience presents individual cases (facts) that form themselves into a norm which is used as a guide in future dealings. Manners, like government, are simply norms of past experience, the probable as pure action.¹³

While Fielding might object to Cook's seeing the norm in non-moral terms, his own treatment of moral standards has much in common with the implications of Cook's statement. Both assume that conduct can, and should, be judged by a preconceived standard, what Cook calls "norms of past experience"; both take it for granted that the behavior of fictional characters can be adequately described in terms of their affirming or transgressing some already existent group of norms; both assume that the standard they are using is a correct or viable one.

According to Cook, norms pertain to "social man,"¹⁴ the subject of the comic writer. To see how the structure of

Fielding's novels supports his belief in absolute moral standards, we might consider how closely he adheres to the comic mode. For while Fielding applies absolute standards of right and wrong to the behavior of his characters, as a writer of comedy he also objects to the rigidifying of absolutes. As Bergson points out, "the attitudes, gestures and movements of the human body are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine";¹⁵ Fielding holds to absolutes in morality; these are clear and fixed and indisputable standards of right and wrong. Yet the comic is so suitable a mode for Fielding because he is so acutely aware of the difficulty for human beings to live up to those standards. He is an absolutist in regard to standards, but not in regard to the demands he makes upon men as they succeed or fail to live by norms.

At the same time, it is also appropriate that Fielding wrote in the comic mode because he believed in both the permanence and the rightness of his social order, and comedy depends upon the presence of a static or unchanging society; the source of the comic is a deviation within a society whose order is founded upon ostensibly permanent standards:

...the more society improves, the more plastic is the adaptability it obtains from its members; while the greater the tendency towards increasing stability below, the more does it force to the surface the disturbing elements inseparable from so vast a bulk; and thus laughter performs a useful function by emphasizing the form of these significant undulations.¹⁶

And as Wylie Sypher puts it, "in middle-class societies,

particularly, the comic artist often reassures the majority that its standards are impregnable or that other standards are not "normal" or "sane."¹⁷ It was for a "middle-class society" that Fielding wrote; it was its standards as they represented a valuable tradition that he sought to uphold. While he ridiculed in characters like Thwackum and Square the hypocrisy that accompanies the approach to everyday life in terms of hardened, and in their case, false absolutes, at the source of Tom Jones is Fielding's confidence that satisfying the absolutes of "benevolence" and "prudence" will lead to happy lives for his characters and for his reader. Perhaps because of his personal sense of the inexhaustibility and charm of human life, because of his own tolerance of deviations from the norm, even if that tolerance is made possible by his confidence in the power and permanence of his values, the comic novel is best suited to Fielding's world-view.

I History As A Source Of Comedy

Sir Robert Walpole, the Prime Minister of England when Fielding first came to London to write plays, has this to say about the problem of social change: "I support to my utmost what is, because I think in my conscience there can be no change but for the worse."¹⁸ In an ultimate sense, Fielding, his sometime political enemy, would perhaps agree. Although he was deeply concerned with the problem of poverty, he never considered the possibility of a social mobility that would involve substantial change in the existing order. His writings on the question, particularly "A Proposal For Making An Effectual Provision For The Poor," contain as Dudden points out, "the underlying idea that poverty was the result rather of depravity than of misfortune, and the consequential imposition of an excessively harsh discipline even on the deserving poor."¹⁹ Fielding believes that each individual should fulfill the functions of his given social station without question; society resembles an "organism" in which each "organ" fulfills its proper function:

The poor (and such must be in any nation where poverty is....) hav[e] nothing but their labour to bestow on the society...if they withhold this from it, they become useless members... on this labour the public hath a right to insist, since this is the only service which the poor can do that society, which in some way or other hath a right to the service of all its members....²⁰

Like the typical Augustan, as Dyson remarks, Fielding "came to feel that if individual men and women failed to fit in

with the excellent environment created for them by current enlightenment, then the fault must be entirely their own."²¹ Fielding believed in the rationality of the norm upholding the structure of classes into which society had been organized:

...the wisest man is the likeliest to possess all worldly blessings in an eminent degree; for as that moderation which wisdom prescribes is the surest way to useful wealth, so can it alone qualify us to taste many pleasures.²²

Precisely because he is convinced that his society is stable, and history static in the sense that it will not progress toward more rational goals than those already embodied in the existing order, because his reader knows that history will neither challenge his moral standards nor alter his way of life, history itself can for Fielding serve as a source of comedy. The writer of comedy is at home in a society whose social structure need not change. As George Meredith points out in his "Essay On Comedy," "the comic poet is in the narrow field, or enclosed square, of the society he depicts."²³ However profoundly it may expose social evils and false standards, comedy depends upon an acceptance of society as a whole and upon the moral standards society at its best approves: "you must...believe that our state of society is founded in common sense, otherwise you will not be struck by the contrasts the Comic Spirit perceives, or have it to look to for your consolation."²⁴ As Bergson affirms, "the comic expresses, above all else, a special lack of adaptability to society."²⁵ Thus while the comic writer accepts the viability of his social order as a given, the comic character finds it difficult to restrain his impulses and conform to that order. But it is

always clear that he must; as a whole comedy does not permit a revolutionizing of society to meet the needs of characters who find its norms and standards too confining. Cook puts it this way:

Social man experiences and predicts the norms of life...he strives for comfort by following the mean and adapting himself as closely as possible to the social norm... social thought and its art form, comedy, considers not the extreme value of good and evil, but the pure-action mean of best policy.²⁶

Whether or not Cook is correct in denying to comedy a consideration of the "extreme value of good and evil," writers on the theory of comedy generally agree that behind the comic mode is a norm urging the individual to adapt his personality to the standards approved by his society, to refine his sensibility so that it may all the more appreciate those standards. Fielding can treat history as comic because he assumes that, as Arnold Kettle says, "the problems of human society, that is to say his society, can and will be solved by humane feeling and right reason."²⁷ And thus upon Mr. Allworthy's falling ill, Fielding can compare opposing a distemper with using proper strategy against the French army:

"Oppose a distemper at its first approach." Thus the doctor and the disease meet in fair and equal conflict; whereas by giving time to the latter, we often suffer him to fortify and entrench himself, like a French army...~~May~~, sometimes by gaining time the disease applies to the French military politics, and corrupts nature over to his side, and then all the powers of physic must arrive too late.²⁸

A conflict with the French can be treated contemptuously because Fielding assumes that England will always repel any invasion or

penetrate to the source of any tactics employed by the French. If the world of Allworthy could at all be threatened, Fielding would more seriously have to take into account in his creation of norms history as a source of change.

The threatened invasion by the Pretender, Bonny Prince Charlie, who is accompanied by his mistress Jeanne Cameron and an army of loyal supporters, is reduced in Tom Jones to a comedy of mistaken identities, almost to farce. After leaving Upton, Sophia stops at an inn where the landlord discovers "that she was no other than Madam Jenny Cameron herself."²⁹ The object of ridicule is the landlord himself who, by pretending to know more than his neighbors, disturbs order and stability:

This landlord had the character, among all his neighbours, of being a very sagacious fellow. He was thought to see farther and deeper into things than any man in the parish, the parson himself not excepted. Perhaps his look had contributed not a little to procure him this reputation; for there was in this something wonderfully wise and significant, especially when he had a pipe in his mouth... "Why, then, depend upon it; mind what I say - depend upon it, they are certainly some of the rebel ladies, who, they say, travel with the young Chevalier, and have taken a round-about way to escape the Duke's army."³⁰

Vanity leads this landlord to error, and history becomes a vehicle through which Fielding can satirize the absurd forms affectation takes. But the landlord and his Jacobite companion who excitedly announces that "ten thousand Frenchmen are landed in Suffolk. Old England for ever!"³¹ can be sources of amusement because in reality Bonny Prince Charlie had already failed and the existing order had been affirmed.

Bonny Prince Charlie may have presented a legitimate threat, a true alternative to the direction history might have taken. But there was never any question that his challenge could disturb the lives of any of Fielding's characters. Squire Western and his sister may be on opposite political sides, but it is their injustices and not their politics that Fielding opposes to the rightness of Sophia's marrying Tom. He does not take the issue of the Pretender's challenge seriously enough to oblige his narrator to side with either Squire or Miss Western politically.

Squire Western and his sister are made ridiculous when they try to bring politics to bear upon the education of Sophia. Western objects that his sister has told Sophia that "she must behave like a princess:"

"You have made a Whig of the girl...I am a true Englishman, and not of your Hanover breed, that have eat up the nation."³²

Miss Western's reply seems to be equally comic in its comparison of her brother's foibles to real historical circumstances:

"Thou art one of those wise men," cries she, "whose nonsensical principles have undone the nation; by weakening the hands of our Government at home, and by discouraging our friends and encouraging our enemies abroad."³³

Western is a Jacobite, his sister a Hanoverian; he desires that Sophia marry the detested Blifil and thus inherit Allworthy's estate, she that Sophia seek her fortune and a "coronet" among the dissolute urban aristocracy in London. Neither seems to be concerned with Sophia's own wishes. Politics is here a secondary device Fielding uses to emphasize the comic absurdity of their affectations.

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For Fielding himself Tories and Hanoverians occupy the side of right; and their rightness seems to be regarded as permanent, a "given"; their value in any case cannot be undermined by the invectives of either Western or his sister. History is here static, and, Fielding almost seems to be saying, a force that keeps the right party in power.

History and politics, however, are useful for the purposes of characterization. That certain characters have the right opinions about current events makes them reliable or favorable characters. For it is approximating a moral norm to be on the side of the forces that will most likely ensure the health and survival of the existing order. Partridge, a figure of secondary importance to the total design of Tom Jones since he belongs to the purely comic aspects of the novel, believes a "Popish priest" who assures him that "the Catholics did not expect to be any gainers for the change; for that Prince Charles was as good a Protestant as any in England; and that nothing but regard to right made him and the rest of the Popish party to be Jacobites."³⁴ Jones, a reliable spokesman for the norms of the author, replies with fervor: "the cause of King George is the cause of liberty and true religion."³⁵

Tom, through whom Fielding will demonstrate the value of his norms, judges correctly; Partridge has been mistaken about which side Tom is on because he believed a landlady's story about Tom's quarrel with an officer over Sophia for whose name the Pretender's was substituted. References to historical

events are included the better to enable the reader to distinguish between the characters who abide by norms of good sense and those whose ignorance of true norms leads them to consequences often far more serious than Partridge's failure to perceive which political party Tom belonged to.

Fielding can even use history as a satiric device for analogical purposes; emasculated, history can be given an aesthetic function in the novel. Comedy merges into satire as Blifil, insisting that no violence be offered to Sophia, is compared to "a Popish inquisitor beg[ging] the lay power to do no violence to the heretic delivered over to it, and against whom the Church hath passed sentence."³⁶ By showing that things seemingly unlike in the magnitude of their immorality are really equivalents, Fielding can further reinforce the importance of his norms. His interest is not in the historical event of the Inquisition, but in the lengths the hypocrite Blifil will go to capture his victim.

II Character And The Norm Of Tolerance

The most important value for the writer of comedy must be "tolerance." For however valid and absolute the standard of right and wrong that is accessible to him, he must also accept the fact that because all men are fallible, norms should not be rigidly applied. Nowhere is this dilemma for Fielding, who would like to apply moral absolutes, more clear than in the trials of Squire Allworthy, who at first glance would seem almost to be a moral paradigm. "What can give greater happiness to the good mind than the reflection of having relieved the misery, or contributed to the well-being of his fellow creature?" Fielding once asked.³⁷ More than any other of his characters, it is Squire Allworthy for whom that kind of happiness seems possible. We see Allworthy most often in his role as the fair and just man settling the disputes and relieving the sorrows of his neighbors. And if one accepts as right and natural the existence of a social hierarchy, noblesse oblige becomes a norm that Mr. Allworthy is to be commended for upholding.

But does Allworthy as a character provide a norm for moral conduct? Although he is occasionally guilty of too great a rigidity and an over-confidence in his own positions, as far as it is humanly possible, Allworthy can stand as a paradigm of the man who tries to live by the correct standards of right and wrong. It is Allworthy's intention always to be just; many of his actions, however, are unjust. But Allworthy's

knowledge, and Fielding implies, that of all men, is necessarily limited. On many occasions Allworthy fails to act justly because he is ignorant of the circumstances surrounding an affair. And while he cannot be blamed for ignorance in the same way that a character could be blamed for deliberately violating an important norm, the outcome for the plot of the novel is the same in the instances in which Allworthy acts from misinformation as it is when norms are transgressed because a character is motivated by evil.

But absolutes retreat to the background of the novel as Fielding, the comic novelist whose function is to expose deviations from a norm, allows his most reliable character to make errors that threaten the wellbeing of his hero. Since Tom Jones is written in the comic mode, says R.S. Crane, "we tend to anticipate the coming troubles with no more than comic fear."³⁸ Our sense of Allworthy's fallibility creates a comic discordance between the standards that we know are meant to be absolutely valid and the seeming impossibility of carrying them out in experience.

The plot of Tom Jones begins with Allworthy's first mistaken yet also unjust act. Believing Partridge to have seduced Jenny Jones and to be the rightful father of the abandoned foundling, Allworthy banishes Partridge from the community. The narrator, however, cautions us that there might be an error in Allworthy's judgment:

...there is a possibility that the schoolmaster was entirely innocent...for, to omit other particulars, there was in the same house a lad near eighteen, between whom and Jenny there had subsided sufficient intimacy to found a reasonable suspicion....³⁹

Undercutting our respect for Allworthy's decision is the narrator's suggestion that human experience may be uncontrollable, that any of our judgments may suffer from the limitations of our perspective. Not only is Allworthy unaware of the "lad near eighteen," but there are also "other particulars" which, if brought to light, might make the punishment of Partridge even more unjustifiable.

By accepting pious claims at face value and mistaking them for a true satisfaction of norms, Allworthy confuses Blifil's hypocrisy with sincerity, and Tom's impulsive good nature with ingratitude, his carelessness with the absence of a good heart. Because everyone else in the neighborhood, even Blifil's own mother, seems to prefer Tom, Allworthy feels that justice demands he favor Blifil:

...for such was the compassion which inhabited Mr. Allworthy's mind, that nothing but the steel of justice could ever subdue it. To be unfortunate in any respect was sufficient; if there was no demerit to counterpoise it, to turn the scale of that good man's pity, and to engage his friendship and his benefaction.⁴⁰

His perception clouded by the limitations of his knowledge, Allworthy remains unaware until the end of the novel of the "demerits" that would surely have changed his opinion of his nephew.

Misinformed, Allworthy banishes Tom, and even agrees to accompany Blifil to London where he may better pursue Sophia.

But Fielding tempers his judgment of Allworthy with his recognition of the difficult context in which Allworthy had to make his decision. The narrator suggests that in this situation wise judgment and compassion seem even to be irreconcilable:

Thus did the affection of Allworthy for his nephew betray the superior understanding to be triumphed over by the inferior; and thus is the prudence of the best of heads often defeated by the tenderness of the best of hearts.⁴¹

Fielding has already indicated that both "prudence" and "tenderness of heart" are important values. But he has never produced an absolute rule defining which should be given priority should they come into conflict. The comic mode insists upon a representation of the inexhaustibility of human experience, a portrayal of such a variety of situations that no absolute rules could be constructed to encompass them all. Fielding is not saying that Allworthy's prudence should have tempered his tenderness of heart because Allworthy's error was an unavoidable one. Only if he were not benevolent and trusting of his fellow men could he have seen through Bilfil's deception. Consequently there are situations in which positive norms cancel each other out; good men make mistakes and innocent men suffer.

Although he believes in the value of certain standards of right and wrong, Fielding rejects the notion that one should make absolute moral judgments. Tolerance is one of his major values - it grows out of his recognition that in the absence of absolute knowledge - even Allworthy, the best of

men, lacks it - moral judgments must be provisional, moral behavior only an approximation of the standard.

And Allworthy himself does not always apply absolute standards of right and wrong in his judgments, although the presence of such standards is always felt. Convinced that Jenny Jones is the mother of Tom, he could have very harshly imposed upon her the full burden of a moral law ostracizing from society the unwed mother:

When Jenny appeared, Mr. Allworthy took her into his study, and spoke to her as follows: "You know, child, it is in my power as a magistrate to punish you very rigorously for what you have done; and you will, perhaps, be the more apt to fear I should execute that power, because you have in a manner laid your sins at my door."⁴²

But Jenny showed that she cared for her child by leaving him to the protection of Mr. Allworthy; Allworthy modifies his judgment because Jenny has exhibited a good motive:

"But, perhaps, this is one reason which hath determined me to act in a milder manner with you; for, as no private resentment should ever influence a magistrate, I will be so far from considering your having deposited the infant in my house an an aggravation of your offence, that I will suppose, in your favour, this to have proceeded from a natural affection to your child, since you might have some hopes to see it thus better provided for than was in the power of yourself, or its wicked father, to provide for it."⁴³

And before passing judgment, Allworthy takes into account the moral qualities of the girl:

"Nor should I have taken this trouble, but from some opinion of your good sense, notwithstanding the dreadful slip you have made; and from some hopes of your hearty repentance which are founded on the openness and sincerity of your confession. If these do not deceive me, I will take care to convey you from this scene of your shame, where you shall, by being unknown, avoid the punishment which, as I have said, is allotted to your crime in this world...Be a good girl the rest of your days...."44

Jenny's "good sense" and open confession save her from the rigor of the law, although her crime seems to be as much a fact as Tom's poaching on Squire Western's preserve. Unlike Allworthy, Thwackum, the teacher of Tom and Blifil, applies the maximum punishment:

The consequence of this was, so severe a whipping, that it possibly fell little short of the torture with which confessions are in some countries extorted from criminals.⁴⁵

Later Allworthy learns that Tom did not confess because he wished to spare Black George; because Tom was motivated by compassion for the man's suffering, Allworthy refuses to judge him harshly:

He could not be prevailed on to sign the warrant for the execution of Jones. There was something within his own breast with which the invincible fidelity which that youth had preserved corresponded much better than it had done with the religion of Thwackum, or with the virtue of Square.⁴⁶

Opposed to the moderation and good sense of Allworthy is the rigid mistaking of false norms for true ones by the Thwackums, Squares and Squire Westerns. Comic precisely because they can view the world from only one perspective, Thwackum from the point of view of "religion," Square of

"right reason," they prevent justice from providing rationality to the community. Despite the efforts of Allworthy to be just, they succeed in distorting the moral order that would favor Tom over Blifil. Only the fact that Tom Jones is a comedy making the restoration of order inevitable, prevents their damage from being irreparable.

Northrop Frye characterizes figures like Thwackum and Square in terms of their misguided obsession with false absolutes:

[The characters who] impede the progress of the comedy toward the hero's victory... are in some kind of mental bondage... helplessly driven by ruling passions, neurotic compulsions, social rituals and selfishness... what we call the moral norm is then, not morality but deliverance from moral bondage.⁴⁷

Frye's point is that the moral norm for the comic novel as a whole is the freeing of society from characters motivated by "ruling passions" or false notions. He might perhaps have better used the term "social norm" since he is referring to the restoration of society to an equilibrium that had been temporarily threatened. But his point is well taken. Thwackum and Square are such characters.

Fielding distinguishes between values that become absolute ruling passions, and therefore have little to do with true morality, and the same values that can flourish amid the modulated judgments of men like Mr. Allworthy. "Upon the whole," says the narrator, "it is not religion or virtue, but the want of them which is here exposed. Had not Thwackum too

much neglected virtue and Square religion, in the composition of their several systems, and had not both utterly discarded all natural goodness of heart, they had never been represented as the objects of derision in this history."⁴⁸ By making false notions of "virtue" and "religion" absolutes, they have destroyed the moral sense of these values. The false doctrines of Thwackum and Square seem to exist, in a vacuum, independent of reality. Their morality collapses once they are caught up in experience. Mr. Allworthy could apply "religion" only after he heard Jenny's confession; he could act religiously only once he considered her moral qualities. The norm, the narrator implies, becomes excessively rigid if it does not take into account the circumstances surrounding an event. Fielding ridicules the notions of Thwackum and Square by presenting them as distortions of reality and contrasting them with the standards of Allworthy, which are always represented in the contexts in which they arise.

But for the first third of the novel the distortions of Thwackum and Square seem to triumph. After Mr. Allworthy has suggested that Tom has perhaps not confessed to the shooting of the partridges because of "a mistaken point of honour," Thwackum characteristically demands a definition of "honour" that does not take into account any of the details of the situation in question: "Can honour teach any one to tell a lie, or can any honour exist independently of religion?"⁴⁹ For Thwackum who cares little for true morality "honour" can be conveniently applied to any experience independently of

what may for those who are concerned with justice be extenuating circumstances. Motivated by a selfish desire to ingratiate himself with Mr. Allworthy by favoring his nephew, Square also tries to manipulate situations through a false value - the laws of nature. Pretending to be greatly impressed with Blifil's reasons for maliciously freeing the bird that Tom had given Sophia, he invokes his own dogmatic substitute for a moral perspective:

"To confine anything, seems to be against the law of nature, by which everything hath a right to liberty...can any man have a higher notion of the rule of right and the eternal fitness of things?"⁵⁰

Thwackum and Square are necessary to the novel because they illustrate how far from true morality is a rigid approach to experience. Their presence also suggests how inevitable are the threats to moral standards in a world in which so many are motivated by selfishness disguised by hypocrisy. Thwackum and Square contribute largely to the comic effect of the novel, for as Sheldon Sacks says, "the special comic power of Tom Jones is best realized when, without prejudice to the individuality of minor characters, their ethical deficiencies are comprehended as general and permanent evils of the comic world."⁵¹ To appreciate true morality one must see the Thwackums and Squares as a permanent threat.

As a writer of comedy Fielding delights in creating characters who are not only fallible in their moral judgments, but whose lives balance moral considerations with a sheer zest

for living. When they are not confronted with moral problems, the characters in a comic novel show that no standard or measure can encompass them, that their actions will often be unpredictable. The comic hero most characteristically can be seen indulging his appetites, perhaps symbolically expressing an affirmation of life itself. Tom's gigantic dinner at Upton inspires a commentary on the profound mortality of the hero:

Heroes, notwithstanding the high ideas which, by the means of flatterers, they may entertain of themselves, or the world may conceive of them, have certainly more of mortal than divine about them. However elevated their minds may be, their bodies at least (which is much the major part of most) are liable to the worst infirmities, and subject to the vilest offices of human nature. Among these latter, the act of eating, which hath by several wise men been considered as extremely mean and derogatory from the philosophic dignity, must be in some measure performed by the greatest prince, hero, or philosopher upon earth.⁵²

The narrative tension in Tom Jones is between the frequent appearance of moral questions, whether they be as seemingly insignificant as Tom's lying about who trapped Mr. Western's partridges or as crucial as Blifil's concealing from Squire Allworthy the knowledge of Tom's true parentage, and the vast areas of human experience in which moral standards seem not even to be crucially relevant.

The comic plot is not bound by strict rules of probability, and perhaps no episode in Tom Jones seems to be more gratuitously included than that in which Tom is told that he has committed incest by sleeping with his mother, Mrs. Waters, formerly Jenny Jones. The incident does not

seem to grow out of anything that has come before, as, for example, Tom's sleeping with Mrs. Waters at Upton leads to his missing Sophia. Neither does the threat of incest seem to illustrate the importance of a moral standard, for there is too much of farce, too much of comedy associated with the episode to convince the reader that the author has any moral intention. Why then does so gratuitous an episode seem to be at home within the narrative texture of Tom Jones?

Although the excitement surrounding the possibility that Tom has slept with his mother seems to be part of comedy's treatment of the inexhaustibility of human life, revealing another of the multiplicity of situations that make up the open-ended world in which no problem seems insurmountable to the hero, this is not the complete answer. For just as Fielding portrays a wide range of experiences in which moral standards do not come into play, he usually brings the reader back to moral considerations quite soon. Partridge's melodramatic revelation to Tom still belongs to the realm of comedy:

"...the Lord have mercy upon your soul,
and forgive you...but as sure as I stand
here alive, you have been a-bed with your
own mother."⁵³

Partridge's words serve as a touchstone, and through Tom's mind suddenly races the entire history of his transgressions. He realizes that seemingly trivial immoralities can have serious consequences, and that any deviation from approved norms is dangerous. Partridge's news serves a function similar to Joyce's use of the epiphany as Tom suddenly sees

his own imprudence and not "Fortune" as the cause of all his troubles:

"Sure," cries Jones, "Fortune will never have done with me till she hath driven me to distraction. But why do I blame Fortune? I am myself the cause of all my misery. All the dreadful mischiefs which have befallen me are the consequences only of my own folly and vice."⁵⁴

We are quickly distracted from the immediate disaster of Tom's having committed incest (never a serious threat anyway, since Fielding has indicated that he will allow only probable troubles to befall Tom)⁵⁵ to Fielding's real subject, the hero's discovery of the necessity for the moral norms upon which the order of his society is founded.

Yet Fielding does alternate between describing the healthy impulses that are the expression of human vitality, and those that, springing from the "good mind" bring ethical judgments to bear upon events. The tone of Tom Jones remains cheerful despite Allworthy's or the narrator's frequent moralisms, partly perhaps because Fielding keeps returning to those areas of human experience in which moral norms play no crucial role. At times Fielding, in his role as a comic novelist, asks us to enjoy the same characters who in other places are condemned for failing to live by moral norms. Fielding's characters can be both more or less "pure" specimens of human nature and subject to the moral judgments of the author as well. Ian Watt rightly suggests that "perhaps the most insistent note in Tom Jones is

Fielding's worldly-wise good-humour...it often persuades us to regard sexual irregularities as ludicrous rather than wicked."⁵⁶ And John Middleton Murry, influenced perhaps by D.H. Lawrence, even goes so far as to conclude that Fielding's norms involve the free expression of natural or physical behavior, rather than an imposition of moral absolutes:

...[the] consummation of physical passion between a man and a woman of good nature who love one another, Fielding holds, very definitely, to be the supreme felicity attainable on earth.⁵⁷

A look at two incidents which seem to be included in the structure of Tom Jones for no moral purpose, Molly Seagrim's battle in the churchyard and Squire Western's abandoning the pursuit of Sophia for the prospect of a hunt, might throw some light upon what seems to be a contradiction in Fielding's intention. For suddenly "human nature" appears as a value in itself: the most important norm seems to have become - satisfying one's impulses.

In this description of Molly's battle in the churchyard with her envious friends, Fielding clearly sides with the promiscuous Molly. Her natural impulses, her enjoyment of her relationship with Tom, unblemished for the moment by either vanity or hypocrisy, become a norm clearly to be preferred to the petty jealousy of the Goody Browns:

Goody Brown had great advantage of Molly ...for the former had indeed no breasts, her bosom (if it may be so called), as well in color as in many other properties, exactly resembling an ancient piece of parchment... Molly, beside her present unhappy condition, was differently formed in those parts....⁵⁸

There is no doubt that Fielding even admires Molly. And Tom, rescuing "his Molly" gives Goody "a lash or two with his horsewhip."⁵⁹ Both Fielding and the reader must sympathize with Molly against the self-righteousness, the hypocrisy and the false "goodness" of her enemies. Even after Jones finds Molly in bed with Square, Fielding sympathizes with her plight:

...this poor girl, who was yet a novice in her business, had not arrived to that perfection of assurance which helps off a town lady in any extremity.⁶⁰

Later, however, Fielding is harder on Molly for the hypocrisy with which she recovers from Tom's discovery:

She began at first to upbraid Square with having been the occasion of her loss of Jones; but that gentleman soon found the means of mitigating her anger, partly by caresses, and partly by a small nostrum from his purse...She then poured forth a vast profusion of tenderness towards her new lover; turned all she had said to Jones, and Jones himself, into ridicule; and vowed, though he once had the possession of her person, that none but Square had ever been master of her heart.⁶¹

Three reasons might help to illuminate Fielding's intentions in so wavering from a moral to a seemingly amoral point of view. First, Fielding does not seem to expect the same degree of moral strictness from his lower class figures that he does from the gentry, from Allworthy, Tom, and Sophia. Molly is one of the "low" figures in the comedy, Tom, the hero, and this as much separates them as Molly's infidelity. Fielding also implies that although occasional exceptions may be discovered, moral norms will be approximated most

frequently by the higher orders. Among the "high life," Fielding says, there exists "a liberality of spirits which ...I myself have scarce ever seen in men of low birth and education."⁶²

Second, Fielding is not committed to a narrow view of novelistic "unity" and can use his characters to serve the moral purposes of a given situation; each character himself need not always be judged by the same moral norms. For a character may live by some standards and at the same time transgress others. After Square has excused Blifil for setting Sophia's bird free in terms of "the eternal fitness of things," Squire Western pronounces Blifil's action to be a wicked one:

"Drink about," says Western. "Pox of your laws of nature! I don't know what you mean, either of you [Thwackum or Square] by right and wrong. To take away my girl's bird was wrong...."⁶³

Western seems to show all the fairness that flows from the open heart. Yet later he will rigidly maintain a false social standard and almost destroy his daughter's chance for happiness. When the moral norm, that Sophia marry for love, comes into conflict with a social standard in which Western happens to believe, he chooses the latter:

He did indeed consider a parity of fortune and circumstances to be physically as necessary an ingredient in marriage as difference of sexes...and had no more apprehension of his daughter's falling in love with a poor man than any animal of a different species.⁶⁴

The reader recognizes that although he is morally wrong to choose a false standard over a true, Western loves his Sophy. For as the narrator tells us, "except in that single instance in which the whole future happiness of her life was concerned, she was sovereign mistress of his inclinations."⁶⁵

Fielding clearly believes that Western is wrong; he makes the Squire an object of ridicule, the intemperance of his behavior itself a proof of the wrongness of his cause: "'You can't live with Mr. Blifil?' says Western... 'Then die and be d__d,' cries he."⁶⁶ That Western locks Sophia in her room, that he says he would rather she "beg, and starve, and rot in the streets"⁶⁷ than marry a bastard, his extreme and unfeeling behavior in general, indicate Fielding's disapproval of an absolute insistence on marriage between social equals. Fielding seems to imply that Sophia and Tom should have married even if Tom were not the nephew and heir of Squire Allworthy. Although at the end Sophia and Tom do marry as social equals, Fielding clearly indicates that marriage for love is the just norm, as marriage for money is not. "'I have always thought love the only foundation of happiness in a married state, as it can only produce that high and tender friendship which should always be the cement of this union,' says Mr. Allworthy."⁶⁸ One of Tom's noblest acts is his encouraging Nightingale to marry Nancy Miller, even though she belongs to a much lower social station. Although Fielding's norms are ultimately based upon and preserve the structure of the society he is writing about, they do not always act strictly and mercilessly

when more important values come into play.

While Fielding himself holds to absolute moral standards, he need not judge his characters in absolute terms; the standards are infallible, but the people are not. Most of Fielding's characters are both good and bad. What is important is that within particular circumstances we are never left in doubt for long whether a character is violating an important norm. In Joseph Andrews Fielding says that his intention as a comic novelist is to expose "not men, but manners."⁶⁹ The meaning of Tom Jones as a whole is dependent upon general truths, upon the rightness of the values and norms exemplified in the behavior of Allworthy and Tom; but, paradoxically, it is primarily when these norms are complicated and even called into question by the unpredictable nature of human experience that we learn what they are.

It becomes irrelevant that Fielding's characters never develop in a psychological sense. Each of Tom's adventures is measured against the yardstick of rational norms; we are meant to evaluate each incident separately as it violates or embodies moral values. To apply moral categories to Tom, to define his nature in absolute terms, would be to eliminate the possibility of accepting some of his actions as the expressions of his good heart and others as the result of his lack of prudence. Squire Western can be both praised for his love for Sophia and condemned for the gross materialism that causes him to reject Tom as a suitable

son-in-law, although he welcomes him as a hunting companion. In the sense that Fielding's characters are manipulated so as on one occasion to illustrate a norm, on another to violate a different one, they are not so much "real people" or "round characters," psychological portraits in the manner of George Eliot's Dorothea Brooke or Conrad's Decoud, as the puppets of the comic novelist who also on occasion serve the needs of an author with highly moralistic intentions. Yet in the sense that Fielding's characters are capable of both good and evil actions, they become all the more realistic.

And Fielding's conception of the novelistic character helps to explain why there does not seem to be a dynamic inter-relationship between some of his episodes, why they are not linked by means of causality or probability. The "man on the hill" appears in order to tell his tale; Mrs. Hunt falls in love with Tom to give him the opportunity of refusing her; unexpectedly Squire Western arrives in London at a crucial moment. Although each of these episodes furthers the actions of the novel, it is not always true that what happens is most probable. Writing in the comic mode, Fielding, while he believes that causality operates in human affairs, can include incidents purely for their comic effect.

But there may also be another explanation for why Fielding does not have all incidents contribute to the plot in a crucial way. A unity based on every event being a consequence of another that preceded it would have forced Fielding to narrow the distance between his reader and his characters. We would have witnessed the interrelationship between motive, deed and consequence, and how these affect personal relationships. And our attention would have been drawn away from the moral atmosphere of each action to the characters as unique

individuals. Once we became aware of the difficulty of making moral judgments about actions which seem to be psychologically inevitable, we might be less willing to subject them to moral criteria. Although the plot of Tom Jones is an organic whole, even with, in the Aristotelian sense, a beginning, a middle and an end, Fielding encourages the reader to explore each episode in detail for the moral that it alone teaches.

A third possible reason for Fielding's juxtaposing moral and amoral incidents is that by presenting as wide a portrayal of human nature as possible, he ensures that his norms will be seen in the context of everyday life; and if norms can be approximated within so multifarious a context, they will seem all the more possible. For example, although we know that he both loves his daughter and is a man who very adamantly adheres to his principles, Squire Western, having missed Sophia at Upton, suddenly acts solely upon his impulses. When Parson Supple attempts to console him for not retrieving Sophia, "Sorrow not, sir...like those without hope," Western replies, "Pogh! d__n the slut!...I am lamenting the loss of so fine a morning for hunting."⁷⁰ And he proceeds to join a hunt. For norms to be viable, they must not clash too sharply with the normal impulses of human nature.

Fielding's best argument for the viability of moral norms is the adventures and misfortunes of Tom Jones himself. For Fielding hoped to demonstrate through the painful experiences of Tom, a character who does have a "good heart," how one cannot hope to live without effort by the norms defining

virtue. To hope to act morally merely because one is naturally good leads to a failure to combat the hazards of social life that inevitably lead one astray. Even good impulses can be distorted by society. "Goodness of heart and openness of temper," cautions the narrator of Tom Jones, "will by no means, alas! do their business in the world. Prudence and circumspection are necessary even to the best of men. They are indeed, as it were, a guard to Virtue, without which she can never be safe."⁷¹ The values that must be learned, "prudence" and "circumspection," presuppose knowledge of the world. Others, like "generosity," spring naturally from the noble heart.

The subject of the novel becomes the moral education of the hero who must learn how to adapt his natural impulses to the norms approved by the rational members of the society, Mr. Allworthy and Sophia. "Though nature...must give the seeds," Fielding once said, "art may cultivate them. To improve or to depress their growth is greatly within the power of education."⁷² Tom must learn how to be charitable, and when "honour" becomes a relevant value. Although his extreme poverty may serve as a mitigating factor, Tom's courting of Lady Bellaston at all indicates a very callow notion of what "honour" means:

...gallantry to the ladies was among his principles of honour, and he held it as much incumbent on him to accept a challenge to love as if it had been a challenge to fight.⁷³

In his treatment of Tom, Fielding creates an interplay between the moral standards Tom does bring to bear upon his actions and his deviations from the norms of good sense. At times Fielding leaves us with no doubt that Tom has behaved imprudently. Tom impulsively gets drunk when he learns that Mr. Allworthy will recover, and his sexual experiences with Molly Seagrim, with Mrs. Waters, and with Lady Bellaston cause him almost to lose Sophia, although with Molly and Mrs. Waters the danger is never very great.

But Tom is also, next to Mr. Allworthy, Fielding's best spokesman for moral standards:

He was never an indifferent spectator of the misery or happiness of any one; and he felt either the one or the other in great proportion as he himself contributed to either.⁷⁴

Tom is generous to Black George and toward a highwayman who tries to rob him; he aids a beggar despite Partridge's rebuke, "every parish ought to keep their own poor."⁷⁵ Partridge invokes the social standard; Tom chooses to abide by the moral norm, although Partridge's position is an acceptable one. And Tom encourages Nightingale to marry Nancy on the basis of moral arguments, again insisting that there are times when social standards, what Cook called "the pure-action mean of best policy,"⁷⁶ must be superseded:

"Can you, with honour, be guilty of having under false pretences deceived a young woman and her family, and of having by these means treacherously robbed her of her innocence?"⁷⁷

For Tom "fidelity" and "honour" are more important values than the implied norm of marrying within one's social class. Moral obligations to individuals must take precedence, and Tom in this context need not even argue the irrelevance of class distinctions.

And Tom is also flexible in his moral judgments; he forgives Nancy Miller her transgression because "she hath sinned more against prudence than virtue."⁷⁸ Finally, Tom even pleads that Mr. Allworthy show mercy to Blifil. It is an academic distinction to oppose, as Middleton Murry does, Tom's "natural and effortless goodness" to "goodness which is constrained by religious fears, or by the pursuit of a rationally conceived ideal of virtue."⁷⁹ Tom's goodness is both "natural" and "rationally conceived," both learned yet made possible by his intrinsic good nature.

Thus Tom deserves to learn "prudence" and return to favor within the social order presided over by Squire Allworthy. He has fulfilled one of the novel's most important values - "benevolence," Reunited with Allworthy, Tom indicates that he will pay more attention to moral standards in the future:

"My dear uncle," says Tom, "I thank Heaven, I have had time to reflect on my past, where, though I cannot charge myself with any gross villainy, yet I can discern follies and vices more than enough to repent and to be ashamed of; follies which have been attended with dreadful consequences to myself."⁸⁰

And Allworthy replies by restating the norm: "Prudence is indeed the duty which we owe to ourselves."⁸¹

Northrop Frye suggests that in the last scene of a comedy "when the dramatist tries to get all his characters on the stage at once, the audience witnesses the birth of a revived sense of social integration."⁸² Such an integration certainly occurs at the end of Tom Jones. Tom attains a high place in a rationally ordered world at the point where he learns to appreciate the norms and values that make both social and personal relationships possible in that community.

III The Narrator And The Moral Sensibility

Since Fielding believes in the moral function of art as well as in certain norms and values, it seems logical that his narrator have a moral task, and perhaps even a moralizing tone. Yet this is not wholly the case in Tom Jones. For Fielding had a choice of how to present his narrator, and what range of sensibility for him to display. Within the narrative voice of Tom Jones there is an interplay between the worldliness, and resulting tolerance, of the omniscient author, and his recognition of the need for standards of right and wrong.

What are the characteristics of this narrative consciousness and what is the narrator's distance from moral norms and values? According to Henry James, the wisdom of the narrative voice seems to grant Tom Jones a mind and a fully developed consciousness which he does not actually possess:

He [Tom Jones] has so much "life" that it amounts...almost to his having a mind, that is to his having reactions and a full consciousness; besides which his author - he handsomely possessed of a mind - has such an amplitude of reflection for him and round him that we see him through the mellow air of Fielding's fine old moralism, fine old humour and fine old style, which somehow really enlarge, make every one and every thing important.⁸³

James suggests that three qualities define Fielding's narrative consciousness: "fine old moralism, fine old humour and fine old style." But how, for example, does Fielding's "fine old moralism" interact with his "fine old humour?" Fielding

creates an interplay between "humour" and "moralism." "Humour" recognizes the permanence of evil, and therefore tolerates it, while "moralism" suggests a demand that irrevocable judgments be made on the basis of an absolute distinction between right and wrong. That evil, or at least error, is permanent does not prevent Fielding from opposing it.

And what qualities of mind does one need to be able to alternate between "humour" and "morality?" Commenting on the author of comedy, Meredith points out that "genuine humour and true wit...require a sound and capacious mind, which is always a grave one."⁸⁴ And in Fielding's own century, Joseph Addison noted that behind comedy's exposing of evil and vice must be the presence of stable and positive values:

There is a kind of nature that is to be observed in this sort of compositions....and a certain regularity of thought which must discover the writer to be a man of sense, at the same time that he appears altogether given up to caprice.⁸⁵

"Caprice" and "sense," "wit" and "gravity" alternate to provide the wide range of tones in which Fielding's narrator tells his story.

Fielding's "fine old humour" has its source in his worldliness, in the realism of his sense of what is, as opposed to what might be. Although Tom Jones, through the figure of Squire Allworthy, suggests that "benevolence" and "justice" are often possible, the narrator recognizes that vanity and hypocrisy are far more prevalent. Threatening the very existence of moral standards are the omnipresent forces

within society that are motivated only by self-interest.

Thus his knowledge of the world demands that the narrator begin the "Preface" to Book XV in which Lord Fellamar launches his attack on Sophia by asserting that living by moral norms will not always suffice to protect the individual who ventures out into society from destruction:

There are a set of religious or rather moral writers, who teach that virtue is the certain road to happiness, and vice to misery, in this world. A very wholesome and comfortable doctrine, and to which we have but one objection, namely, that it is not true.⁸⁶

The narrator suggests that he is not one of those "moral writers" who ignore what is out of their desire to portray what ought to be. This narrator whose experience is so much wider than that of any of his characters tells us, with his customary editorial "we," that because "we have in our voyage through life seen so many...exceptions to it,"⁸⁷ he cannot accept as a rule that virtue will always be rewarded. Although his "fine old moralism" demands that he reward his good characters and punish his evil, he is too worldly not to suggest that it was at least possible that Sophia fall into the hands of Lord Fellamar, and the truth about Tom's goodness and his true parentage never become known to Mr. Allworthy. For even as we know that the comic form requires a resolution of all major conflicts, the narrator is too well-versed in the ways of the world not to suggest that perhaps it is only fortuitous that Sophia is saved and Tom rewarded for his noble heart.

Without explicitly mentioning the values of "reason," "benevolence," and the "good heart," the narrator invokes their

presence by commenting with "fine old humour" on what the world is like when they are absent. After Captain Blifil has renounced the brother who arranged his most advantageous marriage, "if you dislike anything in my brother's [Mr. Allworthy's] house, sir, you know you are at liberty to quit it,"⁸⁸ the narrator exposes the state of mind of the doctor who has overreached himself, but who is not basically evil:

This strange, cruel, and almost unaccountable ingratitude in the captain absolutely broke the poor doctor's heart.⁸⁹

We are prepared to sympathize with the doctor who seems to have been betrayed. But the narrator's very next comment widens the distance between him and his characters as the self-interest of both Captain and Doctor Blifil is ridiculed:

...ingratitude never so thoroughly pierces the human breast as when it proceeds from those in whose behalf we have been guilty of transgressions...what consolation shall we receive under so biting a calamity as the ungrateful behavior of our friend, when our wounded conscience at the same time flies in our face, and upbraids us with having spotted it in the service of one so worthless!⁹⁰

Fielding's narrator delights in the "justice" by which Captain Blifil removes his brother when he is no longer useful to him. The comic world is sometimes restored to partial order when the selfish and the hypocritical replace each other.

Perhaps we can accuse Fielding of being too distant, of sacrificing morality for humor. We never feel that the narrator himself hates either Captain Blifil or the doctor.

Rather, he seems to enjoy the discovery of the hypocrisy with which they have collaborated to capture Miss Bridget, and herein perhaps lies the source of Fielding's kind of immediacy:

To deal plainly with the reader, the captain, ever since his arrival, at least from the moment his brother had proposed the match to him, long before he had discovered any flattering symptoms in Miss Bridget, had been greatly enamoured; that is to say, of Mr. Allworthy's house and gardens, and of his lands, tenements, and hereditaments....⁹¹

As Meredith points out, "contempt is a sentiment that cannot be entertained by comic intelligence. What is it but an excuse to be idly-minded, or personally lofty, or comfortably narrow, not perfectly humane?"⁹² Fielding is "perfectly humane," speaking of bad men, as Crane suggests, not with "indignation," but with "urbane scorn."⁹³ And sometimes this narrator reflects neither indignation nor scorn. As William Empson puts it, "he [Fielding] is always ready to consider what he would do if one of his characters came before him when he was on the bench."⁹⁴ And on the bench Fielding more often than not refused to impose harshly absolute standards of right and wrong; he was a very compassionate and sympathetic magistrate:

...a poor woman, the mother of three small children, was charged with larceny of a cap, valued at threepence. Though she was evidently guilty, Fielding had not the heart to punish the unhappy creature, and accordingly discharged her. Similarly lenient was his treatment of a wretched diseased woman who was convicted of stealing blankets; instead of sending her to prison, he recommended her to a hospital.⁹⁵

Justice in the comic sense of being a step toward the return to correct norms prevents Tom from meeting Sophia at Upton, although they stay at the same inn at the same time. And perhaps nowhere are the comic and moral functions of Fielding's narrator better resolved than in his comments on this "coincidence":

But so matters fell out, and so I must relate them; and if any reader is shocked at their appearing unnatural I cannot help it. I must remind such persons that I am not writing a system, but a history, and I am not obliged to reconcile every matter to the received notions concerning truth and nature. But if this was never so easy to do, perhaps it might be more prudent in me to avoid it...for wise and good men may consider what happened to Tom at Upton as a just punishment for his wickedness with regard to women, of which it was the immediate consequence; and silly and bad persons may comfort themselves in their vices by flattering their own hearts that the characters of men are rather owing to accident than to virtue.⁹⁶

The narrator speaks as if he is unaware that the novel is written in the comic mode and that we are thereby sure of the triumph of the hero. Even if "received notions concerning truth and nature," probability itself and an epistemological "system" were to decree that it was inevitable that Tom and Sophia meet at Upton, he believes it "prudent" that he prevent such a meeting. Temporarily abandoning the worldly tone with which he sometimes tolerates evil, he asserts that "wise and good men" should consider Tom's punishment to be just. Although he will say later that only "religious" or "moral" writers arrange that virtue triumph, he here attributes to the "silly" and "bad" the

notion that "accident" and not obedience to moral norms determines the fates of men. Later as Tom sets out in pursuit of the profligate Nightingale, this narrator, speaking in the tone of his "fine old moralism" declares, "the good or evil we confer on others very often, I believe, recoils on ourselves."⁹⁷ Fielding implies that the very structure of human relationships is influenced by the degree to which a character can respond to everyday situations in terms of moral norms, and that moral norms were accepted in the first place because they facilitated humane relations between men.

Thus the narrator varies from a tone of worldly and tolerant amusement at vice and corruption to a serious moral tone which brings standards of right and wrong to bear upon events. There is an interplay too between the narrator's sense of social outrage and his commitment to the norms and values of his society. Tom may marry Sophia, and Tom Jones may chronicle the gentry's attaining of norms of good sense, but Fielding's narrator is always intensely aware of the high degree of immorality prevalent among the higher orders, from the greed of Doctor Blifil and the narrow-mindedness of Squire Western to the dissolute ruthlessness of Lady Bellaston and Lord Fellamar. Although Fielding conservatively respected the existing order, he did not feel constrained to conceal its vices: "Where again shall we look for an example of temperance?" he asked in The Covent-Garden Journal. "In the stinking kitchens of the rich, or under the humble roofs of the poor? Where for prudence but among those who have the fewest desires?"⁹⁸ A social structure

that grants privileges only to some, Fielding implies, may occasionally breed injustice, and one of his disagreeable landladies who manages an inn "frequented by people of fashion"⁹⁹ manifests an affectation based upon class superiority that invites the narrator's "urbane scorn":

I know not whence it is, but all those who get their livelihood by people of fashion, contract as much insolence to the rest of mankind, as if they really belonged to that rank themselves.¹⁰⁰

But while Fielding does indicate examples of injustice that seem to result from the structure of the existing order, he nowhere suggests that a radical transformation of that order would provide a more viable solution. Rather, he suggests that individual transgressions are to be treated by each individual reforming himself, becoming better adjusted to existing moral standards.

Fielding's narrator demands a sympathetic relationship with his reader, a shared acceptance of moral norms. At the end of Tom Jones he takes leave of his readers, "like fellow-travellers in a stage-coach who generally make all up at last, and mount, for the last time, into their vehicle with cheerfulness and good-humour."¹⁰¹ Unlike Lawrence who will demand that his reader substitute new values for old, Fielding expects that his reader, once he applies his good sense, will realize that he and the narrator have always agreed on moral questions. Fielding and his reader can "make all up at last" because, since moral laws for Fielding are neither arbitrary nor subjective, sooner or later they

must agree. After his discourse on "Love," Fielding expects that his reader has accepted his judgments:

Examine your heart, my good reader, and resolve whether you do believe these matters with me. If you do, you may now proceed to their exemplification in the following pages: if you do not, you have, I assure you, already read more than you have understood; and it would be wiser to pursue your business, or your pleasures (such as they are), than to throw away any more of your time in reading what you can neither taste nor comprehend.¹⁰²

Fielding, in fact, desires only readers who "believe these matters with me." Tom Jones is written for those who already have a moral sense, and who will thus be all the more able to appreciate the value of prudence in making moral acts possible. Fielding chooses to describe incidents that will be pleasing to this reader, ironically perhaps omitting details which might offend his moral sensibility. Thus he omits the particulars of Lord Fellamar's address to Sophia: "Laying hold of her hand, he ran on for some minutes in a strain which would be little more pleasing to the reader than it was to the lady."¹⁰³

Yet although as a comic novelist he is also a puppeteer, moving his characters about like marionettes as moral problems are explored, Fielding's narrator explicitly refuses to assume the mask of omniscience. For he wants the reader to believe that not his efforts, but the moral necessities of Tom's own actions will determine his fate. Tom must prove that he did not strike the first blow in his duel with Fitzpatrick. If justice is on Tom's side, the machinations of a deus ex machina will be superfluous:

We will lend him none of that supernatural assistance with which we are entrusted...if he doth not, therefore, find some natural means of fairly extricating himself from all his distresses, we will do no violence to the truth and dignity of history for his sake; for we had rather relate that he was hanged at Tyburn (which may very probably be the case) than forfeit our integrity or shock the faith of our reader.¹⁰⁴

Wayne Booth emphasizes the omniscience and omnipresence of Fielding's narrator who "is never overwhelmed by his problems...he never doubts his own ability to tell his story or to move the reader in any way he pleases."¹⁰⁵ But Fielding's narrator often takes care to disguise his omniscience. Fielding wishes the truths expressed by his narrator to seem not the opinions of a single consciousness, implying that they might legitimately conflict with another writer's world-view, but to reflect the views of all men of good sense. Ultimately, Fielding wishes the voice of his narrator to strike the reader as the voice of a culture, unified and secure in the truth of its moral standards. The voice of a narrator who is confident enough in himself to assume such a role also appears at ease with himself. His tone may occasionally become complacent because he knows that his judgments are those of a whole culture; he cannot be "wrong." And within the limits defined by the norms exacted by that culture, he can also afford to be humane; any challenge to his moral judgments must come from a minority, from, in his terms, a group not yet fully appreciative of the benefits and order made possible by those norms.

In order to appear to be objective, Fielding

occasionally pretends that his "history" is a true one, and that therefore he cannot always know what a character is thinking; he cannot tell us Sophia's thoughts, after Mrs. Fitzpatrick warns her not to expect constancy to the marriage bed, because he does not know what they are:

A gentle sigh stole from Sophia at these words, which perhaps contributed to form a dream of no very pleasant kind; but, as she never revealed this dream to any one, so the reader cannot expect to see it related here.¹⁰⁶

He can pretend, too, to be naive, almost shocked at the revelations of his characters, and desirous above all else of protecting his reader from knowledge of the wickedness of the world:

[Nightingale] had no sooner, therefore, received a full liberty of speaking from Jones, than he entered upon a long narrative concerning the lady [Lady Bellaston]; which, as it contained many particulars highly to her dishonour, we have too great a tenderness for all women of condition to repeat. We would cautiously avoid giving an opportunity to the future commentators on our works, of making any malicious application and of forcing us to be, against our will, the author of scandal, which never entered into our head.¹⁰⁷

Not to appear didactic, Fielding's narrator also sometimes refuses to make moral judgments, even when they seem obvious, leaving it to the reader to draw his own conclusions from the information that he has been given. Of the character of Doctor Blifil, Fielding at first provides only an objective account; we learn that Doctor Blifil's father bred him to a profession he disliked, "the doctor was master of almost every other science but that by which he was to get his bread,"

and "the doctor had one positive recommendation; - this was a great appearance of religion."¹⁰⁸ Having already proved him to be a hypocrite in the matter of his profession, the omniscient narrator need not himself comment on the sincerity of Doctor Blifil's religious beliefs:

Whether his religion was real, or consisted only in appearance, I shall not presume to say, as I am not possessed of any touchstone which can distinguish the true from the false.¹⁰⁹

And Fielding's narrator even denies that as the author of a comedy, it is his duty to contrive a happy ending. When tears start in the eyes of Mr. Allworthy, as he recalls Tom as a baby, "he was my darling, he was,"¹¹⁰ the narrator intercedes to provide an objective reason for Mr. Allworthy's relenting towards Tom:

...we will here stop to account for the visible alteration in Mr. Allworthy's mind, and the abatement of his anger to Jones. Revolutions of this kind, it is true, do frequently occur in histories and dramatic writers, for no other reason than because the history or play draws to a conclusion...though we insist upon as much authority as any author whatever, we shall use this power very sparingly, and never but when we are driven to it by necessity... This alteration, then, in the mind of Mr. Allworthy was occasioned by a letter he had just received from Mr. Square....¹¹¹

The motivating force behind the outcome of the novel is to be justice, and not sentiment.

Fielding's assumed diffidence is perhaps a measure of his absolute confidence in the truth of his moral position. Empson suggests that "in Tom Jones he is expressing a theory about ethics, and the ironies are made to interlock with the progress of the demonstration...the feeling that he is proving

a case is what gives Tom Jones its radiance."¹¹² "Radiance" certainly characterizes the overall tone of the narration, and such radiance would not be accessible to an author who did not have complete confidence in his moral judgments.

Bathed in a glow of the author's kindness and tolerance as Tom Jones is, we tend to forget the presence of the norms and values with which Fielding has ordered his world. The personal sensibility of the narrator, discovering new forms of old vices and follies, seems not to be imposing moral standards on the inexhaustible range of experiences at his disposal. But "to be able to laugh at evil and error means that we have surmounted them."¹¹³ And what norms and values sustain Mr. Allworthy's domain is as much Fielding's subject as the vagaries of the comic world he so delights in dissecting.

Jane Austen too creates a comic world sustained by her sense of rational and permanent moral standards. Her ethical perspective has much in common with Fielding's, and it might be useful to view these two novelists as the foremost representatives of one of the many traditions in the English novel. It is perhaps significant that both Fielding and Jane Austen wrote in the comic mode - the requirements of their form itself ensured an ultimate return to stability and a purging of society from the disorders bred by the false social standards that have become, in the guise of acceptable norms, the way of the world.

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(Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967), p. 173.
- 52 Tom Jones, p. 432.
- 53 Ibid., p. 821.
- 54 Ibid., p. 821.
- 55 Ironically, Fielding introduces his argument for probability
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Jane Austen: The Morality Of Affection

Jane Austen's voice, like that of Fielding, is the voice of a culture sanctioning a set of norms and values that are not unique to her, but belong to a valuable Christian and humane tradition. And, like Fielding, Jane Austen assumes that her readers share her belief in the rightness of the values she chooses as moral criteria. The values approved by this tradition are sanctioned by Jane Austen not merely because she relies upon the teachings of the past for her interpretation of human experience. Rather, she accepts the moral standards approved by her culture because they make possible a rationally ordered mode of existence. Like Fielding, she would not have taken seriously the view that the acceptance of moral principles threatens personal freedom; on the contrary, it provides the possibility for an ordered and coherent life in which the individual sensibility can express itself unhindered by the fear of injuring others.

Lionel Trilling has noticed this fact in relation to Pride And Prejudice:

The novel celebrates the traits of spiritedness, vivacity, celerity, and lightness, and associates them with happiness and virtue. Its social doctrine is a generous one, asserting the right of at least the good individual to define himself according to his own essence.¹

Trilling suggests that the association of "spiritedness" with "virtue" is a characteristic particular to Pride And Prejudice, much less relevant to Emma, and not at all part of the texture

of Mansfield Park. But it seems as if Jane Austen always rewards virtue by having it provide the opportunity for restrained self-expression. Paradoxically, virtue makes possible the freedom to participate in whatever situations there may be in which moral norms need not overtly come into play. Jane Austen insists upon a mediation between the observance of moral norms and the outpouring of high spirits. Nowhere does Emma seem more free or more responsive to the needs of her own nature than in her decision to apologize to Miss Bates. And however often she is eclipsed, as Trilling puts it, by the "style" of Mary Crawford,² Fanny is most bold, most spirited in her persistent refusals to marry Henry Crawford because he is not a good man. Offended by Darcy's pride, limited by her own prejudice, Elizabeth Bennet's dilemmas, much less than Fanny's or Emma's, approach the essential norms and values demanded by Jane Austen. Her intrinsic good nature never comes into conflict with these norms, as Emma's does; she is never faced with the problem of choosing between two equally negative moral positions; Fanny must either disobey a benevolent foster father or marry a morally lax man. From the point of view of a dialectic between the impulses of the active spirit and the need for moral restraints, Emma and Mansfield Park seem to be much more germane than Pride And Prejudice to a discussion of Jane Austen's moral outlook.

Jane Austen, like Fielding, writes in the comic mode; the vitality and high spirits of Elizabeth Bennet and

Emma reflect Jane Austen's sense of the inexhaustibility of human experience. And Emma's personality suggests a sense of the richness of life despite Jane Austen's fear that she would be "a heroine whom no one but myself will much like."³ The acceptance of moral norms is, as it was for Fielding, with Jane Austen the precondition for the expression of the vital impulses of human nature. Jane Austen does not see convention and spontaneity as in utter conflict; the spontaneous outpourings of the active sensibility need not always defy convention just as the acceptance of conventions does not necessarily suppress the active spirit. At the same time that Jane Austen encourages the expression of the open nature, she demands a constant awareness of the necessity of adjusting to the demands of social life. Perhaps more than in any other of her novels, in Emma Jane Austen most emphatically pits the expressions of personal sensibility against the rules of moral decorum.

As Bergson points out, "comedy can only begin at the point where our neighbor's personality ceases to affect us. It begins, in fact, with what might be called a growing callousness to social life... it is the part of laughter to reprove his [the hero's] absentmindedness and wake him out of his dream."⁴ Bergson's description might serve as a foreword to Emma. Both Emma and, in Mansfield Park, Henry and Mary Crawford and the Bertram sisters display a growing lack of concern for the norms that add moral order to social

life. In both Emma and Mansfield Park Jane Austen is concerned with illustrating how organic a part of everyday life must be the awareness of moral values and the correct outward behavior through which they are to be expressed.

I Character And The Value Of Being Humane

That people in Jane Austen's novels are defined in terms of the values which they either live by or transgress makes it possible for the reader always to see characters like Emma in a moral context. As Ian Watt suggests, Jane Austen "presented all her characters in terms of their relation to a fixed code of values."⁵ Thus while we might be inclined to define Emma by her outspoken sensibility alone, the continuous presence within the novel of the moral judgments directed at other characters prompts us to consider whether Emma's actions are violating moral norms. The novel is a mosaic of such judgments. And a hierarchy emerges in which some characters, like Mr. Weston, appear as moderately moral, while others, like his son, Frank Churchill, appear as moderately lax. Mr. Weston, a man of good intentions, if not always sound judgment, is described in a positive manner:

Mr. Weston was a man of unexceptionable character, easy fortune, suitable age, and pleasant manners.⁶

If Mr. Weston's virtues are not especially outstanding ones, there is at least nothing against which to take exception in his character. But we sense that he will not be the hero. Similarly, the description of Miss Taylor, his bride, as "useful"⁷ places her in the correct moral camp. At the same time it tells us that neither will she be particularly interesting, that her moral conflicts will not occupy the center of the novel, and that she may even serve as what Henry James

was later to term a ficelle.

The first descriptions of her major characters are restrained, because Jane Austen's dramatic sense cannot yet disclose her heroine's "comic flaw." Yet while at least in the opening chapters we seem to learn less about Emma and Knightley than about the Westons, Jane Austen does begin by placing her two most important figures in a moral context. At the beginning, as at the end, Mr. Knightley is described as "a sensible man about seven or eight-and-thirty."⁸ Emma herself, when we first meet her, seems to live a privileged existence, immune from moral problems:

Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence.⁹

But only a few lines later we learn that Emma's conduct is reprehensible: "the real evils, indeed, of Emma's situation were the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself."¹⁰ It is only Emma herself who praises the "cleverness" which she possesses in an abundant degree. "Little Emma," she tells her baby niece, "grow up to be a better woman than your aunt. Be infinitely cleverer."¹¹ Of Harriet's shortcomings, Emma will concede only that "she is not a clever girl."¹² Jane Austen makes Emma clever so that her violations of moral norms will be all the more reprehensible. "Better be without sense than misapply it as you do,"¹³ Mr. Knightley tells her. The reader is meant to contrast Emma's cleverness with the

much more positive virtues of Jane Fairfax:

Living constantly with right-minded and well-informed people her heart and understanding had received every advantage of discipline and culture....¹⁴

Clearly Emma lacks the stability, the discipline and the sensitivity of Jane Fairfax.

That Emma's faults will not be irremediable is perhaps implied by the much more serious list of transgressions assigned to Frank Churchill. For after having only just arrived on his first visit to his father, Frank goes off to London to have his hair cut:

...there was an air of foppery and nonsense in it which she could not approve. It did not accord with the rationality of plan, the moderation in expense, or even the unselfish warmth of heart, which she had believed herself to discern in him yesterday. Vanity, extravagance, love of change, restlessness of temper, which must be doing something, good or bad....¹⁵

If Emma is not "sensible" like Mr. Knightley, neither is she guilty, like Frank Churchill, of ignoring the most important norms. Emma herself is always solicitous of her father, always concerned with securing his physical comfort and allaying the irrational fears with which he seems to be afflicted. That it is Emma herself who analyzes where Frank is amiss suggests to the reader that he should judge her own violations of moral norms as only temporary.

Jane Austen's characters learn too that seemingly trivial immoralities can have serious consequences, that any deviation from moral norms can be dangerous. At Box Hill Emma indulges in what seems to her to be a harmless rebuke

of the garrulous Miss Bates:

Emma could not resist.

"Ah! ma'am, but there may be a difficulty. Pardon me, but you will be limited as to number - only three at once."

Miss Bates, deceived by the mock ceremony of her manner, did not immediately catch her meaning; but, when it burst upon her, it could not anger, though a slight blush showed that it could pain her.¹⁶

Emma defends herself against Mr. Knightley's judgments by minimizing the incident: "it was not so very bad."¹⁷ But Mr. Knightley argues that in her carelessness Emma has overlooked the particulars of the situation; the consequences of her action are more serious than perhaps the remark itself indicates because Miss Bates, not Emma's social equal, is especially vulnerable:

She is poor; she has sunk from the comforts she was born to; and if she live to old age must probably sink more. Her situation should secure your compassion. It was badly done, indeed!¹⁸

Emma ignores the values of tolerance and compassion when her snobbery blinds her to the true worth and to the problems of other people.

In Mansfield Park Edmund loses his role as moral spokesman for Jane Austen through a seemingly trivial incident - he lends Mary Crawford a mare reserved for Fanny and forgets to return it. The act itself would seem to be unimportant. For even if she were greatly inconvenienced, Fanny could go riding another day. But Jane Austen wishes to emphasize that one ought to be considerate toward others, and that any forgetfulness is a breach of the norm. Edmund's

act has its consequence, and Fanny comes down with a headache. Yet the fact that Jane Austen allows Edmund to judge his own action suggests that he, like Emma, will at the end become fully aware of the importance of moral norms:

His own forgetfulness of her was worse than anything which they [his mother and his aunt] had done. Nothing of this would have happened had she been properly considered; but she had been left four days together without any choice of companions or exercise, and without any excuse for avoiding whatever her unreasonable aunts might require. He was shamed to think that for four days together she had not had the power of riding....¹⁹

Henry Crawford's seemingly harmless flirtations make it impossible for Fanny to accept him as a husband. Henry's later elopement with Mrs. Rushworth justifies Fanny's judgment that a man's character is revealed through all of his actions.

Violations of norms are also violations of reason; according to Jane Austen, for one to be rational he must be aware of moral imperatives. When Emma wishes to manipulate Harriet and convince her to renounce Robert Martin and become her protegee instead, Emma must use faulty reasoning. Her act is immoral, her arguments unreasonable:

"I lay it down as a general rule, Harriet, that if a woman doubts as to whether she should accept a man or not, she certainly ought to refuse him."²⁰

Harriet by herself, of course, ironically would not doubt her feelings at all; it is only Emma's irrational promise that she may some day live the life of a high-born lady that prompts Harriet to refuse Robert Martin.

If there is any norm that predominates in the fiction of Jane Austen, it is that one should be aware of the needs and desires of others. Self-knowledge must be complemented by knowledge of other people and "unreasonable" emotions divorced from reality are as dangerous as the seemingly trivial misdemeanors that have unexpected moral consequences. Emma's "falling in love" with Frank Churchill before she even meets him is an example of such an unreasonable emotion:

...there was something in the name, in the idea, of Mr. Frank Churchill, which always interested her. She had frequently thought ...that if she were to marry, he was the very person to suit her in age, character, and condition.²¹

Like Fielding, Jane Austen believes that one should marry for love; the measure of Emma's deviation from rational norms is her choice for a husband of a man whom she has not yet met. Emma is not to be blamed for her ignorance of Frank Churchill's secret engagement to Jane Fairfax. But she does violate reason in her repeated defenses to Mr. Knightley of Frank's waywardness.

Nowhere is Emma more guilty of violating reason and good sense than in her mistaking of both the intelligence of Harriet Smith and the intentions of Mr. Elton. Harriet Smith has flattered her, and she enjoys her role as Harriet's patroness. But vanity quickly blinds Emma to reason; her judgment becomes so clouded that she insists without demonstrable proof that the illegitimate Harriet must be of genteel origin: "there can be no doubt of your being a gentleman's daughter."²² Emma then seeks a genteel husband

for Harriet, basing her claim on the flimsy evidence that Harriet "had voluntarily noticed her father's gentleness with admiration as well as wonder."²³ Emma's conduct is all the more reprehensible because, being "clever," she ought to have been a much more acute observer of the behavior of other people.

While Emma does notice that she "come[s] in for a pretty good share as a second"²⁴ in Mr. Elton's compliments, she interprets his attentions, clearly meant for her, as "his gratitude on Harriet's account."²⁵ Emma's willful misinterpretation of Mr. Elton's indifference to Harriet's cold may be humorous. But Jane Austen is serious in her criticism of Emma's substitution of her own preconceived ideas for a realistic appraisal of the situation.

The episode with Mr. Elton has consequences for Emma that go beyond her embarrassment during the unpleasant scene in which he proposes to her. For after her first failure at matchmaking, Emma seems to become all the more vulnerable to error, all the more likely to be fooled by Frank Churchill, whose interest will lie in disguising his true affections. Her pride and her refusal to accept the errors in her moral position lead Emma to make the same mistake again and to make it in a more aggravated form.

How to make reasonable judgments is perhaps the subject of Mansfield Park. The nature of education is frequently discussed: the narrator says that an inferior education has caused the moral transgressions of her charac-

ters. Norms are important because they create and preserve human relationships; only the proper education can ensure that a character will choose to act by a norm rather than follow the impulses of a passionate sensibility.

Agreeing with Fielding, Jane Austen believes that however open and generous the nature of an individual may be, he must learn norms if he is to lead an ordered moral life. But whereas Fielding never suggests that a better education would have made Blifil a better man, in Mansfield Park, Jane Austen even implies that by accepting moral principles all people can learn to behave properly. Although Jane Austen holds the Bertram sisters responsible for their actions, an inadequate education, not their intrinsic natures, is the direct cause of their unwillingness to allow moral norms to guide their conduct. For the languid Lady Bertram has never been concerned with the education of her daughters:

To the education of her daughters Lady Bertram paid not the smallest attention. She had not time for such cares. She was a woman who spent her days in sitting, nicely dressed, on a sofa, doing some long piece of needlework, of little use and no beauty, thinking more of her pug than her children....²⁶

Jane Austen contrasts Fanny's education with Maria's and Julia's. At first the narrator seems to suggest that Fanny, socially, and seemingly intellectually, inferior to the others, has quite justifiably had only the rudiments of an education: "Fanny could read, work, or write, but she had been taught nothing more."²⁷ But juxtaposed with the

manner in which Sir Thomas's daughters have wasted their time, Fanny's simple talents seem to fulfill a norm. Fanny has learned skills that enable her to get along in the world. Her ability and willingness to work satisfy her very demanding aunts. Memorizing "the chronological order of the kings of England, with the dates of their accession, and most of the principal events of their reigns"²⁸ has increased the vanity and pride of the two sisters, but has taught them nothing about how to govern their relationships with other people. Nor has their education taught them how to behave in general with dignity and decorum. Jane Austen is ironic at Mrs. Norris's expense when she flatters her nieces by comparing their accomplishments with the meagerness of Fanny's: "it is not at all necessary that she should be as accomplished as you are."²⁹

Fielding generally rewards the character who possesses abundantly healthy spirits by making it possible for him to learn to live by moral norms. Jane Austen's vision is perhaps more severe. For at one time Maria and Julia did possess "promising talents and early information."³⁰ Yet an inadequate education makes it forever impossible for them to gain "the less common acquirements of self-knowledge, generosity and humility."³¹ The education of Maria and Julia has been faulty not only because they have been fed with useless information. For while Lady Bertram has simply ignored her daughters, Sir Thomas, with his sternness and distance, has violated a crucial norm, one which Allworthy amply fulfills:

he has not expressed warmth and affection toward his daughters. For Jane Austen, as for Fielding, the expression of affection and of human feeling in general is as much a part of the moral life as prudence or sexual restraint. Sir Thomas's reserve has diminished the moral experience of his daughters who repress "all the flow of their spirits before him."³² And he has made it impossible for himself to discover and remedy their ignorance of moral principles.

In most cases Jane Austen suggests that proper education would have made improper conduct less likely. Henry Crawford does admire Fanny and try to please her with acts of charity. But Henry was educated by the Admiral, "a man of vicious conduct, who chose, instead of retaining his niece, to bring his mistress under his own roof."³³ Unrestrained by any moral principle learned in his youth, Henry Crawford, bored and impatient of succeeding with Fanny, elopes with Mrs. Rushworth. It takes only "his unsettled affections, wavering with his vanity, Maria's decided attachment, and no sufficient principle on either side"³⁴ for him to violate moral norms. Maria's behavior is anticipated by the example of her own mother who seems to have married not for love, but for a fortune. Throughout the novel, Lady Bertram offers Fanny and her daughters only one piece of advice: "it is every young woman's duty to accept...unexceptionable offer[s]."³⁵ Henry can be an unobjectionable suitor only when moral considerations are not brought into play. And

Mary Crawford loses Edmund for the same reason that Henry loses Fanny. Unaccustomed to applying moral criteria to events, she views her brother's elopement with Mrs. Rushworth as "the folly of our two relations."³⁶ Like her brother, she is guilty of "faults of principle,"³⁷ a crime for which neither vivacity of spirit nor charm can compensate.

Principle decrees that Maria be unqualifiedly condemned for violating the norm which binds her to her marriage vow and that Henry share in that guilt. Maria's very presence might now undermine the ordered human relationships that prevail at Mansfield, and she is told that she must never return to her home.

As Sir Thomas finally realizes, in the education of his daughters, "principle, active principle, had been wanting;...they had never been properly taught to govern their inclinations and tempers by that sense of duty which alone can suffice."³⁸ Education must instruct the individual to respect moral norms and values for the order that they impart to human life. Jane Austen equates personal growth and psychological "development" with the ability of her characters to integrate moral norms into their everyday actions and decisions. We know that Edmund has matured when he can accurately appraise the character of Mary Crawford, "the charm is broken. My eyes are opened,"³⁹ and when his affections so conform to his appreciation of moral principles that he can choose Fanny for his wife. Ian Watt accurately

summarizes Jane Austen's conception of the relationship between character and principle when he emphasizes her desire that her characters be educated in a "set position," a series of moral principles:

She did not visualize the course of the individual life as a process of climbing to higher and yet higher planes of aesthetic perfection and moral insight. More classical, and more pessimistic, she saw the individual life less as a series of pinnacles to be scaled than as...a set position to be maintained against the forces of selfishness, unreason, and emotional excess.⁴⁰

Jane Austen associates morality with order. She suggests that the maintaining of moral principles is dependent upon an ordered and perhaps even a fixed mode of existence. In Mansfield Park two ways of life are contrasted, that of Mansfield and that of Portsmouth, the scene of Fanny's childhood. The disorder of Mrs. Price's household at Portsmouth, the squalor and mismanagement, seem to be a direct cause of the fractious relationships between the members of the family:

Further discussion was prevented by various bustles; first, the driver came to be paid; then there was a squabble between Sam and Rebecca about the manner of carrying up his sister's trunk, which he would manage all his own way; and lastly in walked Mr. Price himself, his own loud voice preceding him, as with something of the oath kind he kicked away his son's portmanteau and his daughter's band-box in the passage.⁴¹

Each member of this family seems to function independently and none recognizes the needs of the others.

For Jane Austen, whether or not order and moral principles prevail is dependent upon education. There is

a correlation between the fact that Mrs. Price "neither taught nor restrained her children,"⁴² that her "house was the scene of mismanagement and discomfort"⁴³ and that she shows little affection or interest in the daughter whom she has not seen for so many years.

And appropriately, it is Fanny, having suffered the injustices of Portsmouth, who can best cherish the values that predominate at Mansfield Park:

The elegance, propriety, regularity, harmony, and perhaps, above all, the peace and tranquility of Mansfield, were brought to her remembrance every hour of the day by the prevalence of everything opposite to them here [at Portsmouth].⁴⁴

Mansfield is to be preferred because it has provided a stable home for Fanny; Jane Austen does not value stability and restraint because they have perpetuated the high social status of the Bertrams. They are meaningful values because they make affection for a lonely and homeless girl possible. And affection is one of Jane Austen's major values; Maria is banished from Mansfield largely because she seems to be incapable of disinterested feeling for any other person. Her choice of Mr. Rushworth was never motivated by love:

Indifference was the most favorable state they [her feelings] could be in. Her behavior to Mr. Rushworth was careless and cold. She could not, did not like him.⁴⁵

Because they remove the normal, everyday restraints from personal relationships, private theatricals held at Mansfield Park in the absence of Sir Thomas threaten to destroy order. In Jane Austen's world values must be safeguarded against the arbitrary expression of the passions and

impulses of characters who have not learned moral restraint. And because Edmund, unlike his sisters, basically respects moral principles, he at first objects to the theatricals on the ground that they jeopardize a relationship that has previously been defined, the engagement of Maria to Mr. Rushworth:

"It [putting on the play] would show great want of feeling on my father's account, absent as he is, and in some degree of constant danger; and it would be imprudent, I think, with regard to Maria, whose situation is a very delicate one, considering everything, extremely delicate."⁴⁶

But Edmund's passion for Mary Crawford defeats his reason. He argues that although he objects to theatricals in general, he must participate in these because it would be indecorous to allow a stranger to play opposite Mary. Thus, norms of proper conduct are relaxed and the flirtation between Maria and Henry Crawford is allowed to proceed. The physical disruption of his household to which Sir Thomas so strongly objects upon his unannounced return, is merely an objective correlative for the moral disorder; the problem is not that a norm has been violated because the furniture has been rearranged or that there is something immoral about a bookcase being removed "from before the billiard-room door,"⁴⁷ but that in the absence of decorum, human relationships that embody order and principle become impossible.

The order of Mansfield, like that of Paradise Hall in Tom Jones, is founded upon disinterested and humane concern for the welfare and happiness of others. But if Tom drunkenly celebrates the recovery of Mr. Allworthy, Maria

and Julia Bertram feel no sadness on the occasion of Sir Thomas's departure for Antigua. "The Miss Bertrams," says Jane Austen's narrator, "were much to be pitied on the occasion, not for their sorrow, but for their want of it. Their father was no object of love to them; he had never seemed the friend of their pleasures, and his absence was unhappily most welcome."⁴⁸

Active concern for the welfare of others is possible only when genuine frankness and openness rule human relationships. Maria Bertram had always to conceal her motives and her true affections. And if there is anything at all undesirable in the character of Jane Fairfax, it may be her temper which, as Knightley says, "wants openness."⁴⁹ Emma's manipulations have at least been facilitated by Jane's lack of frankness about her engagement. And when Jane Fairfax does confide to Emma that she and Frank will live with Mr. Churchill, Emma exuberantly expresses her own and Jane Austen's approval: "Oh! if you knew how much I love everything that is decided and open."⁵⁰

Once the moral education of the heroine, or, as in Mansfield Park, the hero, seems to have been accomplished, once any threat to moral norms has been suppressed, a new freedom of self-expression seems to become possible. More subdued in tone, the informed sensibility seems to recognize that it will remain free only so long as others are not injured by its outpourings. It is free precisely because it has chosen to observe the rules of moral decorum. This kind

of freedom is inaccessible to a character like Henry Crawford for whom "the temptation of immediate pleasure was too strong for a mind unused to make any sacrifice to right."⁵¹ Jane Austen's point is that to obtain the highest rewards, in Henry's case, a woman with "sweetness of temper," "purity of mind," and "excellent principles,"⁵² there must be a mediation between norms and passion, sense and sensibility. And because experience has taught Sir Thomas to "prize more and more the sterling good of principle and temper,"⁵³ Edmund's application for Fanny's hand is met with "joyful consent." Moral considerations, as in Fielding, must precede considerations of social rank or material advantage.

Almost as if no description could do the enlightened sensibility justice, Jane Austen abstains from describing either Edmund's or Fanny's joy. Thus she increases our sense of the unrestrained delight that each must have felt:

His happiness in knowing himself to have been so long the beloved of such a heart, must have been great enough to warrant any strength of language in which he could clothe it to her or to himself; it must have been a delightful happiness. But there was happiness elsewhere which no description can reach. Let no one presume to give the feelings of a young woman on receiving the assurance of that affection of which she has scarcely allowed herself to entertain a hope.⁵⁴

Similarly, when the newly-enlightened Emma is told of Harriet's engagement to Robert Martin, she can barely reply because of the overflowing of her spirits:

To speak, she was sure, would be to betray a most unreasonable degree of happiness. She must wait a moment, or he would think her mad.⁵⁵

And finally Emma does speak:

"I am perfectly satisfied," replied Emma, with the brightest smiles, "and most sincerely wish them happy."

"You are materially changed since we talked on this subject before."

"I hope so - for at that time I was a fool."⁵⁶

No longer a fool, Emma can express the deepest qualities of her nature confident that her feelings express a reasonable moral perspective; and Jane Austen emphasizes the value of moral principles by suggesting that Emma's feelings are richest when she has accepted restraint and decorum. As with Fanny, only a hint can be given of the variety and depth of Emma's happiness:

The joy, the gratitude, the exquisite delight of her sensations may be imagined. The sole grievance and alloy thus removed in the prospect of Harriet's welfare, she was really in danger of becoming too happy for security. What had she to wish for? Nothing, but to grow more worthy of him, whose intentions and judgment had been ever so superior to her own.⁵⁷

II Moral Norms and Social Standards: Jane Austen As A Comic Novelist

The norms of any novelist suggest either his acceptance of the structure of his society, or his determination to oppose or even to change that structure. When in Tom Jones the norm urging an acceptance of the social structure endangers values such as respect for the worth of another human being regardless of his social rank, Fielding suggests, not that the structure of his society change, but that individuals in their private lives protect those vulnerable values all the more. Like Fielding, Jane Austen is a comic novelist, and as Cook points out about the comic mode, "as the social group becomes normal by expelling the abnormal individual... so the individual by wit adjusts himself to society."⁵⁸

But unlike Fielding's, some of Jane Austen's positive or reliable characters find it very difficult to accommodate their feelings and their needs to social standards. To some it even seems as if the values demanded by society conflict with moral norms and values. And perhaps the social standard that most frequently seems to interfere with the happiness and well-being of her characters is that which would preserve the existing class structure of society by urging each individual to marry within his own class.

For more basic norms come into direct conflict with the norm urging absolute class separation. And to the extent that she deals with this conflict on the plane of a choice between two seemingly absolute norms, Jane Austen's novels

belie Arnold Kettle's judgment that she failed "to notice the existence of the problem [of class divisions]." ⁵⁹

It is most frequently when a character must choose a suitable husband or wife that social norms and moral values seem to conflict. Although the norms urging decorum are important, affection seems to be for Jane Austen the cohesive value that most ensures order in human relationships. It is when affection and the absolute separation of classes seem to be irreconcilable that the problem arises. And it is her unreliable or negative characters who place the preservation of class distinctions above sincere feeling. It is Maria Bertram who sees a "moral obligation" ⁶⁰ in not refusing Mr. Rushworth because "a marriage with Mr. Rushworth would give her the enjoyment of a larger income than her father's as well as ensure her the house in town, which was now a prime object." ⁶¹ Her marriage ends in disaster.

For Sir Thomas, her father, the decision about whether or not he should allow his daughter to marry Mr. Rushworth is not an easy one. Although he consistently upholds traditional moral and social norms, equating the two as Jane Austen frequently does, he nevertheless seems to be willing to commit a breach of moral decorum rather than allow his daughter to marry a man whom she does not love: "advantageous as would be the alliance, and long standing and public as was the engagement, her happiness must not be sacrificed to it." ⁶² Sir Thomas must choose between three norms, one

advocating marriage between families of equal wealth and rank, one demanding that a man keep his word, and one decreeing that a person's conduct be guided first by his affections.

Sir Thomas makes the wrong decision; he chooses to abide by the more easily defined and socially approved norm: "it was an alliance which he could not have relinquished without pain."⁶³ And to further emphasize that his choice has been unwise, Jane Austen shows him to be partially tempted by a selfish motive: "a well-disposed young woman, who did not marry for love, was in general but the more attached to her own family."⁶⁴ The consequences that follow, culminating in Maria's adultery, are inevitable once she marries not for love, but for gain. As Fanny puts it, "how wretched, and how unpardonable, how hopeless, and how wicked it was, to marry without affection."⁶⁵

But what is a character to do when the object of his affections is born into a lower social class and when, therefore, through his marriage he would be questioning the validity of class distinctions? How often is Jane Austen willing to modulate her norms by making affection triumph over traditional social barriers?

Because Jane Austen so highly valued the way of life of the country gentry, that of the Darcys, the Knightleys and the Tilneys, for the rationality and order it provides, she treats the criticism of class separation on the grounds of its exclusiveness only peripherally. If a character born

into the country gentry fails to appreciate its value, he can justifiably be banished from it. But Jane Austen does also ask whether it is "moral" that a character amply possessed of virtue and understanding be excluded from the most intellectually and emotionally desirable way of life simply because he was not born to it. The very fact that she creates such a character, that the presence of Jane Fairfax and the fragility of her fate seem to pervade Emma from the time she is first mentioned, seems to indicate that Jane Austen was at least aware of the danger of too unqualifiedly affirming the norm ensuring class separation. The question of the future of Jane Fairfax seems, at times, almost to displace our interest in Emma. And even though it is Emma herself who first describes Jane Fairfax in a way reflecting envy of her accomplishments, we still are curious about Jane:

...we are always forced to be acquainted whenever she comes to Highbury...Heaven forbid, at least, that I should ever bore people half so much about all the Knightleys together as she [Miss Bates] does about Jane Fairfax. One is sick of the very name of Jane Fairfax. Every letter from her is read forty times over; her compliments to all her friends go round and round again; and if she does but send her aunt the pattern of a stomacher, or knit a pair of garters for her grandmother, one hears of nothing else for a month. I wish Jane Fairfax very well, but she tires me to death.⁶⁶

Although she is as well educated as Emma, and considerably more virtuous and sensitive to the needs of others, poverty almost condemns Jane Fairfax to entering the home of a stranger as a schoolmistress; an accomplished and highly spirited young woman who has violated no moral norms seems suddenly about to be excluded from all the benefits of

civilized life:

With the fortitude of a devoted novitiate, she had resolved at one-and-twenty to complete the sacrifice, and retire from all the pleasures of life, of rational intercourse, equal society, peace and hope, to penance and mortification for ever.⁶⁷

A girl who by any moral standard deserved to partake of "equal society" is almost condemned to "the sale, not quite of human flesh, but of human intellect."⁶⁸ The tone in which Jane speaks of her impending doom seems somewhat out of place in Emma, a comic novel concerning which we feel the same sense of moral security that is elicited by Tom Jones. The language, and especially Jane's very use of the word "flesh" to describe herself, suggests that such a problem as that confronting Jane Fairfax does not really belong to the milieu of Highbury and that perhaps Jane Austen was either not prepared or not willing to deal with it. Perhaps, however, a problem like that facing Jane Fairfax can be brought into a comic novel as long as it remains in the background, and is treated only briefly.

Jane Austen does seem to be willing to modulate the norms requiring the separation of classes when they seem too harsh or when they ignore the needs of her morally deserving characters. She does not hesitate to apply her norms rigidly to Maria Bertram and Mary Crawford for their unwillingness to choose affection and love over material security. But Jane Austen does not rigidly enforce the norm preserving class distinctions when it seems to be a gratuitous threat to the happiness of a virtuous character. She justifies this leniency by

making her flexibility available only to eminently virtuous characters such as Jane Fairfax and Fanny Price.

By adopting Fanny, Sir Thomas Bertram fears that he is violating the norm preserving the separation of the classes. Jane Austen makes his apprehension seem reasonable. He is afraid that Fanny will demand a social position that is not commensurate with her birth, and he ponders

...how to preserve in the minds of my daughters the consciousness of what they are, without making them think too lowly of their cousin; and how, without depressing her spirits too far, to make her remember that she is not a Miss Bertram...they cannot be equals. Their rank, fortune, rights, and expectations will always be different.⁶⁹

Later Sir Thomas will confer on Fanny all the advantages of Mansfield Park because she has earned them. But Jane Austen writes as if any sensible person would begin with the reservations felt by Sir Thomas. A constant consciousness of norms seems to be a prerequisite of order. The reward of freedom from the limitations of the class to which she was born reflects Sir Thomas's appreciation of Fanny's virtue. That Sir Thomas's own daughters lose the privileges of their class when they cease to behave morally reflects Jane Austen's sense that goodness must be an absolute value.

Jane Fairfax, by virtue of her accomplishments and character, also gains a position in society that transcends the relative lowness of her origins. It is true that Jane Fairfax must suffer greatly before she is allowed the relief of a secure and socially acceptable marriage. And perhaps,

although she is virtuous, Jane Fairfax "deserves" to suffer for violating the proprieties and keeping her engagement secret. But because she has violated only the proprieties and not moral norms, at the end she is awarded a social position equal, if not superior, to Emma's.

But in general Jane Austen seems to find it difficult to modulate norms. In her society frequent outbursts of irrationality seem to make it all the more necessary to enforce existing norms and standards. Virginia Woolf defends Jane Austen for her unwillingness to challenge social conventions. Mrs. Woolf suggests that behind Jane Austen's conservatism is her sense of the difficulty of changing society as a whole, however prevalent may be its abuses of moral norms:

Nor does she pay to conventions merely the tribute of lip homage; she believes in them besides accepting them...she wishes neither to reform nor to annihilate...⁷⁰ for even if the pangs of outraged vanity, or the heat of moral wrath, urged us to improve away a world so full of spite, pettiness, and folly, the task is beyond our powers....⁷¹

Viewed from this perspective, Jane Austen seems to be not at all the rigid conservative described by Arnold Kettle: "the values and standards of the Hartfield world are based on the assumption that it is right and proper for a minority of the community to live at the expense of the majority."⁷²

By making it possible for characters like Fanny Price and Jane Fairfax to share in the benefits of the most wealthy members of the society, Jane Austen seems to be saying that moral considerations, those that respect the integrity of

the individual, must supersede social norms. If one can ignore the question of the justice of class distinctions, a question with which Jane Austen is not concerned, it becomes possible to see her social theory as a generous and just one. David Daiches misses Jane Austen's emphasis on moral norms in his interpretation of her message: "to achieve the truly civilized life...you must be completely free from economic cares and be in a position to enjoy fully the arts and sciences."⁷³ For Jane Austen the "civilized life" is associated above all with moral decorum and social status matters primarily insofar as it enables her characters to achieve this decorum.

By comparing Harriet Smith with Fanny Price or with Jane Fairfax, one may see why in her case norms are not modulated and she is made to marry a man of birth similar to her own. The key lies in Knightley's question: "What are Harriet Smith's claims, either of birth, nature, or education, to any connection higher than Robert Martin?"⁷⁴ Both by "nature" and by "education" Fanny Price and Jane Fairfax are entitled to husbands of the highest distinction. But even though we see Harriet Smith through Emma's own eyes, and Emma tries to justify her advancing of Harriet, we are in no danger of confusing her abilities with those of Jane Fairfax. And although Emma will later justify her interest in Harriet on the grounds of the girl's accomplishments, Emma's portrait ironically emphasizes the mediocrity of Harriet's character. Emma at this stage of her development would not choose to befriend a girl with achievements similar to her own:

She was not struck by anything remarkably clever in Miss Smith's conversation, but she found her altogether very engaging - not inconveniently shy, nor unwilling to talk - and yet so far from pushing, showing so proper and becoming a deference, seeming so pleasantly grateful for being admitted to Hartfield, and so artlessly impressed by the appearance of everything in so superior a style to what she had been used to....⁷⁵

As Edgar F. Shannon points out, Harriet does not deserve to be part of any kind of elite:

By bringing Harriet into equilibrium with Robert Martin, Jane Austen has not been betrayed by the beliefs of her own time. In any age, differences of background, education, intelligence, force of character, and occupation create varying degrees of familiarity among people.⁷⁶

Similarly, Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill are perhaps best suited to each other. For if Frank Churchill lacks Knightley's good sense, Jane lacks the educated Emma's openness of spirit. It might be argued, however, that Frank Churchill's laxness in observing proper respect for his father seems to be a more serious violation of moral norms than Jane's lack of openness of spirit, that she more deserves a Knightley than Jane Austen is willing to admit. In the case of Jane Fairfax, Jane Austen hints that perhaps we do not always get what we deserve. If Jane deserves a better man for a husband than Frank Churchill, her natural abilities seem to indicate that she also deserved as much as Emma to be born into the country gentry.

Recognizing the deficiencies in both Harriet's birth and her character, Knightley objects to Emma's search for a husband for Harriet among the gentry:

Men of family would not be very fond of connecting themselves with a girl of such obscurity - and most prudent men would be afraid of the inconvenience and disgrace they might be involved in, when the mystery of her parentage came to be revealed.⁷⁷

Part of Emma's moral education is completed when she admits that Knightley's judgment was the correct one: "the stain of illegitimacy, unbleached by nobility or wealth, would have been a stain indeed."⁷⁸

Yet the case of Robert Martin seems to suggest to Jane Austen that she consider some modulation of the norm rigidly preserving class distinctions. For as Knightley, her spokesman, points out to Emma, Robert Martin is a man of very high character and moral sense!

"I never hear better sense from anyone than Robert Martin. He always speaks to the purpose; open, straight-forward, and very well judging...He is an excellent young man, both as son and brother."⁷⁹

And Knightley recognizes that Robert Martin is fixed in a social class that is not commensurate with his worth as a human being. His final judgment is that Martin's "situation is an evil,"⁸⁰ and that he would alter it if he could.⁸¹

Lionel Trilling may be correct in his observation that Robert Martin "is on his way to being a gentleman pure and simple,"⁸² that the suggestion of at least potential social mobility softens Jane Austen's picture of a rigidly stratified society.

But it should be noted as well that the modulation of norms in the fiction of Jane Austen is relatively infrequent. The community of Highbury at the end of Emma is presided over by Emma and Knightley, both members of the highest

social class, and not by Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax, a more understanding and sweet-tempered character than Emma herself. Jane and Frank fade into the background, and in the last pages of Emma we hear little of them. That Frank does marry Jane, although as Mrs. Weston puts it, "it is not a connection to gratify,"⁸³ means that social norms can sometimes be modified to meet the needs of spirited and highly intelligent characters. But the infrequency of such alliances in Jane Austen's novels suggests that the violation of even unjust social norms is possible only in exceptional cases. And perhaps E.N. Hayes is right when he says that Jane Austen does not make an unqualified statement on the conflict of social and moral norms, that she "again and again hints at a class conflict which is never allowed to develop."⁸⁴

Perhaps Jane Austen's best answer to this problem may come in Persuasion. For in her last novel she deals directly with this question. The "message" of Persuasion seems to be that if a character does not challenge an unjust social norm, his personal happiness may become permanently impossible. In a sense it is only accidental that Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth meet again and that Anne is thereby given a second chance. Jane Austen suggests that the consequences of accepting rigid and immoral social standards may be very harsh. Not to obscure this point, the plot of Persuasion has Wentworth at first indifferent to the aging Anne who seems to bear so little resemblance to the nineteen year old who rejected him. Anne is told that

Wentworth's first reaction to seeing her again after almost eight years was only, "you were so altered he should not have known you again."⁸⁵

Wentworth is still in love with Anne, and Anne's being misled about his feelings increases the suspense over whether they will be finally united. Wentworth's noticing that the years have destroyed Anne's "youth and bloom" is an objective correlative for his anger that "she had given him up to oblige others."⁸⁶ Anne seems to deserve to be punished for having chosen a false social standard over a truly moral norm. For she had succumbed to Lady Russell, her foster parent, who advised that she not throw herself away on "a young man who had nothing but himself to recommend him, and no hopes of attaining affluence."⁸⁷ At the end Anne is rewarded for her faithfulness and fine discrimination; she was at least unwilling to be persuaded to marry a lesser, if more affluent man, as her sister did. She remained available for Wentworth's possible return.

But is Jane Austen, by having Anne conclude at the end that no idea that denies the affections be elevated to the status of a norm, absolutely choosing moral over social standards? For Anne says that "it was, perhaps, one of those cases in which advice is good or bad only as the event decides; and for myself, I certainly never should, in any circumstance of tolerable similarity, give such advice."⁸⁸ She seems not only to be saying that norms are not to be absolutely applied, but that the individual in many cases must decide on the basis

of his own circumstances whether or not a norm is relevant.

Jane Austen remains a writer of comedy - and the comic mode demands at the end a reconciliation of the individual with his society. Anne rejects a false value and argues that moral considerations must precede questions of material advantage. But at the same time she affirms the value of obedience to the objective codes of behavior approved by her society. Jane Austen seems to believe that only anarchy would result from a total transfer of judgment to the individual.

Jane Austen does not suggest that all of her society's standards conflict with moral norms. Rather, she implies that most of the norms sanctioned by her society are correct. For built into the structure of a moral philosophy that suggests appropriate norms is the need for the individual to submit his desires and his choices to the approval of those, usually parents, who uphold and teach moral values to the next generation. Lady Russell "was in the place of a parent"⁸⁹ to Anne, and parents as the wardens of moral principles should be obeyed. "I was right in submitting to her," says Anne, "if I had done otherwise, I should have suffered more in continuing the engagement than I did even in giving it up, because I should have suffered in my conscience."⁹⁰

Faithful to the optimism of the comic mode, confident in the triumph of the affections over most obstacles, Jane Austen can both challenge a false standard and demand

obedience to the norms approved by a society. For Jane Austen's is a society which, if it allows irrationality to win out occasionally, nevertheless can also provide an ordered and sensible way of life. Once the principle of obedience is accepted, the norms sanctioned by the society as a whole may be modulated to meet the needs of individuals. As Anne pointed out, in her case the event should have decided. And, paradoxically, an objective standard can survive only if there is room for both obedience and flexibility. Jane Austen's view of human nature is a comic view which allows for the correction of errors. And because she creates many superior individuals who will be guided by their affections, happiness for most of Jane Austen's heroines is as probable as it was for Tom Jones:

When any two young people take it into their heads to marry, they are pretty sure by perseverance to carry their point, be they ever so poor, or ever so imprudent, or ever so little likely to be necessary to each other's ultimate comfort. This may be bad morality to conclude with, but I believe it to be truth....⁹¹

The happiness that finally comes to Anne makes Jane Austen's moral self-criticism seem ironic.

Jane Austen believes that class distinctions must be maintained, not especially because they are desirable in themselves, but because order and decorum are possible only when all facets of social existence are precisely defined. But social snobbery based upon class superiority is reprehensible and violates the values of understanding and compassion for others. While the status quo must, according to

Jane Austen, ultimately be maintained, the worth of human beings is not to be determined simply by their place in the social hierarchy.

In fact, when Jane Austen wishes to create a character who will seem morally undesirable, she usually assigns to him the traits of snobbery and intolerance. Mary Crawford's "early presentiment that she should like the eldest [son] best"⁹² is our first indication that she will always choose material over moral values. That Tom is "an agreeable man himself" is important to her only after his "park" and his "spacious modern-built house."⁹³ She has come to the country "with the true London maxim that everything is to be got with money";⁹⁴ she knows only admirals in the navy, for "post-captains may be very good sort of men, but they do not belong to us."⁹⁵ Although Jane Austen writes about people who seem to possess material wealth in great abundance, this fact in itself allows her to complicate her treatment of moral values. A great deal of wealth seems to be accessible. Yet because characters must frequently choose between material advantage and moral rectitude, Jane Austen can so much the more intensely dramatize that choice and demand that moral considerations come first. The more widely her characters are surrounded by the possibilities of greater material comfort and higher social status, the more relentlessly she insists that all choices must be legitimated by an equal degree of moral wealth. Ironically, Mary Crawford falls in love with a second son. Yet although she seems to go beyond materialistic values,

Edmund still rejects her for not being aware enough of moral principles.

That Mary's social values have made her a lesser human being is intensified by the mere presence of Fanny. For the often cruel and neglectful treatment Fanny receives in the Bertram household testifies to the injustice of the class consciousness that values social distinctions above the intrinsic worth of a human life. Jane Austen contrasts the attitudes of Mary and of Fanny toward Edmund. For Mary, Edmund sometimes becomes the generic "second son" rather than a man in his own right: "there is something in the sound of Mr. Edmund Bertram so formal, so pitiful, so younger-brother like, that I detest it."⁹⁶ When the two seem to be irreconcilable, Mary values high place over affection. In contrast, Fanny values Edmund for himself:

"To me, the sound of Mr. Bertram is so cold...so entirely without warmth or character! It just stands for a gentlemen, and that's all. But there is nobleness in the name of Edmund."⁹⁷

For Fanny there is "nobleness" in the name of Edmund because it belongs to the man she loves; for her everything attached to him gains in value because of the strength of his character.

Mary's values determine her beliefs. She objects to Edmund's entering the church on the ground of the low social status of a clergyman: "Men love to distinguish themselves," she says, "and in either of the other lines distinction may be gained, but not in the church. A clergyman is nothing."⁹⁸ Before her need of a high social position, even human life seems to lose its value. Should Tom die, she points out,

"wealth and consequence could fall into no hands more deserving of them."⁹⁹

And until she learns the value of moral norms, Emma is also guilty of snobbery; like Mary Crawford she values other people according to their social rank. Because Knightley has praised Robert Martin, we know we are to respect the man. Emma's refusal to notice Robert Martin because "the yeomanry are precisely the order of people with whom I feel I can have nothing to do"¹⁰⁰ sounds like a judgment Mary Crawford might have made. Within the class society accepted by Jane Austen, individuals are still to be judged according to their merits. Morals are to precede manners in importance, and Emma is clearly wrong to base her negative opinion of Robert Martin solely on "his awkward look and abrupt manner and the uncouthness of a voice which I heard to be wholly unmodulated as I stood here."¹⁰¹

Unreproved, Emma uses her own high social standing to increase her domination over Harriet Smith. Harriet must refuse Martin if only because Emma "could not have visited Mrs. Robert Martin, of Abbey-Mill Farm...you would have thrown yourself out of all good society."¹⁰² Knightley's kindness to Miss Bates both illustrates a norm and indicts Emma for not visiting Mrs. and Miss Bates because of the "danger of falling in with the second rate and third rate of Highbury."¹⁰³

But because misguided characters like Emma use the class structure of society as a means of exerting their wills over others does not mean that the class structure itself is

at fault. Rather, the misuse of social position and its consequences only emphasizes the need for individuals to recognize that especially within a class society human relationships must be governed by moral values. If the cause of the disorder in Tom Jones was largely Tom's imprudence, in Emma it is the heroine's failure to observe rational norms. Both Tom and Emma ultimately do find it possible to adapt their high spirits to the social and moral order in which they must live, and in that approved social adjustment the comedies resolve themselves.

III Norms And An Organic Structure

In Tom Jones, incidents tend to be illustrative of the norms sanctioned by the narrator and his spokesman, Squire Allworthy. To suggest the need for normative guides to behavior, Fielding depends upon the cumulative effect of a series of episodes possessing varying degrees of relevance to the main thread of the action. Even the interpolated tale of "The Man On The Hill" in Tom Jones or the biography of Mr. Wilson in Joseph Andrews add to the meaning of the novels, although they are not causally connected to the plot. Any incident, tale or anecdote that comments on the importance of moral norms is welcome in a novel by Fielding.

Fielding introduces us to a wide panorama of experiences and to a wide range of characters who at first appear simply to be going about the business of living. Tom Jones begins with the birth of the hero and presents his growth to manhood as interesting in itself, irrespective of any moral lessons that it may teach. It is true that norms and moral codes frequently come to the foreground in Tom Jones, but they seem simply to be an organic and commonly accepted part of life.

Unlike her predecessor, Jane Austen creates a sustained dramatic action in which every incident tacitly comments on the need for moral norms. Narrowing her canvas, she traces the vicissitudes of only a few personal relationships. "3 or 4 Families in a Country Village," wrote Jane Austen, "is the very thing to work on."¹⁰⁴ Each character in a novel by

Jane Austen in some way serves its moral design, so that her novels seem to be written primarily in order that the place of moral norms in life be clarified anew.

The structure of Jane Austen's novels is likely to strike us as more "organic" than Fielding's because norms appear both to grow out of and to initiate dramatic situations. Her novels focus on the problem of how one can overcome the difficulty of having to live by norms. And sometimes these norms seem to be arbitrarily imposed from without solely in order to restrain or hinder the expressions of an active sensibility. What initiates the action of Mansfield Park is that two characters, Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris, are confronted with the problem of having to obey a norm and invite their niece Fanny to share their home. The motives of the two are immediately brought to light by how they respond to this dilemma. And the very fact that this decision opens the novel indicates how central to its meaning will be the question of norms:

The division of gratifying sensations ought not, in strict justice, to have been equal; for Sir Thomas was fully resolved to be the real and consistent patron of the selected child, and Mrs. Norris had not the least intention of being at any expense whatever in her maintenance. As far as walking, talking, and contriving reached, she was thoroughly benevolent, and nobody knew better how to dictate liberality to others; but her love of money was equal to her love of directing, and she knew quite as well how to save her own as to spend that of her friends.¹⁰⁵

The plots of both Emma and Mansfield Park grow out of violations of basic and humane values.

Like Fielding's, the conclusions of Jane Austen's novels reward the characters who have agreed to allow norms to govern their conduct. As Tom was granted his Sophia, so Emma can marry Knightley once it seems likely that this time she will not dismiss the insights that follow her recognition of her errors. At the end of the novels of both Fielding and Jane Austen, all conflicts are resolved and a cluster of moral principles has been affirmed. Tom's acceptance of prudence is a result of his experiences; the consequences of his careless behavior almost cause him permanently to lose Allworthy's protection and the possibility of ever marrying the woman he loves. Since the action of the novel has illustrated the dangers of ignoring prudence and good sense, Tom's reform is hardly gratuitous or not "organic" to the structure of Tom Jones. Yet in the sense that the consideration of moral norms constantly occupies Jane Austen's attention, we can at least speak of her treatment of moral norms as more germane to her novels than it is to Fielding's.

Unlike Fielding, Jane Austen dramatizes most of the judgments she makes of her characters. Fielding's omniscient narrator is a character in his own right, but he exists on a different plane from the other characters; he has access to more information and his judgments are colored by his superior wisdom. These judgments seem infallible. But, paradoxically, precisely because his superiority makes this narrator seem so distant from the reader, his judgments occasionally lose their force. For the reader may sense that if moral norms do not arise and are not recognized by characters in the course of

their everyday lives, perhaps it is asking too much that they submit their personal desires to an objective standard.

Jane Austen's omniscient narrator, through her persistent ironies, constantly makes moral judgments. But the moral comments that carry the most weight and those that seem to influence her people to accept moral norms are made by characters within her novels. The good man responds rationally to a situation threatening the community with moral chaos by evoking moral norms. The reader, having shared the experience of making the moral judgment with a reliable commentator who is on the scene, will thus be all the more likely to accept the moral norms he proposes. While it is true that Allworthy, a character in Tom Jones as fully drawn as Knightley is in Emma, makes many moral judgments, his own personal fate is never seriously jeopardized by the immoralities going on around him. And because he is invulnerable to the damages created by the action, he sometimes seems to be as distant from the reader as the omniscient narrator. In fact, Allworthy's judgments sound so much like those of the narrator that he might even be called an omnipresent and characterized deus ex machina. Fielding solves this problem by often illustrating the narrator's norms through the life of Squire Allworthy. If Allworthy is not personally threatened by the injustice done to Tom, his interests are still involved in having right triumph over wrong. Paradoxically, the more Allworthy proves to be fallible and violates moral norms, the more objective Fielding's norms seem. Allworthy's fallibility

stems from his naivete; his isolation from the experiences of the ordinary man suggests that norms are accessible to any man involved enough in experience to recognize them. And norms become more and more apparent to Allworthy and to the reader as the plot of Tom Jones becomes complicated and Allworthy is made to confront experience and suffer the pain of discovering the malicious character of his nephew.

In Emma it is Knightley who most frequently and most accurately brings moral judgments to bear upon the action. Only perhaps in his harsh condemnation of Frank Churchill can Knightley's moral judgments be considered too rigid. And in the case of Frank Churchill, Knightley is at least partially motivated by jealousy of a man with whom, it seems, Emma is in love. At the end of the novel, however, Knightley's judgment, even of Frank, has become totally impartial:

"I am very ready to believe his character will improve, and acquire from hers the steadiness and delicacy of principle that it wants."106

Most of Knightley's moral judgments come as reactions to Emma's behavior; in addition, Knightley's interest in Emma is also "organically" part of the action since he was in love with her well before the action of the novel begins, since, in fact, she was thirteen years old. But only when Emma can thoroughly govern her conduct by norms of good sense will she become a suitable wife. Thus, it is in Knightley's own interest to observe whether or not Emma is perceiving the significance of moral norms. Unlike an omniscient narrator, who may, like Fielding's, feel great compassion and fondness for

his hero, yet not himself be affected by the hero's fate, Knightley's future existence itself will be determined by whether or not Emma can learn moral norms. The virtue of Jane Austen's approach is one of immediacy. By having characters make most of the moral judgments, Jane Austen allows the reader to closely associate the advantages of living by moral norms with his own life.

It is in the interplay of Emma's relationship with Knightley that moral norms are brought to the foreground of the novel. Ironically, although Knightley will provide some of the sternest judgments of Emma, it is Emma's good opinion of Knightley that first establishes him as a reliable character: "You might not see one in a hundred," says Emma, "gentleman so plainly written as in Mr. Knightley."¹⁰⁷ When Knightley opens Chapter 5, "I do not know what your opinion may be, Mrs. Weston...of this great intimacy between Emma and Harriet Smith but I think it a bad thing,"¹⁰⁸ we are prepared to accept him as a reliable commentator on moral questions.

In spite of his envy, Knightley is correct in his early judgment of Frank Churchill. And his criticisms of Frank serve Jane Austen in her moral design. For the inclusion of Knightley's observations makes it impossible for Frank to marry the heroine of a comic novel. Rhetorically, Knightley's objections to Frank Churchill prepare us to see Emma reserved for himself. Although reform is always possible in a comic novel, Frank seems to be guilty of transgressions more deeply ingrained in his character than the

easily correctible carelessness and imprudence manifested by Tom Jones. Knightley's stern condemnation of Frank's behavior toward his father foreshadows the climax of the novel in which Emma will learn about the value of moral norms and simultaneously choose the more virtuous man to be her husband.

Knightley's analysis of Frank Churchill's character also functions as a lesson, a step in Emma's moral education. For Knightley spends much time simply in telling her what the important norms are: "There is one thing, Emma, which a man can always do, if he chooses, and that is, his duty; not by manoeuvring and finessing, but by vigour and resolution."¹⁰⁹ Emma tries to excuse Frank's not coming to see his father on the ground of his financial dependence upon the Churchills: "You are the worst judge in the world, Mr. Knightley, of the difficulties of dependence...nobody, who has not been in the interior of a family, can say what the difficulties of any individual of that family may be."¹¹⁰ Emma asks Knightley if the norm might not be modulated, if there are not circumstances in which an absolute moral judgment of a son's devotion need not be made. But Knightley refuses and goes on to make an absolute statement: "Respect for right conduct is felt by everybody: if he would act in this sort of manner on principle, consistently, regularly, their little minds would bend to his."¹¹¹ The key words in Knightley's answer are "consistently" and "regularly"; Knightley is suggesting that with continuous action by moral norms, the circumstances of one's life, the demands of the people with whom one lives, will them-

selves be modulated to accept the norm. Like Fielding, Jane Austen says that her norms are absolutes; although Knightley's judgment of Frank will later be modulated by his awareness that with Jane Fairfax as his wife, Frank may all the more appreciate the importance of the principles of right conduct, the norm which originally condemned Frank is itself treated as fixed and given.

That Emma's judgments have been influenced by Knightley's instructions is revealed in her reaction to the news that Frank Churchill has been long engaged to Jane Fairfax:

"None of that upright integrity, that strict adherence to truth and principle, that disdain of trick and littleness which a man should display in every transaction of his life."¹¹²

By invoking adherence to "principle" as an essential norm, it is almost as if Emma were generalizing from Knightley's statements. And the structure of the plot of Emma is so tightly unified that Knightley's very words, his accusing Frank of ignoring moral principles, seem to motivate Emma's choice of himself as her husband. For it is by comparing Knightley with Frank Churchill that Emma perceives Knightley's true worth:

...pleased as she had been to see Frank Churchill, and really regarding him as she did with friendship, she had never been more sensible of Mr. Knightley's high superiority of character. The happiness of this most happy day received its completion in the animated contemplation of his worth which this comparison produced.¹¹³

If we have any evidence at all of Emma's reform, of her learning to place moral values before impulses inspired by vanity or too great a self-esteem, it must be in Knightley's

assurance that she has finally been educated and has become a mature woman. When he becomes convinced that she will take her own criticisms of herself seriously, the reader is convinced as well. In the plot of Emma Knightley's conviction that Emma has reformed is reflected in his decision to ask her to be his wife.

And it has been true that after each one of her projects ends in disaster, Emma recognizes the errors of her ways and promises to herself that she will behave more prudently next time. After Mr. Elton makes it clear that he had never thought of marrying Harriet, "Oh, Miss Woodhouse, who can think of Miss Smith when Miss Woodhouse is near?"¹¹⁴ Emma does admit that "it was wrong to take so active a part in bringing any two people together. It was adventuring too far, assuming too much, making light of what ought to be serious."¹¹⁵ But Emma almost immediately thinks of someone else who will do just as well for Harriet as Mr. Elton. She then rejects her own suggestion on the ground that he is not of a high enough social class: "William Coxie - oh, no, I could not endure William Coxie - a pert young lawyer."¹¹⁶ What disturbs Emma is more her failure than her awareness that she has been violating moral principles. Emma "laugh[s] at her own relapse."¹¹⁷ The reader cannot yet take Emma's remorse seriously. And Knightley has cautioned us quite early in the novel not to believe that Emma will be able to submit her impulses to the guidance of moral principles:

...she will never submit to anything requiring industry and patience, and a subjection of the fancy to the understanding.¹¹⁸

That Emma will later seek to marry Harriet to Frank Churchill comes as no surprise. But can we then take seriously Emma's seemingly deepfelt regret at having insulted Miss Bates at Box Hill? Jane Austen's moral design requires that in order for Emma to remain the heroine of the novel she must feel remorse for insulting Miss Bates; for here she is charged with gratuitously hurting an innocent and defenseless person.

And we do accept Emma's remorse at having insulted the lady as genuine, not because we now can take her word for it, but rather because her self-chastisement is motivated by her desire to keep the good opinion of Mr. Knightley which she seems to have lost:

He had misinterpreted the feelings which had kept her face averted, and her tongue motionless. They were combined only of anger against herself, mortification, and deep concern.¹¹⁹

Before she leaves Box Hill, Emma tries to attract Knightley's attention. She must indicate to him in some way that she has been affected positively by his stern judgment. But it is too late; he has already turned away:

Never had she felt so agitated, mortified, grieved, at any circumstance in her life. The truth of his representation there was no denying. She felt it at her heart. How could she have been so brutal, so cruel to Miss Bates! How could she have exposed herself to such ill opinion in anyone she valued! And how suffer him to leave her without saying one word of gratitude, of concurrence, of common kindness!¹²⁰

Emma feels more grieved than at any other circumstance in her

life because she senses that her whole fate has been jeopardized by her seemingly casual remark to Miss Bates. Unlike her earlier regret at having failed to perceive that Mr. Elton was not in love with Harriet Smith, Emma here associates her own lack of informed concern for the welfare of another person with Knightley's opinion of her. Since Knightley's judgments directly express the moral norms with which Jane Austen has been in sympathy, we may here conclude that Emma does finally recognize not only that she is a person who seems to have no regard for moral principles, but also that she has isolated herself from the community of good people who do uphold norms, a community represented by Mr. Knightley. Emma's sense of isolation is increased when she learns that Harriet is not only in love with Mr. Knightley, but also that she has hopes of succeeding with him.

The structure of Emma seems to be so organic because it often appears that the fates of all the characters are dependent upon Emma's ability to learn moral principles. And it is only when Emma fears another character, Harriet, will supplant her in Knightley's affections that she realizes both that she loves him, and that, without a doubt, both moral norms and social standards must be respected. For by not paying attention to principles, she seems by her own efforts to have brought Knightley and Harriet together:

A few minutes were sufficient for making her acquainted with her own heart. A mind like hers, once opening to suspicion, made rapid progress; she touched, she admitted, she acknowledged the whole truth. Why was it so much worse that Harriet should be in love with Mr. Knightley than with Frank Churchill? Why was the evil so dreadfully increased by Harriet's having some hope of a return? It darted through her with the speed of an arrow that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself!¹²¹

A hint that Jane Austen expects us to believe that Emma is truly reforming is perhaps in her emphasis on the "rapid progress" of Emma's mind, on the basic intelligence which both the omniscient narrator and Knightley have long recognized Emma to possess. And later Knightley will confirm not only that Emma has finally agreed to take moral norms seriously, but also that she always had the potential to do so: "Nature gave you understanding," he tells her, "Miss Taylor gave you principles. You must have done well."¹²²

Whether or not Emma's reform is motivated by her fear of losing Mr. Knightley is not relevant. The point is that she does realize how little attention she has paid to the needs of other human beings:

With insufferable vanity had she believed herself in the secret of everybody's feelings; with unpardonable arrogance proposed to arrange everybody's destiny. She was proved to be universally mistaken; and she had not quite done nothing - for she had done mischief. She had brought evil on Harriet, on herself, and, she too much feared, on Mr. Knightley.¹²³

Emma recognizes that she has totally disregarded the feelings of others, that she is guilty of the "arrogance" of presuming

to exercise her will over their lives. She also realizes that her seemingly innocent attempts at matchmaking have had dangerous consequences, that they may have robbed her of her own chance of happiness. If Fielding was aware of the wide areas of human experience in which norms need not be brought into play, Jane Austen, constructing her novels more closely about moral questions, seems to suggest that moral problems pervade every area of human experience and that no part of our lives is immune from the consequences of ignoring moral principles. Finally, if the reader has any doubt that Emma has learned her lesson, we have Knightley's word for it. When Emma wishes Harriet and Robert Martin a long and happy life, Knightley responds by noticing that Emma has "materially changed since we talked on this subject before."¹²⁴ This change, we feel, is meant to apply not solely to her attitude toward Harriet Smith, but to the whole of Emma's moral outlook.

The moral design of Mansfield Park is similar to that of Emma. Jane Austen's spokesman there is Fanny Price whose judgments of Mary Crawford, like Knightley's of Frank Churchill, are not totally disinterested, but are directly related to her own hope for future happiness. As Lionel Trilling notes in his essay on Mansfield Park, in this novel Jane Austen is deciding "the question of principle as against personality, of character as against style."¹²⁵ In novels like Pride And Prejudice and Sense And Sensibility, Jane Austen recognizes the value of personality: the active spirit seems to be a good in itself. But in Mansfield Park Jane Austen not only allies

herself with "principle," but she even suggests that, as Trilling points out, personality without the active presence of principle may merely mask "the style of sincerity, virtue and intelligence,"¹²⁶ it may not really represent those values. The novel dramatizes the value of "principle." We see much of the action, and especially the behavior of Mary Crawford, who represents personality uninformed by principle, through the eyes of the highly moral Fanny. And her sensitivity to every response of her rival makes Fanny's moral sense organic to the plot. Fanny must be somewhat glad of every moral weakness displayed by Mary since it may increase her own chances with Edmund. And in Fanny's very carefully detailed enumeration of Mary's offenses, the reader is also presented with an objective moral scale, with a sense of what values a young woman ought to uphold. When Edmund, a man in love, forgives Mary for her materialism and blames her moral laxness on outside forces, such as "the influence of the fashionable world,"¹²⁷ Fanny provides the necessary corrective commentary for the reader:

Her friends leading her astray for years!
 She is quite as likely to have led them astray.
 They have all, perhaps, been corrupting one
 another; but if they are so much fonder of her
 than she is of them, she is the less likely to
 have been hurt, except by their flattery.¹²⁸

Fanny objects to the theatricals largely because Sir Thomas would not approve of them, because they threaten to destroy moral decorum. But the theatricals also bring Edmund and Mary together to play in love scenes, and Fanny's indignation must certainly be intensified by the fact that she must

watch the man she loves play opposite another woman. Later when she hears Henry Crawford say that he was "never happier"¹²⁹ than when they were all acting in the theatrical, her silent judgment seems to reflect her memory of the pain she felt at the time:

...never happier! - never happier than when doing what you know was not justifiable! - never happier than when behaving so dishonourably and unfeelingly! Oh! What a corrupted mind!¹³⁰

The structure of Mansfield Park suggests that the fate of every character is influenced by his moral stance. And the drama of the novel is certainly heightened by the fact that at the same time that she makes her moral judgments Fanny is aware of how deeply her own happiness is being threatened. Yet Fanny's comments are motivated by her moral sense, and not by jealousy. As a character Fanny herself is perhaps too humble to recognize that every immoral act committed by Mary Crawford makes her own chances of succeeding with Edmund more likely. Meanwhile, every action both illustrates a moral norm and at the same time contributes to the progress of the plot by moving the characters one step farther toward their final destinies.

IV Jane Austen and Henry Fielding

Although their novels seem to be differently constructed, Jane Austen and Henry Fielding belong together in one "tradition" of the English novel because they share similar world-views. Both believe that moral norms need not be problematic, that, in fact, the moral norms their society generally upholds are absolutely valid. Both Fielding and Jane Austen suggest that only an adherence to absolutes can provide the necessary order by which men could live together rationally. Whether they are made by an omniscient narrator or by fictional characters, moral judgments are frequent in their novels.

But neither Fielding nor Jane Austen applies his absolutes rigidly. Circumstances sometimes dictate that norms be modulated in their fiction. Sometimes the needs of the individuals conflict with social standards; and occasionally these standards can be treated flexibly. Even the social norm preserving the separation of classes may sometimes be ignored. But it should also be noted that this flexibility is perhaps only a measure of the confidence that Jane Austen and Fielding have in moral principles. History for both is static in the sense that no historical event could possibly change their minds about either what those principles are or whether they are applicable to every situation. For Henry Fielding and Jane Austen it seems to be inconceivable that social change could call moral norms into question, that moral

values are not universally valid. Each writes in the comic mode because the affirmations of order and good sense that come at the end of a comedy are so suitable for a novelist whose world-view confirms the rightness of an established moral code.

Perhaps with Fielding and Jane Austen there comes to an end a period in the development of the English novel. For it seems as if all the elements of fiction - the nature of the events of the plot, the conception of character, the functions of the narrative voice - all undergo some degree of transformation once a novelist begins to question whether moral norms, let alone social standards, can be either absolute or universal.

Notes

- 1 "Mansfield Park," Jane Austen: A Collection Of Critical Essays, ed. Ian Watt (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1963), p. 127.
- 2 Ibid., p. 133.
- 3 Quoted in James Edward Austen-Leigh, Memoir Of His Aunt (Oxford, 1926), p. 157.
- 4 Henri Bergson, "Laughter," Comedy (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956), p. 147.
- 5 "On Sense And Sensibility," Jane Austen: A Collection Of Critical Essays, p. 43.
- 6 Jane Austen, "Emma," The Complete Novels of Jane Austen (New York: The Modern Library), p. 763.
- 7 Ibid., p. 764.
- 8 Ibid., p. 766.
- 9 Ibid., p. 763.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid., p. 822
- 12 Ibid., p. 800
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid., p. 861.
- 15 Ibid., p. 887.
- 16 Ibid., p. 989.
- 17 Ibid., p. 992.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 "Mansfield Park," The Complete Novels, p. 513.
- 20 "Emma," p. 792.
- 21 Ibid., pp. 834-835.
- 22 Ibid., p. 779.

- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Ibid., p. 791.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 "Mansfield Park," p. 479.
- 27 Ibid., p. 478.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Ibid., p. 479.
- 30 Ibid.
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George Eliot: Morality And The "Historic Imagination"

I Continuity And Change

To say that George Eliot begins a new tradition for the English novel is not necessarily to deny that her novels have many similarities, both in structure and content, with the novels of Fielding and Jane Austen. For like her two most important predecessors, George Eliot concentrates primarily on dramatizing moral themes and depicting the consequences that follow a wrong moral decision. Like Fielding, she examines the problem of how a young man is to become a moral and upright citizen of his community; like Jane Austen, she ponders the two almost inseparable questions of how a young woman is to respond to the norms suggested by her society and how she is to choose her husband wisely. If Tom Jones must prudently assume his responsibilities to the community presided over by Squire Allworthy, so must George Eliot's Lydgate find the means of becoming both socially useful and socially accepted. And if Anne Elliot had to find some mediating factor between conflicting social standards and moral norms, so also must Lydgate, who wishes to serve humanity as a doctor yet who resists conforming to the socially accepted medical practices that seem almost directly to militate against the healing of the sick.

George Eliot seems to be much more aware than either Fielding or Jane Austen that social standards can be reprehensible.

sible. But this does not make it any easier for her characters to remain part of the social community and yet choose to obey only truly moral norms than it was for Anne Elliot and Fanny Price. If George Eliot will ultimately suggest more flexible answers to the dilemma of how to abide by moral norms, it is nevertheless true that the problems she poses are very similar to those dealt with by Fielding and Jane Austen.

What even more closely binds George Eliot to Fielding and Jane Austen than her subject matter itself is the fact that she, like them, upholds traditional moral norms; she also suggests that correct moral principles have already been discovered and need only now to be implemented. Even at the age of eighteen, George Eliot wrote, "May the Lord give me such an insight into what is truly good, that I may not rest contented with making Christianity a mere addendum to my pursuits."¹ For George Eliot, as for Fielding and Jane Austen, "what is truly good" is not a mystery, but is knowable as a truth that appears to be clear and distinct. And George Eliot's conversation with F.W. Myers at Cambridge in 1873 leaves room for no doubt that she saw duty as an absolute:

[George Eliot] taking as her text the three words which had been used so often as the inspiring trumpet call of men - the words God, Immortality, Duty - pronounced with terrible earnestness how inconceivable was the first, how unbelievable was the second, and yet how peremptory and absolute the third. Never, perhaps, have sterner accents confirmed the sovereignty of impersonal and unrecompensing Law.²

"We cannot be utterly blind to the results of duty," George Eliot wrote, "since that cannot be duty which is not already judged to be for human good. To say the contrary is

to say that mankind have reached no inductions as to what is for their good or evil."³ Just as Jane Austen believes in "reason," "decorum," and "good sense," and Fielding believes in "prudence" and "benevolence," George Eliot chooses "duty" with a confidence equal to theirs that she is in possession of "what is for their [mankind's] good or evil." Like Fielding and Jane Austen, George Eliot recognizes that her culture has already discovered values that satisfy the needs of men who must live together in a social group. Her "duty" seems to function as a value which binds men to a community as much as did Fielding's "benevolence" and Jane Austen's "generosity of spirit." As strongly as Fielding and Jane Austen, George Eliot believes that it is essential that one possess the criteria for making moral judgments. "The highest lot," she wrote, "is to have definite beliefs about which you feel that 'necessity is laid upon you' to declare them, as something better which you are bound to try and give to those who have the worse."⁴

George Eliot seems to ask human beings to be devoted to some idea or principle greater than themselves, that only in such devotion can people find satisfaction and fulfillment. Her most important value is that one should sacrifice self-interest for the common good. Especially in Middlemarch George Eliot seems to suggest that duty on behalf of the public good is the foundation of all moral behavior. Early in the novel Dorothea's advice to Sir James Chettam to experiment with patterns of farming for his tenants indicates

how, for Sir James, the value of duty may be translated into the appropriate norm:

"It is better to spend money in finding out how men can make the most of the land which supports them all, than in keeping dogs and horses only to gallop over it. It is not a sin to make yourself poor in performing experiments for the good of all."⁵

In fact, her characters' acceptance of the value of duty seems to be much more urgent for George Eliot than the choice of their values was for the characters of Fielding and Jane Austen. The sense of suffering and the possible loss of all that one holds dear seem to be much more probable for George Eliot's favorable characters than they were for Fielding's or Jane Austen's. George Eliot does not assure the reader that things will turn out well in the end; she does not write in the comic mode. The life devoted to duty becomes more necessary because it will alleviate a type of personal suffering that generally does not appear in the fiction of Fielding and Jane Austen. And while it is true that Tom Jones and Emma suffer greatly when they are faced with the consequences of their own transgressions of moral norms, a solution to their dilemma is never far off. They need only recognize the value of moral norms and their circumstances are soon altered. Paradoxically, moral norms become even more important to George Eliot because they can only alleviate suffering and rarely change drastically the circumstances of a character's life. "That must be the best life," says Esther

Lyon in Felix Holt, The Radical after she learns that Rufus Lyon, who has raised her, is not her real father, "that where one bears and does everything because of some great and strong feeling - so that this and that in one's circumstances don't signify."⁶ Life becomes bearable only when self-interest is superseded by duty toward others in need.

In the structure of her novels as well as in their content, George Eliot is similar to Fielding and Jane Austen. And sometimes it seems even as if she differs from Jane Austen only when her model is Fielding, and vice versa. Like both of theirs, her settings are provincial; life in the provinces becomes a microcosm for human experience in general. Like Fielding's, her novels are filled with a wealth of characters from all levels of social life; yet like Jane Austen she generally focuses her attention on "3 or 4 Families." At the foreground of Middlemarch are primarily the Brookes, the Lydgates, the Vincys and the Bulstrodes. But the variety of her characters as well as their physical mobility make her novels seem most like Fielding's. George Eliot's plots, like his, are largely episodic, and we can follow her characters, as we follow Tom Jones, over a wide area of time and of space. The texture of George Eliot's narratives, however, is more like Jane Austen's. Although she does not present a sustained dramatic action, she very often engages, like Jane Austen, in psychological description and analysis of the inner lives of her most important characters.

George Eliot's theory of the function of the novel is very similar to Fielding's. Just as Fielding wishes to reinforce the importance of moral norms by speaking directly to his readers, "to hold the glass to thousands in their closets, that they may contemplate their deformity, and endeavour to reduce it,"⁷ George Eliot also believes that the function of the novelist is a moral one, that the "man or woman who publishes writings inevitably assumes the office of teacher or influencer of the public mind."⁸ Each wishes to instruct his implied reader in a particular approach to moral problems and each does so by speaking directly to him.

George Eliot's method of narration, her use of an omniscient and commenting narrator, is also in many ways quite similar to Fielding's. John Holloway makes the point that "the novelist is every bit as well equipped as the discursive essayist to mediate a view of life...the prophet's sense of things is more readily expressed concretely and not abstractly."⁹ In their methods of narration both Fielding and George Eliot "mediate a view of life"; and although Fielding interrupts the action of Tom Jones for much longer digressions than George Eliot ever does Middlemarch, both at times become "discursive essayists." The very convention of the omniscient author that both use suggests, as W.J. Harvey points out, that the "illusion of reality" they are creating "is not that of a self-contained world, a fictional microcosm intact and autonomous...but a world coterminous with the'

'real' world, the factual macrocosm."¹⁰ The narrative voices of both Fielding and George Eliot, commenting as they do upon general truths as well as upon the action of the novel, seem to be trying to convince their readers that the values and norms they are advocating are just as applicable to life in the real world as they are to the world of the novel.

Critical opinion in general of George Eliot seems to be that she is in many respects an innovator. As Arnold Hauser puts it, "the turning towards introversion in the history of the English novel is accomplished in the works of George Eliot...with George Eliot, the novel acquires a new intellectual-emotional content."¹¹ But critics also seem to insist that George Eliot continues to write in the moral tradition of Fielding and Jane Austen. As F.R. Leavis says, George Eliot "exhibits a traditional moral sensibility expressing itself, not within a frame of 'old articles of faith' ...but nevertheless with perfect sureness, in judgments that involve confident positive standards."¹²

But there is also much evidence to support the position that George Eliot, unlike Fielding and Jane Austen, doubts she can make the kind of absolute moral judgments "that involve confident positive standards." Circumstances too frequently undermine the norms the author does uphold. For while it appears that George Eliot's subject matter, and even many of her novelistic techniques, are very similar to those of Fielding and Jane Austen, George Eliot often does not appear to be willing to provide solutions to the moral conflicts facing her characters with either the absoluteness

or the confidence of those earlier novelists.

If the plots of George Eliot's novels seem to be similar to Fielding's, the fact remains that, unlike him, she does not resolve all moral conflicts at the end of a novel; she does not write in the comic mode whose tone ensures the triumph of the hero. Maggie Tulliver's problem is "resolved" at the end of The Mill On The Floss only with her death; in Middlemarch Lydgate dies without ever accomplishing any of his goals, and the end of Daniel Deronda leaves Gwendolen Harleth sobered, but totally uncertain about what to do with her life, or even whether the future has any good at all in store for her.

There is a philosophical explanation why George Eliot does not, like her predecessors, write in the comic mode. If the situations her characters at first find themselves in seem to be similar to events in the novels of Fielding and Jane Austen, there are also wide differences in the world-views of these three writers. Unlike Fielding and Jane Austen, George Eliot can finally find no absolute criteria for the making of a moral judgment. She often will not judge her characters in terms of moral norms, not because human nature makes it necessary to modulate norms, although it often does, but rather because norms themselves cannot always be treated as absolutes. While George Eliot may at times long for rules by which experience can be judged in moral terms, she is no less certain that this often cannot

be. And in Middlemarch it is only old Mrs. Farebrother who remembers and now mourns the absence of absolute codes:

"When I was young, Mr. Lydgate, there never was any question about right and wrong. We knew our catechism, and that was enough; we learned our creed and our duty. Every respectable church person had the same opinions."¹³

We must now return to a distinction made in my introduction between values and norms. By a "value" has been meant a presupposition or idea which the author believes is moral, by a "norm" the form of behavior society suggests through which a value may be expressed or embodied. This distinction is admittedly an imprecise one; for example, it might be argued that only a norm itself can be properly called a "value" since only through behavior can a value be realized and thus meaningfully exist. But what is clear is that while in George Eliot there remains a strong attachment to the moral premises that led people in earlier generations to cling to Christian standards or norms of conduct, she also exhibits a growing doubt as to whether those standards can continue to embody the values they were supposed to.

Unlike both Fielding and Jane Austen, George Eliot distinguishes between the reliability of values and norms. Values like "duty" remain reliable; but it has become very difficult to discover the appropriate norms through which values might be expressed. At the close of a novel by Fielding or Jane Austen the hero or heroine appreciates a series of values, be they called "prudence" or "tolerance," and the

reader assumes that they will now successfully bring these values to bear upon their experience. George Eliot begins to wonder whether knowledge or even acceptance of a value alone will necessarily lead to a moral response in particular circumstances. George Eliot's characters often find that they cannot discover appropriate norms and George Eliot will argue that given the nature of life in the society of her time, the notion itself of absoluteness is no longer viable.

Neither Fielding nor Jane Austen doubted that once individuals realized the value of moral norms, they could dominate their circumstances. In Middlemarch, however, Dorothea Brooke and Lydgate diligently search for a context in which they can put their values into practice. For the most part they are unsuccessful. Joan Bennett points out that "the conception of good embodied in the novels [of George Eliot] is that it is relative and not absolute."¹⁴ Mrs. Bennett goes on to say that George Eliot poses moral problems which cannot be solved by any absolute standard:

They must be solved as they arise, with due consideration of every circumstance; the right solution will depend upon the consequences of the choice when it is made and there is no absolute code that can serve instead of an attempt to foresee those consequences.¹⁵

While duty is certainly a worthwhile value, the very nature of experience seems often to prevent its application. "It is one thing to feel keenly for one's fellow-beings," George Eliot said, "another to say, 'This step, and this alone, will be the best to take for the removal of particular calamities!'"¹⁶

Unlike the characters of Fielding and Jane Austen who could not be moral because they were personally motivated by self-interest, by vanity, greed or hypocrisy, George Eliot's characters often find it hard to act morally because they cannot discover the moral choice that will best suit their circumstances at a given moment. Circumstances will often make conflicting demands, and much more often than in Fielding a character must choose between two equally desirable values. In Middlemarch Lydgate's desire to vote for Mr. Farebrother, his friend and a more worthy man for chaplain, would undermine the chances of Bulstrode's financing the hospital in which Lydgate would be able to carry out his life's work:

...whichever way Lydgate began to incline, there was something to make him wince...he did not like frustrating his own best purposes by getting on bad terms with Bulstrode, he did not like voting against Farebrother, and helping to deprive him of function and salary...Moreover, Lydgate did not like the consciousness that in voting for Tyke, he should be voting on the side obviously convenient for himself. But would the end really be his own convenience? Other people would say so, and would allege that he was currying favour with Bulstrode for the sake of making himself important and getting on in the world... What he really cared for was a medium for his work, a vehicle for his ideas; and after all, was he not bound to prefer the object of getting a good hospital....? For the first time Lydgate was feeling the hampering threadlike pressure of small social conditions....¹¹⁷

Lydgate finally votes for Bulstrode's candidate. And George Eliot does not blame him for sacrificing the career of his good friend to his own needs and to his own definition of a greater moral good. For George Eliot believes that "it is idle to insist that action ought to be

this or that, without considering how far the outward conditions of such change are present."¹⁸ On the other hand, although an action may be beneficial to the society as a whole, if it is to be moral, its consequences must not result in hardships to individuals. Mr. Farebrother's suffering will not be undone by the fact that Middlemarch is gaining a hospital in which medical research may make great strides:

Wide-reaching motives, blessed and glorious as they are, and of the highest sacramental virtue, have their dangers...they are arch-angels with awful brow and flaming sword, summoning and encouraging us to do the right and the divinely heroic,...but to learn what it is they thus summon us to do, we have to consider the mortals we are elbowing, who are of our own stature and our own appetites.¹⁹

Mr. Farebrother, of course, is one of the "mortals" Lydgate must "elbow" to achieve his own ends.

It seems as if Jane Austen's and Fielding's characters are motivated by one passion at a time. George Eliot's characters are sometimes assaulted simultaneously by many passions. And the problem of acting morally is further complicated in George Eliot's fiction by the often complex and conflicting motivations inspiring a character. In the head-note to chapter sixty-one of Middlemarch George Eliot quotes Dr. Johnson's Imlac: "Inconsistencies...cannot both be right, but imputed to man they may both be true."²⁰ The fact that a man may be selfish on some occasions, and unselfish on others, causes George Eliot to be even more flexible than Fielding or Jane Austen, even more willing to modulate her norms. Even after Bulstrode turns out to be a self-righteous hypocrite,

George Eliot does not dismiss him from the narrative until he has made some amends - Bulstrode is allowed to start Fred Vincy off as a farmer. And if Dorothea Brooke desires to be useful primarily in order to relieve the sufferings of others, George Eliot also suggests that Dorothea's acts of charity also fulfill her personal need to be an independent and self-sufficient individual. There is some irony in George Eliot's description of Dorothea's ambition for "some lofty conception of the world which might frankly include the parish of Tipton and her own rule of conduct there."²¹ Whereas Jane Austen's Knightley suggested that Frank Churchill change his ways so as to abide by important norms, George Eliot seems to be saying that norms themselves must be modulated to take into account the capacities of individuals; for if they do not, they will lose any validity they might have had. This point George Eliot develops in a poem called "A College Breakfast-Party:"

...All sacred rules
Can have no form or potency apart
From the percipient and emotive mind.
God, duty, love, submission, fellowship
Must first be framed in man, as music is,
Before they live outside him as a law.²²

George Eliot's sense of the limited applicability of the moral norm is perhaps best reflected in Middlemarch. For in this novel she seems to explore the possibilities for moral action in a society which imposes conditions transforming any norm into a very vulnerable ideal.

II History And Morality

What has caused George Eliot to suggest that moral action may be much more difficult than either Fielding or Jane Austen foresaw, and in fact may often be impossible? It is George Eliot's consciousness of history as a force moving in unpredictable directions and affecting the life of every individual that has made her reluctant to suggest that any norms can be infallible guides to moral behavior.

George Eliot believes that a writer cannot describe the lives of individuals without illustrating how historical events can limit their possibilities for socially useful action or even for personal fulfillment. "I like to mark the time," she wrote in Daniel Deronda, "and connect the course of individual lives with the historic stream, for all classes of thinkers."²³ George Eliot describes herself as having "a religious and moral sympathy with the historical life of man."²⁴ What is essential for the writer, she says, is the "historic imagination," concerned with "working out in detail...the various steps by which a political or social change was reached... how triumphant opinions originally spread - how institutions arose...what circumstances affecting individual lots are attendant on the decay of long-established systems."²⁵ Part of her function as a novelist, she believes, is to offer "a vivid presentation of how results have actually been brought about, especially in religious and social change."²⁶

Jane Austen's perspective was much narrower. When it was suggested to her that she write "any historical romance, illustrative of the august House of Saxe Cobourg,"²⁷ Jane Austen replied:

I am fully sensible that an historical romance, founded on the House of Saxe Cobourg, might be much more to the purpose of profit or popularity than such pictures of domestic life in country villages as I deal in. But I could no more write a romance than an epic poem. I could not sit seriously down to write a serious romance under any other motive than to save my life....²⁸

The flow of historical events was not a subject Jane Austen felt either prepared or interested in examining. "I must keep to my own style and go on in my own way," she said.²⁹

And it has become a cliché of literary criticism to point out that although Jane Austen, writing in the first decades of the nineteenth century, nowhere mentions the French Revolution, this does not cause her content any loss of complexity. As Arnold Kettle points out, "she wrote about what she understood and no artist can do more."³⁰ And Mark Schorer goes even farther in justifying the ahistorical quality of Jane Austen's fiction:

Even though the French Revolution, and the Napoleonic wars, and the great convulsion of class movement at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth... even though none of these plays any part in her novels, the moral conflicts that are at the heart of the greatest catastrophes and the most striking social and intellectual changes are also at the heart of her work.³¹

George Eliot will argue in her fiction that it is not possible to represent the moral conflicts that arise from "striking

social and intellectual changes;" the effects of historical change, without also representing those changes themselves.

But perhaps the point of the original criticism that Jane Austen is too little concerned with events in the world outside her country villages is not that a reference to the events of her own time was necessary for Jane Austen's "two Inches of Ivory."³² The mere mentioning of historical events in the background of a novel can be as gratuitous as Fielding's introducing the Pretender's attempt to gain the throne of England. But it does seem that from the interplay between the aspirations of men and the limitations imposed by historical events results a new perspective on human experience. Unlike Fielding and Jane Austen, George Eliot does not believe that people can live unaffected by history. For her history both forms the character of a man and limits his power to act.

History for Fielding was tamed by the norms of his culture; it proceeded in cycles, in which events consistently confirmed the viability of those norms. George Eliot's characters must modify their aspirations to conform to the demands of history. In Middlemarch it is only the garrulous and frivolous-minded Mr. Brooke who argues that "history moves in circles,"³³ who fails to grasp that men make their choices within a historical context. "As to the Whigs," he says, "a man who goes with the thinkers is not likely to be hooked on by any party."³⁴

But George Eliot insists that each man speak up for what he believes; in social life this means becoming a member

of the political party that best serves one's interests. "I should like to be told how a man can have any certain point when he belongs to no party," Mrs. Cadwallader replies to Mr. Brooke, " - leading a roving life, and never letting his friends know his address."³⁵ Mr. Brooke, who wavers from one side to another, who on one occasion is for the Reform Bill and on another is against it, cannot be an effective spokesman for any group.

For George Eliot no body of norms remains intact, no norms can withstand the demands for change made by history:

Each age and each race has had a faith and a symbolism suited to its need and its stage of development, and that for succeeding ages to dream of retaining the spirit along with the forms of the past, is as futile as the embalming of the dead body in the hope that it may one day be resumed by the living soul.³⁶

One of the difficulties facing George Eliot's characters will be how to evaluate the present as history, how to perceive when a norm which seems to be a natural and permanent part of their culture is no longer viable and has become a "dead body." And because changing social conditions make old norms outdated, George Eliot does not always expect her characters to live by preconceived norms. The tension in her fiction sometimes arises when a character realizes too late that circumstances require a modification of norms. And sometimes groups, rather than individuals, must demand that a new norm supersede an old: "The only conscience we can trust to," Will Ladislav tells Lydgate, "is the massive sense of

wrong in a class, and the best wisdom that will work is the wisdom of balancing claims."³⁷ If history is a process in which groups, each with differing interests, exert differing claims upon the society as a whole, how can there be many norms obligatory upon all? Although there may be some commonly accepted norms, those by which competing groups agree to abide in order to modulate their differences, these can be only temporary restraints, postponing the outcome of the conflict which will ultimately see some groups as victorious and others defeated.

After George Eliot, novelists, especially Joseph Conrad and D.H. Lawrence, become profoundly aware of the limitations imposed on the actions of any individual by history. The novelist's sense of history seems to determine whether or not he is willing to make an absolute of any moral principle.

The two most important results for her own fiction of George Eliot's emphasis on historical and social change are first, in her conception of society, and second in her conception of the character and how he is to act morally. Her consciousness that history changes society and her interpretation of the experiences of characters in terms of the "historic imagination" are perhaps the causes of George Eliot's loss of faith in the universality of any ideal or abstraction. Ideals, she finds, may lose their specific content; they continue to be accepted simply because they have been sanctified some time in the past when they did reflect a moral value and

no one has yet come forward to challenge them. In Impressions Of Theophrastus Such George Eliot calls abstractions "deities having many specific names."³⁸ Her use of the word "deities" is ironic, since George Eliot will suggest that these "deities" be dethroned. Activities which were valuable in the past may even have become associated with immoral practices. And in Theophrastus George Eliot introduces "Spike, an elector who voted on the side of Progress."³⁹ But is his conception of progress adjusted to the needs of his own time? The problem George Eliot is raising is that at any given time it may no longer be obvious which norms best ensure a value like progress:

...to many minds even among the ancients...
the goddess of wisdom was doubtless worshipped
— simply as the patroness of spinning and weaving
...spinning and weaving from a manufacturing,
wholesale point of view, was the chief form
under which Spike from early years had uncon-
sciously been a devotee of Progress.⁴⁰

George Eliot's tone suggests that "progress" and the "manufacturing, wholesale point of view" have little in common. She is perhaps also implying that progress must at least have something to do with reducing the sufferings of mankind. By having the definition of progress go as far back into time as the "ancients," George Eliot is suggesting that Spike's definition needs to be re-examined. Theophrastus himself has learned to distinguish between "what has been given in [the] parenthetical state of excitement [of ideal vision] and what he has known, and may count on, in the ordinary world of experience."⁴¹ Spike must decide what would be progressive in the ordinary world in which he lives.

While Fielding and Jane Austen could safely rely upon the abstract moral principles which had been sanctioned by their culture, George Eliot seems to have become sceptical of the permanent value of any abstract ideal:

Abstract words and phrases which have an excellent genealogy are apt to live a little too much on their reputation and even to sink into dangerous imposters that should be made to show how they get their living. For this reason, it is often good to consider an old subject as if nothing had yet been said about it; to suspend one's attention even to revered authorities and simply ask what in the present state of our knowledge are the facts which can with any congruity be tied together and labelled by a given abstraction.⁴²

Absolute judgments, the acceptance of any "abstract words and phrases" that are not tested by experience can lead to error. When she refers to "the shallow absoluteness of men's judgments,"⁴³ what George Eliot is suggesting is that one should hesitate before he makes any "absolute" judgment. The contingencies and mitigating factors imposed both by men themselves and by their society must make any judgment at least provisional and certainly susceptible to revision.

George Eliot's distrust of absolute ideas results in her refusal to accept her society or her culture as a fixed given. Like an abstract idea that has lost its meaning, society itself must recreate its standards with each new period in history:

Our civilization, and yet more, our religion, are an anomalous blending of lifeless barbarisms, which have descended to us like so many petrifications from distant ages, with living ideas, the

offspring of a true process of development. We are in bondage to terms and conceptions, which, having had their roots in conditions of thought no longer existing, have ceased to possess any vitality, and are for us as spells which have lost their virtue.⁴⁴

The "conditions of thought" for a particular norm must still be apparent in the present and society should suggest only norms that reflect living ideas and thus can reasonably be fulfilled within the context of everyday life. Fixed ideas brought forth from the past cannot be applied to social conditions in the present which demands "new conceptions and new deeds."⁴⁵

One of the "new conceptions and new deeds" which is put forward in Middlemarch as a solution to the social needs of the time is the Reform Bill of 1832, which for many of George Eliot's characters promises a radical change in their material situations. Such a hope was not accessible to any of the characters of Fielding, Jane Austen or even Dickens. George Eliot is perhaps one of the first novelists to suggest that historical change can alter one's social position. Middlemarch presents a double perspective on history by representing the consciousness of the community during both the rise and decline of the idea that Reform would mean a change in the political influence of the lower classes. But although the Reform Bill fails to fulfill its promise, the very raising of the question of Reform facilitates the growth of new ideas among the lower ranks, who now increase their social and economic expectations, demanding rights they had not known they possessed; they now see themselves as part of the political process of the nation and as part of history. "In that

part of the country," George Eliot relates, "before Reform had done its notable part in developing the political consciousness, there was a clearer distinction of ranks and a dimmer distinction of parties."⁴⁶ Once the question of reform is raised, men no longer accept the idea that class distinctions are fixed, that a norm sanctifies them, that they are not arbitrary and transitory. The lower ranks begin to gain power as they organize into a party with the purpose of having a Reform Bill passed.

In Middlemarch the conflict between historical change and the existing social order is perhaps complicated by the fact that George Eliot is writing about the Reform Bill thirty years after its passage, when it is no longer possible to believe that it will be a complete panacea. And George Eliot's comment on the election centering around the Reform Bill in Felix Holt reflects both her belief in the possibility of reform as well as her nostalgia for a time when that belief was unblemished by knowledge of exactly how much or little social good such a bill could accomplish:

At that time, when faith in the efficacy of political change was at fever-heat in ardent Reformers, many measures which men are still discussing with little confidence on either side, were then talked about and disposed of like property in near reversion.⁴⁷

But that this particular Bill was ineffectual does not mean that George Eliot has lost confidence in the possibility of social change. If she will decide that change must come slowly, she is no less certain that it will come.

If Fielding and Jane Austen represented members of the lower classes in their fiction, they did so only because these characters somehow became involved in the main thread of the action. But their part always seemed secondary and even accidental. Black George's presence is necessary for the plot of Tom Jones, but perhaps only in a mechanical sense; he is there so that Tom will have the opportunity to get into trouble. And there is certainly never any question of Black George or any of his family changing their social class.

George Eliot, however, believes that she is obligated to include people from the lower ranks in her fiction because history is suddenly giving them an important role to play. And history may even change their social standing. She tells us that she must call serious attention "to the existence of low people by whose interference, however little we may like it, the course of the world is very much determined."⁴⁸ The historical process, George Eliot finds, seems to be slowly operating to equalize the fortunes of men. And George Eliot welcomes such a change. Of her "low people" she writes, "it would be well, certainly, if we could help to reduce their number."⁴⁹

George Eliot's lower class figures themselves recognize that history now seems to be moving in their favor. When Mr. Brooke drops in on his tenant, Dagley, to reprimand his son for poaching, Dagley threatens his landlord with the Reform Bill which will, Dagley believes, remove the economic and social distinctions that separate landlord from tenant:

"There's to be a Rinform, and them landlords as never done the right thing by their tenants will be treated i' that way as they'll hev to scuttle off...You'd better let my boy aloan, and look to yoursen, afore the Rinform has got upo' your back."⁵⁰

In the provincial community of Middlemarch, however, most people are not aware that they are playing a role in history; most members of the lower classes are even suspicious of the Reform Bill whose consequences they cannot foresee. Only the promise of immediate and uncomplicated economic advantage motivates George Eliot's characters to political affiliations; they remain unaware of how wider political changes and the shifting of the norms fixing one's social position could alter their own lives:

Even the rumour of Reform had not yet excited any millennial expectations in Frick, there being no definite promise in it, as of gratuitous grains to fatten Hiram Ford's pig, or of a publican at the "Weights and Scales" who would brew beer for nothing, or of an offer on the part of the three neighbouring farmers to raise wages during the winter. And without distinct good of this kind in its promises, Reform seemed on a footing with the bragging of pedlars, which was a hint for distrust to every knowing person.⁵¹

The measure of the failure of the Reform Bill to liberalize social conditions is exemplified in the association of the Bill in Middlemarch with Mr. Brooke, its ineffectual and sometime supporter. It is only when the House of Lords throws out the Second Reform Bill that Mr. Brooke gains the courage to speak on its behalf:

"The Bill, eh? ah!" said Mr. Brooke, with a mild distractedness of manner. "Thrown out, you know, eh? The Lords are going too far, though, They'll have to pull up."⁵²

But George Eliot's tone does not suggest that reform will always fail. This particular bill may have failed, but the very presence in the novel of Dorothea Brooke who is so desirous of social reform suggests that the value of fighting for social improvement has not been endangered.

George Eliot's belief that no idea is absolute or sacred, no form of society permanent also influences her treatment of her characters. For George Eliot the human being cannot be understood only as an individual; he is also defined by his circumstances, however fluid and difficult to encompass these may seem. A dialogue between two gentlemen in one of her headnotes makes clear George Eliot's sense of the interdependence of men and their environment. One remarks that "our deeds are fetters that we forge ourselves,"⁵³ the other replies that "it is the world that brings the iron."⁵⁴ The "iron" represents the social and historical forces that form the background of the novel. As Dorothea Brooke will discover, we can accomplish no more than our circumstances permit. Saint Theresa was able to fulfill a valuable norm because the historical period in which she lived was conducive to the changes she sought:

A new Theresa will hardly have the opportunity of reforming a conventual life, any more than a new Antigone will spend her heroic piety in daring all for the sake of a brother's burial: the medium in which their ardent deeds took shape is for ever gone.⁵⁵

Fielding, but Jane Austen much more, represented the private lives of individuals disturbed only by the failure to appreciate moral values. George Eliot, however,

tells us that "there is no private life which has not been determined by a wider public life."⁵⁶ As Arnold Hauser puts it, George Eliot "shows that no one can lead an isolated, autonomous life within modern society."⁵⁷ The idea of a private life exalted by Samuel Richardson and Jane Austen seems to be too narrow for George Eliot whose characters can carry out the values they discover in their private lives only in socially useful action. Casaubon is ultimately an unfavourable character because of the impotence and uselessness of his life's work; toward Lydgate George Eliot is more sympathetic because he is at least aware of the idea of the life devoted to the social good. But no human being, according to George Eliot, is so self-sufficient that the success of his moral actions is dependent only upon the strength of his own will. "There is no creature," George Eliot says in Middlemarch, "whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it."⁵⁸ The most effective action Fielding and Jane Austen could imagine was that accomplished by individuals affirming the necessity for moral values and norms in their relationships with other individuals. George Eliot says that effective moral action can come about only through the interaction between men and their society; she prescribes the "willing forces - a movement towards a more assured end than the chances of a single life."⁵⁹

Nowhere does George Eliot make her point more dramatically that the human being can be defined directly in terms of the influences to which he has been exposed than in her representation of the character of Rosamund Vincy. What Rosamund Vincy is can be explained by her high social position as the daughter of the Mayor of Middlemarch and as a graduate of Mrs. Lemon's finishing school. Lydgate chooses to believe that Rosamund is exceptional, that "one need not be surprised to find the rare conjunctions of nature under circumstances apparently unfavourable."⁶⁰ But George Eliot would not agree. She believes that we are the composite of our experiences. And Lydgate discovers this truth once he falls into debt and Rosamund becomes cold and indifferent toward him: "It seemed that she had no more identified herself with him than if they had been creatures of different species and opposing interests."⁶¹

Because the moral life of the individual is so dependent upon the society in which he lives, George Eliot "strive[s] after as full a vision of the medium in which a character moves as of the character itself."⁶² She must tell the reader as much about society as about her characters. And George Eliot often accomplishes this task by indicating the social changes going on in the background of the novel at the same time as she describes her characters.

The people in George Eliot's fiction are often described in terms of how they react to the historical changes affecting their society. A coachman in Felix Holt

"about any actual landed proprietor...could also tell whether he was a Reformer or an Anti-Reformer."⁶³ In the same novel one of the major characters, Mrs. Transome, is described both as a member of a class and in terms of the class conflict occupying the consciousness of the community:

[Mrs. Transome] had that high-born imperious air which would have marked her as an object of hatred and reviling by a revolutionary mob. Her person was too typical of social distinctions to be passed by with indifference by any one.⁶⁴

And in Middlemarch the very mannerisms of Mr. Standish's speech are determined by his identification with a class which he admires, but which his inferior social position prevents him from attaining:

"A fine woman, Miss Brooke! an uncommonly fine woman, by God!" said Mr. Standish the old lawyer, who had been so long concerned with the landed gentry that he had become landed himself, and used that oath in a deep-mouthed manner as a sort of armorial bearings, stamping the speech of a man who held a good position.⁶⁵

The very fact that a middle-class character views himself in aristocratic terms hints at the possibility for social change. It is true that Jane Austen suggests social mobility in her portrait of the Coles, who, although "they were of low origin, in trade,"⁶⁶ have accumulated enough money to presume to invite Emma and Knightley to a dance as well as in Knightley's suggestion that it is unjust that Robert Martin remain in a low social rank. But Jane Austen also writes as if a norm upholds the separation of the classes. With George Eliot social mobility is taken for granted, and the ignoring of class distinctions does not necessarily violate a norm.

III The Plot Of Middlemarch: The Undermining of Moral Absolutes

Despite her greater awareness of history and her reservations about the viability of absolute moral principles, George Eliot does seem to resolve all fates with as traditional an approach as Fielding's or Jane Austen's. The structure of her novels does not seem to be affected by the loss of absolutes; and the end of Middlemarch celebrates the marriages of Dorothea and Will, Mary Garth and Fred Vincy:

...marriage, which has been the bourne of so many narratives, is still a great beginning, as it was to Adam and Eve, who kept their honeymoon in Eden, but had their first little one among the thorns and thistles of the wilderness....⁶⁷

George Eliot has a sense of being a storyteller within a long tradition. She does not, like Fielding, tell us that she is "the founder of a new province in writing."⁶⁸

Yet George Eliot's new emphasis on how history affects the moral codes of individuals does influence the structure of her novels. The structure of Middlemarch seems to be much less unified, less governed by absolute principles of form than that of Emma with its sustained dramatic action or even that of Tom Jones with its three part movement. George Eliot departs from the structural premise of a single hero or heroine; she does not concentrate on following the fortunes of any one character for long. No individual can make of his own desires an absolute. His aspirations must be balanced against the demands made upon him by other people with whose lives his is connected. And their stories must

be told as well. His desires must also be seen in the context of the changes affecting his society as a whole. His society must thus be described for its own sake, as if society were now a "character" in its own right.

George Eliot is as interested in portraying the consequences of an action for a social group as she is in examining its consequences for an individual's life; she believes that when a character makes a decision, he must judge its morality in terms of its effect on many other people besides himself:

Any molecule of the body politic working towards his own interest in an orderly way gets his understanding more or less penetrated with the fact that his interest is included in that of a large number.⁶⁹

Wishing to explore the fate of absolutes for society as a whole, in Middlemarch George Eliot divides her attention between several groups. Commenting on her structure she writes, "in watching effects, if only of an electric battery, it is often necessary to change our place and examine a particular mixture or group at some distance from the point where the movement we are interested in was set up."⁷⁰ Middlemarch is equally the story of Dorothea Brooke, of Tertius Lydgate, of Bulstrode, of Middlemarch itself. George Eliot's conception of structure is one of complex interrelationships:

...the conception of wholes composed of parts more and more multiplied and highly differenced, yet more and more absolutely bound together by various conditions of common likeness or mutual dependence...the highest Form, then, is the highest organism, that is to say, the most varied group of relations bound together in a wholeness which again has the most varied relations with all other phenomena.⁷¹

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George Eliot's sense of the fragility of moral principles affects her idea of "society." Since to her society is constantly changing, the norms chosen by individuals can affect the direction of that change. And the setting of a novel which describes a society whose morality is evolving comes much more to the foreground than the one in which "society" appears as a fixed and static entity. Middlemarch the community becomes a character in its own right. Joan Bennett contrasts George Eliot's structure with Jane Austen's in terms of their handling of the social environment of their novels:

...[with George Eliot] the social environment is wider, more complex, made up of a greater variety of minor characters drawn from many more social and economic levels, and also that the display of this outer circle or environment is more conscious. Jane Austen took her social milieu for granted; its manners and traditions were, for her, as little open to question as the laws of nature.⁷²

As George Eliot describes it, her society, or at least its more conscious citizens, seems to be in the process of choosing its norms. Two points of view seem to be at war - a conservative one clinging to the solutions of the past and one seeking an alleviation of human misery through reform and change. Tensions rise to the surface of social life as all parties fight to retain their own norms and values:

It was a time...when the crying needs of the country might well counteract a reluctance to public action on the part of men whose minds had from long experience acquired breadth as well as concentration, decision of judgment as well as tolerance, dispassionateness as well as energy - in fact, all those qualities which

in the melancholy experience of mankind have been the least disposed to share lodgings.⁷³

In this way does George Eliot explain why Mr. Hackbutt's reaction to Mr. Brooke's ambition to stand for Parliament, "let Brooke reform his rent-roll,"⁷⁴ is so hostile. And the novel must represent the point of view of all sides.

George Eliot depicts in detail the various styles of argument men use to justify their resistance to change. And by so doing she chronicles the dilemma over the usefulness of absolute principles. The absence of absolute standards often results in contradictory behavior on the part of individuals. For example, there is a discrepancy between the liberal values Brooke upholds in his public life and the much more conservative claims through which he views his personal relationships. While Brooke can criticize the income of bishops in a "Liberal speech," he also "think[s] with pleasure of his niece's husband having a large ecclesiastical income."⁷⁵ The norms ensuring self-interest and those designed to further the social good often conflict.

The conservatives would uphold a value that, in the world shown by George Eliot, has outlived its usefulness: confidence in the status quo. Sir James Chettam objects to Mr. Brooke's standing for Parliament on the ground that any change is a breach of decorum, and George Eliot, finding this point of view out of touch with reality, makes him a comic figure: "'I do wish people would behave like gentlemen,' said the good baronet, feeling that this was a simple and comprehensive programme for social well-being."⁷⁶ Contrary to the

wishes of Sir James, society does seem to be changing:

Municipal town and rural parish gradually made fresh threads of connection - gradually, as the old stocking gave way to the savings bank, and the worship of the solar guinea became extinct; while squires and baronets, and even lords who had once lived blamelessly afar from the civic mind, gathered the faultiness of closer acquaintanceship.⁷⁷

Where they were once only latent, conflicts between the groups resistant to change and those which demand reform are now overtly expressed. Personal relationships are affected by which social norm one chooses. And Will Ladislav's reformist ideas cause him to make many enemies:

It was disgusting to Keck [the editor of the "Trumpet"] to see a strip of a fellow, with light curls round his head, get up and speechify by the hour against institutions which had existed when he was in his cradle.⁷⁸

Conflicts become more open because of the slowness with which society changes. When Mr. Brooke, supposedly speaking as the Reform candidate, after a second glass of sherry admonishes the working-class crowd, —

"It won't do, you know, breaking machines: everything must go on in trade, manufactures, commerce, interchange of staples - that kind of thing - since Adam Smith, that must go on. We must look all over the globe,"⁷⁹

the response is fierce and unrelenting: "Blast your ideas! we want the Bill."⁸⁰

Mr. Brooke fails to speak meaningfully to the social problems of the time. Finally it is the reluctance of society as represented by figures like Mr. Brooke, Sir James Chettam, Casaubon and Cadwallader to give up obsolete

ideas that will cause George Eliot's major characters almost totally to fail to live by her one absolute value - that of duty. Their difficulty in living moral lives is intensified by the slowness with which society changes. If social institutions like the church often seem to have lost their function as sources of moral strength for the community, none more vital has replaced them. The failure of religious institutions to suggest appropriate norms is illustrated in the petty rivalry between Tyke, Farebrother and Cadwallader; the chaotic hassle in Parliament over the Reform Bill points to the impotence of the national political life to direct society to an ideal of justice. Middlemarch lacks a central figure whose moral authority is equivalent to that of Squire Allworthy or Knightley, for now the individual must discover norms by himself. The structure of Middlemarch with its alteration from one point of view to another itself points to the moral isolation of the individual.

Within this setting at war between old and new norms, characters try to live moral lives. As Joan Bennett puts it, the structure of Middlemarch consists of "an inner circle (a small group of individuals involved in a moral dilemma) surrounded by an outer circle (the social world within which the dilemma has to be resolved)."⁸¹ George Eliot parallels the struggles of her characters with the struggle of their society; the progress of the inner circle reflects that of the outer, and vice versa: "while Lydgate felt himself struggling for Medical Reform against Middlemarch, Middlemarch

was becoming more and more conscious of the national struggle for another kind of Reform."⁸² And it is largely through a man's life work that George Eliot demonstrates the influence of society on the morality of the individual.

In a novel by Jane Austen moral life is largely seen as separate from the work one does; and Jane Fairfax even fears that her work as a schoolmistress would have cut her off from the only social context in which one could act morally. Moral acts for Jane Austen were mainly accomplished in places like the Woodhouse drawing room. George Eliot presents a different point of view. For George Eliot work is the best outlet for moral experience; in work one can pursue personal ideals with full knowledge of the social forces that must be conquered if values are to be sustained. And when Mary Garth, a reliable spokesman for George Eliot, admonishes Fred Vincy for not working, it is on the ground that his laziness is immoral:

"How can you bear to be so contemptible, when others are working and striving, and there are so many things to be done - how can you bear to be fit for nothing in the world that is useful? And with so much good in your disposition, Fred, - you might be worth a great deal."⁸³

In "Notes on 'The Spanish Gypsy'," George Eliot wrote that "the will of God is the same thing as the will of other men, compelling us to work and avoid what they have seen to be harmful to social existence."⁸⁴ Through the work of individuals, social standards may be informed by some ideal of justice.

What is perhaps new in George Eliot's fiction is that the plot of Middlemarch finds Dorothea Brooke and Lydgate in quest of meaningful work through which they can express moral values. Both for the most part fail. Fielding's Squire Allworthy found an outlet for his charity and benevolence by helping the needy of the neighborhood. For Jane Austen's characters personal relationships provided the means by which life could be made more comfortable for other people. Dorothea Brooke, however, finds no means at hand by which she can realize her values.

Unlike any of Fielding's or Jane Austen's characters, Dorothea must search for norms: "something she yearned for by which her life might be filled with action at once rational and ardent."⁸⁵ But although she comes to see her duty to lessen the misfortunes of others as a meaningful value, she finds no "long-recognisable deed"⁸⁶ through which that value can be expressed. And it might be noted that Dorothea's values are different from those of Jane Austen's heroines. Elizabeth Bennet could not help but admire Darcy's estate; wealth was no deterrent to morality. Dorothea Brooke would have preferred "finding that her home would be in a parish which had a larger share of the world's misery, so that she might have had more active duties in it."⁸⁷

The plot of Middlemarch illustrates the failure of traditional responses to satisfy the individual. Society, unchanged in many ways since Jane Austen's time, offers only marriage as a vocation for Dorothea. But while Jane Austen

never allows her heroines any aspirations that cannot be fulfilled in marriage, Dorothea expects that "duty would present itself in some new form of inspiration and give a new meaning to wifely love."⁸⁸ She discovers that it does not:

Marriage, which was to bring guidance into worthy and imperative occupation, had not yet freed her from the gentlewoman's oppressive liberty.⁸⁹

Dorothea finds that marriage brings only the imposition of the norms of the husband upon the wife. Only Casaubon's sudden death saves her from promising that she will devote her life to his worthless project, the "Key To All Mythologies." Casaubon had asked that she submit her judgment to his will. Fulfillment for Dorothea, George Eliot suggests, would have to come from her acting as an individual, finding her own norms. Dorothea, living in a society suspicious of any unusual aspirations on the part of a woman, learns to compromise. She finally tells Will "that by desiring what is perfectly good, even when we don't know what it is and cannot do what we would, we are part of the divine power against evil."⁹⁰ It is enough if one believes in moral values; one must accept the fact that the norms through which they might be expressed may not be accessible, sometimes merely because one is a woman.

The loss of absolutes results in the absence of preconceived outlets for socially useful action. George Eliot provides her characters with no context in which to act morally. Dorothea can find no outlet for her values; the outer circle, society, is too recalcitrant to change

for her to live by her moral code. Lydgate's problem is that the outer circle is directly hostile to his needs, that social standards too frequently conspire against the man who would maintain his integrity by satisfying only moral norms. Lydgate would like to remain aloof from the petty conflicts pervading Middlemarch; and he believes that if he only concern himself with working well in his own profession, this will be possible. But Bulstrode will finance the new hospital only if Lydgate votes for Tyke. And Lydgate, compromising, agreeing with Will that they must continue to work for good although they cannot find "immaculate men to work with,"⁹¹ fails to carry out his values. The moral compromises in the non-professional areas of his life corrode his power to work effectively as a doctor.

Lydgate's error lies in his belief that moral norms need be seriously considered only in the direct exercise of his profession. If Fielding portrays wide areas of experience in which norms need not directly be brought into play, Jane Austen insists that no area of life can be exempt from moral considerations. George Eliot's structure also presupposes an interdependence of all facets of a man's life. Lydgate must fail to achieve his goals because he does not possess moral norms and values to guide his private life. As a public man he is courageous enough to defy the Middlemarch standard and "prescribe, without dispensing drugs or taking percentage from druggists."⁹² But in his private life his values are those of the upper-class gentleman; and these George Eliot calls "common":

Lydgate's spots of commonness lay in the complexion of his prejudices...that distinction of mind which belonged to his intellectual ardour, did not penetrate his feeling and judgment about furniture, or women, or the desirability of its being known (without his telling) that he was better born than other country surgeons.⁹³

He marries a woman for whom social standards are everything, a true daughter of the middle-class motivated by the "prospect of rising in rank and getting a little nearer to that celestial condition on earth in which she would have nothing to do with vulgar people."⁹⁴ It is to these "vulgar people" that Lydgate had pledged to devote his life. And Rosamund's values make his devotion to his fellow men impossible. George Eliot is clearly ironic in asking us to forgive her:

Think no unfair evil of her, pray; she had no wicked plots, nothing sordid or mercenary; in fact she never thought of money except as something which other people would always provide.⁹⁵

In the structure of George Eliot's novels, there are no "wicked plots," and Raffles' attempt to blackmail Bulstrode is a melodramatic blemish on a novel that is otherwise intent on locating wrongdoing within the context of ordinary, everyday life.

Although Lydgate begins with an absolute moral norm in mind, the resistance of Middlemarch to change as well as the vices of his own character, prevent him from living by it. "It's uncommonly difficult to make the right thing work," he tells Dorothea when these two finally come together in their common distress, "there are so many strings pulling at once."⁹⁶ His compromise, putting himself in

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Bulstrode's power by accepting a bribe, is anticlimactic; Lydgate had already lost the power to exert the force of his moral convictions upon the community.

Unlike Lydgate, Dorothea sees the necessity of defying social norms in her private life. The social standard says that she ought not marry Will Ladislav because Casaubon has stipulated in his will that she forfeit her inheritance if she does. "It would have been better if I had called him out and shot him a year ago," Sir James says, "if Ladislav had had a spark of honour he would have gone out of the country at once, and never shown his face in it again."⁹⁷ But Dorothea defies this social standard as well as public opinion which has associated Lydgate with Bulstrode's murder of Raffles; she becomes Lydgate's champion. "What do we live for," she asks Lydgate at one point, "if it is not to make life less difficult to each other?"⁹⁸ Dorothea's sympathetic consolation of Lydgate, "You have never done anything vile. You would not do anything dishonourable,"⁹⁹ fulfills her values of duty and sympathy at last.

But does George Eliot finally resolve the fates of her characters in as traditional a manner as Fielding and Jane Austen? The answer must be that she does not. Lydgate winds up "alternating, according to the season, between London and a Continental bathing-place; having written a treatise on Gout."¹⁰⁰ He sacrifices all his aspirations. And although at the end she does marry a man she loves, neither is Dorothea's future presented as ideal. Although

Fielding had Tom and Sophia, and Jane Austen had Emma and Knightley about to live happily ever after, George Eliot presents her heroine with no prospect for an absolutely perfect life. And George Eliot even says that she agrees in part with those who would criticize Dorothea for marrying first Casaubon and later Will Ladislaw:

Certainly those determining acts of her life were not ideally beautiful. They were the mixed result of young and noble impulse struggling amidst the conditions of an imperfect social state.¹⁰¹

Given that our social state is "imperfect," the human character cannot be anything other than "mixed," and often the intention to live by moral norms must be ground enough for an author to approve of her characters.

IV The Narrator And Her Characters

Unlike Fielding's narrator who never challenges the validity of Allworthy's best efforts, the narrator of Middlemarch is often sceptical of the morality behind the decisions made by her characters. She is aware that any absolute can be challenged, and she sympathizes with the quest of her characters for reliable norms. It is almost as if her function is to point out to the people in her novels that changing social relations may make old forms of consciousness obsolete.

Only superficially, only in the sense that they both impose omniscient voices from without are Fielding's and George Eliot's narrative methods similar. Fielding's narrator, who could point to norms immune to the challenge of history, speaks with a tone of supreme confidence. He believes that he can infallibly point out when a character is transgressing a moral norm. Thus, he can much more unequivocally function as a guide to correct moral standards. But George Eliot suggests that history constantly modifies moral norms. Although her narrator's wisdom, like Fielding's, transcends that of any of her characters, she no more than they can be certain of the appropriateness of a response to a particular set of circumstances. And George Eliot points out a major distinction between her own and Fielding's narrative methods; in her comments on his introductory chapters "where he seems to bring his arm-chair to the proscenium and chat with us in all the lusty ease of his fine English,"¹⁰² she contrasts his method with her own:

But Fielding lived when the days were longer (for time, like money, is measured by our needs) ...we belated historians must not linger after his example; and if we did so, it is probable that our chat would be thin and eager...I at least have so much to do in unravelling certain human lots, and seeing how they were woven and interwoven, that all the light I can command must be concentrated on this particular web, and not dispersed over that tempting range of relevancies called the universe.¹⁰³

The days are shorter for George Eliot's narrator because human life has become more complicated, less susceptible to moral judgment. "Human lots" seem to be much more "woven and interwoven," and upon the moral implications of these connections she must concentrate her efforts. Fielding could indulge in leisurely satire because events did not threaten the reliability of his moral code. Uncertain as to moral norms, George Eliot must devote herself to examining the particulars of experience to see if these will yield any concrete answers. Leisurely satire will no longer suffice because as men become entangled in the affairs of each other and of their society, the need for moral standards has grown more urgent. And because George Eliot's narrator is not in possession of absolute standards, she cannot disperse her attention "over that tempting range of relevancies called the universe." Because human needs are not being defined by a society possessing a universal moral code, the tone of George Eliot's narrator becomes much more impatient at times than Fielding's ever is.

The tone of Fielding's narrator indicates that he regards himself as a seer. And he rightly believes that he

fulfills the four necessary criteria of the seer: "Genius," "Humanity," "Learning," and "Experience."¹⁰⁴ Because George Eliot's narrator cannot uphold absolutes, she says that she cannot be a seer. Critics have argued, however, that George Eliot's tone is in fact as all-knowing as Fielding's. Henry James says that it is, that she too assumes the role of a seer who "accepted the great obligations which to her mind belonged to a person who had the ear of the public...her whole effort... was highly to respond to them...by teaching, by vivid moral illustration and even by direct exhortation."¹⁰⁵ But while the effect of George Eliot's novels as a whole may be to inspire the reader with moral teachings, one must also consider George Eliot's own sense of her narrative voice; and her narrator explicitly refuses the mask of the seer. For she sees the danger of the seer becoming a Don Quixote, clinging to absolute judgments that have lost their validity by losing their relation to everyday life:

His [the seer's] powers may have been used up, like Don Quixote's, in their visionary or theoretic constructions, so that the reports of common-sense fail to affect him.¹⁰⁶

A seer's function is to offer "theoretic" analyses. The tone of much of the commentary of Middlemarch may be authoritative enough to seem to be the exhortations of a prophet. But since for George Eliot moral principles, even those firmly held to, can in practice function only in a tenuous and uncertain way, she is reluctant to assume the voice or the pretensions of a seer. For a seer must be as confident of his interpretation of the future as he is of his knowledge of the past; the

fluctuating reliability of moral norms makes it very difficult for George Eliot to be certain of what the future will hold. Commenting on the prospects of Will Ladislav, George Eliot's narrator declares that "among all forms of mistake, prophecy is the most gratuitous."¹⁰⁷ Becoming a seer, she implies, is for the narrator an unnecessary burden.

In place of Fielding's infallible tone, George Eliot's narrator offers her sincerity as evidence for the truth of her moral judgments. In the famous chapter in Adam Bede "In Which The Story Pauses A Little," George Eliot responds to the implied question of her reader as to why she has not allowed the Reverend Mr. Irvine to give better advice to Arthur Donnithorne who is about to seduce Hetty Sorrel. George Eliot says that she could have done so only "if I held it the highest function of the novelist to represent things as they never have been and never will be."¹⁰⁸ Only then could she have selected "the most unexceptionable type of clergyman, and put my own opinions into his mouth on all occasions."¹⁰⁹ Fielding's narrator juxtaposes what he finds with what he thinks ought to be. George Eliot's narrator explains that because she does not possess absolute truth and is often unsure about what ought to be, her effort has been to tell the truth as accurately as her limited capacities allow:-

My strongest effort is to avoid any such arbitrary picture, and to give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind. The mirror is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed, the reflection faint or confused; but I feel as much bound to tell you as precisely as I can what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box, narrating my experience on oath.¹¹⁰

By describing herself as if she were in a "witness-box," this narrator emphasizes not her superior wisdom, her "Genius," "Humanity," "Learning," or "Experience," but the sincerity behind her intention to tell the truth as she sees it.

Henry James criticizes George Eliot's narrative style on the ground that a too frequent moralizing on the part of her narrator results in a loss of immediacy. James says that "she proceeds from the abstract to the concrete; that her figures and situations are evolved, as the phrase is, from her moral consciousness, and are only indirectly the products of observation."¹¹¹ James would call Middlemarch a "moralised fable";¹¹² yet the effect of reading the novel is actually of proceeding from the concrete to the abstract. The omniscient narrator seems to draw conclusions only after the moral pattern of an individual's deeds has become clear.

The narrative approach George Eliot's narrator chooses is primarily inductive. Although George Eliot herself may long ago have defined her own moral position, and is now deducing how events support her conclusions, the narrative reads as if generalizations follow only after a set of details has been examined. The narrator concludes that in those times medical men often found their expenses doubling their receipts¹¹³ only after Lydgate's financial plight has been examined in great detail:

How this came about may be easily seen without much arithmetic or knowledge of prices. When a man in setting up a house and preparing for marriage finds that his furniture and other initial expenses come to between four and five

hundred pounds more than he has capital to pay for; when at the end of a year it appears that his household expenses, horses, and et ceteras, amount to nearly a thousand while the proceeds of the practice reckoned from the old books to be worth eight hundred per annum have sunk like a summer pond and make hardly five hundred chiefly in unpaid entries, the plain inference is that, whether he minds it or not, he is in debt.¹¹⁴

The wealth of detail, the seeming inevitability of his debts, undermines our tendency to judge Lydgate absolutely. What this narrator emphasizes is the difficulty human beings face when they try to live by norms. It would be as impossible for George Eliot's narrator, like the narrator Jane Austen creates for Mansfield Park, to wish to "let other pens dwell on guilt and misery. I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can"¹¹⁵ as it would be for her to speak with Fielding's confidence in absolute moral principles.

The structure of Middlemarch, with its inner and outer circles moving sometimes in unison, sometimes in opposition, itself suggests the need for a narrator who can mediate between two independent, yet inextricably interrelated forces: the individual and society as a whole. George Eliot's narrator, refusing to sanction many norms as absolutes, becomes an arbiter of norms and values, a mediator between the needs of men and the demands made by social life. She points out where moral principles must give way to compromise as well as where they must be clung to no matter how strongly threatened by a social standard. Unlike either Fielding or Jane Austen, George Eliot perceives what often seems to be an irreconcil-

able conflict between the needs of individuals and the demands made by their society. Her narrator tries to propose meaningful resolutions to these conflicts. If Lydgate's circumstances seem to dictate that he temporarily suspend moral scruples and accept a loan from Bulstrode, the narrator must then suggest that integrity is not an impossible value. Into the narrative appears Caleb Garth, who, although he too is in need of money, decides not to work for Bulstrode once he hears the story Raffles tells.

But most frequently, George Eliot's narrator is reluctant to make absolute judgments. In summing up the character of Dorothea's intended husband, Mr. Casaubon, she is careful to moderate the dogmatic judgments of all the interested observers. As opposed to their prejudices, she wishes to suggest that Mr. Casaubon ought to be judged by some more objective criterion:

I protest against any absolute conclusion, any prejudice derived from Mrs. Cadwallader's contempt for a neighbouring clergyman's alleged greatness of soul, or Sir James Chettam's poor opinion of his rival's legs, - from Mr. Brooke's failure to elicit a companion's ideas, or from Celia's criticism of a middle-aged scholar's personal appearance. I am not sure that the greatest man of his age; if ever that solitary superlative existed, could escape these unfavourable reflections of himself in various small mirrors.¹¹⁶

At this point in the novel, the narrator will permit no absolute condemnation of Mr. Casaubon. No realistic estimate of his character can be induced from either Mrs. Cadwallader's professional or Sir James's sexual jealousy. The "value" of

Mr. Casaubon must emerge from the narrator's unravelling of the motivations ruling his everyday life, and of his effect upon the lives with which his is intertwined.

George Eliot's reluctance to assume the mask of the seer is reflected best in her narrator's unwillingness to judge the conduct of her characters by absolute standards of right and wrong. Because she has discovered how difficult it is to locate moral norms, she can urge the reader to have sympathy for characters who must grope for a moral perspective with no infallible guides handed down from the past. "The only effect I ardently long to produce by my writings is," George Eliot had written to Charles Bray, "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."¹¹⁷

Sympathy thus becomes a major value for George Eliot in her narrative commentary. Her sense of the importance and the unpredictability of history has caused her to be wary of any large claims to alter hostile social conditions. Realizing the enormity of the odds against the individual who would oppose his own values to the way of the world, she suggests that compassion for others must in many cases take the place of moral judgments. George Eliot herself even said that her intention was to represent "mixed human beings in such a way as to call forth tolerant judgment, pity, and sympathy."¹¹⁸ Jane Austen applied absolute moral values to Emma's conduct

by her very showing that the consequences of not living by the correct norms become more and more intolerable. George Eliot finds it much more necessary to modulate her moral judgments. "Our moral progress may be measured," she declared, "by the degree in which we sympathize with individual suffering and individual joy."¹¹⁹

W.J. Harvey seems to be correct in his suggestion that George Eliot's sympathy for her characters flows from her role as an "observer who is seeking to understand what he observes by placing it in a larger context, standing back to view it in a wider perspective."¹²⁰ Writing from this wider perspective, George Eliot cannot, like Fielding or Jane Austen, expel unregenerate members from the community. By viewing all transgressions within the social and historical contest in which they arise, she can see them sometimes as more the result of unfortunate circumstances than as a lapse from moral rectitude. But this is not to suggest, as Miriam Allott does, that George Eliot is a rigid determinist who expresses "a sense of the total arbitrariness of human destiny":¹²¹

From Romola onwards...this determinism becomes even more forbidding. The consequences of "deeds" are extended until it is seen that an unending chain of reciprocal processes binds the individual indissolubly to the society he has helped to create.¹²²

Rather, as Jane Austen's Anne Elliot puts it, one must distinguish between "cases," and in some "advice is good or bad only as the event decides."¹²³ The judgments of George Eliot's narrator are made on the basis of the merits of each case,

of how much moral force a character has posed against the chain of circumstances threatening to engulf him. Yet at the same time that George Eliot pictures Lydgate regretting that he has been capable of too little of such moral force, her narrator seems to sympathize with him:

But his endurance was mingled with a self-discontent which, if we know how to be candid, we shall confess to make more than half our bitterness under grievances, wife or husband included. It always remains true that if we had been greater, circumstance would have been less strong against us.¹²⁴

This narrator believes that if absolute ideas seem to be less than universally applicable, one must at least be wary of making absolute moral judgments of individuals.

Often the narrator's sympathies are not given to those characters whom the reader believes are most deserving. For the reader might expect that the narrator would sympathize with Dorothea Brooke, now Mrs. Casaubon, the blooming young girl who has married "a dried bookworm towards fifty."¹²⁵ But if Middlemarch as a whole is largely sympathetic with Dorothea, George Eliot also offers the "wider perspective" Harvey noticed:

Was her point of view the only possible one with regard to this marriage? I protest against all our interest, all our effort at understanding being given to the young skins that look blooming in spite of trouble; for these too will get faded, and will know the older and more eating griefs which we are helping to neglect.¹²⁶

Dorothea's discontent is measured against the harsher dilemma of Mr. Casaubon's wasted life and the threat of death haunting him. The reader is encouraged to grant Mr. Casaubon the sympathy that George Eliot's narrator tells us he deserves:

For my part I am very sorry for him. It is an uneasy lot at best, to be what we call highly taught and yet not to enjoy: to be present at this great spectacle of life and never to be liberated from a small hungry shivering self;... never to have our consciousness rapturously transformed into the vividness of a thought, the ardour of a passion, the energy of an action, but always to be scholarly and uninspired, ambitious and timid, scrupulous and dimsighted.¹²⁷

The deeper her analysis probes, the less likely is this narrator to apply preconceived standards to Mr. Casaubon's character. If she is well aware of the error of Mr. Casaubon's particular adjustment to the world, for the man himself she feels only compassion:

Will not a tiny speck very close to our vision blot out the glory of the world, and leave only a margin by which we see the blot? I know no speck so troublesome as self. And who, if Mr. Casaubon had chosen to expound his discontents - his suspicions that he was not any longer adored without criticism - could have denied that they were founded on good reasons?¹²⁸

But George Eliot's narrator also relentlessly judges those characters who are so selfish that they can feel no compassion for others. For Rosamund Vincy she spares none of her sympathy:

In fact there was but one person in Rosamund's world whom she did not regard as blameworthy, and that was the graceful creature with blond plaits and with little hands crossed before her, who had never expressed herself unbecomingly, and had always acted for the best - the best naturally being what she best liked.¹²⁹

And George Eliot becomes even harsher than Fielding for whom the consequences of immoral acts are not always permanent. Fielding's good-hearted people could recover from a temporary lapse and resume a moral life with no consequences other than a memory of the pain that follows the transgression

of moral norms. George Eliot suggests that recovery is not so easy because our experiences change our characters; any evil deed may undermine our very nature:

Our deeds determine us, as much as we determine our deeds...there is a terrible coercion in our deeds which may turn the honest man into a deceiver and then reconcile him to the change; for this reason - that the second wrong presents itself to him in the guise of the only practicable light.¹³⁰

The point is not that George Eliot is a rigid determinist sternly pointing out that every cause has an effect, but that like society, the individual is to be viewed from the perspective of the "historic imagination." Much less than Fielding or Jane Austen does George Eliot imply that one can speak of an unchanging "human nature." The "innate" qualities of a man can be altered by his actions. Tom Jones could recover from his profligate way of life with his character intact. In Middlemarch Lydgate can never salvage his life from those of his errors that are motivated by the "spots of commonness"¹³¹ which are as much a part of his character as his ideals. The headnote to the chapter dramatizing the defeats of Bulstrode and Lydgate reads, "Our deeds still travel with us from afar,/ And what we have been makes us what we are."¹³² For Fielding it was Tom's goodness that defined him - ultimately his conduct could be guided by that goodness. But although the fact that old Mr. Featherstone was once a good man might have moved Fielding to make him at least a "mixed" character, it in no way softens George Eliot's narrator into making Featherstone anything other than a mean and selfish old man:

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If any one will here contend that there must have been traits of goodness in old Featherstone, I will not presume to deny this; but I must observe that goodness is of a modest nature, easily discouraged, and when much elbowed in early life by unabashed vices, is apt to retire into extreme privacy, so that it is more easily believed in by those who construct a selfish old gentleman theoretically, than by those who form the narrower judgments based on his personal acquaintance.¹³³

Just as the force of history influences her conception of society, the force of "personal acquaintance" governs her moral judgment of Featherstone's character. Theories abstracted from everyday reality must always be modified by actual circumstances.

The tone employed by George Eliot's narrator indicates both her closeness and her distance from Fielding and Jane Austen. They believed that the key to the meaning of human existence was in absolute moral principles. Her tone is often nostalgic - she regrets that she can no longer believe in such absolutes. They could often affect a placid tone no matter how harrowing the dilemmas of their characters became, confident that moral laws would eventually restore order. Such confidence is no longer accessible to George Eliot.

Although she sees her civilization in flux, George Eliot is not quite prepared to see the loss of the old norms as a positive gain. And her reluctance is reflected in the tone of her narrative voice. She feels nostalgia for the days when there was no difficulty in distinguishing between right and wrong; to her there is "pathos" and "heroism in the decay and final struggle of old systems."¹³⁴ If some of the social

gains history has introduced show a greater concern with justice than did the old order, a certain quality of life has been lost. And in Felix Holt the narrator recalls with longing what life was like five and thirty years ago:

...[there were] unrepealed corn laws, three-and-sixpenny letters, a brawny and many-breeding pauperism, and other departed evils; but there were some pleasant things too, which have also departed...you have not the best of it in all things, O youngsters!

That George Eliot, unlike Fielding, has lost confidence in absolutes does not mean that she does not have her own message to convey. The value of the omniscient and commenting narrator is that he can add meaning to the novel through his very statements. It is only that George Eliot's message has a different content. Unlike Fielding, she no longer has any faith that individuals can solve their problems without taking into account the demands made by history. Her message is that meaningful action is to be found in a moral response to the small events of life. She hopes to change the perspective of the reader so that he may make valuable responses to events of everyday life that Fielding and Jane Austen would perhaps not represent at all. "The progress of the world," George Eliot wrote, "can certainly never come at all save by the modified action of the individual beings who compose the world."¹³⁵ The key word here must be "modified." For having become sceptical of absolute moral norms, George Eliot also rejects the notion that any one measure, even a Reform Bill, could significantly alter the nature of social life, could provide an absolute solution to social needs.

Her narrator has a positive message as well; it is that small individual actions may ultimately accomplish great tasks:

We see human heroism broken into units and say, this unit did little - might as well not have been. But in this way we might break up a great army into units.¹³⁶

And in the final sentences of Middlemarch the narrator confirms the value of the few worthwhile deeds Dorothea Brooke was able to accomplish:

For the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.¹³⁷

The scale may have been diminished, but like Fielding and Jane Austen, George Eliot maintains her faith in the power of the individual, guided by moral principles, to transform his world.

Even more than George Eliot, Joseph Conrad will feel the corrosive effect of an imperfect society on the integrity of the individual. George Eliot advised a continued striving to live by moral principles; Conrad will suggest that an unjust society seems to deny us the possibility of ever discovering a moral principle, let alone moral norms.

Notes

- ¹ George Eliot's Life As Related In Her Letters And Journals, ed. J.W. Cross. 3 volumes (Boston and New York, 1908), I, 35.
- ² quoted by Walter Allen, George Eliot (London, 1965) pp. 13-14.
- ³ Cross, II, 14.
- ⁴ "Letter to Mrs. Wm. Smith, 25 April 1873," Cross, III, 152.
- ⁵ Middlemarch: A Study Of Provincial Life (Boston: Riverside Edition, 1956), p. 12.
- ⁶ Felix Holt, The Radical (Boston and New York: Colonial Press), pp. 263-264.
- ⁷ The History Of The Adventures of Joseph Andrews And Of His Friend Mr. Abraham Adams (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), p. 219.
- ⁸ "Leaves From A Note-Book," The Works of George Eliot, ed. J.W. Cross (Edinburgh and London, 1885), XII, 291.
- ⁹ The Victorian Sage: Studies In Argument (New York: The Norton Library, 1965), p. 12.
- ¹⁰ "George Eliot And The Omniscient Author Convention," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 13 (September 1958), p. 90.
- ¹¹ "The Social Novel In England And Russia," The Social History Of Art, Four Volumes (New York: Vintage Books), IV, 130-131.
- ¹² The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad (New York, 1963), p. 123.
- ¹³ Middlemarch, p. 126.
- ¹⁴ George Eliot: Her Mind And Her Art (Cambridge, 1962), p. 85.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., p. 123.
- ¹⁶ "Letter to Mrs. Peter Taylor, 18 July 1878," Cross, III, 239-240.
- ¹⁷ Middlemarch, p. 133.
- ¹⁸ "Leaves From A Note-Book," p. 287.

- 19 "Impressions Of Theophrastus Such," Works, XI, 121-122.
- 20 Middlemarch, p. 447.
- 21 Ibid., p. 6.
- 22 quoted by William H. Hyde, "George Eliot And The Climate of Realism," PMLA, LXXII (March 1957), p. 163.
- 23 Daniel Deronda (New York: A Harper Torchbook, 1961), p.64.
- 24 Cross, II, 276.
- 25 "Leaves From A Note-Book," p. 301.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 "Letter to Jane Austen from James Stanier Clarke, 27 March 1816," Jane Austen's Letters To Her Sister Cassandra And Others, ed. R.W. Chapman (London, 1952), p. 451.
- 28 "Letter to James Stanier Clarke, 1 April 1816," Letters, p. 452.
- 29 Ibid., p. 453.
- 30 "Emma," Jane Austen: A Collection Of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1963), p. 118.
- 31 "Introduction," Sense And Sensibility (New York: The Laurel Jane Austen, 1959), p. 9.
- 32 "Letter to J. Edward Austen-Leigh, 16 December 1816," Letters 1796-1817, ed. R.W. Chapman (London, 1956), p. 189.
- 33 Middlemarch, p. 12.
- 34 Ibid., p. 39
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Cross, I, 210.
- 37 Middlemarch, p. 341.
- 38 "Theophrastus," p. 110.
- 39 Ibid., p. 109.
- 40 Ibid., p. 110.
- 41 Ibid., p. 197.

- 42 "Notes On Form In Art," Essays Of George Eliot, ed. Thomas Pinney (London, 1963), p. 432.
- 43 Middlemarch, p. 587.
- 44 Cross, I, 209-210.
- 45 "Letter to Chas. Ritter, 11 August 1878," Cross, III, 241-242.
- 46 Middlemarch, P. 65.
- 47 Felix Holt, p. 186.
- 48 Middlemarch, p. 302.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Ibid., p. 291.
- 51 Ibid., p. 404.
- 52 Ibid., p. 596.
- 53 Ibid., p. 25.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Ibid., p. 612.
- 56 Felix Holt, p. 53.
- 57 Hauser, p. 130.
- 58 Middlemarch, p. 612.
- 59 Felix Holt, p. 191.
- 60 Middlemarch, p. 119.
- 61 Ibid., p. 436.
- 62 "Letter to R.H. Hutton, 8 August 1863," Cross, II, 275-276.
- 63 Felix Holt, p. 9.
- 64 Ibid., p. 30.
- 65 Middlemarch, p. 65.
- 66 "Emma," The Complete Novels Of Jane Austen (New York: The Modern Library), p. 889.

- 67 Middlemarch, pp. 607-608.
- 68 The History Of Tom Jones, A Foundling (New York: The Modern Library, 1951), p. 41.
- 69 "Theophrastus," p. 109.
- 70 Middlemarch, p. 292.
- 71 "Notes On Form In Art," p. 433.
- 72 Bennett, p. 101.
- 73 Middlemarch, p. 262.
- 74 Ibid., p. 262.
- 75 Ibid., p. 49.
- 76 Ibid., p. 280.
- 77 Ibid., p. 71.
- 78 Ibid., p. 339.
- 79 Ibid., p. 370.
- 80 Ibid., p. 371.
- 81 Bennett, p. 101.
- 82 Middlemarch, p. 336.
- 83 Ibid., p. 188.
- 84 Cross, III, 3.
- 85 Middlemarch, p. 64.
- 86 Ibid., p. 4.
- 87 Ibid., p. 57.
- 88 Ibid., p. 202.
- 89 Ibid.
- 90 Ibid., p. 287.
- 91 Ibid., p. 341.
- 92 Ibid., p. 109.
- 93 Ibid., pp. 111-112.
- 94 Ibid., p. 123.

- 95 Ibid., p. 198.
- 96 Ibid., p. 363.
- 97 Ibid., p. 597.
- 98 Ibid., p. 537.
- 99 Ibid., p. 558.
- 100 Ibid., p. 610.
- 101 Ibid., p. 612.
- 102 Ibid., p. 105.
- 103 Ibid.
- 104 Tom Jones, pp. 598-599.
- 105 "The Life Of George Eliot," Partial Portraits (London, 1919), p. 49.
- 106 "Theophrastus," p. 198.
- 107 Middlemarch, p. 62.
- 108 Adam Bede (London, 1962), p. 169.
- 109 Ibid.
- 110 Ibid.
- 111 James, p. 51.
- 112 Ibid., p. 50.
- 113 Middlemarch, p. 429.
- 114 Ibid.
- 115 "Mansfield Park," The Complete Novels, p. 751.
- 116 Middlemarch, p. 62.
- 117 "5 July 1859," Cross, II, 137-138.
- 118 "Letter to John Blackwood, 18 February 1857," Cross, II, 36.
- 119 "Letter to Charles Bray, 15 November 1857," Cross, II, 63.
- 120 Harvey, p. 99.
- 121 "George Eliot In The 1860s," Victorian Studies, V (December 1961), p. 105.

- 122 Ibid., p. 103.
- 123 "Persuasion," The Complete Novels, p. 1361.
- 124 Middlemarch, p. 428.
- 125 Ibid., p. 17.
- 126 Ibid., p. 205.
- 127 Ibid., p. 206.
- 128 Ibid., p. 307.
- 129 Ibid., p. 487.
- 130 Adam Bede, pp. 297-298.
- 131 Middlemarch, p. 111.
- 132 Ibid., p. 514.
- 133 Ibid., p. 236.
- 134 "Leaves From A Note-Book," p. 301.
- 135 "Letter to the Hon. Mrs. Ponsonby, 6 December 1874,"
Cross, III, 176.
- 136 Felix Holt, p. 191.
- 137 Middlemarch, p. 613.

Joseph Conrad: "Successful Action" And The Loss Of The Ethical Absolute

Squire Allworthy, Mr. Knightley, and Dorothea Brooke all devote their lives to working for the social good. Each seeks to live for more than the gratification of his personal desires. And their moral codes can be explained in terms of a continuing ethical tradition which refuses to sanction or to credit the idea of private, subjective experience totally divorced from concern for the welfare of a larger social group. It is perhaps in part the accessibility of an accepted ethical tradition upon which novelists can draw that contributes to the continuity in the structure of the English novel through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

George Eliot's novels employ the conventional narrative structure which characterizes the novels of Fielding and Jane Austen. Her plots progress chronologically toward a dénouement which justifies the relevance of the moral principles which an omniscient author has all along possessed and on which she has been commenting. George Eliot can still employ a narrator to whom general truths have been revealed some time in the past. And this common acceptance of preconceived ideas is perhaps more significant than the fact that her narrator differs from Fielding's in both her sceptical tone and the dialectical relationship she brings into play between the principles she knows to be of certain and ineluctable truth and the obscuring of these general truths

by historical change. For in her novels changing social relations begin to make it difficult for moral principles to appear other than problematic. At the center of the action in the novels of Fielding and Jane Austen stands a hero or a heroine whose failures in ethical awareness are followed by a greater appreciation of the traditional humanistic moral standard than they had before.

George Eliot, with her stern emphasis on the "peremptory and absolute" imperative of "duty,"¹ would not alter Fielding's definition of moral action. She also believes in prudence and benevolence. But George Eliot recognizes a tension between on the one hand moral ideals which are absolutely valid in themselves, and on the other, the difficulty of applying preconceived ideals to particular situations. Circumstances seem to follow the movement of history as much as they are subject to the will of individuals.

George Eliot, aware of the idea of history in a way Fielding is not, introduces as the background of her novels a social setting that is rapidly undergoing change. This consciousness of history makes it impossible for later novelists like Conrad to approach ethical problems solely in terms of preconceived ideals of conduct. For while her prescriptive principles defining right and wrong remain similar in content to those of Squire Allworthy or Knightley, Dorothea Brooke is not always as certain as they are how and when to apply these principles. However deeply she yearns to perform some "long-recognisable deed,"² Dorothea finds it very diffi-

cult to anticipate moral behavior.

What comes dramatically to the foreground in the novels of George Eliot is a conflict between codes of behavior which individuals are told ought to be translated into action and the hindrances to moral behavior put forth by a society whose institutions seem to develop almost autonomously. That they live in a world in which their aspirations cannot be gratified by adherence to the old standards makes it increasingly difficult for George Eliot's characters to define moral conduct. And Conrad's characters are even much more frequently faced with the tension between a tradition which suggests an absolute moral code and the irrational. For Conrad the arbitrary nature of human motivations as well as the irrationality of history seem to imply that the ethical tradition of Fielding and Jane Austen is of historical value alone.

With the loss of confidence in the old principles, the novelist's conception of the concrete form moral action can take is also altered. Squire Allworthy and Dorothea Brooke both in general work for the social good. But Dorothea finds the preconceived pattern of noblesse oblige unworkable; she searches instead for a more spontaneous expression of morality. Unlike Allworthy, Dorothea is faced with defining an ethical life in a community in which the act of charity is no longer a sufficiently relevant moral response. Although she would have preferred "finding that her home would be in a parish which had a larger share of the world's misery so that she might have had more active duties in it,"³ she realizes that she must define her own outlet for moral action.

Although Conrad seems to be searching for a moral principle that would provide society with order, he also becomes suspicious of the idea that such order could be provided by a principle alone. In Nostromo particularly, but in much of Conrad, one can trace a conflict between his belief in the desirability of an ethical tradition with absolute laws and standards that could be realized in the context of everyday life and his conviction that "rules, principles and standards die and vanish every day. Perhaps they are all dead and vanished by this time."⁴ "Where is the thing, institution or principle which I do not doubt?" he asked.⁵ "Theory," Conrad said, "is a cold and lying tombstone of departed truth."⁶

F.R. Leavis asks, "what are his positives?"⁷ It is too easy to say, as Robert Penn Warren does, that "fidelity and the job sense make for the human community the solidarity in which Conrad finds his final values."⁸ For the Marlow in "Heart of Darkness" who makes the famous statement about the redeeming power of work, "I like what is in the work, the chance to find yourself. Your own reality - for yourself, not for others - what no other men can ever know,"⁹ hardly has discovered a moral principle through which men could live together in a community founded upon an ideal of justice. And Marlow realizes this. "Principles won't do," he says. He "didn't go ashore for a howl and a dance" because he "had no time. I had to mess about with white lead and strips of woolen blanket helping to put bandages on those leaky steam pipes."¹⁰ On the contrary, Marlow has found only momentary solace in the exercise of his personal powers. Work seems

satisfying because it can be done alone and one can suspend his awareness that he has no binding relation to a social community. As Irving Howe says, "it is a useful crutch, but little more."¹¹

Confronted by the impossibility of sustaining the meaning of his novels by means of the kind of "positives" sought by Leavis and perhaps the "common reader" who delights in Fielding and Jane Austen, Conrad introduces various "crutches" meant to help man live in a world in which his principles are too often revealed to be "tombstone[s] of departed truth." Against the chaos of a world in which a sense of community is absent, "work" becomes such a bulwark. The active will is another of the supports that Conrad suggests may sustain men in a world in which values have become so relative that there seems to be no absolute truth or objective moral standard. Stein's advice for Jim, "the way is to the destructive element submit yourself and with the exertions of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up,"¹² describes a form of behavior rather than a moral position. The key word is "make"; Stein seems to be saying that what separates successful from unsuccessful action is the will not to stray from one's purpose. The content of the purpose is almost irrelevant.

Stein nowhere grants absolute value to any one plan for Jim's survival. Jim can go to remote Patusan because from a moral point of view it does not matter where he goes. The destructive element, as I read the novel, is the world in general. An act of will is necessary for survival in any set of circumstances. In

Victory Heyst fails to protect his life with Lena from the three subhuman intruders because, Conrad tells us, he "had lost the habit of asserting himself."¹³ Principles or pre-conceived patterns of behavior would have been no safeguard against so irrational an enemy: only a man with a will strong enough "to hope, to love - and to put [his] trust in life"¹⁴ could have survived this challenge.

Neither is it the French lieutenant's ability to live by a principle that has made the difference between him who stayed aboard the Patna and Jim who jumped. The French lieutenant has chosen at some point to maintain the moral standard of his craft; he has decided that the code of honor it represents is a worthwhile and useful defense against the chaos of having nothing to live for: "the honour," he says, "that is real - that is! And what life may be worth when... when the honour is gone - ah ca! par exemple - I can offer no opinion...because - monsieur - I know nothing of it."¹⁵ The will to submit to an ideal seems to be as important a factor as the ideal itself. The French lieutenant's active will suffices to shape his life; Decoud, in Nostromo, kills himself not so much because he loses faith in the idea of an independent Sulaco or in the reality of his love for Antonia Avellanos as because "sleeplessness had robbed his will of all energy."¹⁶ And without sufficient will, he could have no faith in his continued existence.

The French lieutenant, whose testimony most seriously diminishes our sympathy for Jim, once "made [his]

proofs,"¹⁷ and he too recognizes that "given a certain combination of circumstances, fear is sure to come."¹⁸ Stein also minimizes the moral distinction that Marlow makes between himself and Jim: "And do you know how many opportunities I let escape; how many dreams I had lost that had come in my way?"¹⁹ Conrad seems to make his most favorable characters fallible to emphasize that neither absolute rectitude nor absolute faith in the truth of one's ideals is necessary. The will to sustain oneself seems to be enough.

The other bulwark Conrad most frequently offers against a life in which an intelligent man can find no ethical mandate as valid as "the truth of his own sensations"²⁰ is the intimate personal relationship and the expression of personal sensibility. For only the intuitive feeling can survive independently of an objective moral standard. "Only in men's imagination," Conrad thought, "does every truth find an effective and undeniable existence."²¹ "Everything is relative," he believed, "and the light of consciousness is only enduring."²²

But neither can Conrad offer the sanctity of personal relationships as an absolute; for these are too often shattered by the very absence of an ethical standard in society that makes them so important a refuge. Like "work" or "fidelity" or the active will, they too are only temporary bulwarks against the kind of encroaching solitude felt by all men who, like Decoud, frequently lose faith in the possibility of leading a moral life.

The insistence of Conrad's characters on pursuing absolute ideals nevertheless can have extremely destructive consequences. For these ideals threaten to destroy the delicate fabric of personal relationships. George Eliot cautions that "wide-reaching motives, blessed and glorious as they are ...have their dangers...to learn what it is they thus summon us to do, we have to consider the mortals we are elbowing, who are of our own stature and our own appetites."²³ And Conrad, in Nostromo, condemns Charles Gould on the ground not only that his faith in the absolute ideals of "law," "good faith," "order," and "security,"²⁴ which are to be the legacy of the San Tome mine, is sheer folly, but also that his devotion to these empty ideals destroys the one element of order in his life, his relationship with his wife:

A man haunted by a fixed idea is insane. He is dangerous even if that idea is an idea of justice, for may he not bring the heaven down pitilessly upon a loved head?²⁵

Unlike "Heart of Darkness" and Lord Jim, in Nostromo the previously effective bulwarks no longer work because the personal lives of its characters are much more deeply dependent on the nature of their commitment to their social environment.

What are the structural requirements of a novel that would challenge the viability of the idea that preconceived principles can meaningfully control moral conduct? The structure of Conrad's novels, particularly Nostromo, reflects his conviction that the idealism of absolute moral principles distorts moral life more than contributing to it. And his

method of composition reflects this belief. "I don't start with an abstract notion," he said. "I start with definite images and as their rendering is true some little effect is produced."²⁶

It could be argued that Conrad begins with the preconceived idea that no moral principles exist to sustain modern society, and constructs novels whose episodes illustrate that truth. But to avoid the effect of his novels seeming to be deductions from previously known general truths, Conrad radically alters the structure of the novel as it had been written by Fielding or Jane Austen or George Eliot. He refuses to allow his narrative to progress chronologically toward some increasingly more apparent moral resolution because he does not believe that such a resolution is feasible. The interpenetration of past and present events within the narrative of Nostromo points to society's failure to progress toward a moral and rational order. The past is as relevant as the present because Conrad has discovered that "the only possible form of permanence in this world of relative values [is] the permanence of memory."²⁷

With the loss of a chronological sequence of episodes, the setting or social background of Conrad's novels becomes even less stable and less susceptible to definition than George Eliot's. Political forces in the background of Nostromo constantly come to the foreground and require of Conrad's characters new, if no more rational, forms of compromise. And unlike the characters of Fielding, Jane Austen or

George Eliot, Conrad's people in Nostromo are not introduced in terms of a fixed set of qualities that would make them immediately recognisable to the reader. Rather, they are defined in terms of an irreconcilable conflict between action and moral intention. Lord Jim and Nostromo as much emphasize the absence of a practical standard of right and wrong as they draw our attention toward individual personalities. In Nostromo an omniscient narrator who could even tentatively apply universal moral principles to the formless flux of events would be an anachronism since moral principles themselves seem to have become obsolete.

I

The Historical and Social Background: The Absence Of A Moral Principle

What kind of social and political background would be most appropriate to a novel illustrating the failure of moral ideals to endow stability either on society as a whole or on the private experience of individuals? In Nostromo Conrad blurs the distinction between background and foreground that one feels in the novels of Fielding, Jane Austen and to a lesser extent, George Eliot, making the vicissitudes of Costaguanan politics as much the subject of the novel as are the personal fates of his characters. Conrad questions the relevance of moral rules and principles by exploring the degree to which men can live by ideals as well as the degree to which the moral tenor of society as a whole reflects such

principles. The history of Costaguana helps to make clear the absence of a moral principle which might provide order for a society now at the mercy of ruthless men motivated by "material interests."

The first principle of Razumov's credo in Under Western Eyes is "History not Theory."²⁸ George Eliot's method of composition is to "connect the course of individual lives with the historic stream, for all classes of thinkers."²⁹ Conrad also does not define his characters in abstract terms. Like George Eliot, he places primary importance on exploring the society that forms the background of his novels. History and society are such dominant elements in Nostromo that Conrad chooses no hero, like Dorothea Brooke, whose exploits seem to possess more moral significance than his milieu seems capable of yielding. "Nostromo has never been intended for the hero of the Tale of the Seaboard," Conrad said, "silver is the pivot of the moral and material interests affecting the lives of everybody in the tale."³⁰

For Conrad in Nostromo the moral quality of society becomes the central question. What kind of moral action will be possible in that environment for Conrad will decide the fate of the ethical tradition that he wants so much to share with his predecessors. The outlets for political behavior possible in Costaguana determine the moral commitments which characters can make. The political system with which Conrad's characters must cope also determines the success of their personal relationships.

A tension develops between the all-encompassing social and historical background of the novel and its foreground which is occupied by characters espousing a variety of political positions. Conrad suggests no absolute standard of conduct that would distinguish moral from immoral behavior within that environment. No ideal political stance is suggested. Thus what emerges is the lesson that particular responses, however moral they may appear to be in one situation, may under different circumstances be irrelevant. Dr. Monygham was unable to sustain his personal integrity in the face of the torture he suffered at the hands of the tyrant Guzman Bento. But Conrad is not interested primarily in making a moral judgment of the doctor's character. His point is that unflinching courage is another absolute impossible to sustain. For Conrad as for George Eliot the "historic imagination" portrays "what circumstances affecting individual lots are attendant on the decay of long-established systems."³¹ The encroachment of circumstance more than any other single factor seems to destroy the capacities of men to live by any standard of honor or justice.

Organized society in Nostromo is divided into factions, with each seeking its share of the material wealth. The pursuit of material interests forms the primary relation between men and their environment in Costaguana. And Conrad can envision no moral principle influential enough to replace greed with "a mere idea of pity and justice:"³²

The common ground of concord, good faith and justice is not sufficient to establish an action upon; since the conscience of but very few men amongst us, and of no single Western nation as yet, will brook the restraint of abstract ideas as against the fascination of a material advantage.³³

Conrad's definition of society is determined by the motives of his people which in turn are shown to have determined the character of their society. "L'homme est un animal méchant," he wrote. "Sa méchanceté doit être organisée. Le crime est une condition nécessaire de l'existence organisée. La société est essentiellement criminelle, - ou elle n'existerait pas."³⁴ The distinction between background and foreground, between man and society, all but disappears. Society with its endless irrational upheavals prevents men from living by moral ideals because it is "impossible to disentangle one's activity from its debasing contacts."³⁵ Men, in turn, by their choices contribute to the moral barrenness of their society.

Does Conrad ever prescribe a proper relation between man and society? For Albert Guerard, Conrad's judgment on this question, in Lord Jim, is, "if anywhere," in the "privileged man" to whom Marlow relates the last events of Jim's life and who judges Jim solely on the principle that "we must fight in the ranks or our lives don't count!"³⁶ But the absolute-ness of this man's social credo, one which he suggests would be invulnerable to extenuating circumstances, and one which sanctifies "the truth of ideas racially our own, in whose name are established the order, the morality of an ethical progress,"³⁷ seems to disqualify him as a reliable spokesman for Conrad. It is true that there is a side of Conrad, the Conrad

perhaps of "The Nigger of the Narcissus," which maintains a faith in "the truth of ideas racially our own." The laws binding the seaman to his craft might be such rules. And at times Conrad even seems to suggest that the strict observance of these rules is equivalent to "the morality of an ethical progress." But Conrad's total world-view seems to discount this perhaps too easy affirmation. Neither in Lord Jim nor in Nostromo does he point to "ethical progress" as the fruit of the imperialist ethic which the "privileged man" represents.

But Conrad's technique of describing first the political and historical background and then his characters seems to reflect his belief that fighting in the ranks or keeping oneself afloat in the destructive element must be accepted if one is to define a meaningful life. His individuals are rarely seen apart from their "destructive element." Frequent descriptions of the town and of the countryside in Nostromo point out that the reader will understand the significance of the isolated movements of Conrad's people only if he also is aware of the quality of the world with which every man must come to terms.

Thus we are told the history of the San Tomé mine, which in microcosm both foretells and repeats the history of the Republic. That at one point the mine had been closed by a revolt in which the native miners "had risen upon their English chiefs and murdered them to a man"³⁸ foretells the success of both the Monterist and the coming Marxist revolutions. The decree issued at the time reflects Conrad's general

belief that as long as society is governed by no moral principle such uprisings will be the rule rather than the exception in history:

Justly incensed at the grinding oppression of foreigners, actuated by sordid motives of gain rather than by love for a country where they come impoverished to seek their fortunes, the mining population of San Tomé, etc....³⁹

The mine is closed, then reopened by another government that "judged of its opportunities sanely."⁴⁰ Silver is Conrad's "hero" and for both governments and individuals the risk of violence and popular discontent is worth taking for the sake of the greater material good.

The conflict operating in the background of Nostromo is between the needs of the Costaguanan poor, who are always threatening to erupt into mass action, and the temporarily stabilizing effect of the mine with its hospital and church and school. To ensure its survival the mine must become "an institution, a rallying point for everything in the province that needed order and stability to live."⁴¹ The tension in the setting of Nostromo flows from society's need for an idea of justice. Yet Conrad seems to believe that such an ideal will arise neither from the unstructured discontent of the "politically immature"⁴² and uneducated poor who go "on strike regularly (every bullfight day)"⁴³ nor from the superficial order provided by expansionist interests.

This tension inspires much of Conrad's depiction of his setting. Perhaps nowhere more emphatically does Conrad translate social tension into pictorial description than in the ride of the Goulds through the countryside on their way

to the mine. They view "the heavy stone-work of bridges and churches left by the conquerors [which] proclaimed the disregard of human labor, the tribute-labor of vanished nations."⁴⁴ It is for the reader to provide Conrad's implied judgment as Gould begins his mining enterprise.

The political background of Nostromo dramatizes that society is not progressing toward the discovery of a moral principle, although Dr. Monygham points out that only an ethical standard could bring order to Costaguana:

There is no peace and rest in the development of material interests. They have their law and their justice. But it is founded on expediency, and is inhuman; it is without rectitude, without the continuity and the force that can be found only in a moral principle.⁴⁵

Robert Penn Warren, in his unqualified approval of the progress Costaguana has made, seems to ignore the fact that the principle invoked by Dr. Monygham remains absent:

There has been a civil war, but the forces of "progress" - i.e. the San Tome mine and the capitalistic order - have won. And we must admit that the society at the end of the book is preferable to that at the beginning.⁴⁶

At the end Decoud's Separationist policy has been carried out and in power once more are the liberals in a "Parliamentary party"⁴⁷ with Don Juste Lopez as its head, the same Don Juste who had impotently urged that the Provincial Assembly send a deputation to greet Pedrito Montero, "if only to assert the existence of parliamentary institutions."⁴⁸ But if Sulaco has grown in material prosperity, the underlying tension springing from the unjust distribution of the wealth of the mine remains:

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Sulaco outstripped Nostromo's prudence, growing rich swiftly on the hidden treasures of the earth, hovered over by the anxious spirits of good and evil, torn out by the laboring hands of the people. It was like a second youth, like a new life, full of promise, of unrest, of toil, scattering lavishly its wealth to the four corners of an excited world. Material changes swept along in the train of material interests.⁴⁹

Conrad directs our attention to the "laboring hands of the people" in the background. And later Captain Mitchell must reluctantly point out to his "privileged passenger" that the "socialistic Italians" have organized into a "Democratic party."⁵⁰ The forces of "progress" Penn Warren praises are opposed by a group which seems to have legitimate grievances against the new government.

If the history of Costaguana as Conrad has unfolded it begins with the brutalities of Guzman Bento, it ends with the ascendancy of a different, if equally pernicious, enemy of order and stability, "evolution" and "unity," the values prized equally by Conrad and by Razumov.⁵¹ The Marxist present at the deathbed of Nostromo is anxious to take advantage of the division between labor and capital that is once again coming to the foreground of Costaguanan society. Conrad pictures him as about to institute his own form of chaos. He needs only the word of "Comrade Fidanza" that Dr. Monygham, from whom Nostromo has refused all medical aid, is indeed "a dangerous enemy of the people."⁵² The Marxist, a "pale photographer, small, frail, blood-thirsty, the hater of capitalists"⁵³ has wrongly, if characteristically, interpreted Nostromo's indifference to his own recovery as a political response, whereas, like Jim, Nostromo turns away from life "for want of ground

under his feet, for want of sights for his eyes, for want of voices in his ears."⁵⁴ His honor and personal integrity gone, he no longer has a reason to live.

Nostromo casts a "glance of enigmatic and mocking scorn"⁵⁵ at the Marxist and Conrad's tone as well as his condemnation of the man's politics in terms of his distasteful physical appearance reflect the author's view that the irrational cycle of violence and political upheaval is soon to be resumed. That the Marxist's presence is not irrelevant has been foreshadowed by Antonia's concern with the moral and soon to be political consequences of Sulaco's becoming an independent republic: "how can we abandon, groaning under oppression, those who have been our countrymen only a few years ago, who are our countrymen now."⁵⁶ And a prophecy directed toward the holders of material interests has been uttered by Father Corbelan:

"Let them beware, then, lest the people, prevented from their aspirations, should rise and claim their share of the wealth and their share of the power."⁵⁷

If the Monterists succeeded in arousing the people against the foreigners "who, by introducing railways, mining enterprises, colonization, and under such shallow pretences aimed at robbing poor people of their lands,"⁵⁸ the Marxists will succeed with the same tactic. For Conrad each equally deserves to fail because neither can provide a moral principle that would lead to a more rational organization of society. Each accurately condemns the injustice of the existing system. But for Conrad, it is irresponsible for one to challenge the existing order without

first himself possessing a viable alternative:

The ferocity and imbecility of an autocratic rule rejecting all legality and in fact basing itself upon complete moral anarchism provokes the no less imbecile and atrocious answer of a purely Utopian revolutionism encompassing destruction by the first means to hand, in the strange conviction that a fundamental change of hearts must follow the downfall of any given human institutions.⁵⁹

It is difficult to find support in Conrad's writings, either for Penn Warren's view that decisive moral progress has been made in Costaguana or for Eloise Knapp Hay's conviction that Conrad saw "good politics," that founded upon a moral principle, as likely.⁶⁰

It is by this historical background which seems to possess an independent and hostile movement of its own that Conrad's characters find their private ideals challenged. The very notion of history as a force of continuous change challenges the prescriptive effectiveness of any code of behavior that is meant to be universally valid. Conrad seems to be saying that it is the nature of life in society that makes ideals of conduct unfeasible.

George Eliot's characters could at least temporarily escape from their society, from its history and from its politics. Domestic satisfactions were accessible to Dorothea and Ladislav or to Mary and Fred Garth in their private lives; fighting in the ranks became a partial if no less necessary activity. The setting of Middlemarch, however strongly its provincialism limits the aspirations of George Eliot's characters, does not encompass their lives to the point where moral principles sustaining purely personal relationships are

threatened. Because of the greater penetration of "society" into the lives of his characters, Conrad is forced to write a different kind of novel.

The social setting of Nostromo is so dominant an element that Conrad might be said to be writing a kind of "historical novel," as the genre has been defined by Georg Lukács, who is, however, no admirer of Conrad.⁶¹ According to Lukács, in the historical novel history appears as a "mass experience"; the activity of the miners of Sulaco as much dictates the progress of the plot of Nostromo as the motivations of any of the "major" characters. The historical novel, as Lukács sees it, also reflects a consciousness "that there is such a thing as history, that it is an uninterrupted process of changes and finally that it has a direct effect upon the life of every individual."⁶³

None of Conrad's people can escape from their lives in Costaguana into personal havens of love or friendship; Lord Jim becomes a minor figure in Conrad's canon because he "had no dealings but with himself."⁶⁴ If Dorothea Brooke could defy the social norm dictating that she not marry the man condemned in her husband's will, in Under Western Eyes Razumov, who wishes to retire from the political conflicts into which he has been unwillingly drawn, is asked ironically by Councillor Mikulin, "Where to?"⁶⁵ Nostromo, waking up on the beach, disillusioned with seeking the good opinion of his masters, tells himself that "he must go. But where?"⁶⁶ For Conrad's characters there is nowhere to flee, no matter how hostile one's environment has become. And Conrad has said

also that flight into the purely personal is an evasion of one's responsibilities; he has no sympathy, like George Eliot, with Don Quixote's form of madness: "it was a form of self-indulgence and the ingenious hidalgo of La Mancha was not a good citizen."⁶⁷

Mrs. Gould can discover no principle of conduct to sustain her personal life. The same "destructive element" that exposes the hollowness of the abstract ideals invoked by her husband to sanctify his economic enterprise also has seduced him into making the mine the object dearest to him. Irving Howe describes Gould in terms of the dehumanization resulting from a commitment to a public role devoid of moral content: "if ever a man has fetichized the production of commodities, if ever a man has surrendered his self to his social role, it is Charles Gould. The sterility of the mine is the sterility of his marriage."⁶⁸

The relationship of the Goulds enters a permanent impasse which reflects in turn the tension at the core of Conrad's fiction, that between his suspicion that moral ideals themselves are no longer viable because "there was something inherent in the necessities of successful action which carried with it the moral degradation of the idea"⁶⁹ and his hope for the emergence of a moral principle that would provide man with a rational relation to his society and thereby infuse his personal life with meaning.

II

The Fragmented Narrative: The Absence Of An Organizing Principle

Conrad's breaking up of the chronology of his plot in Nostromo is the structural equivalent of his conviction that there is not to be found a moral principle by which progress toward ethical social relations might be made. His narrative lacks the traditional organizing principle that would "logically" order events because men have yet to embody such a principle in their everyday lives. To demonstrate the absence of a viable moral standard, Conrad juxtaposes past and present events, each event in itself revealing the failure of men and of the society they have organized to improve the human condition.

Joseph Warren Beach attributes Conrad's departure from a strict chronological ordering of the events in his novels to first "story-telling strategy" and Conrad's concern with "the reader's interest," and to second a "question of naturalness, lifelikeness, and getting away from the formality associated with an author."⁷⁰ He derives his approach from Ford Madox Ford's dictum that "you must first get him [the character] in with a strong impression; and then work backwards and forwards over his past,"⁷¹ for "in your gradual making acquaintanceship with your fellows you never do go straight forward".⁷²

But a purely formalistic explanation precludes a consideration of the usefulness of a technique for what the author is trying to say. Beach is right to point out the

qualities of realism inherent in the "impressionistic method," but Albert Guerard approaches much closer to Conrad's purpose in his analysis of why Conrad chooses not to relate events chronologically:

...the chronological dislocations and distortions of emphasis may reflect a theory of history as repetitive yet inconsecutive, devoid of reason, refusing to make sense.⁷³

There is an implied moral judgment in Conrad's making it not matter whether we first see the dictator Don Vincente Ribiera foolishly gallop into Sulaco on a lame mule, or witness, instead, Guzman Bento's torture of Don Jose Avellanos, an event which occurred before the sequence of events in Costaguana with which Conrad deals directly. To reminisce over events that have occurred in the past with as much interest as is devoted to describing the action of the moment is, in Conrad's case, to condemn the present for its failure to improve upon the past. It is for the reader who alone is given the role of ordering events accurately to discover that no moral or redeeming quality distinguishes the present from an unjust past. Conrad persistently distorts his chronology, almost as if he wishes to force his reader into awareness of a shared problem. He often seems to be preoccupied with the need for a valid moral standard; and he sometimes does not seem to be convinced that no such standard is accessible.

Conrad begins Nostromo with the legend of the "two wandering sailors" and the "good-for-nothing mozo" who went into the precipices of Azuera to find gold and never returned. That he does not begin with any one of his "major" characters

is in keeping with his intention that "silver" and the motives of men for material gain be "the pivot" of the narrative. The first person whom we encounter who will be involved in the action is Captain Mitchell, "Fussy Joe," and the first event related, one described as having happened some time in the past, is the escape of "poor Senor Ribiera (such was the dictator's name)" who "had come pelting eighty miles over mountain-tracks after the lost battle of Socorro, in the hope of out-distancing the fatal news - which, of course, he could not manage to do on a lame mule."⁷⁴ Captain Mitchell, however, with the aid of Nostromo, an "invaluable fellow,"⁷⁵ succeeds in spiriting Ribiera out of Costaguana on one of the Company's steamers. There is the logic of Conrad's judgment on what Captain Mitchell calls "cosas de Costaguana" in his juxtaposing the legend of Azuera, the introduction of "our excellent Senor Mitchell" and the escape of the "poor" dictator.

Nostromo begins where it ends, both chronologically, since the same government presides over Costaguana in the last scene as in the first, and in terms of the moral quality of those who govern. For although a stable government seems to be in power, Captain Mitchell still fears "the frequent changes of government brought about by revolutions of the military type."⁷⁶ The story of the "gringo ghosts of Azuera," those legendary inhabitants, becomes an appropriate headnote to a novel which reveals that despite the furious interchanging of political roles, from an ethical point of view nothing changes. The juxtaposition of the legend with the somewhat

ridiculous flight of the dictator Ribiera, which occurred some time later, reinforces this point. The legend, a universal statement, remains valid; the standard dictating that men sacrifice even their lives for the power of material gain becomes almost an absolute to be contrasted with the defeat of the ethical absolutes of "pity" and "justice" in a world dominated by material interests.

To further dramatize the incoherence of life in a society not founded upon a moral principle, only a few chapters later Conrad describes the fateful lunch aboard the Juno which took place eighteen months before. Both Ribiera and his successor, General Montero, are present. If we have seen Ribiera, all dignity gone, "pelting" over the mountains, we see him now as "a Blanco of the Blancos," "smiling urbanely."⁷⁶ But at first Conrad offers only a brief picture of this momentous event. Lunch aboard the Juno is resumed only after the history of the Gould family has been told, and Sir John, Holroyd and Hernandez have been introduced. The reader must first be made aware of the omnipresence of the men whose enterprises will make a just Costaguana impossible before he is allowed to return to the luncheon which now ironically honors Sir John, about to build a railway for the "development" of Costaguana.

The embarrassment of the afternoon is, of course, General Montero, who is annoyed at being ignored in the excitement over Sir John. Conrad has framed the event with first, Sir John's pleased discovery that "the San Tomé

administration had, in part, at least,"⁷⁷ financed the dictatorship of Ribiera. Sir John's faith in "this great development of material interests"⁷⁸ is juxtaposed with the ironic comment of Conrad's narrator who only seems to go along with the optimism of this chairman of the railway: "serious, well-informed men seemed...to hope for better things, for the establishment of legality, of good faith and order in public life."⁷⁹

But who chooses to be "well-informed" enough to predict the ascendancy of Montero, whose sense of his own importance having been injured, proposes a drunken toast to Sir John?: "I drink to the health of the man who brings us a million and a half of pounds."⁸⁰ Montero's brief self-assertion seems to color the tone of the entire event; its seeming irrationality, if only from a polite point of view, barely conceals that Montero will not stand by and allow the development of enterprises like Sir John's without himself trying to grab a share of the wealth. And only a few scenes later Conrad describes the liberal exertions of Don Jose Avellanos, made in the service of the Ribiera government, and by now obviously futile. "Militarism is the enemy," he prophetically declares in one of his speeches addressed in the sala of the Provincial Assembly "with its portraits of the Liberators on the walls."⁸¹ Prophecy will be impotent before Montero's drive to power.

The principle behind the ordering of the plot of Nostromo is at every stage to point out the futility of liberal ideals such as "order, peace, [and] progress"⁸² as

in Costaguanan society they become merely a way of protecting the business enterprises of men like Holroyd, Sir John, and Charles Gould. The details of Senor Ribiera's escape are finally given only once the stage has been set for the next turn in Costaguanan politics and it has been decided that Decoud and Nostromo are to save the silver of the mine from the Monteros. Decoud has already read his plan for the separation of Sulaco from the Republic to a prostrate Don Jose:

...poor Ribiera had many adventures, got separated from his guide, lost his mount, struggled down to the Campo on foot, and if he had not thrown himself on the mercy of a ranchero would have perished a long way from Sulaco.⁸³

The forces that will lead the next revolt have already been set into motion. The personal fate of Ribiera is unimportant. He is a tool of men like Gould and Avellanos. And Conrad seems to suggest that Charles Gould and Don Jose are equally corrupt. Neither is guided by an effective moral principle. Interchangeable in time are the events into which Conrad's characters put so much of their energy and so much "sincerity." The seeds of failure of each new government are planted just as the last coalition is shown in its death throes.

Equally determined by a moral judgment is Conrad's disordering of the events which close the novel and which obliquely reveal the details of the defeat of the Monterists and the victory of the Separationists. For Conrad to have progressed chronologically toward the victory of Gould and the Blancos might have created the effect of a triumph of the forces of stability over those of disorder. The chronological

treatment of events in Middlemarch does not necessarily detract from George Eliot's sense of the fragility of absolute standards of conduct, if only because her focus is on the personal development of her characters. As long as Dorothea Brooke in her private life can mediate the difficulty of finding a "medium" in which her "ardent deeds" may take shape,⁸⁴ the meaning of the novel as a whole is not dependent upon the moral status of society.

Conrad's skepticism that moral progress can arise from the final events of Nostromo is expressed in his refusal to show any improvement in the human relationships which have become strained throughout the course of the novel. The chapter in which, as alone as Isabel Archer before the fire in The Portrait Of A Lady, Mrs. Gould recognizes that "no one would ever ask her with solicitude what she was thinking of,"⁸⁵ that her close relationship with her husband would be "only a short moment of forgetfulness,"⁸⁶ immediately follows that describing the death of Decoud, an event which occurred years earlier. For both Mrs. Gould and Decoud have been disillusioned by the absence of an objective moral standard which could give meaning to one's life. Because he has no faith in the triumph of a moral principle that would change society for the better, Decoud loses all sense of the reality of his relation to Antonia:

He resolved not to give himself up hopelessly to those people in Sulaco, who had beset him, unreal and terrible, like jibbering and obscene spectres. He saw himself struggling feebly in their midst, and Antonia, gigantic and lovely like an allegorical statue, looking on with scornful eyes at his weakness.⁸⁷

On the tenth day, after a night spent without even dozing off once (it had occurred to him that Antonia could not possibly have ever loved a being so impalpable as himself), the solitude appeared like a great void....⁸⁸

Although they occur at different times, these scenes with Decoud and Mrs. Gould are juxtaposed because they reveal the same truth: that there is an unbreakable connection between the moral quality of one's public life and the sustaining of one's personal relationships. The tension in Nostromo between Conrad's despair over the absence of a moral principle and his hope that some adjustment in men's values may lead to the discovery of an absolute standard of conduct is nowhere more apparent than in the different views that he takes toward the disillusionment of Decoud and of Mrs. Gould.

Decoud he seems at least partly to accuse of surrendering to despair too soon out of a lack of faith to which all men are heir:

The brilliant Costaguanero of the boulevards had died from solitude and want of faith in himself and others.⁸⁹

Both his intelligence and his passion were swallowed up easily in this great unbroken solitude of waiting without faith.⁹⁰

Conrad reiterates the leit-motif describing Decoud as a "boulevardier." He contrasts Decoud's "brilliance" with his "want of faith in [him]self," and he seems to suggest that Decoud's is a universal problem, one, like the fact of death, to be accepted. Conrad's narrator accuses Decoud of taking himself too seriously. And Albert Guerard agrees that "there is, generally, a marked discrepancy between what Decoud does and says and is, and what the narrator or omniscient author

says about him."⁹¹ Guerard attributes the narrator's judgment to Conrad's "condemning Decoud for a withdrawal and skepticism more radical than Decoud ever shows; which are, in fact, Conrad's own."⁹² It may be true that Conrad places his scepticism into the mouth of Decoud, that he uses this character to express his own world-view, and that, therefore, Decoud's responses seem to be incommensurate with the shallow cynicism of his personality. But this is not to say that through Decoud Conrad expresses his own troubled "deeply patriotic and even excited feeling toward Poland."⁹³ Conrad's statements in Nostromo always seem to be integrated with the concerns of the novel.

But if Conrad finally suggests that Decoud ought to have lived to fight in the ranks, Mrs. Gould seems to be faced with the inevitable destruction of her personal ideals by the brutalities of capitalism:

She saw the San Tomé mountain hanging over the Camp, over the whole land, feared, hated, wealthy, more soulless than any tyrant, more pitiless and autocratic than the worst government, ready to crush innumerable lives in the expansion of its greatness.⁹⁴

In his examinations of the thoughts of Mrs. Gould, Conrad seems to alternate between despair because even the idea of a moral principle seems inconceivable and nostalgia for the possibility of such an ideal.

Both scenes of reverie, for Mrs. Gould and for Decoud, are preceded by Captain Mitchell's exposition of the beauties of Sulaco and the triumphs of the defeat of the Monterists. His narrative follows the death of Decoud by

several years and follows as well the return of the Goulds from their visit "to Europe and the United States of America,"⁹⁵ a return that crystallizes for Emilia Gould the poverty of feeling that characterizes her marriage. Captain Mitchell's unrestrained praise of the "Treasure House Of The World" which was "saved intact for civilization" is later to be undercut by the revelations of how wasted were the lives of Decoud and Mrs. Gould. That personal tragedy directly stemming from the latest revolution comes to one of its most articulate citizens, while the cumulative effect of living in this society brings lifelong misery to another, is Conrad's comment on the pointlessness of the victory over even the brutal Monteros.

It is only the hopelessly unaware Captain Mitchell whom Conrad allows to exalt Dr. Monygham's feat of keeping Sotillo in the harbor searching for the silver and so saving Sulaco from "massacres and proscription that would have left no man or woman of position alive."⁹⁶ For the very mine extolled by Captain Mitchell as "a great power, this, for good and evil"⁹⁷ has permanently alienated the Goulds from each other. Mitchell admits that political unrest is still present in Sulaco among "these socialistic Italians, sir, with their secret societies, camorras, and such like."⁹⁸ The political and personal failures of the novel justify the dead Decoud's description of "the universe as a succession of incomprehensible images."⁹⁹ They may also subtly admonish him for escaping from the ranks while social injustice remains to be overcome.

The effect of the break-up of chronology is, in

general, to prevent the plot by what would be its rush to a causally prepared-for conclusion from affirming any basic truths by which men ought to live. The outcome of the plot of Tom Jones, the discovery that Tom actually belongs to the gentry, is important because Fielding can now give him the opportunity to live a prudent life under conditions of his own choosing; there is a convergence of the action of the novel with the positive principles that Fielding's narrator has been praising. Conrad's plots can progress to no such unity because he is extremely doubtful of the viability of moral principles. For this reason, neither can he, in Nostromo, permit his narrator to engage even in the kind of semi-prescriptive commentary offered by George Eliot.

III

The Disappearance Of The Narrator As Actor: The Absence Of Absolute Truths

Lord Jim is narrated primarily by Marlow and its distortions in chronology can be explained, at least technically, by the fact that Marlow discovers the details of Jim's case only in a haphazard manner. But more importantly, Marlow seems to distort the chronology when he tells Jim's story to his friends because he wishes to avoid facing a truth that an objectively ordered telling of the events might reveal. For what is at stake is the ideal of conduct that Marlow has spent his life upholding and that Jim has transgressed. By presenting Jim's story in fragments, Marlow can speak as if circum-

stances and Jim's "imagination" conspired against the attainment of the ideal. But the import of the novel as a whole seems to be that the very feasibility of an "ideal of conduct" seems to be called into question. Neither from the French lieutenant nor from Stein nor even from the "privileged man" to whom he writes is Marlow given a satisfactory moral standard by which he could judge Jim.

It is true that a distorted sequence of the early events of Jim's life is given by the omniscient author himself. We learn first that Jim is a Water Clerk, then about his boyhood and his going to sea for the first time, then of the Patna's hitting a derelict. Only much later do we learn that Jim became a Water Clerk only after the Court of Inquiry revoked his Certificate and after he has fled from the house of Marlow's friend. Why does Conrad himself deliberately confuse the order of events from the very beginning?

Lord Jim as a whole offers no answer as to whether what happened to Jim was the result of a fatal flaw in the conduct of a man who in every way was "one of us,"¹⁰⁰ or whether, more generally, the novel is about an insufficiency in preconceived ideals once they must sustain themselves in concrete circumstances. Conrad becomes Marlow's accomplice in now answering this question, and in respect to Lord Jim Irving Howe is surely right in accusing Conrad of an "inability to commit himself fully to his materials."¹⁰¹ Howe points out the essential contrast in Marlow's commentary between "the desire to cling to moral formulae and the recognition that modern life cannot be lived by them."¹⁰²

The Marlow for whom Kurtz's dying words, "the horror, the horror," are "an affirmation, a moral victory,"¹⁰³ lies to Kurtz's Intended in the same spirit as he lies to himself. For if he were not to lie to the woman who shared in the idealism with which Kurtz began his voyage, Marlow would be confronted by the meaninglessness of such abstract ideals as "pity," "science," and "progress"¹⁰⁴ which have no reality in the Belgian Congo. In Lord Jim Conrad contrasts the commentary infused with Marlow's sympathy for Jim with the reports of characters who succeed where Jim fails. Conrad and Marlow both seem to be mystified by how "one of us" could stray so far.

Although the testimony of the Helmsmen, the story of Little Bob Stanton and his conversation with the French lieutenant obviously condemn Jim, Marlow persists in defending him. For Marlow, to rehabilitate Jim is also to maintain the inviolability of his own absolute moral code:

Why I longed to go on grubbing into the deplorable details of an occurrence which, after all, concerned me no more than as a member of an obscure body of men held together by a community of inglorious toil and by fidelity to a certain standard of conduct, I can't explain...I hoped for the impossible - for the laying of what is the most obstinate ghost of man's creation...the doubt of the sovereign power enthroned in a fixed standard of conduct.¹⁰⁵

Although Marlow recognizes the risk he runs "of being circumvented, blinded, decoyed,"¹⁰⁶ he becomes a somewhat unreliable commentator on Jim's moral life. Both he and Conrad, while they agree, as Marlow tells Jewel, that "nobody, nobody is good enough,"¹⁰⁷ still cannot renounce their allegiance to the

the standard decreeing that under no circumstances should Jin have jumped, under no circumstances should he have bargained with Gentleman Brown. For such a renunciation might point up the futility in Jim's determination to prove himself worthy of any ideal at all.

Only in terms of Jim's treatment of Jewel is Marlow forced toward a judgment of Jim in terms of the irrelevance of the code by which he tried to live: "he goes away from a living woman to celebrate his pitiless wedding with a shadowy ideal of conduct."¹⁰⁸ In the face of the wasted lives he leaves behind, Marlow can condemn Jim for "his exalted egoism,"¹⁰⁹ but nowhere else in the novel is Marlow willing to question that "shadowy ideal of conduct." Marlow criticizes only the extent to which Jim allows that false standard to encompass his life. The jumbled chronology seems to be necessary primarily for Marlow to explain Jim satisfactorily to himself. As Douglas Hewitt points out, the quality of the narrative reflects both Marlow's and Conrad's lack of distance from Jim:

The effect of muddlement which is so commonly found in Lord Jim comes, in short, from this - that Marlow is himself muddled. We look to him for a definite comment, explicit or implicit, on Jim's conduct and he is not able to give it... just as much as Marlow is [Conrad] himself fighting to retain a faith in the efficacy and total goodness of the "few simple notions!"¹¹⁰

In Nostromo Conrad can impose no such semi-reliable narrator because the point of view of the novel as a whole is that there is little possibility of rehabilitating the old ideals. The Marlow in search of certainty and a "fixed standard of conduct" would be out of place in a novel which asserts

the absence of such a standard. Irving Howe points to "the voice of Conrad himself" as a "major 'character',"¹¹¹ but in his own voice Conrad is not involved in a search for values and is careful not to identify himself with the idealism of any of his characters. The ironic tone of the omniscient narrator seems to reflect a consciousness very much aware that it is not satisfying the expectations of the reader for a set of positive principles which would provide the novel with an affirmative statement.

Everywhere Conrad's narrator finds disillusionment in the wake of men's aspirations. Underlying the irony with which he exposes the illusions by which men live is his sense that however resolutely men pursue their goals, however closely they approach principles of rectitude, they fail to create a moral standard. Moral goals are frequently undermined by the means chosen to fulfill them, and nowhere is this more apparent than in Charles Gould's intention to keep "the idea of wealth...as a means, not as an end."¹¹² Of old Mr. Gould's reluctance to compromise with the "gang in possession of the Presidential palace" this narrator has little sympathy: "he attached too much importance to form. It is a failing common to mankind, whose views are tinged by prejudices."¹¹³

But that action in itself, mere fighting in the ranks for its own sake, is valuable, is only another illusion by which men attempt to sustain themselves:

Action is consolatory. It is the enemy of thought and the friend of flattering illusions. Only in the conduct of our action can we find the sense of mastery over the Fates.¹¹⁴

In our activity alone do we find the sustaining illusion of an independent existence as against the whole scheme of things of which we form a helpless part.¹¹⁵

Action, in which is to be found the illusion of a mastered destiny, can alone satisfy our uneasy vanity and lay to rest the haunting fear of the future.¹¹⁶

If men are indeed "helpless," it is, the omniscient author sometimes suggests, perhaps because they are involved in a "vain endeavor to attain an enduring solution to the problem."¹¹⁷ Yet at other times, by his very pointing to the absence of a standard of morality, he suggests that such a standard would successfully relieve the suffering to which men seem now to be heir:

Not, perhaps, that primitive men were more faithless than their descendants of to-day, but that they went straighter to their aim and were more artless in their recognition of success as the only standard of morality.¹¹⁸

The narrator implies that men must begin by admitting that they have no standard of morality.

At times Conrad's narrator praises those who attempt to live by positive principles. He is willing temporarily to suspend his judgment of their success. In the description of the first days of the relationship between the Goulds he seems not to criticize "that splendor of hopeful love, which to the most sensible minds appears like a triumph of good over all the evils of the earth."¹¹⁹ He knows that the triumph is only an apparent one; he is lenient toward their idealism because he recognizes the inevitability of man's search for certainties. For it is this same narrator who broodingly writes that "man is a desperately conservative creature."¹²⁰ Far

removed from the tone of Nostromo is Eloise Knapp Hay's assertion that Conrad's "idealism" "leads him again and again to sympathetic consideration of the positive bases of government in human nature."¹²¹

The tension between Conrad's nostalgia for a fixed standard of conduct and his doubt that preconceived codes can morally shape a set of circumstances persists in the voice of the omniscient narrator. At times he seems to say that the rejection of absolutes is unnecessary. For example, his tone suggests that Dr. Monygham's distrust of Nostromo is gratuitous, and that Dr. Monygham ought not to have been "disillusioned as to mankind in general because of the particular instance in which his own manhood had failed."¹²² Yet the comments of this same narrator on the disillusionment of both Decoud and of Nostromo point to an inevitable defeat awaiting the men who aspire to shape their world, whatever the motives or the contents of their plans. Decoud he calls "a victim of the disillusioned weariness which is the retribution meted out to intellectual audacity,"¹²³ Nostromo, a "victim of the disenchanted vanity which is the reward of audacious action."¹²⁴ By neither the most strenuous exertions of thought or action can man succeed in discovering what to do about the void left at the heart of society by the unrealizability of a moral standard.

That surrogate narrators relate long sections of Nostromo suggests Conrad's abdication of the search for a moral standard in favor of exemplifications of its absence.

The ironies in Captain Mitchell's narration of the effects

of Separation on Sulaco have already been commented upon. If Marlow as a semi-reliable narrator seriously offered "work" and "fidelity" as bulwarks against the void of having no principle by which to live, Captain Mitchell, his sea-going counterpart, ironically is made to offer "devotion," "courage," "fidelity," and "intelligence" along with fearlessness and incorruptibility.¹²⁵ For him these are the factors which make up a successful action such as Nostromo's ride to General Barrios with the letters from Sulaco. Nostromo's consciousness, unknown to Captain Mitchell, has already rebelled against the empty ideals of "devotion" and "fidelity" to masters concerned only with their own safety and with the safety of their material wealth. His "intelligence" and "courage" are now enlisted in the service of his own interests. The tone of the narrative told by Mitchell approaches farce as almost everything he praises the novel has already exposed as hollow.

The most important of Conrad's surrogate narrators is Decoud himself who in a letter to his sister relates the events leading up to the arrival of the victorious Monteros. The value of relating part of the narrative from the point of view of so intelligent a spokesman is to diminish the distance between the reader and the characters. Conrad makes use of Decoud's scepticism; it enables him to comment on the absence of morality in the Gould enterprise with enthusiasm and immediacy. Gould he calls an "idealist" who "cannot act or exist without idealizing every simple feeling, desire, or achievement. He could not believe his own motives if he did not make them first a part of some fairy-tale."¹²⁶

Although Conrad himself has already called Gould "the Idealist creator of Material Interests,"¹²⁷ the effect of having Decoud make the judgment as well is to provide the narrative with verisimilitude; an intelligent observer, a reporter, could do no less than affirm Conrad's own judgment. Totally reliable as long as he exposes illusions masked by "altruistic" motives, Decoud, in his narrative, which forms the center of Nostromo, can make general statements about the meaning of all that has come before:

...he [Gould] trusts her [Emilia] perhaps, but I fancy more rather as if he wished to make up for some subtle wrong, for that sentimental unfaithfulness which surrenders her happiness, her life, to the seduction of an idea.¹²⁸

...the sentimentalism of the people that will never do anything for the sake of their passionate desire, unless it comes to them clothed in the fair robes of an idea.¹²⁹

In the very act of participating with the owner of the San Tomé mine in his manipulations, Decoud can attack Gould's idealism. For an omniscient narrator to have made these statements might have imparted to them the static quality of absolute truths. To have Decoud make them is to enable the reader to contrast his criticism of those motivated by "material interests" with his own difficulty in finding a satisfying way of life. Just as particular circumstances belie the usefulness of "ideals," experience as a whole, Conrad implies, may belie the validity of any absolute truth, and even suggest that no standard of conduct is likely to make significant changes in the structure of society.

IV

Techniques of Characterization: The Failures Of The Ideal

Conrad's techniques of characterization in Nostromo reflect a tension between the search for moral principles by characters who wish to live ethically and the impossibility, according to Conrad, of applying preconceived ideas to experience in a hostile environment. Critics, generally feeling that Nostromo's weakest aspect is its characters, seem to wish that Conrad had written a different kind of novel. Jocelyn Baines objects that "most of the characters...exist for what they represent rather than for what they are;"¹³⁰ Beach calls Nostromo as a whole "unsatisfactory because no one character or group of characters holds the center of the stage long enough for us to grow comfortably interested in him or it;"¹³¹ Mrs. Hay complains that Nostromo "argues a theory of history almost at the cost of its felt life and characterization;"¹³² and Leavis attributes the "hollowness" felt in the novel to the absence of "an intimate sense conveyed of the day-by-day continuities of social living."¹³³

All of these critics seem to object to Conrad's use of characters to test the worth of principles. But Conrad's purpose in Nostromo is primarily to find an answer, even if a relative one, to the question of what men should live by. Unlike Henry James, he is not interested in weaving a pattern of personal destinies scrupulously embroidered. The requirements of his form are determined by the nature of his content. Further, to have satisfied Leavis and presented the intimate

details of everyday life might have meant allowing the reader, through his familiar acceptance of old forms of narration, to continue believing in the idea that Conrad is calling into question, that principles or "ideals" are adequate guides to conduct. His intention, Conrad wrote, was to write a kind of novel "perfectly devoid of familiarity as between author and reader."¹³⁴

Conrad refuses to provide an abstract definition of his characters. Rather than being a bundle of static qualities, each is defined by the public role he has chosen to play; his personal relationships flow from the demands made upon his personality by this role. Unlike Jane Austen or George Eliot, Conrad refuses to place an absolute value on private experience that can avoid social demands.

Conrad uses a variety of techniques to dramatize the confrontation between his characters and the emptiness of the ideals by which they have sought to define their lives. Simple is his use of (1) the gesture, in which a character, shown in relief, apart from the texture of his daily life, performs a simple action which reveals how blindly men live in the name of principles of conduct. The gesture may be symbolic of the general irrelevance of ideals. Giorgio Viola, the old Garibaldino, by his very person, isolated and alone in exile in Costaguana, points to the gulf between republican or liberal ideals and their realization in a concrete political situation:

"We wanted nothing, we suffered for the love of all humanity!" he cried out furiously sometimes, and the powerful voice, the blazing eyes, the shaking of the white mane, the brown, sinewy hand pointing upward as if to call Heaven to witness,

impressed his hearers. After the old man had broken off abruptly with a jerk of the head and a movement of the arm, meaning clearly, "But what's the good of talking to you?" they nudged each other.¹³⁵

The intensity of the old man's convictions, expressed in the violence of his gestures, is to be contrasted with the meaninglessness of a "love of all humanity" in a society dominated by men like Guzman Bento and Charles Gould. The futility of the ideal is reflected in Giorgio's impatient gesture. Conrad places him on the periphery of society because he holds on to ideals long after their reality has been called into question.

Conrad reveals character through action, but the action in his novels points beyond individual characters to a statement about ethical values. Symbolic of the effect that her husband's idealistic enterprise will have on her life is Mrs. Gould's gesture as the first lump of silver is extracted from the mine:

...she had laid her unmercenary hands, with an eagerness that made them tremble, upon the first silver ingot turned out still warm from the mould; and by her imaginative estimate of its power she endowed that lump of metal with a justificative conception, as though it were not a mere fact, but something far-reaching and impalpable, like the true expression of an emotion or the emergency of a principle.¹³⁶

Mrs. Gould's gesture, her attitude dramatically associating the silver with a "principle," suggests more the difficulty of satisfying principles in the material world than it reveals her "character"; her gesture asks the reader to consider what relation there could be between "silver" and "principle."

More frequently than the dramatic gesture, Conrad frames his characters in a (2) vignette, which may or may not

expand to become an episode. The most striking is perhaps that of Nostromo awakening on the beach and watched over by a patient vulture to whom he mutters, "I am not dead yet."¹³⁷ The scene, before which the narrative pauses, is important because Nostromo's physical return to consciousness is accompanied by his more meaningful discovery of the emptiness of the ideal by which he has tried to live. The device of the vignette provides a needed emphasis. The dryness of mouth Nostromo feels becomes more than the dryness of heavy sleep: "it may be said that Nostromo tasted the dust and ashes of the fruit of life into which he had bitten deeply in his hunger for praise."¹³⁸ And Nostromo's political awakening is summed up in a gesture within this vignette:

Without removing his head from between his fists he tried to spit before him - "Tfui" - and muttered a curse upon the selfishness of all the rich people.¹³⁹

Powerfully vivid vignettes reveal the defeat of ideals by the stronger forces of greed and rapacity which always seem to be the motives of those gaining political power. The hopes of Conrad's characters for social improvement are undercut by images depicting the humiliations idealistic people have undergone in the past:

It was a diminished company of nearly naked skeletons, loaded with irons, covered with dirt, with vermin, with raw wounds, all men of position, of education, of wealth, who had learned to fight among themselves for scraps of rotten beef thrown to them by soldiers, or to beg a negro cook for a drink of muddy water in pitiful accents. Don Jose Avellanosa, clanking his chains among the others, seemed only to exist in order to prove how much hunger, pain, degradation, and cruel torture a human body can stand without parting with the last spark of life.¹⁴⁰

Even if a moral principle were the correct one, it could not make its presence felt under such conditions of unrestrained brutality.

The dramatic vignette itself can reveal the futility of people living without moral direction in the absence of standards powerful enough to compete against the rampant forces of moral anarchy. At the Casa Viola, writing to his sister, we see Decoud in a vignette which pictorially condemns him for not struggling to discover such a principle:

The highly colored lithograph of the Faithful Hero [Garibaldi] seemed to look dimly, in the light of one candle, at the man with no faith in anything except the truth of his own sensations.¹⁴¹

Yet other vignettes justify Decoud's scepticism, for example, that showing Don Jose's Fifty Years Of Misrule "floating in the gutters, fired out as wads for trabucos loaded with handfuls of type, blown in the wind, trampled in the mud"¹⁴² or that depicting the walk of Dr. Monygham on his way to keep Sotillo from joining the Monteros, as if this measure would in itself ensure the emergence of a moral principle:

The doctor, holding a straight course for the custom-house, appeared lonely, hopping among the dark bushes like a tall bird with a broken wing.¹⁴³

The sombre tone of the portrait seems itself to mediate against the possibility of a moral victory emerging from the errand, however immediately useful it seems to defeat the Monteros.

The vignette employed as a major device tends to prevent any one character from coming to the foreground as a hero. Just as we are shown framed portraits of Decoud, Don Jose or Dr. Monygham, with equal emphasis we see the masses of Costaguana enter Sulaco behind Pedrito Montero. In a novel that

explores society's need for a moral principle, the presence of the people must be felt:

Through the middle of the street streamed, like a torrent of rubbish, a mass of straw hats, ponchos, gun-barrels, with an enormous green-and-yellow flag flapping in their midst, in a cloud of dust, to the furious beating of drums.¹⁴⁴

Even if Conrad views the natives of Costaguana as faceless, plunged in "mental darkness,"¹⁴⁵ and not knowing their own needs, he still treats them as a major political force.

For a deeper portrait of the individual, Conrad turns to (3) the emerging biography as a set piece and to (4) the remembered episode. Why a character either retains his faith in ideals, or, disillusioned, rejects them, can usually be explained in terms of some event in his past. Jim, Conrad's character who clings to preconceived ideals the longest, "originally came from a parsonage:"¹⁴⁶

Jim's father possessed such certain knowledge of the Unknowable as made for the righteousness of people in cottages without disturbing the ease of mind of those whom an unerring providence enables to live in mansions.¹⁴⁷

Jim's aspiration to commit large acts of heroism is clearly related to an upbringing in which abstract ideas were given unprecedented importance before the more commonplace realities of everyday life.

The biographies of people become relevant as they comment on the conflict between moral and material interests. Don Pepe, holding that first silver ingot which Mrs. Gould endowed with "the emergency of a principle," mentions "the muchachos of Hernandez,"¹⁴⁸ the bandit whose biography Conrad then juxtaposes. Hernandez, a "small ranchero, kidnapped with

circumstances of peculiar atrocity...and forced to serve in the army"¹⁴⁹ in his person expresses first the victimization of the innocent in a society unrestrained by positive principles, and second, the lawlessness that results from such injustice. That anarchy inevitably characterizes the society in which moral principles are absent is reflected in Hernandez's retaliation against the oppressing classes:

Poor country people he usually left alone; the upper class were often stopped on the roads and robbed; but any unlucky official that fell into his hands was sure to get a severe flogging.¹⁵⁰

The biography is a useful device for Conrad because a historical view of character can point out the effects on the whole life of an individual of living in a society lacking an idea of justice. In such a society the Sotillos emerge, people with "no convictions of any sort upon anything except as to the irresistible power of [their] personal advantages."¹⁵¹ A history of Sotillo's alignments reveals his partisanship with the Ribierist cause when he believes that "it had the enormous wealth of the Gould Concession on its side"¹⁵² and his subsequent commitment to the Monterist cause when he believes that to be in his interest.

What saves the novel from expressing the view that the human character in general, at the mercy of having to define itself in a brutal society, becomes, like Sotillo's, an arbitrary set of actions motivated by self-interest, is perhaps the biography of Dr. Monygham. From the rather distant hint that "years ago, in the time of Guzman Bento, he had been

mixed up, it was whispered, in a conspiracy which was betrayed, and as people expressed it, drowned in blood,"¹⁵³ Conrad brings us very close to the doctor tortured by his memory of Guzman Bento's Inquisitor, the merciless Father Beron:

Sometimes, on the nights when he walked the floor, he wondered, grinding his teeth with shame and rage, at the fertility of his imagination when stimulated by a sort of pain which makes truth, honor, self-respect, and life itself matters of little moment.¹⁵⁴

The ideals by which he defined his personality shattered, Dr. Monygham goes on in the last third of the novel to save Sulaco by preventing Sotillo from joining the Monteros, not out of patriotism but for the woman whom he loves; he becomes the one character to mourn the absence of a "moral principle" that would meaningfully change the course of history; he, more than any other character, has suffered the horrors of living without the comfort of a moral standard.

Because action is the primary means by which Conrad reveals character, his most important technique of characterization is (5) the dramatic interview or confrontation between two individuals. Each of these interviews contrasts men who justify their actions in the name of moral principles with the actions themselves which so obviously only protect material interests.

The reader sees in his interview with "Pedrito the guerillero"¹⁵⁵ that finally, Gould's is truly "an adventurer's easy morality which takes count of personal risk in the ethical apparising of his action."¹⁵⁶ Gould threatens Pedrito with the

withdrawal of European capital "in a cold-blooded manner"¹⁵⁷ which makes even Pedrito "shudder."¹⁵⁸ Pedrito, intimidated, invokes "the highest expression of democracy...Caesarism - the imperial rule based upon the direct popular vote"¹⁵⁹ and, carried away by his own rhetoric, cries, "we shall understand each other thoroughly, Don Carlos!"¹⁶⁰ - in a tone of fellowship. The Gould who threatens to blow up the mine emerges with no greater moral rectitude than the unscrupulous Pedrito. And the idealism of Gould's enterprise seems to be as much a sham as the grandiose aspirations of Pedrito. The interview, told from Pedrito's point of view, even invokes some sympathy for the half-educated guerillero faced with the cold audacity of Charles Gould.

Conrad uses the technique of the extended conversation lifted out of the main body of the narrative and forming a set piece to restate the terms of the conflict between the need for a moral principle and the difficulty of integrating such principles into the fabric of one's life. For such a purpose Dr. Monygham becomes the most important character since he both believes in such a principle and has seen how circumstances can destroy any ideal. In his conversation with the Chief Engineer, which is central to the meaning of the novel as a whole, Dr. Monygham seems to speak for Conrad. The Engineer has philosophized that "things seem to be worth nothing by what they are in themselves...the only solid thing about them is the spiritual value which every one discovers in his own form of activity."¹⁶¹ The doctor replies:

I put no spiritual value into my desires, or my opinions, or my actions...Have you met the impossible face to face - or have you, the Napoleon of railways, no such word in your dictionary?¹⁶²

The Engineer has been warmly enthusiastic over Decoud's plan for the separation of Sulaco; the doctor becomes not just a character in a novel trying to find personal salvation, but a voice trying to solve the larger question of the meaning and relevance of absolute principles once one senses the imminence of the impossible.

V

Conclusion: The Morality Of Felt Life

Nostromo as a whole laments the absence of a moral principle toward which society could progress. But rather than offer only a negative truth, for his "positive" Conrad turns to the fragmentary expression of emotion or sensibility. Mrs. Gould, Antonia Avellanos, even Linda Viola, emerge as his heroines. For Conrad's conclusion is that "the value of a sentence is in the personality which utters it, for nothing new can be said by man or woman."¹⁶³

Most valuable in a world unredeemed by a moral principle are the sentiments of the discriminating mind. Finding no resolution for the tensions he has uncovered, Conrad elevates moments of insight such as that experienced by Mrs. Gould "alone in the garden of the casa, with her husband at the mine and the house closed to the street":¹⁶⁴

...for life to be large and full it must contain the care of the past and of the future in every passing moment of the present.¹⁶⁵

But Mrs. Gould's insight does not lead to more successful relations with other human beings; it suggests no moral principle which could bind men into a community. Mrs. Gould, like Dorothea Brooke, cannot be satisfied with hospitals and with works of charity. She wants nothing less than that the measure of her world be its moral direction. Conrad himself, however, remains content to elevate her desire.

Finally only the personal gesture can remain uncontaminated, and perhaps the finest moment of the novel is contained in the portrait of the "beautiful Antonia" in the "Author's Note":

I long sometimes for another glimpse of the "beautiful Antonia"...standing absorbed in filial devotion before the monument of Don Jose Avellanos, and, with a tender, faithful glance at the medallion-memorial to Martin Decoud, going out serenely into the sunshine of the Plaza, with her upright carriage and her white head, a relic of the past disregarded by men awaiting impatiently the dawns of other New Eras, the coming of more revolutions.¹⁶⁶

Into the category of the pure moment also falls Linda Viola's passionate promise not to forget the man who never loved her and whom she will never see again: "I shall never forget thee. Never!...Never! Gian' Battista."¹⁶⁷ To Dr. Monygham this is indeed "another of Nostromo's successes, the greatest, the most enviable, the most sinister of all."¹⁶⁸ It is perhaps the greatest triumph the novel as a whole can offer, "sinister" in its expression of Conrad's retreat behind the purity of the gesture. Mrs. Gould's refusal to tell Dr. Monygham that Nostromo too was corrupted by the silver, "he told me

nothing,"¹⁶⁹ is symbolic of Conrad's withdrawal from the theme of the corruption of material interests to idealize the discriminating sensibility.

Finally Conrad seems only to provide a variation on Henry James's assertion of "the perfect dependence of the 'moral' sense of a work of art on the amount of felt life concerned in producing it."¹⁷⁰ For Conrad the "moral sense" has become dependent on the "amount of felt life" of which a character is capable. For if the expression of sensibility need not create a positive relation to another human being, it at least is not made in the name of such unworkable social ideals as "law" or "justice" or "progress."

Conrad has been preoccupied with a question posed also by Ramon Fernandez: "can the spiritual experience of the nineteenth century...supply or suggest some precise intellectual principles which would make human life work better?"¹⁷¹ Conrad has said no. But there remains an unresolved tension throughout Nostromo between Conrad's belief that moral ideals cannot be realized and his hope that men may discover some principle that could be sustained even in a temporarily immoral social setting. For when he says, for example, that "many States have been powerful, but, perhaps, none have been truly great - as yet,"¹⁷² he is still writing as if there have yet to come into being the precise intellectual principles which would provide the foundation for an ethical social order. The power of Dr. Monygham's invocation of such a moral principle seems to haunt Nostromo:

There is no peace and rest in the development of material interests. They have their law and their justice. But it is founded on expediency, and is inhuman; it is without rectitude, without the continuity and the force that can be found only in a moral principle.¹⁷³

And in an essay written a year after Nostromo, Conrad again says not that ideals necessarily cannot work, but that civilization has yet to discover its ethical imperative:

The trouble of the civilized world is the want of a common conservative principle abstract enough to give the impulse, practical enough to form the rallying point of international action tending towards the restraint of particular ambitions...whether such a principle exists - who can say? If it does not, then it ought to be invented...So far there is no trace of such a principle anywhere in sight.¹⁷⁴

But just as often Conrad questions whether ideals could ever function as moral absolutes. And perhaps more characteristic of his tone and his attitude toward moral imperatives are his remarks on the failure of the French revolution:

It is the bitter fate of any idea to lose its royal form and power, to lose its 'virtue' the moment it descends from its solitary throne to work its will among the people...the degradation of the ideas of freedom and justice at the root of the French Revolution is made manifest in the person of its heir; a personality without law or faith....¹⁷⁵

In a sense Conrad almost totally rejects the "spiritual" experience of the nineteenth century." For like the eighteenth, it placed entirely too much faith in ideals and rules of conduct. And Morton Dauwen Zabel is right in emphasizing Conrad's opposition to "the nineteenth century's seduction by abstractions, by the resounding appeal of moral terms or shibboleths

that had lost their basis in conduct or sincerity."¹⁷⁶ Finally Conrad seems to be saying that the exigencies common to social acts invariably destroy the power of an idea to change the world. The Conrad who sought "what is enduring and essential"¹⁷⁷ finally offers no moral vision more substantial than Marlow's elevation of work, which gives you a chance to find "your own reality, for yourself, not for others - what no other man can ever know."¹⁷⁸

Notes

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- 3 Ibid., p. 57.
- 4 "A Personal Record," The Works Of Joseph Conrad, Volume Nine (London, 1925), p. 96.
- 5 "Letter of 8th March 1895," Letters From Joseph Conrad, 1895-1924, ed. Edward Garnett (Indianapolis, 1928), p. 33.
- 6 "Letter of 15th March 1895," Ibid., p. 34.
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- 8 "Introduction," Nostromo (New York: The Modern Library, 1951), pp. xvi-xvii.
- 9 (New York: A Signet Book, 1958), p. 86.
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- 11 Politics And The Novel (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), p. 81.
- 12 Lord Jim (New York: The Modern Library), p. 214.
- 13 "Author's Note," Victory (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1921), p. x.
- 14 Victory, pp. 338-339.
- 15 Lord Jim, p. 148.
- 16 Nostromo, p. 557.
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29 Daniel Deronda (New York: A Harper Torchbook, 1961), p. 64.

30 "Letter to Ernest Benz, 7th March 1923," Aubry, II, 296.

31 "Leaves From A Note-Book," The Works of George Eliot, XII, 301.

32 Nostromo, p. 569.

33 "Autocracy and War," Notes On Life And Letters, p. 111.

34 "Letter to R.B. Cunninghame-Graham, 8th February 1899," Aubry, I, 269.

35 Nostromo, p. 401.

36 Conrad The Novelist (Cambridge, 1958), p. 153.

37 Lord Jim, p. 339.

38 Nostromo, p. 57.

39 Ibid., p. 57.

40 Ibid., p. 58.

41 Ibid., p. 122.

42 Ibid., p. 431.

43 Ibid., p. 105.

44 Ibid., p. 99.

45 Ibid., p. 571.

- 46 Warren, p. xxix.
- 47 Nostromo, p. 535.
- 48 Ibid., p. 408.
- 49 Ibid., p. 563.
- 50 Ibid., p. 535.
- 51 Under Western Eyes, p. 66.
- 52 Nostromo, p. 627.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Lord Jim, p. 115.
- 55 Nostromo, p. 627.
- 56 Ibid., p. 569.
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 Ibid., p. 436.
- 59 "Author's Note," Under Western Eyes, p. x.
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- 61 See The Meaning Of Contemporary Realism (London, 1963), p. 71.
- 62 The Historical Novel, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Boston A Beacon Paperback, 1963), p. 23.
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- 65 Under Western Eyes, p. 99.
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79 Ibid., p. 129.
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83 Ibid., p. 267.
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97 Ibid., p. 543.
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- 99 Ibid., p. 557
- 100 "Author's Note," p. ix.
- 101 Howe, p. 113.
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- 119 Ibid., p. 80.
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- 122 Nostromo, p. 484.
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- 146 Lord Jim, p. 5.
- 147 Ibid.
- 148 Nostromo, p. 119.
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"The Ugly Imperialism Of The Absolute": Lawrence's Theory of Morality And His Techniques Of Composition

Introduction: Lawrence's Theories Of Morality And Art

A moral tradition for the English novel seems to end with George Eliot and Conrad. For Conrad seems to have been one of the last great English novelists who could write as if the lives of individuals, as well as the tenor of society as a whole, could be morally revitalized if only an ethical principle could be discovered and implemented. Conrad approached ethical problems in a more uncertain manner than did George Eliot, both in the scepticism he felt concerning the power of principles alone to alter either individual or collective life, and in the fragmented structure of his novels as these reflected and reaffirmed his scepticism. But although he feared the "moral degradation of the idea" - the corrosion of moral assumptions by experience - Conrad continued to define ethical behavior in terms of absolutes.

As troubled as Conrad by the irreconcilability between the need for and the difficulty of sustaining moral standards, Lawrence attempts to create an ethic that will at least supersede those absolutes which offer no support against the evils of modern industrial society. The point is not that Lawrence is unique because he alone seems to leave all traditional norms and values behind. Lawrence's world-view differs from that of his predecessors insofar as he believes that the

moral presuppositions he does make flow solely from the needs of the "self."

That Lawrence views morality solely in terms of the demands of the "self," that he seems to substitute individual judgment for traditional normative principles, inspired T.S. Eliot to accuse him of being "insensible to ordinary social morality."¹ Eliot sees the "monstrosity" of Lawrence's thinking in the fact that "Lawrence started life wholly free from any restriction of tradition or institution, that he had no guidance except the Inner Light, the most untrustworthy and deceitful guide that ever offered itself to wandering humanity."²

Rather, it seems that first, as F.R. Leavis points out, Lawrence does grow up in "the environment of a living tradition."³ And second, Lawrence consciously rejects both many of the cultural values of his early years, the Protestantism of the English provincial mining village, and some of the values of Western Civilization as a whole as well. In any case, he is far from ignorant of either the achievements of modern European society or of its heritage from the past. As William Troy says, Lawrence offers "a damning criticism not only of our socio-economic organization but of our whole culture to its roots."⁴

Only after he considers and rejects the tradition Eliot is so vocal in protecting does Lawrence insist that moral decisions come from the "self." And according to Lawrence, if it is accepted a priori, any tradition may be stultifying, destructive of the "organic being" in which Mark

Spilka finds Lawrence's ethic.⁵ Critics sympathetic to Lawrence have generally recognized that, as Graham Hough puts it, "his attacks on a priori metaphysics are precautions against allowing partial abstractions from experience to forbid the possibility of further experience."⁶

This chapter will concentrate on the changes in his approach to fiction that accompany Lawrence's loss of confidence in absolute moral principles. For in his novels Lawrence less and less makes positive use of the institutions that had been idealized in English fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. After Sons And Lovers and perhaps the first two-thirds of The Rainbow, Lawrence grants little value to, for example, the power of the "home and the hearth" to sustain his characters. The traditional family unit, generally enmeshed in the values of society, is for Lawrence no longer the sustaining institution it once was. In Women In Love Ursula must find her way alone.

The structure of Lawrence's novels will therefore be affected by his loss of faith in this traditional unifying force. The return to an ordered way of life symbolized by the family cannot provide a resolution for any of Lawrence's plots, as it could for Charles Dickens and occasionally for George Eliot as well. At the end of Sons And Lovers Paul Morel "walks towards the faintly humming, glowing town, quickly,"⁷ with perhaps more a desire to discover an absolute than to reject all ideals; by the time Lawrence finishes The Rainbow, in 1915, only two years later, he seems to have lost confidence in any of the traditional standards that have

guided human conduct in the past.

There seems to be a progression from the world-view of George Eliot to that of Lawrence. If George Eliot could, through old Mrs. Farebrother, long nostalgically for the days when one could infallibly distinguish between right and wrong, Lawrence denies that the moral tradition of his civilization is at all a viable one. And as a means of wooing his reader away from the expectation that the moral decisions of his characters can be measured against an expected and previously agreed-upon standard, such as that decreeing the sanctity of the family, Lawrence, unlike both George Eliot and Conrad, in his major novels and certainly in Women In Love seems to reject the view that moral principles alone can be the basis of a moral life:

We should ask for no absolutes, or absolute. Once and for all and for ever, let us have done with the ugly imperialism of any absolute. There is no absolute good, there is nothing absolutely right. All things flow and change, and even change is not absolute...My yea! of today is oddly different from my yea! of yesterday. My tears of tomorrow will have nothing to do with my tears of a year ago.⁸

Although Lawrence probably made this statement in mid-nineteen-twenties, after he had written all of his novels except Lady Chatterley's Lover,⁹ it could almost stand as an epigram for all of his writings from The Rainbow on.

Lawrence believes that if absolute notions of right and wrong no longer define moral behavior in particular circumstances, the ethical tradition that upholds them ought to be called into question. Certainly by the time Kangaroo appears in 1923 Lawrence seems to be rejecting all abstract ideals of conduct:

...idealism, the ruling of life by the instrumentality of the idea, is precisely the mechanical, even automatic cause-and-effect process. The idea, or ideal, becomes a fixed principle, and life, like any other force, is driven into mechanical repetition of given motions - millions of times over and over again - according to the fixed ideal. So, the Christian-democratic world prescribes certain motions....¹⁰

Because it substitutes the repetition of predetermined patterns of behavior for spontaneous expression, the "fixed principle" becomes a destructive force.

Lawrence also rejects the idea that one should predict the form moral behavior in a particular situation will take: "to submit the conscience to a creed, or an idea, or a tradition, or even an impulse, is our ruin."¹¹ Lawrence recognizes that action always represents an "impulse," sometimes an "idea," and even occasionally a "tradition." What he objects to is the loss of spontaneity that results when an action must first be considered according to whether or not it satisfies an approved idea. If traditional values could also be expressed as spontaneous responses of the self, Lawrence would not oppose them. Rather, he objects to our accepting any values merely because they have become fixed into a seemingly universal code of behavior. Because absolute ideals seem to be so susceptible to becoming anachronistic, and therefore irrelevant, Lawrence seems sometimes to reject the idea that any moral stance can be meaningful all of the time.

Both George Eliot and Conrad had discovered that experience makes it impossible for one to "give a recipe for wise judgment."¹² Because he does not believe that abstract ideas

can accurately describe a reality that is constantly changing, Lawrence goes further by distrusting the idea of knowledge itself. In Women In Love Rupert Birkin says that one "can only have knowledge, strictly...of things concluded, in the past."¹³ Because knowledge seems to describe only history, Lawrence concludes that "there is no such thing as absolute wisdom. Wisdom has reference only to the past. The future remains for ever an infinite field for mistakes. You can't know beforehand."¹⁴ And since ethical values, hardened into standards of right and wrong, cannot a priori be relied upon when one must make a moral decision, Lawrence wishes to make knowledge a less important value than it has become. "Knowing" for him becomes associated with clinging to outmoded ideas of conduct; it operates in direct opposition to the much more basic value of "being":

KNOWING and BEING are opposite, antagonistic states. The more you know, exactly, the less you are. The more you are, in being, the less you know...knowing, then, is the slow death of being...the goal is to know how not-to-know.¹⁵

"Knowing" for Lawrence is associated with the perpetuation of stultifying ideals of conduct and with the consequent mechanizing of moral life. Idealism, "the motivizing of the great affective sources by means of ideas mentally derived,"¹⁶ must be assiduously avoided. Ideals are dangerous because they "work the human psyche automatically."¹⁷

Lawrence is convinced that men should not seek permanent moral ideals. He warns that to believe that "love" can be absolutely fulfilling would be to demand of life a quality that is contrary to the nature of experience itself, as Conrad's Jim unwisely demanded from "honour." "Life is

never a thing of continuous bliss," Lawrence believes. "There is no paradise...Why pin ourselves down on a paradisaal ideal? It is only ourselves we torture." And although the association of manners with morals seems to be a vital part of the literary tradition shared by Fielding, Jane Austen, George Eliot and Conrad, Lawrence rejects the idea that socially approved forms of behavior have a great deal to do with morality. For Lawrence, social decorum would be another mechanical ideal which must be transcended.

That one should treat other people politely was a dictum for Jane Austen. But if Jane Austen asks her reader to judge Emma harshly for insulting the socially, but not morally, inferior Miss Bates, implying that even if they are not as accomplished as she, Emma must learn to treat all people as equals, Ursula Brangwen emerges as a heroine when she gains the courage to make moral judgments apart from such considerations as whether she may be violating the rules of social decorum or delicacy by injuring someone's feelings. Thus she outspokenly interprets a piece of sculpture done by the depraved artist, Loerke: "the horse is a picture of your own stock, stupid brutality, and the girl was a girl you loved and tortured and then ignored."¹⁹ To Lawrence it is not crucial that social decorum has been destroyed by Ursula's blunt outburst. What is important is not that accepted modes of conduct have been violated, but that a moral judgment has been expressed.

Lawrence believes that only new moral standards, a new approach to morality, will make meaningful social values

possible. And since Lawrence insists that "we are all different and unequal in spirit,"²⁰ he even calls the entire notion of "equality" into question. For in contrast to Conrad's search for a universal moral principle that would do away with the evils arising from the unrestrained competition for material wealth in states like Costaguana, Lawrence, turning his attention solely to personal relationships, reverses the traditional formula: he pleads that "we are in sad need of a theory of human relativity."²¹ Challenging the viability of all "theoretic" notions, Lawrence argues that "equality" has "no foundation in experience, but is logically deduced from certain ethical or philosophic principles."²² The consequences of believing in such an ideal, Lawrence continues, is that "your man is no longer a man, living his own life from his own spontaneous centres";²³ he is no longer capable of a personal life.

Finally, Lawrence rejects not so much the idea of absolute truth, but the particular absolutes that have hardened into principles, rules, and codes and have become the instruments by which an outmoded and morally bankrupt society perpetuates itself. What makes his treatment of moral ideas dramatically interesting is that in Lawrence's novels there is an interplay between two seemingly contradictory points of view. On the one hand, Lawrence asserts that "there is no such thing as an actual norm, a living norm:"²⁴

A norm is merely an abstraction, not a reality
...We either love too much, or impose our will too
much, are too spiritual or too sensual. There is
not and cannot be any actual norm of human con-
duct.²⁵

Yet Lawrence says also that "the self is an absolute. It may be relative to everything else in the universe, but to itself it is an absolute."²⁶ Lawrence seems to reject all abstract ideals only to posit one that he personally finds more attractive. But the question must arise: does he arbitrarily make an imperative of the free expression of the self?

Within the plots of Lawrence's novels this seeming contradiction is resolved. Even the demands of the self cannot always become "norms." Absolute judgments must sometimes be modified by the particulars of the incident of being judged. For example, it is true that Lawrence seems to make a norm of marriage; he sometimes suggests that this socially-defined institution can offer an almost absolute means of fulfillment for the self, and in Women In Love marriage is referred to as "this perfect union with a woman."²⁷ But Lawrence's theory is more specific. He believes that marriage is valuable only if it encourages self-fulfillment; in itself it contains no intrinsic moral worth. And therefore no particular form of marriage need serve as an absolute standard:

...if a character in a novel wants two wives - or three - or thirty; well, that is true of that man, at that time, in that circumstance. It may be true of other men, elsewhere and elsewhen. But to infer that all men at all times want two, three, or thirty wives; or that the novelist himself is advocating furious polygamy; is just inbecility.²⁸

But does Lawrence's conception of personal morality actually differ from Conrad's or George Eliot's? In what ways does Lawrence break with the ethical tradition of his prede-

cessors? For the value of "individualism" is as old as the tradition of the novel itself; Ian Watt points to "truth to individual experience - individual experience which is always unique and therefore new"²⁹ as one of the major factors contributing to the rise of the novel in the eighteenth century. And Tom Jones is clearly a unique individual. What is new with Lawrence is therefore not his elevation of the "self." For although society looms as a major force in Middlemarch, George Eliot's tone as well as her plot, leads us to place an absolute value on the moral integrity - the self - of her heroine. Lawrence begins where George Eliot leaves off. But he also goes further. Seeing a necessity to safeguard the integrity of the individual, he finally rejects all preconceived or socially-defined standards of self-definition. The individuality George Eliot desires must be defined in social terms, whereas with Lawrence, by the end of Women In Love, it is set in absolute counterposition to society. The "self" becomes an absolute for Lawrence because its demands must be fulfilled independently of whether or not they lead to actions which satisfy universally accepted principles of good conduct.

Still, some sort of reciprocal relationship must be created between the self, which with its unique qualities and needs should be the single valid absolute, and the world in which men must sometimes obey preconceived patterns of behavior. For as John R. Harrison warns, "society becomes impossible if the moral code of each individual is to fulfill his spontaneous desires."³⁰ Calling Lawrence one of the "reactionaries" of modern times, Harrison contends that Lawrence

never fully faces this problem.

But if one views the body of Lawrence's writings as a whole, it becomes apparent that he does not demand that the self function in a social vacuum: "all depends," he says, "first, on the unknown inward need within the very nuclear centres of the individual himself, and secondly on his circumstance."³¹ Lawrence believes only that it is necessary that the self be distinguished from socially-defined ideas of self. Lawrence cautions that "we have to know ourselves pretty thoroughly before we can break the automatism of ideals and conventions."³² Morality becomes "a delicate act of adjustment on the soul's part, not a rule or a prescription."³³ For although the moral life involves a "spontaneous life-motive in every organism,"³⁴ the moral actions of Lawrence's characters must still be accomplished within a context in which most people still believe in ideals and preconceived standards. While Lawrence believes that, as Julian Moynahan puts it, "values are discovered or created outright in the act of living...life creates value and is somehow self-sanctioning,"³⁵ he recognizes also that the spontaneous creation of values must be carried on amidst the tensions caused by society's continuing to accept a morality that has outlived its usefulness. Moynahan's point is that "for each major character Lawrence creates two distinct selves, the self of ordinary social and familial experience...and the self of essential being involved in mysterious transactions with the 'living universe'...."³⁶ Lawrence retains the "self of essential being" as an absolute by having his most reliable

characters consciously reject their social environments. For Lawrence the individual can ultimately define himself only by opposing the obsolete standards of his society.

To demonstrate the morality of his world-view, Lawrence, unlike George Eliot and even Conrad, cannot appeal to the ethical traditions of Western Civilization. But he does not rely solely on what Eliot called his "Inner Light." For Lawrence, beliefs have to be justified by physiological and psychological truths brought into focus by the conflict of his characters with their social and cultural milieu. According to Lawrence, because the social world of his characters differs from that of Jane Austen, for example, they must discover moral responses unique to the demands of their age. "Jane Austen's England," says Rupert Birkin in Women In Love, "had living thoughts to unfold even then, and pure happiness in unfolding them. And now, we can only fish among the rubbish heaps."³⁷ Ursula insists that although she "hate[s] the present," she does not "want the past to take its place."³⁸ The requirements of the age should determine its moral code. If Lawrence's conception of morality is finally dependent upon a transcendence of the values accessible in his own historical period, he dramatizes his views by contrasting them with the prevailing norms of the age.

As a novelist, Lawrence's intention is to expose to his reader the sterility of the world-view which defines ethical life in terms of absolutes handed down from the past. "There is deep inside one," he wrote, presumably referring to himself, "a revolt against the fixed thing, fixed society,

fixed money, fixed homes, even fixed love."³⁹ Only Lawrence's unfavorable characters will cling to the forms valuable action has taken in the past; only a cipher like Alexander Roddice, whose views the reader knows he is not to accept, could go to church, for while not a Christian, he still believes "in keeping up the old institutions."⁴⁰ Lawrence sees the novel as uniquely capable of demonstrating the danger to personal relationships of belief in absolute codes:

It is useless to talk about my ego. That only means that I have made up an idea of myself, and that I am trying to cut myself out to pattern. Which is no good...True, you can put yourself into ideal corsets. But even in ideal corsets, fashions change.

Let us learn from the novel. In the novel, the characters can do nothing but live. If they keep on being good, according to pattern, they cease to live, and the novel falls dead.⁴¹

In a manner unlike Fielding or Jane Austen or even Conrad, Lawrence approaches the novel as a direct means of changing the life of his reader. Like George Eliot, who was also a conscious arbiter of values, Lawrence wants to challenge the way his seemingly indifferent reader views the world. And Lawrence's commitment to alter his reader's mode of responding to experience seems to be much more intensely expressed than were George Eliot's admonitions that duty be fulfilled by an ethical response to the seemingly unimportant events of life. However discouraging to Lawrence his attempt to influence his reader seems, Lawrence's conception of the novel becomes inseparable from his intention to write as if his teachings could make the lives of others more meaningful. "My field," he says, "is to know the feelings inside a man, and to make

new feelings conscious. What really torments civilized people is that they are full of feelings they know nothing about; they can't realize them, they can't fulfill them, they can't live them." ⁴² The urgent tone of this passage, imparted especially by the rhetoric of the last sentence, hints perhaps that Lawrence's commitment will be to the demands of his content and not so much to evolving a form uniquely appropriate to his message.

Almost like a mathematician demonstrating a formula, Lawrence sets out to prove to the reader that he must "slough the old consciousness [which] has become a tight-fitting prison to us, in which we are going rotten."⁴³ "I want, with Lady C.," Lawrence confides to Lady Ottoline Morrell, "to make an adjustment in consciousness to the basic physical realities."⁴⁴ And Lawrence's novels, unlike, perhaps, those of Fielding, Jane Austen, George Eliot or even Conrad, are, as Hough, says, "deliberate explorations in search of new values."⁴⁵ If Conrad explored the relevance of absolute principles, at least explicitly oblivious to a reader whose values he might be influencing, Lawrence sees the novel as an instrument that will survive only to the extent that it addresses itself to the creation of a new morality. "It's got to have the courage to tackle new propositions without using abstractions," he declares. "It's got to present us with new, really new feelings, a whole line of new emotion."⁴⁶ Lawrence defines his role to broaden the consciousness of the reader so that he may be capable of responding spontaneously and meaningfully to new situations:

The business of art is to reveal the relation between man and his circumambient universe, at the living moment. As mankind is always struggling in the toils of old relationships, art is always ahead of the "times," which themselves are always far in the rear of the living moment.

The novel is a perfect medium for revealing to us the changing rainbow of our living relationships. The novel can help us to live, as nothing else can: no didactic Scripture, anyhow.⁴⁷

The question essential to a study of Lawrence is how Lawrence abandons the traditional narrative structure which he shares in his early novels with George Eliot once he begins to advocate freedom from a tradition based upon absolute values. By breaking-up the narrative form traditional to English fiction, Conrad questions the relevance of absolutes in the very structure of his novels. Does Lawrence find new modifications of the novel form once he discovers new contents?

The answer must be that he does; for the novel as Lawrence writes it is significantly different from that of previous writers, even from the innovations made by George Eliot and Joseph Conrad. The whole conception of the fictional character changes in The Rainbow and especially in Women In Love as Lawrence begins to substitute the representation of "states of being" for George Eliot's or Conrad's synthetic figures who are made intelligible by the inclusion of a detailed biography of their past lives. Lawrence begins to describe his characters only in terms of the present state of their consciousness, and as Horace Gregory points out in his early appreciation, Lawrence writes as a "seer" who "creates a synthesis of past, present, future from evidence that others have ignored."⁴⁸

One might, however, raise the question of whether the overall structures of Lawrence's novels ought to reflect his distrust of absolutes. Yvor Winters might answer that to ask that Lawrence's novels express the disintegration of old values and norms in their structures would be to demand the "fallacy of imitative form."⁴⁹ Winters's point is that for an artist to convince us of such an idea as the breakdown of old moral standards, he must all the more organize his novel in a rational, intelligible and therefore acceptable form; that only by so doing could a writer like Lawrence succeed in enlarging the sensibility of his reader and persuading him of the irrelevance of absolute truths. Winters objects to Joyce's "express[ing] disintegration by breaking down his form, by experiencing disintegration before our very eyes."⁵⁰ He suggests that "this destroys much of his power of expression."⁵¹ And according to Winters, "the author must endeavor to give form, or meaning, to the formless - in so far as he endeavors that his own state of mind may imitate or approximate the condition of the matter, he is surrendering to the matter instead of mastering it."⁵² The premise behind Winters's aesthetic is that literature, no matter how innovative its form, should always provide a logical statement about the meaning of human experience. And Lawrence would probably agree. For Lawrence too the manner of expressing a truth must never interfere with its power to influence the reader.

But if Lawrence's structure does not "imitate" his subject matter, neither are his novels unified in tone as are the novels of Fielding, Jane Austen, George Eliot or Conrad.

And the reader remains somewhat disturbed by the unevenness of Lawrence's narratives. Dorothy Van Ghent explains Lawrence's unevenness this way:

D.H. Lawrence's sensitivity to twentieth-century chaos was peculiarly intense, and his passion for order was similarly intense; but this sensitivity and this passion did not lead him to concentrate on refinements and subtleties of novelistic technique in the direction laid out, for instance, by James and Conrad. Hence, as readers first approaching his work, almost inevitably we feel disappointment and even perhaps shock, that writing so often "loose" and repetitious and such unrestrained emotionalism over glandular matters should appear in the work of a novelist who is assumed to have an important place in the literary canon.⁵³

William Troy asks that we consider none of Lawrence's novels as "complete in itself, either as providing a definitive intellectual conclusion or as a fully achieved work of art";⁵⁴ the following discussion of Lawrence will take Troy's caution into account, recognizing, as Troy says, that "in literary form... Lawrence could only see something sterile, dead, and to be avoided."⁵⁵ For if Lawrence's narratives are disjointed, as Hough points out, "form for him was just this - the following out of an authentic process of living growth."⁵⁶

Finally it is the entire body of Lawrence's writings, his non-fiction as well as his fiction, that can be viewed as a revolutionary achievement for English literature.

II The Background In Lawrence's Fiction

A. Lawrence's Social Philosophy: The Acceptance Of Absolutes

It is true that although historical changes certainly make for changes in morality, there can be a continuity of moral assumptions that cuts through different societies. And although more than a hundred years of history separates Tom Jones from Middlemarch, George Eliot shares many values with Fielding. It is even possible that society, through its institutions, may espouse one set of values, and a writer choose to emphasize a different moral stance. Conceivably if Fielding were an innovator and Lawrence a spokesman for the values of his own time, the two might have a great deal in common. The truth is, however, that Fielding most often speaks for the values of his age, and that Lawrence is most often an innovator. But the point remains that a writer need not, and sometimes finds that he must not, espouse all of the prevailing beliefs of his time.

One of George Eliot's major contributions to the novel, separating her from Fielding and Jane Austen, is that she transfers much of the power of moral judgment to her characters. They are often left with no standard other than their own moral sense. And at least a partial explanation for this change may be found in George Eliot's sense of history which convinces her that no social structure is likely to endure forever and that therefore an unchangeable standard of conduct approved of by a particular society cannot always function as a satisfactory

moral guide. Conrad devotes much more of his effort than does George Eliot to illustrating how historical and social changes undermine ideals of conduct. Not because they are not valuable, because they do not seem to be even tenable, Conrad loses confidence in most traditional ideals.

Lawrence goes farther. He insists that the social institutions of his time are perpetuators of false standards. Thus he rejects the values of his society as a whole. Yet at the same time both Lawrence and his characters seem to be searching for a sense of community.

Like George Eliot's or Conrad's, Lawrence's characters begin their search for meaningful personal values within a historical context. But from The Rainbow on, Lawrence writes about modern society as if it has become frozen, as if change is not even conceivable. And in his society Lawrence is convinced that the ordinary man is doomed because he is taught preconceived responses for all his future experiences by institutions uninformed by any vital relation with the people.

A problem may ensue. For Lawrence's theory seems to imply that for all men to find authentic values they must do battle with the social world which still at least vocally demands that they accept false absolutes. There may have been a general slackening of standards in the early part of the twentieth century, inspired largely by the disillusionment following the first World War. But Lawrence still feels the power of the old norms. And perhaps the idea of changing the old society had to be a prerequisite for a universal development of new values. In any case, Lawrence nowhere represents

a mediation between the new values evolved by individuals and the society which continues to uphold false standards. Implicit in his social philosophy is the sense that it is enough for the individual to discover new modes, that society may be abandoned.

In his writings as a whole, Lawrence offers two contradictory social alternatives, neither of which insists upon a battle with convention and obsolete standards. In Women In Love and Lady Chatterley's Lover Lawrence suggests the possibility of a willed transcendence of social decay by people of superior qualities. He often seems to suggest in these novels that his characters can remain in society while not being "of" it. And Rupert Birkin openly expresses this point of view. He refuses to define "liberty" in the traditional sense, and Gerald Crich objects, insisting that "if I go and take a man's hat from off his head, that hat becomes a symbol of that man's liberty. When he fights me for his hat, he is fighting me for his liberty."⁵⁷ But Birkin refuses to accept another man's definition of freedom: "it is open to me to decide which is a greater loss to me, my hat or my liberty as a free and indifferent man. If I am compelled to offer fight, I lose the latter. It is a question which is worth more to me, my pleasant liberty of conduct or my hat."⁵⁸ For Birkin no socially defined ideal can imply what he ought to do. And this point of view might lead to an explanation of the unevenness and sporadic appearances of Lawrence's settings. For he frequently fails to relate the background of his novels to their moral concerns, apparently assuming, as Birkin's statements imply, that morality can exist independently of social

standards. Ursula puts it this way:

I do think that one can't have anything new whilst one cares for the old...even fighting the old is belonging to it. I know, one is tempted to stop with the world, just to fight it. But then it isn't worth it...one has a sort of other self, that belongs to a new planet, not to this.⁵⁹

Yet although Lawrence has said that what is wrong with the old society is its clinging to "the ugly imperialism of the absolute," in The Plumed Serpent, in which he suggests his second social alternative, he has Don Ramon and Cipriano pose a whole new set of absolutes for the new society that are as fixed and static as any to be found in industrial England. What does remain constant for Lawrence is that the Europe of his time appears in his settings as a counterstatement, as an illustration of what must be rejected. And when Nature appears in the background, it is either a metaphor for desirable psychic states or it stands for the "community" that Lawrence finds absent in industrial societies and that he seeks in Mexico and other places.

To understand Lawrence's treatment of the background of his novels, one must first explore his social views in some depth. For in his letters and essays Lawrence seems to be greatly perplexed by the problem of what to do about society as a whole. Most frequently, however, his personal reflections support the position he takes in Women In Love: that society, however restrictive its codes, need not have a determining effect on the individual's capacity to lead a moral life. Social pressures can always be escaped:

...which is greater, the State or myself? Myself, unquestionably, since the State is only an arrangement made for my convenience. If it is not convenient for me, I must depart from it...I would say to every man whose heart is straining at the enclosure, "Come away from the crowd and the community, come away and be separate in your own soul, and live. Your business is to produce your own life no matter what the nations do."⁶⁰

Lawrence seeks a morality that is affected by the moral state of the external world only insofar as it is a conscious rejection of the false values of a society that alienates the sensitive individual:

I will not live any more in this time. I reject it. As far as I possibly can, I will stand outside this time, I will live my life, and, if possible be happy, though the whole world slides in horror down to the bottomless pit.⁶¹

But Lawrence does not consistently maintain his decision to give up on society. As late as 1927 he still voices a need to be a part of a community, even if it means subordinating or even repudiating his personal desires. To Dr. Trigant Burrow he writes the following:

What ails me is the absolute frustration of my primeval societal instinct...I think societal instinct much deeper than sex instinct - and societal repression much more devastating. There is no repression of the sexual individual comparable to the repression of the societal man in me, by the individual ego, my own and everybody else's.⁶²

And Lawrence's frequent travels can perhaps be explained in part by the frustration in England of what he calls his "societal instinct," his longing to be part of a living and vital tradition.

In search of a sense of community and freedom from the social values of his own time and of his own background,

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Lawrence flees from country to country, to Ceylon, Australia, Mexico. But his flights go off in too many directions, and there are unresolved contradictions in his writings about society. To Katherine Mansfield he writes that "if it is too difficult in England, because here all is destruction and dying and corruption, let us go away to Florida."⁶³ The proposed colony in Florida never materializes. Realizing the futility of trying to find "community" in a tradition in which he has not grown up, in which he will always be an outsider, Lawrence frequently returns to England, arguing that the only meaningful life must involve working for social change within England itself. From Ceylon he complains to Robert Pratt Barlow that "we're rather like Jonahs running away from the place we belong...the responsibility for England, the living England, rests on men like you and me."⁶⁴

Just as Lawrence alternately suggests that personal integrity can be maintained only if one escapes from England and also preaches that men like himself ought to assume "responsibility for England," between involvement and withdrawal, so too, in as inconsistent a manner, he alternately poses both socialist or democratic and fascist or authoritarian solutions for the evils of modern society. But perhaps most often Lawrence rejects "liberty" or "democracy": "I believe in the divine right of natural aristocracy, the right, the sacred duty to wild undisputed authority."⁶⁵ Elevating the principle of absolute power, he contradicts his own demand that we reject fixed and static notions.

One of his political theories Lawrence most often expounds upon is based upon the assumption that those whom he considers to be the morally strong, granted absolute power, are alone fit to rule. To justify this thesis, he asserts that since all men desire power, society can be meaningfully organized only if the strong maintain absolute control over the weak:

As a citizen, as a collective being, man has his fulfillment in the gratification of his power-sense. If he belongs to one of the so called "ruling nations," his soul is fulfilled in the sense of his country's power of strength. If his country mounts up aristocratically to a zenith of splendour and power, in a hierarchy, he will be all the more fulfilled, having his place in the hierarchy. But if his country is powerful and democratic, then he will be obsessed with a perpetual will to assert his power in interfering and preventing other people from doing as they wish, since no man must do more than another man.⁶⁶

According to Lawrence, since all men need to assert themselves over others, democracy in a political sense is untenable. Lawrence does not apply to man's social experience the demands he makes when he speaks of personal morality. Although Lawrence argues that in their daily lives men must not live by absolute ideals, he believes that in society absolute power ought to be imposed.

By why is Lawrence so suspicious of "democracy," which one could define, using Lawrence's own terms, as the freedom for each man to live by his impulses; democracy might be the social form of Lawrence's own theory, valid so long as a man does not interfere with another's freedom to live by the demands of his own unconscious. But Lawrence believes that

democracy as a political system which inevitably influences a man's psychic powers is immoral because it implies the equalization of all personalities in terms of material assets. In place of the uniqueness of the individual self, democracy makes equals of two men who have the same amount of money. "The more I see of democracy," Lawrence writes from Australia, "the more I dislike it. It just brings everything down to the mere vulgar level of wages and prices, electric light and water closets, and nothing else."⁶⁷

Because socialism implies the same absolute idea, the equal possession of material goods, Lawrence finds it equally destructive of the uniqueness of the self. His spokesman in Kangaroo, Richard Lovat Somers, rejects socialism for the same reason that Lawrence rejects democracy: "all this theoretical socialism started by Jews like Marx, and appealing only to the will-to-power in the masses, making money the whole crux...has cruelly injured the working people of Europe."⁶⁸ And Lawrence upholds the notion of class distinctions as the direct correlative to his view that men are not equal in their innermost selves:

Remove the sense of class distinction, of higher and lower, and you have anarchy in Europe. Only nihilists aim at the removal of all class distinctions in Europe...You may be the most liberal Liberal Englishman, and yet you cannot fail to see the categorical difference between the responsible and the irresponsible classes.⁶⁹

Despite his suspicion of absolutes, Lawrence, like Fielding or Jane Austen, believes in the unalterability of class distinctions:

The old nations are organically fixed into classes; you can shake Europe to atoms. And yet peasants fall back to peasantry, artisans to industrial labor, upper classes to their control - inevitably.⁷⁰

Lawrence's upholding of class differences further exposes the contradictions in his thought. Although he at one point says that "all things flow and change, and even change is not an absolute,"⁷¹ his belief in the inevitability of fixed class distinctions implies as well the belief that the structure of society itself is basically unchangeable.

Lawrence's belief that although all men are unique, they do not change, leads him to advocate authoritarian rule:

...there are aristocrats and plebians born, not made. Some amongst us are born fit to govern, and some are born only fit to be governed...it is not a question of tradition or heritage. It is a question of the incontrovertible soul.⁷²

Like Fielding, Lawrence believes that each individual possesses permanent and innate qualities. But from this vision of the individual as a fixed "thing," Lawrence proceeds to the racism of The Plumed Serpent whose hero, Ramon, declares that "the races of the earth are like trees, in the end they neither mix nor mingle."⁷³

Lawrence's political philosophy is characterized by his acceptance of the principles of race, class and authority. His implied answer to the objection that belief in such principles contradicts his thesis that absolutes are not to be tolerated is that a "blood-connection" between men can be maintained only under authoritarian rule. Lawrence himself might argue that racial differences, class distinctions and the need for authority are facts and not principles that could

be accepted or rejected. But if only because in modern history men have engaged in brutal conflicts over these "facts," they do seem to reflect ideological constructs and not inevitable social laws.

Lawrence's social philosophy is further complicated by his occasional argument that the social structure be altered so as to provide economic equality for all men. To Bertrand Russell in 1915, only a year before he speaks about "aristocrats and plebians [being] born, not made," if ten years before the totalitarianism of The Plumed Serpent, he writes:

...there must be a revolution in the state. It shall begin by the nationalizing of all industries and means of communication, and of the land - in one fell blow. Then a man shall have his wages whether he is sick or well or old.⁷⁴

And once, forgetting his own absolutist views against democracy as well as his admiration for authoritarianism, Lawrence talks about the slow evolution of society:

We none of us know what will be best. There is no ready-made solution. Ready-made solutions are almost the greatest danger of all. A change is a slow flux, which must happen bit by bit... within the next fifty years the whole framework of our social life will be altered.

Change in the whole social system is inevitable not merely because conditions change...but because people themselves change...old values depreciate, new values arise.⁷⁵

Here Lawrence seems to indicate that his concern is not with reforming society, that, in fact, social regeneration may result from the appearance of new values. What is interesting about this statement is that Lawrence is applying his distrust of absolutes to a social context. Just as there are few absolute moral principles that are valid for the individual, there is no "ready-made solution" for the ills of society.

Lawrence makes no attempt to reconcile what seem to be violently clashing views. It seems as if most of the contradictions in Lawrence's social philosophy cannot be resolved. And it may perhaps be the case that Lawrence is more interested in exploring various social notions than in propagating a coherent social program.

Unlike Conrad's, Lawrence's analysis of society is founded upon psychological rather than political, social or economic assumptions. And even if most of them seem to be ultimately untenable, Lawrence's social comments remain interesting precisely because he so often points to moral causes for social problems. What is most attractive about Lawrence's world-view is his conviction that if men were educated to live by their blood-consciousness, their social relations would be harmonious, that if only men had a sense of themselves as individuals, they could transform their environment to serve their needs. According to Mellors, the Lawrence of Lady Chatterley's Lover, the discontent of the colliers can be overcome only by a transformation of their personal values:

If you could only tell them that living and spending isn't the same thing! But it's no good. If only they were educated to live instead of earn and spend, they could manage very happily on twenty-five shillings. If the men wore scarlet trousers...they wouldn't think so much of money...they ought to learn to be naked and handsome, and to sing in a mass and dance the old group dances...that's the only way to solve the industrial problem.⁷⁶

According to Lawrence, social dissension has been caused by the absence of harmony between the individual and his deepest self;

...the old blood-warmth has collapsed, and every man is really aware of himself in apartness...in the old England, the curious blood-connection held the classes together. The squires might be arrogant, violent, bullying and unjust, yet in some ways they were at one with the people, part of the same blood-stream. We feel it in Defoe or Fielding. 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, just as Fielding is English in the good, generous sense.⁷⁷

Lawrence is not concerned with accounting for why "knowing in apartness" has arisen. In Women In Love, he blames the machine - industrialism - for alienating men from their work; the implication is that he would prefer a more primitive organization of society, like that of the Middle Ages in which men were artisans rather than "workers." And he can admire Fielding for being "English in the good, generous sense," since perhaps Fielding more than any other English novelist is closer to that ideal in which each man works for himself and is happy if he does well within the limits of the task assigned to him. Thus there can be good innkeepers and bad, generous landowners and selfish. The ultimate import of Lawrence's sociology must perhaps be a nostalgia for a more simple form of social organization.

B. The Background in Lawrence's Fiction

Lawrence's social views are reflected in the ways he develops the backgrounds of his novels. His industrial settings in particular illustrate his sense of why society must change its values. And the quality of his settings

varies from novel to novel. In Women In Love Lawrence sometimes employs the technique of inserting passages which serve more as set pieces than as integrated parts of the narrative in which his characters are involved in order to describe his setting. Very frequently an authorial voice asserts in didactic passages the evils of modern society:

...every civilization, when it loses its inward vision and its cleaner energy, falls into a new sort of sordidness, more vast and more stupendous than the old savage sort. An Augean stable of metallic filth.⁷⁸

Such intrusions, though in principle frowned upon by many writers and critics, are often the measure of Lawrence's success as a novelist. They add a vitality to the narrative. At his best, in passages like the above, taken from St. Mawr, Lawrence modifies the novel form in a perhaps unique way. He combines, with an unprecedented intensity, representation of human conduct with his own heightened passionate speech. He creates a new interplay between the authorial presence and the social background, which mirrors his disgust with the society he is describing.

Like Conrad, Lawrence finds society immoral, its social processes decadent and irreversible. But Conrad's characters had to declare a moral stance within society; and to dramatize their conflicts, he created a complex setting - a politically unstable Costaguana, including its past, its present and its future. Only periodically does Lawrence provide his novels with a social background or with any setting whatsoever. As little confident as Conrad that society

will change for the better, he attempts to create an ethic that could be maintained independently of time or place. Setting consequently becomes a static element in his novels. Unlike both George Eliot and Conrad, Lawrence believes that individuals must learn to live morally before their society can develop positive goals; he employs settings that have not yet begun to change.

In the backgrounds of his novels, Lawrence's attack upon the norms that have become the status quo is dramatized by his rejection of the way of life of the English mining village that has grown up with industrial capitalism; industrialism, whatever its economic benefits, is treated as a false ideal. And the harsh and bleak settings of the novels which describe the colliery towns of provincial England explain why Lawrence has rejected the idea of historical progress. Because industrialism has made the world an unbearable place in which to live, Lawrence cannot expect the sufferings of men to be alleviated by the course of history which had led to the industrial era. The despair with which Lawrence views the external world is characteristically revealed in the tone of his descriptions of the neighborhood through which Lady Chatterley passes on a motor trip. The details of the physical environment are juxtaposed with authorial comments which use those details to justify a rejection of the historical process as a whole:

The miners' cottages, blackened, stood flush on the pavement, with that intimacy and smallness of colliers' dwellings over a hundred years old. They lined all the way. The road had become a street, and as you sank, you forgot instantly the open, rolling country where the castles and big houses still dominated, but

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like ghosts...England, my England! But which is my England? The stately homes of England make good photographs, and create the illusion of a connection with the Elizabethans. The handsome old halls are here, from the days of Good Queen Anne and Tom Jones. But smuts fall and blacken on the drab stucco, that has long ceased to be golden...This is history. One England blots out another. The mines had made the halls wealthy. Now they were blotting them out, as they had blotted out the cottages. The industrial England blots out the agricultural England. One meaning blots out another. The new England blots out the old England. And the continuity is not organic, but mechanical.⁷⁹

Connie's quest for new values is thus explained by a social setting which seems totally hostile to human needs. For although Lawrence describes industrial England, he finds there no moral positives for characters in search of authentic values. This moving passage convinces the reader that the social world exists as a given; Lady Chatterley must find values that consciously reject the sterility and even sordidness of the England of her time.

And in general, when Lawrence does include an extended description of a social setting, he does so to depict a society that no longer serves human needs. That institutions such as the Crich mine in Women In Love have become mechanized objects beyond the control of the individual and more powerful than he, is the correlative in the settings of Lawrence's novels for his theory that personal morality has lost its spontaneity as a result of men's continuing to accept outmoded and fixed ideals like "love" or "equality." Just as men cannot release spontaneous moral lives, they cannot transform their environment to satisfy their needs.

The cities in the background of The Plumed Serpent are pictured as such fixed objects; they seem to bear no relation to the men whose needs they were constructed to serve:

And the cities of Mexico, great and small, that the Spaniards conjured up out of nothing. Stones live and die with the spirit of the builders. And the spirit of Spaniards in Mexico dies, and the very stones in the building die. The natives drift to the centre of the plazas again, and in unspeakable empty weariness the Spanish buildings stand around, in a sort of dry exhaustion.⁸⁰

But only in this novel does Lawrence offer a utopian alternative; only here does he say that the value of no social institution is absolute, that once it no longer serves the people, it will lose its power, that others will take its place. The Plumed Serpent gratuitously promises the triumph of what Lawrence calls the religion of the blood. From the defeat of outworn social institutions Lawrence in this novel predicts the rise of an ethic of spontaneity supported by living institutions around which the new society will be organized. But Lawrence's "solution," characterized by blood sacrifice and by the blind obedience of the many to the few, seems more willed than real, and the primitive setting in which he envisions the new society itself suggests the futility of the ideal.

In Lawrence's major fiction, and this would probably exclude The Plumed Serpent, Kangaroo and Aaron's Rod, the industrial background in which men have been replaced from their labor by machines appears as an unalterable condition. The setting of Women In Love describes how an institution, the coal mine, has made objects of men by destroy-

ing their life-force:

...the men were satisfied to belong to the great and wonderful machine, even whilst it destroyed them...they were exalted by belonging to this great and superhuman system which was beyond feeling or reason, something really godlike. Their hearts died within them, but their souls were satisfied.⁸¹

Here setting and characterization are intrinsically related; Lawrence admits that the ordinary man cannot transcend a hostile social world. Rather, he is formed by it. Passivity characterizes the men who have sacrificed their individual labor to the machine just as unchangeability seems to be an enduring aspect of their environment. Implied is their acceptance of an absolute principle - "the sanctity of the machine" - which has resulted in their alienation from their work and in a loss of spontaneity and vitality in their personal lives. If even George Eliot's peripheral characters believed they could change their environment, that a Reform Bill might change their station in life, Lawrence's miners, ground down by the imperatives of the system they help to perpetuate, have lost the power of transforming the conditions of their lives.

Lawrence rejects the notion of "equality" because it denies the uniqueness of each man. Yet the miners who work for Gerald Crich, although they no longer perform individual tasks, but equally serve the machine, long for social equality:

Seething mobs of men marched about, their faces lighted up as for holy war, with a smoke of cupidity...even in the machine, there should be equality...the instinct for chaos had entered. Mystic equality lies in being,

not in having or in doing, which are processes.
 In function and process, one man, one part,
 must of necessity be subordinate to another.
 It is a condition of being.⁸²

Although it has turned them into objects incapable of moral lives, although it has robbed them of their individuality, men, overwhelmed by the industrial process, have turned to the false absolute of "equality." According to Lawrence, industrial capitalism is evil because by definition it forces the submission of both capitalist and worker to an abstract idea:

...once you abstract master and man, and make them both serve an idea; production, wage, efficiency, and so on: so that each looks on himself as an instrument performing a certain repeated evolution, then you have changed the vital, quivering circuit of master and man into a mechanical machine unison. Just another way of life: or anti-life.⁸³

Clifford Chatterley sees his miners "as objects rather than men, parts of the pit rather than parts of life, crude raw phenomena rather than human beings along with him."⁸⁴ To describe a man as an "object" is to approach experience in terms of abstractions. It is this mode of perception that Lawrence has declared antithetical to the moral life.

The evolution of Lawrence's treatment of the physical and social environment from Sons And Lovers to Women In Love reflects his growing belief that individuals must create personal values apart from a society whose institutions are hostile to their needs and which demands that they submit to an "idea." This social background must be represented because the first struggle of Lawrence's characters will be to free themselves from the domination of the values imposed on them by their society from birth. For at

first the existing order of things seems to Lawrence's characters to be both inevitable and right. In The Rainbow Ursula perceives that "it needed a great, passionate effort of will on her part, seeing the colliery, still to maintain her knowledge that it was meaningless."⁸⁵

In Sons and Lovers there seems to be an organic connection between the natural setting and the colliery village. The mine seems at times to have become almost a part of nature; and Lawrence does not oppose the values of the physical environment, those implying freedom and continuity with natural forces, with birds, beasts and flowers, to the stultifying work the men must do. By The Rainbow the effects of industrialism have come to seem a blight on the natural setting. And in Women In Love the values deriving from the economic organization of society, dehumanizing all who submit to the life-style it demands, have become so dominant that the natural setting can offer no alternative community. In Women In Love physical nature appears only to illustrate the psychic states of characters whose moral survival is dependent upon a flight from their environment.

It is true that even in Sons And Lovers Lawrence contrasts the ugliness done to the landscape by the mine and the village that has grown up around it with the purity and beauty of physical nature:

One could walk all round, seeing little front gardens with auriculas and saxifrage in the shadow of the bottom of the block, sweet-williams and pinks in the sunny top block...But that was outside; that was the view on to the uninhabited parlours of all the colliers' wives. The dwelling-room, the kitchen, was at the back of the house, facing inward between the blocks,

looking at a scrubby back garden, and then at the ash-pits. And between the rows, between the long lines of the ash-pits, went the alley, where the children played and the women gossiped and the men smoked.⁸⁶

But although Lawrence rejects everything about the pits and praises the purity and energy of nature, he does not make the mining community itself destructive of either the relation of his characters to nature or of their relation to their deepest selves. Morel, despite his having been in the pits from the age of ten, comes to Gertrude Coppard psychically whole. Unlike Gerald Crich and his workers, the mine has not made Morel incapable of expressing his passionate nature:

...the dusky, golden softness of this man's sensuous flame of life, that flowed off his flesh like the flame from a candle, not baffled and gripped into incandescence by thought and spirit as her life was, seemed to her something wonderful, beyond her.⁸⁷

If Morel later becomes a paltry figure of a man, Lawrence assigns the cause of his decline not merely to the conditions under which he is forced to work, but to psychological tensions in his relationship with his wife.

As in Middlemarch, the characters in Sons And Lovers seem to be in harmony with their environment, and at least in reference to this novel, F.R. Leavis is correct when he compares Lawrence's treatment of the "environment of a living tradition" with "the environment in which George Eliot, too, was brought up."⁸⁸ Leavis says that "as a recorder of essential English history he [Lawrence] is a great successor to George Eliot."⁸⁹ But if the later George Eliot finds positive value in the life possible in a rural en-

vironment precisely because it participates in a tradition, Lawrence seems to value the English countryside for the extent to which it is able to sustain a primitive or natural way of life despite history and the modern condition which subordinates men to machines.

The Rainbow illustrates an antagonism between the natural setting into which Tom Brangwen so harmoniously integrates his life and the destructive man-made social setting to which his son, young Tom Brangwen, accommodates himself. Two sets of values are contrasted: those symbolized by nature and those symbolized by the machine. At the beginning of The Rainbow individuals can still express personal values by working in harmony with their physical environment. In the very long passage describing the flow of the seasons and the rhythm of the lives of the Brangwen man, Lawrence presents a setting that itself inspires men to express their deepest selves. What is good in the lives of the men can be described in terms of natural processes:

They felt the rush of the sap in spring, they knew the wave which cannot halt, but every year throws forward the seed to begetting, and, falling back, leaves the young-born on the earth. They knew the intercourse between heaven and earth, sunshine drawn into the breast and bowels, the rain sucked up in the daytime, nakedness that comes under the wind in autumn, showing the birds' nests no longer worth hiding. Their life and interrelations were such; feeling the pulse and body of the soil, that opened to their furrow for the grain, and became smooth and supple after their ploughing, and clung to their feet with a weight that pulled like desire, lying hard and unresponsive when the crops were to be shorn away.⁹⁰

If moral life is to be dependent upon the spontaneous expressions of the unconscious self, the outside world will be

either valuable or destructive insofar as it aids or thwarts such expression. And at the beginning of The Rainbow, the Brangwen farm provides the opportunity for moral freedom, since, according to Lawrence, "men are free when they belong to a living, organic, believing community, active in fulfilling some unfulfilled, perhaps unrealized purpose."⁹¹ Lawrence rejects the industrial society of his time, but he does not reject the idea of "community," and this perhaps explains, in part, his wandering around the world in search of a society which still satisfies the needs of men, of which men feel themselves to be a vital and "organic" part. And in his search for community, Lawrence is not rejecting the idea of tradition, he is embracing it. For Squire Allworthy was the center of what was in Fielding's time an organic community, as were the Woodhouses and the Knightleys for Jane Austen's and the Brookes of Tipton for George Eliot's. Lawrence is searching for an equivalent community for his own time. As Raymond Williams points out, Lawrence "was rejecting, not the claims of society, but the claims of industrial society."⁹² Lawrence cannot reject the idea of tradition because he himself preaches a set of cultural values which he hopes might become something of a living tradition.

For Lawrence a "believing community" seemed possible only in a natural or pre-industrial setting. Only there could a man express his deepest self. And in The Plumed Serpent the value of the religion of Quetzalcoatl is aesthetically substantiated by the impassioned descriptions of nature which accompany the rituals in which the men participate:

The sun was not visible. It had gone down in a thick, rose-red flame behind the wavy ridge of the mountains. Now the hills stood up bluish, all the air was a salmon-red flush, the fawn water had pinkish ripples. Boys and men, bathing a little way along the shore, were the color of deep flame.⁹³

That man could be described in the same terms as the natural world, "the color of deep flame," suggests that he has not become alienated from his own nature or from his own needs.

All man-made institutions seem to have failed to provide a living community. The social environment, espousing such meaningless abstractions as "nationalism," or "patriotism," seems to be irrevocably hostile to the needs of men. Ursula will reject her first lover, Skrebensky, on the ground that "he believed a man was important in so far as he represented all humanity...forgetting that the community is an abstraction from the many, and is not the many themselves."⁹⁴ Skrebensky stands for the values of the social community, and Lawrence dismisses him on the ground that for him "the statement of the abstract good for the community has become a formula lacking in all inspiration or value."⁹⁵ Serving in the army of his country, Skrebensky represents all the ideals that have lost their meaning and vitality. Ursula's dismissal of Skrebensky is a reflection of Lawrence's rejection of the social values for which Skrebensky stands.

If Tom Brangwen's life expressed the values of his physical environment, his nephew Will, who belongs to the next generation, is already alienated from the natural world. In churches, in a decaying institution, Will Brangwen,

Lawrence believes, mistakenly seeks the "dark emotional experience of the Infinite, of the Absolute"⁹⁶ that Lawrence finds meaningless. To illustrate Will's error, Lawrence brings his setting forward and includes detailed descriptions of the churches to which Will is attracted. His wife Anna speaks for Lawrence in her contempt for Will's fascination with the objects associated with religion, with, for example, the lamb in the window of the church which represents "the power of the tradition":⁹⁷

Instantly, it was only a silly lamb in the glass again. And dark, violent hatred of her husband swept up in her. What was he doing, sitting there gleaming, carried away, soulful? She shifted sharply, she knocked him as she pretended to pick up her glove, she groped among his feet.⁹⁸

Will finds peace only when he ceases to search for an absolute in social institutions, when he no longer cares for the objects through which tradition says one ought to express oneself:

Sweep away the whole monstrous superstructure of the world to-day, cities and industries and civilization, leave only the bare earth with plants growing and waters running, and he would not mind, so long as he were whole, had Anna and the child and the new, strange certainty in his soul.⁹⁹

Throughout The Rainbow the natural setting stands for freedom and is opposed to false absolutes, be they churches or collieries, that destroy the power of men to release and express themselves:

That which had been his absolute, containing all heaven and earth, was become to him as to her, a shapely heap of dead matter - but dead, dead...before they had been as a world to him within a chaos: a reality, an order, an absolute...he listened to the thrushes in the gardens and heard a note which the cathedrals did

not include: something free and careless and joyous. He crossed a field that was all yellow with dandelions.¹⁰⁰

Moral progress is possible, because the next generation, Ursula's, is no longer troubled by religion which seeks to tell men how they ought to behave. Will's attainment of his freedom from abstractions has freed his daughter as well:

The Brangwens shrank from applying their religion to their own immediate actions. They wanted the sense of the eternal and immortal, not a list of rules for everyday conduct.¹⁰¹

Just as the description of the flow of the seasons expresses the deepest impulses of the Brangwen men, Ursula's visit to Yorkshire where her uncle Tom manages a colliery is to a setting that destroys all possibility of self-expression. This brief chapter in The Rainbow, almost a set piece, in which Lawrence describes "the great mathematical colliery" that has made a "hideous abstraction of the town"¹⁰² furthers Lawrence's contention that moral life must be sought outside of modern society. For if Conrad thought that society makes problematic men's efforts to live by principles, Lawrence says that the modern world with its false values destroys physical vitality itself:

Colliers hanging about in gangs and groups, or passing along the asphalt pavements heavily to work, seemed not like living people, but like spectres. The rigidity of the blank streets, the homogeneous amorphous sterility of the whole suggested death rather than life. There was no meeting place, no centre, no artery, no organic formation. There it lay, like the new foundations of a red-brick confusion rapidly spreading, like a skin-disease.¹⁰³

The people, Tom tells Ursula, take "the pits and the place altogether for granted...they believe they must

alter themselves to fit the pits and the place, rather than alter the pits and the place to fit themselves. It is easier."¹⁰⁴ The men accept the false idea that their social environment, "the pits and the place," is valuable because it already exists; they have become willing to deny their own natures to fulfill the demands made upon them by their work in the mine. By so doing they have ceased to be human; they are "spectres" rather than "living people."

At the end of The Rainbow, the natural setting reappears as an integral part of Ursula's apocalyptic experience. Lawrence again dramatizes an opposition between the value of the natural impulse, which is represented by the horses and symbolized by the rainbow, and a social life which has lost its vitality and is represented by the miners wandering aimlessly in the streets. The setting in itself substantiates that "the old barren form of living"¹⁰⁵ must be replaced. The horses Ursula encounters at Willey Green are both present physically and are symbolically the means through which she can communicate with the higher value of the "passional" life:

In a sort of lightning of knowledge their movement travelled through her, the quiver and strain and thrust of their powerful flanks, as they burst before her and drew on, beyond.¹⁰⁶

Only brute physical passion, such as that expressed by "the thunder of horses galloping down the path,"¹⁰⁷ will save the people Ursula later watches "go by in the street below, colliers, women, children, walking each in the husk of an old fruition, but visible through the husk, the swelling and the heaving contour of the new germination."¹⁰⁸ As

horses and colliers are abstracted from the probable context of everyday life, two sets of values are presented side by side, those promising a "new germination," and those reflecting only old values and a "hard barren form of living."

If The Rainbow began with a realistic natural setting and later included descriptions of industrial England, in Women In Love Lawrence includes no sustained description of the social or natural setting with which his characters could interact. In The Rainbow society was described in terms of the negative institutions of the church and the mine, with nature providing a meaningful contrast; in Women In Love Lawrence introduces natural objects only to illustrate the moral development of his characters. Nature no longer provides an "organic community." Rather, it functions only symbolically, as in the scene following Birkin's violent encounter with Hermione in which he retreats to the natural world, sitting down "naked among the primroses... how fortunate he was, that there was this lovely, subtle, responsive vegetation, waiting for him, as he waited for it."¹⁰⁹ Nature stands for the isolation of Birkin's self which has rebelled against the stagnant social world of Hermione and her friends.

Finding other novelistic uses for his natural setting, Lawrence occasionally domesticates nature in Women In Love. The wild horses of The Rainbow have become the relatively tame Mino who inhabits Birkin's rooms. While the natural world in Sons And Lovers and The Rainbow seemed to have an independent life of its own, the cats appear to

illustrate the possibilities for moral experience accessible to human beings. The Mino provides an example; he is there only so that Birkin can explain to Ursula that she should accept him just as the Mino insists that the stray "acknowledge him as a sort of fate, her own fate."¹¹⁰ Birds are placed in the trees to remind Ursula that she should object to their being called "Little Lloyd Georges...they are really unknown to us, they are the unknown forces."¹¹¹ Much more than The Rainbow, Women In Love is a novel of ideas, and its setting becomes relevant only insofar as either natural forces or social institutions can be used to express Lawrence's attitude toward moral values.

The world of the colliers is present, but it has almost no effect on the progress of the action, on Ursula's and Birkin's search for an authentic way of life. On a train Ursula watches "the sordid streets of the town go by beneath her,"¹¹² but the physical world remains separate: "what had it all to do with her?"¹¹³ "Coal-Dust," a set piece, describes the world from which Gerald and Gudrun will not be able to free themselves. But Lawrence assumes rather than dramatizes a causal connection between Gerald's milieu and the emotional barrenness of his life. The environment of the colliers is there to demonstrate the moral bankruptcy of the industrial system in general:

She [Gudrun] felt herself drawn out at evening into the main street of the town, that was uncreated and ugly, and yet surcharged with this same potent atmosphere of intense, dark callousness. There were always miners about. They moved with their strange, distorted dignity, a certain

beauty, and unnatural stillness in their bearing, a look of abstraction and half resignation in their pale, often gaunt faces. They belonged to another world. 114

The setting of Women In Love has a negative function. For finally, Ursula and Birkin totally reject the world they have known. Although at one point Ursula is "afraid at the depth of her feeling against the home, the milieu, the whole atmosphere of this obsolete life,"¹¹⁵ even her hatred disappears once escape becomes imminent. The setting in the snow with which the novel ends illustrates the poverty of the values of Gerald and Gudrun who, while superficially rejecting "social England," cannot accept Lawrence's absolute submission to the unconscious self. They cannot leave the past behind. The whiteness of the snow suggests the moral annihilation awaiting those who cannot provide a foundation for their relationships: "for Gudrun herself, she seemed to pass altogether into the whiteness of the snow, she became a pure, thoughtless crystal."¹¹⁶ Ursula and Birkin leave Germany for the South, a gesture of total rejection of the old society, of the Anglo-Saxon industrial North.

If Lawrence took seriously his own statement that the responsibility for England rests on men like himself, one might demand that values in his novels emerge after some dialogue between individuals and their society. But although Lawrence says that he revolts against "the fixed thing, fixed society," this revolt does not find a structural counterpart in his description of the social settings of his novels. Although he implies that the happiness of

his characters is dependent upon changes in their society, he does not concern himself with how society is to evolve in a positive direction. The reader is left with a state of unresolved tension between background and foreground.

Ultimately, however great the emphasis Lawrence places on the social evils of his time, his most coherent analysis of what makes life valuable comes in his treatment of personal relationships:

As a novelist, I feel it is the change inside the individual which is my real concern. The great social change interests me and troubles me, but it is not my field. I know a change is coming - and I know we must have a more generous, more human system based on the life values and not on the money values ...But what steps to take I don't know. Other men know better.¹¹⁷

"A vision of a better life must include a revolution of society," Lawrence once said, but he added that "the drama shall be between individual men and women, not between nations and classes."¹¹⁸ Lawrence presents a static view of society in the backgrounds of his novels because he believes that society will change only after individuals change. The element of the novel with which he is most concerned is not the relationship between the individual and society, but the intimate relationship between individuals and between the individual and his deepest self.

Lawrence's dramatization of the obsolescence of absolute standards is most complete in his conception of novelistic "character." For his true subject is the relation of personal, and not social, morality to abstract ideals. Conrad bitterly points out in the foreword to Under Western Eyes that political revolution does not by

definition imply a revitalization of personal morality.

Lawrence would agree. What will we do "when we've got all the coal we want, and all the plush furniture, and pianofortes?" Birkin asks Gerald Crich.¹¹⁹ It is to this question that Lawrence most urgently speaks.

III The Self As An Absolute: Lawrence's Characters

Because modern history is epitomized for Lawrence in the permanent alienation of the miners of northern England from their own labor, he chooses to turn inward and look for meaning in an exploration of his characters as if they lived totally outside of history. A priori rejecting the idea that history or society can progress in a positive direction, Lawrence chooses not to represent confrontations that may arise from conflicts between individuals and their social milieu. The private experiences of characters who play little or no public role become the core of Lawrence's fiction, for it is in the lives of individuals alone that values can still be discovered. And as a historical phenomenon, Lawrence's exaltation of the individual can be related to the concern with the "subjectivity" which characterizes the Romantic period as well as the Modern:

...as the relativity of all values was made increasingly clear by capitalist production methods, so passion - intensity of experience - became increasingly an absolute value.¹²⁰

Lawrence's conception of the novelistic character is an appropriate structural equivalent to his rejection of ideals and preconceived means of viewing the world. His most original contribution to the novel is perhaps his rejection of "the old stable ego - of the character."¹²¹ Lawrence has a notion of "character" that is revolutionary for the English novel up to his time; he insists that a

character in a novel should not be classified in terms of a set of unchanging traits; he strips the character of his "personality":

I don't so much care about what the woman feels - in the ordinary usage of the word. That presumes an ego to feel with. I only care about what the woman is - what she is - inhumanly, physiologically, materially... There is another ego, according to whose action the individual is unrecognisable.¹²²

Because Tom Jones was present to us "humanly," he was always recognisable. Knowing his social milieu, his background, we could usually predict his actions. According to Lawrence, the reader cannot know in advance what the responses of a fully realized character to a particular situation will be. Lawrence wants us to see his characters in terms of their physical or non-social responses, responses that, flowing from the unconscious, will always be unique for them, if predictable for the reader. He rejects the conception of the character as a personality whose manners and morals can be deduced once he enters that fixture of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century English novel - the drawing room.

The notion of the stable ego provided a structural device for writers like Fielding and Jane Austen whose novels stress the validity and urgency of moral absolutes. If a character has a "stable ego," he can be judged at any time in terms of whether or not he is fulfilling moral imperatives. It is possible for Tom Jones to learn the values of "prudence" and "circumspection" because, however profligate his manners have been, his "stable ego," possessing the requisite virtues from birth, ensures that he can be redeemed. Tom Jones appears to the reader equipped with

an essential core of moral rectitude: "he was never an indifferent spectator of the misery or happiness of anyone; and he felt either the one or the other in great proportion as he himself contributed to either."¹²³

For Jane Austen the problem of the stable ego becomes somewhat more ambiguous, although its resolvability is never called into question. The tension in Emma flows from our never quite knowing whether it is a permanent or temporary problem that Emma's ego prevents her from realizing the values of unselfishness and adjustment to the rules of social decorum. At first we are led to believe that the qualities of Emma's personality make her permanently less than virtuous: "the real evils...of Emma's situation were the power of having too much her own way and a disposition to think a little too well of herself."¹²⁴ But once Mr. Knightley becomes convinced that Emma has purged vanity and selfishness from her personality, the reader, recognizing the wisdom of his judgments, also becomes assured that Emma, like Tom Jones, is basically a valuable individual.

George Eliot's characters also have "stable egos"; at any one point in her novels their sensibilities could be described in terms of a personality that is stable and unchanging:

Lydgate's spots of commonness lay in the complexion of his prejudices, which, in spite of noble intention and sympathy, were half of them such as are found in ordinary men of the world: that distinction of mind which belonged to his intellectual ardour did not penetrate his feeling and judgment about furniture, or women, or the desirability of its being known (without his telling) that he was better born than other country surgeons.¹²⁵

Once the motivations of Lydgate's ego are known, his future actions can be accounted for. His choice of Rosamund Vincy as a wife can be measured against an unchanging definition of his character. And although he will perceive the irreconcilability of a moral life with materialistic values, Lydgate will never be able to free himself from the pattern of behavior inspired by those "spots of commonness." For the progress of her plot George Eliot relies upon the "stable ego of the character." If history produces changes in the social milieu, characters like Dorothea Brooke can at least confront them with a stable personality.

In many ways Lord Jim is also an old-style character. Conrad, however, partially abandons the notion of the stable ego by introducing the traits of characters like Jim one at a time and over a large portion of the narrative. For Conrad, however stable the personality, a fixed notion of character cannot be maintained because no personality, however reasonable its values, can sustain itself in a hostile social environment. And at any time in the narrative we may be surprised by what seem to be lapses on the part of a personality we thought we understood.

Although we meet Mrs. Gould first during the luncheon aboard the Juno, quite early in the novel, we are told only one detail of her character at this time: "Mrs. Gould's appearance was made youthful by the mobile intelligence of her face."¹²⁶ Somewhat later Conrad gives us a fuller, if not yet a psychologically complete, portrait of his heroine:

She kept her old Spanish house...open for the dispensation of the small graces of existence. She dispensed them with simplicity and charm because she was guided by an alert perception of values. She was highly gifted in the art of human intercourse, which consists in delicate shades of self-forgetfulness and in the suggestion of universal comprehension.¹²⁷

But it is only in the very last pages of Nostromo that Conrad completes the portrait of Mrs. Gould by picturing her as she sees herself:

...she resembled a good fairy, weary with a long career of well-doing, touched by the withering suspicion of the uselessness of her labors, the powerlessness of her magic.¹²⁸

In the structure of Nostromo, if not in its statement, Conrad rejects the idea of the stable ego; he is convinced that "the necessities of successful action" undermine the integrity of the personality. Structurally, the fullest description of Mrs. Gould can come only at the end of the novel, once the consequences of her public role, which has demanded that she remain loyal to that harmful and life-destroying institution - the San Tomé mine - have made themselves felt upon her personality. Since the brutalities of social life make a mockery of one's integrity of purpose, Conrad can no longer grant to the "self" the absolute and permanent virtues enjoyed by Tom Jones or by Emma. Seeking one's values in a social and political context was one of the conditions of human existence for Conrad. What happened to individual personalities as a result of their confrontations with the world could not be avoided.

Conrad lamented that too often the world prevented the individual from living by his ideals. And because he

could not realize his ideals, he lacked a satisfactory "character," what Lawrence will call a "stable ego." For Lawrence the idea of the completed self is seen negatively; it suggests a mechanization of being and therefore an implied decision not to live spontaneously by one's impulses. The world, because it can be avoided, poses no threat. But Lawrence's characters must take care that they are, as Marvin Mudrick says, "passions and first principles" and not "more or less aggressive bundles of recognizable traits ...egos stabilized by manners and morals."¹²⁹

Of Lawrence's characters, only those who have not achieved the morality of the spontaneous self yearn for a stable ego. And paradoxically, it is Gerald Crich, who believes that "man's will [is] the absolute" and who yearns for "the pure fulfillment of his own will in the struggle with the natural conditions"¹³⁰ who loses the sense of himself as an individual:

...once or twice lately, when he was alone in the evening and had nothing to do, he had suddenly stood up in terror, not knowing what he was. And he went to the mirror and looked long and closely at his own face, at his own eyes, seeking for something...He was afraid that one day he would break down and be a purely meaningless bubble lapping round a darkness.¹³¹

But Lawrence's "reliable" characters, those who represent his own point of view, question the notion of the ego. And at one point in The Lost Girl Lawrence enters the narrative to challenge the view that in becoming a maternity nurse, Alvina Houghton is irrevocably expressing some inherent and unchanging aspect of her personality:

Was Alvina her own real self all this time? The mighty question arises upon us, what is one's own real self? It certainly is not what we think we are and ought to be.¹³²

According to Lawrence, Jane Austen, with her characters, typified "personality" rather than "character" and so in her novels precluded the representation of personal relationships based upon "blood-warmth."¹³³ Unlike Jane Austen's, Lawrence's characters seem to elude the reader with their distance and their lack of personality; they tend to project different qualities according to the situation in which they find themselves. And as Lawrence's spokesman in Women In Love, Rupert Birkin hates standards because "anybody who is anything can just be himself and do as he likes."¹³⁴ Ursula complains that he "says one thing one day, and another the next - and he always contradicts himself."¹³⁵ But Lawrence would approve of Birkin's inconsistencies; they demonstrate that he has been living by his impulses and not by abstract formulas or standards of conduct.

"One thing I know," Lawrence wrote to Katherine Mansfield, "I am tired of this insistence on the personal element; personal truth, personal reality":

I want some new non-personal activity. And I want relations which are not purely personal, based on purely personal qualities; but relations based upon some unanimous accord in truth or belief, and a harmony of purpose, rather than of personality.¹³⁶

Lawrence seeks meaning in the unconscious response rather than amongst the familiar furniture of the novel against which Balzac placed his heroes.

And Lawrence alters the position of his hero. No longer can any one character be the center of the narrative,

for this would grant him transcendent and permanent importance. In The Rainbow the same characters do not occupy the foreground throughout the novel. Guided by no absolute principle as to man's importance in either society or the universe, Lawrence can allow characters to recede into the background once their life-styles have been explored. Once they have reached the highest possible degree of psychic insight, they are no longer relevant to the narrative. Both the reader and Lydia Brangwen can be interested in Tom Brangwen as long as he lives his life in defiance of old moral absolutes, as long as he is willing, as Birkin says in Women In Love, to "let the old meanings go."¹³⁷ But once he is dead, once he has lost his spontaneous being, he is no longer real and Lydia can barely acknowledge that the dead body of Tom Brangwen is that of her husband:

He was beyond change or knowledge, absolute, laid in line with the infinite. What had she to do with him? He was a majestic Abstraction, made visible now for a moment, inviolate, absolute.¹³⁸

Because Lawrence believes in none of the traditional social standards which could define the life-style of a character like Emma, neither can he construct novels whose plots rise to a climax, foreshadowing an at least partial resolution of their conflicts. Lawrence's novels, especially Women In Love, lack the plot which is composed of a series of causally related and interpenetrating episodes; Women In Love often reads like a collection of unrelated scenes. The theory that the spontaneous impulses of the self should replace the stable ego finds expression

in a structure which is fragmented. Conrad's retrospective method reflects his inability to find positive values in the present. But that Lawrence's narrative progresses chronologically is not especially relevant to his moral philosophy.

It is in the immediacy of the single episodes in which Lawrence's characters express the deepest yearnings of their souls that there is a correlation between Lawrence's world-view and the structure of his novels. As Mark Schorer points out, the episodes of Women In Love "are meant to form a pattern of psychic relationships...without the objective or rationalized frame of the old novel."¹³⁹ Within the individual scene, the composition of Lawrence's novels is revolutionary and is a perfect correlative for his theory of morality.

According to Jessie Chambers, Lawrence modelled the structure of his novels after the tradition of George Eliot, the first novelist to start "putting all the action aside":¹⁴⁰

"The usual plan is to take two couples and develop their relationships," he said. "Most of George Eliot's are on that plan. Anyhow, I don't want a plot, I should be bored with it. I shall try two couples for a start."¹⁴¹

But unlike George Eliot's, the episodes of Lawrence's novels describe psychic relationships rather than those defined by socially acceptable codes. Lawrence's most unique novelistic achievement lies in his ability to compose scenes in which the relationships between characters are both presented immediately and naturalistically and yet also

illustrate "the circuit of vital polarity from which the psyche actually develops...the vital circuits between ourselves and the effectual correspondent, the other human being."¹⁴² Each episode, for its completion, depends upon a psychic revelation on the part of one of its participants. Through these revelations, Lawrence can dramatize the value of the impulses felt by the unconscious self. The function of each scene remains the same as it was for Jane Austen - to reveal character. But Lawrence, wishing to describe not the conflict of egos, but a growth of psychic awareness, substitutes a semi-realistic technique of description for the rational and ordered interplay of manners and morals that characterizes the narratives of Fielding and Jane Austen.

In such episodes Lawrence writes as if psychic states were on the same metaphysical level as the digging of potatoes in the Brangwen garden, as if the laws of the individual psyche were as transparent and visible as the laws of the natural world. Thus, Ursula is first described in The Rainbow, not in the terms commonly associated with a child, but in reference to the deepest self that Lawrence has said must become an absolute:

She was a free, unabateable animal, she declared in her revolts; there was no law for her, nor any rule. She existed for herself alone.¹⁴³

Lawrence juxtaposes the mundane scene of Ursula's leaving footprints in the garden and so incurring her father's wrath with the psychic knowledge she gains from the incident:

...very soon, she came to believe in the outward malevolence that was against her. And very early, she learned that even her adored father was part of this malevolence. And very early she learned to harden her soul in resistance and denial of all that was outside her, harden herself upon her own being.¹⁴⁴

From the most ordinary events of everyday life, Ursula as a very small child perceives the psychic price that one must pay for the awareness of one's uniqueness.

Another such ordinary scene, pregnant however with psychic implication, occurs in Sons And Lovers. Morel flings a drawer at his wife, and from her wound, some blood soaks into the baby's scalp:

...he saw a drop of blood fall from the averted wound into the baby's fragile, glistening hair. Fascinated, he watched the heavy dark drop hang in the glistening cloud...it would soak through to the baby's scalp. He watched, fascinated, feeling it soak in; then, finally, his manhood broke.¹⁴⁵

George Eliot would have rendered this episode much more explicitly; Lawrence gives a sudden explicit conclusion only after portraying the psychic effect of his act on Morel. The last line, "finally, his manhood broke," describes a level of experience which George Eliot did not approach. For Lawrence, because the brutalities of everyday life wreak irreparable damage on the deepest self, the psychic consequences of one's actions are of primary importance. He rejects any ideal or transcendent vision which might demand that only the so-called "climactic" experiences of life deserve a high-toned style. For Lawrence no incident is too commonplace to express the impulses of the unconscious self. In The Rainbow, a most mundane event, Anna's giving

a tea-party, inspires in Will psychic reactions that seem to call the whole meaning of his life into question:

Now he must be deposed, his joy must be destroyed, he must put on the vulgar, shallow death of an outward existence.¹⁴⁶

Lawrence dramatizes the interplay between the ordinary events of everyday life and their effect on the unconscious self. While George Eliot would be content to describe in a purely naturalistic style a young husband's jealousy of his wife's connections with the outside world, Lawrence adds the dimension of the unconscious impulse - Will's fear of psychic dissolution once his wife turns her interest outward. It might be added that in taking Will's jealousy so seriously, Lawrence displays no sense of the difference between disaster and foible, no real feeling for human weakness. By emphasizing what is perhaps a petty emotion, Lawrence leaves himself with no literary reserves for expressing the truly debilitating aspects of experience.

If no scene-is-too commonplace to express Lawrence's vision, neither is any human action too eccentric, too unrealistic or too lacking in decorum to embody the value of the unconscious self. The more grotesque the scene, the more can Lawrence assert the value of the self's spontaneous expressions. For these have no respectable correlative in the everyday world, in the drawing room of Mrs. Cadwallader or in the salon of Emilia Gould. By the middle of The Rainbow the reader accepts the realism of the scene in which, big with child, Anna dances naked before her mirror; the incident is described in as natural a manner as that in which

the child Anna fed the chickens in her stepfather's yard years before:

...she danced there in the bedroom by herself, lifting her hands and her body to the Unseen, to the unseen Creator who had chosen her, to Whom she belonged...she danced in secret before the Creator, she took off her clothes and danced in the pride of her bigness.¹⁴⁷

The plots of both The Rainbow and Women In Love trace Ursula's struggle to find an outlet for self-expression. Lawrence juxtaposes Ursula's matter-of-fact observations about the physical details of her life with a description of the omnipresent impulses springing from her unconscious self. The motivations of her unconscious are often portrayed in as mundane a tone as are the details of the physical environment:

...it [the college] was a sham store, a sham warehouse, with a single motive of material gain, and no productivity.¹⁴⁸

Always, always she was spitting out of her mouth the ash and grit of disillusion of falsity...she seemed always negative in her action. That which she was, positively, was dark and unrevealed, it could not come forth.¹⁴⁹

A physical description of Ursula would be irrelevant. Paradoxically, Lawrence's realism is most successful in his evocations of the struggle carried on within the psyche as it aspires toward fulfillment. The best examples are in his treatment of Ursula:

Her active living was suspended, but underneath, in the darkness, something was coming to pass. If only she could break through the last integuments! She seemed to try and put her hands out, like an infant in the womb, and she could not, as yet. Still she had a strange prescience, an intimation of some thing yet to come.¹⁵⁰

Since the self has a continuous history, it must have some continuous elements. But for Lawrence the self still cannot be described as a "stable ego" because it is also constantly changing. Lawrence can alternately suggest metaphoric parallels of the psyche with birds, beasts and flowers because once the individual is free from subservience to abstract ideals of conduct, in a given situation his psyche can be compared with an animal or a flower. At the end of The Rainbow Ursula is described in terms of another organic form of life germinating before its rebirth. That the individual is not composed of a set of fixed and static qualities is revealed in the comparison of Ursula with a growing shoot:

She was the naked, clear kernel issued naked to put itself forth. She was the naked, clear kernel thrusting forth the clear, powerful shoot, and the world was a bygone winter, discarded, her mother and father and Anton...the kernel was free and naked and striving to take new root, to create a new knowledge of Eternity in the flux of Time.¹⁵¹

Ursula can be described as a "naked kernel thrusting for the clear, powerful shoot" because her psychic dimensions are more important to Lawrence's characterization than are the details of her family history, which, however, he has spent considerable time in reporting. But one's family almost by definition assents to tradition and encourages the formation of the stable ego. Just as Joyce gives Stephen Dedalus a well-defined character precisely in terms of his rejection of "my home, my fatherland, my church,"¹⁵² Lawrence characterizes Ursula in terms of her

transcendence of the early influences upon her life:

...she felt that memory was a dirty trick played upon her. What was this decree that she should "remember!" Why not a bath of pure oblivion, a new birth, without any recollections or blemish of a past life. She was with Birkin, she had just come into life, here in the high snow against the stars. What had she to do with parents and antecedents?¹⁵³

But the very fact that The Rainbow, in its overall structure, resembles an old-fashioned family chronicle suggests that at least some of the values it expresses are also traditional. The warmth of the Brangwen hearth has much in common with the cheerful good will that pervades the fire-side of Mr. Brooke or the drawing room of even the Vincys of Middlemarch. Juxtaposed with the eruptions of psychic energy are the more familiar incidents common to the nineteenth-century English novel.

IV Lawrence As A Novelist

Lawrence's innovations in his treatment of the novelistic character are perhaps his most significant contribution to the development of the English novel. But are Lawrence's "great" novels? By what criteria are we to judge him?

Any absolute notion of unity is meaningless in a consideration of Lawrence who is concerned first and foremost not with technique, but with exposing the dangers inherent in old absolutes and dramatizing the need for a radical change in his reader's approach to experience. This intention dictates Lawrence's choice of structure. And he would subsume all notions of novelistic unity to this purpose, be they Fielding's or George Eliot's balance between novelistic action and authorial commentary, or Jane Austen's or Conrad's purging of the narrative of almost every trace of authorial presence.

A problem for the reader arises, however, when Lawrence ceases to describe the sensuous experiences of his characters. For bound by no preconceived idea of novelistic unity, Lawrence too often finds statement a useful technique to reveal his meanings. "I hope, dear reader," Lawrence says coyly in Kangaroo, "you like plenty of conversation in a novel."¹⁵⁴ And debate on the question of values is as frequent a structural device in Women In Love as are the episodes immediately rendered. Just as the individual scenes in Lawrence's novels are a mixture of mundane detail and

psychic processes, the structure of his narratives viewed as a whole is a mixture of the representation of personal relationships and didactic statements.

The question arises whether such didactic passages, frequently taking the form of authorial intrusions, destroy the spontaneity of the narrative. Fielding and George Eliot made statements about values to which the action of their novels then gave life. But we would not say about them, as we could sometimes about Lawrence, that their novels disintegrate into a series of statements exemplified by the appearance and disappearance of characters who come to the center of the stage in order to illustrate a theory.

The answer may lie in the intellectual and literary quality of each separate intrusion. At their best, Lawrence's authorial statements are vital parts of his narratives. At their worst, they become shrill, foolish and willful. In this example from Aaron's Rod, one of Lawrence's ranting intrusions into the narrative is placed in the mouth of Lilly:

We've exhausted our love-urge, for the moment. And yet we try to force it to continue working. So we get inevitably anarchy and murder. It's no good. We've got to accept the power motive, accept it in deep responsibility, do you understand me? It is a great life motive. It was the great dark power-urge which kept Egypt so intensely living for so many centuries. It is a vast dark source of life and strength in us now, waiting either to issue into true action, or to burst into cataclysm. Power - the power-urge....¹⁵⁵

And perhaps recognizing that his tone sometimes becomes too aggressively didactic, in Women In Love Lawrence has Halliday

and his friends in London mock Birkin's prophetic utterances: "it almost supersedes the Bible."¹⁵⁶ And according to Lawrence's own aesthetic, didacticism is destructive of the novel a priori:

If you try to nail anything down in the novel, either it kills the novel, or the novel gets up and walks away with the nail.¹⁵⁷

Although Lawrence's obvious lack of concern with form may result in the reader's indulgence, his willingness to overlook the unevenness of his narratives, certain difficulties remain. Lawrence is too often "ideological," too often the ranting preacher. Partially in Women In Love with its tenuous relationship between the history of the Crich mine and the experiences of the central characters, and certainly in Kangaroo, The Plumed Serpent and Aaron's Rod, Lawrence fails to find a myth appropriate to his belief that "everything is true in its own time, place, circumstance, and untrue outside of its own place, time, circumstance."¹⁵⁸ While his theory of the decline of absolute values seems to be revolutionary for the English novel in terms of its content, he is not concerned with finding the form which would most relevantly express that theory.

But one might even argue that since Lawrence, who does write in the realistic tradition, must describe people still enslaved by a system of false values, there is more urgency and greater validity in his telling as well as showing the reader how to express the most creative aspects of his nature, that behind Lawrence's choice of didactic narrative devices may be his need to convince his reader that "we

do not know how to fulfill our own natures, passionately. We don't even know in which way fulfillment lies."¹⁵⁹

Lawrence presents his own best answer to the charge of didacticism: whether or not a novel is "didactic" depends not upon its overall form or even upon the number of statements made about meaning. Rather, it depends upon the nature of its content. Like Fielding or Jane Austen or George Eliot, Lawrence begins with the premise that "the essential function of art is moral."¹⁶⁰ But didacticism, he believes, results not because the author's intention to "teach" suddenly becomes apparent, since all authors are concerned with dramatizing a moral philosophy; didacticism becomes a function of tone, and according to Lawrence, the tone of a novel will not be didactic if its morality is "passionate" and "implicit" and "changes the blood, rather than the mind."¹⁶¹ Lawrence wishes to appeal not to the intellect of his reader, but to change his unconscious self. His message is that the expression of that self will constitute a moral act. The novel will not have been didactic if it results in a liberation from a "mental" or conceptual approach to experience.

Once permanent solutions to the conflicts of either men or societies no longer seemed possible, the novel demanded a problematic ending. There is a sense of absolute security in the marriages of Tom Jones and Sophia, Emma and Knightley that is not accessible to Dorothea Brooke. United finally with Will Ladislav at the end of Middlemarch, Dorothea has yet to find an outlet for her own moral im-

pulses. Nostromo also ends bleakly; no positive absolute that would save Costaguana from its aimless cycle of bloody revolutions is in sight. And for Conrad personal frustration follows in the wake of political: the novel ends on a note of despair, the abandoned Linda Viola throwing "all her fidelity, her pain, bewilderment, and despair into one great cry."¹⁶² For writers after George Eliot the conclusion of the novel brings no acceptable standard of conduct which could forever resolve either psychic or social difficulties.

Lawrence also ends Women In Love on a note of discord. United with Ursula, Birkin discovers that he is not content; to be truly happy he needs "eternal union with a man too"¹⁶³ and this he has failed to find. Gerald Crich had been unable to offer the blood-brotherhood for which Birkin longs. Divided, the lovers seem to be debating a question which Lawrence himself was unable to resolve. Ursula insists that "it's false, impossible," Birkin disagrees: "I don't believe that."¹⁶⁴ The tone of the ending, while it seems to affirm Lawrence's view that there can be no permanent state of consciousness, however felicitous one state of being seems, expresses a despair as permanent as Conrad's. "We cannot bear connection," Lawrence had said. "That is our malady."¹⁶⁵ For both Conrad and Lawrence, existing side by side, is on the one hand an acceptance of traditional values, and on the other, a distrust of preconceived standards of conduct. Meanwhile both fear that no

sustaining values exist at all, that once man begins to distrust the traditional view of the world, all order disintegrates and only chaos remains.

Notes

- 1 After Strange Gods: A Primer Of Modern Heresy (London, 1934), p. 59.
- 2 Ibid., p. 59.
- 3 D.H. Lawrence: Novelist (New York, 1956), p. 120.
- 4 "The Lawrence Myth," Selected Essays, ed. Stanley Edgar Hyman (Rutgers: The University Press, 1967), p. 131.
- 5 The Love Ethic Of D.H. Lawrence (Bloomington, 1955) p.9.
- 6 The Dark Sun: A Study Of D.H. Lawrence (New York, 1957), p.223.
- 7 Sons And Lovers (New York: The Modern Library, 1962), p. 420.
- 8 "Why The Novel Matters," Phoenix, ed. Edward D. McDonald (London, 1936), p. 536.
- 9 The article "Why The Novel Matters" was found among Lawrence's unpublished writings and included by McDonald in Phoenix (1936). McDonald sees the piece as "closely related in time of composition" to "Morality And The Novel" which was published in 1925. (xxii)
- 10 Kangaroo (New York, 1951), p. 301.
- 11 Fantasia Of The Unconscious (New York: The Viking Press, 1960), p. 165.
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- 13 Women In Love (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), p.97.
- 14 The Lost Girl (London, 1961), p. 44.
- 15 Studies In Classic American Literature (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1951), p. 124.
- 16 Psychoanalysis And The Unconscious (New York: The Viking Press, 1960), pp.11-12.
- 17 Ibid., p. 12.
- 18 Studies In Classic American Literature, p. 152.
- 19 Women In Love, p. 491.

- 20 Ibid., p. 116.
- 21 Fantasia, p. 66.
- 22 Ibid., p. 119.
- 23 Ibid., p. 120.
- 24 Ibid., p. 85.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Kangaroo, p. 286.
- 27 p. 64.
- 28 "The Novel," Reflections On The Death Of A Porcupine And Other Essays (Bloomington, 1963), p. 114.
- 29 The Rise Of The Novel (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1962), p. 13.
- 30 The Reactionaries-Yeats, Lewis, Pound, Eliot, Lawrence: A Study Of The Anti-Democratic Intelligentsia (New York, 1967), p. 186.
- 31 Fantasia, p. 85.
- 32 Ibid., p. 105.
- 33 Ibid., p. 92.
- 34 Psychoanalysis, p. 13.
- 35 The Deed Of Life: The Novels And Tales Of D.H. Lawrence (Princeton, 1963), p. xx.
- 36 Ibid., p. 42.
- 37 pp. 406-407.
- 38 Ibid., p. 407.
- 39 "Letter to M.L. Skinner, 29 August 1925," The Collected Letters of D.H. Lawrence, ed. Harry T. Moore. Two Volumes. (New York, 1962), II, 851.
- 40 Women In Love, p. 112.
- 41 "Why The Novel Matters," p. 537.
- 42 "The State Of Funk," Sex, Literature And Censorship, ed. Harry T. Moore (New York, 1953), p. 64.

- 43 Studies In Classic American Literature, p. 61.
- 44 "28 December 1928," Letters, II, 1111.
- 45 Hough, p. 4.
- 46 "Surgery For The Novel - Or A Bomb," Phoenix, p. 526.
- 47 "Morality And The Novel," Phoenix, p. 527.
- 48 D.H. Lawrence, Pilgrim Of The Apocalypse: A Critical Study (New York, 1957), p. xvi.
- 49 In Defense Of Reason (Denver, 1947), pp. 61-62.
- 50 Ibid., p. 61.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Ibid., p. 64n.
- 53 The English Novel: Form And Function (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), p. 245.
- 54 "D.H. Lawrence As Hero," Essays, p. 112.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 Hough, p. 106.
- 57 Women In Love, p. 32.
- 58 Ibid.
- 59 Women In Love, p. 499.
- 60 "Study Of Thomas Hardy," Phoenix, pp. 428-429.
- 61 "Letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell, 7 February 1916," Letters, I, 424.
- 62 "13 July 1927," Letters, II, 989-990.
- 63 "20 December 1915," Letters, I, 402.
- 64 "30 March 1922," Letters, II, 698.
- 65 "Letter to Mabel Dodge Luhan, 10 April 1922," Letters, II, 700.
- 66 Apocalypse (New York: The Viking Press, 1966), pp. 194-195.
- 67 "Letter to Elsa Jaffe, 13 June 1922," Letters, II, 707.
- 68 p. 204.

- 69 Kangaroo, pp. 16-17.
- 70 Fantasia, p. 144.
- 71 "Why The Novel Matters," p. 536.
- 72 "Letter to Lady Cynthia Asquith, 16 August 1916," Letters, I, 361.
- 73 The Plumed Serpent (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), p. 272.
- 74 "12 February 1915," Letters, I, 317. It should be noted too that only a few months later Lawrence tells Russell to "drop all your democracy...There must be an aristocracy of people who have wisdom, and there must be a Ruler: a Kaiser: no Presidents and democracies." (?7 July, 1915, Letters, I, 352) Lawrence's suggestion of economic revolution without corresponding revolutionary political changes seems incredibly close to the model of Mussolini's Italy. The critics who accuse Lawrence of revealing a fascist mentality seem not to be overstating their case. See John R. Harrison, pp. 187-189.
- 75 "The State Of Funk," pp. 63-64.
- 76 Lady Chatterley's Lover (New York: The Modern Library), p. 341.
- 77 "A Propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover," Sex, Literature And Censorship, p. 119.
- 78 St. Mawr (New York: Vintage Books, 1959), p. 153.
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- 83 Studies In Classic American Literature, pp. 127-128.
- 84 Lady Chatterley's Lover, p. 16.
- 85 p. 330.
- 86 Sons And Lovers, p. 2.
- 87 Ibid., p. 10.
- 88 Leavis, p. 123.
- 89 Ibid.

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- 92 Culture And Society, 1780-1950 (Edinburgh: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 205.
- 93 p. 208.
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- 95 Ibid.
- 96 Ibid., p. 148.
- 97 Ibid., p. 149.
- 98 Ibid.
- 99 Ibid., p. 181.
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- 103 Ibid., pp. 325-236.
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- 105 p. 466.
- 106 p. 460.
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- 108 p. 466.
- 109 Women In Love, pp. 120-121.
- 110 Ibid., p. 169.
- 111 Ibid., p. 301.
- 112 Ibid., p. 163.
- 113 Ibid.
- 114 p. 131.
- 115 p. 11.
- 116 Ibid., p. 478.

- 117 "The State Of Funk," p. 64.
- 118 "Letter to Bertrand Russell, 26 February 1915," Letters, I, 324.
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- 121 "Letter to Edward Garnett, 5 June 1914," Letters, I, 282.
- 122 Ibid., p. 282.
- 123 Henry Fielding, The History Of Tom Jones, A Foundling (New York, The Modern Library), p. 721.
- 124 Jane Austen, "Emma," The Complete Novels of Jane Austen (New York: The Modern Library), p. 763.
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- 127 Ibid., p. 50.
- 128 Ibid., p. 581.
- 129 "The Originality of The Rainbow," D.H. Lawrence: A Collection Of Critical Essays, ed. Mark Spilka (Englewood-Cliffs, New Jersey, 1964), p. 39.
- 130 Women In Love, p. 255.
- 131 Ibid., pp. 264-265.
- 132 p. 34.
- 133 "A Propos Of Lady Chatterley's Lover," p. 119.
- 134 p. 36.
- 135 p. 336.
- 136 "12 December 1915," Letters, I, 395.
- 137 p. 147.
- 138 The Rainbow, p. 235.
- 139 "Women In Love And Death," D.H. Lawrence: A Collection Of Critical Essays, p. 54.

- 140 E.T. (Jessie Chambers), D.H. Lawrence: A Personal Record (New York, 1965), p. 105.
- 141 Ibid., p. 103.
- 142 Psychoanalysis, p. 45.
- 143 p. 253.
- 144 p. 210.
- 145 p. 50.
- 146 p. 141.
- 147 p. 171.
- 148 The Rainbow, p. 411.
- 149 Ibid., pp. 412-413.
- 150 Women In Love, p. 10.
- 151 p. 464.
- 152 A Portrait Of The Artist As A Young Man (New York, 1965), p. 247.
- 153 Women In Love, p. 466.
- 154 p. 288.
- 155 Aaron's Rod (New York: The Viking Press, 1965), p. 288.
- 156 p. 439.
- 157 "Morality And The Novel," p. 528.
- 158 Ibid.
- 159 Psychoanalysis, p. 112.
- 160 Studies In Classic American Literature, p. 184.
- 161 Ibid.
- 162 Nostromo, p. 631.
- 163 p. 548.
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- 165 Apocalypse, p. 198.

Conclusion

Not threatened by the impact of historical change on traditional beliefs and values, both Fielding and Jane Austen write in the comic mode. Their characters are usually well-defined and stable personalities. Any agitations they may suffer result from their violating one or more of the norms approved by the author and generally his society as well. They set their novels in provincial villages in which any failure to satisfy a norm is usually noticed and commented upon. This enables Fielding and Jane Austen to reinforce dramatically their values and norms. The communities they create share, at their best, the author's moral concerns.

Conscious of history as a force of continuous change that may even upset traditional values, George Eliot seems to begin a new trend for the English novel both in her depiction of a society from which her characters are alienated and in her representation of those characters themselves who must learn to temper their aspirations in order to survive in that society. As T.S. Eliot notices, George Eliot initiates a new approach to questions of morality. "We must respect her for being a serious moralist," says Eliot the traditionalist, "but deplore her individualistic morals."¹

Continuing in George Eliot's line, both Conrad and Lawrence offer new structures for the English novel. Though in part still belonging to the tradition of Fielding and Jane Austen, as George Eliot did, and sharing their

respect for an "organic community" as well as their sense of the power of moral principles, they construct novels that express a world-view special to the early part of the twentieth century. Lawrence may perhaps be the more revolutionary of the two. For while, like Conrad, he breaks free of the old notion of the causally connected plot and the exclusive depiction of the surfaces of social life and of consciousness, Lawrence also suggests a new value system, and a new conception of the fictional character.

Both Conrad and Lawrence write a "new novel" in English literature. Uneasy with preconceived standards of right and wrong, each represents his characters in search of an authentic mode of being while at the same time enmeshed in both the particularities of social experience and in ideals which have lost some of their viability. Lawrence's need to substitute old values for new is even stronger than Conrad's:

What we want is to destroy our false, inorganic connections especially those related to money, and re-establish the living organic connections, with the cosmos, the sun and earth, with mankind and nation and family.²

Conrad ultimately found the search fruitless. His subjective treatment of time in which past and present flow into each other expresses the circularity of his vision. Lawrence offers a new standard, perhaps as abstract as the old, but at least, he believes, unique to an age which demands a fresh approach to each experience. Lawrence's ethic, preaching a new freedom of expression for the "unconscious impulses of the self" is more prescriptive than Conrad's because

Conrad, decrying the diminution of ideals by uncontrollable circumstances, offered no alternative.

Lawrence's originality for the English novel may perhaps be best seen in a comparison with Fielding. In a way the Weltanschauung of each of these writers both expresses and re-examines the values of their age. Neither affirms the status quo on the ground that official values must be reliable. No more than Lawrence is Fielding an apologist for the social norms that allow room for the hypocrisies of those characters who espouse one set of values and live by another. Like Lawrence, Fielding could both see through and transcend the irrationalities of his age. And both Lawrence and Fielding are aware of the tension between what they take to be authentic standards and the false values generated by the inevitable corruptions of social life and the selfishness of men.

The difference between these two writers lies perhaps in the sources of their positive standards. If Fielding rejects some of the norms of his age, he finds others satisfying and meaningful. He encourages his reader to accept all that is viable in the Christian moral tradition. The source of Lawrence's values is perhaps also in known materials, and in the ethical and religious tradition which, as Leavis points out, he shares with George Eliot.³ But Lawrence emerges with a new combination of values, and therefore with new norms. Especially in Women In Love, perhaps his finest novel, he grants supreme importance to the individual life and seems to suggest, unlike Fielding, Jane Austen, George Eliot, or Conrad, that social limitations can be transcended

by enlightened individuals. Lawrence places a new emphasis on psychic awareness and the active will; working out of a tradition that already places great faith in the moral stamina of the individual, Lawrence emerges with a new perspective, what William Troy calls a "metaphysical belief in the absolute and inviolate character of human individuality."⁴ Unlike Fielding, Lawrence, preaching a new set of norms, risks that his system will be rejected. While it is true that he begins from a tradition, he also attempts to redefine his culture. And perhaps from The Rainbow on, Lawrence, totally unlike Fielding, becomes, as Troy says, "a religious prophet⁵...a functioning divinity [as well as] a practitioner of the arts."⁶

Consequently, there are basic differences in tone between these two writers. Fielding can be amused by Squire Western because the values of which Fielding approved ultimately could not be threatened by the vagaries of men. They would endure. Lawrence, attempting to pose an alternative morality, insecure because the world has yet to accept his thesis, must brutally punish a character like Gerald Crich with a cold and lonely death because he, symbolically, prevents a more viable morality from coming into being.

Fielding and Lawrence perhaps differ more in the degree of their faith in their own world-views than in the views themselves. And Fielding's attempt to distinguish between two equally possible moralities, a true and a hypocritical, seems more viable because Fielding sought his definition of morality within a recognizable social context.

Lawrence's alternative remains a projection, dependent for its survival on a flight from society.

In their scepticism toward absolutes, George Eliot, Conrad and Lawrence leave Fielding and Jane Austen behind. No longer can an absolute alternative be offered to characters who have fallen victim to false values. A way of looking at the world has been called into question; the approach to ethical questions that posits universals has been judged obsolete. For both George Eliot and Conrad, a broadening of the structure of the novel must accompany this new vision.

Lawrence, voicing agreement with the view that "recipes" become impotent in the face of circumstance, often chooses to say so within the familiar confines of the English novel as it is constructed by Fielding or Jane Austen. His innovations, more than Conrad's, are made within a narrative mode very similar to Jane Austen's.

But this is not to minimize Lawrence's achievement. He frees the character from the surfaces of social life; he adds a passionate and intense prophetic voice to his novels that makes them unique in tone. Lawrence chooses to direct all his energies toward an appeal to his reader, to the expression of a message. The craft of fiction is, for him, always a secondary question. Frequently it ceases to engage him at all.

Lawrence remains both an innovator and in many ways a logical successor to George Eliot and Conrad. That Lawrence seeks to "inform and lead into new places the flow of our sympathetic consciousness...lead our sympathy away in recoil

from things gone dead"⁷ places him in a tradition in the English novel that seems to begin with George Eliot. And like Conrad, he is deeply concerned with analyzing and describing the social institutions and values that have gone dead. In his explorations of the unconscious, Lawrence adds a new dimension to the genre of the novel.

This tradition does not end with Lawrence. Joyce too revitalizes the English novel, creating a new structure as he liberates Bloom from an old ethic. And after Joyce, in France, perhaps Robbe-Grillet, writing with a hope like Lawrence's that he will be creating an "homme nouveau," trying to omit all statements about meaning in his narratives, is even more successful in rejecting the notion of the absolute idea. "There are values only for the past," says Robbe-Grillet.⁸ An idea that for George Eliot was a premonition seems to have become a new norm for the novel, both for its form and for its content.

Innovation proceeds by adapting elements of a tradition, and abandoning others. It then inevitably becomes part of tradition itself. But the question remaining is: have novelists continued to exploit the genre of the novel, adding their innovations to the tradition of Lawrence and Joyce? The novel written in England since 1930 seems rather to indicate a full break with the tradition of innovation, and perhaps even an exhaustion of the genre. And this seems to apply to the American novel as well, to the novels of Bellow, Styron, Mailer. Like their English counterparts, still drawing upon the contribution of the Modernists,

they have also been unable to discover new forms, explore fresh ideas. Perhaps the final question - why? - can be answered only with the help of the sociologists, the political scientists, and the historians of our time.

Notes

- ¹ After Strange Gods: A Primer Of Modern Heresy (London, 1934), p. 54.
- ² Apocalypse (New York: The Viking Press, 1966), p. 200.
- ³ D.H. Lawrence: Novelist (New York, 1956), p. 120.
- ⁴ "D.H. Lawrence As Hero," Selected Essays, ed. Stanley Edgar Hyman (Rutgers: The State University, 1967), p. 115.
- ⁵ Ibid., p. 118.
- ⁶ "The Lawrence Myth," Selected Essays, p. 123.
- ⁷ Lady Chatterley's Lover (New York: The Modern Library), p. 112.
- ⁸ For A New Novel (New York, 1965), p. 143.

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