

FICTIONAL ABSENCE

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INTRODUCTION: THE PRACTICE OF THE ABSENCE OF GOD

English literature is an odd thing. And one of its oddities is it contains very few novels of importance that take seriously the idea of a God who is real and who acts; a God who actually 'does things'.

Why should this be?

After all, if we look at the English poetic tradition, we can see the Christian worldview clearly visible in explicitly Christian writers like Langland, Donne, Herbert, Milton, Coleridge, Browning, Hopkins, Auden and Eliot. But the novel is different. Here we find a general absence of God; the world that's depicted is, when we stop and think, one strangely at variance with the Christian worldview.

And that's despite the fact that the novel as an art form seems fairly wideranging; it doesn't seem - at first glance anyway - to have the kind of formal conventions that must narrow its vision of life. It offers simply to tell its reader a story, which it implies is of significance; and (at least until recently) to include in its account everything we need for an adequate understanding of what it depicts. And yet, no matter how important and far-reaching the events it tells us, it seems these events can be adequately described and understood on an entirely 'horizontal' level, without any reference to the presence and activity of God.

And it isn't as if the novel avoids the big questions. If we think of questions like, 'How do people behave? What effect do forces in society have on individuals? What is it like when someone falls in love? What happens when someone is myopically selfish? How does the consciousness of an artist become awakened?', we can find answers of a kind somewhere in the novel tradition. They aren't the general, 'scientific' answers that would be given by the sociologist or psychologist; but they are answers nonetheless. But if we ask, 'What is it like to know God? What happens when someone prays? What difference does God's presence make in daily life?' -the English novel tradition does not have much to say. These areas of life are seldom explored; they are disregarded.

And yet the novel's history extends back well beyond the nineteenth-century 'loss of faith', into a period when Britain could be regarded as the champion -and, certainly, the printing-house -of Protestant Christianity. Until the nineteenth, or indeed early twentieth, century, belief in a God who 'does things', belief in answered prayer and a loving divine providence, would have been part of the generally-held worldview for the majority of the British population: for some people much more vaguely than for others, of course. Yet this fundamental concept of the Protestant worldview -that God Himself is interested and involved in the life of each individual human being He has created -has largely failed to

leave its mark on the novels they wrote and read.

Of course, many Christian themes are present in the great English novels. Concepts of 'love' that correspond more or less to Christian ideas crop up fairly regularly, for example. Indeed, an issue as central to Christianity as atonement appears prominently even in a book like Conrad's Lord Jim, although in humanistic, 'horizontal' terms: there isn't really a 'Godward' dimension to Jim's atonement, of course. But it's possible to argue that Christianity of one kind or another is visible in the content of, say, Joseph Andrews, Mansfield Park, or much of Dickens. However, the specifically theistic content of Christianity, the notion of a God who is lovingly active in the lives of peoples and individuals, who actually 'does things', is not really presented. The writers themselves may have been orthodox believers; but they did not break out of the attitude to what goes on in the world that became dominant in prose fiction; they did not present the world as a place where God was at work. So, for example, it is possible for a writer like Laurence Lerner to remark regarding Jane Austen,

I say that Jane Austen the novelist did not believe in God because God is totally absent from her work. A person may remain silent about a deeply held and genuine belief, but not a writer: all that exists in a writer's work is what he creates. (1)

Whatever Jane Austen the person may have believed, he is saying, Jane Austen the novelist expresses no belief in God.

One reason why we don't notice this is the imprecise way that the term 'Christian' often gets used in literary criticism. Q.D. Leavis' caustic comment about writers who claim Jane Austen as a 'Christian novelist' merely 'because they know she was a clergyman's daughter'(2) has some justice. It is not helpful when a critic like Buckley classifies the poet Dylan Thomas as a Christian merely on the grounds that he 'resorts so eagerly to Christian references, images, and significances'(3); nor, to give another example, when R.W.B. Lewis labels Silone

a primitive Christian. He resembles most of all some member of the earliest Christian community -during the earliest years, indeed during the earliest days of Christianity, before the shock of the Crucifixion had worn off, or the meaning of the Resurrection had sunk in(4)

- as if we can speak of Christianity without the 'meaning of the Resurrection' being central. This sort of talk may have some value in demonstrating the pervasiveness of Christian ideas; but it does so at the price of blurring the meaning of basic terms.

(1) Laurence Lerner, The Truthtellers (1967), pp.23-24.

(2) Q.D. Leavis, 'Charlotte Yonge and "Christian Discrimination"', reprinted in A Selection from 'Scrutiny', ed. F.R. Leavis (1968), Vol.I, pp.155-56. (3) Vincent Buckley, Poetry and the Sacred (1968), p.62. (4) R.W.B. Lewis, The Picaresque Saint (1960), p.110.

There is a need, then, for definition. So let this writer put his own cards on the table: this study will focus on the Christian belief that God is a God who is active, who gets lovingly involved in people's lives. Obviously there is much more to Christian faith than that. But if we want to consider the relationship of the novel and Christianity, this is a very basic area; because novels too are concerned with what 'goes on' in the events of people's lives. And this 'article of faith' is most certainly basic to the Bible (as it is, indeed, to the creeds and confessions of all the main branches of the Christian church). As Daniel Fuller says,

Christianity distinguishes itself from many other religions and from all speculative philosophy in that its message concerns a God who has acted in history... He exercises his providential rule over the events of history to such an extent that even a bird's falling to the ground is apart of this rule (Matt 10:29). But in addition to initiating and supervising history, this God enters into it from time to time to bring about a sequence of events that will climax in the redemption of the people of God in the new heaven and earth. These redemptive events are considered as completely historical, but they distinguish themselves from the rest of history in that their occurrence cannot be explained by a prior cause within history but only by the direct intervention of God.(1)

In this respect Christianity contrasts very clearly with any variety of deism, any belief which, in Colin Brown's words,

believes in a God but which treats him as an absentee landlord. In the beginning God made the world and set it in motion. But he has now left it to its own devices, running of its own accord rather like a clockwork toy. God exists. But he is too remote to be personally involved in the day-to-day events of his creation. (2)

In contrast, the God of Christian faith is forever getting 'personally involved', throughout the biblical narrative(3); from the point where man is created and given a special mandate over God's creation in the first chapter of Genesis; through the Fall, where man becomes a willing casualty of the cosmic struggle between supernatural good and evil; and on

(1) Daniel P. Fuller, Easter Faith and History (1965), p.13. Pp.13-20 give a fair summary of the biblical concept of history. (2) Colin Brown, Philosophy and the Christian Faith(1969), p.74. (3) Some more cards need laying on the table at this point! In this study, 'Christian doctrine' will be understood as having specific reference to biblically-based Christianity, in which the Old and New Testaments, taken as a whole, are seen as the ultimate, normative and entirely reliable embodiment of Christian belief. There are other points of view about what is 'normative Christian doctrine', and this is not the place to defend this one: such a task would obviously require (and frequently receives) a book to itself. The statement is made here simply by way of clarification: and with an eye to Roland Barthes' wise and far-reaching remark that the 'major sin in criticism is not to have an ideology but to keep quiet about it'! ('Criticism as Language', in Twentieth Century Literary Criticism, ed. David Lodge (1972), p.649.)

through God's choice of Abraham and His activity in the lives of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Then come God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt, His self-revelation in the Mosaic law, and His leading them into the (literally) 'promised' land. The 'historical books' of the Old Testament portray Israel's history, social, military and political, as directly dependent upon their relationship with their God; the Psalms likewise present the life of both the individual and the community as perpetually affected by God's involvement; and this is also a major theme throughout the writings of the prophets. The New Testament continues this story with the ultimate 'invasion' of history by God in the person of Christ: the Incarnation is the definitive proof of God's loving involvement in our world. But the Acts of the Apostles portray that involvement continuing in the work of the Holy Spirit through Christians collectively and as individuals; and the Epistles instruct Christians to live with their faith grounded in God's acts in the past (1),

(1) Eg Hebrews 11.

His providence, companionship and activity in the present (1),

and His deliverance in the future.(2) Finally, the Revelation carries the story on to the God-ordained consummation of history, with the return of Christ, the last judgement, and the advent of the New Jerusalem.

It is plain, therefore, that the biblical-Christian message is not a collection of hellenistic abstractions. Rather, it is an account of God at work in the world of human history, and of humans responding. The message of the early Church centred on the Crucifixion and Resurrection as real, historical acts of God; in I Corinthians 15, for example, the apostle Paul emphasised these events (and the availability of verifiable evidence for them) as that which he 'passed on to you as of first importance'.(3) The Christian life is based on the belief that 'in everything God works for good with those who love Him'(4), on a faith in divine orchestration and intervention operating throughout the whole of human activity. Intercessory prayer - which has always been a fundamental feature of Christianity - would be a

(1) E.g. Romans 8:28.35-39, 2 Timothy 4:17, Philippians 1:19-20.
(2)E.g. Hebrews 9:28, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18, 2 Peter 3:8-14.
(3)1 Corinthians 15:1-8.11. Cf. also vv 14-19 where he stresses that if the Resurrection is not historical, 'our preaching is useless and so is your faith'. The distinction between history and pious myth is drawn clearly in 2 Peter 1:16. (4) Romans 8:28.

meaningless absurdity if God were not present in the everyday.

So C.S. Lewis is able to declare of Christianity, 'There must be no pretence that you can have it with the Supernatural left out. So far as I can see Christianity is precisely the one religion from which the miraculous cannot be separated.'(1) Unlike, say, Hinduism, authentically biblical Christianity is emphatically about what God is doing in the real world of space-time. To the biblical Christian, therefore, an approach to events of importance that omits the 'vertical dimension' of God 'working His purpose out' must seem not so much realistic as myopic.

And yet, although there is a clear historical connection between the Christian worldview and the impulse to portray realistically in literature the events of the everyday (2); and despite the fact that the Puritan concern for the spiritual development of the individual under the hand of God was an important factor in the rise of the novel (3); English prose fiction has become marked by an exclusively non-supernaturalistic convention, one that can only

(1) C.S. Lewis. God in the Dock.: Essays on Theology and Ethics(Grand Rapids. 1970). p.99. (2) Erich Auerbach. Mimesis (Berne,1946), trans. W.R. Trask (Princeton, 1953), demonstrates the historical association of realism in the wide sense with the Judaeo-Christian tradition rather than the classical one. (3)Cf. Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel (1957; Pelican edition of 1972), pp.82-86; also G.A. Starr. Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography (Princeton, 1965).

be described as the fictional counterpart of agnosticism. (Or, at best, deism.) There may indeed be room in our fictions for 'religious' characters (many novels have them); but there is a general failure to take account of that which, to the Christian, is the most significant fact, the most fundamental cause, and the most important personal character, in the universe. The 'way of seeing' that has become dominant is fundamentally alien, in a vital way, to the God-centred vision which radiates through biblical Christianity.

And this is not merely an aesthetic matter. The result could be described as an imaginative training in practical atheism; a training in the art of looking at important events and processes - love, war, marriage, childhood, adolescence, death - in purely 'horizontal' terms; a training in 'leaving God out'. If our culture has lost its ability to think of the world except in terms of things we can see, hear, taste, touch, smell, possess and spend, then the fictional worlds we have chosen to build, and in which we have chosen to immerse ourselves, may be part of the reason.

In this study, we shall consider how this has happened. We shall not be attempting to 'evaluate' works of fiction solely according to how they match up to the biblical-Christian worldview. The Christian critic must recognise that there are many books that display a dazzling 'technique', in the widest sense; that are powerful and significant aesthetic achievements; that are, in a number of important respects, radically 'realistic'; and yet that are also, at bottom, radically opposed to the biblical worldview. Similarly, there can be and are numerous books built on a faith in God which are appallingly bad in numerous other respects. There is more than one criterion of assessment, more than one thing to be said about a work of art. This study is concerned to examine the way in which some of the great novels in English build on or depart from a perception of the world as a place where God is active. This perception is only one part of the biblical worldview. But it is, to the Christian, something on which the whole of human existence is eternally dependent. How the novel handles it, therefore, is of considerable importance.

Pete Lowman.

ONE: THE BIRTH OF THE NOVEL

The world created for us in most of the great English novels is one where the idea of a God who cares about us to the point of actually doing things in our lives seems to have been lost. How has that happened? What has gone wrong?

An important part of the answer must lie in the circumstances of the novel's birth. The English novel arose in the period we call the Enlightenment, with major writers like Defoe, Richardson and Fielding; and, in important respects, it remains essentially an Enlightenment form.

Some years ago, Ian Watt's influential study The Rise of the Novel argued convincingly that the novel's emergence had much to do with the philosophical realism of the late 17th century and early 18th century Enlightenment; especially that movement's revolt against tradition, and its stress on the particular and individual as against that which was universal and general.(1) Both these tendencies offered a new legitimacy and importance for narratives of the everyday and personal: rather than the great (but traditional and general) themes of mythology or of the past, whether sacred or secular, that had preoccupied earlier writers. It was in this context that the novel was born.

Now, these tendencies need not necessarily have been anti-supernaturalistic or anti-Christian in nature. The revolt against the traditional emphasis on the universal and general

(1) Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel (1957; Pelican edition of 1972), ch.1.

was not so much a rebellion against Christianity as against Platonism(1); and among its philosophical leaders were sincere Christians such as Locke. Nonetheless, Enlightenment realism seems to have begun a process

that led eventually to the novel's anti-supernaturalistic convention. Perhaps the key factor was its exaltation of that which was perceived empirically by man, at the expense of that which was divinely revealed to him. In time, this approach drove a wedge between reason and faith, resulting in a restriction of faith and the loss of the whole dimension of the supernatural.

The process can probably be seen as beginning with Descartes (1596-1650). He it was who launched the ambitious project of 'rationalism': he dreamed of building a total philosophical system that worked outwards solely from the starting-point of man's own thoughts. 'I think, therefore I am' was the famous opening move from which he began; and from there he hoped that everything might follow, purely by logical deduction. Again, this starting-point of human thoughts and perceptions need not have led automatically to an anti-Christian position.(2) What set it on this path was the fact that, even after Descartes' (somewhat dubious) proof of God, revelation was still more or less ignored, and complete faith set in the human reason. God had been 'proven' to exist, which meant (for Descartes) that our created senses could be relied upon; but the universe still tended to be contemplated in man-centred terms. It was what I think that was primary; rather than any external reality that preexists me and exists whether I do or not - and that may indeed choose to speak to me and teach me. Colin Brown comments that

Descartes was interested in God not for his own sake, but for the world's. God is invoked as a kind of deus ex machina to guarantee the validity of our thought about the world. Apart from that he remains eternally standing in the wings. It is not surprising that, when later philosophers came along who shared Descartes' assumptions but not his methods, they could dispose entirely of this unwanted prop. (3)

For many of his successors, it appeared to be a safer move to put faith in human sense-perceptions than in divine revelation.

Perhaps, too, the 'Empiricist' thought of such men as Locke and Berkeley served to move things in the same direction. Again, both Locke and Berkeley were Christians; but their heavy stress on the importance of sensory experience may be seen as assisting the change of emphasis from knowing ultimate reality supremely through what its Maker tells us about it, to knowing the world supremely through what we feel and see of it. From a more sociological perspective, it is arguable that the growth of capitalism in this period tended likewise to give priority to what was material, what could be measured, what was instantly observable by sense-perception. In Karl Mannheim's words, there was developing a "quantitative" rationalism' striving for 'a conception of the world which would... explain the world as a mere compound of physical mass and physical forces'(4) -a world in which the supernatural would be pushed to the periphery.

(1) Cf. *ibid*, p.23. (2) Cf. Francis Schaeffer. Escape from reason (1968), pp.88-91. (3) Colin Brown, Philosophy and the Christian Faith (1969), p.52. (4) Karl Mannheim. Essays in Sociology and Social Psychology, ed. Paul Kecskemeti (1953). pp. 85-87.

Such a conception inevitably gives an important role to science; and here, says Basil Willey, there was arising

a 'climate of opinion' in which supernatural and occult explanations of natural phenomena ceased to satisfy, and the universe came more and more to be regarded as the Great Machine, working by rigidly determined laws of material causation. The supernatural, in both its divine and its diabolical forms, was banished from Nature. (1)

Yet again, this need not have been to the disadvantage of Christianity. After all, there is nothing particularly advantageous to belief in asserting a 'special' divine intervention to account for phenomena which are the result of natural 'laws' that are themselves divinely-established; a 'God of the gaps' has never been an entirely safe apologetic strategy. Many of the foremost scientists of the period were devout Christians who saw their task as an exploration of the works of God, and whose concept of scientific law was based on the concept of a divine and rational Lawgiver.(2) But as the Enlightenment wore on, the idea of the universe as a natural system ordained by God slowly _____ modified into one of an exclusively naturalistic system, from which God remained absent.

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Basil Willey. The Eighteenth Century Background (1957), p.4. (2) Cf. R. Hooykaas. Philosophia Libera: Christian Faith and the Freedom of Science (1957); also A.N. Whitehead, Science and the Modern World (1953). pp.15-16.

The result of all this was the prevalence of Deism, the religion of God as the absentee landlord, the 'great watchmaker' who has set the

world in motion but takes no further part in its affairs. 'The Divine', says Paul Hazard in the classic work on the period, 'was relegated to a vague and impenetrable heaven, somewhere up in the the skies.' (1) Colin Brown agrees: 'God was pushed more and more to the perimeter and sometimes outside altogether.' (2) To borrow a phrase used by the Dutch art historian H.R. Rookmaaker, 'The sky is closed... the sole facts are the things that we can see -the things we see are really the only facts there are.' (3) R.G. Cox sees the main difference between the 'world-picture' when Donne began to write in 1592, and that at the time of Marvell's death in 1678, as being that in the earlier picture

Faith and Reason were not commonly set in opposition to each other, and their spheres were not sharply distinguished. At the end of the period, very different assumptions prevail. Empirical science has emerged and is claiming the whole material universe as its field; the territory of Faith is coming to be strictly limited and fenced off so as to leave all tile rest to Reason.(4)

The Reformation concept of a unified world that included both 'natural' and 'supernatural', was disappearing. Faith was becoming restricted

(1) Paul Hazard, The European Mind. 1680-1715 (1935), p.xvii. (2) Brown. op. cit., p.39. (3) H.R. Rookmaaker, Modern Art and the Death of a Culture (1970), p.52. (4) R.G. Cox, 'A Survey of Literature From Donne to Marvell', in The Pelican Guide to English Literature, ed. Boris Ford, Vol.III (1956; revised edition of 1968), p.45.

to an area where it had little or no effect on daily life, and the stress was placed heavily on the world of the senses. This was the context in which the modern novel emerged. (1)

And this way of thinking worked through into most areas of culture. C.A.Patrides' book The Grand Design of God demonstrates the change that took place in the dominant way of looking at events, from the historiography of the period. History was still seen theocentrically, that is, with divine supervision, well into the second half of the seventeenth century. But Milton's History of Britain, first published in 1670, and Bossuet's Discours sur l'histoire universelle of 1681

(1) It may be objected that the Enlightenment worldview should not be seen as a direct cause of the novel's naturalistic causality, in that writers like Defoe and Fielding were all in print before some of the works that would seem to be important examples of Enlightenment thought; Moll Flanders(1722), or Tom Jones(1749),are earlier than the most important works of Hume, for example. But Descartes, Spinoza and Locke all belong to the seventeenth, rather than the eighteenth, century. A heavy stress on reason over revelation appears in the seventeenth-century Cambridge Platonists; and deism emerged fully fledged in 1696 in Toland's Christianity Not Mysterious. In fact Paul Hazard's classic study operates on the premise that all the main features in Enlightenment thought are visible in the period from 1680 to 1715. But we are not asserting a strictly causal relationship between the philosophers and the writers. Instead, as Watt says, 'Both the philosophical and the literary innovations must be seen as parallel manifestations of larger change' (op.cit., pp.33-34) Both disciplines reflected changing views as to what was central to life and what peripheral.

stand at the end of this tradition. Indeed a secularized historical picture (stressing the classical heritage) began to compete with the Judaeo-Christian, providentially-oriented approach from the beginning of the sixteenth century, in men like Guicciardini (1): Machiavelli, for example, 'appears to have displaced Providence by the arbitrary goddess Fortune.' (2) By the end of the seventeenth century the onset of the Enlightenment was demonstrated by the general disappearance of providence from historiography. Patrides points out that, in contrast to Milton's Paradise Lost, Dryden's opera The State of Innocence and the Fall of Man (1673-74) 'is not Christocentric for the simple reason that Dryden denied the God-man any active role in the affairs of mankind.' (3) Milton's History of Britain, he says, marked 'the termination of an era in the history of European thought.' (4)

Dryden has been said to mark the comparable triumph of Enlightenment presuppositions in the area of poetry. Buckley suggests that in him 'we have a ruling poet, who, for the first time in more than three-quarters of a century, can hardly be regarded as a religious poet'; and he goes on to point out the

(1) See C.A.Patrides, The Grand Design of God: the literary form of the Christian view of history (1972), esp. ch.4. (2) Ibid, p.68, n.74, where Patrides cites Burleigh T. Williams, 'Machiavelli on History and Fortune', Bucknell Review VIII, 1959, pp.225-245. (3) Patrides, ibid, p.125. Leopold Damrosch compares the 'absolute and invulnerable' place of Christian faith in Dante, and its 'embattled and problematical' situation in Milton (God's Plot and Man's Stories (Chicago, 1985), p.7). Milton's deliberate objective of 'justifying the ways of God to men' reflects the faith-struggle in which he was involved, a struggle that was turning against biblical Christianity by the time of Dryden. (4) Patrides, ibid, p.124.

generally un-religious nature of the poetry of the period that followed - Pope, Swift, Thomson, even Johnson: 'Deism came gradually to replace Christianity as the effective motive power of poetry... "Religious poetry", what there was of it, tried... to become a separate genre, and an intolerantly narrow one, which would admit very little of the poet's life-process.' (1) The sky was becoming closed: God and the everyday world had been compartmentalised and cut off from each other.

By the time the novel emerged, then, in novels like Defoe's Moll Flanders(1722), a worldview had become dominant in which the supernatural was tending to be excluded from human affairs, and the stress was placed on the empirical, material world. Truth and meaning were to be found in Nature and human reason without the aid of revelation - or with revelation banished to the perimeter. It is not surprising that the novel-form that arose in this situation should be one which fails to handle the presentation of God actively working out His purposes in life and society.

(1) Vincent Buckley, Poetry and the Sacred (1968), pp.40-42. See also Hoxie N. Fairchild, Religious Trends in English Poetry (New York, 1939-57). On Pope see Willey, op. cit., p.296.

(ii) The Stories Nobody Wrote

Things might have been different, and the modern novel might not have grown up with the shortcomings of Enlightenment thought built into it, if there had already been a tradition of prose fiction that took seriously the activity of God in everyday situations. But no such tradition existed.

Pre-Renaissance Catholic thought was, obviously, thoroughly supernaturalistic. However, its emphasis was on the universal and permanent rather than the particular and contemporary; and this, as Ian Watt has demonstrated, was not the sort of cultural context in which something like the realistic novel might be expected to develop.(1) There was also a marked tendency towards separating the spheres of 'grace', the world of God's activity, and 'nature', the world of the everyday. Such a separation can be traced a long way back in some areas of Catholic thought - as far, indeed, as the patristic interpreters of scriptural narrative who, as Erich Auerbach says, 'often removed the thing told very far from its sensory base. The sensory occurrence pales before the power of the figural meaning'.(2) It was a way of thinking that led, in the visual arts, to the icon, where 'the heavenly things were all-important, and were so holy that they were not pictured realistically... Only symbols were portrayed'(3); indeed, so important was the world of grace that often 'simple nature...held no interest for the artist.'(4)

In literature, the result of such thought could be works like the eleventh-century Old French Chanson d'Alexis, where, says Auerbach,

(1) Watt, op.cit., ch.1. Patrides points out that this attitude was also a hindrance in historiography (Patrides, op.cit., pp.32-33).
(2) Erich Auerbach, Mimesis (Berne, 1946), trans. W.R.Trask (Princeton, 1953), pp.48-49. (3) Schaeffer, op.cit., p.10. See also Rookmaaker, op.cit., pp.II-14. (4) Schaeffer, ibid.

On the one hand there is serving God, forsaking the world, and seeking eternal bliss -on the other, natural life in the world, which leads to "great sorrow." There are no other levels of consciousness, and external reality -the many additional phenomena which have their place in the universe and which ought somehow to constitute the frame for the occurrences of the narration -is submitted to such reduction that nothing survives but an insubstantial background for the life of the saint. (1)

Buckley comments that much late medieval poetry is likewise 'a poetry...envisaging the saving forces as existing quite outside the world of human manners and relationships.'(3) Where such an attitude was dominant there was little place for serious exploration of God's activity in contemporary social life. The only medieval vernacular prose literature that showed much interest in the world of 'nature' (apart from the historiography, which was thoroughly theocentric) tended not to be very serious in

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Auerbach, op.cit., pp.111-112. (3) Buckley, op.cit., p.23

intention -popular folktales, and the like. And as for the romances, as Ryan has remarked,

While the bulk of medieval literature is subordinated to a greater or lesser extent to the influence of Christianity, the romances, entertaining narrative works whose gratification value seems to have been escape from the banality of day to day existence, are among the few types of literary activity that display little of that influence. (1)

The situation did not really improve with the advent of the Renaissance, or rather Renaissances, and their rediscovery of the importance of physical nature. The separation of grace and nature was still a dominant idea; and in the form it took in scholasticism after Aquinas, 'the world of faith, of grace, of religion is the higher one, a world for which we have need of God's revelation... But the lower world, the world of men, the world of 'nature', can be understood by reason, and here in fact reason reigns. It is as such non-religious, secular.'(2) And, as Etienne Gilson argues, this dichotomy between faith and reason led to a parallel dichotomy ('new chasms') between God and His world(3): 'Heaven began...to seem farther off' -precisely the problem the novel would later inherit, exacerbated by the developments of the Enlightenment. The world of the natural creation and of day-to-day living were beginning to be, in Schaeffer's term, 'autonomous '(4), bearing little relation to the supernatural aspect of the universe. Consequently, the discovery that nature was worthy of depiction in art -in Petrarch's poetry, for example, or Giotto's painting -led towards a situation where the rediscovered natural world replaced rather than complemented the supernatural

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J.S. Ryan, Tolkien: Cult or Culture? (Armidale, NSW, 1969), p.213. (2) Rookmaaker, op.cit., pp.34-35. (3) Quoted in C.S.Lewis, The Allegory of Love (1936), p.88. (4) Schaeffer, op.cit., p.11.

universe that had inspired earlier ages.(1) Auerbach notes that even in the great Christian poetry of Dante there is a tendency for the image of man to eclipse the image of God; and when we move on to Boccaccio, 'Of the figural-Christian conception which pervaded

Dante's imitation of the earthly and human world and which gave it power and depth, no trace is to be found... Boccaccio's characters live on earth, and only on earth.'(2)

So, with the coming of the Renaissance, the split that had been allowed to open in earlier scholastic thinking between God's grace and the everyday world began to push grace out of sight altogether. Where 'grace' survived, it tended to be in a separate universe: '"The sacred " becomes a category, either a poem or a feeling, quite separate from others', as Buckley remarks of sixteenth-century religious poetry.(3) So if we set this schizophrenia of vision alongside the earlier scholastic disinterest in the everyday, we see why, by the time of the Enlightenment, there was not an available tradition of story-telling that took seriously the presence of grace in everyday reality. Instead, the Enlightenment worldview would provide a philosophical foundation for this schizophrenia. and so make it more widespread - and permanent.

(iii) Another Way to Close the Sky

But there was another factor too; and this was the rediscovery by Renaissance humanism of classical aesthetics, especially the concept of the Stiltrennung ('segregation of styles').

This was a critical doctrine involving a marked division between tragedy (where heroic characters were depicted performing

(1) Ibid, pp.11-16. Basil Willey comments that 'It was... in this region of "things" that the new age wanted soberly and continually to live'. He adds that in Francis Bacon the supernatural was already beginning to be excluded from the natural: in Bacon's writings 'Religious thought... must be "skied", elevated far out of reach, not in order that so it may be more devoutly approached,. but in order to keep it out of mischief' (The Seventeenth Century Background, pp.26, 29.) This separation was kept at bay for a while by the strong insistence of the Reformation thinkers on a unified field of knowledge, in which God and the supernatural were relevant to every area of life; but the Reformation worldview lost much influence in England at the time of the Restoration, and the Enlightenment marks the end of its dominance. (2) Auerbach, op.cit., pp.202,224. (3) Buckley op.cit., p.29. There are, of course, many exceptions to these generalizations, especially among productions arising out of popular culture. Langland's magnificent fusion in Piers Plowman is one; the miracle plays are another, as Auerbach points out (op.cit., pp.158,160.) But the general tendency in the centuries prior to the rise of the novel was away from fusion of the realms of 'grace' and 'nature'.

lofty actions with elevated language) and comedy (where 'low' or rustic characters were involved in 'low' or everyday actions); with a resultant separation between the sublime and everyday reality.

Erich Auerbach discusses this doctrine in some detail in his book Mimesis. It may be seen - being wrestled with but transcended- as early as Dante(1); and it grew in importance as the Renaissance progressed. Realistic prose came to be classed firmly in the comic category, as the earlier, more Christian vision disappeared:

[Dante's] sovereignty over reality in its sensory multiplicity remained as a permanent conquest, but the order in which it was comprehended was now lost, and for a time there was nothing to take its place... Early humanism, that is, lacks constructive ethical force when it is confronted with the reality of life; it again lowers realism to the intermediate, unproblematic and non-tragic level of style which, in classical antiquity, was assigned to it as an extreme upper limit, and, as in the same period, makes the erotic its principal, and almost exclusive, theme. (2)

Now the whole concept of such a dichotomy was completely foreign to the Judaeo-Christian tradition:

That the King of Kings was treated as a low criminal, that he was mocked, spat upon, whipped, and nailed to the cross -that story no sooner comes to dominate the consciousness of the people than it completely destroys the aesthetics of the separation of styles. (3)

(1) Auerbach, ibid, pp.185-187. (2) Ibid., p.228. (3) Ibid., p.72.

Consequently, in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, from the gospel narratives through the saints' legends and the Divine Comedy to the miracle plays, the doings of 'humble people' are depicted seriously: the sublime and the lowly can appear together. (And it was from this Judaeo-Christian tradition, mediated through writers

like Bunyan and Defoe, that serious, realistic prose fiction about 'humble people' was later to develop.)

But the resurgence of classical aesthetics marked the triumph of a different outlook: and one result of the 'segregation of styles' was the near-impossibility of depicting God at work in history on either side of the dichotomy.(1) The 'comic' category, which at this stage was marked by its 'low' nature as much as by its 'happy ending', excluded God almost by definition; while the Christian view of history, and a belief in the action of God for good within history, are not easy to combine with the classical 'tragic vision', turning as that often does on what Nathan Scott calls 'a sense of shipwreck, a sense of radical fissure or rift in the realm of ultimate reality', the efforts of the tragic hero to put matters right, and the consequent disaster resulting from his limitations. ('The whole slant and bias of authentically tragic drama is humanistic', concludes Scott.(2)) Where this aesthetic was followed, Christian literature itself deserted realism as pertaining to 'low' characters: thus for example

(1) The question of the historical nature of God's activity was a key point of conflict whenever the Judaeo-Christian and Hellenistic worldviews met, as both Patrides and Fuller have pointed out. Cf. Patrides, op.cit., pp.13-14, and Daniel P. Fuller, Easter Faith and History (1965), pp.25-26. (2) Nathan A. Scott Jr., The Broken Center (Yale, 1965), pp.123-27. Auerbach notes that, in seventeenth-century French tragic drama (in which the 'segregation of styles' reached its most marked expression), the 'exaggerated tragic character...and the extreme cult of the passions are actually anti-Christian' (Auerbach, op.cit., p.393.) All this is not to say that Christian tragedy is an impossibility: the biblical narrative of Saul would disprove that. But, as Auden suggests, where Greek tragedy arouses the feeling 'What a pity it had to be this way', a Christian tragedy would suggest something different - 'What a pity it was this way when it might have been otherwise' (quoted Damrosch, op.cit., p.98). In the resurgence of classical aesthetics, the Greek alternative obviously dominated, without the redemptive 'possible other case' of God's grace.

'the great and significant Christian literature of the French seventeenth century...is constantly elevated and sublime in tone... It shuns every "base" expression, every type of concrete

realism.' (1) The 'segregation of styles', then, excluded the depiction of God in the everyday; and perhaps it is not altogether surprising that there should be little scope for the expression of the Judaeo-Christian worldview within the conventions of a Hellenistic aesthetic.

Of course, as Ian Watt points out, 'In Protestant countries...the Stiltrennung never achieved such authority, especially in England.' (2) Nonetheless, he adds, English literature was not unaffected. Certainly English prose fiction up to Defoe's time seems either to lack realism or else serious intention - or both. The romances tended to be non-realistic, neo-Platonist and concerned with the universal: the names of the characters either denoted particular qualities, as in Sidney, or 'like those of Lyly, Aphra Behn or Mrs. Manley carried foreign, archaic or literary connotations which excluded any suggestion of real and contemporary life.' (3) The position Sidney would have taken towards the notion of a realistic novel may be deduced from his criticism (obviously influenced by Platonism) of the historian as being regrettably 'captived to the truths of a foolish world.' (4)

(1) Auerbach, ibid., pp.393-94. (2) Watt, op.cit., p.88. (3) Ibid, pp.17,20. (4) Sir Philip Sidney, Apology for Poetry (c.1583), quoted Maurice Evans in the introduction to his edition of Sidney's Arcadia (1590-98; Penguin edition of 1977), p.23. Sidney, indeed, was a committed Christian, and the causality in his romances reflects this, as we shall see; but he was not concerned to introduce this causality into a presentation of everyday life.

The Carde of Fancie, by the playwright Robert Greene, illustrates how a writer in this kind of classically-influenced tradition may well end up creating fictions that present a causality far from the Christian system (to which, of course, that same writer might well have been an adherent in

everyday life). Castania, Greene's heroine, is to be found enduring 'a painful conflict between fancie and the fates, love and the destinies'(1); providence is not in view as a governing framework. She wishes Gwydonius 'such happie success, as either fortune or the fates can allow him', and signs herself 'Thine, though the Gods say no'.(2) And although she prays to the gods to preserve her lover, the gods in a romance of this kind are such that it is a positive quality for the heroine to trust her own judgment in love, rather than trusting heaven's guidance to be something reliable and utterly loving; her prayer is immediately followed by this passage:

For I hope though Fortune frowne, though the destinies denie it,
though the fates forswear it, yea, though the Gods themselves saie no,
yet in time we shall have such happie success, as the loyalty of our
love, and the cleereness of our conscience by the lawe of justice do
deserve. (3)

Here the gods are supreme by might rather than right, and not necessarily either just or almighty. This was probably not Greene's own creed; but the kind of fiction he was writing was not interested in a serious exploration of the real world, such as might bring his real beliefs into play and confront issues like the actions of providence in contemporary life: instead, he stays with the classical framework.

And Greene is not atypical. Jusserand has written of Elizabethan prose romancers in general,

What have we to do, thought men, with things practical, convenient, or of ordinary use? We wish for nothing but what is brilliant, unexpected, extraordinary. What is the good of setting down in writing the incidents of commonplace lives? Are they not sufficiently known to us?... Authors...took good care to relieve themselves of difficult search after the truth. (4)

The difference between such an attitude, and the ethos of the Enlightenment that gave birth to the modern realistic novel, is obvious. If reality was unworthy of serious exploration, a tradition of providentialist realism was not going to arise.

Nashe and Deloney are examples of the other alternative: realism, but realism of the low comic, unproblematic variety. Here providence is invoked only in casual phrases dropped in passing(5), or else for such purposes as adding solemnity to an execution scene; at the close of The Unfortunate Traveller, for example, Nashe presents Cutwolfe's death, and

(1) Robert Greene, The Carde of Fancie(1584), reprinted in the Everyman Shorter Novels: Elizabethan and Jacobean(1929), p.188. (2) Ibid, pp.223-24. (3) Ibid, p.249. (4) J.J. Jusserand, The English Novel in the time of Shakespeare, trans. Elizabeth Lee (1890; new edition, ed. Philip Brockbank, 1966), pp.103-104. (5) Eg in Deloney's Jack of Newberie(1597) and Thomas of Reading(1600) in the Everyman Shorter Novels, pp.20,134,136. tells his audience, 'Prepare your eares and your teares, for never tyll this thrust I anie tragecall matter upon you. Strange and wonderfull are Gods judgments, here shine they in their glory...Guiltlesse soules that live every houre subject to violence, and with your despairing feares doe much empaire Gods providence: fasten your eies on this spectacle that will add to your

faith.' (1) But this is simply drawing upon the providentialist heritage shared by writer and reader to add a resonance, and a backcloth of eternal judgment, when Nashe wishes to present 'tragedy matter'. The rest of the book is essentially a comic series of 'good yarns', too deliberately 'low-life' for the presentation of providence.

It seems, then, that under the influence of the 'segregation of styles', writers on both the 'high' and 'low' sides of the divide were hindered from making a serious exploration of reality such as has marked the modern novel at its best. Until Defoe, we may say with A.R.Humphreys that 'fiction's relation to life was peripheral, as idealization or moral doctrine or satire'(2), or else simply as comic picaresque. And it is noteworthy that three of the main exceptions to the 'exclusion of God' from the early novel, Bunyan, Defoe, and Richardson, were all to be writers who for one reason or another were unlikely to be influenced by such matters as the neo-classical aesthetics of the 'segregation of styles'. Neither Bunyan nor Defoe were seeking to create deliberate 'works of art' in quite the same way as, say, Fielding. Bunyan's fiction might be considered as emerging out of preaching; with his choice of material dictated by the strong concern of the preacher for the supernatural dimension to the lives of ordinary people. Defoe's work likewise owes much to his journalism. It would be in such areas of popular culture that the doctrines of neo-classical aesthetics would have least effect. Richardson's Pamela may be considered as another example of supernaturalistic fiction; and Richardson too 'slid' into novel-writing, from the composition of exemplary letters. He was no friend of the classical heritage, and his attribution of a 'high' concept of sexual morality to an apparently 'low' character such as the servant-girl Pamela makes clear his hostility towards the divisions set up by the 'segregation of styles'.(3) Clearly, the 'segregation of styles' and a realism that took seriously a Christian supernaturalism in the everyday world were mutually exclusive.

(1) Thomas Nashe, The Unfortunate Traveller (1594) in the Everyman Shorter Novels, p.350. (2) A.R.Humphreys, 'The Literary Scene', in The Pelican Guide to English Literature, ed. Boris Ford, Vol.IV (1957, revised edition of 1968), p.75. (3) Cf. Watt, op.cit., pp.188, 276-78.

Looking back over the period preceding the birth of the novel, therefore, we are faced with a tragically recurrent schizophrenia of vision. In the scholastic heritage, there was a gulf between grace and nature that hindered the making of stories of grace at work in nature. The Renaissance inherited this dichotomy, and so there was less interest in the activities of grace even as there was much more interest in the world of nature. And, at the same time, the resurgence of classical aesthetics made it difficult to portray together the

sublime with 'low, ordinary' life in any case. So, though providentialist beliefs were common in everyday culture, fictional expressions of these beliefs were in short supply.

And so it was that, when the novel as we know it today began to emerge, it lacked models of how to depict the interest and involvement of God Himself in the lives of 'ordinary people'; even though, in its own serious attention to 'ordinary people', the novel was reintroducing a Judaeo-Christian attitude that had been lost under the rule of the classically-based 'segregation of styles'. To the Christian, the period of the rise of the novel looks like an opportunity missed. And as the Enlightenment gathered momentum, the surrounding cultural atmosphere became more radically dechristianised. In the further development of the novel form, therefore, God was forgotten almost altogether.

(iv) The Puritan Alternative

Yet, once again, it need not have been so. For to summarise the story in these terms is to omit something of enormous importance; and that is the Reformation.

One of the crucial things characterising the thinking of the Reformers was their insistence that God was concerned with the total lives of ordinary individuals. No separation of grace from nature here, nor of the sublime from the everyday; for Calvin and his heirs in particular, there was a passionate desire to express the implications of God's Kingdom in every area of life. It is not surprising, therefore, that when we look at the poetry of writers influenced by the rediscovered biblical faith of the Reformation - poets like Donne, Herbert and Marvell - we find that religious poetry has come back dramatically and excitingly into the real world.

From this tradition, realistic and providentialist fiction might also have been expected to emerge. And indeed the Puritan culture, with its Reformation worldview, has been seen as a key factor in the birth of the novel form in England. To start with, Puritanism emphasised the salvation of the individual as the main issue in God's dealings with men; and this was as suitable a foundation for the novel's 'serious' depiction of everyday life as the Enlightenment philosophers' stress on particulars would be. (In a way, the 'salvation of the individual' could be said to have been a prominent theme in the novel ever since!) Along with this went a high valuation of the inner life, a result of the Puritan emphasis on spiritual self-examination.(1) In contrast to the

(1) Watt, ibid, pp.83-85. And cf Damrosch: 'For the Puritans the self is all-important not because it is one's self but because it represents the sole battleground of the war between good and evil... But the self is duplicitous and complex, requiring the most stringent analysis... The truth can only emerge from a sustained scrutiny of behaviour over a period of time, and thus the need for temporal narrative is born... The relevance of Puritanism to the novel... lies... in the peculiar power, as a basis for fiction, of a faith that sees human life as a narrative invented by God' (and hence containing a real pattern) 'but interpreted by human beings' (op.cit., p.4).

elitist 'segregation of styles' doctrine, there was in Puritan thought a more democratic approach regarding all classes seriously, in line with the main Judaeo-Christian tradition; and in contrast to the scholastic separation of grace and nature, there was a strong belief in the value of all activity, whether apparently 'spiritual' or not: that is to say, a greater interest in, and a higher valuation of, the affairs of daily life. 'If God had given

the individual prime responsibility for his own spiritual destiny, it followed that he must have made this possible by signifying his intentions to the individual in the events of his daily life. The Puritan therefore tended to see every item in his personal experience as potentially rich in inward and spiritual meaning.'(1) Such interests point towards narratives of the kind we see in the novel. And they did indeed bear fruit in fiction; as we can see from the work of Sidney, Bunyan, and Defoe.

Sidney is an intriguing figure. He is a Puritan, but a real 'Renaissance man' too, and his writing owes a great deal to the classical heritage. As we have already noted above, it bears the marks of the 'segregation of styles'; and his enormously long tale Arcadia is by no means a realistic book. But the story - which describes how an oracle becomes fulfilled despite all the efforts of the human beings involved to prevent its outworking - has as a major theme the exploration and enactment of a mysterious, omnipotent, but ultimately benign providence at work in the lives of individuals. Oracle fulfilments are a fairly ancient (and classical) topic; but as Sidney pursues his narrative, he makes use of an underlying providential causality that could have come straight out of his own, Christian, world-picture, and that is, in that sense, 'realistic', as far as he is concerned:

The almighty wisdom (evermore delighting to show the world that by unlikeliest means greatest matters may come to conclusion that human reason may be the more humbled and more willingly give place to divine providence) as at the first it brought in Dametas to play a part in this royal pageant, so having continued him still an actor, now that all things were growing ripe for an end, made his folly the instrument of revealing that which far greater cunning had sought to conceal. (2)

(1) Watt, ibid., pp.88,85. It is also worth noting in passing Coleman O.Parsons' suggestion that the English short story 'originated as narrative proof of immortality and an overseeing deity', having its forebears in the tales of 'apparition evidence' gathered by such men as Glanville and Baxter, and then partly secularized in Defoe's A True Relation of the Apparition of one Mrs.Veal. Even this, adds Parsons, 'when used as a preface to Drelincourt's The Christian's Defence Against the Fears of Death... disclosed its theologico-propagandic affinity.' (Reported in PMLA, LXVII, February 1952, p.144.) (2) Sidney, Arcadia, p.715. Pp.27-36 of Evans' introduction give a useful survey of the providential theme in the book.

In this sort of vagabonding in those untrodden places, they were guided by the everlasting justice (using themselves to be punishers of their faults, and making their own actions the beginning of their chastisements) unhappily both for him and themselves to light upon Musidorus. (1)

The heroines of the story, Pamela and Philoclea, endure their sufferings with a fortitude grounded in their trust in such a providence. Pamela's prayer in her imprisonment arises directly out of the Christian tradition:

Look upon my misery with Thine eye of mercy, and let Thine infinite power vouchsafe to limit out some proportion of deliverance unto me, as to Thee shall seem most convenient... Let not injury, O Lord, triumph over me, and let my faults by Thy hand be corrected... O Lord, I yield unto Thy will, and joyfully embrace what sorrow Thou wilt have me suffer. (2)

Arcadia is most definitely a romance, of course, and not a realistic novel. Nonetheless, as Evans observes, there is not a total disjunction between Arcadia and the work of the early novelists Fielding and Richardson, and 'it is no accident that Richardson gave the name of Pamela to his first heroine' (3) - who likewise turns to prayer when she finds herself imprisoned to further the interests of an unwelcome suitor. And if tradition is

(1) Ibid., p.754. (2) Ibid, p.464.

(3) Ibid., p.9.

right that Charles I quoted Pamela's prayer when he was on the scaffold(1), then it demonstrates that, whatever its genre, Arcadia could be read as presenting, in all its deliberate non-realism and artifice, a model of the workings of providence in real

life, as Christians - on either side of the Civil War - would have considered them to operate. (After all, it is just such a balance of fantasy and realism that we find in twentieth-century Christian fantasists such as C.S.Lewis.) Arcadia, then, is providentialist fiction of a kind - and is quite capable of depicting the outworkings of providence in the same volume with extramarital sex and attempted rape. From it a providentially-oriented novel tradition could conceivably have developed, once the Platonism that made Sidney disinterested in realistic narrative had gone out of fashion.

Of course there was a strong current in Puritanism that was thoroughly opposed to anything of the kind. A major cause of this may have been the dislike of the low morality of much Renaissance prose fiction; this certainly seems to have been the case with Elizabethan Puritanism -for example, Roger Ascham's attack on Italian fiction.(2) But a writer of the stature of Richard Baxter was capable of criticising as 'time-wasting' the literature that fell into the category of 'pastimes'(3), and believing that fictional literature 'dangerously bewitcheth and corrupteth the minds of young and empty people', taking 'precious time in which much better work might be done.'(4) There was also a definite unease about

(1) Ibid. (2) Quoted Jusserand, op.cit.pp.74-75. (3) Richard Baxter, Christian Directory, quoted Leland Ryken, Triumphs of the Imagination(1979), p.16. (4) Richard Baxter, Treatise of Self-Denial, quoted Ryken, ibid.

the lack of truthfulness of fiction in general. It is noticeable that Bunyan felt it necessary to protect himself by placing the biblical text 'I have used similitudes' and a defensive preface at the opening of both parts of Pilgrim's Progress.

Nonetheless, Bunyan, like Sidney, demonstrates the feasibility of providentially-oriented fiction arising out of the Puritan tradition. Indeed, a good part of his work constitutes 'realistic fiction', given his beliefs about the nature of reality, and may be taken as a proof that fiction based upon a supernaturalistic realism is indeed a practical possibility. Bunyan's cast of mind is supernaturalistic as a matter of course: to him the world is above all a place where the drama of salvation and damnation is being played out. His autobiography, Grace Abounding, is subtitled 'A Brief Relation of the Exceeding Mercy of God in Christ, to His Poor Servant, John Bunyan.' That is to say, Bunyan's understanding of his own life is as a series of events in which the mercy of God has been active. In the preface, he quotes Moses' words 'Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness', and adds, 'Wherefore this I have endeavoured to do; and not only so, but to publish it also; that, if God will, others may be put in remembrance of what he hath done for their souls, by reading his work upon me.' God's activity is neither a myth nor something that has ceased: rather, the scriptural narrative provides a model for understanding Bunyan's own life, just as he hopes his own autobiography may do for his readers.

When he commences his story, it is with the presupposition that God is sovereign over each event in his life. 'I magnify the heavenly Majesty, for that by this door he brought me into this world', he

says of his mean birth(1): a sovereign God is predisposing for good the circumstances of Bunyan's origins. Likewise it 'pleased God to put it into [his parents'] hearts to put me to school'(2); when he took to 'cursing, swearing, lying and blaspheming,' it 'did so offend the Lord, that even in my childhood he did scare and affright me with fearful dreams.' (3)

Had not a miracle of precious grace prevented, I had... perished... But God did not utterly leave me, but followed me still, not now with convictions, but judgements; yet such as were mixed with mercy. For once I fell into a creek out of the sea, and hardly escaped drowning. Another time I fell out of a boat into Bedford river, but mercy yet preserved me alive. (4)

God is also active in Bunyan's thought-life:

But the same day, as I was in the midst of a game of cat... a voice did suddenly dart from heaven into my soul, which said, Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to heaven, or have thy sins and go to hell? (5)

Even the act of writing the autobiography takes place in the conscious presence of an active God: 'O Lord, thou knowest my life, and my ways were not hid from thee.' (6)

(1) John Bunyan, Grace Abounding, and The Life and Death of Mr. Badman(1666,1689), p.7. All references are to the Everyman edition of these two books, published in one volume in 1928. (2) Ibid.
(3) Ibid, p.8. (4) Ibid, p.9. (5) Ibid, p.12. (6) Ibid,p.9.

In such a universe, prayer and temptation involve dialogue with God and with the devil:

Once as I was walking to and fro in a good man's shop,
bemoaning of myself in my sad and doleful state...
praying, also, that if this sin of mine did differ from that
against the Holy Ghost, the Lord would show it me.
And being now ready to sink with fear, suddenly there was, as
if there had rushed in at the window, the noise of wind upon
me, but very pleasant, and as if I heard a voice speaking,
Didst ever refuse to be justified by the blood of Christ?
And, withal my whole life and profession past was, in a
moment, opened to me, wherein I was made to see that
designedly I had not. (1)

Yet, thought I, I will pray. But, said the tempter, your
sin is unpardonable. Well, said I, I will pray. It is to no
boot, said he. Yet, said I, I will pray. So I went to prayer
to God.... And as I was thus before the Lord, that scripture
fastened on my heart, "O woman, great is thy faith" (Matt.
xv.28), even as if one had clapped me on the back, as I was
on my knees before God. (2)

When we turn to Bunyan's fiction in the light of this, its
supernaturalistic mode of thought is evident. Christian's
adventures in Pilgrim's Progress are not entirely allegorical, of
course; they could not be; they must inevitably contain many elements
of the real world.(3) And when the temptations Christian endures are
considered in the light of the autobiography, it becomes plain that a
'devil' in Bunyan need not be considered as an allegorical depiction
of an evil thought, but rather, like the highway robbers Christian's
wife faces in Part II of Pilgrim's Progress, is a peril out of real
life included in the story:

(1) Ibid. p.53. (2) Ibid. p.63. (3) Just as a later novel like
Fielding's Tom Jones, with characters with names like Allworthy and
Supple, is not entirely non-allegorical. Allegory and novel are not
watertight categories.

I took notice that now poor Christian was so confounded
that he did not know his own voice, and thus I perceived
it: just when he was come over against the mouth of the
burning pit, one of the wicked ones got behind him. and
stepped up softly to him. and whisperingly suggested many
grievous blasphemies to him, which he verily thought had
proceeded from his own mind. (1)

It is worth recording that, in communities where Bunyan's own supernaturalism is still current, this passage is read as realism rather than allegory, and as being a classic expression of the difficulty of distinguishing between the merely psychological phenomena of one's own thought-life and the spiritual warfare of temptation: the writer has heard it quoted to that purpose more than once. Bunyan certainly thought in both these categories (in Grace Abounding he speaks of temptations, 'both from Satan, mine own heart, and carnal acquaintance'(2)): so it is reasonable to understand this passage as a piece of intentionally realistic depiction, just as much as, say, the economics of *Vanity Fair*.

When we turn to The Life and Death of Mr Badman, we are more or less in the world of the realistic novel. The name 'Badman' - and the names of the two narrators, Wiseman and Attentive -are obviously intended to be representative. But the rest of the details are to be understood as part of the real world: the preface says,

(1) John Bunyan. Pilgrim's Progress (1678; Penguin edition of 1965), p.90. (2) Bunyan. Grace Abounding. p.24.

And although, as I said, I have put it forth in this method, yet have I as little as may be gone out of the road of mine own observation of things. Yes, I think I may truly say that to the best of my remembrance, all the things that here I discourse of, I mean as to matter of fact, have been acted upon the stage of this world, even many times before mine eyes... And why I have concealed most of the names of the persons whose sins or punishments I here and there in this book make relation of is, (i) For that neither the sins nor the judgements were all

alike open; the sins of some were committed, and the judgements executed for them, only in a corner.... (ii) Because I would not provoke those of their relations that survive them.... (iii) Nor would I lay them under disgrace or contempt.... As for those whose names I mention, their crimes or judgements were manifest; public almost as anything of that nature that happeneth to mortal men. Such therefore have published their own shame by their sin, and God his anger, by taking of open vengeance. (1)

The Life and Death of Mr. Badman, then, is intended to be thoroughly realistic: its narratives of divine judgement, and the pattern of supernatural causality underlying them, are as little 'allegorical' as its narratives of crime. Bunyan is asserting that his novel is just like life. For that reason, it may be seen as a clear example of deliberate 'supernaturalistic realism.'

Well, so it came to pass, through the righteous judgement of God, that Ned's wishes and curses were in a little time fulfilled upon his father; for not many months passed between them after this manner, but the devil did indeed take him, possess him; I mean, so it was judged by those that knew him, and had to do with him in that his lamentable condition. (2)

You must rather word it thus -it was the judgement of God that he did, that is, he came acquainted with them through the anger of God. (3)

For a family, where godliness is professed and practised, is God's ordinance, the place which He has appointed to teach young ones the way and fear of God (Gen.xviii.18.19). Now, to be put out of such a family, into a bad, a wicked one, as Mr. Badman was, must needs be in judgement, and a sign of the anger of God. (4)

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- (1) Ed.cit.,pp.139.146-47. (2) Ibid. p.171. (3) Ibid. p.177.
(4) Ibid. p.192.

But now, methinks, when he was brought thus low, he should have considered the hand of God that was gone out against him, and should have smote upon the breast, and have returned. (1)

To someone of Bunyan's beliefs, the single most important aspect of the career of an evildoer was that his life was lived out in the presence of God, experiencing and at the same time defying the judgements of God. The biblical material he cites provides the paradigms through which events are to be interpreted. Bunyan is

thoroughly aware of the necessity of this interpretative process; the hand of God is not something to be discerned through the physical eye, but rather through a process of applying general principles about the forces at work in the universe to a new collection of data. This process of interpretation may be seen clearly at work in the passages quoted above; it is embodied in the phrases 'I mean, so it was judged...' 'you must rather word it thus...', 'must needs be in judgement', and the simple 'methinks'. To discern the spiritual universe in operation, Bunyan implies, requires the deliberate effort of thoughtful and perceptive faith; and he is not afraid to build that process of perception into his novel.

The world he constructs thereby is one in which the hidden actions of both God and the devil stand revealed. By so doing, Bunyan sets out what he believes to be the all-important events underlying Mr.Badman's career, without which the narrative would be woefully inadequate. So when, at the close of the book, Wiseman asks Attentive to pray 'that I with you may be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation', it is not merely a pious epilogue. Rather, Bunyan has attempted to draw a realistic picture of life as he sees it, as being above all else a drama of grace and judgement: and the closing remark is the most logical thing to wish for if life is indeed like that. Bunyan's novel is written with an explicitness that would have to be assisted with an extraordinary brilliance of style if his book were to find readers among people unsympathetic to his supernaturalistic faith; a novelist writing with a similar worldview today would need to be far more discreet. But at any rate, his work provides a clear example of a way in which a supernaturalistic worldview could be expressed in realistic fictional narrative, simply by recording events as he believed they would be, and including all the causes his worldview held to be present.

(1) Ibid, p.200.

(v) 'Robinson Crusoe'

But the most important example of a novel arising out of the Puritan heritage and marked by an explicit supernaturalism must be Defoe's Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe (1719). The preface to this book announces as one of its purposes 'to justify and honour the wisdom of Providence in all the variety of our circumstances, let them happen how they will' (1) -a statement of

intent none too far removed from John Milton's resolve to 'justify the ways of God to men' at the beginning of Paradise Lost. And this providential theme marks the narrative throughout the book.

The opening of the story presents Crusoe in his youth, restless and eventually running away to sea. This restlessness is very

(1) Daniel Defoe, The life and strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe (1719), p.1. All references are to the Everyman edition of 1945.

deliberately set in the context of a spiritual pattern by his father's reaction: 'tho' he said he would not cease to pray for me, yet he would venture to say to me, that if I did take this foolish step, God would not bless me, and I would have leisure hereafter to reflect upon having neglected his counsel when there might be none to assist in my recovery.' Crusoe describes these remarks as 'truly prophetick'(1), and they do indeed match

what takes place in the rest of the story. This elucidation of the book's shape beforehand implies that the events are part of a divinely-foreknown providential pattern.(2) (Defoe does not, of course, tell us so much about them that he destroys the book's suspense.)

Crusoe ignores his father's warning, and this attitude is depicted in thoroughly theistic terms. He goes off to sea 'without asking God's blessing, or my father's...in an ill hour, God knows'.

(1) Ibid. p.7. (2) Ian Watt, who believes that 'otherworldly concerns do not provide the essential themes of Defoe's novels', suggests - at first sight plausibly - that if this 'filial disobedience' was indeed an 'original sin' on a scale that should be seen as the mainspring of the narrative, then 'no real retribution follows since he does very well out of it' (op.cit., p.89). However, as Pat Rogers responds, to see it as such a mainspring is to give to the phrase 'original sin' (in Defoe, Robinson Crusoe, p.142) the significance it would have had for most readers in Defoe's time (Pat Rogers, Robinson Crusoe (1979), p.63); that is, of a fundamental disobedience expressed in an outwardly minor action but leading to drastic consequences - exile in the case both of Crusoe and of Adam in the Genesis account. It is also important to note that, while Crusoe 'does very well' out of his adventures, it is only after 28 years on his island (fairly 'real retribution', one would have thought). His final prosperity would presumably have been seen by contemporary readers as proof that God can bring good even out of wilful rebellion, provided that the individual concerned truly repents, as Crusoe does. It is the pattern of the felix culpa from the original sin in Genesis.

When a storm blows up he sees himself as 'justly...overtaken by the judgement of Heaven' for his 'breach of my duty to God and my father', and vows that 'if it would please God here to spare my life' he would return home 'like a true repenting prodigal'(1) - that is, according to the pattern of the well-known biblical story of the Prodigal Son. These good resolutions do not, however, survive the abatement of the storm. To a Puritan, going on in sin despite a direct warning from God was a doubly culpable 'hardening

of heart', as Starr points out. (2) Defoe makes it very plain that this is exactly what is taking place: 'I was to have another trial for it still; and Providence, as in such cases generally it does, resolv'd to leave me entirely without excuse. For if I would not take this for a deliverance, the next was to be such a one as the worst and most harden'd wretch among us would confess both the danger and the mercy.'(3)

The 'trial' that follows is a far more severe storm; but even after that Crusoe does not return home. Again, his determination is described in terms of a providential framework. Crusoe's experiences are now not only seen as reenacting the pattern of the story of the Prodigal Son, which is explicitly alluded to, but also

(1) Defoe, Robinson Crusoe, pp.8-9. (2) G.A.Starr, Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography (Princeton, 1965), pp.58, 87-88, 133.
(3) Defoe, Robinson Crusoe, p.10.

he is told that disaster might conceivably have befallen his ship 'on your account, like Jonah in the ship of Tarshish.' (1) (Jonah, like Crusoe, embarked contrary to God's instructions, and the result was a tempest that endangered the ship.) He is warned not to 'tempt Providence to my ruine', and told that 'I might see a visible hand of Heaven against me.' But, says Crusoe,

my ill fate push'd me on now with an obstinacy that nothing could resist; and tho' I had several times loud calls from my reason and my more composed judgment to go home, yet I had no power to do it. I know not what to call this, nor will I urge that it is a secret overruling decree that hurries us on to be the instruments of our own destruction... (2)

Starr notes that such a 'process of subjection, first of reason to rebellious inclination' (as here), 'next of action in general to external circumstances' (as when Crusoe becomes enslaved in Barbary soon afterwards), 'traditionally marks the worsening predicament of unregenerate man', and points out that in the pages that follow references to 'Providence' are displaced by references to 'Fate', as when Crusoe escapes from slavery.(3) Crusoe's lack of repentance cuts him off both from free action and God's benign care, producing a growing obtuseness towards providential threats and deliverances;

(1) Ibid, p.13. (2) Ibid. (3) Ibid, pp.14,19. But cf. p.16 for a reference to the hand of Heaven'.

this, Starr argues convincingly, is the reason why Defoe devotes so much space to the slavery episode.(1) The Godward dimension, then, is a major factor shaping the narrative.

The same is true when, after his escape from slavery, Crusoe settles down in Brazil, and begins to make good. After a time, discontent and wanderlust seize him

again, 'in contradiction to the clearest views of doing himself good... which nature and Providence concurred to present me with, and to make my duty.' (2) Lack of companionship makes him feel, he complains, 'just like a man cast away upon some desolate

island.' The punishment ordained by providence for this discontent is to fit the crime; that is to say, his later exile on just such an island is presented to us as an educative process. 'But how just has it been, and should all men reflect, that, when they compare their present conditions with others that are worse, Heaven may oblige them to make the exchange, and be convinc'd of their former felicity by their experience.' (3)

When Crusoe becomes a castaway on the island that is to become his home, his initial reaction is to 'consider it as a determination of Heaven, that in this desolate place and in this

(1) Starr, op.cit., pp.85-89. Starr cites contemporary preachers to show that Defoe is portraying what was regarded as a common progression in spiritual experience. (2) Defoe. Robinson Crusoe, p.30. (3) Ibid. p.28.

desolate manner I should end my life', and to wonder 'why Providence should thus compleatly ruine its creatures.'(1) But all he concludes is that 'All evils are to be considered with the good that is in them, and with what worse attends them'; 'the good' including the fact that 'God wonderfully sent the ship in near enough to shore' for him to be able to retrieve many tools and provisions from it. (2) It seems that at this stage Defoe wants to bring home to his reader the difference between the casual attitude to religion that can be expressed in such a phrase, and a life lived out in full awareness of the presence of God.

The issue recurs a little later when Crusoe is astounded to find some stalks of barley growing:

I had hitherto acted upon no religious foundation at all; Indeed, I had very few notions of religion in my head, or had entertain'd any sense of any thing that had befallen me, otherwise than as a chance, or, as we lightly say, what pleases God; without so much as enquiring into the end of Providence in these things, or His order in governing events in the world. But after I saw barley grow there, in a climate which I know was not proper for corn, and especially that I knew not how it came there, it startl'd me strangely, and I began to suggest that God had miraculously caus'd this grain to grow... This touch'd my heart a little, and brought tears out of my eyes. (3)

(1) Ibid, p.47. (2) Ibid, pp.48,50. (3) Ibid, pp.58-59.

But this response has little depth. When Crusoe recalls that he has shaken a 'bag of chicken's meat out in that place... my religious thankfulness to God's providence began to abate too.'

That is to say, it was an attitude of no greater significance than the casualness that unthinkingly ('as we lightly say') tosses off a phrase like 'what pleases God.' Such religion, Defoe is saying, is merely being dazzled by the apparently inexplicable, rather than exercising faith in God as the provider and sustainer of all things, and looking beyond the immediate event to God's overall 'order in governing events in the world.' The same weakness

appears two pages later, when in an earthquake Crusoe 'had not the least serious religious thought, nothing but the common Lord ha' mercy upon me; and when it was over that went away too.' (1)

Defoe's careful delineation of this distinction emphasises the seriousness with which he is contemplating providential causality. Soon afterwards he devotes eight pages to portraying Crusoe coming genuinely to terms with his God. It begins with Crusoe falling ill, and praying seriously for the first time since his initial experience of a storm, off Hull: 'but scarce knew what I said, or why, my thoughts being all confused.' He is at least serious about

(1) Ibid, p.61.

what he is doing, however: six days later 'I lay and cry'd, "Lord look upon me, Lord pity me, Lord have mercy upon me." I suppose I did nothing else for two or three hours.' That night he dreams of a man 'as bright as a flame' coming down 'from a great black cloud', menacing him and telling him, 'Seeing all these things have not brought thee to repentance, now thou shalt die.' (1) Crusoe is horrified. He becomes conscious that he has been overwhelmed by 'a certain stupidity of soul, without desire of good or conscience of evil', and this is marked by his 'not having the least sense, either of the fear of God in danger, or of thankfulness to God in

deliverances... I was meerly thoughtless of a God or a providence; acted like a meer brute from the principles of nature, and by the dictates of common sense only, and indeed hardly that.' (2) The sign of 'stupidity of soul' is an attitude that views the development of events through naturalistic 'common sense' only, and fails to penetrate to the underlying providential ordering or to respond in awe and thankfulness.

These reflections 'exhorted some words from me, like praying to God, tho' I cannot say they were either a prayer attended with desires or with hopes; it was rather the voice of meer fright and

(1) Ibid, p.65. (2) Ibid, p.66.

distress.' As he reflects further, however, and sees his plight as the fulfilment of his father's warning, he articulates something more specific: "'Lord, be my help, for I am in great distress."

This was the first prayer, if I may call it so, that I made for many years.' Defoe makes clear that Crusoe is now at last penetrating to the true final causes of events, as he presents him thanking God for his supper of turtle's eggs: 'This was the first bit of meat I had ever ask'd God's blessing to, even as I cou'd remember, in my whole life.' (1)

He continues his reflections, and does so, insists his author, under the hand of God. He searches in a chest for some tobacco, 'directed by Heaven, no doubt; for in this chest I found a cure, both for soul and body', that is, some Bibles. He attempts to make use of the tobacco -in various ways -and reads the Bible as he does so:

My head was too much disturb'd with the tobacco to bear reading, at least that time; only having opened the book casually, the first words that occur'd to me were these: Call on me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver, and thou shalt glorify me The tobacco had, as I said, doz'd my head so much, that I inclin'd to sleep...but before I lay down, I did what I had never done in all my life, I kneel'd down and pray'd to God to fulfil the promise to me. (2)

(1) lbid, pp.67-68. (2) lbid, pp.69-70.

He goes on reading the new testament twice daily, and finally comes to the words

He is exalted a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance, and to give remission. I threw down the book, and with my heart as well as my hands lifted up to heaven, in a kind of extasy of joy, I cry'd out aloud, "Jesus, thou son of David, Jesus, thou exalted Prince and Saviour, give me repentance!"

This was the first time that I could say, in the true sense of the words, that I pray'd in all my life; for now I pray'd with a sense of my condition, and with a true

scripture view of hope founded on the encouragement of the word of God; and from this time, I may say, I began to have hope that God would hear me. (1)

This is not just 'Sunday religion,' as Ian Watt suggests (2); it is not something in a separate compartment from the rest of the book's action. Rather, it is presented as marking a crucial shift in Crusoe's priorities. He is - of course -still concerned to escape from the island, but he now construes the scriptural promise 'I will deliver you' in a different sense: 'My soul sought nothing of God but deliverance from the load of guilt that bore down all my comfort.'(3) And the consequences are numerous: 'a constant reading the scripture and praying to God'(4), observing the sabbath, and keeping the anniversary of his shipwreck as a day of prayer and fasting.(5) Indeed, when he is joined by the native he names

(1) Ibid, p.72. (2) Watt, op.cit., p.90. (3) Defoe, Robinson Crusoe, p.72. (4) Ibid. (5) Ibid, p.77.

Friday, Crusoe turns missionary, until through his efforts Friday becomes 'a good Christian, a much better than I.'(1) And -despite Watt's bizarre assertion that a 'functional silence, broken only by an occasional "No Friday," or an abject "Yes Master," is the golden music of Crusoe's ile joyeuse'(2) -Defoe presents Crusoe and Friday spending much time in studying the Bible together:

The conversation which employ'd the hours between Friday and I was such as made the three years which we liv'd

there together perfectly and compleatly happy... I always apply'd myself in reading the scripture, to let him know, as well as I could, the meaning of what I read; and he again, by his serious enquiries and questionings, made me, as I said before, a much better scholar in the scripture knowledge than I should ever have been by my own private meer reading.(3)

We have surveyed the providential element and Crusoe's own struggle with and surrender to God in the first half of Robinson Crusoe at some length, in order to demonstrate the crucial part that these themes play as organizing principles within the narrative. A survey of this kind makes it difficult to see how a writer like Watt could have concluded that 'otherworldly concerns do not provide the essential themes.'(4) Robinson Crusoe is clearly a fictional analogue of the spiritual autobiographies written in large numbers by Protestant Christians of the

(1) Ibid, p.160. (2) Watt, op.cit., p.77. (3) Defoe, Robinson Crusoe. pp.160-61. (4) Watt, op.cit., pp.90-91. G.A.Starr's study Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography draws out the dominant shape of Crusoe's 'pilgrim's progress' with considerable and convincing detail. Cf. also J. Paul Hunter, The Reluctant Pilgrim (Baltimore,1966). For a survey of the debate see Rogers, op.cit., chs. 3 and 7.

seventeenth century (of which Bunyan's Grace Abounding is, of course, the prime example). As such, it is a clear instance of a major novel in which the 'vertical dimension' of relationship with God plays an integral role.

It is this that Watt denies, asserting that

If, for example, we turn to the actual effect of Crusoe's religion on his behaviour, we find that it has curiously

little.... Both Marx and Gildon were right in drawing attention to the discontinuity between the religious aspects of the book and its action.... His spiritual intentions....manifest themselves in somewhat unconvincing periodical tributes to the transcendent at times when a respite from real action and practical intellectual effort is allowed or enforced.(1)

(1) Watt, op.cit., pp.89-90.

But Watt's remarks are simply false to the text. Crusoe's basic attitude to his experiences undergoes an immediate and marked change as a result of his spiritual rebirth:

I gave humble and hearty thanks that God had been pleased to discover to me, even that it was possible I might be more happy in this solitary condition, than I should have been in a liberty of society, and in all the pleasures of the world; that He could fully make up to me the deficiencies of my solitary state, and the want of humane society, by His presence and the communications of His grace to my soul, supporting, comforting, and encouraging me. (1)

It is true that this contentment is not maintained without difficulty; but the Christian life is not supposed to be a state in which a thoroughly 'renewed mind' (Romans 12:2) is retained without deliberate effort. The effect of his faith on his actions is apparent in other ways too. When he first discovers the cave that becomes his stronghold, he is frightened by seeing two eyes shining deep within it, and what motivates him to go on is the reflection that 'the power and presence of God was everywhere, and was able to protect me.'(2) And more generally, as Starr observes, Crusoe's

(1) Defoe, Robinson Crusoe, p.83. (2) Ibid. p.130.

earlier rash and unthinking behaviour becomes replaced by a greater prudence and circumspection, as a result of his 'attending, interpreting and obeying the various manifestations of the divine will towards him.'(1)

Defoe makes it very clear, in fact, that Crusoe's faith is by no means limited to 'times when a respite from real action and practical intellectual effort is allowed or enforced':

Having regularly divided my time, according to the several daily employments that were before me, such as, first, my duty to God, and the reading the scriptures, which I constantly set apart some time for thrice every day; secondly, the going abroad with my gun for food, which generally took me up three hours in every morning, when it did not rain; thirdly, the ordering, curing, preserving and cooking what I had kill'd or catch'd for my supply; these took up great part of the day.(2)

Prayer is sufficiently significant to Defoe for him to be able to devote space to a consideration of what psychological state is most conducive to it. (3) Indeed, his depiction of Crusoe's spirituality is generally perceptive. Soon after his 'conversion', as it may be termed, Crusoe is giving thanks to God for bringing him to a place

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- (1) Starr. op.cit.,p.119. (2) Defoe, Robinson Crusoe. pp.84-85.
(3) Ibid, p.120.

where such a thing could occur, when suddenly he thinks that this smacks of hypocrisy:

'How canst thou be such a hypocrite,' said I, even audibly, 'to pretend to be thankful for a condition, which however thou may'st endeavour to be contented with, thou would'st rather pray heartily to be deliver'd from?' So I stopp'd there; but though I could not say I thank'd God for being there, yet I sincerely gave thanks to God for opening my eyes, by whatever afflicting providences... (1)

Crusoe's spiritual health does have its sicknesses too. His terror at finding a footprint on his island banishes his faith and courage; he recovers these after the 'words of the scripture... Call upon me

in the day of trouble' had returned to his mind, motivating him to 'pray earnestly to God for deliverance,' and then to further Bible reading. However, he suffers another setback when he finds the footprint to be far bigger than his own, and 'did not now take due ways to compose my mind, by crying to God in my distress, and resting upon His providence, as I had done before, for my defence and deliverance.' (2) It is several pages before his faith is once more firmly expressed. But this, again, does not mean that the book's religion is 'Sunday religion': Defoe is simply drawing a realistic picture of how the calm that should flow logically from

(1) Ibid, p.84. (2) Ibid, pp.114-17; cf. p.144.

reliance on God can be swamped by an outburst of fear. This subjective (and, Defoe implies, unreasonable) condition can coexist perfectly well with the objective shaping of events by providence.(1) At any rate, this loss of faith is not permanent, and a clear reference to faith in providential overruling occurs almost every ten pages till the end of the book, with the exception of the section immediately preceding his escape from the island. He describes his eventual condition -as he did his earlier wanderings - by referring to a providentially-oriented biblical narrative as model; in this case, the story of Job.(2)

Clearly, then, Crusoe's spirituality is not separate from the mainstream of his life. Rather, it is an integral part of his existence, and its strength or weakness is a significant aspect of his story. Writers like Watt have posed the critical problem in the wrong terms; the question is rather whether Crusoe's spirituality is convincing to the modern reader. Many contemporary readers find the attempt to see signs of God's hand in everyday life as fanciful and absurd; and the dream of the avenging angel that has so powerful an effect on Crusoe may appear simply as a case of psychological disturbance. But it would not have appeared so to readers of Defoe's time. As Starr points out, Defoe's

(1) Defoe extends this shaping to the extent that the date of Crusoe's beginning life on the island is the date of his birth; the date of his original departure from home (and becoming enslaved by wanderlust?) is also that of his being enslaved by the Moors; the date of his escape from slavery is that of his escape from the Yarmouth storm (likewise an escape from judgement?), and also the day in the month when he finally escapes from captivity on the island (ibid, pp.98, 202). (2) Ibid, p.206.

contemporaries believed that man was responsible to observe and heed such phenomena as declarations of the divine will.(1) Perhaps the writer can add from personal experience that the signs and dream would appear perfectly credible in many non-Western cultures today (including the academic circles in those countries!) The issue of whether it is reasonable to conceive of a supernatural presence omnipresent enough - and caring enough - to manifest itself in such ways is not a literary-critical issue. It seems fair to suggest that the difficulty with Defoe's providentialism lies as much with the mind of the twenty-first century reader as with the words of the text.

But the crucial point about Robinson Crusoe for this study is that it too is an unabashedly supernaturalistic work standing in the mainstream of the English novel. It is not merely a 'book about religion'. Crusoe's spirituality supplies an organizing pattern to the novel; arguably the most significant such pattern. That is only reasonable: if there is an eternal yet knowable God, then logically a person's relationship with that God must be the most significant thing about their life-story. Robinson Crusoe stands as an example of the tradition that might have been, a novel based on the Reformation worldview including in one rich vision both

(1) Starr, op.cit., p.90.

the natural and the supernatural. God was banished from the novel as a result of the Enlightenment; but it need not have been that way.

(vi) After Crusoe

But Robinson Crusoe had no offspring of significance. It was a book with an underlying worldview that ran counter to many powerful forces of its period: to the exclusive Enlightenment emphasis on the world of sense-data, to the prevalence of deism in religion, to the stress of emergent capitalism on material things. In Defoe's own later novels such forces came to overwhelm

the spiritual pilgrimage that gives Robinson Crusoe its shape. Even in Robinson Crusoe itself, other elements are present, of course. Watt is perfectly right when he observes that Crusoe and Defoe's other heroes have the 'book-keeping' mentality which 'Weber considered to be the distinctive technical feature of modern capitalism.... They.... keep us more fully informed of their present stocks of money and commodities than any other characters in fiction.'(1) Crusoe's lament that he had gone wandering 'in contradiction to the clearest views of doing my self good in a fair and plain pursuit of those prospects and those measures of life which nature and Providence concurred to present me with, and to make my duty'(2) (italics mine) is as clear an example of late Puritanism's tendency towards making a moral imperative out of economic growth - the so-called 'Weber-Tawney hypothesis' -as could be wished. In Robinson Crusoe these tendencies are matched

(1) Watt, op.cit., pp.69-70. (2) Defoe, Robinson Crusoe, p.30. Damrosch makes the useful point that Crusoe, unlike Bunyan's characters, is very much at home in this world (cf Damrosch, op.cit., pp.192-93).

by the heavy emphasis on Crusoe's relationship with God. In Moll Flanders, they virtually take over the story.

It is true that Moll Flanders can conceivably be read as spiritual autobiography, depicting a progression from a false, merely prudential or sentimental 'repentance' to a real change of heart; as Starr indicates in his chapter on the novel in Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography. It is true, too, that Moll's adventures take place in a nominally supernaturalistic universe: there seems no reason to doubt (given the interest in

the supernatural evident in Defoe's other work) that Defoe endorses the worldview expressed when Moll speaks of 'the devil, who began, by the help of an irresistible poverty, to push me into this wickedness.'(1) And, as Starr points out, it is a sign of Moll's reformation when her perceptions of her experience as governed by 'fate' give way to references to 'providence'.(2)

However, Moll Flanders does not present a supernaturalistic vision of the world and the events that take place within it with the clarity of its predecessor. Moll's notorious preoccupation with the material, cash-value aspects of her world dominates the novel to such a degree that we find it hard to take her comments about providence or repentance seriously, and indeed 'laugh at the concept of reformation through hogs and cows' presented when Moll's

(1) Daniel Defoe, Moll Flanders (1722), p.173; other examples are to be found on pp.167,170,174. (All references are to the 1930 Everyman edition.) (2) Starr, op.cit., pp.159-60.

husband's penitence is confirmed by such acquisitions.(1) Moll's providence seems to enable her to do very well for herself by rather ungodly means, despite the moral protestations of the novel's introduction. The spiritual concerns and Godward dimension that gave the dominant shape to Robinson Crusoe's presentation of the world only come into the foreground in the apocalyptic situation of Moll's arrest, where material wellbeing has (temporarily) been lost. (2) But when she escapes execution, the story once again becomes

preoccupied with the 'stock' she can take with her in her transportation to Virginia, the inheritance she receives there from her mother, and how much it would bring in a year, until she and her current husband 'were now in very considerable circumstances, and every year increasing.'(3)

In Moll Flanders, then, the precise, realistic notation for which Defoe is justly renowned has become separated from any significant awareness of the spiritual dimensions of events, and the fundamental value-system throughout the narrative is economic: whether a marriage enables Moll to live well or leaves her penniless, whether a pearl necklace is of 'good' quality, and so on.(4) What seizes Defoe's imagination is the cataloguing of

(1) As Ian Watt points out (op.cit., p.141). (2) Defoe, Moll Flanders, pp.243 ff. (3) Ibid, pp.269. (4) Dorothy Van Ghent has an excellent analysis of this aspect of the novel in The English Novel: Form and Function (New York, 1953; Harper edition of 1961), pp.33-37.

possessions of market-value; laying up treasure on earth, by fair means or foul, is the order of the day. It is a world where God may possibly be at work in Newgate at the foot of the gallows, but scarcely anywhere else.

There has of course been a good deal of critical debate as to whether Moll's narrowly money-oriented view of the world is

presented ironically by her creator or not. For our purposes, it is not of crucial importance; whether the attitude depicted is just Moll's, or Defoe's as well, her view of life will not be received by the reader as a trustworthy presentation of the world under the hand of providence, whatever other attractions its vitality may possess. Moll's assessment of the operations of providence can have no more authority than the opposing armies in the last century's world wars all invoking the Almighty as the supporter of their particular cause. And the providential dimension does not feature in any aspect of the novel that can be read as the expression of the authorial perspective as distinct from Moll's own.

That the spiritual, and (as part of it) the providential, content of Defoe's work dwindles as time goes on may be gauged from the fact that, while Starr tries manfully to make Moll Flanders read credibly as spiritual autobiography, he is forced to recognise that

'some portions of the narratlve...are not fully assimilated into the spiritual framework'(1); and that in Roxana and Colonel Jacque this element has almost disappeared. In Roxana, he says, the 'sheer bulk and vitality' of the unassimllated material 'tend to obscure the somber implications and indeed the very outlines' of Roxana's spiritual development(2). It is arguable that Watt's comment that Robinson Crusoe 'embodied the struggle between Puritanism and the tendency to secularization which was rooted in

material progress'(3), while unfair to Robinson Crusoe itself, is nonetheless a fair description of Defoe's work as a whole. In short, Defoe illustrates the process R.H.Tawney describes as taking place in this period:

From a spiritual being, who, in order to survive, must devote a reasonable attention to economic interests, man seems sometimes to have become an economic animal, who will be prudent, nevertheless, if he takes due precautions to assure his spiritual well-being. (4)

That is more or less the difference between Robinson Crusoe and Moll Flanders; and as Defoe's work underwent that transition, so the possibility of a providentially-oriented novel tradition drawing on the Puritan heritage dwindled away.

(1) Starr, op.cit., p.162. A large number of Moll's successful escapades might be said to come into this category! (2) Ibid,p.183.
(3) Watt, op.cit., p.93. (4) R.H.Tawney, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism (1922). p.279.

TWO: THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

(i) 'Pamela'

As we look at the major novels of the eighteenth century, we can see the continuing loss of God in English prose fiction.

Samuel Richardson's extremely long story Pamela is a convenient point to begin. It concerns a servant girl who is kidnapped and threatened (at great length) with rape, but finally softens her captor's heart and marries him.

It is a fiction retaining a strong sense of providentialism. But unfortunately Pamela -like Moll Flanders -presents providence largely in connection with the laying up of treasure on earth; though her creator has a strong desire to keep her on the right side of the moral law, as he sees it.

The first page of the narrative presents Pamela writing to her parents:

God, whose graciousness to us we have so often experienced, put it into my good lady's heart, just an hour before she expired, to recommend to my young master all her servants, one by one... And these were some of her last words. O how my eyes run! Don't wonder to see the paper so blotted.

Well, but God's will must be done!.... My master said, "I will take care of you all, my good maidens"... God bless him! and pray with me, my dear father and mother, for a blessing upon him.(1)

Such expressions might appear to be mere commonplaces of speech, but this is belied by the sheer extent to which Pamela resorts to a mental dependence on God in her predicament: 'And so I will only say, pray for your Pamela'(2); 'God, I hope, will give me his grace; and so I will not, if I can help it, make myself too uneasy' (3) - here the reality of divine grace is definite and dependable

(1) Samuel Richardson, Pamela (First Part, 1740; all references are to the 1946 Everyman edltion), p.1. (2) Ibid, p.2. (3) Ibid, p.10.

enough to mean that Pamela can be free from anxiety; 'And while I presume not upon my own strength, and am willing to avoid the tempter, I hope the Divine Grace will assist me'(1); 'But the Divine Grace is not confined to space; and remorse may, and I hope Has, smitten him to the heart'(2); the resort to prayer in a crisis in Letter XXX, 'O how my heart throbbd! And I begun (for I did not know what I did) to say the Lord's Prayer. "None of your beads to me, Pamela!" said he; "thou art a perfect nun." But I said

aloud, with my eyes lifted up to Heaven, "Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil, O my good God!"(3) 'I had recourse again, to my only refuge, comforting myself, that God never fails to take the innocent heart into his protection, and is alone able to baffle the devices of the mighty'(4); 'This plot is laid too deep.... I put my trust in God, who I knew was able to do everything for me, when all other possible means should fail.'(5)

Once again it is not altogether easy for a modern reader to recognise the full content of these phrases, that in a less secularised culture they are not mere platitudes but represent an assertion that the power of God can be relied upon for deliverance, in the face of human probability and in defiance of the

(1) Ibid, p.40. (2) Ibid. p.53. (3) Ibid, p.70. (4) Ibid, pp.89-90.
(5) Ibid, p:91.

powers of this world. 'Pray for poor Pamela', she writes to her parents after being carried off to Lincolnshire; and indeed 'having enquired of all their acquaintance what could be done, and no one being able to put them in a way how to proceed, on so extraordinary an occasion, against so rich and resolute a gentleman... they applied themselves to prayers.'(1) This is realistic enough: prayer is something that the oppressed can 'apply themselves to', and one of the points that Richardson seeks to make in the novel as

a whole is that virtue is not defenceless and will in truth be rewarded. This he makes clear in his summary of morals to be drawn at the close of the First Part:

Let the desponding heart be comforted by the happy issue which the troubles and trials of PAMELA met with, when they see that no danger or distress, however inevitable or deep, to their apprehensions, is out of the power of providence to obviate or relieve; and that, too, at a time when all human prospects seem to fail.(2)

The objective reality of providence may be demonstrated from its interplay with human action. Richardson was reacting against the romance tradition, and hence shy of anything approaching the miraculous. Consequently, divine grace is often portrayed in his work as operating through and interwoven with human thought. The episode where

(1) Ibid, pp.81-82. (2) Ibid, p.452.

Pamela contemplates committing suicide is an example of this. Pamela reasons through the eternal consequences of suicide in a logical process of thought. But there is also the suggestion that both God and the devil are affecting these thoughts: 'That thought was surely of the devil's instigation; for it was very soothing and powerful with me' is the way she describes her fantasies(1), and later she exhorts herself,

While thou hast power left thee, avoid the tempting evil, lest thy grand enemy, now repulsed by Divine Grace, and due reflection, return to the assault with a force that

thy weakness may not be able to resist!.... Though I should have praised God for my deliverance, had I been freed from my wicked keepers, and my designing master, yet I have more abundant reason to praise him, that I have been delivered from a worse enemy, myself.(2)

The modern reader may understand the first sentence cited here as nothing more than 'Get away from temptation in case the idea returns to your mind.' But to Richardson's Pamela, there are supernatural forces at work too; 'Divine Grace and due reflection' are both operative. As in any theology influenced by the attitude exemplified in Proverbs 3:5, 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding', the human mind is here seen as a fallen and

(1) Ibid, p.150. (2) Ibid, p.152.

fallible organ, capable of accurate decision-making with the aid of 'Divine Grace', but under pressure too from hidden but malignant forces. Pamela can give the name 'myself' to mental processes that would have led her to drown herself; that was where her own thoughts led her, while in contrast the logical process by which she moved away from that option is itself a 'deliverance' for which she should praise God as the prime agent: 'I will tell you my conflicts on this dreadful occasion, that the Divine Mercies may be magnified in my deliverance.'(1) (This gives her hope for her

captor's thinking too: 'God can touch his heart in an instant', she reflects.(2) The reality of divine influence on the human mind is the presence of the incalculable, and prevents despair.)

In these cases, the action of 'Divine Grace' is more or less identified with Pamela's thought processes. But on the other hand, Richardson presents grace as active also in the orchestration of events as a whole. And the extent to which grace runs contrary to human expectation is an indication of the degree to which we should understand it as an objective reality:

Henceforth let not us poor short-sighted mortals pretend to rely on our own wisdom; or vainly think, that we are absolutely to direct for ourselves. I have great reason to say, that, when I was most disappointed, I was nearer my happiness: for had I made my escape, which was so often my chief point in view, and what I had placed my heart upon, I had escaped the blessings now before me, and fallen, perhaps, into the miseries I would have avoided. And yet after all, it was necessary I should take the steps I did, to bring on this wonderful turn: O the unsearchable wisdom of God!(3)

(1) Ibid, p.149. (2) Ibid, p.151. (3) Ibid, pp. 276-277.

The objectivity of grace here means that it can bring about precisely the opposite of what the human probabilities would suggest (had Pamela escaped, she would have forfeited her eventual happiness); and yet it is not separate from, but rather working through, the human agent (it is through Pamela's resistance that her captor is softened: her resistance brings about God's purposes, although it does not accomplish her own goal of escape).

It seems, then, that Richardson, who brought a new degree of psychological insight to the novel (eg his depiction of Pamela's ambivalent feelings towards her captor), brought to it also a supernaturalistic vision in which the human psyche was open to, and part of, spiritual warfare and providential purposes. Richardson's overriding moral purpose in writing fiction (Clarissa, he claimed, in that book's postscript, was intended to 'steal in... the great doctrines of Christianity under a fashionable amusement', since 'when the Pulpit fails other expedients are necessary') causes him to adopt a causality that owes more to the Puritans than to the Enlightenment, and nothing at all to neo-classicism.

But, again, it did not establish a providentially-oriented tradition of significance to the novel's development. A major cause presumably is those deficiencies in his vision which have earned him much critical disgust. Virtue is Rewarded in Pamela (though not in Clarissa) in thoroughly earthly terms: one wonders whether Richardson gave any thought while writing it to the reasons why Paul and the apostles ended up

as martyrs rather than millionaires. His spirituality here is all too closely akin to that of Moll Flanders. Again, the providential scheme is too tidy: at the end of the First Part providence has completed its business, the moral lessons from its actions in the lives of 'Mr WILLIAMS... good old ANDREWS and his WIFE... Miss GODFREY'(1) are all plain to see, and there are no loose ends.

That lacks realism: Christian theology promises no such neat arrangement until the Second Coming.

But thirdly, there is Richardson's preoccupation with rape in both Pamela and Clarissa. Dorothy Van Ghent blames it on the Puritan element in Richardson's cultural background: 'In the Puritan mythology sex is the culmination of all evil, the unmasked face of fear.' (2) This is not really fair: Spenser, Sidney and Marvell were Puritans, and they were responsible for 'Epithalamion', the 'Astrophil and Stella' sequence, and 'To His Coy Mistress' respectively. Likewise, one cannot imagine a sturdy Puritan like John Bunyan reducing the whole Pilgrimage from this world to the next to a single sexual assault(3) - even if his sexual ethic has permitted the writing of such voyeuristic books as Pamela and Clarissa. When an attempt is made to rape Christiana early in the second part of Pilgrim's Progress, the matter is only incidental. The difference between Bunyan and Richardson arises not

(1) Ibid., p.451. (2) Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel: Form and Function (New York, 1953: Harper edition of 1961), p.54.

(3) Graham Greene makes the interesting suggestion that in Richardson's (very different) contemporary Fielding 'Evil is always a purely sexual matter: the struggle seems invariably to take the form of whether or not the "noble lord" or colonel James will succeed in raping or seducing Amelia, and the characters in this superficial struggle... do tend to become less and less real' (Collected Essays (1969), p.73). This loss of the significance of evil seems to have been a general eighteenth-century problem.

because seduction and rape had been unacceptable subjects to the Puritans(1), but because the spiritual universe of Bunyan's Puritanism was far broader than the narrow arena in which Richardson's morbid obsession places his heroines. If Richardson had been closer to Bunyan's Puritanism he might well have been less myopic rather than more; but by the mid-eighteenth century the

Puritan heritage had lost much of its power. At any rate, there is something unhealthy and restricted about Richardson's vision.

Taking these points together, then, Richardson's model of providence at work is not one that could be expected to establish a lasting tradition of any great significance.

(ii) 'Tom Jones'

Richardson's contemporary Fielding was a writer who did not share Richardson's apparent morbidity; and in his work too there remains a hint of providential overruling underlying purely naturalistic events. But it is not a pattern of deliverance in answer to prayer such as appears in Pamela. Rather, Fielding's approach in Tom Jones is to create a comic pattern whereby the coincidences of a carefully-contrived plot bring about a happy ending; and this, he suggests, is the work of a 'Fortune' that corresponds to a fundamentally beneficent divine ordering of the real universe.

The plot of Tom Jones includes numerous such coincidences: the meeting of the Man of the Hill with his father (2), and with his friend Watson (3); the unexpected meeting between Sophia and her cousin (4);

(1) Louis B. Wright, Middle Class Culture in Elizabethan England (North Carolina, 1935), pp.476-77. (2) Henry Fielding, Tom Jones (1749; Penguin edition of 1966), p.419. (3) Ibid, p.423. (4) Ibid, p.511.

Jones finding Sophia's pocket-book (1); the fact that the incompetent highwayman whom Jones takes pity on is his landlady's cousin (2); the discovery of Blifil's villainy by 'a very odd accident' (3); and so on. Fielding remarks at one point that

...certain it is, there are some incidents in life so very strange and unaccountable, that it seems to require more than human skill and foresight in producing them. Of this kind was what now happened to Jones, who found Mr Nightingale the elder in so critical a minute, that Fortune, if she was really worthy all the worship she received at Rome, could not have contrived such another. (4)

All these are the contrivances of a consciously non-realistic work of art. And yet they bear an oblique relation to reality: Fielding's reference here to 'some incidents in life' indicates that some sort of parallel is intended to exist between what he is describing and the real world. It is not surprising, therefore, that there are several points in the fiction - contexts that are not especially 'low' or comic, particularly utterances by Allworthy - when instead of referring to 'Fortune' he suggests that the real 'final cause' behind the development and patterning of events is 'Providence':

Here an accident happened of a very extraordinary kind; one indeed of those strange chances, whence very good and grave men have concluded that Providence often interposes in the discovery of the most secret villainy, in order to caution men from quitting the paths of honesty, however warily they tread in those of vice. (5)

(1) Ibid, p.561. (2) Ibid, p.643. (3) Ibid, p.838. (4) Ibid . p.682. (5) Ibid, p.819.

'I need not, madam,' said Allworthy, 'express my astonishment at what you have told me... Good Heaven! Well! the Lord disposeth all things.'(1)

And, in a passage of great topical significance in a book published just four years after the 1745 rebellion:

I had been for some time very seriously affected with the danger to which the Protestant religion was so visibly exposed, that nothing but the immediate interposition of Providence seemed capable of preserving it.(2)

It seems reasonable, then, to conclude with Martin Battestin that

The design of Tom Jones mirrors a similar Order... in Fielding's universe. Another, equally celebrated feature of the book, the omniscient narrator himself, functions, as both Thackeray and Wayne Booth have observed, as a kind of surrogate providence in the world of the novel, whose wit and wisdom we rely on and whose intrusions into the story keep us constantly aware of the shaping intelligence that arranges and governs all contingencies and will bring the characters at last to their just rewards... As the divines whom Fielding read and admired were at pains to make clear... it is Providence, not Fortune, that contrives the extraordinary casualties of life. The happy accidents and surprising reversals in Fielding's novel remind us of the manipulating intelligence of the author who conducts the story, as those in real life are signs of the Deity's providential care.(3)

The concept of the author as surrogate providence is no invention of Thackeray or Wayne Booth. Fielding himself articulates it:

(1) Ibid, p.837. (2) Ibid, p.426. (3) Martin C. Battestin, in his introduction to Twentieth Century Interpretations of 'Tom Jones', ed. Battestin (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1968), p.12.

This work may, indeed, be considered as a great creation of our own.... The allusion and metaphor we have here made use of, we must acknowledge to be infinitely too great for our occasion, but there is, indeed, no other, which is at all adequate to express the difference between an author of the first rate, and a critic of the lowest.(1)

However, the parallel between 'Fortune' in Fielding's novel and

the providential ordering in real life is not unambiguous. It is obvious from several of the references to 'Fortune' that, whatever overall pattern may be meant by this notion, in any specific context it can refer to a capricious accident, rather than an act of God:

Mr Fitzpatrick... flew directly upstairs... and unluckily (as Fortune loves to play tricks with those gentlemen who put themselves entirely under her conduct) ran his head against several doors and posts to no purpose.(2)

Indeed Fortune seems to have resolved to put Sophia to the blush that day, and the second malicious attempt succeeded better than the first; for my landlord had no sooner received the young lady in his arms, than his feet, which the gout had lately very severely handled, gave way, and down he tumbled.(3)

And now Fortune, according to her usual custom, reversed the face of affairs, the former victor lay breathless on the ground, and the vanquished gentleman had recovered breath...(4)

That the specific references to 'Fortune' are not intended to represent a direct parallel to the nature of providence in reality may also be deduced from Fielding's criticisms of Richardson, as Battestin points out:

(1) Tom Jones, p.467. (2) Ibid, p.489. (3) Ibid, p.511. (4) Ibid, p.622.

The events in the novel ultimately lead toward a comic Apocalypse - that last, improbable, joyous catastrophe in which true identities are discovered, the innocent redeemed, an unerring justice meted out to one and all. How is it, then, that one of the absurdities of Pamela that Fielding ridiculed was Richardson's insistence that virtue was rewarded in this world? 'A very wholesome and comfortable doctrine', Fielding remarked in Tom Jones (XV.i), 'to which we have but one objection, namely that it is not true'. Why, one may well ask, should the happy conclusion of Fielding's own fiction be considered any

less intellectually reprehensible than that of Pamela? The answer is implicit in what we have been saying so far about the relation of form to meaning in Tom Jones. Whereas Richardson offers Pamela to us as a literal transcription of reality, Fielding's intention is ultimately symbolic.... Ultimately he asks us to consider not Tom Jones, but 'HUMAN NATURE', not so much the particular story of one man's fall and redemption, as the rational and benign scheme of things which the story and its witty, genial author imply.(1)

Indeed, in the passage Battestin cites, Fielding derides the doctrine that 'virtue is the certain road to happiness' as both un-Christian and false ('We have in our voyage through life seen so many other exceptions to it' (2)). The reason why he can depict virtue leading to happiness in Tom Jones is that his purpose is not what we might understand by the term 'realism'; it is 'by no means necessary', he insists, for an author's 'characters, or his incidents' to be 'such as happen in every street, or in every house, or which may be met with in the home articles of a newspaper.' (3) As a good neo-classicist, he is depicting the

(1) Battestin, op.cit., pp.12-13. (2) Tom Jones, p.697. (3) Ibid, p.367.

universal, not the particular; and the relation between the pattern he indicates and the realities of the lives of individuals is unspecified.

The fact that he is a neo-classicist has two other results. It means that his characters are static 'types' rather than individuals in

their own right, and consequently do not have the ability to develop in the way that would be necessary if they were to be depicted in a dynamic relationship with providence.(1) Auerbach remarks in Mimesis that a crucial difference between the classical and Judaeo-Christian traditions is that in the latter we find a wide range of qualities and development within one character, whereas the classical characters tend towards 'types' or 'humours' that are static and easily summarized in ethical terms.(2) It would not have been easy for Fielding to take the forms of the classical tradition and force their characters to develop under the hand of providence in a way presupposing the concerns of the Judaeo-Christian worldview.

Fielding's neo-classicism also involved something of the 'segregation of styles', which meant that his choice of comedy as his form hindered the use of Christian supernaturalism in his subject-matter.(3) In the Preface to Joseph Andrews he remarks that the comic romance such as he is writing

(1) Cf. Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel (1957; Pelican edition of 1972), pp.309,312. Admittedly, some of the characters do undergo changes; Tom Jones learns prudence, Square repents. But Jones is fundamentally the same good-natured individual at the beginning of the book as at the end, and Square's repentance smacks of the plot device - even though it is narrated in thoroughly providential style: 'God hath however been so gracious to shew me my error in time' (Tom Jones, p.624). (2) Erich Auerbach, Mimesis (Berne, 1946; trans. W.R.Trask, Princeton, 1953), pp.17-18. (3) Although Fielding professes his impatience with the 'many rules for good writing' (Tom Jones, p.200), this does not apply to the more 'noble critics' (p.507).

differs from the serious romance in its fable and action, in this; that as in the one these are grave and solemn, so in the other they are light and ridiculous: it differs in its characters by introducing persons of inferior rank, and consequently, of inferior manners, whereas the grave romance sets the highest before us.

So, at the close of that preface, he feels the need to apologise for introducing a clergyman into 'the low adventures in which he is engaged'; and it becomes plain why he felt he could not 'introduce into his works any of that heavenly host which make a part of his creed', as he remarks in Tom Jones.(1) 'Man therefore is the highest subject (unless on very extraordinary occasions indeed) which presents itself to the pen of our historian.'(2)

It is noticeable, too, that he states a deliberate intention not to explore the causality underlying his narrative events; when relating a marked change in Partridge's circumstances, Fielding comments that 'as we are very far from believing in any such heathen goddess' as a personified Nemesis,

...so we wish Mr John Fr--, or some other such philosopher, would bestir himself a little, in order to find out the real cause of this sudden transition, from good to bad fortune... for it is our province to relate facts, and we shall leave causes to persons of much higher genius.(3)

These tongue-in-cheek remarks confirm that while the pattern of 'Fortune' in Tom Jones matches Fielding's belief in the overall beneficence of providence, it is not intended to represent a providential causality behind individual events as they take place
------(1)

Ibid, p.362. (2) Ibid, p.363. (3) Ibid, p.95.

in the real world. Fielding's basic beliefs are not given any close working out in the lives of his characters. Such a 'supernatural realism' was not his purpose.

(iii) Amelia

It is striking to see how Fielding's approach had altered by the time he published Amelia in 1751. Amelia may be said to be a less neo-classical and more deliberately 'realistic' novel than Tom Jones. The long authorial disquisitions, drawing attention to the fictive nature of the work, have largely disappeared; the names tend to be ordinary names rather than the 'typical' kind that many characters in Tom Jones possessed(1); and the depiction of London as experienced by a family in straitened circumstances has the flavour of daily life. It is, interesting, therefore, that this closer relation to realism is accompanied by a clearer use of a Christian concept of providence.

On the novel's very first page, Fielding distances himself from the use of 'Fortune' that underlay the coincidence-based plot of Tom Jones:

The distresses which they waded through were some of them so exquisite, and the incidents which produced these so extraordinary, that they seemed to require not only the utmost malice, but the utmost invention, which superstition hath ever attributed to Fortune: though whether any such being interfered in the case, or, indeed, whether there be any such being in the universe, is a matter which I by no means presume to determine in the affirmative. To speak a bold truth, I am, after much deliberation, inclined to suspect that the public voice hath, in all ages, done much injustice to Fortune, and hath convicted her of many facts in which she had not the least concern.(2)

At this point, he affirms instead the importance of 'natural means' and the extent to which people follow 'the directions of Prudence'. Within a few pages, however, we find his hero Booth in prison, and there the idea of providence emerges; the first villainous character he encounters is one in part marked out by his being 'a deist, or,

(1) The point is Watt's (op.cit., p.22); he also notes that epic diction and the mock-heroic have been abandoned, and that the reader no longer needs to recognise the book's analogy with classical epic to appreciate it (pp.290-91). He describes Fielding's 'increasingly serious moral outlook' as resulting in a disillusionment with his earlier models, and cites the Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon's preface, where Fielding departs from classicism so far as to wish Homer had written 'a true history of his own times in humble prose' (pp.291-92). Here again the swing towards the realist approach, and a deepened moral concern grounded in a Christian providentialism, seem to come together. (2) Fielding, Amelia (1751; Everyman edition of 1962), Vol.I, p.3.

perhaps, an atheist; for, though he did not absolutely deny the existence of a God, yet he entirely denied his providence.'(1)

As the novel progresses it becomes clear that faith in providence is to be set over against attitudes based around fortune. To speak of fortune is to speak superficially(2), and though this is acceptable in passing (3), the novel makes clear that a safe passage through the difficulties of life depends on penetrating to a deeper (or higher) perspective. Booth escapes unhurt from a duel with the pugnacious Colonel Bath; 'it was Fortune's pleasure, and neither of our faults',

says the latter(4); but Amelia sees it differently: "'Oh, Heavens!" cried she, falling upon her knees, "from what misery have I escaped, from what have these poor babes escaped, through your gracious providence this day!"'(5)

In fact the character who gives her name to the book, and whose unblemished nature is the anchor for her family's survival, is sustained throughout by a strong faith in the overruling of providence. When Booth has to go abroad in the army, he finds the grief-stricken Amelia 'on her knees, a posture in which I never disturbed her'(6); and her responses to crisis are of a piece with this commitment to prayer: 'Heaven will, I doubt not, provide for us'(7); 'I have been guilty of many transgressions ...against that Divine will and pleasure without whose permission, at least, no human accident can happen... I am shocked at my own folly'(8); 'The tears burst from her eyes, and she cried -"Heaven will, I hope, provide for us."'(9) (It is perhaps Amelia's strength of feeling - even though it makes her over-prone to swooning - and her expressive affection for her husband, that keep her from appearing a colourlessly perfect saint-figure.)

Her faith finds its mentor in Dr.Harrison, the clergyman who is in the end the architect of Booth's escape from misfortune. Again, it is important to note that this man who proves a wise guide and effective rescuer in life's misfortunes grounds his own conduct on faith in the eternal world. His letter to Booth in Paris challenges him that it is when 'we are not in earnest in our faith' that we become troubled by our experience of 'temporary and short transitory evils' -though Harrison knows he is acting the radical in saying so:

'If one of my cloth should begin a discourse of heaven ...at Garraway's, or at White's; would he gain a hearing... would he not

(1)Ibid, p.14. It should be added, however, that the next villain Booth encounters is a methodist who calls on Booth to 'rejoice at' his crime, whatever it might be, because wrongdoing makes 'room for grace. The spirit is active, and loves best to inhabit those minds where it may meet with the most work.'(Ibid, p.19.) To Fielding, deism and antinomianism were equally dangerous to practical Christianity. (2) Eg ibid, p.177: 'Such rises we often see in life, without being able to give any satisfactory account of the means, and therefore ascribe them to the good fortune of the person.' (3) Cf. the narrator's own use in ibid, Vol. II, p.69. (4) ibid, vol.I. p,232. (5) ibid, p.234. (6) ibid, p.99. (7) ibid, p.170. (8) ibid, Vol.II, p.70. (9) ibid, p.242.

presently acquire the name of the mad parson?'(1) When Booth is converted to Christianity, Dr.Harrisons's comment is 'The devil hath thought proper to set you free'(2) (and as A.R.Humphreys comments, 'Fielding means this literally' (3)). It is such a man, Fielding insists throughout Amelia,who is best able to find his way through the complexities of the social universe that is depicted with grainy realism in the novel.

There is, indeed, an awareness that providence has its unfathomable complexities. Mrs. Atkinson, recalling her own experience of

seduction, speaks of her discovery of the attempted betrayal of Amelia as 'mere accident... unless there are some guardian angels that in general protect innocence and virtue; though I may say, I have not always found them so watchful.' (4) As the book's action comes to completion, however, Booth and Amelia are brought out of misfortune; and the final passage is one with clear providential overtones. Robinson the deistic gambler, seriously wounded, informs Harrison that he has had a chance encounter with Amelia in a pawnbroker's. Or not by chance; Robinson now wants to repent before his Creator, and knows he has a wrong against Amelia weighing on his conscience, which this chance encounter gives him the opportunity to undo. 'I think further, that this is thrown in my way, and hinted to me by that great Being; for an accident happened to me yesterday, by which, as things have fallen out since' (i.e. his being wounded and so facing up at last to his responsibilities before God) 'I think I plainly discern the hand of Providence.' (5) The doctor sees it the same way: 'Good Heaven! How wonderful is thy providence!' (6) The result of Robinson's confession is that good triumphs, evil is unmasked, and Amelia comes at last into her rightful property.

Amelia's story, the doctor suggests, is a paradigm, an example of the providential purposes being completed in a visible manner in this world, rather than being left ambiguous as may occur in other instances: 'Providence hath done you the justice at last which it will, one day or other, render to all men.' (7) Fielding's classicism is not left entirely outside the happy resolution; Booth has had a dream the previous night of their fortunes being restored, and the doctor declares he has 'a rather better opinion of dreams than Horace had. Old Homer says they come from Jupiter', and he proceeds to quote Homer on the certainty that 'If Jupiter doth not immediately execute his vengeance, he will however execute it at last'. (8) But the classical heritage is here

(1) Ibid, Vol.I, p.141. Cf. also Fielding's extended presentation of the doctor's enthusiasm over the glories of worship, and the profound effect his words have on Amelia: 'One of the greatest and highest entertainments in the world... Suppose ...I should carry you to the court... Ay, suppose I should have interest enough indeed to introduce you into the presence....Indeed, I am serious... I will introduce you into that presence, compared to whom the greatest emperor on the earth is many millions of degrees meaner than the most contemptible reptile is to him.' (Ibid, Vol II, pp.151-52.)
(2) Ibid, p.288. (3) ibid, Vol I, p.xiii. (4) ibid, p.68. (5) ibid, p.293. (6) ibid, p.294. (7) Ibid, p.299. (8) Ibid, p.306.

being used to testify to the certainty of divine providence active in the real world.

An outburst of praise to the Christian God is Amelia's response to her deliverance, as we might expect; not casually, either, but 'falling on her knees' once again. (1) And Fielding is wise in making her immediately follow it like this: 'Starting up, she ran to her husband, and, embracing him, cried, "My dear love, I wish you joy"; her strength of human feeling, expressed despite Dr. Harrison's recommendation to avoid 'any violent transports of mind', gives essential colour

to her faith. One suspects that Fielding is wise also to make his final reference to the action's causality in terms of a lighthearted allusion to the very 'fortune' that he undermined on the opening page: 'As to Booth and Amelia, Fortune seems to have made them large amends for the tricks she had played them in their youth.'(2) He has shown us the deeper perspective; but this is a story, not a sermon; better, therefore, to close on the casual note, given that it has already been made quite clear how events are really organized.

Fielding died three years after Amelia. In this his last novel, therefore, we can see how his deepening moral concern and his increased interest in the realistic depiction of 'true history' come together in a novel of ordinary life based on a clear providentialism. But the future did not lie that way. As saint-figures go, the resolute yet passionate Amelia is not unattractive. But it is less easy to write a colourful novel about such a figure than about a picaresque and promiscuous rogue like Tom Jones. Fielding had a partial solution to this problem, in that much of Amelia's most interesting action happens to her husband; she and Dr.Harrison pray, trust, encourage, explain, and simply go on living. But as the centrepiece character, the title character, of a book, Tom Jones has the stronger power. Fielding's earlier, picaresque novel, with its much vaguer commitment to the actions of providence in the real world, was the one to be more central in the English novel's developing tradition.

(1) ibid, p.307. (2) ibid, p.311.

(iv) Goldsmith and Smollett

Fielding's practice is similar to that of some other eighteenth-century authors. Oliver Goldsmith, the author of The Vicar of Wakefield, can be seen as standing in the neo-classical tradition,

and he does not attempt a realism of the kind that marks Robinson Crusoe or Pamela. However, The Vicar of Wakefield is closer to them than is Tom Jones. Goldsmith does not scruple to portray a clergyman in his narrative (although, indeed, the narrative is not as 'low' as some parts of Fielding); and there is a much clearer reference to providence.(1) Goldsmith's vicar, Mr Primrose, is distinguished by his faith. When his son leaves home, he reminds him of the text, 'I have been young, and now am old; yet never saw I the righteous man forsaken, or his seed begging their bread.'(2) After their house has been burnt down, he urges his (recently seduced) daughter, 'Our

(1) It is interesting to speculate whether the stress on 'Providence' rather than 'Fortune' is linked to Goldsmith's interest in biography, and the presentation of The Vicar of Wakefield as a kind of spiritual autobiography (cf. Stephen Coote's introduction to the Penguin edition, pp.10-11), in view of the providentialist tendencies of the spiritual autobiography tradition. (2) Oliver Goldsmith, The Vicar of Wakefield (1766; Penguin edition of 1982), p.45.

happiness... is in the power of one who can bring it about a thousand unforeseen ways, that mock our foresight.' (1) Prayer forms an important part in Mr Primrose's life: at the start of each day his family 'all bent in gratitude to that Being who gave us another

day'(3). When his misfortunes conclude in him being thrown into the debtor's prison, he goes to sleep 'after my usual meditations, and having praised my heavenly corrector' (4); and his reaction to his eventual deliverance is 'as soon as I found myself alone, I poured out my heart in gratitude to the giver of joy.'(5) Indeed, even in jail he seeks to accomplish God's work (and be a good Augustan) by bringing order to the society within the prison; some passages that are both humorous and realistic follow as Goldsmith describes his attempts to get the prisoners' attention. The loss of his last hope, when his son appears as a prisoner guilty of a capital offence, is itself made a pretext for a sermon on providence, that he hopes will have a powerful effect on the prisoners.

The fact that Primrose suffers both from naivete and intellectual pride (but to an extent that is gently comic rather than obnoxious) serves to make him and his attitudes acceptable, in a

(1) Ibid, p.144.(3) Ibid. p.50. (4) Ibid. p.155.
(5) Ibid. p.196.

way that would not be so if he were a total paragon of virtue and wisdom. Indeed, Goldsmith presents both Primrose and his wife expressing their confidence in the protection of providence at

exactly the wrong moment, immediately before a catastrophe.(1)

This much weakness is necessary to make Primrose tolerable.

Overall, his faith in God is conveyed sufficiently strikingly to mean that, when the denouement comes and the family's fortunes are restored, Primrose's own providential and worshipping interpretation of the situation seems to be the right one.

However, the numerous improbabilities on which Goldsmith's comic denouement depends(2) make it clear that The Vicar of Wakefield is not intended to be a realistic novel. The beneficent patterning of events is, as in Tom Jones, an expression of faith in the general overall benevolence of providence.(3) The basic appropriateness of a providential worldview is expressed, but not what that means in everyday reality.

Providentialism is conspicuous by its absence from much other

(1) Ibid, pp.169-71. (2) Eg the fact that Mr. Burchell is really Sir William Thornhill; the kindness of Jenkinson; the unreality of the deaths of Primrose's daughter and the person his son had supposedly killed; the arrival of Miss Wilmot; the documentation of Olivia's marriage. (3) Goldsmith interrupts his narrative towards the end to remark, 'Nor can I go on, without a reflection on those accidental meetings, which, though they happen every day, seldom excite our surprise but upon some extraordinary occasion. To what a fortuitous concurrence do we not owe every pleasure and convenience of our lives' (ibid, p.188). The novel as a whole gives a providential cast to these 'accidents', perhaps, as with a similar passage (quoted above) in Tom Jones, p.819. But though these remarks point towards reality, as does the Fielding passage, they do not alter the basically non-realistic nature of the book.

eighteenth-century fiction. It is significant that the hero of Johnson's Rasselas makes his extensive investigations into the meaning of existence and the 'choice of life'(1) without any hint of a superintending providence drawing him towards God.(2) And in

Smollett the absence is clearer still. Most of Smollett's fiction is picaresque, comic, non-idealist - very definitely on the 'lower' side of the 'segregation of styles'. But the picture that results seems virtually to imply a metaphysic. As Leopold Damrosch remarks,

Roderick Random... puts its unlovable hero through a series of disasters and recoveries that are as random as the title suggests, and ends by conferring wealth, a wife, and a long-lost father he has done nothing to deserve. The tale eventually gets somewhere, but not for any good reason; the hero eventually learns something, but not much... Roderick inhabits a Lucretian universe of ceaseless change that is at once random and determined: random in that it responds only to the swerving and rebounding of atom against atom in their fall through the void; determined in that every rebound leads to another rebound, and there is thus plenty of causation even though no presiding principle organizes the whole.(3)

The 'segregation of styles' may be only a formal principle, but comedy of Smollett's kind creates a vision of a certain kind of amoral, patternless world: in much of his work, as Alastair Duckworth says, 'Life is assumed to lack order. '(4)

A somewhat mellower picture of the world is to be found in Humphry Clinker, which appeared at the end of Smollett's life; and here belief in providence is given rather more treatment. But such a faith is still either mocked or patronised as a belief fit only for the weak

(1) Samuel Johnson, Rasselas (1759; Penguin edition of 1976), pp.75-76. (2) It is true that at the close the 'choice of eternity' comes to dominate the 'choice of life' in the princess' thinking (ibid, p.149); it is also true that there is one occasion when Imlac directs her attention to the sovereignty of God, when Pekuah is kidnapped (p.112). But this suggestion is an isolated instance; and the final emphasis on 'eternity' is not matched by any this-worldly action of grace in Rasselas' searchings. (3) Leopold Damrosch, God's Plot and Man's Stories(Chicago, 1985), p.286. (4) Alastair Duckworth, The Improvement of the Estate (1971), p.16.

minds of women or of servants (such as Humphry Clinker himself, who is a keen Methodist): for example, in Mrs Jenkins' disastrously-misspelled letters:

Ould Scratch has not a greater enemy upon earth than Mr Clinker, who is, indeed, a very powerful labourer in the Lord's vineyard. I do no more than use the words of my good lady, who has got the infectual calling; and I trust that even myself, though unworthy, shall find grease to be excepted.(1)

Likewise among the upper classes: 'my good lady', Tabitha Bramble, is as fervent a Wesleyan as her servant, but all too obviously her faith is part of her matrimonial schemes(2); Lydia, the niece of the Bramble household, is a believer in the work of providence(3) (though not a Methodist), but she again is clearly young and inexperienced. The real mouthpieces of commonsense in Humphry Clinker, the shrewd 'men of the world', are old Matthew Bramble (who in some respects resembles Smollett himself) and his nephew Jery; and though somewhere at the root of their view of life there seems to be a vague faith which occasionally surfaces in the most general of terms(5), their usual attitude is a supercilious scorn of any practical expressions of faith.(6) A good example is Jery's attitude after they have all narrowly escaped drowning on the Firth. (During the crisis the servants have turned to 'prayer and ejaculation'; Matthew Bramble, in contrast, 'sat, collected in himself, without speaking.')

'To be sure (cried Tabby, when she found herself on terra firma), we must all have perished, if we had not been the particular care of Providence.' 'Yes (replied my uncle), but I am much of the honest highlander's mind - after he had made such a passage as this: his friend told him he was much indebted to Providence;- "Certainly (said Donald), but, by my saul, mon, I'se ne'er trouble Providence again, so long as the brig of Stirling stands."'(7)

Rather more ugly is the incident where Bramble and Jery find the other members of their household at a Methodist chapel hearing Clinker, the footman, preach. Jery comments that Humphrey led the singing 'with peculiar graces', but nonetheless 'I could hardly keep my gravity on this ludicrous occasion'; and what strikes Bramble 'was the presumption of his lacquey, whom he commanded to come down, with such an air of authority as Humphry did not think proper to disregard... My uncle, with a sneer, asked pardon of the ladies for having interrupted their devotion, saying, he had particular business with the preacher, whom he ordered to call a hackney-coach.' In the subsequent interview Bramble demands, 'What right has such a fellow as you to set up for a reformer?', and browbeats Clinker into a denial of his sense of calling. Bramble himself is treated slightly ironically by Smollett, but there can be little doubt that he and Jery are being presented as the most sensible

(1) Tobias Smollett, Humphry Clinker (1771; Penguin edition of 1967), p.189.
(2) Eg ibid, p.173. (3) Ibid, pp.39, 376. (5) Eg Matthew Bramble on p.63 and p.383, and (probably) in the 'wonderful interposition' of p.203. Jery doesn't tend to make comments of this kind. (6) It is not surprising to find the approving narrative Smollett includes of the death of an individual named Hewett, who chose to fast to death, and 'finished his course with such ease and serenity, as would have done honour to the firmest Stoic of antiquity'(p.218). Christian content is completely lacking at this point; the classical heritage has replaced it again. (7) Ibid, pp.266-67.

participants in the incident; Clinker's co-religionist, Mrs Tabitha, does their cause no good by callously criticising him when he backs down.(1)

In fact in preaching to Clinker 'the light of reason, which you don't pretend to follow'(2), Bramble identifies himself as a good Augustan, a follower of moderation in all things(3) - not the kind of person to whom the enthusiasm of Methodism, with its faith in a God who was disturbingly present in the everyday world, seemed very attractive. Yet Humphry Clinker appeared in 1771, a stage in the 'Age of Reason' by which it was becoming obvious that the 'light of reason' might need to be complemented by other sources of significance. The 'man of feeling' had made his appearance in fiction (Mackenzie's novel of that name appeared the same year); and in Humphry Clinker Smollett (like his contemporary Sterne) has a lot of time for sentiment.(4) As a result there is a curious ambiguity in the presentation of Clinker.(5) Though as a Methodist he comes in for the ridicule to which believers in simple Christianity seem doomed in English fiction (from Nashe's attacks on the Anabaptists through to Dickens savaging the dissenters of his era), yet there seems to be a grudging recognition that he embodies something genuine which, somehow, the 'men of the world' of the age of reason may have missed; when an example of simple goodness is needed, Smollett is forced to make use of a Methodist.(6) One example of this ambivalence is Smollett's presentation of a scene in which Clinker is mistakenly arrested; while in jail he brings about a virtual revival among the prisoners, in a manner similar to Goldsmith's Mr Primrose:

The turnkey... looked remarkably sullen; and when we enquired for Clinker, 'I don't care, if the devil had him (said he); here has been nothing but canting and praying since the fellow entered the place - Rabbit him! the tap will be ruined - we han't sold a cask of beer, nor a dozen of wine, since he paid his garnish -the gentlemen get drunk with nothing but your damned religion... Two or three as bold hearts as ever took the air on Hounslow, have been blubbering all night; and if the fellow an't speedily removed by Habeas Corpus, or otherwise, I'll be damned if there's a grain of true spirit left within these walls.'

Jery's own description of the scene makes clear that all this is 'not for him'; and he uses the colourful vocabulary appropriate to ridicule - but there is something too genuine for him to press the attack home:

I never saw any thing so strongly picturesque as this congregation of felons clanking their chains, in the midst of whom stood orator Clinker, expatiating in a transport of fervor, on the torments of hell, denounced in scripture against evil-doers, comprehending murderers, robbers, thieves and whore mongers. The variety of attention exhibited in the faces of those ragamuffins, formed a group that would not have disgraced the pencil of a Raphael. In one, it denoted admiration; in another, doubt; in a third, disdain; in a fourth, contempt; in a fifth, terror... The gaoler's wife declared he was a saint in trouble, saying, she wished from her heart there was such another good soul, like him, in every gaol in England.(7)

(1) Ibid, pp.169-71. (2) Ibid. (3) Eg the attacks on excess and passion, pp.333,369,374. (4) Eg ibid, pp.302-03. (5) Eg ibid, pp.220-21. (6) An interesting parallel is the apparently simplistic faith and goodness of Dilsey among the ubiquitous meanness of Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury. (7) HumphryClinker, pp.I83-84.

The challenge Clinker poses to Smollett's world is not an insignificant one -he is, after all, the book's title character. But in the end, Smollett declines to endorse the radicalism Clinker stands for, even though he recognises in it a goodness of genuine power: in Smollett's world the truly shrewd are too clever to take on board the faith of the Methodists. It must be left to the women and the servants. And so the providence Clinker believes in remains, once again, absent from the structure of the narrative.

Nor does providential faith find much more expression in the fiction of Sterne, vicar though he was. The general ethos of Tristram Shandy may reflect an easy-going belief; but the task of establishing any real engagement between his book and the world of reality remains (entertainingly) beyond Tristram's grasp. Hence, no close working-out of providentialism in the everyday can be attempted in it. But in these instances where no such working-out exists, the result can all too easily be the kind of divorce between the general credal statement about God's activity on the one hand, and its grounding in any practical particulars on the other, that writers like Francis Schaeffer have seen as a key problem in the theological thinking of the modern era.(3) The danger is that where the general belief that God has acted in history cannot be expressed in particular terms, then, as Os Guinness says, 'What starts as a factual assertion is gradually reduced to a particular religious way of looking at things.'(4) It becomes less and less clear what 'living by faith' means in the mundane world. For practical purposes life is to be seen in a naturalistic way. And that is the picture presented by the novel as the century proceeds.

(3) Cf. Francis Schaeffer, The God Who Is There (1968), passim. (4) Os Guinness, The Dust of Death (1973), p.341. See also Anthony Flew, 'Theology and Falsification', in New Essays in Philosophical Theology, ed. Anthony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre (1955), pp.95-97, and the essays that follow.

(iv) Latitudinarianism and the Anti-Romance Reaction

We should finally note two other factors in the eighteenth century milieu that may have been of significance in accentuating the novel's loss of God: the dominance of Latitudinarianism in religion, and the reaction against the romancers.

Latitudinarianism was a movement within Anglican theology that was a significant influence on Fielding and Sterne in particular.(1)It tended to stress charity above (and therefore as distinct from)dogma; in reaction, no doubt, to the violent doctrinal warfare of the previous century, the dogmatism of which had often been far from charitable. But this emphasis tended to devalue and marginalize concern for the believer's relationship with the supernatural realities of his faith. Latitudinarianism was very much a creed of the Enlightenment, with its emphasis on a rationalistically-based morality, and its beliefs in the ability of man to achieve and know this morality without such a radical revolution of grace as was necessitated by the Fall of humankind as the Puritans understood it. Of course, if man can more or less reform himself, then the activity of God in history becomes less important, or at least less distinguishable from history itself - which brings us back towards deism. Latitudinarians would still pray, of course; nonetheless, the supernatural was to them something of a peripheral reality. Theirs was a conservative creed, a well-behaved part of the orderly Enlightenment world.

In a Latitudinarian author, then, we expect to find an emphasis on natural order and charity in society and the universe, rather than individual salvation, or the Puritan emphasis on being 'strangers and pilgrims', traces of which are still visible in Defoe. Such a well-behaved, orderly creed fits neatly with the neo-classical influence in the work of a writer like Fielding: the basic direction of the plot of Tom Jones is, as Watt says, a 'return to the norm', which demonstrates a 'fundamentally static quality'.(2) In Latitudinarianism there was no desire for radicalism: 'Above all', says A.R. Humphreys, this movement 'feared "enthusiasm", that ardent sense of divine stimulus which had fired the sects of the seventeenth century.'(3) So Fielding's stress on charity, and Sterne's concern in The Sermons of Mr.Yorick with 'philanthropy, and those kindred virtues to it, upon which hang all the law and the prophets'(4), signal their commitment to a theological tradition that was not overwhelmingly anxious to see the supernatural intervening in their world.(5) The tendency towards an anti-supernaturalistic convention in the novel was a product of its times theologically as well as philosophically.

Again, it should be noted that, in their interest in a 'normal universe' consisting of that which was perceivable by the senses, the eighteenth-century novelists were consciously reacting against the earlier continental romance tradition of writers like de Scudery, de la Calprenede and d'Urfe; and a key aspect of this reaction was the rejection of what could be

(1) See A.R.Humphreys, The Augustan World (1954),ch.4, or Gerald R.Cragg, The Church and the Age of Reason (1970), pp.70-72, 157-59.(2) Watt, op.cit., pp.306,308. See also Daniel P. Fuller, Easter Faith and History(1965), pp.28-29. (3) A.R.Humphreys, 'The Social Setting', in The Pelican Guide to English Literature, ed. Boris Ford, Vol.iv, p.41. (4) Quoted in Peter Faulkner, Humanism in the English Novel (1975), p.24. (5) Wesley complained that 'The doctrine of a particular providence is absolutely out of fashion in England - and any but a particular providence is no providence at all.' (Quoted in Damrosch, op.cit., p.190.)

considered 'marvellous' or 'wonderful'. 'What the duce', wrote Richardson to Miss Mulso, 'do you think that I am writing a Romance? Don't you see that I am copying nature?' (1);, and his criticism of romances was that they 'gave me no pleasure; for... they dealt so much in the marvellous and improbable'.(2) Fielding stresses the need to keep 'within the rules of probability'.(3) Smollett attacks the writers of romances as having arisen 'when the minds of men were debauched, by the imposition of priestcraft, to the highest pitch of credulity'; these authors, he says, having lost 'sight of probability, filled their performances with the most monstrous hyperboles'.(4) Miriam Allott sees Scott as summarizing the development up to his time by distinguishing the Novel - 'a fictitious narrative, differing from the Romance, because the events are accommodated to the ordinary train of human events and the modern state of society,' from the Romance 'which turns upon marvellous and uncommon events'. (5)

One wonders whether, in this exclusion of the unusual, the 'religious supernatural' tended to be parcelled up and rejected along with the purely 'fantastic' in which the romancers loved to deal: to be fair, such a combination was an amalgam that some of the saints' legends had plentifully provided. In these, thundered Holcroft late in the century,

(1) Samuel Richardson, in a letter to Miss Mulso (5 October 1752), quoted in Miriam Allott, *Novelists on the Novel* (1959), p.41. (2) Richardson, Pamela, quoted Allott, ibid. (3) Fielding, Tom Jones, p.363. (4) Tobias Smollett, Preface to Roderick Random (1748), quoted Allott, ibid, p.43. (5) Sir Walter Scott, Essay on Romance (1824), quoted Allott, ibid, p.15.

'Secure from criticism, by the tremendous alliance between their works and THE FAITH, the more improbable the story, the greater was its merit.'(1)

Hence, the young novel tradition's need to mark out a territory distinct from that of the romancers may have been a further factor combining with the Enlightenment's sense of an orderly, regular universe to establish a consensus as to what was 'probable' which stayed within a closed, naturalistic system. The novel form, complained Leslie Fiedler, was 'invented precisely (as Samuel Richardson himself once boasted) to drive the "marvellous" and "wonderful" from the realm of prose fiction'(2): and the intervention of providence, which is certainly 'wonderful' in one way or another, tended to be a casualty. (3)

When one puts together all these factors -the philosophical background of the Enlightenment; the absence of any tradition of fiction based on supernaturalistic realism; the neo-classical aesthetic doctrine of the Stiltrennung or 'segregation of styles'; the decline of Puritanism as a living force, and its eclipse by Latitudinarianism; the reaction against the 'marvellous' in the romancers - it is not surprising that the developing novel

(1) Thomas Holcroft, Preface to Alwyn (1780), quoted Allott, *ibid*, p.46. (2) Leslie Fiedler, 'Ishmael's Trip', The Listener, 3 August 1967, p.135. (3) The influence on Fielding, Smollett and Sterne of the prince of anti-romancers, Cervantes, was perhaps a further force pointing in the same direction; parodic, balancing different and opposed notions of reality, unlikely to express any view of the world more serious or radical than a general benevolence.

tradition tended to become, in practice, naturalistic; based on what we might call a 'lowest-common-denominator' view of reality, stressing the world as perceived by the senses and the generally-agreed virtues. By the late eighteenth century a convention had been established, whereby the novel left God out of the world, and yet still considered the resulting picture adequate.

3. THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

In some ways, nineteenth-century England - Victorian England especially - was much more self-consciously 'Christian' than the England of a century earlier. This was the era of the 'Evangelical Awakening'. But in the end, the fundamental direction of the novel form's development did not change: among most of the great English novelists, the loss of God outlived the Age of Reason.

At the start of the nineteenth century, we find Sir Walter Scott and Jane Austen. These are two novelists who might seem, as the humanist critic Peter Faulkner says, to 'represent, at least superficially, a far more orthodox outlook'(1) than some of their predecessors. But when we look more closely, we find their orthodoxy has more to do with ethics than with faith in the activity of a 'living God'. In both Scott and Jane Austen, a narrative is usually presented as complete without any reference to the Godward dimension of events, to the purposes of God in what is befalling the hero or heroine. In general, the sense of divinely-ordained patterns underlying events that had been part of Robinson Crusoe, Pamela, and Amelia, is missing.

We have already noted the influence on Scott of the reaction against the romances. It may be that his desire not to depart, along with 'the epic poem and the romance of chivalry', into 'a world of wonders, where supernatural agents are mixed with human characters, where the human characters themselves are prodigies, and where events are produced by causes widely and manifestly different from those which regulate the course of human affairs', and to avoid 'the relation of what is obviously miraculous and impossible'(2),

(1) Peter Faulkner, Humanism in the English Novel (1975), p.33. (2) Footnote to Essay on Romance(1824) , quoted Miriam Allott, Novelists on the Novel (1959),p.49.

discouraged him from the introduction of providentialist material. His characterization of an ideal supernatural tale as one in which the narrator, having professed general disbelief in its assumptions, confesses to 'something... which he has been always obliged to give up as inexplicable'(1), implies that a writer will not find anything supernatural to narrate that he would be obliged to believe because of its connection with his faith. The 'supernatural' is for Scott (as indeed it seems to be for Fielding) a category describing the content of ghost stories, folktales, and so on, rather than a term for the non-naturalistic content of Christian faith.(2)

The Heart of Midlothian is a partial exception to this. It tells how a Scottish girl, Effie Deans, is rescued from hanging through the exertions of her sister Jeanie, who walks nearly all the way from Scotland to London and, by a happy turn of events, succeeds in procuring a royal pardon. There can be no doubt that the mainspring of Jeanie's efforts is her faith in divine power upholding her, a faith she has acquired as part of the extreme 'Cameronian' Presbyterianism to which her family are committed. Indeed, Effie's predicament has arisen because Jeanie has refused to tell a lie that would secure her sister's acquittal; and Jeanie has made this refusal - with great distress: Scott represents this refusal as something far removed from legalistic intransigence - because of her 'faith in Providence'.(3) Her father's ambivalent advice to her on the topic

(1) Sir Walter Scott, Chronicles of the Canonsgate, First Series (collected edition of 1829-33), p.306; quoted Mary Lascelles, 'Scott and the Art of Revision', in Mack and Gregor, op.cit., p.156. (2) An instructive comparison may be made between Scott and the much clearer Christian commitment of James Hogg's 'The Cameronian Preacher's Tale' (conveniently available in Christian Short Stories: an Anthology, ed. Mark Booth (1984). Hogg is writing in a folktale mode, but what he narrates is clearly shaped by a Christian attitude to the supernatural. (3) Sir Walter Scott, The Heart of Midlothian (1818; Everyman edition of 1956), p.219.

concludes, 'If ye arena free in conscience to speak for her in the court of judicature, follow your conscience, Jeanie, and let God's will be done.'(1) God's will, he dares to hope, can pick up the pieces if Jeanie follows her conscience. It is a similar faith-commitment that finally leads her to undertake the highly hazardous journey into England, because 'I am amaist sure that I will be strengthened to speak the errand I came for.'{2)

Scott makes this foundation to Jeanie's actions abundantly clear. Soon after Effie's conviction, Jeanie decides -very prayerfully (3) -to risk her own life by a dangerous meeting alone with a criminal, in an attempt to assist Effie; she narrowly escapes being raped, and on arriving home hears her father praying for her. She concludes

that while she was exposed to danger, her head had been covered by the prayers of the just as by a helmet, and under the strong confidence, that while she walked worthy of the protection of Heaven, she would experience its countenance. It was in that moment that a vague idea first darted across her mind, that something might yet be achieved for her sister's safety, conscious as she now was of her innocence of the unnatural murder with which she stood charged. It came, as she described it, on her mind, like a sun-blink on a stormy sea; and although it instantly vanished, yet she felt a degree of composure which she had not experienced for many days, and could not help being strongly persuaded that, by some means or other, she would be called upon, and directed, to work out her sister's deliverance.{4)

And so it turns out; the minor coincidences that help her on her

-----(1)
Ibid, p.218. (2) Ibid, p.290. (3) Ibid, p.160. (4) Ibid, p.197.

way (such as her fiancé being a descendant of someone who had saved the life of an ancestor of the Duke of Argyll, the nobleman who eventually introduces Jeanie to the Queen), and indeed the fact that her enterprise is accomplished at all against great odds, suggest that her faith might be an accurate assessment of the realities of life.(1) Jeanie's providentialism receives further endorsement from Scott's depiction of the Deans family. This is splendidly comic at times(2), and can present the father in particular as possessing a definite element of self-righteousness (3); but it is nonetheless sympathetic, and gives them a real wholesomeness, integrity and dignity -all of which reflects on the faith around which their life revolves.

However, there seems to be an ambiguity -or perhaps confusion - in the book's presentation of providentialism. Dorothy Van Ghent notices this confusion, but wrongly locates it in the doctrine of providence itself:

Where Providence provides all, individual willing is a derogation of Providential function; it is absurd to will or to do. And yet, in the Providential universe of Scott's book, the central determination of our attitudes is Jeanie Deans's immense exertion of stubborn willpower in legging it to London to upset whatever work Providence may have had in mind regarding Effie... Scott does not use the paradox. Because he ignores it, the work is

(1) So, in a different sense, does Scott's introduction telling the story of Helen Walker, Jeanie's real-life original. But the inclusion of a preface asserting that such a thing happened in real life is not a fictional strategy.(2) Ibid, pp.121,130-131. (3) Ibid, pp.211-212.

sentimental, in the sense that it sets up feelings about a Providential kind of life - feelings of hope, trust, gratitude, and humility, let us say - while concretely it exhibits a way of life in which Providence has no part, a way of life in which the individual determines destiny, by using his legs if not his head.(1)

This is over-simplistic. Scott's readers would surely have been accustomed to the biblical understanding of this issue, embodied in Paul's words 'Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose'(2) -to cite just one example. That is to say, while on the one hand there is a divine strategy that will be accomplished in the lives of human beings, yet that strategy is designed to be accomplished in good measure through the free decisions and labours of humans working in partnership with God, equipped by His grace. In such a worldview, the purposes of providence for Effie are intended to be brought about by Jeanie's labours; and indeed God is glorified precisely by and in those divinely-inspired and assisted labours. Scott's conception of this is suggested when he presents Jeanie deciding whether to save Effie through a lie, and 'resting on one only sure cable and anchor - faith in Providence, and a resolution to discharge her duty.'(3) The two are in harmony; Jeanie rests on 'one only sure cable', not two.

(1)Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel: Form and Function (New York, 1953; Harper edition of 1961), pp.122-23. (2) Philippians 2:12-13. (3) The Heart of Midlothian, p.219.

This paradox, then, is not the problem. The question is whether Scott has preserved this balance; whether he really intends to assert a providential pattern similar to Jeanie's beliefs to be the actual shape of reality (as the passages we have cited would suggest); or whether, in contrast, Jeanie's providentialism is presented as (or becomes, as the novel proceeds) mere 'local colour', biographical data, a component of the general uprightness of the Deans family (like their marvellous Scottish speech). In that case, the reader ends up understanding the narrative solely as an example of sisterly devotion and pluck; Jeanie's gamble of faith comes off, not because there is a God who works in such situations, but because of Jeanie's own good deeds.

Scott evidently wishes to distance himself from some aspects of Jeanie's supernaturalism, for example her attitude towards divine guidance.⁽¹⁾ This is linked with a more general uncertainty. (That is not necessarily a criticism in aesthetic terms; it is merely an assessment of how far the book can be considered a providentialist novel.) For example, when Jeanie is captured by ruffians on the road south, she comforts herself with reflecting on how her Cameronian forebears had found divine deliverance: 'and I bethought myself, that the same help that was wi' them in their strait, wad be wi' me in mine, an I could but watch the Lord's

(1) Ibid, p.160.

time and opportunity for delivering my feet from their snare.' Such a 'time and opportunity' does indeed come, but any sense of direct deliverance is qualified considerably by the words with which Scott follows this soliloquy of Jeanie's: 'Strengthened in a mind naturally calm, sedate, and firm, by the influence of religious confidence...' Here her Cameronian faith seems merely a useful addition to an already admirable character that is in itself sufficient to see Jeanie through.(1)

The other question is whether the worldview that Scott suddenly produces in the postscript he places at the end of the book is the same as the providentialism suggested by earlier passages. Jeanie's own attitude has been identical with that of her real-life original, Helen Walker, whose story is told in the introduction:

She was heard to say that, by the Almighty's strength, she had been enabled to meet the Duke at the most critical moment, which, if lost, would have caused the inevitable forfeiture of her sister's life.(2)

Here Helen's deliberate effort, strengthened by divine grace, was matched by specific divine intervention; and this kind of attitude to what happens in the world has clearly been Jeanie's too. It is noticeable, however, that Scott lessens the aspect of direct

(1) Ibid, p.314. Cf. C.S.Lewis' comments on Glenallan's forgiveness of Elspeth in The Antiquary: 'Glenallan has been painted by Scott as a lifelong penitent and ascetic, a man whose every thought has been for years fixed on the supernatural. But when he has to forgive, no motive of a Christian kind is brought into play: the battle is won by "the generosity of his nature". It does not occur to Scott that his fasts, his solitudes, his beads, and his confessor, however useful as romantic "properties", could be effectively connected with a serious action which concerns the plot of the book....In his work, as in that of most of his contemporaries, only secular and natural values are taken seriously.' (C.S.Lewis, God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics (Grand Rapids, 1970), p.219.) (2) The Heart of Midlothian,p.7.

intervention in his fictional version of Helen's story, by omitting the aspect of timing in Jeanie's encounter with the Duke. And when we reach the postscript at the end of the book, Scott offers us something much more mechanical:

Reader, this tale will not be told in vain, if it shall be found to illustrate the great truth, that guilt, though it may attain temporal splendour, can never confer real happiness; that the evil consequences of our crimes long survive their commission, and, like the ghosts of the murdered, for ever haunt the steps of the malefactor; and that the paths of virtue, though seldom those of worldly greatness, are always those of pleasantness and peace.(1)

This is all rather deterministic, having more to do with the inexorable and automatic distribution of rewards and punishments than with the redemptive challenge and intervention of God transforming the human personality. Certainly, for the last eighty-five or so pages, it is difficult to see that Effie and her seducer-turned-husband Staunton are offered any option other than working out the unpleasant consequences of their misdeeds. These consequences include the deaths of their children (2); the misery(3) that torments Effie even in her social triumphs (which seem given her merely to tantalise her); and finally - after the narrative has become somewhat longwinded and predictable -the rather implausible death of Staunton at the hands of his own son.

(1) Ibid p.540. (2)Ibid p.483. (3) Ibid, p.508.

Scott seems forced to stretch the bounds of possibility in order to give his characters their deterministic comeuppance -in this life rather than the next.

Also, there seems no opportunity for a new beginning. Staunton does marry Effie (it would have been very plausible for him to have deserted her), and Effie shows a conscious submissiveness to God's judgement in the loss of their children ('God's will be done!')(1), leading her eventually to retire to a convent.(2) But there is no real possibility of redemption and restoration, no sense of a chance to 'start afresh'; grace does not function that way.

We may consider the question Dorothy Van Ghent raises: what is the crime for which Effie undergoes lifelong punishment? (3) The answer seems to be that she slept with Staunton in her youth. (And, perhaps, that she insisted on marrying her seducer despite his vices.) Admittedly biblical Christianity has always known that a single sin can often have far-reaching and irrevocable consequences. But it has also affirmed the possibility, if not always of the removal of the consequences of sin, at least of grace operating through them to a positive end. It is doubtful if we see such an offer of grace in The Heart of Midlothian.

In short, the whole personal dimension of providence is lacking: the love of a personal divine Father, and the individuality of the object of providence. The causality that underlies the loss of

(1) Ibid, p.483. (2) Ibid, p.540. (3) Van Ghent, op.cit., p.121.

Effie's children, and the remarkable death of Staunton, seems more than naturalistic; but its ethos is that of the efficient, impersonal (but distinctly un-Cameronian) machine of the well-ordered but deistic Augustan universe. So in Jeanie's case the role of providence is ambiguous, and in Effie's there is no God who is a redemptive 'very present help in trouble'. Even in The Heart of Midlothian, then, Scott's action is not really marked by a biblical providentialism.

It is not surprising that Scott's biographer Edgar Johnson, author of Sir Walter Scott: The Great Unknown, chooses the word 'stoic' to describe Scott's basic outlook. For a faith of a Presbyterian kind, that has been marked by the Calvinistic stress on predestination, is likely in a state of decay to lose the sense of God's presence in the outworkings of destiny. In such a situation, stoicism - including perhaps a basic conviction of the orderliness of the universe, as in Scott's case, but not a living vibrancy of faith - becomes a reasonable enough life-stance. But it is not the same as the exuberant supernaturalism of New Testament Christianity.

(ii) Jane Austen

Significantly, Jane Austen's heroines likewise can be seen in terms of 'stoicism'. Alastair Duckworth, for example, suggests that

At the times of greatest distress, the 'reduced' self in Jane Austen's fiction is apt to fall back on its own 'resources', an idea which suggests a Christian stoicism, an inner resilience in the face of adversity. Elinor Dashwood, Fanny Price and Anne Elliot all at times approach a kind of Christian heroism which recognises that, whatever the distresses of the moment, this world is not after all the place of ultimate reward. (1)

(1) Duckworth, The Improvement of the Estate (1971), p.8.

This needs qualifying. While it is true that the endurance with which Jane Austen's heroines face misfortune would probably have been understood by her contemporary readers as being rooted in a basically Christian consciousness which she and they shared, the novels themselves do not stress any other-worldly dimension to their experience as the ground of their resilience. And one wonders what is particularly 'Christian' about a stoicism that falls back on 'its own "resources"' and 'inner resilience'; one would have thought that a hallmark of anything authentically Christian would have been a prayerful, dependent reliance on God for strengthening. In this sense, there is something much more explicitly Christian about the reactions to a crisis of Jeanie Deans or Robinson Crusoe, or even (one hates to say it) Richardson's Pamela, than of Jane Austen's heroines. The latter, marvellous ladies though they often are, suffer, agonize and meditate, but they do not pray:

The tumult of her mind was now painfully great. She knew not how to support herself, and from actual weakness sat down and cried for half an hour....She continued in very agitating reflections.... Elizabeth awoke the next morning to the same thoughts and meditations which had at length closed her eyes. She could not yet recover from the surprise of what had happened: it was impossible to think of any thing else, and totally indisposed for employment, she resolved soon after breakfast to indulge herself in air and exercise.(1)

As these considerations occurred to her in painful succession, she wept for him, more than for herself. Supported by the conviction of having done nothing to merit her present unhappiness, and consoled by the belief that Edward had done nothing to forfeit her esteem, she thought she could even now, under the first smart of the heavy blow, command herself enough to guard every suspicion of the truth from her mother and sisters. (2)

(1) Jane Austen, Pride and Prejudice (1813; Penguin edition of 1972), pp.224-226. (2) Jane Austen, Sense and Sensibility (1811;Penguin edition of 1969), p.158.

Mansfield Park is a partial exception; here the attitudes of Fanny Price and Edmund Bertram - their ill-ease at the flippancy of their companions, or their concern for the role of the clergyman and for family prayers (1) - seem to be grounded in the Evangelicalism of the day. Fanny's reaction to the elopement of Henry Crawford and Maria Rushworth is that 'as far as this world alone was concerned, the greatest blessing to everyone of kindred with Mrs Rushworth would be instant annihilation'.(2) Edmund wishes that God will support Fanny through this anguish (3), and later bursts out, 'Thank God!' at the 'merciful appointment of Providence' that Fanny has not suffered overmuch.(4) These, however, are what a clergyman should say; Edmund does not actually do any praying; and neither does Fanny, except on one occasion.(5)

Peter Faulkner comments, 'The ladies... never seek for guidance or consolation from any source beyond themselves'.(6) That this should seem normal to us - as indeed it does - is a mark of our secularization. It is equally noticeable that the events of Jane Austen's novels are not generally presented as part of a providential design for the characters' lives -even in as perfunctory a fashion as that which we find in Moll Flanders. The universal on which Pride and Prejudice is based is that 'It

(1) Jane Austen, Mansfield Park (1814; Penguin edition of 1966), pp.120-121, 115-116. (2) Ibid, p.430; my emphasis. (3) Ibid. (4) Ibid , p.442. (5) Ibid, p.271. There are rare indications of a supernaturalistic context elsewhere in Jane Austen: Marianne towards the end of Sense and Sensibility, severely ill, is anxious to recover and 'have time for atonement to my God, and to you all' (Sense and Sensibility, p.337). Anne Elliot doesn't go any further than 'meditation, serious and grateful', again late in the story (Persuasion (1818; Penguin edition of 1965), p.247), but her eventual husband, Wentworth, tries to calm his feelings by 'prayer and reflection' after Louisa's injury (ibid, p.132). But the placing of these references indicates the peripheral nature of their concerns. (6) Faulkner, op.cit., p.36.

is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife' (or some inversion of this maxim, Jane Austen's irony being what it is). Courtship and marriage are the truly vital and fundamental area of human activity. Edmund Bertram's defence of the role of the clergyman is equally illuminating:

But I cannot call that situation nothing, which has the charge of all that is of the first importance to mankind, individually or collectively considered, temporally and eternally - which has the guardianship of religion and morals, and consequently of the manners which result from their influence.... The manners I speak of, might rather be called conduct, perhaps, the result of good principles; the effect, in short, of those doctrines which it is their duty to teach and recommend. (1)

Here, indeed, the religious dimension of life is asserted as a priority (although it is a would-be clergyman speaking). But even in Mansfield Park, it exists almost entirely in the horizontal dimension. When one considers how else Edmund could have phrased his defence, it becomes plain that he does not (for example) describe the clergy as a channel for the means of grace, or as encouraging others to a deeper knowledge of God and a greater involvement with His purposes. Manners (in the widest sense of the term), not knowing God, is determinative.

And for a clergyman-hero like Henry Tilney in Northanger Abbey, Sunday is purely a social occasion. As Laurence Lerner observes, Jane Austen's clergy regard 'religion as a social institution, not as a personal experience'. Indeed, he says, there is 'in Jane Austen's

(1) Mansfield Park, pp.120-121.

conception of the clerical life as complete an absence of the religious dimension as she found in Mr. Collins' conception.' Edmund Bertram and Henry Tilney 'will defer, and they will patronize', but they will not be any more religious than Mr. Collins; 'and they certainly will not show enthusiasm'. It is hard to disagree with Lerner's summary:

Whatever Miss Austen the sister of Henry may have Believed, Jane Austen the novelist did not believe In God.... She did not arrange, control or interpret her deepest experience in the light of these opinions or this piety - did not, in such a sense, believe.(1)

Mansfield Park may be a partial exception; but in general, in Jane Austen as in Scott, the 'grand design of God' has gone, and little but stoicism is left behind.

(iii) Gothicism

Meanwhile, the supernatural had re-emerged in force in the Gothic novel, with its paraphernalia of ghosts, devils, and other marvels. This was a form that Jane Austen satirised. for instance in Northanger Abbey; and perhaps, like the eighteenth-century novelists, reacted against. Gothicism, however, could hardly be said to have much to do with Christian supernaturalism. Walpole states as his presupposition in the preface to The Castle of Otranto that 'Miracles, visions, necromancy, dreams, and other preternatural events, are exploded now even from romances.' In Gothic novels, says one recent critic,

(1) Laurence Lerner, The Truth-tellers (1967), pp. 23-25, 28.

the presence of the supernatural is of a piece with dislocated plots, frenzied passions, the use of chiaroscuro and underground passages and vaults containing guilty secrets and unbridled lusts: it expresses the revolt of a purely human subconscious against reason, figured in organised religion and social civility. (1)

The supernatural is left entirely alien, for the point is the shock, the 'frisson of the supernatural' that is experienced both by the characters and the reader. That frisson is invariably one of numinous rage. (2)

It is for this reason that, as Dorothy Scarborough points out, 'In Gothicism we find that the Deity disappears though the devil remains.' Pleasurable terror is the aim of this fiction.(3) It is 'escapist' rather than serious art; it is not concerned with any kind of reality.

There is an interesting parallel between Gothicism and some forms of Romanticism, in that in both cases an alternative to the rationalistic straitjacket of the eighteenth century was produced outside reality, in the realm of the imagination. In both cases it tended to be a non-Christian alternative. Obviously there are distinctions to be made, in so far as Romantic art was intended to be serious rather than escapist. But at any rate the trend at the start of the nineteenth century was not one of a return to a Christian supernaturalism: the Imagination could be offered as

(1) C.N.Manlove, Modern Fantasy (1975), p.6. (2) Ibid, p.9. (3) Dorothy Scarborough, The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction (1917), pp.2,7.

something of a religion-substitute. And even where Romanticism was firmly rooted in reality, as in Wordsworth, the tendency was to incorporate the supra-rational with the empirical world by a pantheistic fusion rather than a Christian one. (Fairchild points out that in Wordsworth, as against Donne, Crashaw or Herbert, 'Grace becomes, not something that human nature needs, but something that human nature possesses'.(1))

(iv) Charles Dickens

When we turn to the Victorian era, we might expect that, strongly influenced as its worldview was by Evangelicalism, it would have produced some challenge to the dominant consensus. But generally this is not the case. C.S.Lewis has remarked on the predominantly secular nature of nineteenth-century fiction:

The novels of Meredith, Trollope and Thackeray are not written either by or for men who see this world as the vestibule of eternity, who regard pride as the greatest of the sins, who desire to be poor in spirit, and look for a supernatural salvation. Even more significant is the absence from Dickens' Christmas Carol of any interest in the Incarnation. Mary, the Magi, and the Angels are replaced by 'spirits' of his own invention, and the animals present are not the ox and ass in the stable but the goose and turkey in the poulterer's shop.(2)

The spirits have no reference to biblical-Christian supernaturalism.

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- (1) Hoxie N.Fairchild, Religious Trends in English Poetry (New York, 1939-57), Vol I, p.567, quoted in Vincent Buckley, Poetry and the Sacred (1968), p.44. Buckley qualifies Fairchild's remarks by pointing out the experiences of the 'sacred' in Wordsworth, but concludes, 'Admittedly, one does not get from his great poetry any but ambiguous and momentary apprehensions of a personal God in the traditional Christian sense.'
- (2) C.S.Lewis, op.cit., p.219.

And this disinclination to 'look for a supernatural salvation' that Lewis notes is accompanied in Thackeray and Dickens by a suspicion of the notion of 'special providence'. Thackeray expressed his dislike of those 'who are forever dragging the Awful Divinity into a participation with their private concerns', and declared that he could not 'request any special change in my behalf from the ordinary processes, or see any special Divine animus superintending my illnesses or wellnesses'(1) -a position which applied consistently would seem to rule out praying(2) for any everyday matter ('Give us this day our daily bread'). God is presumably not big enough or loving enough to be concerned with such things.

Dickens likewise sets a belief in providence in some fairly damning contexts: Mrs. Sparsit in *Hard Times* hauling in a captive Mrs. Pegler with 'It's a coincidence... It's a providence!'(3); the unpleasant Mrs Clennam's 'I know nothing of summer and winter, shut up here. The Lord has been pleased to put me beyond all that' in Little Dorrit (4); and, above all, the hypocritical Pecksniff in Martin Chuzzlewit: 'Providence, perhaps I may be permitted to say a

(1) The Letters and Private Papers of W.M.Thackeray. ed. G.N.Ray(1945-46), Vol.IV, pp.128-129; quoted in Elizabeth Jay, The Religion of the Heart (1979), p.98. (2) There were differences of opinion on the question of prayer during this period. Mrs Trollope denounced evangelical-style extempore prayer - the kind that would be likely to be concerned with everyday issues -in her novel The Vicar of Wrexhill, as 'an abomination to those who have preserved their right to sit within the sacred pale of our established church; and... it is among such that I wish to find my readers'(quoted Valentine Cunningham. Everywhere Spoken Against (1975),p.22) .(3) Charles Dickens, Hard Times (1854; Penguin edition of 1969), p.277. (4) Charles Dickens. Little Dorrit (1857; edition of 1967), p.74.

special Providence, has blessed my endeavours' -a complacency Dickens singles out for a paragraph's well-deserved demolition.(1) Certainly Dickens was no friend to the evangelicals, the section of the church that was most committed to providentialism (2); and during the 1840s at least he was closely linked with the anti-supernaturalistic Unitarians. It is highly significant that he should picture Mr. Weller presenting the new birth itself - the heart of the evangelical gospel, and a concept originating in Jesus' own words to Nicodemus(3) - as a Methodistical 'invention'.(4) Even at its best, Dickens' own religion seems to match T.S.Eliot's description: 'still of the good old torpid eighteenth century kind, dressed up with a profusion of holly and turkey, and supplemented by strong humanitarian zeal.'(5) Like Latitudinarianism, it is not a faith putting a great stress on the vertical dimension of supernatural grace.

(1) Charles Dickens, Martin Chuzzlewit (1844; Everyman edition of 1907), p.317. Needless to say, Dickens' sallies against the misuse of the notion of providence would be endorsed by the most ardent Christian supernaturalist. (2) Cf. Cunningham, op.cit., pp.215-225. (3) John 3:3. (4) The point is Cunningham's, ibid, pp.193-94,190. (5) T.S.Eliot, After Strange Gods (1934), pp.53-54. A.O.J. Cockshut notes that 'Thackeray and Dickens... are always contrasting the religion of their evangelical characters with some vague undefined ideal of "true.. or ..real" Christianity. But what this may be we are never told. By implication we are allowed to guess that it lays great stress on one or two moral precepts of the gospels, such as the duty of forgiveness and of generosity, to the exclusion of others. It concentrates, in fact, on those moral qualities which the ordinary good-natured man of the world usually imagines himself to possess.' (A.O.J.Cockshut, Anthony Trollope (1955), p.71, quoted Faulkner, op.cit., p.41). Faulkner adds, 'Mr Cockshut is surely right to see something vague about the religious commitment of the mid-Victorian novelists. They all tend towards the position which he ascribes to Trollope: "Though impatient of much dogma and suspicious of churches, he always considered himself a Christian... For this reason, there is no major Victorian religious novel. ' (Faulkner, ibid.)

At the same time, of course, Dickens' imagination was of a type with an openness to - even a yearning for - the marvellous. So although a Christian supernaturalism is not a hallmark of his work, yet supernaturalism of other kinds is often present. (A good example of this is the dreams that haunt Mrs. Flintwinch in Little Dorrit.(1)) And he is writing as a popular, and populist, author in an age of overt religiosity. Consequently, Dickens does still make occasional gestures towards the notion of providence, suggesting that God is concerned about His world - even if Dickens himself is not altogether clear how that concern might manifest itself. The result is often a sentimental substitute for Christian supernaturalism, which lacks the robustness of its biblical equivalent. The dying Paul Dombey's vision of his mother is one instance; another is the 'mighty, universal Truth' expressed in The Old Curiosity Shop:

When death strikes down the innocent and young, for every fragile form from which he lets the panting spirit free, a hundred virtues rise, in shapes of mercy, charity, and love, to walk the world, and bless it. Of every tear that sorrowing mortals shed on such green graves, some good is born, some gentler nature comes. In the Destroyer's steps

(1) It is not entirely clear whether these are anything more than dreams; but the accuracy of the knowledge that Affery Flintwinch acquires through them, and particularly her sense of the presence of the dead girl who had been tormented in the house by Mrs Clennam (Little Dorrit, p.854), certainly appear to extend beyond the natural. After the explosion, Dickens offers the suggestion that the noises can be explained naturally (p.863), but this seems rather halfhearted.

there spring up bright creations that defy his power, and his dark path becomes a way of light to heaven. (1)

This is 'more akin to religious humanism, despite its use of orthodox vocabulary, than to Christian dogma', as Elizabeth Jay rightly comments(2); and it is not entirely clear what it means in practical terms. Divorced as it is from a notion of a close relationship with God, it becomes almost deistic.

Oliver Twist contains similar problems. Here Dickens introduces a notion of providence towards the end of the narrative, when Mr. Brownlow comments that Oliver 'was cast in my way by a stronger hand than chance'(3); and also on the last page, where 'the two orphans, tried by adversity, remembered its lessons in mercy to others, and mutual love, and fervent thanks to Him who had protected and preserved them'.(4) In addition, the Christian supernatural seems present in the dreams of heaven that comfort the dying Dick(5), and - in inescapable judgement - in the vision of the murdered Nancy

that torments Sikes: 'Let no man talk of murderers escaping justice, and hint that Providence must sleep.'(6) But there is something ironic in the fact that Dickens, the scourge of loveless theologies, should create in this manifestation of judgement the most powerful image of providential causality in the book. Elsewhere, the marvellous is most strikingly present in contexts outside any suggestion of providentialism: Nancy's premonitions of coffins

before her murder(7); Monks finding Bumble 'by one of those chances which the devil throws in the way of his friends sometimes'(8); and perhaps the 'folktale' manner in which Fagin and Monks vanish without trace - or footprint - after sighting Oliver in the house at Chertsey.(9) It is not in the perception of providence at work, but in the delineation of characters far distant from divine providence, that Dickens' presentation is most effectively deepened by overtones resonating beyond the natural.

Indeed, it is in the portrayal of the evil characters that Dickens' imagination comes alive. The good characters come across to the reader as lacking colour and energy. And that, in turn, reflects on the providence that is supposedly backing them: there is no hint of glory about its instruments. While it is true that the new testament conception of providence is one where God has 'chosen what is weak in the world' in order 'to show that

(1) Charles Dickens, The Old Curiosity Shop (1841; Penguin edition of 1972), p.659. (2) Jay, op.cit., p.164. (3) Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist (1838; Everyman edition of 1907), p.384. (4) Ibid, p.423. (5) Ibid, p.51. (6) Ibid, p.375. (7) Ibid, p.356. (8) Ibid p.280. (9) Ibid, pp.263-265.

the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us'(1), yet it is plainly meant to manifest the presence and power of God too.(2) This dimension is clearly lacking from the 'alternative community' of goodness that Dickens presents, here and elsewhere. As Graham Greene observes,

How can we really believe that these inadequate ghosts of goodness can triumph over Fagin, Monks, and Sikes? And the answer, of course, is that they never could have triumphed without the elaborate machinery of the plot disclosed in the last pages. The world of Dickens is a world without God; and as a substitute for the power and the glory of the omnipotent and omniscient are a few references to heaven, angels, the sweet faces of the dead, and Oliver saying, 'Heaven is a long way off, and they are too happy there to come down to the bedside of a poor boy.' ...We have witnessed Oliver's temporary escapes too often and his inevitable recapture; there is the truth and the creative experience.(3)

As a whole, says Greene, Oliver Twist depicts 'the nightmare fight between the darkness, where the demons walk, and the sunlight, where ineffective goodness makes its last stand in a condemned world.' As we shall see in a later chapter, Greene himself is predisposed to sense the 'eternal and alluring taint of the Manichee, with its simple and terrible explanation of our plight, how the world was made by Satan and not by God'(4); but in this case, the imagined world that Dickens has created does indeed seem one where the power

(1) Cf 1 Corinthians 1:26-31, 2 Corinthians 4:7-10, 12:9~10. (2) 1 Corinthians 14:25. (3) Graham Greene, Collected Essays (1969; Penguin edition of 1970), pp.85-S6. (4) *Ibid*, p.86.

is all on one side; where the happy ending brought about by unconvincing coincidences (Oliver's two robberies are on his father's best friend and his mother's sister's guardian) does not seem plausible. And that must go for the involvement of providence too; as we remarked earlier, the optimistic assertions of faith have become a myth divorced from the particulars of reality.

It is arguable that these characteristics of Dickens' vision grow still more marked in his later work, where there seems to be a deepening sense of pessimism. Some of his characters still express themselves in providential terms, of course: Little Dorrit for example is willing to go to prison with Arthur 'if it should be the will of God'(1); but pious comments of this kind are to be expected from the good characters in a novel of the 1850s. Dickens' 'alternative communities' continue to lack vitality - 'dear old' Tom Pinch playing the organ at the end of Martin Chuzzlewit; the motley crew of eccentrics and simpletons who are the (vastly entertaining) heroes of Dombey and Son, out of date, out of touch with the world, and scarcely to be rescued by Dickens' desperate remark that 'instead

(1) Little Dorrit, p.886.

of being behind the time....as he supposed, he was, in truth, a little before it'(1); Arthur Clennam and his wife going 'quietly down into the roaring streets', completely unnoticed by the world around them making its 'usual uproar', at the close of Little Dorrit. If any providence is at work here, it is maintaining little beyond an ineffectual bridgehead.

And what is conveyed most powerfully in Hard Times is the direct opposite of providentialism: the truth of the dying Stephen Blackpool's summary, 'Aw a muddle! Fro' first to last, a muddle!' {2} In the final chapter of Bleak House Esther speaks of 'the Eternal wisdom' and of receiving through the train of events 'a new sense of the goodness and the tenderness of God'(3); but the perspective of the novel's other narrator is far more nihilistic, and the novel does not resolve the tension between the two.(4) Esther's faith in providence must be balanced against Jo's experience:

And there he sits munching, and gnawing, and looking up at the great Cross on the summit of St. Paul's Cathedral, glittering above a red and violet-tinted cloud of smoke. From the boy's face one might suppose that sacred emblem to be, in his eyes, the crowning confusion of a great confused city;- so golden, so high up, so far out of his reach.(5)

The absence of a providential dimension is made all the clearer by Dickens' sense of the interconnectedness of events, which could have been part of a 'grand design' but are equally probably 'aw a muddle':

(1) Charles Dickens, Dombey and Son (1846-48; Everyman edition of 1907), p.810. (2) Hard Times, p.289. (3) Charles Dickens, Bleak House (1853; Penguin edition of 1971), p.932. (4) Cf. J. Hillis Miller's comments on this topic in his introduction to the Penguin edition of Bleak House, p.33. (5) Ibid, p.326.

What connexion can there be, between the place in Lincolnshire, the house in town, the Mercury in powder, and the whereabouts of Jo the outlaw with the broom...? What connexion can there have been between many people in the innumerable histories of this world, who, from opposite sides of great gulfs, have, nevertheless, been very curiously brought together? (1)

Strange, if the little sick-room fire were in effect a beacon fire, summoning some one, and that the most unlikely some one in the world, to the spot that must be come to... Which of the vast multitude of travellers, under the sun and the stars, climbing the dusty hills and toiling along the weary plains, journeying by land and journeying by sea, coming and going so strangely, to meet and to act and re-act on one another, which of the host may, with no suspicion of the journey's end, be travelling surely hither?(2)

Dickens' anti-evangelical faith did not have the intellectual robustness to build a credible providential world-picture out of such a vision.

(v) The Novel and the Believers

Nor, for different reasons, did the evangelicals (3). They were extremely uneasy about fiction for a good part of the century. When the Christian Observer reviewed Scott's Pirate in 1822, for example, the aim was to demonstrate the dangers

(1) Ibid, p.272. (2) Little Dorrit, p.221. (3) This term is used here to include all those, both Anglicans and dissenters, who held what would today be described as an 'evangelical' position, including a full-blooded supernaturalism. In the mid-nineteenth century, however, the term would usually be used of Anglicans in particular; and by no means all of them would have favoured collaboration with dissenters.

of reading even the least offensive novels; and from 1826 to 1844 that magazine carried no reviews of fiction at all, as a matter of principle.(1) The Christian Lady's Magazine remarked in 1834 that 'The impression seems also very strong, and very general, that we should not indulge in fictitious narrative.'(2) Even Charlotte Bronte (who was more towards the centre of the Anglican spectrum) could write, 'For fiction, read Scott alone; all novels after his are worthless'(3); while George Eliot -who was much influenced by evangelicals in her youth - expressed one of the concerns many evangelicals felt regarding fiction when she wrote of Scott, 'The spiritual sleep of that man was awful... Sir W.S. himself is the best commentary on the effect of romances and novels. He sacrificed almost his integrity for the sake of acting out the character of the Scotch Laird, which he had so often depicted.'(4) Among dissenters, the brilliant Baptist leader C.H.Spurgeon insisted that 'The chaff of fiction, and the bran of the quarterlies, are poor substitutes for the old corn of Scripture'(5); and Edmund Gosse's mother believed that 'to compose fictitious narrative of any kind, was a sin.'(6) A more liberal approach to fiction appeared among Congregationalists in the middle of the century, spreading to the Baptists and Methodists in the 1870s; and this was accompanied by the emergence of a good deal of

(1) Cf. Jay. op.cit, pp.213.195-202. (2) Quoted ibid, p.15.

(3) E.C.Gaskell, Life of Charlotte Bronte, ed. T. Scott and B.W.Willett (1924),p.115, quoted Jay, ibid, p.181. (4) The George Eliot Letters. ed. L.S.Haight (1954-56), Vol I, p.24, quoted Jay, ibid, p.215. (5) Quoted Cunningham, op.cit., pp.50-51. (6) Edmund Gosse, Father and Son (1907), quoted Cunningham, ibid., p.51.

`religious fiction'.(1) But none of these evangelical writers - Anglicans or dissenters -were of major significance as novelists.

And what Henry James referred to as 'the old evangelical hostility to the novel'(2) was in fact part of a wider phenomenon. The evangelicalism of the nineteenth century was perhaps not marked by the stringency of its intellectual aspect, outside the area of biblical scholarship. Colin Brown notes the lack of concern that existed among evangelicals for study of the philosophical implications of their beliefs (3); Rookmaaker comments that an anti-cultural stance, and an absence of any realisation of the presuppositional shift that had occurred since the Enlightenment, produced a similar result in the area of painting.(4) And there was on occasions a quite overt anti-intellectualism: for example, Shaftesbury, the great evangelical social reformer, said that 'Satan reigns in the intellect, God in the heart of man.'(5)

It should also be remembered that for a large part of the century the novel was still regarded primarily as an 'entertainment' rather than as a serious exploration of life and reality. (A 'higher' view of the novel may be seen as gaining in strength as the second half of the century progressed.(6)) This meant on the one hand that

(1) Cf. Cunningham, ibid,pp.58-61. (2) Henry James, 'The Art of Fiction'(1884), in his Selected Literary Criticism, ed. Morris Shapira (1963), p.50. (3) Colin Brown, Philosophy and the Christian Faith (1969), p.166. (4) H.R.Rookmaaker, Modern Art and the Death of a Culture (1970), p.67. (5) E.Hodder, The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury (1686), Vol III, p.19, quoted Jay, op.cit., p.40. (6) Richard Stang, The Theory of the Novel in England 1850-1870 (1959), p.ix, quotes Walter Allen, The English Novel: a Short Critical History (New York, 1955), p.xxi: 'The notion of the novel as a literary form having something to do with art in the sense of being consciously made and shaped to an aesthetic end is quite new...' Stang criticises the suggestion that this notion appeared 'not earlier than the last two decades of the nineteenth century ': but his work merely pushes the genesis of the change back to around 1850.

novels were viewed as frivolities that lured people's minds away from eternal considerations; it also meant that the depiction of God's activity within such a context would verge on the blasphemous. Alternatively, the presentation of God's activity in fiction could appear blasphemous on the grounds that it was misrepresenting God: and this attitude survived into the mid-twentieth century in some quarters. I am indebted to Professor David Gooding for the comment that, in the conservative evangelical circles in which he grew up, it was believed to be

wrong in any work of fiction to represent someone being 'born again', for instance. It was not that representing such a solemn thing in the context of 'mere entertainment' was felt to be wrong: no one minded how entertaining a story of an actual regeneration was, so long as it did actually take place; for then, the story was simply a report of a work that the Holy Spirit had been pleased to perform. What was objected to was the novelist's representing the Holy Spirit as having done a work that in fact He had not done.

These are some of the factors that hindered the development of the 'evangelical novel'. Novelists in other wings of the church were perhaps less likely to be concerned for the depiction of the supernatural in the everyday; some because their emphasis was on humanitarianism, some because they would limit the motions of grace to the sacraments, some (particularly later in the century) because the development of biblical 'higher criticism' had weakened their faith in biblically-based supernaturalism in general. Thus even

where it was accepted that the novel had an 'outright moral or philosophical function', this was generally interpreted 'in the familiar Victorian terms of a vague ethical idealism'.(1)

We should note in passing that providentialism did find brief expression during the last part of the century through the notion of 'poetic justice'. Ruskin defined this as consisting

not only in the gracing of virtue with her own proper rewards of mental peace and spiritual victory: but in the proportioning also of worldly prosperity to visible virtue; and the manifestation, therefore, of the presence of the Father in this world, no less than that which is to come.(3)

R.H.Hutton attacked Henry James for neglecting this, and for failing to show the 'providences of fiction' which best express the 'moral equities of life'.(4) But 'poetic justice' of this kind usually amounted to a comfortable, bourgeois belief, that the gods smile on the economically victorious, and that 'worldly prosperity' is a sign of virtue: Weber-Tawney encore. Such a belief would to sensitive minds (and to careful readers of the New Testament) suffer from a crippling lack of verisimilitude; Christians who were convinced that the world was not as God-deserted as in Hard Times or Little Dorrit would nonetheless know by bitter experience that the actual fate of

(1) Kenneth Graham, English Criticism of the Novel 1865-1900 (1965), p.74. (3) John Ruskin, Fors Clavigera (1877), letter 83, quoted Graham, ibid, p.84. (4) R.H.Hutton, in the Spectator, LIV, 1881, pp.185-186, quoted Graham, ibid, p.85.

Stephen Blackpool or Arthur Clennam was all too realistic. and that the presence of the Father in this world' was by no means manifested always in 'the proportioning of worldly prosperity to visible virtue'. It was, after all, the poor whom God had chosen rich in faith, according to the epistle of James.

Taken literally and universally, then, 'poetic justice' was neither realistic nor biblical. And taken as a more general expression of a faith that 'all manner of thing shall be well', it faced the same problem as we noted above in connection with Tom Jones: if matters do not work out like this in the details of everyday reality, what does it mean in practice? It is possible that Dickens' progression, from the happy ending of Oliver Twist and the passage quoted above from The Old Curiosity Shop to the grimmer but less facile conclusions of Little Dorrit or Hard Times, amounted to a loss of faith in 'poetic justice', combined with an uncertainty as to how otherwise the 'presence of the Father' manifests itself. At any rate, 'poetic justice' did not have the potential for a lasting tradition.

(vi) 'Jane Eyre'

All in all, then, providentialism finds little expression among the major nineteenth-century novelists. There are two major exceptions: Charlotte Bronte, and - in one sense most ironically - George Eliot.

Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre is emphatically a product of the Romantic movement. And as David Lodge observes,

The 'gothic' elements so often noted by commentators on the novel - the Byronic hero-with-a-past, the mad wife locked up in an attic, and so on - constitute only a small part of Charlotte's debt to Romantic literature. Far more important is the characteristically Romantic theme of the novel- the struggle of an individual consciousness towards self-fulfilment - and the romantic imagery of landscape, seascape, sun, moon, and the elements. through which this theme is expressed.(1)

This note is visible in Jane's paintings of subjects such as 'clouds low and livid, rolling over a swollen sea...a half-submerged mast, on which sat a cormorant, dark and large, with wings flecked with foam; its beak held a gold bracelet'(2);in Rochester's wife with her 'demoniac laugh -low, suppressed, and deep'(3); in the significant image of the chestnut-tree, 'black and riven: the trunk, split down the centre, gasped ghastly. The cloven halves were not broken from each other...though...the sap could flow no more'(4) (foreshadowing, Lodge suggests, the union of Jane and the crippled Rochester at the book's close(5)); in the moon, 'blood-red and half overcast' which illuminates the tree (6); or in the content of Jane's dreams of disaster.(7) And perhaps it is not surprising in a work of late Romanticism to find a strong element of wish-fulfilment, as Charlotte Bronte's apparently shy surrogate twists the seemingly terrifying male in her life round her little finger, with a marvellous display of cool, composed and neatly-phrased wit.(8)

(1) David Lodge, The Language of Fiction (1966).p.114.(2) Charlotte Bronte, Jane Eyre(1847; Penguin edition of 1966). p.157. (3) Ibid, p.179. (4) Ibid,p.304. (5) Lodge, op.cit., p.127. (6) Jane Eyre, Ibid . (7) Ibid.pp.309-10. (8) Eg ibid, pp.297-98, 465-68.

Into all this Romanticism Charlotte Bronte introduces providence. There is no reason why she should not; a Christian Romanticism is every bit as feasible as a Christian Augustanism or a Christian Renaissance humanism. But it has its own particular problems: and Jane Eyre demonstrates ways in which the fusion can fail. The combination of providence and a wish-fulfilment-dream is all too easy; the notion of providential overruling adds credibility to the achievement of the desired developments, while at the same time enhancing the whole structure (how much more pleasant it is if your desires are being endorsed by providence!)

Providence is introduced into the novel by several trustworthy characters: Helen Burns(1), Mrs Fairfax ('daily thankful for the choice Providence led me to make' in appointing Jane as governess(2)), and Jane herself: 'I...brought my own water-jug, baptized the couch afresh, and, by God's aid, succeeded in extinguishing the flames.'(3) Jane tells Rochester, 'Yesterday I trusted well in Providence, and believed that events were working together for your good and mine.'(4) (There is an allusion here, presumably, to the Authorised Version of Romans 8:28: 'And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God.')

(1) Ibid,p.101. (2) Ibid,p.154. (3) Ibid,pp.179-80. (4) lbid, p.308.

As the story develops, Rochester's passion for Jane and Jane's

Christianity come into conflict. 'God pardon me', he says of their relationship, 'and man meddle not with me: I have her, and will hold her'(1) -a remark for which Jane (wisely?) seeks no explanation at the time. She too faces the conflict of commitments: 'He stood between me and every thought of religion, as an eclipse intervenes between man and the broad sun. I could not, in those days, see God for His creature: of whom I had made an idol.'(2) When their wedding is interrupted (by a witness insisting that Rochester is already married) Rochester's reaction is that 'fate has out-manoevred me, or Providence has checked me -perhaps the last'(3) -the expression of the two alternatives making it clear that the use of the phrase is not a casual commonplace.

As for Jane, God is suddenly all she has left when the wedding breaks up:

To rise I had no will, to flee I had no strength. I lay faint, longing to be dead. One idea only still throbbed lifelike within me - a remembrance of God: it begot an unuttered prayer: these words went wandering up and down in my rayless mind, as something that should be whispered, but no energy was found to express them.

'Be not far from me, for trouble is near: there is none to help. '(4)

The almost-prayer is answered. Jane finds the moral courage to

(1) Ibid,p.284. (2) Ibid,p.302. (3) Ibid,p.319. (4) Ibid,p.324.

decide to leave Thornfield (as distinct from waiting passively for

circumstances to force her out)(1); and when she has to inform Rochester of her decision, she feels 'an inward power; a sense of influence, which supported me.'(2) Here, however, an artistic danger in this sort of providentialism is revealed: the sense of crisis is lessened -particularly given the slight tinge of wish-fulfilment that accompanies her ability to resist Rochester's wrath: 'The crisis was perilous; but not without its charm: such as the Indian, perhaps, feels when he slips over the rapid in his canoe.' Charlotte Bronte handles the narrative better two pages later when Jane

did what human beings do instinctively when they are driven to utter extremity -looked for aid to one higher than man: the words 'God help me' burst involuntarily from my lips.(3)

This time, the answer to prayer comes through Rochester changing the topic of the conversation -a tactical move on his part, but a relief for Jane, and one which gives less sense of being facile.

From this point on, Jane is committed to her submission to providence. When Rochester asks what he should do, she replies, 'Do as I do: trust in God and yourself. Believe in heaven.'(4) (The Romantic element is still present too: it is nothing less than a

(1) Ibid,p.325. (2) Ibid,p.330. (3) Ibid,p.332. (4) Ibid,p.343.

a vision of her mother that eventually pushes Jane to carry out her flight(1) - not, for example, prayerful reflection based on the Bible.) But there is a complex issue at stake. Jane is aware that she is leaving Rochester to 'misery, perhaps...ruin...self-abandonment'(2) And it is this point in the narrative that marks out Jane Eyre as a novel committed to Christian supernaturalism beyond almost any other of the great Victorian novels. For where a vaguely religious humanist - a situational ethicist, for example - might expect Jane to subordinate her sexual ethics to Rochester's needs, she instead works on the biblical principle that the ends never justify the means, that the first priority is to obey God in what we are sure of and trust His love to care for what is uncertain:

Still I could not turn, nor retrace one step. God must have led me on... Gentle reader... May you never appeal to Heaven in prayers so hopeless and so agonized as in that hour left my lips; for never may you, like me, dread to be the instrument of evil to what you wholly love.(3)

To trust and obey God in such a situation is to live by faith. Charlotte Bronte has succeeded in creating a narrative situation that reveals this faith with all its pain and complexity; there are few other novelists that have dared to suggest that an action like Jane's might be right, and that there might be a God who will actively and lovingly overrule the results, in defiance of the human probabilities of the situation.

(1) Ibid,p.346. (2) Ibid,p.348. (3) Ibid.

As Jane looks up at the Milky Way, her conception of the greatness and reliability of God is - with total realism -strengthened and broadened:

Remembering what it was - what countless systems there swept space like a soft trace of light -I felt the might and strength of God. Sure was I of His efficiency to save what He had made: convinced I grew that neither earth should perish, nor one of the souls it treasured. I turned my prayer to thanksgiving: the Source of Life was also the Saviour of spirits. Mr Rochester was safe: he was God's, and by God would he be guarded. I again nestled to the breast of the hill; and ere long in sleep forgot sorrow.(1)

Having reached this significant point, Charlotte Bronte begins a somewhat more complex exploration of her character's understanding of providence. It is while Jane is sitting in a state of despairing faith at the Rivers' door, having been denied entry ('I can but die...and I believe in God. Let me try to wait His will In silence'(2)), that her rescuer, St.John Rivers, appears. He turns out to be a close relative (shades of the unexpected relatives in Oliver Twist, which was published ten years before Jane Eyre). But this rock-like figure -'a good and a great man', as Jane describes him even when he is most a threat(3) - develops an unfortunate conviction that Jane should accompany him to India as a missionary -and as his wife.

(1) Ibid.p.351. (2) Ibid,p.361. (3) Ibid.p.441.

God and nature intended you for a missionary's wife.... You shall be mine: I claim you - not for my pleasure, but for my sovereign's service....Do not forget that if you reject it, it is not me you deny, but God. (1)

He goes so far as to suggest (and this heightening of the tension is unjustified from his doctrine, and perhaps unfitted to his character) that Jane will court damnation by refusing.(2) Jane challenges his dogmatic assessments of God's will: 'God did not give me my life to throw away; and to do as you wish me would, I begin to think, be almost equivalent to committing suicide.'(3)

St.John Rivers is stern, unyielding, and clearly not in love with Jane, but neither sanctimonious nor a hypocrite (as perhaps he might have been in Dickens). He brings matters to a head when taking family devotions; his manner is a 'calm, subdued triumph, blent with a longing earnestness', and he prays with 'stern zeal... He was in deep earnest, wrestling with God, and resolved on a conquest.'(4) This is the crisis point. Everything seems to endorse Rivers' unambiguous directness. The authoress invokes all the religious imagery at her command, in a passage that, while visionary, does not appear to be intended as overblown:

(1) Ibid,pp.428,434. (2) Ibid,p.442. (3) Ibid,p.439. This is not to be read as over-fearful; the mortality rate among missionaries was still enormous several decades after Jane Eyre's publication. The cause even of malaria was not discovered till 1895, let alone its cure (Oliver R.Barclay, Whatever Happened to the Jesus Lane Lot? (1977),p.56). St.John Rivers is approaching an early grave when the book closes. (4) Jane Eyre,p.442.

The Impossible - that is, my marriage with St John -was fast

becoming the Possible. All was changing utterly with a sudden sweep. Religion called - Angels beckoned -God commanded - life rolled together like a scroll - death's gates opening showed eternity beyond: it seemed, that for safety and bliss there, all here might be sacrificed in a second.(1)

Here Jane comes right to the verge of accepting Rivers' understanding of providence and throwing in her lot with him. She is stopped at the last minute. But, fascinatingly, Charlotte Bronte does not present her disentangling her perception of God's providential will from Rivers', or choosing between her deeper convictions and this burst of vision. Instead, she is rescued by the return of Romanticism, and its displacement of providentialism.

'Show me, show me the path!' I entreated of Heaven... Whether what followed was the effect of excitement, the reader shall judge... The one candle was dying out: the room was full of moonlight. My heart beat fast and thick: I heard its throb. Suddenly it stood still to an inexpressible feeling that thrilled it through, and passed at once to my head and extremities... I heard a voice somewhere cry -

'Jane! Jane! Jane!'- nothing more.

'Oh God! what is it?' I gasped.(2)

It is, of course, the voice -or telepathic summons -of Jane's Romantic lover, Rochester; and the exclamation with which Jane greets it may be a prayer, but sounds more like the expletive of a

(1) Ibid,pp.443-44. (2) Ibid,p.444.

Romantic heroine.(1) Jane rushes out; there is nothing -except Romanticism:
'The wind sighed low in the firs: all was moorland loneliness and midnight
hush.' Was it, then, 'superstition'? No: 'This is not thy deception, nor
thy witchcraft: it is the work of nature.' But the very categories she
employs here make clear the sudden change that has taken place. Six pages
earlier a conflict within Rivers was described as a 'struggle...between
Nature and Grace'.(2) Nature has now altered from a tempter into a
deliverer, and a force to be obeyed. Jane orders Rivers to leave her: 'He
obeyed at once' (another triumph for the heroine over males of seemingly-
terrifying power). She prays -'a different way to St John's, but effective
in its own fashion. I seemed to penetrate very near a Mighty Spirit' -and
the very vagueness of the
terminology makes it sound as if she is worshipping alongside Keats
or Wordsworth in his pantheistic phase.

Charlotte Bronte cannot quite bring her heroine to affirm the direction
of providence in her return to Rochester with the same forcefulness as when
she left him ('God directed me to a correct choice: I thank His providence
for the guidance!')(3) was the earlier version):

'My flesh, I hope, is strong enough to accomplish the
will of Heavenm when once that will is distinctly known to me. At
any rate, it shall be strong enough to search - inquire - to grope
an outlet from this cloud of doubt.'...

(1) As it certainly is nine pages later (ibid,p.453). (2) Ibid.p.438. (3)
Ibid.p.386.

I asked was it a mere nervous impression- a delusion? I could not conceive or believe: it was more like an inspiration. The wondrous shock of feeling had come like the earthquake which shook the foundations of Paul and Silas's prison.(1)

That Christian experience could be like Romantic experience was never in . doubt. What Charlotte Bronte fails to give her character is any reason to believe that her telepathic voice is a divine message that brings with it an imperative; rather than the 'sympathies' which she earlier suggested exist between 'far-distant, long-absent, wholly estranged relatives'(2), but which represent no divine command. The fusion of Christianity and Romanticism has a ragged edge at this point. And no further reference to providence appears for the next twenty-four pages, during which Jane returns to Rochester.

Rochester responds to her arrival in images not of providence but of magical enchantment.(3) It is only later, when Jane has accepted a proposal of marriage. that Rochester bursts out 'God bless you and reward you!'(4). and - now that the crisis is over -launches into a thoroughly providentialist account of his sufferings:

Jane! you think me, I daresay, an irreligious dog: but my heart swells with gratitude to the beneficent God of this earth just now. He sees not as man sees, but far clearer... I would have sullied my innocent flower - breathed guilt on its purity: the Omnipotent snatched it from me... Divine justice pursued its course; disasters came thick on me: I was forced to pass through the valley of the shadow of death. His chastisements are mighty; and one smote me

(1) Ibid.p.446. (2) Ibid.p.249. (3) Ibid.p.462. (4) Ibid.p.470.

which has humbled me for ever... Of late, Jane -only -
only of late -I began to see and acknowledge the hand of
God in my doom. I began to experience remorse, repentance,
the wish for reconcilment to my Maker. I began sometimes
to pray... Now, I thank God... Yes, I thank God(1)

This brings the two streams of Romanticism and Christianity together again. Even so, it is an uneasy alliance. Jane does not tell Rochester of how she heard his voice: 'That mind, yet from its sufferings too prone to gloom, needed not the deeper shade of the supernatural. I kept these things then, and pondered them in my heart.'(2) This may be expressed in biblical language (the last sentence is almost a direct quotation of the Authorized Version of Luke 2:19); but the 'supernatural' still seems to have rather unbiblical connotations - there is a note of the ominous in 'the deeper shade', rather than of the radiance and trustworthiness that accompany the supernatural in scripture; a sense of something to be avoided by those inclined to gloom, rather than something to be welcomed, trusted and rejoiced over. And when Jane relates that she now knows, in her Romantic paradise, 'what it is to live entirely for and with what I love best on earth' (my emphasis) (3), the memory arises of Rivers' warning against a life of 'selfish ease and barren obscurity'.(4) The missionary vision which seemed so important to her earlier (her objections to service in India had been over marrying Rivers, finally abandoning Rochester, and her fragile health) has vanished. One thinks of the energetic activities of Goldsmith's Mr. Primrose in jail as a comparison.

Charlotte Bronte seems to have felt these problems. Now that she

(1)Ibid, pp.471-72. (2) Ibid,p.472. (3) Ibid,p.475. (4) Ibid, p.434.

has resolved the book's ambiguity and given the victory to the Romantic impulse through the narrative action, the final paragraphs seem to represent a last glance back at the other alternative. They are about Rivers, and the praise they give him is virtually unalloyed: 'His is the exaction of the apostle, who speaks but for Christ, when he says -"Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me"'. But 'speaks but for Christ' throws a huge question-mark, surely, over Jane's earlier choice. His last letter, she records, 'filled my heart with divine joy' - something Rochester never manages to do. So the book ends, expressing something unresolved in its fundamental vision: Providence and Romanticism have made, at best, a difficult marriage. Still, it has to be said that this very ambivalence adds to the book's interest; it records an 'implied author' (and, almost certainly, a real author too) on the horns of a dilemma, and enacting that dilemma in fiction. At any rate, much of it succeeds in presenting a providentialist vision in fictional narrative: and that is a rare achievement among the great Victorian novelists.

(vii) 'Shirley' and 'Villette'

What Charlotte Bronte does in Shirley is something different, but equally significant.

Shirley is a somewhat flawed novel, but one that has been praised for its social realism.(1) It has several themes: the 'condition of England', a twofold love theme, issues of women's roles, the clash of imagination and reality. What is striking for our purposes is the straightforward way in which a very natural providentialism forms part of the fundamental basis of the novel, in terms of casual references to prayer, God's overruling, and so on. Such content might seem virtually inevitable to us; but to

(1) Andrew and Judith Hook, for example, praise its 'extraordinarily accurate' presentation of its social setting in their introduction to the 1974 Penguin edition.

see its simple introduction in Shirley is to realise the significance of its absence in, say, Walter Scott, or Jane Austen.

For Caroline Helstone, one of the book's two heroines, prayer is unashamedly a natural rhythm in her life:

'Nothing will happen, Lina. To speak in your own language, there is a Providence above all -is there not?'
'Yes, dear Robert. May He guard you!'
'And if prayers have efficacy, yours will benefit me: you pray for me sometimes?'
'Not sometimes, Robert: you, and Louis, and Hortense are always remembered.'
'(2)

She heard Mr.Helstone come in; she saw Robert stride the tombs and vault the wall; she then went down to prayers.(3)

'The repeal of Orders in Council saves me. Now I shall not turn bankrupt; now I shall not give up business... I breathe; I can act.'
'At last! Oh! Providence is kind. Thank Him, Robert.'
'I do thank Providence.'
'And I also, for your sake!' She looked up devoutly.(4)

In this novel, belief in providence is both a faith for difficult times, as expressed by the admirable Mr Hall ('His will be done! but He tries us to the utmost'(5), and an overall worldview underlying the narration's approach to the activities of the church ('It was a joyous scene...the work, first of God, and then of the clergy... Britain would miss her church, if that church fell. God save it! God also reform it!')(6), or the developments of the Napoleonic war in Moscow or Spain, which are recorded as dependent ultimately on 'the word of the Lord of Hosts'.(7) Whether we are dealing with England's church, the fate of Bonaparte or the political-economic developments of Orders in Council, an adequate presentation of events is for Charlotte Bronte one that takes note of the Godward dimension. And what is important for us is that this dimension is not the book's central theme: Shirley is not a 'religious novel', but a combination of a 'condition of England' fiction, a love-story, and a number of other things. In this respect, Charlotte Bronte has provided a good example of how an outlook that is firmly providentialist can without jarring serve as backcloth and foundation for a realistic novel whose main narrative themes are mostly 'this-worldly': she exemplifies a providentialist 'way of seeing'.

Not that this viewpoint is easily held. Caroline goes through a crippling experience of frustration in love, and in this experience she faces severe doubts about her Christian beliefs.(8) 'She wished she could be happy: she wished she could know inward peace: she wondered Providence had no pity on her, and would not help or console her.'(9) Even so, the crisis is presented as having a 'vertical dimension', as it were - unlike most such situations in Jane Austen. And in her narration, Charlotte Bronte insists we are not dealing with mere biographical phenomena, but that God Himself is really at work:

(2) Charlotte Bronte, Shirley (1849; 1974 Penguin edition), p.144. (3)Ibid, p.260. (4) Ibid, p.594. Cf also pp.330-31, 542. (5) Ibid, p.159. (6)p.298. (7) p.590. (8) p.191. (9) p.202.

Caroline was a Christian; therefore in trouble she framed many a prayer... She believed, sometimes, that God had turned His face from her... Most people have had a period or periods in their lives when they felt thus forsaken; when, having long hoped against hope, and still the day of fruition deferred, their hearts have truly sickened within them. This is a terrible hour... Yet, let whoever grieves still cling fast to love and faith in God: God will never deceive, never finally desert him... The household was astir at last; the servants were up; the shutters were opened below.(1)

As a whole this is a somewhat longwinded passage, probably too much so to make its point effectively today in a colder climate; and the author might have been wiser to remain content with setting out the pattern in the narrative, rather than addressing her reader herself. But the world she is seeking to image is clear. Caroline's own faith is renewed as she hears the sad story of Mrs Pryor (who will turn out to be her mother), along with a providentialist reading of those events ('None saw- none knew. There was no sympathy... It is over, and not fruitlessly. I tried to keep the word of His patience: He kept me in the days of my anguish'(2). What is being modelled in the action here is the belief that, when life seems to have turned into a trap, the central issue must be finding God's purpose in it. The extensive use of biblical or quasi-biblical language makes these passages less accessible to a reader of a century later: however, we need to recognise that these allusions are used precisely because Charlotte Bronte is asserting the Bible to be the ultimate model and paradigm, containing the full causality and significance needed to interpret the enigmas in our own experience, and the experience of her contemporary heroine.

The novel's crisis comes as Caroline's deep-seated frustrations - extending, as they do, beyond her romantic loss to a profound sense of fruitlessness about her entire existence - lead to severe illness. She struggles with her feelings in a long and not unrealistic soliloquy, verging from complaint ('Oh! I should see him once more before all is over: Heaven might favour me thus far!') to desperate prayer.(3) She reaches the point where her sanity is fading fast; and at this point Charlotte Bronte concludes a chapter by describing her mother, who is nursing her, spending the night 'like Jacob at Peniel' (another biblical paradigm): 'Till break of day, she wrestled with God in earnest prayer.'(4) This is realistic, in the sense that that is what would happen in the circumstances in many Christian families - but it is something very few characters do in the works of the major English novelists! Again we can recognise the rarity of Shirley by considering how many characters ever spend a night praying in Jane Austen, Dickens, or Trollope - let alone James or Lawrence. In Shirley, Charlotte Bronte reflects and recreates a world where people do such things, and where their prayers receive answers: Caroline is restored to health, and indeed (eventually) to both love and fulfilment.

(1) Ibid, p.362. (2) Ibid, pp.411-12; cf p.367. (3) Ibid, p.404. (4) Ibid, p.417.

To any Christian, however, the statement that God answers prayer is not the same as the idea that we will automatically get what we ask for. Charlotte Bronte begins the following chapter of Shirley with a careful reminder to this effect. And in Villette, which seems currently to be her most critically-acclaimed novel, she grapples with this aspect of providentialism. Lucy Snowe, the heroine of Villette, is, like Caroline Helstone, a woman trapped in frustrating circumstances. But, unlike Caroline, Lucy faces these in deep loneliness. Even so, there is not the sense that God is absent: there are, Lucy believes, divine purposes at work; but she fears she is destined to experience their darker side.

In Villette, therefore, as in Shirley, providentialist references appear periodically. Lucy finds a comfortable position as companion to an old lady, Miss Marchmont; but it is an existence she is forced to recognise as 'crawling on' ('I had wanted to compromise with Fate: to escape great agonies by submitting to a whole life of privation and small pains'). But if there is a providence it will not be satisfied with that for her: 'nor would Providence sanction this shrinking sloth and cowardly indolence'.(1) That same providence is what she senses watching over her when she migrates to Belgium, loses her trunk, is chased by 'moustachioed men... hunters', and completely loses her way to the inn she is seeking - yet suddenly finds herself before the house of the woman she (rightly) hopes may employ her: 'Providence said, "Stop here; this is your inn."'(2) 'My devotions that night were all thanksgiving: strangely had I been led since morning - unexpectedly had I been provided for.'(3) For Lucy, as for Caroline, prayer is a daily exercise that is worthy of record in her own narrative(4), and 'inwardly thanking God' is likewise an automatic response to a good occurrence.(5)

Yet in all this there is an overpowering sense of the pain that may be involved in the providential design. The night the old lady she is nursing dies (a few hours before she is to alter her will to Lucy's advantage), she tells Lucy of how the one love of her own life met with a fatal accident: 'I cannot - I cannot see the reason; yet at this hour I can say with sincerity, what I never tried to say before - Inscrutable God, Thy will be done!'(6) And as events proceed, Lucy comes to see herself as someone else who may be called to live by faith in the face of this inscrutability:

How I used to pray to Heaven for consolation and support! With what dread force the conviction would grasp me that Fate was my permanent foe, never to be conciliated. I did not, in my heart, arraign the mercy or justice of God for this; I concluded it to be a part of his great plan that some must deeply suffer while they live, and I thrilled in the certainty that of this number, I was one.(7)

When I tried to pray I could only utter these words:- 'From my youth up Thy terrors have I suffered with a troubled mind.' Most true was it.(8)

If life be a war, it seemed my destiny to conduct it single-handed. I pondered now how to break up my winter quarters -to leave an

(1) Charlotte Bronte, Villette (1853; Penguin edition of 1979), p.97. (2) Ibid, p.126. (3) Ibid, p.131. (4) Ibid, p.251. (5) Ibid, p.318. (6) Ibid, p.99. (7) Ibid, p.229:- (8) Ibid, p.232.

encampment where food and forage failed. Perhaps, to effect this change, another pitched battle must be fought with fortune; if so, I had a mind to the encounter: too poor to lose, God might destine me to gain.(1) .

Is there nothing more for me in life -no true home...?... I suppose, Lucy Snowe, the orb of your life is not to be so rounded... I find no reason why I should be of the few favoured... I believe that this life is not all; neither the beginning nor the end. I believe while I tremble; I trust while I weep.(2)

Most of this is written simply, without the somewhat overblown diction that sometimes vitiates Caroline's outpourings in Shirley; and, set in the context of a realistic narrative of Lucy's everyday activities, it is moving and powerful.

A contrast is provided by Lucy's friends Graham and Paulina. Lucy looks at the joy of their love and asks herself, 'Is there indeed such happiness on earth?... Yes; it is so... But it is not so for all.'(3) 'In all that mutually concerns you and Graham', Lucy tells Paulina, 'there seems to me promise, plan, harmony... Some lives are thus blessed: it is God's will... Other travellers... are belated and overtaken by the early closing winter night... I know that, amidst His boundless works, is somewhere stored the secret of this last fate's justice.'(4) Lucy knows her own story may involve exploring what it means to be one of those placed by providence in the second category. 'As to what lies below', the inner struggles, she says in a (long and perhaps overwritten) chapter opening,

leave that with God... Take it to your Maker - show Him the secrets of the spirit He gave - ask Him how you are to bear the pains He has appointed - kneel, in His presence, and pray in faith for light in darkness, for strength in piteous weakness, for patience in extreme need. Certainly, at some hour, though perhaps not your hour, the waiting waters will stir; in some shape, though perhaps not the shape you dreamed, which your heart loved, and for which it bled, the healing herald will descend.

And then the pain breaks out -realistically, and powerfully, if again in somewhat literary tongue:

Herald, come quickly! Thousands lie around the pool, weeping and despairing, to see it, through slow years, stagnant. Long are the 'times' of heaven: the orbits of angel messengers seem wide to

(1) Ibid, p.381 (2) Ibid, pp.450-51.(3) Ibid, pp.532-34. (4) Ibid, pp.467-68.

mortal vision; they may en-ring ages... and dust, kindling to brief suffering life, and, through pain, passing back to dust, may meanwhile perish out of memory again, and yet again.(1)

It is realistic enough. Perhaps these reflections are a trifle verbose and highly-coloured; but Villette, unlike Shirley, is a first-person narrative, and reading Lucy's words we sense that this is the kind of thing a woman in such a situation might indeed have recorded in her journal: and, as such, it is poignantly meaningful. We may, indeed, feel that very little is shown us of Lucy's own spirituality that could serve as a source for her strength and endurance - unless indeed we see her recurrent use of biblical allusion as implying that the shape she derives for her experience from her Bible reading is her ultimate anchor.(2) Perhaps, therefore, it is not surprising that alongside her Christian faith we find emphasised a Romantic cult of the imagination - something compatible enough with her Christianity, yet nonetheless a little surprising in the vehemence with which it is stated: 'When I bend the knee to other than God, it shall be at thy white and winged feet, beautiful on mountain or on plain.'(3) But, once again, this may seem realistic enough, given the emotional deprivation Lucy is portrayed enduring.

Yet towards the end of the book it seems that for Lucy, as for Caroline Helstone, the joyous turn is coming. In a movingly-written passage, Lucy finds real friendship (and 'such a pleasure as, certainly, I had never felt') with Paul Emanuel.(4) The friendship develops, then falls into an apparent hiatus which, it transpires, M.Paul has used to acquire for Lucy the thing she has dreamed of: a school of her own. Nor does it stop there: M.Paul leaves for three years in the West Indies, but before he does so it is arranged that they are to be married. It is all Lucy has longed for. Over three years his letters arrive, 'real food that nourished, living water that refreshed.'(5) And then, on the closing page, comes the journey home. Storm clouds gather ('God, watch that sail!'); 'The atlantic was strewn with wrecks... Not till the destroying angel of tempest had achieved his perfect work, would he fold the wings whose waft was thunder' (a metaphor reminding us that, if there is a God, He has permitted all this); and M.Paul is drowned. So, in short, blank, comfortless sentences, the story ends.

It is a hard ending to comment on. Aesthetically, it is powerful, and moving: experientially, it is true - providence or not, such things occur. Yet there is, perhaps, a sense of something incomplete. The narration of

(1) Ibid, p.252. (2) Cf. p.514: 'I had a book up-stairs, under my pillow, whereof certain chapters satisfied my needs in the article of spiritual lore'; and the striking reference to worship as 'lifting the secret vision to Him whose home is Infinity'(p.516). But these references occur when Lucy is defending her own faith against Catholicism; we do not experience these things actually taking place.(3) Ibid, p.308. (4) Ibid, p.501. (5) Ibid, p.594.

the death of Miss Marchmont (the old lady whom Lucy had nursed) portrays a certain completion being achieved in her learning to accept, on the night of her death, the loss of her lover thirty years previously. Lucy's pattern is not brought to that completion: we learn of the loss, but not whether it has a 'meaning'. Is this a point where Charlotte Bronte's Romanticism has taken over, as in Jane Eyre; with the Romantic susceptibility for disaster dictating the close, rather than working it out fully in terms of the providential pattern? In contrast, we might note the number of modern Christian novelists who have made powerful fiction out of precisely this theme of the loss of the beloved: C.S. Lewis in Till We Have Faces, Graham Greene in The End of the Affair, Rudy Wiebe in First and Vital Candle. Charlotte Bronte has not used up all her potential here: there is something huge left to be said - how will Lucy handle this now?

And yet, perhaps, she has told us enough. We know already, from Lucy's own experience and Miss Marchmont's, how such events can be confronted in faith. The 'implied narrator' of the book, with her unflinching trust in God, has been looking back from beyond the book's close. It is not inappropriate to present a final evocation of the dark night of the soul as conclusion to this powerful narrative of a woman alone, living out a faith in providence when providence seems most froward.

And perhaps by leaving her reader with the very blankness of the ending, Charlotte Bronte poses the question: given what has happened throughout, in such a situation of catastrophe can you still live by faith?

(viii) George Eliot

Charlotte Bronte's uniqueness is not quite absolute. And it is intriguing that the other major example of providentialism in the Victorian novel(1) should be the professed agnostic George Eliot. But George Eliot had had an extensive

(1) Anne Bronte should also be mentioned at this point. The characterisation in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall is perhaps a trifle too wooden for the book to be considered on a level with Villette or with the work of George Eliot. Nonetheless, as a study of a woman surviving by faith and prayer through the torments and darkness of an outrageously difficult marriage, the novel has moments of real power - particularly, perhaps, as the heroine is forced to watch helplessly the corrupting and alienation of her young son.

experience of evangelicalism, including leading prayer meetings during her youth.(1) Although she rejected these beliefs, she retained considerable sympathy for those who held them -in marked contrast to the scorn almost invariably manifested by Dickens. Hence, when Adam Bede was published, the Nonconformist hailed it as having done 'ample justice to evangelical piety, which no novelist known to us (at least, no novelist of the same mark) had ever done before. '(2) Modern critics of the interaction between nineteenth-century evangelicalism and the novel have reached similar conclusions: Cunningham's study of dissenters and the novel declares that 'No great English novelist has ever got closer than George Eliot to the heart of the Dissenting matter', and speaks of her 'very unique compassion for and insight into the Nonconformist spirit, the enthusiastic character, the Puritan temper.'(3) Elizabeth Jay, whose concern is with specifically Anglican evangelicalism, describes George Eliot as 'paramount among major novelists in the accuracy and subtlety with which she used her experience of Evangelicalism... perhaps the one major novelist to portray Evangelicalism with detailed fidelity and imaginative sympathy. '(4)

(1) George Eliot's Life As Related in Her Letters and Journals, ed.J.E.Cross (Edinburgh,1885),Vol.I,p.27, quoted Cunningham, op.cit.,p.146. (2) Nonconformist, 6 April 1859,p.277, quoted Cunningham, ibid, p.147. (3) Cunningham, ibid,p.189. (4) Jay, op.cit., pp.208-109.

If George Eliot shows an accurate and sympathetic knowledge of the attitudes and lifestyles of the evangelicals she depicts, it is not entirely surprising that the providence in which they believed should also find some place in her novels. The characters in Silas Marner, for example, are all people who see the world in providential terms. Silas himself has had his faith in God shattered after his wretched experience of condemnation by casting lots in the sect in Lantern Yard: but the appearance of the foundling Eppie brings back to him 'old impressions of awe at the presentiment of some Power presiding over his life'.(1)

His advisor Dolly Winthrop is quite explicit on the subject:

'There's Them as took care of it, and brought it to your door', she tells Silas.(2)

Other characters speak in these terms with equal naturalness.

Godfrey Cass confesses his guilt to his wife because, he

Says, 'When God Almighty wills it, our secrets are found out.'(3)

When he attempts to take Eppie (who is actually his daughter) from

Silas, Silas objects that 'God gave her to me because you turned your back upon her, and He looks upon her as mine'(4), an argument Godfrey

accepts entirely after a while.(5) Godfrey's wife is used by George Eliot to point out the weaknesses of a particular attitude to providence:

'She would have given up making a purchase at a particular place if.

on three successive times, rain or some other cause of Heaven's

sending,. had formed an obstacle. '(6) But this does not

(1) George Eliot, Silas Marner (1861; Everyman edition of 1977), p.132.

(2) Ibid, p.144. (3) Ibid, p.191. (4) Ibid, p.200. (5) Ibid, p.205.

(6) Ibid, p.184.

become part of a sustained assault on the whole doctrine of providence. It could have done; and the Lantern Yard incident could (and in Dickens' hands undoubtedly would) have been used as a basis for a stinging denunciation of dissenting supernaturalism. Instead, Dolly Winthrop leads Silas to understand that, while his suffering caused by that affair cannot be neatly explained away, yet what he knows of God's love and of human love should lead him to faith in the reality of God's involvement in those things he cannot see:

But what come to me as clear as the daylight, it was when I was troublin' over poor Bessy Fawkes, and it allays comes into my head when I'm sorry for folks... as Them above has got a deal tenderer heart nor what I've got -for I can't be anyways better nor Them as made me, and if anything looks hard to me, it's because there's things I don't know on... and it all come pouring in -if I felt i' my inside what was the right and just thing by you, and them as prayed and drawed the lots, all but that wicked un, if they'd ha' done the right thing by you if they could, isn't there Them as was at the making on us, and knows better and has a better will? And that's all as ever I can be sure on, and everything else is a big puzzle to me when I think on it... And if you could but ha' gone on trustening, Master Marner, you wouldn't ha' run away from your fellow-creatur and been so lone.(1)

The rural accent ('allays', 'creatur'), and the theologically abnormal 'Them', help the reader with this passage. Silas responds,

(1) Ibid, p. 170.

There's good i' this world -I've a feeling o' that now; and it makes a man feel as there's a good more nor he can see, i' spite o' the trouble and the wickedness. That drawing o' the lots is dark; but the child was sent to me: there's dealings with us - there's dealings.(1)

The importance of this lesson of the reality of providence is brought home in the last chapter before the book's 'Conclusion', where the story comes full circle as Silas and Eppie go in search of Lantern Yard. But the chapel has gone; Silas recognises he can learn nothing more either about his betrayal, or from the chapel's teaching. 'It's the will o' Them above as a many things should be dark to us', Dolly reminds him on his return; and Silas replies that, since Eppie's advent, 'I've had light enough to trusten by; and, now she says she'll never leave me, I think I shall trusten till I die.'(2) And so the chapter ends.

The sense of overall patterning in Silas Marner accords very well with what F.R.Leavis has called its 'fairy tale' mode.(3) But it is matched in George Eliot's other books. She chooses to write about humble, religious people, and in doing so she enters into their

thinking to such a marked degree that providence becomes not merely something professed by a trustworthy character (like Dolly Winthrop), but is at times asserted within the narration itself. Near the end of The Mill on the Floss, Maggie is wrestling with the feelings aroused by her lover Stephen's letter, and her own commitment to 'bear the

(1) Ibid,p.171. (2) Ibid,p.211. (3) F.R.Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (1948; new edition of 1960),p.46.

Cross'.(1) Her life stretches ahead of her as a renunciation lasting till death:

'How shall I have patience and strength?'... With that cry of self-despair, Maggie fell on her knees against the table, and buried her sorrow-stricken face. Her soul went out to the Unseen Pity that would be with her to the end. Surely, there was something being taught her by this experience of great need; and she must be learning a secret of human tenderness and long-suffering, that the less erring could hardly know? 'O God, if my life is to be long, let me live to bless and comfort -' (2)

At that point her prayer is interrupted by the coming of the flood. And just as Maggie's spiritual pilgrimage has throughout the book been founded on her perceptions of the spiritual world as the ground of her actions, so the action that resolves and concludes the book takes place in a theistic context. Maggie is swept away in her boat, and the narrative (not Maggie herself) describes her as 'alone in the darkness with God.'(3) To her, the flood is an 'awful visitation of God', and her automatic reaction is to pray: 'O God, where am I? Which is the way home?' The consequence is her rescue of Tom, her estranged brother: this the narrative describes as 'a story of almost miraculous divinely-protected effort.'(4) 'God has taken care of me, to bring me to you', is what Maggie herself tells Tom. Thus the reconciliation scene that is the novel's climax takes place - according to both Maggie and the narrator -under the hand of providence.

(1) George Eliot, The Mill on the Floss (1860; Penguin edition of 1979).p.648. (2) Ibid .p.649. (3) Ibid.p.651. (4) Ibid .p.654.

It is the same in the critical scene between Dinah and Hetty in the prison in Adam Bede. Dinah goes in to see Hetty with 'a deep concentrated calmness, as if, even when she was speaking, her soul was in prayer reposing on an unseen support.'(1) And the whole encounter takes place, as Dinah insists repeatedly, in the context of 'the presence of God'(2):

But it was borne in upon her, as she afterwards said, that she must not hurry God's work: we are over-hasty to speak - as if God did not manifest himself by our silent feeling, and make his love felt through ours... But she felt the Divine presence more and more, - nay, as if she herself were a part of it, and it was the Divine pity that was beating in her heart, and was willing the rescue of this helpless one.(3)

Here again, when George Eliot wants to penetrate to 'the heart of the matter', she sets up an overtly theistic context. No doubt it has much to do with the narrative's origins: George Eliot based this episode on a story her aunt, a Methodist preacher, told her, of how she spent a night with a girl condemned of child-murder and brought her to confess what she had done: 'The story, told by my aunt with great feeling, affected me deeply, and I never lost the impression of that afternoon and our talk together.'(4) As with Robinson Crusoe and (to some extent) The Heart of Midlothian, a powerful depiction of a Godward dimension to experience is achieved by a work that builds upon a direct autobiographical source.

(1) George Eliot, Adam Bede (1859; Everyman edition of 1960), p.428.

(2) Ibid, pp.431,432. (3) Ibid, p.430. (4) The George Eliot Letters, Vol.II, pp.502. quoted Cunningham, op.cit., pp.154. Pp.153-57 of

Cunningham's book contain a useful discussion of George Eliot's subsequent (and rather dubious) denial of the connection between Dinah and her aunt. There is also a helpful examination on pp.169-71 of how, having established a powerful theistic atmosphere, George Eliot is forced to wrench the narrative in order to achieve a humanistic ending.

To quote these passages from The Hill on the Floss and Adam Bede in isolation is of course to falsify somewhat. George Eliot wrote as an author who no longer believed in the basic tenets of Christianity; human goodness, not the workings of providence, was what really mattered to her. But when as a realistic novelist she set about describing characters that displayed that goodness, she included the religious framework and life-stance through which it often expressed itself(1); and in these last two novels, her identification with her heroine has gone so far that the heroine's providentialism is carried across into the narration itself. This can be seen either as an inconsistency, or as a tribute to her ability as a realistic novelist to enter wholeheartedly into the imaginative experience of a viewpoint with which she disagreed in real life. At any rate, these casual references, slipped in undramatically as part of the novels' climax scenes, demonstrate again that natural, unforced narration from a providentialist standpoint was by no means an impossibility.

(viii) The Triumph of Naturalism

But providentialism was not the norm, either in George Eliot or anywhere else. And here it is necessary to draw attention to a problem in our discussion of these novels; by examining those few works in which some sort of reference to providence is made, it is possible to give a false impression of the extent to which the classic novel became an almost entirely non-supernaturalistic form. The expression of providence even

(1) She was, however, also very aware that belief in providence could serve to give complacency to vice, as the portrayal of Bulstrode in Middlemarch demonstrates.

in some of the novels we have discussed consists only

of minor asides: and in many of the most impressive works it is virtually -or entirely -ignored. And as the nineteenth century wore on, it became less and less necessary for a writer to make polite concessions to the putative popular religion of his readership. It is obvious that such a background is not assumed by the time of Hardy, James or Conrad in the way it is in Dickens or Thackeray.

Meanwhile, the growth of concern for 'realism' had had a tendency to turn the novel into something of a sterilised character laboratory, from which irregularities or coincidences were (theoretically at least) to be rigorously excluded; even though they might frequently be the means by which a character was revealed in real life. In 1869, for example, Mrs.Oliphant criticised the novels of Charles Reade on the grounds that 'Such a thing might happen in fact; but fiction is bound as fact is not... Fiction is bound by harder laws than fact is, and must consider vraisemblance as well as absolute truth.'⁽¹⁾ Fiction, in other words, must conform to the popular consensus view of reality, whether or not this corresponds with 'fact' or 'absolute truth'. Another writer remarks that 'The domain of the novelist is nature under its ordinary rules; not fact, which is often irreconcilable with life.'⁽²⁾ Kenneth Graham notes that some of these critics 'suggest that this vraisemblance is

(1) Mrs.Oliphant, 'Charles Reade's Novels', Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine. CVI, 1869. p.510, quoted Graham, op.cit..p.45: (2) 'Recent Novels', unsigned article, Frasers Magazine, XX. 1879. p.560. quoted Graham.

achieved neither by the devices of artistic form, nor by plain mimesis, but by selective representation of the familiar. The more common the event in real life, the more acceptable does it seem when transposed into an artistic world'(1) -a 'lowest common denominator' reality again, in fact.

This selectivity was based on a consensus that was becoming less and less influenced by the biblical-Christian worldview. We have already noted Leslie Fiedler's complaint about the deliberate exclusion of the 'marvellous' and 'wonderful' from prose fiction; Ian Watt likewise has commented on the novel's 'tendency to restrict the field in which its psychological and intellectual discriminations operate to a small and arbitrary selection of human situations.'(2) Nineteenth-century realism accentuated these tendencies. In a rather different way from that originally meant by James, it was notably true that 'universally relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily appear to do so.'(3) The 'circle' which was drawn, and the selection of the 'more common' events, tended towards the exclusion from the 'realistic laboratory' of any major causes whose existence might need to be inferred or deduced from sources other than the immediately empirical; and the intervention of God in human affairs would come into that category.

(1) Graham. *ibid.* (2) Dickens, of course, is something of an exception to -much of this. Similarly the romancers - Haggard, Lang, Hall Caine - sought out the unusual. But theirs was an escapist tradition and little of their work was of high quality. (3) Henry James, Preface to Roderick Hudson (1875).

In such a convention, religion becomes no more than a biographical social phenomenon, to be recorded in the same way as any other; or at best, a matter of personal experience. (This was a danger we noted above, in our discussion of The Heart of Midlothian.) It is seldom regarded as the point at which humans are in direct contact with the eternal powers of the universe. Laurence Lerner cites George Eliot as an example of this trend:

In her impartial regard for human experience, she included the religious: not rejecting Christianity, but treating it as a human phenomenon... What matters about the "recognition of something to be lived for beyond the mere satisfaction of self" is not its truth but its function... Prayer, on such a view, is a form of magic; its true purpose is not to invoke supernatural aid, but to arouse emotion.(1)

Here religion has no objective supernatural reference; it is of interest entirely for the light it throws, and the effect it has, on the characters and societies espousing it. There are contemporary parallels to this in other arts: Robert Langbaum noted that much of the poetry of the period is 'a literature which returns upon itself, making its own values only to dissolve them before the possibility of judgement, turning them into biographical phenomena.'(2) And Rookmaaker notes of a typical picture of the period, 'Women Praying at a Crucifix near St. James in Antwerp', by the Belgian painter Leys,

(1) Lerner, op.cit., pp.42-44. This is, incidentally, an unusual definition of 'magic'! Of course, the isolated instances of theistic narration by George Eliot that we noted earlier do not affect the truth of Lerner's comments as regards the tenor of her work as a whole; she was, let us repeat, an agnostic. (2) Robert Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience (1957), quoted by John Killham in his introduction to Critical Essays on the Poetry of Tennyson, ed. Killham (1960), p.19.

that we see

People from a past period, full of faith, reverent, praying - but we do not see the object of faith, the crucified Christ. This is typical... The focus is on the faithful men and women, not on the content of their faith. The crucifix, Christ Himself, has been left outside the picture-frame. This was done again and again by nineteenth century painters.(1)

The dominant naturalistic convention received its purest theoretical formulations on the Continent, in the Realist movement, and its more doctrinaire successor, Naturalism. These movements, especially Naturalism, were very strongly oriented towards a deterministic materialism, and strove for the reproduction of scientific objectivity within literature. Realism, says Becker, 'denied that there was a reality of essences and forms which was not accessible to ordinary sense-perceptions, insisting instead that reality be viewed as something immediately at hand, common to ordinary human experience and open to observation.'(2) As a result, it was not open to anything that might need to be apprehended by faith. Its exponents failed to notice that in making demands as to how 'reality be viewed', their opinions lost objectivity and became themselves a matter of faith and dogma; so that their realism was not a matter of objective record, but rather a projection of a particular ideology.

'The basic ideal of the

(1) Rookmaaker, op.cit., pp.69-70. (2) George J.Becker, Documents of Modern Literary Realism (Princeton,1963), p.6.

movement was and is rigorous objectivity', says Becker. 'In spite of this it was almost impossible not to take a position, at least implicitly, about man and his fate, particularly since the whole climate of thought in which realism flourished was one of scientism.'(1) The movement had, in short, its own creeds; and these were in many respects diametrically opposed to Christian beliefs. The view of man was radically different: instead of being a little lower than the angels, he was a little higher than the apes. The law of the jungle and the struggle for the survival of the fittest had replaced the law of God and the providential plan. Here the philosophy of evolutionism was of great significance: 'In the development of Naturalism Darwin's theory is without doubt the most important single shaping factor', comment Furst and Skrine.(2) Zola saw 'l'homme metaphysique' as being replaced by 'l'homme physiologique'.(3) As a whole, says Becker, the Realists were

sceptical of that whole cluster of things which are associated with traditional theistic belief, such as the soul, telic motion, the power of divine grace, and the whole world of miracle, that is, the events which escape the otherwise ineluctable laws of causality. It is this last term which is the key to the realist position: the universe is observably subject to physical causality... and anything which asserts otherwise is wishful thinking... If [realism] makes allowance for random and fortuitous events in an otherwise causally constituted universe, it generally denies them purpose and is likely to see them as agents of

misfortune and destruction rather than of well-being.(4)

F.W.J.Hemmings.,one of the foremost British critics of these novelists, adds that

(1) Becker, ibid,p.35. (2) Lilian R.Furst and Peter N.Skrine, Naturalism (1971).p.16. (3) Emile Zola,Une Campagne, quoted Furst and Skrine, ibid. (4)Becker, ibid,pp.35-36.

If there was one metaphysical principle on which all the French realists worked, it was scientific determinism. The supernatural, or, simply, the inexplicable, never intervened in their stories: once given the postulates of initial temperament and subsequent upbringing, the characters behaved in strict accordance. Thus realism left out of account any independent moral agent; metaphysically, it was atheism.(1)

The fictional consequences are evident in a novel such as Zola's *L'Assommoir*. Right from the beginning of the novel, to the end where the heroine Gervaise is found dead and 'turning green already', there is a logical, deterministic progression. There is no question of grace and little of hope; humans are trapped in a naturalistic box. But this is more a consequence of Zola's original presuppositions than of rigorous objectivity. In demanding that writers abandon the unknown for the known(2), Zola had left himself open to the criticism that what was unknown to him might not be unknown to others; and in his determined exclusion of the non-empirical, he could himself be charged with unreality. To the Christian, the world of *L'Assommoir*, totally devoid as it is of any possibility of grace offering to interrupt the characters' degradation, or of any sign whatever of the presence of God, lacks verisimilitude and completeness; this is not the world as the Christian (experimentally!) knows it to be.

But on both sides of the Channel, the future lay with Zola's side of this particular argument. *L'Assommoir* was written in 1877; by that time, in Britain, the 'loss of faith' was an established feature of the intellectual landscape. Since then there have been very few major novels with much reference to providential causality: in the fictional worlds of the great English novels, God has died.

(1) F.W.J. Hemmings, *The Russian Novel in France, 1884-1914* (1950), pp.31-32. Hemmings notes that this opposition was clearly recognised by the French Catholic opponents of Naturalism, such as de Vogue.

(2) Emile Zola, 'Le Roman Experimental'(1880); see Damian Grant, *Realism* (1970), p.40.

4. AFTER THE FUNERAL

Yet, even if God had died in English fiction, He still did not quite stop moving. Supernaturalism did not disappear altogether. To the Christian reader, this comes as no surprise: if human beings are 'built' for relationship with a God, then denial of that God will not lead to total forgetfulness, but rather to a hunger that will resurface from time to time. It would seem that the imaginations of a number of leading novelists required something of the kind; and the result was various forms of 'secularised supernaturalism'. Miriam Allott comments that

Paradoxically, it is in this context of doubt and scepticism that the novel acquires its most potent supernatural ambience - we are particularly aware of it in the novels of Hardy, James and Conrad, where it is associated with a vivid sense of hostile and evil forces in the world.(1)

We also find -later in the twentieth century -the emergence of writers with visions of Christianity that deviate significantly from biblical orthodoxy, but in whose fictions God is nonetheless doing something. Perhaps the cultural situation was now at a stage where it would be hard for a novel based on a genuinely biblical worldview to 'make it' into the literary canon, since that worldview was now becoming very much a radical minority viewpoint. But God and the supernatural could not be squeezed out altogether.

(i) Whispers, Echoes and Metaphors

The first thing we would expect to find in a situation of 'loss of faith' is that the images of Christian supernaturalism, while no longer believed in as such, would continue to retain their attraction as a source of powerful metaphor. This tendency can be seen emerging back before the departure from a Christian pattern had become entirely dominant, in two virtually contemporary novels, Dickens' Dombey and Son (1846-48) and Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights (1847).

In Dombey and Son Dickens repeatedly makes metaphorical use of the concepts of Christian supernaturalism. Alice and Edith are both compared to fallen spirits.(2) Florence is referred to as an angel throughout the book; and when she leaves Edith, it is as if the latter's 'good angel went out in that form'(3), and she is left to the 'devil' Carker says 'possesses' her at Dijon.(4) As Edith's husband Dombey is also possessed by a 'moody, stubborn, sullen demon'(5), disaster follows. Carker has lost 'his solitary angel' with his sister Harriet's departure(6); the full result is only reaped in his return from Dijon, drawn by 'smoking horses...as if...ridden by a demon'(7), after which he is run down by the 'fiery devil', the train.(8) This is only one of the chains of images in the novel, of course. And we are clearly involved in a process of secularization when the primary use of the Christian supernatural is as a source of metaphor on a par with explicitly "legendary" images such as 'enchantress', 'ogress', and 'good monster', which are also employed in Dombey and Son.

(1)Miriam Allott, Novelists on the Novel (1959), p.39. See also T.S.Eliot, After Strange Gods (1934), pp.56-57. (2) Charles Dickens, Dombey and Son (1846-48; Everyman edition of 1907), pp.613,698. (3) Ibid, p.604. (4) Ibid, p.708. (5) Ibid, p.522. (6) Ibid, p.440. (7) Ibid, p.714. (8) Ibid, p.720, where also Carker wonders when the next train is due - 'when another Devil would come by.'

Something similar occurs in Wuthering Heights, where the invocation of the demonic is integral to Emily Bronte's success in building up a very real sense of evil. The demonic archetype is introduced in particular with reference to Heathcliff, who is described as being, at his first appearance, 'as dark almost as if it came from the devil'.(1) He is portrayed as 'possessed of something diabolical' as a boy(2), and, elsewhere, as a goblin.(3) Isabella wonders, 'Is he a devil?'(4), and soon decides he is indeed 'a lying fiend, a monster, and not a human being'(5); Nellie too asks herself if he is a 'hideous, incarnate demon'.(6) There are several similar references. But the demonic seems to have a share in most of the characters: Hindley is 'Devil daddy' to Hareton(7), Catherine Earnshaw dreams of being unhappy in heaven and consequently being expelled thence(8), and even the younger Catherine ('taking a long, dark book from a shelf') claims to have 'progressed' in black magic - 'I shall soon be competent to make a clear house of it.'(9) All in all it is hardly surprising to find Wuthering Heights described as an 'infernal house'(10), and as purgatory or worse.(11)

These references are employed to give a kind of resonance; there is no unambiguous suggestion that the moors have suffered the intrusion of supernatural beings. The demonic is an archetype that is being used primarily to dramatise a quality which can come to power in the soul of the ordinary mortal. The prosaic Lockwood's unexpected and horrific dream, and the force of Heathcliff's final experiences, serve to leave just a shadow of a doubt -as if

(1) Emily Bronte, Wuthering Heights (1847; Penguin edition of (1965)),p.77. The reasons why the causality of Emily Bronte's novel should be so different from the providentialism of her sisters' work lie beyond this study's scope. Nonetheless, it is striking to note, in Charlotte Bronte's 'Biographical Notice' for her two sisters, the emphasis on Anne's being 'a very sincere and practical Christian' in life and death, and the lack of such references when she speaks of Emily (cf.pp.34-35 of the Penguin Wuthering Heights). (2) Ibid.p.106. (3) Eg Ibid,pp.149,359. (4) Ibid,p.173. (5)Ibid.p.188.. (6) Ibid.p.359. (7) Ibid.p.148. (8) Ibid.p.120. (9)Ibid.p.57. (10) Ibid.p.106. (11) Ibid.pp.217-18.

the forms invoked by the author, and the figure of Catherine contemplated so intensely at the end by Heathcliff in a bizarre kind of neo-Platonism. might just possibly have independent objective existence.

A providential view is indeed suggested as something of an alternative by Nellie: 'He trusted God; and God comforted him', she remarks in a matter-of-fact way about Edgar(1); and she advises the latter to resign the younger Catherine to God, in view of His providence.(2) A certain ambiguity hangs over this; in a sense Nellie's faith could be said to be justified - Catherine does survive in the end. But the providential view can more plausibly be seen as Nellie's attempt to impose a 'civilising shape' on what she sees. The old retainer Joseph's Christianity does not exactly add any lustre to the faith: and Edgar's merely becomes part of the colourlessly 'safe' world of the Grange.

When Heathcliff returns to Wuthering Heights, Nellie remarks, 'I felt that God had forsaken the stray sheep there to its own wicked wanderings, and an evil beast prowled between it and the fold, waiting his time to spring and destroy.'(3) There is no question of prayer as a resource or grace as a solution to the problems of Isabella or the younger Catherine; and one of the most painful things

(1) Ibid.p.219. (2) Ibid.p.289. (3) Ibid.p.146.

about Wuthering Heights is the way one character after another is left at the mercy of forces that will corrupt or destroy it. God is as catastrophically absent from the world of Emily Bronte's novel as from the world of Zola. But where God is absent the demons have full power: the language of demonology provides categories for the description of an evil (or an amoral power doing much that within the Christian framework would be described as evil) that is rendered with such devouring intensity as to dwarf and distance the 'normal' world of Nellie and Lockwood; thereby almost imparting a kind of reality to the numinous world from which its metaphors are drawn.

This is similar to what takes place in Tess of the D'Urbervilles, at the end of which Hardy's tragic movement reaches a mythic culmination: 'The President of the Immortals, in AEschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess.' Hardy is not setting up a metaphysic: the myth merely expresses an insight - or an opinion - about the nature of ordinary life. At the same time, if Hardy's coincidences are not to seem too contrived, if his reader is not to be left with too much unease about the 'dismal generalizations he illogically induces from the extraordinary actions he invents'(1), then the support of a mythology that comes close to taking on objective reality is of some assistance. The necessary background to Hardy's vision involves a hint of supernaturalism.

(1) Herbert J.Muller, 'The Novels of Hardy Today', in Southern Review, Summer 1940, quoted Q.D.Leavis, 'Hardy and Criticism', in A Selection from 'Scrutiny', ed. F.R.Leavis (1968), Vol I, p.295.

In Conrad there are some clear examples of this 'secularised supernatural', the 'vivid sense of hostile and evil forces in the world' to which Miriam Allott refers. There are the hostile seas of The Shadow Line, where the young captain laughs at Mr. Burns' fears of the evil influence of his dead predecessor, but immediately afterwards, with 'the southern shoulder of Koh-ring...like an evil attendant, on our port quarter', encounters 'an inexplicable, steady breeze, right in our teeth. There was no sense in it.... Only purposeful malevolence could account for it.'(1) In the end it is by 'the exorcising virtue of Mr. Burns' awful laugh' that 'the malicious spectre had been laid, the evil spell broken, the curse removed. We were now in the hands of a kind and energetic Providence.'

(2)

In Lord Jim and Heart of Darkness Conrad presents something persistently 'abominable' which comes almost to seem more than natural, and reveals itself in the malevolence of the universe through which Jim (in his open boat) and Harlow (in his river steamer) travel; finally culminating in Jim's temptation by Gentleman Brown - 'it was as if a demon had been whispering advice in his ear'(3) - and Harlow's encounter with Kurtz who 'had taken a high seat among the devils of the land - I mean literally. You can't understand. How could you?'(4) In all this Conrad remained an agnostic. But his work seems virtually to demand a transcendent ground for its metaphor. It does not assume that such a ground exists: it merely enacts Sartre's

(1) Joseph Conrad, The Shadow Line (1917 Everyman edition, with The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' and Typhoon, 1945). p.271. (2) Ibid, p.299. Cf. also p.254: 'It appeared that even at sea a man could become the victim of evil spirits. I felt on my face the breath of unknown powers that shape our destinies.' Nonetheless, Conrad's preface makes it clear that the supernatural in the book exists only as metaphor (pp.207-08). (3) Joseph Conrad, Lord Jim (1900; Everyman edition of 1935). p.285. (4) Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness (1902; Everyman edition with Youth and The End of the Tether, 1974), p.116.

remark that a finite point, if it is to have meaning, must have an infinite reference point. The use of some kind of 'beyond' becomes essential if the 'given' is to be described. How, after all, is one to define evil in a totally relativistic universe, or disorder if there is no underlying order to give the term meaning?

Graham Greene sees something similar taking place in the fiction of James. To him, the 'crystallization' of the 'dominant theme' in James' private universe is the point in the scenario to The Ivory Tower where James speaks of 'the black and merciless things that are behind great possessions'. To Greene, this is the keynote of a 'sense of evil religious in its intensity' in James' work.(1)

Experience taught him to believe in supernatural evil, but not in supernatural good. Milly Theale is all human; her courage has not the supernatural support which holds Kate Croy and Charlotte Stant in a strong coil.(2)

The ghosts in The Turn of the Screw are presented with a deliberate ambiguity as to whether they are to seem objective realities, or the creation of the governess' brain; at the very least they serve as 'secularised supernaturalism' in the sense of a mythic representation of evil. James himself remarked, 'I recognise that they are not ghosts at all, as we now know the ghost, but goblins, elves, imps, demons. The essence of the matter was the villainy of the motive in the evoked predatory creature.'(3)

Moving into the twentieth century, Lawrence and Forster also include such

(1) Graham Greene, Collected Essays(1969; Penguin edition of 1970), p.21. (2) Ibid, p.43. The argument is developed in the two general essays on Henry James in this book. (3) Quoted Dorothy Scarborough, The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction (1917),p.109. It is interesting that of all the major novelists it should be James, the supreme craftsman, who found the supernatural significant enough to introduce a ghost into fictions like The Portrait of a Lady and The Jolly Corner.

references to give depth and resonance to what they are describing. Forster writes (fascinatingly) in A Passage to India,

If this world is not to our taste, well, at all events there is Heaven, Hell, Annihilation - one or other of those large things, that huge scenic background of stars, fires, blue or black air. All heroic endeavour, and all that is known as art, assumes that there is such a background.(1)

When Mrs. Moore encounters the 'echo' in the Marabar caves that, for her, destroys this background, Forster depicts it (one paragraph after the previous quotation) in supernaturalistic terms:

What had spoken to her in that scoured-out cavity of the granite? What dwelt in the first of the caves? Something very old and very small. Before time, it was before space also. Something snub-nosed, incapable of generosity -the undying worm itself. Since hearing its voice, she had not entertained one large thought, she was actually envious of Adela... Visions are supposed to entail profundity but - Wait till you get one, dear reader! The abyss also may be petty, the serpent of eternity made of maggots; her constant thought was: 'Less attention should be paid to my future daughter-in-law and more to me...'

Laurence Lerner notes 'the tact with which Forster stops just short of the supernatural, the completeness with which the newly-released evil is embodied in the book's action and yet retains a further, numinous quality', and proceeds to call the 'Caves' section 'one of the most brilliant and disturbing episodes in modern fiction'.(2)

D.H.Lawrence almost takes a step further into outright paganism, for example in the powerful section at the close of St.Mawr. Lou, weary of men and of sex, resolves to 'give myself only to the unseen

(1) E.M.Forster, A Passage to India (1924; Everyman edition of 1942),p.180. (2) Laurence Lerner, The Truthtellers (1967), p.188.

presences', like a Vestal Virgin, 'woman weary of the embrace of incompetent men...turning to the unseen gods, the unseen spirits, the hidden fire, and devoting herself to that, and that alone.'(1)

She buys a ranch in the wilds of New Mexico; the previous owner had given up the struggle against the 'aroma and the power and the slight horror of the pre-sexual primeval world'(2), where there was 'always some mysterious malevolence fighting, fighting against the will of man. A strange invisible influence coming out of the livid rock fastnesses in the bowels of those uncreated rocky Mountains, preying upon the will of man, and slowly wearing down his resistance, his onward-pushing spirit.'(3) This alien force has its own attraction, however:

The same when a couple of horses were struck by lightning. It frightened her...and made her know, secretly and with cynical certainty, that there was no merciful God in the heavens. A very tall, elegant pine tree just above her cabin took the lightning, and stood tall and elegant as before, but with a white seam spiralling from its crest, all down its tall trunk, to earth. The perfect scar, white and long as lightning itself. And every time she looked at it, she said to herself, in spite of herself: 'There is no Almighty loving God. The God there is shaggy as the pine trees, and horrible as the lightning.' Outwardly, she never confessed this. Openly, she thought of her dear New England Church as usual. But in the violent undercurrent of her woman's soul, after the storms, she would look at that living, seamed tree, and the voice would say in her, almost savagely: 'What nonsense about Jesus and a God of Love, in a place like this! This is more awful and more splendid. I like it better.'... There was no love on this ranch. There was life, intense, bristling life, full of energy, but also, with an undertone of savage sordidness... Nay, it was a world before and after the God of Love.(4)

(1) D.H.Lawrence, *St.Mawr* (1925; Phoenix collected edition of 1956),p.128. (2) Ibid, p.135. (3) Ibid,p.133. (4) Ibid,pp.138-139.

Lawrence is a superb writer, and the power that has left the pine tree 'tall and elegant' but with a 'perfect scar' is conveyed to the reader as real, daunting, in the strict sense awesome. As it happens, what Lawrence creates is something not entirely removed from the vision of the God of power, of 'otherness', that appears in some of the Old Testament prophets (Isaiah 45:7 for example: 'I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things'). The Christian reader may feel that Lawrence - like many another - is right in what he affirms, while hopelessly wrong in what he denies. Anyway, it is - perhaps disturbingly - to this power that Lou surrenders herself a couple of paragraphs from the book's close:

There's something else even that loves me and wants me. I can't tell you what it is. It's a spirit. And it's here, on this ranch. It's here, in this landscape. It's something more real to me than men are, and it soothes me, and it holds me up. I don't know what it is, definitely. It's something wild, that will hurt me sometimes and will wear me down sometimes. I know it. But it's something big, bigger than men, bigger than people, bigger than religion... It's a mission if you like. I am imbecile enough for that! -But it's my mission to keep myself for the spirit that is wild, and has waited so long here: even waited for such as me. Now I've come! Now I'm here. Now I am where I want to be: with the spirit that wants me... And it doesn't want to save me either. It needs me. It craves for me.(1)

On the far side of the Enlightenment, 'secularized supernaturalism' comes to the very edge of turning into a new animism. It is still, probably, a myth: a reification of the disparate forces of the

(1) Ibid, p.146.

'other', of the natural world. But to make such a comment is to run the risk of 'demythologizing' Lawrence into something more comfortable, more humanistic. Certainly Lawrence is here speaking to parts of the human psyche seldom stirred since the 'loss of faith'; imaginative capacities that could have reached forth in worship to the God of the unabridged biblical revelation. Worship, devotion, is what Lawrence gropes after here: if only, alas, for something that is no more than power, that finally rises no higher than the Baals, the nature gods denounced in the Old Testament.

A more directly Christian supernaturalism is toyed with, for other purposes, in Faulkner and Fitzgerald. In 'The Bear', the central story in William Faulkner's masterly Go Down, Moses, the saint-hero, Isaac McCaslin, gives a theistic interpretation to the history of the American South, and proceeds at some cost to base his whole life on that. On the other hand, he does not pray, and the theistic content of his opinions are really (once again) biographical data, intended to say more about him than about history. Providential reference is likewise employed to indicate America's existence beyond the possessiveness of any particular group of human beings in Fitzgerald's The Diamond as Big as the Ritz. Here the significantly-named Braddock Washington has built his personal empire on ruthlessly selfish exploitation of the enormous natural resource he has discovered - a mountain that is one solid diamond. But his empire collapses; and the rejection of his last proud bribe by the Creator of the diamond on which his wealth and power are based - the God behind the 'Providence' that supposedly led him to the

diamond in the first place{1} -is a device emphasising Washington's lack of any real title to the resources he has used with massive and deliberate egoism. But the objective existence of a Creator is not absolutely essential to the point Fitzgerald is making{2}; the Creator, like the diamond mountain, is part of Fitzgerald's fable. Fitzgerald's real attitude to providence, one suspects, is exemplified by the hero of The Great Gatsby, who can find no reality anywhere to match the grandeur of his Platonic dream; the 'act of God' for which Daisy sends Nick Carraway to watch does not take place{3}, and the only eyes watching over the valley of ashes are the expressionless, unthinking, heedless eyes of the advertisement for Dr.T.J.Eckleburg. The man who appeals to these as divine authority{4} goes off and kills the wrong person as a result{5}; it is a powerful image of a world adrift.

(ii) Deviant Visions: 'Brideshead Revisited'

Of course the 'loss of faith' did not render the depiction of a supernaturalistic causality utterly impossible; and there have been authors who have attempted to fly in the face of the dominant convention. Two that deserve particular attention are Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene.

(I) F.Scott Fitzgerald, The Diamond as Big as the Ritz (original story 1922; Penguin collection of 1962),pp.105-06. (2) That is, provided some humanistic values - what The Great Gatsby (1926; Penguin edition of 1950; p.7) calls 'fundamental decencies' - can be invoked to replace a theistic morality. A complete relativism would leave no basis for judging Washington: in terms of the 'will to power', or the survival of the fittest, what he does is unquestionable -as Fitzgerald is aware (p.116). (3) Ibid,p.112. (4) Ibid,p.166. (5) Cf. Henry Dan Piper, 'The Untrimmed Christmas Tree: The Religious Background of The Great Gatsby', in The Great Gatsby: a Study, ed. Frederick J.Hoffman (New York,1962),p.333. Piper cites the short story 'Absolution' {originally planned as Gatsby's prologue) and suggests that the main point about the world of Gatsby's imagination is that there 'he was safe from God', and so free to follow his own 'Platonic conception of himself' (The Great Gatsby,p.105.) But this does not mean that Gatsby should be read as a (conscious) retelling of Adam hiding in Eden, the man running away from God. Rather, as Piper continues, the standards by which Gatsby's dream is judged, the standards of the reality that is not 'a rock built on a fairy's wing'(The Great Gatsby, p.106), are a combination of 'fundamental decencies' and an awareness of mortality and the irreversible nature of time (ibid,p.117): humanistic values rather than theistic, although they would have been theistically grounded in an earlier era.

Not much of Waugh's work is relevant here(1), but Brideshead Revisited (subtitled 'The Sacred and Profane Memories of Captain Charles Ryder') undoubtedly is. Its theme, according to Waugh's own 1959 preface, is 'the operation of divine grace on a group of diverse but closely connected characters'. In this respect, the central passage is the conversation between Ryder and Cordelia that gives the title to Book Three, 'A Twitch Upon the Thread':

'Still trying to convert me, Cordelia?'

'Oh, no. That's all over, too. D'you know what papa said when he became a Catholic? Mummy told me once. He said to her: "You have brought back my family to the faith of their ancestors." Pompous, you know. It takes people different ways. Anyhow, the family haven't been very constant, have they? There's him gone and Sebastian gone and Julia gone. But God won't let them go for long, you know. I wonder if you remember the story mummy read us the evening Sebastian first got drunk -I mean the bad evening.

"Father Brown" said something like "I caught him" (the thief) "with an unseen hook and an invisible line which is long enough to let him wander to the ends of the world and still to bring him back with a twitch upon the thread."'(2)

The various characters are indeed gone away from God to 'the ends of the world'. Ryder, the narrator, has passed beyond his 'Arcadia' phase of illusions, aestheticism, alcohol and Oxford:

'I have left behind illusion,' I said to myself. 'Henceforth I live in a world of three dimensions - with the aid of my five senses.'

(1) Malcolm Bradbury suggests that in most of his work, Waugh, 'despairing of God's sensible presence in modern history, feels free to represent it as chaos, as a vulgarized nonsense, without any really significant moral substance. Faith may enter, but the idea of it as a possession that redeems this world is not given; it is as often as not an attribute of those who suffer or are historically victimized, a story or a remarkably oblique alternative.' ('Muriel Spark's Fingernails', in Contemporary Women Novelists: a Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Patricia Meyer Spacks (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey,1977),p.139.) Bradbury includes Brideshead Revisited as an example of the 'oblique' variety. (2) Evelyn Waugh, Brideshead Revisited (1945; revised Penguin edition of 1962), p.212.

I have since learned that there is no such world, but then, as the car turned out of sight of the house, I thought it took no finding, but lay all about me at the end of the avenue.(1)

Since that moment of naturalistic optimism he has roamed the jungles — of Central America, painting the geographical 'ends of the world'. Of the Brideshead family, Julia has married a divorcee, and then become deeply involved in an adulterous liaison with Ryder after his return from Central America (the moral 'ends of the world'); Sebastian has settled in Morocco and become an alcoholic; and Lord Marchmain himself has been living in Venice for years, again in an adulterous relationship.

How exactly the 'twitch upon the thread' operates for these people is something that Waugh leaves unclear. Sebastian finds some sort of equilibrium in Morocco, and goes 'back to the Church'(2), for reasons that are not particularly obvious, apart from the fact that he was looked after by Franciscans when he was ill. Finally, still something of an alcoholic, he attaches himself to a monastery in Tunis. Cordelia (a member of the family who has remained a committed Catholic) predicts that 'one morning, after one of his drinking bouts, he'll be picked up at the gate dying, and show by a mere flicker of the eyelid that he is conscious when they give him the last sacraments. It's not such a bad way of getting through one's life.'(3) Julia's return begins when she simply starts to think in Catholic categories again: she tells Ryder,

(1) Ibid.p.164. (2) Ibid.p.276. (3) Ibid.p.294

I've been punished a little for marrying Rex. You see, I can't get all that sort of thing out of my mind, quite - Death, Judgement, Heaven, Hell, Nanny Hawkins, and the catechism. It becomes part of oneself, if they give it one early enough. And yet I wanted my child to have it... now I suppose I shall be punished for what I've just done. Perhaps that is why you and I are here together like this...part of a plan.(1)

It is difficult to avoid an impression that the 'divine grace' that is Waugh's theme functions primarily as sacramental grace, even though what is being stressed in this immediate context is Catholic teaching rather than infant baptism. At any rate, the idea seems basically to be 'once a catholic, always a Catholic'. As time goes on, Julia becomes haunted by a feeling that 'all mankind and God, too, were in a conspiracy against us But we've got our happiness in spite of them.... They can't hurt us, can they?' 'Not tonight; not now', her lover Ryder reassures her. She replies uneasily, 'Not for how many nights?'(2) The same idea of inevitable re-conversion recurs when - after an embarrassing passage where Julia waxes hysterical about sin and damnation in pastiche Eliot - Ryder says,

'Of course it's a thing psychologists could explain; a preconditioning from childhood; feelings of guilt from the nonsense you were taught in the nursery. You do know at heart that it's all bosh. don't you?'

'How I wish it was!'(3)

(1) Ibid.p.247. (2) Ibid.p.263. (3) Ibid.p.276.

The process continues: Julia's relationship with Ryder fades slowly but inevitably. Nineteen pages later, a page after the account of Sebastian's return to the Church, Ryder (who has learned through talking with Cordelia to stop thinking of her piety as 'thwarted passion') glimpses Julia wearing a 'thwarted look that had seemed to say, "Surely I was made for some other purpose than this?"'(1) Cordelia's faith, not Julia's secularity, begins to appear the norm. And then the final, conclusive 'twitch upon the thread' comes with the return to England of the dying Lord Marchmain.

Brideshead, the eldest son, a convinced (if somewhat dense) Catholic, arranges for his father to be visited by a priest. Ryder is outraged: 'No one could have made it clearer, all his life, what he thought of religion... How can we stop this tomfoolery?' Julia 'did not answer for some time; then: "Why should we?"'(2) Waugh seems to be setting up a direct opposition in both Julia's life and her father's between a more or less predestined grace ('Papa doesn't want him yet', is Cordelia's comment on the priest (my emphasis)) and human freewill (as expressed in Lord Marchmain's lifelong rejection of religion, and Julia's 'wish' that Catholicism should be untrue). Indeed, Ryder's attitude to the 'tomfoolery' is unmistakably endorsed by Lord Marchmain: 'I have not been a practising member of your Church for twenty-five years. Brideshead, show Father Mackay the way out.' But Waugh throws a subtle aura of doubt on Ryder as the embodiment of objective wisdom:

(1) Ibid,p.295. (2) Ibid,p.309.

I felt triumphant. I had been right, everyone else had been' wrong, truth had prevailed...and there was also - I can now confess it - another unexpressed, inexpressible, indecent little victory that I was furtively celebrating. I guessed that that morning's business had put Brideshead some considerable way further from his rightful inheritance.(1)

This 'indecent' hope that the family mansion would go to Ryder's beloved Julia is so easily understandable, like Julia's sense of being thwarted; and yet both of these imply some norm by the standards of which they are incomplete.

Next, Waugh succeeds paradoxically in making the Catholic belief about the reality of grace in the ritual of last rites seem all the more strong by appearing absurd.(2) Ryder asks for the rationale of the priest's visit to the dying man to be explained:

Brldeshead told me at some length, and when he had finished Cara slightly marred the unity of the Catholic front by saying in simple wonder, 'I never heard that before.'(3)

That the steady commitment of the dour Brideshead and the admirable Cordelia, not to mention the erratic Sebastian, should have stayed loyal to such a faith, seems almost to demand the existence of a power of divine grace such as that in which they believe.

(1) Ibid,p.312. (2) It is a technique he uses throughout the novel. Cordelia is much better equipped to be the novel's mouthpiece of Catholicism for having appeared in a superbly farcical scene earlier, where she confesses having told Rex - who is methodically turning Catholic in order to marry Julia - that Catholics must sleep with their feet pointing east because that is heaven's direction, 'and if you die in the night you can walk there'; besides similar gems about sacred monkeys, and damning your enemies by giving the Church a pound note with their name on it (ibid,p.187). (3) Ibid,p.314.

Lord Marchmain suddenly worsens. Hrideshead and Cordelia are absent: Julia is forced to take action, and calls in the priest, even though the doctor says the disturbance might kill her father. The priest anoints Lord Marchmain and pronounces words of absolution, asking him to make a sign that he is 'sorry for his sins'. It is a taut moment: Julia and Cara (Lord Marchmain's long-term mistress) are kneeling, and then, very credibly, Ryder follows suit:

Then I knelt, too, and prayed: 'O God, if there is a God, forgive him his sins, if there is such a thing as sin'... I suddenly felt the longing for a sign, if only of courtesy, if only for the sake of the woman I loved... Suddenly Lord Marchmain moved his hand to his forehead; I thought he had felt the touch of the chrism and was wiping it away. 'O God,' I prayed. 'don't let him do that.' But there was no need for fear; the hand moved slowly down his breast, then to his shoulder, and Lord Marchmain made the sign of the cross. Then I knew that the sign I had asked for was not a little thing, not a passing nod of recognition, and a phrase came back to me from my childhood of the veil of the temple being rent from top to bottom.(1)

It is the miracle that authenticates Waugh's 'grace'; in that room, where the cool, objective narrator Ryder is praying - praying for reasons immediately explicable in emotional terms, yet in praying putting the emotional force of the narrative point of view firmly behind Julia and the priest - it all seems very logical, very credible. Within a page the action moves swiftly to an equally

(1) Ibid, p.322.

logical consummation. Lord Marchmain dies, 'proving both sides right in the dispute, priest and doctor' (a shrewd move on Waugh's part, implying that the novel is not really seeing things only from the Catholic angle); and Julia bids farewell to Ryder, recognising that as a Catholic she cannot marry him. The logic of the movement of events - under grace, perhaps - is emphasised to the end:

'I don't want to make it easier for you,' I said; 'I hope your heart may break; but I do understand.'

The avalanche was down, the hillside swept bare behind it; the last echoes died on the white slopes; the new mound glittered and lay still in the silent valley.(1)

With that marvellous final image the book's main section closes. It is an image Waugh used earlier for Ryder's sense of being threatened by Cordelia's and Julia's faith(2): a vast mound of snow building up behind an arctic trapper's hut, about to crash down and destroy it. In so many ways it is admirably suited to depict grace - powerful, huge, overwhelming, glittering, silent, dangerous. There follows an epilogue depicting Ryder's return to the mansion years later, along with what seems to be his own 'twitch upon the thread'. Again, no reasons are given; we only know (from the prologue) that in the intervening years he has grown disillusioned with the Army in which he now serves. He simply tells us, without comment,

(1) Ibid,p.324. (2) Ibid,pp.295-196.

'I said a prayer, an ancient, newly-learned form of words', as he visits the chapel. The house has been desecrated by its military occupants; but still there is a lamp burning in the chapel. Ryder's words again draw out the sense of an irresistible power of grace:

Something quite remote from anything the builders intended, has come out of their work, and out of the fierce little human tragedy in which I played; something none of us thought about at the time; a small red flame - a beaten-copper lamp of deplorable design relit before the beaten-copper doors of a tabernacle... It could not have been lit but for the builders and the tragedians, and there I found it this morning, burning anew among the old stones.(1)

Despite the desecration of the mansion; despite the 'tragedy' of Ryder's own relationships; something of grace continues. Ryder leaves 'looking unusually cheerful'.

Here, then, is a twentieth-century novelist attempting to depict the operations of grace. The twin images of the avalanche and the 'lamp of deplorable design' (one depicting the irresistible strength of grace, the other the weakness, indeed tawdriness, of its physical expression) are crucial to Waugh's success. But the less successful aspects of the work have to be recognised too. Brideshead Revisited is a book in which Waugh's Catholicism cannot be disentangled from his other positives. To this reader, at any rate, the values of the

(1) Ibid.p.331.

opening 'Et in Arcadia Ego' section, narrated with loving remembrance and with all the colour and glamour of Fitzgerald's Gatsby, become distasteful when one is forced by the introduction of the Catholic theme to consider them in moral categories rather than in aesthetic detachment. The problem is, essentially, that Waugh really tries to have both the aestheticism and the Catholic vision; the aestheticism is gone beyond recall, but the Catholicism is not distinct from it. Sebastian, to the end the alcoholic of 'Arcadia', yet nonetheless (according to Cordelia) 'holy'(1), embodies this attempted fusion. And there are parts of that 'Arcadia' which (although tongue-in-cheek) read distastefully today:

'Ought we to be drunk every night?' Sebastian asked one morning.

'Yes, I think so.'

'I think so too.'(2)

I remember Sebastian looking up at the Colleoni statue and saying, 'It's rather sad to think that whatever happens you and I can never possibly get involved in a war.'(3)

Sebastian's undergraduate mixture of aestheticism and Catholicism is represented by his praying 'like mad to St. Anthony of Padua' to find his lost teddy bear, and his indignant assertion that he is 'very, very much wickeder' than Ryder.(4) That is acceptable, viewed

(1) Ibid,p.291. (2) Ibid,p.82. (3) Ibid,p.98. (4) Ibid,p.84.

benevolently through an alcoholic haze: the difficulty is that Waugh later asks us to believe in Sebastian's 'holiness' without him showing too much sign of having matured.

An important aspect of the problem is that Waugh's Christianity seems to possess little in the way of ethics. The savouring of alcoholism or of the dubious morality of the 'Old Hundredth'(1) merges with the dilettante proto-fascism ('Jean...claimed the right to bear arms in any battle anywhere against the lower classes'(2)), with Ryder's scathing treatment of his wife, and his bitter hatred of the twentieth century, which is sometimes satirically effective but almost entirely lacking in anything positive or constructive. An overall mood is produced that is never quite affirmed as admirable, but is narrated with relish (in the passages of indulgence) or at least with feeling (in the passages of bitterness) - and never really transcended. Grace, the author seems to suggest, fits very well with this kind of dilettante elitism.

And finally there is the sacramentalism. Waugh's refusal to indicate any kind of 'conversion' at the level of ideas would appear to present grace as something a Catholic possesses from birth. Sebastian and Julia never quite lose it and eventually (we are invited to believe) drift back into it. It is one sentence after Lord Marchmain is anointed with sacramental oil that he 'suddenly'

(1) Ibid.p.112. (2) Ibid.p.193. (3) Ibid, p.322.

makes his sign.(1) But it is very hard to accept such an isolated deathbed gesture - dramatically effective though it undoubtedly is - as a real, heartfelt repentance. Yet Lord Marchmain has accepted the sacrament; and his condition matches the state Cordelia predicts Sebastian will die in, 'after one of his drinking bouts', showing 'by a mere flicker of the eyelid that he is conscious when they give him the last sacraments.' However, the problem at this point is not literary: it is theological, a matter of whether the reader can accept a presentation of salvation by sacraments that seems to leave so little room for meaningful exercise of faith.

(iii) Deviant Visions: Greene's Religious Trilogy

But among twentieth-century fiction it must surely be Graham Greene's work that most obviously requires our careful examination. Greene is the most famous post-war 'religious novelist'; and his novels concede a great deal to the convention of the absence of God. Yet, as we shall see, this absence is by no means total, and some of his fictions take the activity of God more seriously than any other writer who can be regarded as an indisputable member of the century's literary 'canon'; even if, in the end, Greene's underlying vision is heterodox in a peculiarly contemporary way.

The Heart of the Matter is perhaps Greene's most impressive novel; and, along with Brighton Rock and The Power and the Glory, it forms a kind of trilogy of religious novels. It is set in wartime West Africa. Its hero, Scobie, a police officer, falls into adultery with a young and rather helpless widow named Helen Rolt, while his wife Louise is out of the country. Scobie's attitude towards Helen is neither love, nor lust, so much as pity for her loneliness and bewilderment; and that same pity prevents him breaking off the affair when his wife returns. But at the same time he does not want to hurt Louise, and rather than admit the

(1) Ibid, p.322.

affair to her he takes the sacrament in a state of mortal sin. But this, too, he cannot endure repeating, and he commits suicide.

Greene has become famous for the depiction of a drab, frustrating and above all seedy world that his critics call Greeneland.

(Reading Greene's novels, and being plunged into this world, can be a depressing experience: to this reader at any rate there is scarcely any other author who implants in the mind such an overwhelming sense of weariness and futility.) The West Africa of The Heart of the Matter certainly falls into this category:

Nobody here could ever talk about a heaven on earth. Heaven remained rigidly in its proper place on the other side of death, and on this side flourished the injustices, the cruelties, the meanness that elsewhere people so cleverly hushed up. Here you could love human beings nearly as God loved them, knowing the worst (1)

'The injustices, the cruelties' and particularly 'the meanness' are what Greene gives us as the book proceeds. From its opening, in which Wilson, 'almost intolerably lonely'(2), shares a balcony (which overlooks a street full of schoolboys pimping for the local brothel) with an Indian fortune-teller, the totally disenchanted Harris, and a vulture, we are presented with a setting where the dominant features seem to be corruption, sweat and fatigue. 'What an absurd thing it was to expect happiness in a world so full of misery', reflects Scobie. 'Point me out the happy man and I will point you out either egotism, evil - or else an absolute ignorance.'(3) Helen describes 'Everybody on the beach...pretending to be happy about something'(4); Harris 'felt the loyalty we feel to unhappiness -the sense that that is where we really belong'.(5) Consequently, 'It seemed to Scobie that life was immeasurably long. Couldn't we have committed our first major sin at seven, have ruined ourselves for love or hate at ten, have clutched at redemption on a fifteen-year-old deathbed? '(6) Death is indeed, in

(1) Graham Greene, The Heart of the Matter (1948),pp.35-36. All references are to the Penguin edition of 1971, henceforth referred to as THOTM, unless otherwise indicated. (2) Ibid,p.11. (3) Ibid, p.123. (4) Ibid,p.156. (5) Ibid,p.166. (6) Ibid,p.52.

Hamlet's phrase, 'a consummation devoutly to be wished': Scobie's daughter is dead and 'safe now, for ever'(1), and the problem of suffering presents itself to him at Pende in the form of the question he asks God: 'Why didn't you let her drown?'(2) 'But it is all right. She will die.'()

It is a world that is very far from being 'very good', as Genesis has it: and religion, instead of being a transcendent source of joy, is an integral part of the depressingly futile whole. Prayer, to Scobie, is formal, purposeless, and a duty, certainly not part of a joyous and creative relationship with God: "I neglected my evening prayers". This was no more than admitting what every soldier did -that he had avoided a fatigue when the occasion offered.' As he continues praying he falls asleep.(4) As his despair grows he finds that 'The Lord's Prayer lay as dead on his tongue as a legal document'(5): and the idea of prayer is further undercut by its employment by the fat Portuguese captain, dripping 'gently with sweat in the stuffy cabin' as Greene's characters tend to do, and praying his way around the contraband traffic: "When the moment of Grace returns [our prayers] rise", the captain raised his fat arms in an absurd and touching gesture, "all at once together like a flock of birds."(6)

Scobie's visit to confession is similarly a well-meaning but shallow piece of routine. He has no real sense of sin (and accordingly no real sense of holiness); and the Church can supply

(1) Ibid,p.26. (2) Ibid,p.126. (3) Ibid,p.120. (4) Ibid, pp.115-16. (5) Ibid,p.189 (6) Ibid,p.201.

only 'a formula...a hocus-pocus'.(1) In fact the Church seems to be very little use anywhere; we are shown the restless Father Clay 'with his breviary and a few religious tracts. He was a man without resources'(2); and Father Rank -'For twenty-two years that voice had been laughing... Could its cheeriness ever have comforted a single soul? Wilson wondered: had it even comforted itself? It was like the noise one heard rebounding from the tiles in a public baths'(3) - a superb image. 'When I was a novice, I thought that people talked to their priests', reminisces Father Rank gloomily -the fact that even this doesn't occur doubles his tragedy -'and I thought God somehow gave the right words. Don't mind me, Scobie, don't listen to me... God doesn't give the right words, Scobie....'(4)

Consequently, when Scobie finds himself trapped, as he does in some of the most effective scenes in the book(5), he is left to find his own way out: he may be a Catholic, but God is not a 'very present help in trouble'. There is no dynamic of grace and faith. Scobie is as lonely and 'abandoned' a man (in a religious sense) as any tragic hero could be:

He would still have made the promise even if he could have foreseen all that would come of it. He had always been prepared to accept the responsibility for his actions, and he had always been half aware too, from the time he had made his terrible private vow that she should be happy, how far this action might carry him. Despair is the price one pays for setting oneself an impossible aim. (6)

(1) Ibid, p.154. (2) Ibid, p.86. (3) Ibid, p.68. (4) Ibid, p.183. (5) For example, after Louise's telegram (ibid,p.189) and her request that they go to communion (ibid,p.219). (6) Ibid,p.60.

It is presumably because Greene is a Catholic, because he has a strong sense that God ought to be present, that he can render the absence of God and the loneliness of moral decision with such power and poignancy. That absence becomes particularly significant in the crucial passage at the end of Part One when Scobie's entire spiritual destiny is at stake. Here he slips into adultery with Helen Rolt more or less accidentally: he is completely unwarned, God is not mentioned. It is, admittedly, not the strongest aspect of the book; why Scobie's morality so suddenly and drastically collapses -and why a committed Catholic proceeds from an impulsive kiss to fully-fledged adultery - is very unclear. (Why his adultery should then, of necessity, have to be repeated, receives even less explanation; Helen 'needs' him, it seems, and that need cannot be satisfied by anything short of further adultery.) But it is striking that, despite the many earlier references to religion, God is unmentioned(1) in this vital scene when Scobie's fate is more or less sealed (for Scobie will take communion in a state of mortal sin, and finally commit suicide, because of his inability to abandon either Helen or his wife Louise). Instead of a God who 'with the temptation will provide the way of escape also'(2), there is in the world Greene creates a sense of inevitability at the moment of crisis, by which God is implicitly denied.

Even when God does step into the action in The Heart of the Matter, it is in a highly paradoxical manner, as we may see from the occasions when Scobie's prayers receive answers. His first prayers - that Louise

(1) The only exception to this is the veiled hint in the sentences that close the chapter two pages later: 'Somewhere on the face of those obscure waters moved the sense of yet another wrong and another victim, not Louise, nor Helen'(ibid, p.162). (The first edition included the additional sentence, 'Away in the town the cocks began to crow for the false dawn'(p.192) -where the cockcrow probably echoes Peter's denial of Christ.) This further victim is presumably the God for whose protection Scobie will kill himself at the end of the book (cf. Genesis 1:2, 'The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters'). But the reference here is to the aftermath; God is absent from the crucial moment of need when Scobie's destiny is in the balance. (2) 1 Corinthians 10:13.

will not lose Wilson's friendship by patronizing him or being absurd(1), and that he himself will die before retirement(2) -are both fulfilled, but with a strong element of paradox: Louise keeps Wilson's friendship to the extent that he attempts an affair with her, Scobie dies before retirement because he commits suicide. Scobie has prayed for peace, and when Louise leaves, he believes he is getting it; but only at the cost of compromise with the dishonest Syrian, Yusef: 'He thought... It's terrible the way that prayer is answered. It had better be good.

I've paid a high enough price for it.'(3) We may well feel that this answer to prayer that has been won from God with such difficulty and at such cost - and that consequently Scobie displays neither joy nor thankfulness at receiving(4) -is in actual fact the product of his own efforts; besides, his peace lasts only until Helen Rolt enters his life, bringing with her the eventual temptation to a fatal adultery.

(1) The Heart of the Matter, p.33. (2) Ibid. p.43. (3) Ibid. p.98. (4) Cf. in contrast John 16:24: 'Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.'

His next prayers are prayed at the bedside of a dying child who reminds him of his own dead daughter. First he prays, 'O God, don't let anything happen.' But despite this the child worsens:

Looking between his fingers he could see the six-year-old's face convulsed like a navvy's with labour. 'Father', he prayed, 'give her peace. Take away my peace for ever, but give her peace.' The sweat broke out on his hands. 'Father...'(1)

This prayer is answered: the child is given peace - that is to say, she dies. Death is the blessing by which Greene's God keeps His side of the bargain - and in exchange for which He does indeed take away Scobie's peace for the rest of his life. In a letter to Marcel More, Greene wrote,

I
Obviously one did have in mind that when he offered up his peace for the child it was genuine prayer and had the results that followed. I always believe that such prayers, though obviously a God would not fulfil them to the limit of robbing him of a peace for ever, are answered up to the point as a kind of test of a man's sincerity and to see whether in fact the offer was merely based on emotion. (2)

(1) THOTM, p.125. (2) Quoted Marie-Beatrice Mesnet, Graham Greene and the Heart of the Matter (1954), p.102.

However, it would seem that providence overplays its hand, as it were, given that the eventual consequence of Scobie's loss of peace is one mortal sin after another, and finally suicide. If the teaching of Greene's own church is meant to be seen as any guide at all to the wishes of providence, then the bargain would seem to have gone wrong for both parties. His next prayer - 'O God, I have deserted you. Do not you desert me'(1) -he unsays later. Then soon afterwards he prays, 'The dead can be forgotten. O God, give me death before I give them unhappiness.'(2) This is answered in part (God seems to answer when the prayer is for death); but nonetheless Scobie is not to die before making both Louise and Helen miserable over his affair; and his death will make matters worse for both of them.

Next he prays to be convinced of God's will, and goes into the confessional hoping that 'a miracle may still happen. Even Father Rank may for once find the word, the right word...'(3) But he doesn't. It is a tragic scene, and Greene handles it well; but it is tragic because the motive power that marks every aspect of Scobie's world and drives him into an ever deeper dilemma is a moral awareness, and the God (and the church) that are the source of that morality are unwilling or unable to assist him. This absence of God creates a spiritual dilemma to which Greene's description of the discomfort of the airless confessional-box, and the sweat dripping into the priest's eyes, give striking concreteness. Scobie comes out of the box:

(1) THOTM,p.181. (2) Ibid,p.189. (3) Ibid,p.220.

It seemed to Scobie that for the first time his footsteps had taken him out of sight of hope. There was no hope anywhere he turned his eyes: the dead figure of the God upon the Cross, the plaster Virgin, the hideous Stations representing a series of events that had happened a long time ago.(1)

Scobie's damnation then progresses unhindered. He takes the sacrament in a state of mortal sin.

Only a miracle can save me now, Scobie told himself, watching Father Rank at the altar opening the tabernacle, but God would never work a miracle to save Himself... For a moment he dreamed that the priest's steps had indeed faltered: perhaps after all something may yet happen before he reaches me: some incredible interposition... But with open mouth (the time had come) he made one last attempt at prayer, 'O God, I offer up my damnation to you. Take it. Use it for them,' and was aware of the pale papery taste of an eternal sentence on the tongue.(2)

It is only after this, as Scobie chooses suicide as the only way out, that God appears to take action. Scobie visits the church for the last time, and, as it were, informs God of what he is going to do. The monologue turns into a dialogue:

He couldn't keep the other voice silent; it spoke from the cave of his body: it was as if the sacrament which had lodged there for his damnation gave tongue. You say you love me, and yet you'll do this to me - rob me of you for ever. I made you with love. I've wept your tears. I've saved you from more than you will ever know... and now you push me away, you put me out of your reach.(3)

(1) Ibid,p.222. (2) Ibid,p.225. (3) Ibid,p.258.

This is effective; the voice of God - assuming, as we probably can, that it is intended to be God and not altogether a projection of Scobie's mind - is neither a piece of tasteless melodrama nor an embodiment of religious jargon. There is real passion in its reply to Scobie's farewell. But what it cannot do is persuade Scobie:

So long as you live, the voice said, I have hope. There's no human hopelessness like the hopelessness of God.... But no, he said, no. That's impossible. I won't go on insulting you at your own altar. You see it's an impasse, God, an impasse, he said, clutching the package in his pocket. He got up and turned his back on the altar and went out. Only when he saw his face in the driving mirror did he realize that his eyes were bruised with suppressed tears.(1)

Like the promotion to the Commissionership that could have prevented all his problems(2), God's intervention comes to Scobie too late.

And so he comes to his last night. This chapter has at times an almost unbearable power. A suicide is, of course, good raw material for a writer: and Greene makes the most of it. Scobie's mental condition remains calm, and the situation is reported with cool awareness:

Everything he did now was for the last time - an odd sensation. He would never come this way again, and five

(1) Ibid.p.259. (2) Ibid.p.228.

minutes later taking a new bottle of gin from his cupboard, he thought: I shall never open another bottle. The actions which could be repeated became fewer and fewer. Presently there would be only one unrepeatable action left, the action of swallowing.(1)

Scobie forces himself to display an interest in the future so as to leave his suicide unsuspected, while at the same time taking his farewell of Louise:

Bed-time came, and he felt a terrible unwillingness to let her go. There was nothing to do when she had once gone but die. He didn't know how to keep her - they had talked about all the subjects they had in common.... People said you couldn't love two women, but what was this emotion if it were not love? This hungry absorption of what he was never going to see again? The greying hair, the line of nerves upon the face, the thickening body held him as her beauty never had.(2)

God, too, is present at last:

Though the voice was no longer speaking from the cave of his belly, it was as though fingers touched him, signalled their mute messages of distress, tried to hold him... (3)

The first edition adds, 'He had never before known so clearly the weakness of God.' The weakness of God, however, is not, in

(1) Ibid,p.262. (2) Ibid,pp.262-63. He has pretended to be suffering from angina. It is, of course, appropriate that the climax of The Heart of the Matter should be a faked heart attack. (3) Ibid,p.263.

Greenland, stronger than men. Louise goes to bed with a perfunctory kiss and a casual caress, and Scobie is left alone with his poison. And God: for 'solitude itself has a voice' which urges him to throw away the tablets he has saved. "No", Scobie said, "No".' Even now, however, it is not all over; there seems to be quite a flurry of divine activity when it is too late; not enough for Scobie to be able to pray, but enough for this:

It seemed to him as though someone outside the room were seeking him, calling him, and he made a last effort to indicate that he was here... All the time outside the house, outside the world that drummed like hammer blows within his ear, someone wandered, seeking to get in, someone appealing for help, someone in need of him.(1)

Scobie 'strung himself to act' and responds to that need with a final prayer that gets as far as 'Dear God, I love...' before he slumps to the floor. Under the ice-box - a final touch that keeps the atmosphere from getting too highly-charged - tinkles a medal of a 'saint whose name nobody could remember'.

It is a very moving scene, a powerful example of fiction that presents God within its narrative; and apart from the dialogue with God in Scobie's last visit to the church, it is the first unambiguous divine intervention in the book. But God's deliverance has been absent or ambivalent, and heaven has remained 'rigidly on the other side of death', until it is too late. Such is Greene's conception of the workings of providence - real, capable of depiction in his novel, but paradoxical. The consequences can only be left to the mercy of God that Father Rank is sure he knows nothing about.(2)

(1) Ibid.p.265. (2) Ibid.p.272.

This picture is what we find again in the opening book of Greene's trilogy, Brighton Rock. This is set in Brighton, but Brighton is part of Greeneland, and Greeneland remains quite like Hell. 'This is Hell, nor are we out of it', says the crooked lawyer Prewitt, quoting Faustus, to the boy gangster Pinkie.(1) There is little need: Pinkie is Mephistophiles' nearest kinsman among Greene's characters, his eyes 'touched with the annihilating eternity from which he had come and to which he went'.(2) His creed is 'Credo in unum Satanum'(3), and although hell is to him a self-evident fact, the existence of heaven is merely a dubious inference from the existence of its opposite.(4) (Actually, the same could be said of much of Greene's work in general.) Pinkie is an ascetic who had once vowed to become a priest(5), but his devotion does not belong to heaven: instead he is one who enjoys 'the finest of all sensations, the infliction of pain'(6), and thinks of 'all the good times he'd had in the old days with nails and splinters: the tricks he'd learnt later with a razor-blade.'(7) In Pinkie's life, even more than in The Heart of the Matter, Heaven stays 'rigidly in its proper place': 'Hell lay about him in his infancy'(8), and grace never seems to have broken through the infernal monopoly.

An awful resentment stirred in him -why shouldn't he have had his chance like all the rest, seen his glimpse of heaven if it was only a crack between the Brighton walls.... He turned as they went down to Rottingdean and took a long look at Rose as if she might be it - but the brain couldn't conceive.... (9)

But things are little different for the other denizens of this God-abandoned part of Greeneland. Greene disposes early on of one of the alternatives to Pinkie, that of the 'modernist' religion represented by the clergyman at the funeral of Fred Hale, killed by Pinkie early in the book. Pinkie is convinced of hell, but has only a dubious concept of heaven: the clergyman has dispensed with hell, and heaven into the bargain. Greene makes short work of this particular target in the 'bare cold secular chapel' with its

impoverished jam-pots of wilting wild flowers. Ida was late. Hesitating a moment outside the door for fear the place might be full of Fred's friends, she thought someone had turned on the National Programme... 'We believe,' the clergyman said, glancing swiftly along the smooth polished slipway towards the New Art doors

(1) Brighton Rock (1938; Penguin edition of 1975),p.210.(2) Ibid,p.21. (3) Ibid,p.163. Even his phone number - three sixes(p.48) - is the mark of the beast in the book of Revelation.(4)Ibid. p.52. (5) Ibid,p.164. (6) Ibid,pp.101-102. (7) Ibid, p.51. (8) Ibid,p.68. (9) Ibid,p.228.

through which the coffin would be launched into the flames, 'we believe that this our brother is already at one with the One.' He stamped his words like little pats of butter with his personal mark. 'He has attained unity. We do not know what that One is with whom (or with which) he is now at one. We do not retain the old medieval beliefs in glassy seas and golden crowns....' He touched a little buzzer, the New Art doors opened, the flames flapped and the coffin slid smoothly down into the fiery sea. The doors closed, the nurse rose and made for the door, the clergyman smiled gently from behind the slipway, like a conjuror who has produced his nine hundred and fortieth rabbit without a hitch.(1)

The 'wilting' flowers, the confusion with the 'National Programme', and the pompous nonsense of 'Our brother is at one with the One... He has attained unity', matched by total vagueness as to what these words actually mean, combine to make a competent piece of butchery on Greene's part. A page later it turns out that what Fred Hale has become 'part of' is 'the smoke nuisance over London'; although the references to his being 'launched into the flames... the fiery sea' hint that there might be some reality to the 'old medieval beliefs' too. (Pinkie would certainly have thought so.) Having jettisoned these beliefs, however, the clergyman, with his coffin sliding smoothly down, is really no more than a conjuror producing rabbits 'without a hitch'; and God is nowhere to be found.

The other alternatives are represented by Ida Arnold and by Pinkie's wife Rose. Ida is the person who

(1) Ibid,p.35.

finally brings retribution on Pinkie, very much a woman of the people, easy-going in her morals, sharing the popular pleasures and the popular superstitions, simplistic and egoistic in her attitudes to right and wrong:

'I'm going to work on that kid every hour of the day until I get something.' She rose formidably and moved across the restaurant like a warship going into action, a warship on the right side in a war to end wars, the signal flags proclaiming that every man would do his duty. Her big breasts, which had never suckled a child of her own, felt a merciless compassion.(1)

As the novel progresses Ida's ideas of 'right and wrong' are set against the different universe of Pinkie and Rose, of evil and good. 'You can see she don't believe a thing.' says Rose of Ida; '... You can tell the world's all dandy with her.'(3) The world is God-deserted; Pinkie knows it, Rose knows it; to Ida, however, it's 'all dandy'. "'Right and wrong"', Rose says later with contempt. "'Oh, she won't burn. She couldn't burn if she tried.'" She

(1) Ibid.pp.120-21. (2) Ibid.pp.222-23. (3) Ibid.p.91.

might have been discussing a damp Catherine wheel.'(1) The universe Ida knows is very far from that of Pinkie and Rose (or of God): 'She was as far from either of them as she was from Hell - or Heaven. Good or evil lived in the same country, spoke the same language, came together like old friends.'(2) God would seem to have even less to do with this secularised 'damp Catherine-wheel' of a woman than with Pinkie himself.

And then finally there are the saints. Rose, it would seem from the references to 'good or evil', should be classed among these. But her sainthood does not amount to much: a concern that Pinkie should go to mass, an occasional attendance herself, a loyalty to Pinkie based on hardly any foundation (but then the girls in the restaurant where she works seem fairly desperate for husbands (3)), a willingness to be damned with Pinkie, and a rosary in a handbag. It is not very difficult to be a saint in Brighton Rock, it would seem, providing you are born that way.(4) But the relationship of all this to salvation through grace is nearer parody than enactment. In practice it seems that Rose, too, has no contact with God.

Thus, although Greene's novel sets up the spiritually conscious - Rose and Pinkie - as the characters that are fully alive ('She's just nothing', says Pinkie caustically of the sublunary Ida(1)), none of them have any real relationship with the divine. All of

(1) Ibid,pp.113-14. To Pinkie it seems that 'right and wrong' are controlled by the successful gangster Colleoni: 'He looked as a man might look who owned the whole world, the whole visible world that is, the cash registers and policemen and prostitutes, Parliament and the laws which say "this is Right and this is Wrong"'(P.65) - which obviously reflects on Ida. It is, one assumes, the invisible world of Good and Evil that is outside Colleoni's control. (2) Ibid, pp.126-27. (3) Ibid,p.195. (4) There is a resemblance here to that other Catholic novel, Brideshead Revisited.

them are deistically predestined to their own class. They belong

to a Brighton that is devoid of God: except, perhaps, in the mass - offstage, so far as the novel is concerned. Rose, in her desire to be damned along with Pinkie, worries that 'you couldn't tell what life would do to you in making you meek, good, repentant... You could win to the evil side suddenly, in a moment of despair or passion, but through a long life the guardian good drove you remorselessly toward the crib, the "happy death."' (2) But we do not see such a process occurring. Pinkie is damned from his birth; Rose, it seems, can do nothing to jeopardise her salvation; and Ida remains a nullity, without the contact with the spiritual universe that would make her human. It is not surprising that Greene has found himself accused of sharing the rigid Jansenist view of predestination.

And yet there is again a hint of the supernatural behind it all; and, as with The Heart of the Matter, the supernatural element moves finally into the picture at the book's culmination. Ida and her companion have a chance meeting with the gangsters on the pier: 'It's fate', says Ida. (3) Whether it is fate or not, Ida's persistent investigation gives Pinkie (who wants to get rid of his wife) a pretext for urging Rose to commit suicide; and they go out into the country, with Rose thinking it to be a suicide pact involving them

(1) Brighton Rock, p.127. (2) Ibid, p.241. (3) Ibid, p.221.

both. They call at a pub for a drink and Pinkie feels 'the prowling presence of pity'. (1) The latter is imaged as something locked outside:

He had a sense that somewhere, like a beggar outside a shuttered house, tenderness stirred, but he was bound in a habit of hate. He turned his back and went on up the stairs... Life would go on... The huge darkness pressed a wet mouth against the panes....

This is image and metaphor, of course, and refers primarily to what is going on inside Pinkie: and yet Greene contrives by his use of the 'outside' image to hint at something external and objective, some embodiment that is more than metaphor. The image is repeated when downstairs Pinkie watches two travellers making a contemptuous pass at Rose: 'Tenderness came up to the very window and looked in. What the hell right had they got to swagger and laugh...if she was good enough for him.'(2) But she isn't: he wants to be 'free again', and he and Rose drive on. She asks if he had hated her for sleeping with him.

He hadn't hated her.... There had been a kind of pleasure, a kind of pride, a kind of - something else.... An enormous emotion beat on him; it was like something trying to get in; the pressure of gigantic wings against the glass. *Dona nobis pacem*. He withstood it.... If the glass broke, if the beast -whatever it was - got in, God knows [sic] what it would do. He had a sense of huge havoc -the confession, the penance and the sacrament - and awful distraction, and he drove blind into the rain. He could see nothing through the cracked stained windscreen. (3)

This seems successful as a symbol of grace, hovering between mere metaphor and the mental embodiment Pinkie gives to something with external existence. Possibly it is a final revelation, Pinkie's last chance.

(1) Ibid.p.231. (2) Ibid.pp. 237-38. (3) Ibid,pp.239-40.

But it stays on the other side of the glass; and Pinkie leaves Rose, having given her a pistol and instructions to shoot. Rose, however, wants to live; that urge produces a verbalization of

itself which, as in the suicide in The Heart of the Matter, might just possibly be her 'guardian angel'.(1) If it is, then, again as in The Heart of the Matter, it achieves nothing; it is the arrival of Ida that prevents her shooting herself, not the inner voice. And if the apparition of grace beyond the windscreen was to prevent Pinkie from having an attempted murder on his conscience, it has failed there too; failed where the easy, shallow force of Ida Arnold succeeds.

Pinkie attempts to use his vitriol bottle, scalds his own face, then in agony - and mortal sin -leaps over the cliff. Rose, longing to be damned with Pinkie, goes back to the shivering priest, with his "appalling...strangeness of the mercy of God... We must hope", he said mechanically, "hope and pray."(2) But the ending of the book shows the hope he has 'mechanically' offered as being very fragile; Rose walks off towards 'the worst horror of all'(3), a taped message that is the proof of Pinkie's hatred for her.

Grace may have intervened at the crisis, then; but it seems, again, to be to little purpose. The Greenland of Brighton Rock is a place where human beings are abandoned until it is too late.

(1) Ibid,p.241. (2) Ibid, p.246. (3) Ibid, p.247.

Abandonment is also the keynote of the third book in the trilogy, The Power and the Glory. This is the story of how a 'whisky priest', the last priest in a particular part of Mexico, is hunted down and executed.

The world of Greene's Mexico is the same as that of The Heart of the Matter and Brighton Rock; here is how the novel opens:

Mr. Tench went out to look for his ether cylinder, into the blazing Mexican sun and the bleaching dust. A few vultures looked down from the roof with shabby indifference: he wasn't carrion yet. A faint feeling of rebellion stirred in Mr.Tench's heart, and he wrenched up a piece of the road with splintering finger-nails and tossed it feebly towards them. One rose and flapped across the town: over the tiny plaza, over the bust of an ex-president, ex-general, ex-human being, over the two stalls which sold mineral water, towards the river and the sea. It wouldn't find anything there: the sharks looked after the carrion on that side. Mr. Tench went on across the plaza.(1)

It is a world of devitalized physical discomfort where even the vultures are indifferent. The faintness and petty destructiveness of Mr.Tench's rebellion, and the splintering of his fingernails, give a sense of the futility of all effort; and the 'ex-president, ex-general, ex-human being', like the earlier 'he wasn't carrion yet', enforce a feeling of inevitable decay and disintegration in a world divided between the sharks and the vultures. Mr.Tench makes his way to the river bank:

(1) Graham Greene. The Power and the Glory (1940; Penguin edition of 1971. henceforth referred to as PG).p.7.

Mr.Tench stood in the shade of the customs house and thought: what am I here for? Memory drained out of him in the heat. He gathered his bile together and spat forlornly into the sun. Then he sat down on a case and waited. Nothing to do. Nobody would come to see him before five.

The General Obregon was about thirty yards long. A few feet of damaged rail, one lifeboat, a bell hanging on a rotten cord, an oil-lamp in the bow, she looked as if she might weather two or three more Atlantic years, if she didn't strike a Norther in the gulf. That, of course, would be the end of her. It didn't really matter: everybody was insured when he bought a ticket, automatically.(1)

Again, the overwhelming sense is of the unrewarding nature of all activity (even spitting), the collapse of the faculties (such as memory), and, overall, decay and worthlessness; whether the particular instance is that of the General Obregon or of her passengers, whose insurance would be the most significant thing about their deaths. Civilization's contribution has been to automatize the insurance: nothing has been done about death or the general futility of life. Human beings and their activities are in general not very significant in Greene's Mexico. Even in religion; we find the confession of the treacherous halfcaste presented as a typical, unimportant part of 'a world of treachery, violence and lust in which his shame was altogether insignificant'(2); God, it would appear, is not really interested. (Or at any rate the

(1) Ibid,p.8. (2) Ibid,p.97. A similar note is sounded by the priest the end of The Heart of the Matter:

'A priest only knows the unimportant things.'

'Unimportant?'

'Oh, I mean the sins...' (THOTM,p.271).

priest who is the book's central character is not; and at that point, as the priest journeys through the wilderness with his betrayer, most of what he says seems to be endorsed by his author.)

Just such a sense of the unimportance of man played a significant part in Scobie's tragedy in The Heart of the Matter. (Scobie's prayer, for example, was 'a formality...because it had never occurred to him that his life was important enough one way or another.'(1))It is an attitude that can appropriately be contrasted with the alert, faith-impelled responsiveness called for in the New Testament by the apostle Peter: 'Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you. Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith...' (2) Such a sense of spiritual reality was a motivating force in the Puritan contribution to the rise of the novel, as we noted early on in this study. But Greene's world lacks the awareness of such realities; and, in God's absence, lethargy, spiritual and physical, seems the inevitable consequence of the environment. The circumstances are to blame; it is the natural, created but Creator-less universe that is all wrong. Man's situation is determined by the forces that come to bear on him. In the absence of God, the heat is presented as the most important of these.

This depiction of man is particularly paradoxical given Greene's own insistence in his essays that the importance of the human act depends on the religious sense.(3) A greater awareness of human significance does indeed surface in the whisky priest's last desperate words to his illegitimate daughter -

My dear, my dear, try to understand that you are - so important.... You must take care of yourself because you are so - necessary. The president up in the capital goes guarded by men with guns but my child, you have all the angels of heaven.... (4)

- but unfortunately the novel's world demonstrates far more clearly the need to 'take care of yourself' than the possibility of anyone being concerned in heaven. Still, a similar faith informs the priest's compassion for the halfcaste who betrays him, despite his unconcern about the latter's sin and confession. In a sense the priest, as (we are to believe) God's final representative, is the last fitful outpost of faith in human worth: all around him is a universe hostile to man's significance.

R.W.B.Lewis quotes Greene's remarks on Conrad that 'All he retained of Catholicism was the ironic sense of an omniscience and of the final unimportance of human life under the watching eyes'(5). and suggests that 'It is a paradox. and a perfectly sound

(1) Ibid, p.115. (2) 1 Peter 5:7-9. (3) Graham Greene, Collected Essays (1969; Penguin edition of 1970).p.91. (4) PG, p.82. (5) Collected Essays,p.140; quoted R.W.B.Lewis,The Picaresque Saint (1960), p.233. In Nostramo as in The Power and the Glory this sense is conveyed by use of the sun.

and traditional one, that human life is both infinitely important and infinitely unimportant from the divine standpoint.'(1) This is true: yet although Christianity is aware that man set beside God is no more than 'a drop in a bucket'(2), the main emphasis in the New Testament is that Christ's death on Calvary was the value God set on us - and on human sin, which is the point Greene raises in the passage about the halfcaste's confession. But in The Power and the Glory, there are few signs of the nearness and involvement of God, of 'watching eyes' that might contain love and concern for man. The priest's activities are almost the sole exception, for example in the mass(3) -but even he, like Father Rank in The Heart of the Matter, is not enabled to do his job properly: 'If only one could find the right word... He leant hopelessly back... But the right words never came to him.'(5) In The Power and the Glory we are faced with a 'huge abandonment'(6), an 'abandoned star'.(7) 'It was as if man in all this state had been left to man. '(8)

(1) R.W.B.Lewis, *ibid.* (2) Cf. Isaiah 40:15. (3) PG, p.151. Indeed, the priest feels that God is totally dependent on him: 'When he was gone it would be as if God in all this space between the sea and the mountains ceased to exist'(ibid,p.65). (5) *Ibid*,p.132. (6) *Ibid*,p.18. (7) *Ibid*, p.30. Here the effect is generalised to a statement about the world in general. The radio broadcasts from England have this function in The Heart of the Matter. (8)PG, p.150.

The Power and the Glory in a sense offers a definition of the ways in which it is possible for sainthood to operate in such a situation. As such it comes as a reply to the simplistic black-and-white idealizations of the piece of hagiography that the pious Catholic woman reads to her children.(1) For, despite his fornication and drunkenness and unreliability, despite the fact that he is in a continual state of mortal sin, the whisky priest - like Scobie - is presented to us as something of a saint. When he comes to one village, he is badgered by an old man to hear confession and celebrate the Mass: the priest responds impatiently and irritably (he wants to get some sleep), and he falls asleep at the end of the confession. But his tiredness has already gained our sympathy, and we feel that his annoyance is understandable.

His eyes closed, his lips and tongue stumbled over the Absolution, failed to finish... he sprang awake again.

'Can I bring the woman?' the old man was saying. 'It is five years...'

'Oh, let them come. Let them all come', the priest cried angrily. 'I am your servant.' He put his hand over his eyes and began to weep. The old man...went across to the women's huts and knocked. 'Come,' he said, 'You must say your confessions. It is only polite to the father.'

(1) Ibid, pp.25ff, 49ff, 217ff.

They wailed at him that they were tired... the morning would do. 'Would you insult him?' he said. 'What do you think he has come here for? He is a very holy father. There he is in my hut now, weeping for our sins.' He hustled them out... (1)

Here all our sympathy is engaged on the side of the priest's weariness. (The reader may well feel sympathy by this stage with any character who is tired: there can be few novelists with Greene's ability to make the reader feel and share in the enervated exhaustion of his world.) So what is conveyed is not the discrepancy between the old man's description 'He is a very holy father' and the reality we have seen, even in this episode, but a sense that possibly, paradoxically, the old man might be right: that anyone who does anything like their duty in such a 'huge abandonment' deserves our respect. And as he weeps, although it may be from tiredness and vexation and not 'for our sins' as the old man imagines, he wins our compassion.

To this end Greene makes use of hinted parallels with Christ (the man who preaches to the poor is betrayed by a Judas-figure: 'He knew. He was in the presence of Judas'(2)); and there is the symbolic identification when the priest and an American gangster figure in the 'wanted' posters - 'Somebody had inked round the priest's head to detach him from the girls' and the women's faces: the unbearable grin peeked out of a halo'(3), where 'the unbearable grin peeked' saves the halo from being obtrusively

(1) Ibid. p.45. (2) Ibid,p.91. (3) Ibid,p.58.

portentous. More importantly there are his actions: his mention in the jail of the price on his head, because 'if there was an informer here, there was no reason why the wretched creature should be bilked of his reward'(1); his repeated compassion for the halfcaste who, he knows, is going to betray him(2); and finally his journey back into danger across the mountains, after hardly surviving his first crossing into safety: going knowingly to his death to give confession to an American gangster dying in mortal sin.(3)

Indeed, even our knowledge of his vices is mobilised to contribute to this presentation of the whisky-priest as saint. It becomes, to use a phrase from the end of Brighton Rock, 'a case of greater love hath no man than this that he lay down his soul for his friend'(4), because the priest believes his own soul is in a state of mortal sin as he goes back across the border to capture and death, and that his death will therefore mean, not a momentary suffering, but an eternity of loss. Still, there is perhaps an element of authorial sleight-of-hand at this point; for the vices Greene presents are mostly such as will not damn his hero in the reader's eyes. (Nobody in Greeneland seems to be able to do much with prayer but neglect it; and fornication and drunkenness are sins that the reader of the modern novel has been trained to treat leniently, and the lapses mostly take place 'offstage', as far as the reader is concerned.) Hence, when the priest finds himself unable to communicate with his illegitimate daughter (who is, it seems, damned from the start), it is compassion for him that the reader is led to feel, and not a sense that it is his fault his daughter is in this situation, that the price he has caused her to pay is greater than that he has brought on himself. The assessment we accept is that of his opponent: "'You aren't a bad fellow", the Lieutenant said grudgingly.'(5) In Greene's 'abandoned star' this is the best we can expect: God is (almost) absent, and those who find themselves called to be saints must muddle on as best they can, on their own.

But again we should notice how different this is from the vision of the New Testament. Paul emphasises repeatedly that holiness and Christlikeness are unattainable in our own strength; but they may however be brought about slowly by the power of the Spirit within us.(6) The human weakness is there in Greene, certainly: but is there much more than an ironical embodiment of the 'power and the glory'? One wonders whether this rogue-saint figure, predicated as it is on God's absence or inactivity, does not owe (or surrender) a great deal to a non-Christian ethos, in its

(1) Ibid,p.128.(2) Ibid,pp.95,182,197. (3) Ibid,p.180. (4) Brighton Rock,p.246. (5) PG p.201. The sceptic Bendrix is used to establish Sarah's sainthood in the same way in The End of the Affair. (6) Eg Paul's classic treatment in Romans 7 and 8.

thorough reinterpretation of the notion of holiness.(1) As a presentation of the product of an individual's own unaided efforts it might be acceptable; but the postulate of omnipotent grace intervening should open up another dimension of possibility. It may be, indeed, as Mauriac and others have suggested, that sainthood is extremely hard to portray in a novel(2); but that cannot be true of simple goodness - one thinks of Dilsey in Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury, for example. It is true, too, that every Christian is aware that God's strength is 'made perfect in weakness'(3); that is an integral part of the very idea of grace - St.Paul was very aware that apart from the power of the Holy Spirit 'the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practise the very evil that I do not wish'.(4) So any fictional portrayal must take seriously the need for 'warts-and-all' presentation of the negatives, the failures. Still, the Christian is not expected to exhibit quite the lack of integrity of a drunken, fornicating priest -a figure which, all things considered, deserves few admirers among Christians or humanists. Accepting that, as R.W.B.Lewis insists, complexity and contradictoriness may be essential elements in the depiction of a successfully 'good' figure(5), we can nevertheless assert that goodness - even a real power and a real glory - triumphing amid very real weakness is a mark of ordinary, not particularly outstanding, mortals of our acquaintance, who can (with skill) have fitting fictional analogues. For the Christian, the possibility of goodness through the power of grace is an essential part of their vision. The Holy Spirit came to convict the world, not only of the existence of sin, but also of the existence of righteousness(6); and the practical demonstration of this possibility was part of the charge Christ gave to His disciples.(7) Otherwise the awareness of man's failure ceases to be part of any conceivable 'gospel' or 'good news', but rather an announcement that everybody is trapped. The Power and the Glory is all too much like that.

Yet, once again, the absence of God is not quite the whole story in Greenland. It is a fair description of how the priest experiences

(1) It is worth noting that R.W.B.Lewis -who argues in The Picaresque Saint that the saint-figure in contemporary fiction must be at least half rogue - suggests that this 'crucial connection between sainthood and roguery - with all the attendant paradoxes' is expressed 'beyond anything elsewhere proposed in this generation' by the existentialist Sartre, in Saint Genet -Comedien et Martyr(Lewis, p.308). (2) Cf. Francois Mauriac, God and Mammon, quoted A.A.De Vitis in Graham Greene: Some Critical Considerations, ed. Robert O Evans (Kentucky, 1963), p.117. (3) 2 Corinthians 12:9. (4) Romans 7:19. (5) Lewis, op.cit.,p.213. Cf. also Lionel Trilling: 'We think that virtue is not interesting, even that it is not really virtue, unless it manifests itself as a product of "grace" operating through a strong inclination to sin.' ('Jane Austen and Mansfield Park', in The Pelican Guide to English Literature, ed. Boris Ford, Vol.V (1957; revised edition of 1969),p.116.) (6) John 16:8-11. (7) Matthew 5:16, John 13:35.

things, most of the time; but nonetheless there is a hint of providence at work. When the priest is captured and put in jail, he muses that

It was, of course, the end, but at the same time you had to be prepared for anything, even escape. If God intended him to escape He could snatch him away from in front of a firing squad. But God was merciful. There was only one reason, surely, which would make Him refuse His peace - if there was any peace - that he could still be of use in saving a soul, his own or another's.(1)

And, indeed, he is released. 'God had decided. He had to go on with life, go on making decisions, acting on his own advice, making plans.'(1) Once again, there is no sustained divine guidance involved here; the saint remains alone, with providence intervening in the hunt for him only to dictate the timing of the kill - a bizarre variant on the hound of heaven, rather than a companion through the valley of the shadow of death. We are left to guess that the point of the escape, and the unexpectedly safe journey over the mountains ('as if Somebody had determined that from now on he was to be left alone - altogether alone'(2)), are overruled to make possible the sacrifice of crossing the border yet again on the road back to martyrdom.(3) (Perhaps, too, his escape makes possible the long ride with the lieutenant, which at least jolts the latter's atheism.) Certainly, when the double journey is completed and he is captured again, he knows there will be no further escape. He believes in miracles, but 'not for me. I'm no more good to anyone, so why should God keep me alive?'(4)

In the end, The Power and the Glory, like the other two novels in the trilogy, would seem to point to a 'kingdom of heaven' that remains fairly 'rigidly in its proper place' on the other side of the watertight firmament between this life and the next. Concerning that next life the priest is not hopeful: 'If there's ever been a single man in this state damned, then I'll be damned too', he says to the Lieutenant. 'I wouldn't want it to be any different. I just want justice, that's all.'(5) But the reader knows that this demand for justice is discounting mercy: as the priest says just before, 'I don't know a thing about the mercy of God.' And it seems that the priest's lack of any faith in this mercy is to be considered unimportant; for some such possibility of mercy is suggested in his last dream before his execution. Greene's dream scenes always have a good deal of power without being particularly explicit, and this is no exception. The priest is eating a meal of six dishes, which 'did not taste of much', expecting the seventh to be the best,

(1) PG, p.129. Ibid,p.138. (2) Ibid,p.148. (3) It is possible too that the hunt does what the priest had felt only a confessor could do: 'to draw his mind slowly down the drab passages which led to grief and repentance' (ibid,p.128; cf.p.210). (4) Ibid, p.201. (5) Ibid,p.200.

while meanwhile mass is being celebrated, ignored by him:

At last the six plates were empty; someone out of sight rang the sanctus bell. and the serving priest knelt before he raised the Host. But he sat on, just waiting, paying no attention to the God over the altar, as though that were a God for other people and not for him. Then the glass by his plate began to fill with wine, and looking up he saw that the child from the banana station was serving him. She said, 'I got it from my father's room.'

'You didn't steal it?'

'Not exactly', she said in her careful and precise voice.

He said, 'It is very good of you. I had forgotten the code - what did you call it?'

'Morse.'

'That was it. Morse. Three long taps and one short one,' and immediately the taps began: the priest by the altar tapped, a whole invisible congregation tapped along the aisles - three long and one short. He asked, 'What is it?'

'News,' the child said. watching him with a stern, responsible and interested gaze.(1)

What this 'means' is not clear: but it would seem that it is the priest's relationships with others, especially his love for his daughter (which 'seemed to contain all that he felt himself of repentance'(2)), that make up for what is lacking in his relationship with the God of Mexico's abandonment. Earlier in the book. the girl from the banana station had promised to help him if he signalled in Morse; she seems to be presented as his spiritual daughter(3), so paralleling his physical daughter, Brigitta. Hence, while, as he thinks to himself, he has loved all the wrong things' -the dishes which 'did not

(1) Ibid.pp.209-210. (2) Ibid.p.147. (3) Ibid.pp.52-53.214.

taste of much' -and has neglected his prayers and religious duties, yet, through the daughter-relationship, he can nevertheless be given the

sacramental wine he has ignored and the help he has forgotten to ask for. And we may also understand the dream as implying perhaps that the priest is being assisted through the girl's prayers: she is now dead(1), and in the dream she brings the sacramental wine 'from my father's room... with a stern, responsible and interested gaze.' The priest has forgotten the Morse code for help (just as in reality he has forgotten his prayers(2)), and is 'paying no attention to the God over the altar, as though that were a God for other people and not for him' (just as in reality he believes that miraculous deliverances occur 'But not for me'(3)). Appropriately, then, when he receives the wine from the child, it is by means that do not adhere strictly to the rulebook: just like his love. The dream is a very effective way for Greene to hint that grace may be operating in this situation after all.

But, when all is said and done, few people benefit from it. By staying at his post the priest wins just one convert - the boy Luis(4). At the end of the book Luis goes to bed feeling 'cheated and disappointed', disgusted with the lieutenant's successful extinction of the priests and the heroes; he dreams of the dead priest winking at him, and wakes straightaway to find another priest - again, 'a tall pale man with a rather sour mouth... with an odd frightened smile' -at the door. Providence has still its purposes, it seems, even in the 'vast abandonment'; but it remains that abandonment that sets the dominant tone. Grace keeps only a foothold on

(1) Cf. ibid, pp.140ff, pp.211ff. (2) Ibid, p.196. (3) Ibid, p.201. (4) Ibid, pp.219-22.

this side of death, and most of its activity seems devoted to bringing that foothold to martyrdom. Otherwise, the world is left to itself; which is a rather bizarre kind of Christianity.

So here we have the problem. The major religious novelist of the mid-twentieth century turns out to be building fictional worlds from which God is absent, where heaven stays 'rigidly on the other side of death' - almost. In that 'almost' lies the specificity of Greene's vision. Admittedly the real causality of the supernatural events in these novels is not entirely certain: the voice that pleads with Scobie in the powerful scenes at the end of The Heart of the Matter might be purely subjective; the whisky priest might be wrong about his unexpected release and escape; Pinkie might be wrong about the 'something trying to get in' at the close of Brighton Rock. Of these three, Brighton Rock is the instance that can most plausibly be seen as mere subjective experience or mere metaphor. But neither Scobie nor the whisky priest nor Pinkie - the people who seem to know best the worlds they inhabit - would see the supernatural world as anything but real. Greene's trilogy seems therefore to invite the reader to contemplate the possible objective reality of grace; the pattern of each book suggests that the causality of its events is in fact providential, supernaturalistic. So it is not a formal difficulty that hinders the full emergence of the Christian pattern in Greene's narrative; the problem is theological.

We have not yet considered Greene's later novel The End of the Affair. But a speech from that book gives a valuable clue to the world of Greene's trilogy. Towards the end of the book, Bendrix, apostrophizing Sarah, reflects on the problems involved in loving God: 'Loving you I had no appetite for food, I felt no lust for any other woman, but loving him there'd be no pleasure in anything at all with him away.' (1)

This quotation surely summarizes the world the trilogy gives us. Greene, as a theist, is entirely aware of the extent to which all value depends on the existence of God; consequently a sense of God's absence, of the world as an 'abandoned star' in which Scobie, the whisky priest et al are left to the mercy of circumstances, creates in him a deeper horror than it would in an atheistic writer. 'There'd be no pleasure in anything at all with Him away';

(1) The End of the Affair (1951; Penguin edition of 1962), p.182.

there is, indeed, very little pleasure at all in the largely God
-abandoned Greeneland. Because Greene's spirituality is so hapless and
joyless, his whole world grows futile.

But here is the complication. Greene does not present this drab
sense of an absence as a result of spiritual myopia on his
characters' part; instead, the attitudes expressed by, say, Scobie
are endorsed by the narration, the other protagonists, in fact the
whole of the rest of the fictional world. Man is experiencing
alienation, not because he has chosen to try to run his own world
without God (which is the diagnosis of the problem in the biblical
system(1) -and which means the alienation can be swept away and
relationship with God restored through the cross(2)); instead it
seems to stem from the fundamental metaphysical nature of the
universe, in which there appears to be a 'great gulf fixed' between
the sphere of Nature where we are and the sphere of Grace where God
may be. Divine sovereignty becomes limited moatly to the latter sphere
(remaining 'rigidly on the other side of death') , and our human
struggles and problems cease to be under its control, even for those
who seek and desire it. 'You could

(1) Cf., for example, Isaiah 59:2: 'Your iniquities have made a
separation between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face
from you so that He does not hear.' (2) Ephesians 2 is a classic
expression of this vision; cf also 2 Corinthians 5:19-20. The
distinction between a 'moral cause' of the human dilemma and a
'metaphysical cause' is highlighted by Francis Schaeffer in
The God Who is There (1968),pp.99-100, as a vital distinction between
the orthodox biblical worldview and existentialist-orientated
theology.

trust God to make allowances', muses the whisky-priest, 'but you couldn't trust small-pox, starvation, men...' (1) -nor, presumably, could you rely upon the presence of God in such dangerous matters. Brighton Rock enacts the disjunction by putting morality, as embodied by Ida Arnold, within the sphere of Nature, separated from Grace. Francis X. Connolly has commented that in this book 'there is a trace of savage Manicheism in his resentment of well-being', a sign of a rejection of the idea that 'the same God who created the supernatural order created the natural order.' (2)

And that is not overstating the case. Greene himself has spoken of 'the eternal and alluring taint of the Manichee, with its simple and terrible explanation of our plight, how that the world was made by Satan and not by God' (3); and in 'The Lost Childhood' he expresses the vision that possessed him from an early age:

It was as if I had been supplied once and for all with a subject... Goodness has only once found a perfect incarnation in a human body and never will again, but evil can always find a home there. Human nature is not black and white but black and grey. I read all that in The Viper of Milan and I looked round and I saw that it was so... Religion might later explain it to me in other terms, but the pattern was already there - perfect evil walking the world where perfect good can never walk again, and only the pendulum ensures that after all in the end justice is done. (4)

(1) PG, p.66. (2) Francis X. Connolly, 'The Spiritual Adventures of Graham Greene', Renascence, I, Spring 1949, p.20. (3) Collected Essays, p.86. (4) Ibid, p. 16-17.

How different this is from Christ's jubilant promise at the close of Matthew's Gospel: 'Surely, I will be with you always, to the very end of the age.'(1) In the world of the trilogy, 'perfect good' indeed 'never walks again', is not 'with you always'; instead of providence, we seem to be left at the mercy of the 'pendulum' (and, indeed, in Brighton Rock, the pit). Grace has become a power that is alien, unpredictable, and alarming: 'You can't conceive', says the shivering, sneezing priest at the end of Brighton Rock, '...nor can I or anyone the... appalling strangeness of the mercy of God. '(2) The Heart of the Matter closes on the same note: 'Father Rank clapped the cover of the diary to and said furiously, "For goodness' sake, Mrs Scobie, don't imagine you -or I -know a thing about God's mercy"'(3)- which eliminates the idea of God making His purposes known by revelation. The priest remarks to the lieutenant towards the end of The Power and the Glory:

We wouldn't recognise that love. It might even look like hate. It would be enough to scare us - God's love... Oh, a man like me would run a mile to get away if he felt that love around... I don't know a thing about the mercy of God.(4)

This is a grace that can also tempt like vice. Rose's guardian angel 'tempted her to virtue like a sin.... It would be an act of cowardice.... The evil act was the honest act, the bold and the faithful.'(5) Scobie

(1) Matthew 28:20. (2) BR, p.246. (3) THOTM,p.272. (4) PG,p.200.
(5) BR, pp.241-42. (6) PG;p.49.

feels that 'Virtue, the good life, tempted him in the dark like a sin.'(1) These bizarre reversals have of course a surprise value that is novelistically effective: but it is bought at the price of despair, of an insoluble ambiguity. For the whole movement of these books seems to postulate a deeper truth or higher order behind the ostensible activities of grace, by which Rose, Scobie and the whisky priest are justified in their resistance to the blandishments of `virtue', and to the apparently exclusive claims of heaven. When Rose remains loyal to Pinkie, the reader surely seems intended by Greene to feel she is 'in the right', and already far from her goal of alliance with the Herod who murdered the innocents - demon-lover though Pinkie may be. When the whisky priest turns from his own confession at Las Casas, and (effectively) from eternity in heaven, to see to the dying murderer at the cost of dying in mortal sin himself, we feel that his course of action is the unselfish and therefore right one. (To the non-Catholic Christian, of course, the problem is an unreal one in this case.) And the same is obviously true when Scobie refuses to look after himself rather than Helen - 'I know the answers... One should look after one's soul at whatever cost to another, and that's what I can't do.'(2) There is a clear implication that Rose, Scobie and the whisky priest might be acting in accordance with the will of God in spite of 'the teaching of the church'.

But such a reconciliation of human love (including adultery) with the will of God does not alter the basic 'appalling strangeness' of grace in Greeneland. For we are left with a choice. One possibility is that grace is indeed the tempter, luring the faithful into an egoistic salvation at whatever cost to others. Or, if this is not the case, then the will of God recedes further into a deeper level of mystery, beyond and without revelation, and there is a major disjunction between God's will and its ostensible manifestations. Both orthodoxy and, crucially, the voice of God that Greene presents pleading with Scobie shortly before his suicide(3) urge Scobie to end his affair with Helen; hence, on this reading, both turn out to be completely unreliable guides to the real intents and activities of grace, which remains as paradoxical and unknowable as ever. The model Greene creates of the conflicting pull of a human love with divine love is indeed a picture of what many people may genuinely experience (particularly if they are believers committing adultery); but the model includes no clear sense of what the presence of God is doing and saying in such a situation. (In The End of the Affair, as we shall see, Greene grasps this particular nettle.)

(1) THOTM,p.I86. It has been pointed out that the alien character of Greene's religion takes on a quasi-pornographic character, what with the whisky priest's religious book disguised as a salacious novel (PG,p.I8), and Sarah's apparent adultery in The End of the Affair which turns out to be a religious conversion. We find the same in England Made Me (1935) where Minty goes to church 'with the caution and dry-mouthed excitement of a secret debauchee' (quoted R.W.B.Lewis, op.cit.,p.233). As an apologetic strategy, this is perhaps a little double-edged. (2) THOTM,p.I84. (3) Ibid,p.259. It should be noted that the voice clearly envisages a farewell to Helen as the best option open to Scobie.

As far as Scobie is concerned, therefore, God is not to be trusted, and he tells Him so: 'No, I don't trust you. I've never trusted you.'(1) This is, in fact, the crucial point. Scobie will not rely on God's care to see to the consequences for Helen if Scobie himself acts according to God's will and leaves her. Consequently he must usurp God's role in history as the giver of life and death(2), and seize for himself the death God has not granted in an attempt to snatch the happiness for others that God apparently grudges to give.

(1) Ibid, p.259. (2) The point is David H. Hesla's, in Evans, op.cit.,p.108.

An illuminating contrast may be supplied by referring back to an author writing from within a more orthodox framework, Charlotte Bronte in Jane Eyre. In this novel, a situation parallel to that of Scobie and Helen arises when Jane feels it is God's will for her to leave Rochester, even though his despair is liable to be a formidable and destructive force: if it is definitely God's will, then He has foreseen and will take care of the consequences:

I had risen to my knees to pray for Mr Rochester. Looking up, I, with tear-dimmed eyes, saw the mighty Milky Way. Remembering what it was - what countless systems there swept space like a soft trace of light - I felt the might and strength of God. Sure was I of His efficiency to save what He had made... I turned my prayer to thanksgiving: the Source of Life was also the Saviour of Spirits. Mr Rochester was safe: he was God's, and by God would he be guarded. I again nestled to the breast of the hill: and ere long in sleep forgot sorrow.(1)

And the later events of the story endorse Jane's faith: matters turn out for the best as they would not otherwise have done, as Rochester himself says at the close of the book. Charlotte Bronte's characters are given an orthodox faith and they are prepared to act on it.

Greene's, however, are not: in his novels the just cannot live by faith. As far as Scobie is concerned, when it comes to the point, God is not to be relied upon: and, indeed, providence is shown as doing little in the novel to make that lack of trust seem culpable. Greene's heroes are left largely at the

(1) Charlotte Bronte, Jane Eyre (1847: Penguin edition of 1966), p.351.

mercy of circumstances, as we noted in the case of Scobie's adultery.

And this in turn becomes an accusation of God. Scobie tells God.

If you made me you made this feeling of responsibility that I've always carried about like a sack of bricks... I'm responsible and I'll see it through the only way I can.(1)

Looking up towards the Cross on the altar he thought savagely: Take your sponge of gall. You made me what I am. Take the spear thrust. (2)

All in all, then, the vision of Greene's powerful but enervating trilogy is of a devitalized universe where God's activity is either absent or unpredictably alien. The power and the glory have metamorphosed into something new and strange; the coming of the all-powerful, all-loving Holy Spirit, the 'Comforter', at Pentecost might just as well not have happened. There is no sign of a God who 'is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us'(4), and

(1) THOTM,p.259. (2) Ibid,p.224. (4) Ephesians 3:20.

hence nothing that matches the exuberant Pauline summons to `rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice.'(1) Scobie's version of charity, unguided, unaided, blunders to death; the whisky-priest is accompanied, not by a sense of God's presence in his persecution, but of God's absence and his own abandonment and damnation, and all he has to show for his troubles are one posthumous conversion and his own martyrdom; and Rose walks off in the last sentence of Brighton Rock to 'the worst horror of all', the message of hate that will smash what hope her priest has given her. It is a Christianity catering for -and seemingly accepting as unchallengeable - a readership that has lost its faith in grace and hope.

To say all this is not to reflect upon the stature of Greene's novels considered purely as aesthetic constructs. But it does point towards the question asked by Martin Turnell when he suggests that

The disparity between the quality of his religion and his artistic experience means that religion fails to provide a proper discipline, that the depth of his artistic experience is not balanced by a corresponding depth of religious experience.(2)

On the one hand the religion of Greene's world is just a part of the overall wretchedness, on the other the wretchedness reflects on the value and reality of the religious experience. It is a heterodox vision. Yet, even so, it must be noted that Greene does not submit to the dominant naturalistic convention. It would seem that the workings of providence are, even in their apparent alienness, a significant part of the patterns of his trilogy. One can only conclude that in a novel with a pattern based more consistently on biblical Christianity, the power of grace could be rather more present and trustworthy; but certainly no less of a factor to be taken into account.

And something a little more like this is what we find in The End of the Affair. Here the workings of grace play a key role in the novel's action, and require a detailed examination.

(1) Philippians 4:4. (2) Martin Turnell, Modern Literature and Christian Faith (1961), p.64.

(iv) Deviant Visions: THE END OF THE AFFAIR

In The End of the Affair, some of the dominant marks of Greeneland are still present. London in 1939 has been a place where 'the sense of happiness had been a long while dying'(1):

The door of the bar opened and I could see the rain lashing down against the light. A little hilarious man darted in and called out, 'Wot cher, everybody,' and nobody answered.(2)

But this atmosphere does not pervade the novel with the same oppressive tawdriness as in the trilogy. For The End of the Affair is a story of genuine (albeit adulterous) love (3); it tells of the affair of the narrator, the novelist Maurice Bendrix, with Sarah, the wife of a highly conventional civil servant named Henry. Sarah is notable for 'her beauty and her happiness'(4), and capable of shattering her lover's 'reserve' with avowals of love of 'such sweetness and amplitude'(5)- most unlike the women of the trilogy. Although the two of them are very much in love, Sarah abruptly terminates their liaison after Bendrix is apparently killed by a bomb and then, as she believes, miraculously resurrected in response to a prayer in which she promises to give him up if he lives again. From that point onwards a real love for God develops in Sarah - a real 'affair' with God, in the terms of the book's central metaphor. So the novel is a chronicle of thoroughgoing and devoted affection: and this is a novelty in Greeneland.

(1) Graham Greene, The End of the Affair (1951),p.25, henceforth referred to as TEOTA. Unless otherwise indicated, all references are to the Penguin edition of 1975. (2) Ibid,p.12. (3) Harvey Curtis Webster describes this affair as 'the first in Greene to be presented as true passion that brings real happiness whilst it lasts.' (Evans,op.cit. ,p.21.) (4) TEOTA,p.25. (5) Ibid, p.30.

Similarly, though the heroine dies and the hero, at the end of the book, is still a determined atheist, yet there is a clear sense in the book of a purposive providence at work. If the seediness is still present, it no longer implies the absence of God: the world has not been abandoned.(1) This is not to say that the world-picture of The End of the Affair is entirely orthodox from a biblical perspective. Some of Greene's presentations of sexuality might well seem voyeuristic to the Christian reader, for example. But it seems plain that Greene's whole vision has altered considerably here; and it is significant that this has happened in a book where the providential is overtly represented. The whole novel turns on a miracle, and it is the atheist hero who is confused, doubting, and by the end of the book using every dodge he can master to retain his atheism; rather than the religious hero clinging with difficulty to faith that we find elsewhere in Greene. The involvement of God is an intrusive possibility from the very first paragraph:

If I had believed then in a God, I could also have believed in a hand, plucking at my elbow, a suggestion, 'Speak to him: he hasn't seen you yet.' (1)

This is the keynote of a story open to the presence of the Christian supernatural in a way that goes well beyond what we find in the trilogy.

(1) Bendrix's comment that the whole world would soon 'be abandoned to our own devices' (ibid,p.68) need not be seen as more than an expression of his melancholy: in the narrative as a whole, God has evidently not finished with the world.

The crucial turning point of the novel, the point that Bendrix describes -in the words of the title - as 'the end of the whole "affair"' (1), is likewise a point where God breaks into their lives. It is narrated in the fifth chapter of Book Two. Bendrix commences this section of his narrative by recording Sarah's words 'Love doesn't end. Just because we don't see each other... People go on loving God, don't they, all their lives without seeing Him?' His own response is immediate:

'That's not our kind of love.'

'I sometimes don't believe there's any other kind.' I suppose I should have recognised that she was already under a stranger's influence - she had never spoken like that when we were first together. We had agreed so happily to eliminate God from our world. (2)

But it is not for human beings to agree so carelessly to 'eliminate God from our world': the 'stranger' is one who can suddenly and unexpectedly step into the heart of the action. Bendrix has been caught under debris from a bomb blast:

I never heard the explosion, and I woke after five seconds or five minutes in a changed world... My mind for a few moments was clear of everything except a sense of tiredness as though I had been on a long journey. I had no memory at all of Sarah and I was completely free from anxiety, jealousy, insecurity, hate: my mind was a blank sheet on which somebody had just been on the point of writing a message of happiness. (3)

As Sarah's later account reveals, this is the moment when Bendrix was probably dead - a 'long journey' indeed, and one in which his liaison has no place, any more than should 'anxiety, jealousy, insecurity, hate'. His resuscitation represents the intervention of the 'stranger'. Greene is cautious in his presentation of the reality of the death and the miracle; only one piece of evidence is offered, an 'odd' inconsistency between Bendrix's physical condition and what must have happened to him if the miracle did not take place:

(1) Ibid, p.68. (2) Ibid, p.69. (3) Ibid, p.71.

What balanced over me, shutting out the light, was the front door: some other debris had caught it and suspended it a few inches above my body, though the odd thing was that later I found myself bruised from the shoulders to the knees as if by its shadow.(1)

On rising, Bendrix finds Sarah, and her first reaction is 'Oh, God, you're alive' (an ambiguous exclamation that could also be read as a prayer of discovery):

'What were you doing on the floor?' I asked.

'Praying.'

'Who to?'

'To anything that might exist.'

'It would have been more practical to come downstairs.'

'I did. I couldn't lift the door.'

'There was room to move me. The door wasn't holding me. I'd have woken up.'

'I don't understand. I knew for certain you were dead.'

'There wasn't much to pray for then, was there?' I teased her. 'Except a miracle.'

'When you are hopeless enough,' she said, 'you can pray for miracles. They happen, don't they, to the poor, and I was poor.' (2)

The conversation is credible enough. The miracle, if miracle it is, is offstage, indistinct, and the reactions of the characters are what is brought to our attention. Perhaps Sarah is merely hysterical (but she has seemed shrewd enough hitherto); or perhaps the other alternative is true. The miraculous intrusion of God and the commencement of Sarah's new 'affair' are discreetly managed.

(1) Ibid. (2) Ibid, pp.72-73.

So, too, with Sarah's account of the event, later in the book.

Sarah thought Maurice was dead:

Now, of course, I know that this was hysteria. I was cheated. He wasn't dead. Is one responsible for what one promises in hysteria? Or what promises one breaks? I'm hysterical now, writing all this down.(1)

But the hysteria is suspect. The tone of the writing is calm, and Sarah has obvious reasons for wanting to believe in her hysteria: and as we doubt her hysteria, we give credence to the miracle. Indeed, even the hysteria leads towards God. She is writing all this down because she cannot tell anyone, since her husband Henry must be protected; and that annoys her:

Oh, to hell with Henry, to hell with Henry. I want somebody who'll accept the truth about me and doesn't need protection. If I'm a bitch and a fake, is there nobody who will love a bitch and a fake? (2)

That description is a reflection on herself at the time of writing, a day or so after the miracle; after making it she returns to her narrative of the 'miracle' itself. But there is a logical connection between her expression of human need for unrejecting love, and what immediately follows:

I knelt down on the floor: I was mad to do such a thing: I never even had to do it as a child -my parents never believed in prayer, any more than I do. I hadn't any idea what to say. Maurice was dead. Extinct.... Dear God, I said -why dear, why dear? - make me believe. Make me. I said, I'm a bitch and a fake and I hate myself. I can't do anything of myself. Make me believe... Let him have his happiness. Do this and I'll believe. But that wasn't enough. It doesn't hurt to believe. So I said, I love him and I'll do anything if you'll make him alive. I said very slowly, I'll give him up forever, only let him be alive with a chance.... and then he came in at the door, and he was alive, and I thought now the agony of being without him starts, and I wished he was safely back dead again under the door. (3)

(1) Ibid,p.94. (2) Ibid,p.95. (3) Ibid.

In some respects this is a classic passage of repentance in the biblical sense. Sarah is not merely pleading for a miracle; her prayer also has a moral dimension, including the attitude of self-despair ('I can't do anything of myself'), the willingness for practical alteration of behaviour, and the faith that are the preconditions, according to the New Testament, of new birth. Several factors make the passage a success. The stream of consciousness is realistic, and so is the passion (particularly in the paradoxical close of the passage). Also effective is the sense that prayer is both an unaccustomed absurdity to Sarah and yet a logical development of the yearnings she has expressed in the previous paragraph. Her vow may have been absurd on the evening it was made, but the ordering process of the text reveals a progression taking place, from her need to its solution. The miracle has been introduced: adultery has been turned into prayer.

Sarah's diary then takes up the story, going back before the 'miracle' and recalling the sense of unhappiness arising from their mutual jealousy:

What are we doing to each other? Because I know that I am doing to him exactly what he is doing to me.... It's as if we were working together on the same statue, cutting it out of each other's misery. But I don't even know the design.(1)

Nonetheless, she has introduced the notion that there might conceivably be a design, and after the 'miracle' it begins to become clear. Sarah

(1) Ibid,p.92.

hopes to 'run into Maurice' accidentally, but it doesn't happen(1); she tries to begin an affair with another man. but 'it didn't work. it didn't work'(2); and whatever else she attempts in this direction, 'Nothing worked. Will it never work again?'(3) Finally she attempts to phone Bendrix, but she finds a girl has borrowed his flat.

I said to God, 'So that's it, I begin to believe in you, and if I believe in you I shall hate you. I have free will to break my promise, haven't I, but I haven't the power to gain anything from breaking it. You let me telephone, but then you close the door in my face... You let me try to escape with D., but you don't allow me to enjoy it... What do you expect me to do now, God? Where do I go from here?'(4)

The intrusive God is presented as a God who traps, a God who can be hated: a God distant from predictable religiosity. But, anyway, a God who acts: even if Sarah still tries to insist, 'Believe me, God. I don't believe in you yet, I don't believe in you yet.' (5)

The only question with all this is how plausible it is. Many women with Sarah's relationship and desires would simply forget the 'vow', one might suspect. But perhaps the tenacity of the idea in such inhospitable circumstances, and the very practical hindrances

(1) Ibid.p.97. (2) Ibid.p.99. (3) Ibid. (4) Ibid.p.100. (5) Ibid.p.102

that Sarah encounters when she seeks to return to adultery, are to stand as the signs of grace at work:

How many promises I've made and broken in a lifetime. Why did this promise stay, like an ugly vase a friend has given and one waits for a maid to break it, and year after year she breaks the things one values and the ugly vase remains?(1)

She has a similar experience when she visits Smythe, a militant atheist, partly in hope of losing what belief she has in God, and partly for Smythe's own sake, since nobody seems to want to listen to him. Here, ironically, comes her next prayer: she agrees out of pity to visit him again, 'shovelling all the hope I could into his lap, praying to the God he was promising to cure me of, "Let me be of use to him."' (2) There is an element here of the 'appalling...strangeness of the mercy of God', but once again it is transmuted into something positive; for Smythe will find both faith and physical healing as the eventual result of his contact with Sarah. But the prayer affects Sarah in its 'appalling...strangeness' too. The more Smythe argues, the more Sarah begins to feel that there must be something there for him to argue against: that his very hatred (like her own, stirred up a few pages earlier by the discovery that there seems to be a very real Power trapping her) must be a sign of God's reality. Belief becomes more plausible.

This merges (in a touch of psychological realism) with her frustration at her husband's dismissal of Catholic images as 'materialist', and her realisation that if there is no eternity for the body, then there is none for Bendrix's body in particular:

(1) Ibid,p.106. (2) Ibid,p.109.

I can't love a vapour that was Maurice. That's coarse, that's beastly, that's materialist, I know, but why shouldn't I be beastly and coarse and materialist. I walked out of the church in a flaming rage, and in defiance of Henry and all the reasonable and the detached I did what I had seen people do in Spanish churches: I dipped my finger in the so-called holy water and made a kind of cross on my forehead.(1)

So, deliberately invoking a series of concepts - 'coarse', 'materialist', 'flaming rage', Sarah's dislike of her husband - that do not normally belong with religious conversion, and producing with them a sense of passion, Greene brings his heroine across to full faith. Once again, grace is depicted working in and through human failings, just as it originally broke into

Sarah's life through her adultery.

And a page later she is in love again - with God. She recalls the night of the miracle when

I said, 'Let him be alive', not believing in You, and my disbelief made no difference to You. You took it into Your love and accepted it like an offering, and tonight the rain soaked through my coat and my clothes and into my skin, and I shivered with the cold, and it was for the first time as though I nearly loved You. I walked under Your windows in the rain and I wanted to wait under them all night only to show that after all I might learn to love and I wasn't afraid of the desert any longer because You were there.(2)

The capitalized 'You' marks the fact that a new stage has begun; but it is not needed. In Sarah's recollections is reproduced the note of authentic tenderness, of adoration. 'I walked under Your windows in the rain' is both a continuation of the book's metaphor of a love-affair (though what Sarah is

(1) Ibid,p.112.. (2) Ibid,p.113.

doing is the act of a lover out of Shakespeare rather than Greenland!) and at the same time a realistic expression of the sense of worship every Christian must feel from time to time. She is 'in love' with God, and that love has its moments of tender humour just as did her love for Bendrix:

I came back into the house and there was Maurice with Henry. It was the second time You had given him back: the first time I had hated You for it and You'd taken my hate like You'd taken my disbelief into Your love, keeping them to show me later, so that we could both laugh -as I have sometimes laughed at Maurice, saying, 'Do you remember how stupid we were...?'(1)

The relation between Sarah and her God gathers depth from the overtones of human affection (rather than of human sexuality). Nor need this be criticised for anthropomorphism: Christian doctrine has always taught that God is a God of Love, and that the best way to understand this is by analogy with the love of a Father or a Bridegroom. And, at this point when the concept of God carries powerful overtones of tender warmth, Greene expounds the events of the previous pages in theistic terms: God has orchestrated the apparent pain and wretchedness, 'keeping them to show me later, so that we could both laugh'. The same note of tenderness creeps in from a different angle two pages later:

I said to God, as I might have said to my father, if I could ever have remembered having one, Dear God, I'm tired.(2)

(1) Ibid. (2) Ibid, p.115.

Nonetheless, Sarah's faith is not entirely secure. The old affair still retains its pull: and a fortnight (but only a couple of lines of text) later Sarah sees Bendrix and follows him.

I stood at the door and watched him go up to the bar. If he turns round and sees me, I told God, I'll go in, but he didn't turn round. I began to walk home, but I couldn't keep him out of my mind... Suddenly I felt free and happy. I'm not going to worry about you any more, I said to God as I walked across the Common... I'm going to make him happy, that's my second vow, God, and stop me if you can, stop me if you can.(1)

'You', interestingly, is no longer capitalised. Sarah's sudden decision is in one sense a direct challenge to God: can He act? Can He stop her? Sarah goes upstairs to write a farewell letter to her husband. Henry, however, returns in tears (Bendrix has just told him of Sarah's infidelity); and Sarah finds she cannot bear to leave him in his misery. God has indeed stepped in. Or perhaps not: 'The door has closed again against Maurice. Only I can't put the blame on God this time. I closed the door myself. '(2) But of course it is not a simple either/or. Sarah is kept from leaving her husband by an unexpected chain of events that bring out her tenderness and pity; and in that chain of events we can choose to see the hand of God working again in and through human

(1) Ibid. p.116. (2) Ibid, p.119.

pain. Amid this paradoxical combination of emotions and loyalties, the possible involvement of grace cannot appear a cold abstraction that dwarfs human beings till they are mere ciphers:

I went upstairs and tore up the letter so small nobody could put it together again, and I kicked the suitcase under the bed because I was too tired to start unpacking, and I started writing this down. Maurice's pain goes into his writing: you can hear the nerves twitch through his sentences. Well, if pain can make a writer, I'm learning, Maurice, too. I wish I could talk to you just once. I can't talk to Henry. I can't talk to anyone. Dear God, let me talk.(2)

This prayer will be answered too, at least in part, because the diary in which it is written is stolen for Bendrix by the private detective Parkis: Sarah's prayers are tending to find answers. But this is not merely a record of Sarah being caught up in the machinations of a successful magic. *It* has a moral aspect. Greene is suggesting that pain, instead of being (as in the trilogy) a function of

(2) Ibid,p.119.

the 'huge abandonment' in which man finds himself, can be a

means of revelation and blessing. 'Man has places in his heart which do not yet exist, and into them enters suffering in order that they may have existence', writes Leon Bloy in the passage Greene chooses as the book's epigraph.

The theme recurs time and again. It is because of Henry's pain that Bendrix briefly confesses an 'enormous Liking' for him, 'standing there on the Common, away from his own party, with tears in his eyes'(1); the same misery prevents Henry losing Sarah in the passage just quoted. The private detective Parkis becomes real to Bendrix only as he speaks of the agonies of his bizarre profession.(2) It was as Sarah 'pressed my nails into the palms of my hands until I could feel nothing but the pain'(3) that she found belief, a time she describes later as one when 'I didn't know it but You moved in the pain'.(4) If God is present, then presumably pain must be potentially meaningful and creative, whether or not we 'know it' at the time: that is to say, as Paul insists in 2 Corinthians, that 'this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.'(5) And Greene goes one stage

(1) Ibid,p.26. (2) Ibid,p.41. (3) Ibid,p.95. (4) Ibid,p.113.

(5) 2 Corinthians 4:17

further when Sarah kisses the atheist Smythe's deformed cheek:

'You believe in God,' he said. 'That's easy. You are beautiful. You have no complaint, but why should I love a God who gave a child this?'

'Dear Richard,' I said, 'there's nothing so very bad...' I shut my eyes and put my mouth against the check. I felt sick for a moment because I fear deformity, and he sat quiet and let me kiss him, and I thought I am kissing pain and pain belongs to You as happiness never does.(1)

Here the same matrix of ideas is presented as a response to the problem of suffering. There is arguably something out of proportion in 'pain belongs to You as happiness never does'; but given Greene's starting point, his overpowering vision of something awry in the universe, we should not be surprised to find such a manifestation of the presence of God - which was, after all, scarcely attainable at all in the trilogy.

(1) TEOTA, p.122.

Sarah's loyalties continue to swing back and forth.

I'm tired and I don't want any more pain. I want Maurice. I want ordinary corrupt human love. Dear God, you know I want to want Your

pain, but I don't want it now. Take it away for a while and give it me another time.(1)

These words close Book Three, and are the last words in the diary that Parkis, the private detective, has stolen for Bendrix. So Book Four opens with Bendrix realising there is hope for him yet: Sarah may yet be recoverable. He telephones her: she is ill. but when he announces he is coming to her she gets up and flees from him, through the rain, into a church.

I followed, and sure enough there she was sitting in one of the side aisles close to a pillar and a hideous statue of the virgin... I could have waited years now that I knew the end of the story. I was cold and wet and very happy. I could even look with charity towards the altar and the figure dangling there. She loves us both, I thought, but if there is to be a conflict between an image and a man, I know who will win...He was imprisoned behind the altar and couldn't move to plead his cause.(2)

It is the vital question again: Can God act? Can (or will) He - 'the figure dangling there... imprisoned behind the altar' -do anything? In Brighton Rock and perhaps The Heart of the Matter the answer would seem to be, Only when it is too late; or, in the case of the whisky priest (and maybe Scobie), a defeat is incurred that might just possibly turn out to be something else. The End of the Affair is different. The passage continues:

(1) Ibid, p.124. (2) Ibid, p.128.

Suddenly she began to cough with her hand pressed to her side. I knew she was in pain, and I couldn't leave her alone in pain. I came and sat beside her and put my hand on her knee while she coughed. I thought, If only one had a touch that could heal.(1)

It is the tactfulness of a skilled novelist: Bendrix cannot heal- but Christ, of course, could. (Indeed, He has already raised the dead - Bendrix himself.) But Bendrix doesn't notice this point; particularly as Sarah appears to have yielded:

'I don't mind the cold. And it's dark. I can believe anything in the dark.'

'Just believe in us.'

'That's what I meant.' She shut her eyes again, and looking up at the altar I thought with triumph, almost as though he were a living rival, You see - these are the arguments that win.(2)

And in the next section he writes of his confidence: 'I hadn't during that period any hatred of her God, for hadn't I in the end proved stronger?'(3) But 'eight days passed before the telephone rang'; and when it rings, it is Henry to say that Sarah has died.

'She got up and went out a week ago. God knows where or why... She didn't get in till nine, soaked through worse than the first time.... She was feverish all night, talking to somebody, I don't know who: it wasn't you or me, Bendrix....'

There wasn't anything to do for either of us but pour out more whisky. I thought of the stranger I had paid Parkis to track down: the stranger had certainly won in the end. No, I thought, I don't hate Henry. I hate You if you exist.(4)

Humanly speaking, Bendrix has killed Sarah by forcing her out

(1) Ibid. (2) Ibid,p.130. (3) Ibid,p.I32. (4) Ibid,pp.I35-136.

into the sleet. Ironically, and realistically, it is not that aspect that occurs to him -although his atheism should rule out other considerations -but rather that Sarah's God has won. Sarah 'talking to somebody, I don't know who'

makes that God seem more real. This realism is achieved through the pattern in the events rather than any abrupt or miraculous break in the causality.

I thought with anger and bitterness, You might have left poor Henry alone. We have got on for years without you. Why should You suddenly start intruding into all situations like a strange relation returned from the Antipodes?(1)

The sheer sense of intrusiveness evokes the presence of God here in a most telling fashion. At the same time Greene does not let that intrusive presence at her death appear to have overpowered Sarah's freewill. Henry's puzzled remarks make clear that it had her deepest loyalties:

When she was delirious (of course, she wasn't responsible), the nurse told me that she kept on asking for a priest. At least she kept on saying, Father, Father, and it couldn't have been her own. She never knew him. Of course the nurse knew we weren't Catholics. She was quite sensible. She soothed her down.(2)

Being 'quite sensible' is no longer enough with such an intruder around. It is entirely credible that Henry should not even consider that 'Father' might refer to God: it is outside his 'sensible' range of probabilities. It seems as if Sarah's death can be read as her last answered prayer -her final letter to Maurice closes 'I pray to God He won't keep me alive like

(1) Ibid,p.137. (2) Ibid.

this.' (1) Yet this is not the kind of self-defeating paradox we saw in Scobie's prayers in The Heart of the Matter; for in death Sarah has gone to meet the 'stranger' with

whom she has had her 'affair'. The words of her last letter to Bendrix apply as well to her death as to her conversion:

You took away all my lies and self-deceptions like they clear a road of rubble for somebody to come along it, somebody of importance, and now he's come.(2)

From there on the book is Bendrix's story rather than Sarah's. Bendrix's love has already opened him up to some sort of perception of God while saying goodbye to Sarah in the church, on what would turn out to be their final meeting:

'God bless you,' she said, and I thought, That's what she crossed out in her letter to Henry. One says good-bye to another's good-bye unless one is Smythe and it was an involuntary act when I repeated her blessing back to her, but turning as I left the church and seeing her huddled there at the edge of the candle-light, like a beggar come in for warmth, I could imagine a God blessing her: or a God loving her.(3)

It is a moving passage; and again, the notion of God acting, blessing, loving, is introduced not as a cold proposition but in the context of

(1) Ibid, p.147. (2) Ibid. (3) Ibid, p.131.

human tenderness, and made more comprehensible by its immediate

analogy with that tenderness. However, that is a moment when Bendrix thinks he has won. When Sarah dies there is hatred for God. Bendrix finds himself suddenly anxious that she should be cremated rather than buried:

I wanted her burnt up, I wanted to be able to say, Resurrect that body if you can. My jealousy had not finished, like Henry's, with her death. It was as if she were alive still, in the company of a lover she had referred to me. How I wished I could send Parkis after her to interrupt their eternity.(1)

There is a nice touch of comic self-awareness in the final sentence; but self-awareness reveals the problem:

I thought, I've got to be careful, I mustn't be like Richard Smythe. I mustn't hate, for if I were really to hate I would believe, and if I were to believe. what a triumph for You and her.(2)

(1) Ibid, p.137. (2) Ibid, p.138.

This refusal to believe has its price. Sarah had written in a letter to God that 'You were there' in her affair with Bendrix 'teaching us... so

that one day we might have nothing left except this love of You.'(1) But Bendrix is coming to the culmination of the process and refusing the fruition; hence there is 'nothing left' at all. His sexuality seems to have died: 'I have fallen in love once: it can be done again. But I was unconvinced: it seemed to me that I had given all the sex I had away.'(2) The gift of life, the 'chance' for which Sarah had bargained their affair is likewise soured:

I looked at the hall, clear as a cell, hideous with green paint, and I thought, she wanted me to have a second chance and here it is: the empty life, odourless, antiseptic, the life of a prison.(3)

These, suggests Greene, may be the consequences of being involved in the purposes of God and yet refusing to collaborate.

Yet these purposes continue whether Bendrix collaborates or not. Bendrix finds himself drifting into a new liaison which he knows he can only betray ('Hate lay like boredom over the evening ahead'(4)). That hatred had a moment earlier been directed at the dead Sarah, and, as with his attitude towards God, hatred had provided the foundation for the expression of a belief in her continued existence:

Are you there? I said to Sarah. Are you watching me? See how I can get on without you. It isn't so difficult, I said to her. My hatred could believe in her survival.(5)

(1) Ibid,p.123. (2) Ibid,p.141. (3) Ibid,p.145. (4) Ibid,p.159.(5) Ibid, pp.158-59.

But precisely because of this it is quite natural for Bendrix, when he realises where his new liaison is headed, to think again of Sarah:

I thought, this is where a whole long future may begin. I implored Sarah, Get me out of it. I don't want to begin it all again and injure her. I'm incapable of love.(1)

It is not conversion, it is not a prayer; yet it functions like one, and is immediately answered:

Except of you, except of you, and the grey old woman swerved towards me, crackling the thin ice. 'Are you Mr. Bendrix?' she asked.

'Yes.'

'Sarah told me,' she began, and while she hesitated a wild hope came to me that she had a message to deliver; that the dead could speak.

'You were her best friend -she often told me.' (2)

The 'grey old woman' is Sarah's mother, and her appearance enables Bendrix to escape from his new assignation. The 'wild hope' of a verbal message from beyond the grave suggests an outrageous possibility in contrast to which the apparent answered prayer seems more normal. Again, Greene does not insist on the answer: he simply portrays the pattern functioning and does not affirm whether it is the result of chance or miracle.

Even a dinner with Sarah's -apparently non-Christian - mother can turn out to be a further step in the revelatory process. It transpires that Sarah had been baptised by her mother, more out of spite for her father than for any other

(1) Ibid, p.159. (2)Ibid.

reason. Sarah was a 'real Catholic', says her mother,

'... only she didn't know it. I wish Henry had buried her properly,' Mrs. Bertram said and began again the

grotesque drip of tears.

'You can't blame him if even Sarah didn't know.'

'I always had a wish that it would "take." Like vaccination.'

'It doesn't seem to have "taken" much with you,' I couldn't resist saying, but she wasn't offended. 'Oh,' she said, 'I've had a lot of temptations in my life, I expect things will come right in the end. Sarah was very patient with me. She was a good girl. Nobody appreciated her like I did.' She took some more port... 'But it just didn't take,' I said fiercely, and I called the waiter to bring the bill. A wing of those grey geese that fly above our future graves had sent a draught down my back... (1)

Greene uses the sheer absurdity of the old woman ('grotesque drip'... 'like vaccination'... 'I expect things will come right in the end'... 'Nobody appreciated her like I did') to undercut any sense of the portentous - but in so doing he still leaves open the question 'But what if something like this were true'. Bendrix's fierce reaction, and his shudder - expressed in terms as superstitious as anything said by Mrs. Bertram - makes that clear; the notion he is faced with is preposterous, outrageous, and yet the pattern is there. As he writes two pages earlier,

Suddenly, inexplicably, I felt fear, like a man who has committed the all-but-perfect crime and watches the first unexpected crack in the wall of his deception. How deep does the crack go? Can it be plugged in time?(2)

(1) Ibid,p.164. (2) Ibid,p.162.

The vital paradox here is inherent in the fact that, rationally, there should be no problem ('inexplicably'), and yet

there is something troublesome. The reader is meant to share the anxiety of these two questioning sentences. Bendrix's inability to forget the matter, and his debates with the God he refuses to believe in, make the problem plain. 'It didn't take, I repeated to myself all the way home in the tube'; what Sarah learnt from her mother 'had nothing to do with the shifty ceremony near the beach. It wasn't You that "took", I told the God I didn't believe in.... It's just a coincidence, I thought, a horrible coincidence.... You didn't own her all those years: I owned her.... When she slept, I was with her, not you.' (1) It is rationally conclusive, demonstrable, tidy: but his inability to argue Sarah's baptism finally into unimportance is driven home in the paragraph at the end of the chapter, in one of those dream sequences that Greene does so well:

I dreamed I was at a fair with a gun in my hand. I was shooting at bottles that looked as though they were made of glass but my bullets bounded off them as though they were coated with steel. I fired and fired, and not a bottle could I crack, and at five in the morning I woke with exactly the same thought in my head: for those years you were mine, not His.(2)

Greene is not writing apologetics, but a novel: his goal is not to show Bendrix's arguments to be rationally false but rather to portray Bendrix feeling their insufficiency. The device of the simple transition from dreaming to waking makes easy the move from the imaginatively powerful parable to its

interpretation, its analogy, without conceding either the power

(1) Ibid, pp.164-65. (2) Ibid, p.165.

or the clarity. And the subtle alteration in Bendrix's thinking

in the final sentence drives the point home. The original phrasing of his argument ('I was with her, not You') asserts that God was not there: but 'you were mine, not His' is an argument over possession, and concedes that both parties are present. The distinctiveness of The End of the Affair among Greene's novels reappears when we recall that it is the atheist, not the Christian, who is wrestling with these difficulties.

Nevertheless, Bendrix does not change his position as the novel draws towards its close. As he looks through some of Sarah's childhood possessions, Bendrix can only think of himself and Sarah as a couple who 'were later to come together for no apparent purpose but to give each other so much pain.'⁽¹⁾ In the margin of Scott's Last Expedition Sarah had written:

'And what comes next? Is it God? Robert Browning.' Even then, I thought, He came into her mind. He was as underhand as a lover, taking advantage of a passing mood, like a hero seducing us with his improbabilities and his legends. I put the last book back and turned the key in the lock.⁽²⁾

It is not necessary for Bendrix to believe for the possibility of the presence of God to be presented forcibly to the reader: the bizarre simile of God as an unscrupulous seducer has real power. But indeed Bendrix's key has been 'turned ...in the lock. 'In the next chapter an unattractive priest visits Henry and Bendrix for dinner, 'ugly, haggard, graceless'. Bendrix raises some objections to the priest's faith, but achieves nothing; the doorbell rings, and

(1) Ibid,p.173. (2) Ibid.

I was glad to get away from that oppressive presence.
He had the answers too pat: the amateur could never

hope to catch him out, he was like a conjuror who bores one by his very skill.(1)

This proves nothing about the truth or falsehood of the priest's beliefs. What it makes clear is the fixed nature of Bendrix's own thinking: he is not searching for truth, merely seeking to 'catch him out'. Suddenly Bendrix has the next miracle/coincidence thrust upon him: on opening the door he is given a parcel with a letter from Parkis:

I sat down in the hall. I heard Henry say, 'Don't think I've got a closed mind, Father Crompton...' and I began to read Parkis's letter from the beginning.(2)

Has Bendrix himself got a closed mind, Greene seems to be asking -or, indeed, has Greene's reader? For Parkis's letter relates -in an absurd manner -how his son fell sick, and how he prayed to God, to his wife, and to Sarah:

Now if a grown man can do that, Mr. Bendrix, you can understand my poor boy imagining things. When I woke up this morning, his temperature was ninety-nine and he hadn't any pain, and when the doctor came there wasn't any tenderness left, so he says we can wait a while and he's been all right all day. Only he told the doctor it was Mrs. Miles who came and took away the pain - touching him on the right side of the stomach if you'll forgive the indelicacy... (3)

(1) Ibid, p.176. (2) Ibid, p.177. (3) Ibid, p.178.

Like the baptism and Sarah's mother's 'grotesque drip', and

the unattractive priest, the possibility of the divine is being offered clad in unprepossessing material. (Which is thoroughly orthodox; it is the principle of incarnation.) Comedy is being used as an apologetic strategy to disarm the reader. Greene is asking the question, 'What if...?': or as the priest suggests two pages earlier, 'Isn't it more sensible to believe that anything may happen than...?'(2) 'If I could suffer like you, I could heal like you', Sarah had prayed earlier(3); and the weight of the book's pervasive emphasis on the positive effect of pain endorses the possibility that this has proved to be the case.

But Bendrix will not have it. When the priest asserts, 'She was a good woman', he loses his temper: "'She was nothing of the sort Any man could have her." I longed to believe what I said, for then there would be nothing to miss or regret.'(4) Whatever his motive, he has lost his grip on truth -and so may be wrong on the main issue? 'Go back to your own people, father,' he tells the priest, 'back to your bloody little box

(1) Ibid,p.179. (2) Ibid,p.176. (3) Ibid,p.120. (4) Ibid,p.180.

and your beads.' 'I know when a man's in pain', says the priest; Bendrix replies,

You're wrong, father. This isn't anything subtle like pain. I'm not in pain, I'm in hate. I hate Sarah because she was a little tart, I hate Henry because she stuck to him, and I hate you and your imaginary God because you took her away from all of us.(1)

It is a crucial moment: the positive effects of pain have been a theme of the book, and suddenly Bendrix denies it and asserts that all he has is hatred.

'You're a good hater,' Father Crompton said.

Tears stood in my eyes because I was powerless to hurt any of them. 'To hell with the lot of you,' I said.

I slammed the door behind me and shut them in together. Let him spill his holy wisdom to Henry, I thought, I'm alone. I want to be alone.(2)

Bendrix's choice of exile, loneliness and hatred -that desire to hurt that could have been Pinkie's in Brighton Rock - are a combination bearing the hallmarks of someone going 'to hell'. The passage is effective, far removed from the mere denouement of an exemplary fable, exactly because at this moment Bendrix's hatred of the unattractive and immoveable priest seem understandable.

His choice of hell is not yet final, however; there is still mental turmoil, and even hatred may prove a trap -or, looked at another way, possible material for the purposes of grace:

(1) Ibid, p.181. (2) Ibid.

Oh, I'm as capable of belief as the next man. I would only have to shut the eyes of my mind for a long enough time, and I could believe that you came to Parkis's boy in the night... But if I start believing in that, then I have to believe in your God. I'd have to love your God. I'd rather love the men you slept with.

I've got to be reasonable, I told myself going upstairs... I lay down on my bed and closed my eyes and I tried to be reasonable. If I hate her so much as I sometimes do, how can I love her? Can one really hate and love?... And, I thought, sometimes I've hated Maurice, but would I have hated him if I hadn't loved him too? O God, if I could really hate you...(1)

And a final 'miracle' follows. The militantly atheistic Smythe has been healed of his disfigured face; and, it seems, as a result of Sarah's kiss and through sleeping on a lock of her hair.

'It cleared up, suddenly, in a night.'

'How? I still don't...'

He said with an awful air of conspiracy, 'You and I know how. There's no getting round it. It wasn't right of me keeping it dark. It was a...' but I put down the receiver before he could use that foolish newspaper word that was the alternative to 'coincidence'.(2)

The absurd 'awful air of conspiracy' is so plausible, so right, and the touch of the 'foolish newspaper word' gives a sense of control - yet the sentence's refusal to use the word merely spotlights the idea of miracle. Bendrix himself embodies the effort of his denial as he reports the cure to Henry:

'Electric treatment?'

'I'm not sure. I've read somewhere that urticaria is hysterical in origin. A mixture of psychiatry and radium.' It sounded plausible. Perhaps after all it was the truth. Another coincidence, two cars with

(1) Ibid, pp.181-82. (2) Ibid, pp.188-189.

the same number plate, and I thought with a sense of weariness, how many coincidences are there going to be? Her mother at the funeral, the child's dream. Is this going to continue day by day? I felt like a swimmer who has over-passed his strength and knows the tide is stronger than himself... (1)

The tired 'after all' and the fine image of the swimmer, with its strong sense of defeat, almost necessitate, create, the presence of God. Then comes a significant passage in which Bendrix faces -for the last time in the book -the implications of the situation:

For if this God exists, I thought, and if even you - with your lusts and your adulteries and the timid lies you used to tell - can change like this, we could all be saints by leaping as you leapt, by shutting the eyes and leaping once for all... But I won't leap.(2)

This passage raises an important question that goes to the heart of the book. 'Shutting the eyes and leaping once for all' is Bendrix's controversial description of conversion; it sounds like a polemical point, until we recall how much contemporary theology has accepted the existentialist emphases of Kierkegaard's stress on the 'leap of faith', the leap into commitment. The book as a whole stands in ambivalent relation to that tradition.(3) On the one hand. the storyline presents Sarah's faith being created and Bendrix's atheism shaken by what seems to function as evidence: Bendrix's apparent resurrection, Sarah's inability to form a new liaison, the three miracles towards the close. On the other hand, much of the book seems more existentialist, suggesting that faith - and, indeed, unbelief - exist apart from rational evidence. Sarah writes to

(1) Ibid, p.189. (2) Ibid, p.190. (3) It is significant that Greene acknowledges a debt to Kierkegaard; cf. Evans.op.cit., p.x. There are other points of contact with existentialism; eg the contrast between the moral nullities, 'just nothing' like Ida Arnold (Brighton Rock p.127), and the apparent spiritual elite of saints and sinners (like Rose and Pinkie in Brighton Rock) who make their choice and follow it through.

Bendrix:

I believe the whole bag of tricks... They could dig up records that proved Christ had been invented by Pilate to get himself promoted and I'd believe just the same. I've caught belief like a disease. I've fallen into belief like I fell in love. I've never loved before as I love you, and I've never believed in anything before as I believe now. I'm sure. I've never been sure before about anything. When you came in at the door with the blood on your face, I became sure. Once and for all.... I'm a phoney and a fake, but this isn't phoney or fake.... You took away all my lies and self-deceptions like they clear a road of rubble for somebody to come along it, somebody of importance, and now he's come.(1)

It is a difficult passage. On the one hand, there is certainty: 'I'm sure... Now he's come.' And Sarah implies this is not merely a fact about her psychology. 'When you came in at the door' seems to be presented as the cause: her convinced faith has a rational, evidential foundation, and Bendrix's resurrection is such conclusive proof that no other evidence could possibly challenge it. But what, then, are we to make of the second sentence? 'Proved' is a strong word, and seems to suggest that Sarah will now believe no matter what the facts, the rational evidence, turn out to be. All that emerges clearly is that Sarah is in considerable confusion regarding the status of the faith on which she has based her life. Greene does not seem to suggest that the available evidence can finally remove that tension.

But the same problem exists for the unbelieving characters. Smythe's atheistic reasonings are counter-productive: Sarah listens to him 'arguing against the arguments for a God. I

1) TEOTA, pp.146-147.

hadn't really known there were any -except this cowardly need
I feel of not being alone'(1) - itself a very double-edged argument.
Smythe asserts that the earliest Gospel 'wasn't written within a hundred
years of Christ being born'; Sarah's reaction is 'I hadn't realised they
were as early as that.'(2) In the end Smythe's arguments serve only to
strengthen her faith.(3) Bendrix, too, is aware he 'cannot disprove God.
But I just know he's a lie'(4); and as the 'miracles' take place, he has
to 'summon up all my faith [sic]
in coincidence.'(5) Greene seems to be emptying the issue of evidential
content: either way it is a deliberate 'leap', either way one has to
choose to have 'faith'.

If that is the nature of belief and unbelief, then the book
may be read as presenting the 'miracles' in a manner similar to Father
Crompton's understanding of Catholicism: something open
to 'a bit of superstition' (ie something that is not grounded in
rational evidence) because 'It gives people the idea that this world's
not everything... It could be the beginning of wisdom' (6), without
necessarily setting out the full 'wisdom' as to
what 'everything' is really like. The function of the book's miracles

(1) Ibid,p.92. (2) Ibid,p.97. (3) Ibid,p.121. (4) Ibid,p.168.
(5) Ibid, p.189. (6) Ibid, p.175.

is to raise a question rather than to offer an answer.

The ambiguity is safely woven into the book's fictional continuity,
however. Bendrix rejects faith, of any kind:

But I won't leap. I sat on my bed and said to God: You've taken
her, but You haven't got me yet. I know Your cunning. It's You
who take us up to a high place and offer us the whole universe.
You're a devil, God, tempting us to leap. But I don't want Your
peace and I don't want Your love.... I hate You, God, I hate You
as though You existed.(1)

The reference is to Matthew 4, where the devil takes Christ to a high
mountain and offers Him the whole world, and then brings Him to the
pinnacle of the temple and challenges Him to leap. Once a man decides to
see God as the devil there is nowhere left to go; even if God proves to
exist, he will reject Him.

I said to Sarah, all right, have it your way. I
believe you live and that He exists, but it will take more than
your prayers to turn this hatred of Him
into love.... Hatred is in my brain, not in my
stomach or my skin. It can't be removed like a rash or an ache....

I thought, in the morning I'll ring up a doctor and ask him
whether a faith cure is possible. And then I thought, better
not; so long as one doesn't know, one can imagine innumerable
cures.(2)

(1) Ibid, pp.190-91. (2) Ibid, p.191.

The evidence for God is not wanted, because God is not wanted.

And so the book ends:

I wrote at the start that this was a record of hate, and walking there beside Henry towards the evening glass of beer, I found the one prayer that seemed to serve the winter mood: O God, You've done enough, You've robbed me of enough, I'm too tired and old to learn to love, leave me alone for ever.(1)

This final sentence of the book is not a plea for the intervention of grace in his inability to learn to love (we could compare Sarah's prayer, 'I can't believe. Make me. I said, I'm a bitch and a fake and I hate myself. I can't do anything of myself.'(2)) Bendrix's self-despair does not turn him towards God. Instead, it amounts to a request for hell - to be away from the presence of God forever, choosing rather hatred and loneliness. Earlier in the book, under Sarah's influence and believing himself to have recaptured her, Bendrix had written, 'When I begin to write our story down, I thought I was writing a record of hate, but somehow the hate has got mislaid.'(3) At the very end he is back with the 'record of hate' with which he opened.(4)

Some critics have read optimism into the ending. R.W.B.Lewis says that 'the narrator's voice... is thick with premonitions of leaping.'(5) 'The reader feels sure he cannot escape', says

(1) Ibid,p.192. (2) Ibid, p.95. (3) Ibid,p.131. (4) Ibid, p.7. (5) R.W.B.Lewis, op.cit.,271.

Harvey Curtis Webster(1); Kurt Keinhardt has similar suspicions.(2) It must be conceded that the book asserts that a man hates only what he is capable of loving. But that does not mean he will actually come to love it. Reinhardt also points out, with some force, the importance of the epigraph's stress on the creative nature of suffering. But again, that epigraph does not necessitate the negation of Bendrix's freewill, the impossibility of his refusing the fruit of suffering and the grace by which that fruit is brought into being. The reality of Bendrix's choice, the settled hatred of God and the desire to be left alone, are plain at the close, to this reader at least: and it should be remembered that the book is the End of the affair. By the narrative's end, the affair is arguably ended too, with a definitive decision on Bendrix's part.

It is a powerful conclusion. What is less certain is the effectiveness of the miracles in the closing sections. Greene wrote in the Preface to the Collected Edition of his novels that it may seem 'to the agnostic reader -with whom I increasingly sympathize' (an admission which helps to explain why this novel's supernaturalism is unusual in Greene's work?)

(1) Webster, in Evans, op.cit.tp.22. (2) Kurt F.Reinhardt, The Theological Novel of Modern Europe (New York, 1969), p.202.

to introduce the notion of magic. But if we are to believe in some power infinitely above us in capacity and knowledge magic does inevitably form part of our belief -or rather magic is the term we use for the mysterious and the inexplicable.(1)

That may be so. But he also remarks self-critically in the Preface that after the section on Sarah's death he 'began to hurry to the end': 'Every so-called miracle, like the curing of Parkis's boy, ought to have had a completely natural explanation. The coincidences should have continued over the years, battering the mind of Bendrix, forcing on him a reluctant doubt of his own atheism.'(2)

But despite this weakness, the book is, to this reader at least, a success. Bendrix reflects on his own writing that

Always I find when I begin to write there is one character who obstinately will not come alive... And yet one cannot do without him. I can imagine a God feeling in just that way about some of us. The saints,

(1) TEOTA, Heinemann Collected Edition of 1974, p.x. (2) Ibid, pp.ix-x. To compensate for this he amended the novel slightly for the Collected Edition, so that Smythe's disfigurement 'might have had a nervous origin and be susceptible to faith healing' (p.x).

one would suppose... come alive.... But we have to be pushed around. We have the obstinacy of non-existence. We are inextricably bound to the plot, and wearily God forces us, here and there, according to his intention, characters without poetry, without free will, whose only importance is that somewhere, at some time, we help to furnish the scene in which a living character moves and speaks, providing perhaps the saints with the opportunities for their free will.(1)

But Bendrix himself is not so: and The End of the Affair gives us a striking model of what it means to be caught up in the purposes of God, both for those who submit to them and for those who reject. The transformation of Greeneland that accompanies God's activity is plain: here are real love, real faith, and a situation where pain is or can be creative in a manner suggesting an answer to the problem of suffering. The presence of God is determinative for the world of The End of the Affair: and while William Faulkner's eulogy of the book as 'one of the best, most true and moving novels of my time'(2) may be a little strong, the result is certainly a novel with few flaws, and perhaps the most positive in the whole of Greene's work.

(1) TEOTA, Penguin edition, pp.185-86. (2) Quoted Webster in Evans, op.cit., p.22.

But Greene did not go this route again. Instead, his fictional worlds in subsequent books come to contain less and less of God. David Lodge offers as explanation the words of a character in one of Greene's later novels, The Comedians:

When I was a boy I had faith in the Christian God. Life under his shadow was a very serious affair; I saw him incarnated in every tragedy. He belonged to the lacrimae rerum like a gigantic figure looming through a Scottish mist. Now that I approached the end of life it was only my sense of humour that enabled me sometimes to believe in him.

Lodge comments,

Without interpreting this passage as a personal confession we may perhaps see it as some kind of gloss on Greene's progress from fiction based on a "tragic" conflict between human and divine values, to fiction conceived in terms of comedy and irony in which the possibility of religious faith has all but retreated out of sight in the anarchic confusion of human behaviour... But the permeation of his later work with negative and sceptical attitudes... has resulted in some loss of intensity. (1)

And, of course, in a further example of the loss of God from the novel.

(1) David Lodge, Graham Greene (New York, 1966), pp.44-45. The faith-element is perhaps at its clearest in the moving closing pages of Monsignor Quixote.

(v) The Sense of an Absence

But Waugh and Greene were not the twentieth-century norm. Reading them we know it. Waugh is irritably overt about his alienation from his era; and in Greene's trilogy a faith in God is struggling to survive alongside a more standard contemporary vision of the world as an abandoned star; so that we are not surprised when in Greene's later work God is left out almost altogether. (Is it possible that these authors' lack of a real challenge to the secularised mind is an explanation of their acceptability?)

But there are other authors this century who have at least experimented in passing with the notion of a Christian supernatural. The idea is clearly there among the conflicting planes of possibility that we find in Golding's novels; and at the end of Pincher Martin, for example, it becomes quite overt, as 'black lightning' breaks finally into the dying Martin's egoistically-created imaginary universe, bringing a last offer of heaven. Martin's innermost being is 'a dark centre that turned its back on the thing that created it and struggled to escape'(1), yet is at last forced to confront it:

'You gave me the power to choose and all my life you led me carefully to this suffering because my choice was my own. Oh yes! I understand the pattern. All my life, whatever I had done I should have found myself in the end on that same bridge, at that same time, giving that same order - the right order, the wrong order. Yet, suppose I climbed away from the cellar over the bodies of used and defeated people, broke them to make steps on the road away from you, why should you torture me? If I ate them, who gave me a mouth?'

'There is no answer in your vocabulary.'

He squatted back and glared up at the face. He shouted.

'I have considered. I prefer it, pain and all... I spit on your compassion!'(2)

Or there is Muriel Spark, in The Go-Away Bird for example, playfully weaving her fantasies (but are we quite sure, she might ask?) of the disturbing problems that could result if prayers get answered ('The Black Madonna'), or telling us of the imperturbably intrusive angel who turns up in 'The Seraph and the Zambesi'. Or there is The Ballad of Peckham Rye, where it is never quite clear how seriously we are to take the claims of the hero, Dougal, supposedly born with horns on his head (which had to be amputated, he says), and professing to be 'one of the wicked spirits that wander through the world for the ruin of souls'(3) -a threat he amply justifies. The book's closing sentence describes the Rye 'looking like a cloud of green and gold, the people seeming to ride upon it, as you might say there was another world than this'(4); and that 'as you might say' is basic to the book. The possibility that the somewhat bizarre and enigmatic Dougal might be a real devil is tossed in playfully by the author as an added ingredient to her fiction. The result is a book that is generally realistic, but whose causality nonetheless may include the supernatural; we do not know, and are not meant to know.

(1) William Golding, Pincher Martin (1956; 1984 edition, with Lord of the Flies and Rites of Passage), p.304. (2) Ibid, pp.316-17, 318. (3) Muriel Spark, The Ballad of Peckham Rye (1960; Penguin edition of 1963),p.77. (4) Ibid, p.143.

Fantasy is also the mode of the most significant evangelical novelist of the century, C.S. Lewis, and his friend and colleague J.R.R. Tolkien. Their work contains a strong element of supernaturalism rooted in the Christian faith they shared - even though Tolkien at any rate denied any didactic purpose in his work. Tolkien's imagination is to a considerable extent a Christianised imagination, and the story that takes shape in it contains a providential pattern. Auden claimed that The Lord of the Rings 'holds up the mirror to the only world we know, our own'; and Tolkien's pattern of the eucatastrophe, the 'joyous turn' or happy ending, is no mere legend because, as Tolkien himself insists in the closing section of his essay On Fairy Stories, it has entered into history through Christ's incarnation and resurrection. Similarly, Lewis' Voyage to Venus is a fantasy, but we are conscious as we read the hymn of praise to divine providence at the end of the book that this is a hymn to the Christ whom Lewis worshipped, not an imaginary deity.

So it is that Lewis presents in Voyage to Venus a gripping drama of the Christian in combat with supernatural evil, with prayer, guidance, conscience his means of contact with Christ Himself, and fear and mental confusion the weapons of the enemy; or, in Till We Have Faces, a brilliant and complex model of what the gods are doing (and what the problem really is) when they appear to be totally incommunicative. In Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings, the quest is played out on a background of a controlling providence which clearly overrules such events as Bilbo's finding the Ring and Frodo's inheriting it(1), or Gandalf's meeting with Thorin - 'a chance-meeting, as we say in Middle-earth'.(2) That ambiguity about the true nature of what we call 'chance' is a repeated theme, particularly in the revelatory Rivendell section:

That is the purpose for which you are called hither. Called, I say, though I have not called you to me... You have come and are here met, in this very nick of time, by chance as it may seem. Yet it is not so. Believe rather that it is so ordered that we, who sit here, and none others, must now find counsel for the peril of the world.(3)

In Tolkien, following the 'paths that are laid'(4) involves a long obedience, venturing into the darkness in the face of monstrous evil, motivated by a sense of an overall pattern and an awareness of duty, and supported by mutual fellowship. But there is also a clear sense in the narrative of a power that comes to the aid of those seeking to carry through their 'appointed...task'(5) but coming to the end of their endurance: this is particularly visible in the last stages of Frodo's journey through Mordor, and in the crucial reappearance of Gollum who had 'some part to play... before the end'.(6) The quest is finally carried through not merely by mortal hardihood, but by something resembling grace that manifests itself repeatedly in the darkest moments of all. And for Frodo at least the journey finally leads right out of this world into the mysterious place known as the 'west', away 'oversea', a numinous realm that is a source of values and meaning, but also of providential aid and eventual healing for the wounded of Middle-earth. The embodiment of evil to which the pattern in events has been opposed is equally supernatural - the 'dark lord' who 'came from outside'(7); the evil in Tolkien's world is defined by its supernatural origin.

(1) J.R.R. Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings (1954-55; 1995 one-volume edition), pp.54-55. (2) Ibid, p.1053. (3) Ibid, p.2369. (4) Ibid, pp.359, 696. (5) The phrase is from the Rivendell section, ibid, p.264. (6) Ibid, p.58. (7) Ibid, p.129.

There is much more to be said about these authors' presentation of providence and the supernatural.(1) Yet in speaking of Lewis and Tolkien, we are considering authors who are outside the literary 'canon' of our current consensus. And, indeed, we must be aware of the problems involved in their choice of the fantasy form. Fantasy may be seen as a practicable strategy for evading the problems posed by the current consensus to any portrayal of the forces of the 'other world'. But historically there is a strong connection between the Judaeo-Christian world view and a realistic approach, as we noted early in this study, and there are difficulties inherent in abandoning that link. There is a danger of repeating the error of some earlier ages in lumping together the 'Christian supernatural' and the fantastic; so that providence may appear to belong only to fantasy-worlds, to 'fairy-tales' - a specialised taste, despite the apologies of the Inklings. The need today, it could be argued, is to make Christian supernaturalism appear more real, not more fantastic; not on the level of Tolkien's hobbits and Lewis' talking beasts, attractive though these may be.

Is there also, perhaps, a danger of suggesting that providence is only to be seen in the great apocalyptic events, and is irrelevant to everyday life, which stays within a naturalistic framework? Fantasy's business, admittedly, is not (directly) with the everyday; but if the meaning of providence is never worked out in details of ordinary life, then we are again in danger of the dichotomy that preoccupied Francis Schaeffer, where the statement of faith (in this case regarding providence) exists only as a doctrinal generality, or in terms of myth (ie literary fantasy), but cannot be envisaged in particular, concretely existential terms. We say that God is at work within history, but it grows uncertain what we mean.

There are very few first-rank Christian novelists who have taken up this challenge, following in the footsteps of The Life and Death of Mr. Badman, Robinson Crusoe, Amelia, Jane Eyre, or Villette. There is Jack Clemo's striking first novel, Wilding Graft, with its powerful presentation of a pattern of grace that is neither facile nor sentimental, and the contrasting interpretations of the believer and the atheist. But Clemo is better known as a poet than as a writer of prose fiction; and it is the poetry that has appeared in Penguin, while Wilding Graft is currently available only through a regional press, the 'Cornish Library' of Anthony Mott. Or there is Rudy Wiebe's superb narrative of the Canadian north, First and Vital Candle; but here again, although this is published by New Canadian Library in Wiebe's own country, it has yet to find a publisher on this side of the Atlantic. And there is Hwee Hwee Tan's very funny Foreign Bodies.

But for every novel by Greene, Waugh, Clemo, Wiebe or Tan that experiments with the presentation of providence, there are - as every novel-reader must recognise - a hundred in which the fictional world that is created knows no God at all. The norm for the depiction of providence in the modern novel is overwhelmingly that which we find in the early masters of this century; Joseph Conrad:

(1) For a detailed exploration see the companion study to this one, Chronicles of Heaven Unshackled, obtainable free from peterlowman@lineone.net .

My destiny! Droll thing life is - that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose. The most you can hope from it is some knowledge of yourself - that comes too late - a crop of unextinguishable regrets.(1)

James Joyce:

The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails.(2)

D.H.Lawrence:

'I know,' he said, 'it just doesn't centre. The old ideals are dead -nothing there. It seems to me there remains only this perfect union with a woman -sort of ultimate marriage -and there isn't anything else.'

'And you mean if there isn't the woman, there's nothing?' said Gerald.

'Pretty well that -seeing there's no God.'
'Then we're hard put to it,' said Gerald.(3)

Virginia Woolf:

It will end, It will end, she said. It will come, It will come, when suddenly she added: We are in the hands of the Lord.

But instantly she was annoyed with herself for saying that... The insincerity slipping in among the truths roused her, annoyed her. She returned to her knitting again. How could any Lord have made this world? she asked. With her mind she had always seized the fact that there is no reason, order, justice: but suffering, death, the poor. There was no treachery too base for the world to commit; she knew that. No happiness lasted; she knew that.(4)

(1) Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness, (1902; 1974 Everyman edition, with Youth and The End of the Tether), p.150. (2) James Joyce, Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916), in The Essential Joyce (Penguin edition of 1963),p.221. (3) D.H.Lawrence, Women in Love (1921; Penguin edition of 1960),p.64. (4) Virginia Woolf, To the Lighthouse (1927; Everyman edition of 1938),pp.73-74.

Here is the logical outworking of the naturalistic convention of the novel form. Looking back over its history in England, it seems fair to say that the novel has never really shaken off the limitations of the Enlightenment worldview. The religious impulse in the novel has tended to express itself solely in ethical terms, and reactions against the rationalist straitjacket have tended to evaporate in sentimentalism (as in Dickens) or escapism (as in Gothicism). Unlike in poetry, there has been little expression of the sense of the presence of God. It may be that the novel's commercial basis has inclined it towards a 'lowest-common-denominator' view of reality; and as it became a more 'serious' art-form, capable of challenging a consensus-view of reality, the 'loss of faith' set in, completing what the Enlightenment had started. On the whole, the dominant pattern in the English tradition has increasingly been that of Virginia Woolf's view of events and impressions as 'an incessant shower of innumerable atoms' which 'shape themselves' (my emphasis) 'into the life of Monday or Tuesday. '(1) The novel has become an agnostic form, the epic, as Lukacs says, of a world forsaken by God.(2) A writer (or reader) who, like Hopkins, sees the world as 'charged with the grandeur of God'(3), will inevitably come into conflict with some of the most venerable conventions of the English novel tradition.

(1) Virginia Woolf, The Common Reader, first Series (1925),p.I89. (2) Georg Lukacs. Die Theorie des Romans (Berlin, 1920), trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), p.88. (3) Gerald Manley Hopkins, 'God's Grandeur'.

CONCLUSION: LEARNING TO GO BLIND

The tragedy of the modern world, said Solzhenitsyn in his Templeton Address, is that man has forgotten God.

Or perhaps one should say white European man. Some of the material related to this study was compiled in Lagos; and among the Nigerian university community the writer was struck by the prevalence of a supernaturalistic worldview that seemed universally acceptable, and that often made the average British student -even the average British Christian student -seem a humanist by comparison! One encounters a similar situation in many other cultural contexts: in the Middle East, for example, and among African-Americans. Or, indeed, almost anywhere in the 'two-thirds world', amongst the majority of the world's population.

A worldview dominated by an exclusively naturalistic causality, that does not 'see or hear' God or the supernatural at work in its world, is thus a fairly 'local' phenomenon of the contemporary West. That it should be the view of a minority (a highly influential minority) does not per se prove it to be false, of course; many things believed only by a minority have later turned out to be true. But it certainly makes it worth asking what effect the dominance of this particular 'party line' is having, in terms of shaping our consciousnesses, and the ways in which we are capable of seeing the world.

Of course the Christian will concede that the specific direction of providence in the everyday is frequently highly obscure to the human observer. Hence, a narrative of events including no clear expression of providential causality is acceptable as a model of reality as it frequently appears, even to the most hardened supernaturalist: on the small scale, that is. But not as the panorama widens. When a whole lifetime or a whole society or a set of crucial events (a marriage or a bankruptcy or a war) come into the picture -as they tend to do in most novels - the Christian will feel it imperative to ask, Where is the presence of God in what's happening here? What is God's will here, and how do I act upon it? For if there is a God at all, He is the prime factor in any situation.

The Christian's complaint about the naturalistic convention is therefore that it amounts to a repetitive imaginative training in thinking about events without reference to God's purposes, and dealing with them entirely independently of His power. Hence a logically preposterous situation is fostered where the average Englander apparently believes vaguely (so the pollsters tell us) in some sort of almighty God, but pays no practical attention to Him whatsoever! Logically, there could be nothing more disastrous - or absurd- than attempting to put together the jigsaw puzzle of our lives with the central piece left out. Yet our culture is a post-Enlightenment culture, and trains us in many subtle ways to do just this; training us, perhaps, to be deaf or blind.(1) And the causality presented in the most vivid and imaginatively striking novels we read plays a part in this, helping to shape the value-systems and frameworks through which we look out at the world.

(1) Sociologist Alan Gilbert, in The Making of Post-Christian Britain (1980) cites Weber's remark 'I am a-musical as far as religion is concerned, and have neither the desire nor the capacity to build religious architectures in myself.' 'It is a salient fact', comments Gilbert, 'that the crisis of contemporary Christianity lies not in challenges to the truth of its dogmas, but in the fact that... people in a secular culture have become increasingly "tone-deaf" to the orchestration of those dogmas'(p.14).

Harry Blamires has written at some length on this topic:

It is a commonplace that the mind of modern man has been secularized. For instance, it has been deprived of any orientation towards the supernatural... Secularism is so rooted in this world that it does not allow for the existence of any other. Therefore whenever secularism encounters the Christian mind, either the Christian mind will momentarily shake that rootedness, or secularism will seduce the Christian mind to a temporary mode of converse which overlooks the supernatural....

Turn to the glossy magazines, to the sensational press, cinema, T.V., and the like. Ask yourself what kind of a world is pictured there. Is it the world known vividly to the Christian mind? A world in which angel and demon are locked in conflict? A world packed full of sinners desperately dependent on the mercy of God?... A world fashioned by God, sustained by God, worried over by God, died for by God?... No. The world... present to current popular thinking is very different. It is a self-sufficient world... It is a world run by men, possessed by men, dominated by men, its course determined by men... The Christian mind looks at the propaganda of modern secularism and is astonished to learn that under man's management the world is supposed to be on the whole in a tolerable shape...

What price are we paying, in terms of intellectual clarity and integrity, for the continuance of easy co-existence of the Christian mind with the secular mind? Ponder the violence of the concealed collision. On the one hand is the assumption that all is over when you die; that...eating, sleeping, growing, learning, breeding, and the rest, constitute the total sum of things... On the other hand is the almost crushing awareness of a spiritual war tearing at the heart of the universe, pushing its ruthless way into the lives of men - stabbing at you now, now, now, in the impulses and choices of every waking moment; the belief that the thoughts and actions of every hour are

moulding a soul which is on its way to eternity; that we are choosing every moment of our lives in obedience or disobedience to the God who created and sustains all that is; that we are always responsible, always at war, always involved in what is spiritual and deathless; that we are committing ourselves with every breath to salvation or damnation.(1)

The evidential basis for these two frameworks is a separate issue, which cannot be dealt with here. But these issues, to the Christian, are what is at stake in the English novel's naturalistic convention.

(1) Harry Blamires, The Christian Mind (1963), pp.3,68,73-76.

(ii) Possibilities

One of the greatest problems with this blotting out of the consciousness of God is that it is not something willingly chosen and undergone by those affected. It is, in a sense, a brainwashing; except that it is not usually intended so to function by the practitioners concerned. Without any exploration of the facts and evidence regarding what is involved, the 'consumer' of British culture today is continually being schooled in a particular way of regarding 'life, the universe and everything'. For a good part of the postwar period in Britain the beliefs and values of North Atlantic liberal humanism were ubiquitously presented as the 'obvious', 'normal', 'only sensible' way of looking at things. The more recent challenges of various varieties of marxist and post-structuralist thought have at least shown this 'normality' up for what it is. But so much the worse for anyone transgressing the consensus on which marxists and liberal humanists are agreed; that is going to mean working directly against the worldview enforced by the increasingly secularised productions of two centuries of post-Enlightenment culture, and now reinforced by the shared assumptions of most forms of contemporary Western media, arguably the most powerful (if unconscious) form of self-manipulation humanity has yet devised. (Christians have much to learn from thinkers such as Gramsci - or Barthes - concerning the ways in which the assumptions of a dominant consensus are reinforced in the substructures of a culture.)

What then is to be done? Christians engaged in literary criticism can profitably give attention to one specific aspect of the overall critical task; that is, the delineation of the latent presuppositions and the fictional hypotheses that underlie and are articulated by the novels of the tradition. This is not an evaluative enterprise; it is descriptive. It is not a way of assessing the merit of literary works according to their conformity to Christian orthodoxy; the Christian critic is a fool if he does not recognise that the existence of many aesthetic qualities in literature bears no proportional relationship (either direct or inverse!) to the presence of Christian belief. The task - or a task - is rather to identify the presuppositions or value-systems that are being presented with imaginative power. 'The fiction we read', said T.S.Eliot, 'affects our behaviour... The author of a work of imagination is trying to affect us wholly, as human beings, whether he knows it or not; and we are affected by it, as human beings, whether we intend to be or not'(1) -particularly since many of us enter into our experience of a novel 'for relaxation', that is, when we are at our most uncritical and receptive.

For such a task, the critic - and, indeed, the general novel-reader - will need a prayerful, Bible-saturated 'Christian mind' - Bible-saturated because, if the Bible is indeed where God uniquely speaks,

(1) T.S.Eliot, 'Religion and Literature', in Selected Essays (enlarged edition of 1951), pp.393, 394. In this essay Eliot emphasises the duty incumbent upon Christians of 'maintaining consciously certain standards and criteria of criticism over and above those applied by the rest of the world', because 'the greater part of our current reading matter is written for us by people who have no belief in a supernatural order' (p.399).

then it is only systematic Bible study in significant quantity that will enable us to maintain a distinctive theistic consciousness amidst all the voices surrounding us. Among all the words and images of power, there is no neutral ground. But if the latent presuppositions in our reading can be overtly identified, the 'consumer' has at least the choice of whether to accept what they are seeing or to regard it as false. A similar exploration of value-systems is carried on by marxists, of course; and the Christian, like the marxist, will run the danger of confusing this exercise with the whole business of criticism. But it needs to be done.

And then there is the creative task. Hopefully this study has shown that there is no reason why a worldview marked by Christian supernaturalism should not be embodied, or modelled, or paralleled, in the underlying hypothesis of prose fiction; just like any other way of looking at the world. What can be seen can be modelled. On the other hand, this study will also have shown that the novel, having arisen and developed under the influence of particular sociocultural forces, is at present a form that is not easily hospitable to such content; and the task grows harder as the implications of post-Enlightenment culture, are worked out in our society, and become reflected in increasingly widespread and powerful expressions that condition the expectations and responses of the novel-reader.

But that is not the whole story. It could also be argued that we are living at a time of unprecedented cultural breakdown when the myths of humanism are revealing their weaknesses, and many other life-stances are receiving expression from time to time. The Latin American 'magic realists' have reintroduced the supernatural to the world of Nobel Prize-winning fiction - admittedly from an occultist perspective, but providing a reminder of the threat posed by two-thirds-world input to the north Atlantic humanist consensus. A little while ago the Guardian's drama critic reported, without comment, the New York performance of the Yiddish writer Solomon Anski's play The Dybbuk, which includes an exorcism of a dybbuk-spirit, and how at one performance the actress

playing the 'exorcised' character 'was not performing well immediately after the exorcism': whereupon a woman called out from the audience. "The dybbuk hasn't left her; it's still there". Myers [the director] duly performed the exorcism again, and after the performance asked the woman if she really believed in dybbuks. "Do I believe in them?" she replied with a shrug. "I know!" Similarly, the Guardian's television critic reviewed a film of Bob Marley's life and again ended up reporting, without comment, that 'The singer's life was marked to an extraordinary degree by an intuitive sense of divine guidance communicated through dreams and signs, and no amount of academic rigour will resolve it.' It may be that the coming years will be a time of more genuine pluralism, and hence openness (for both good and ill), than has sometimes been the case in the past.(1)

Still, the external problem is not the only difficulty in the writing of providentialist fiction. Venturing guesses at the nature of the purposes of God remains a hazardous venture. To falsify in this area has for some writers in the past meant making the workings of providence the means to an end of material or marital prosperity; this is all too visible in Richardson, and the danger is clearly present in Defoe and Charlotte Bronte too. The attempt to express providentialism in terms of everyday reality will be prone to show up mercilessly the inconsistencies in the artist's own vision; any unresolved conflict in their values - shall we call it syncretism?- will become all too plain. This may be illustrated from the difficult fusions between the Christian and the capitalist in Defoe, the Christian and the Romantic in Jane Eyre, the Christian and the aesthete in Brideshead Revisited.

And the alternative danger is to fall into an ultimately damaging sensationalism. In the eighteenth century it was observed that

To deny the exercise of a particular providence in the Deity's government of the world is certainly impious: yet nothing serves the cause of the scorner more than an incautious forward zeal in determining the particular instances of it.(2)

(1) Cf. Eliot: 'We find in practice that what is "objectionable" in literature is merely what the present generation is not used to. It is a commonplace that what shocks one generation is accepted quite calmly by the next.' (Ibid, p.389). We are already at a phase where popular science-fiction paperbacks can present supernaturalism as an attraction: '...tops off a catastrophe of necromancy and ruin with a divine intervention', proclaims one recent blurb. (2) Dr. Abernethy's Life in Biographia Britannica, quoted in Boswell's Life of Johnson, and cited in turn by David Bebbington, Patterns in History (1979), p.66.

And, indeed, to misrepresent God is to blaspheme.

All this is to say that neither the church nor the world has any need of a torrent of fourth-rate Christian fiction. A good Christian novelist will be attempting one of the most demanding tasks a writer could set themselves, and will need an unusual combination of qualities: all the abilities and extensive experience that any good writer must have, plus a deep knowledge of God, both in His self-revelation in the Bible and in the novelist's own life. They will need reverence; the awareness that they must tread warily and with awe because, like Moses at the burning bush, they are on holy ground-

You are not here to verify,
Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity
Or carry report. You are here to kneel
Where prayer has been valid(1)

- besides the humility that is prayerfully conscious at every moment of the farcical nature of the attempt to encapsulate God and His ways, and of its own biases and perennial tendency to misinterpretation. To appear to claim a final grasp of the divine strategy would be preposterous and impious; a tentative model, shaped by the patterns learned from the biblical revelation, is the best that can be hoped for.

There are other disciplines from which insights may be gained. Parallel difficulties in the presentation of providentialism occur in historiography, biography and autobiography, all of which are in

(1) T.S.Eliot, 'Little Gidding'.

a sense constructing a model (or even a metaphor) of a reality from which they are distinct: and all of which, indeed, involve some element of sub-creation. A useful study of the problems of providentialist historiography is to be found in the last chapter of David Bebbington's Patterns in History, the conclusions of which parallel those advanced here. An important affirmation of the feasibility of providentialist historiography is Christianity and History by Herbert Butterfield, Professor of Modern History at Cambridge after the war. As regards autobiography, it is significant that a number of the great modern novelists have turned to this mode as a basis for presenting experience (Joyce and Lawrence, for example): it is significant, too, that, as we noted earlier, several of the exercises in providentialist or quasi-providentialist fiction in the English tradition have roots in autobiography: Bunyan, Defoe, Goldsmith, even Scott in Heart of Midlothian or George Eliot in Adam Bede. Indeed, a would-be Christian novelist may well have something to learn from the fusion of 'realism' and providentialism in C.S.Lewis' austere narrative of his bereavement, A Grief Observed. This powerful and moving account combines an honest record of the turmoil and wild agonies of grief with sudden, momentary perceptions of the presence of God, and a slowly-emerging sense of overall direction. Its mode of first-person narration (in a manner not entirely removed from 'stream of consciousness', despite Lewis' dislike of that mode(1)) in a series of discrete sections would provide an

(1) Cf. Walter Hooper's introduction to C.S.Lewis' The Dark Tower (1977), p.11.

interesting approach for a novel. Finally, it is intriguing to speculate whether a revival of 'spiritual autobiography' as practised in the seventeenth century, such as was called for some time back by Roger Pooley(1), might in time produce anything like a Bunyan or a Defoe.

There are plenty of possibilities. Perhaps there is such a thing as being too tentative. There is a school of Christian criticism which seems preoccupied by the scarcely perceptible nature of grace. But to see that as the whole story amounts almost to a failure of nerve. There is a time for celebration, for giving tongue to the sheer joy of the presence of God and of participating in His everyday purposes of proclaiming salvation and justice: the twin sides of discipleship, the worshipper and the activist.

And beyond that, providentialist fiction, if it can be done properly, ought surely to be a form of huge potential. Waugh once remarked that 'You can only leave God out by making your characters pure abstractions'(2); that may or may not be true, but it is noticeable that the outworkings of the 'death of God' in literature can include the destruction or reduction of characters to the figures that inhabit the world of Waiting for Godot or Ionesco's The Chairs, figures without stature or heroism. The vision of the presence of God can underpin the reality of man in the image of God. It offers the restoration of meaningfulness to all the

(1) Roger Pooley, Spiritual Autobiography: A DIY Guide (1983). (2) Quoted Kurt Reinhardt, The Theological Novel of Modern Europe(New York. 1969), p.209.

particulars of an everyday world that can otherwise seem drably trivial. It offers a celebration that stands in continuity with the historic connection Auerbach described in Mimesis between the Judaeo-Christian worldview and the serious literary depiction of reality. It was D.H.Lawrence who - in an essay by no means pro-Christian -referred to 'The Bible - but all the Bible' as comprising, along with Homer and Shakespeare, 'the supreme old novels'.(1) The biblical-Christian vision offers a rich framework for story-telling even today.

And there is still the greater issue at stake. One does not have to accept everything in Leavis to agree that a significant goal of the major novelist is to promote an `awareness of the possibilities of life'.(2) And if there really were a God, the novel that 'widened the world' for its readers so that they were able, in defiance of their culture, to conceive that possibility, would be promoting 'awareness of the possibilities of life' to the last degree. There could be few things more important. And what, then, of the absence of God in the novel? What if it were the accidental propagation of a falsely myopic and disastrously shrunken vision, ignoring and training its readers to ignore the very purposes on which their existence depended? What, in short, if it were an entirely fictional absence?

(1) D.H.Lawrence. 'Why the novel matters', in Twentieth Century Literary Criticism. ed.David Lodge (1972) p.134. (2) F.R.Leavis, The Great Tradition (1948; new edition of 1960),p.2. And cf Marshall McLuhan, in McLuhan Hot and Cool, ed. G.E.Stearn(1968), p.329: 'The job of art is not to store moments of experience but to explore environments that are otherwise invisible...'

APPENDIX I: THE POSSIBILITY OF PROVIDENCE

One conclusion that has sometimes been drawn from the 'loss of God' in the English novel is that 'You can't have God in a novel, can you?' -in other words, that it is simply impossible to tell a long story which takes seriously either God or providence in any sustained way. That seems to have been Ian Watt's conclusion when he wrote The Rise of the Novel, where he suggests that an exclusively naturalistic approach is necessary even for the 'religious novelist':

This, of course, is not to say that the novelist himself or his novel cannot be religious, but only that whatever the ends of the novelist may be, his means should be rigidly restricted to terrestrial characters and actions: the realm of the spirit should be presented only through the subjective experiences of the characters. Thus Dostoevsky's novels, for example, in no sense depend for their verisimilitude or their significance on his religious views; divine intervention is not a necessary construct for an adequate and complete explanation of the causes and meanings of each action, as it is in Bunyan. Alyosha and Father Zossima are portrayed very objectively: indeed, the very brilliance of Dostoevsky's presentation shows that he cannot assume, but must prove, the reality of the spirit: and The Brothers Karamazov as a whole does not depend upon any non-naturalistic causation or significance to be effective and complete.(1)

This assertion of the need to 'rigidly restrict' the novel's subject-matter obviously raises a fundamental question for our study. A number of interesting theoretical issues are involved, with wide-ranging implications, which we shall look at briefly below. But 'the text should come first': and the example Watt cites, the fiction of the Russian novelist Dostoevsky, is worth our attention, in that it is generally seen as looming rather larger in the novel's history than works like Jane Eyre or Amelia or The End of the Affair. But a careful reading of Dostoevsky demonstrates that Watt is mistaken: no such 'rigid restriction' or exclusion of providentialism is at all necessary.

(i) From Russia with God's Love?

Take Crime and Punishment, for example. This is the story of Raskolnikov's murder of an apparently useless old woman, and his subsequent guilt and eventual confession. Certainly its 'verisimilitude' does not depend on Dostoevsky's religious views: it can be read purely in psychological terms; providence is not a 'necessary construct' for an adequate explanation of events. But it is clearly present as one possible understanding of what has taken place; Dostoevsky carefully opens the door for the beyond.

(1) Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel (1957; Pelican edition of 1972), pp.93-94.

Early references in the book to such a causality are, we may concede, ambivalent. When Katerina Ivanovna throws out the challenge 'Good God!... is there no justice upon earth? Whom should you protect if not us orphans? We shall see! There is law and justice on earth, there is, I will find it!'(1), all that results is her own death. Yet it is not quite impossible that she is right: as a result of her death her children are taken care of. Still, if there is a providence at work here, it is one that works in mysterious ways.

But this mystery is central to what Dostoevsky does with the notion of providence in the book: the issue is raised, yet with a deliberate ambivalence. This becomes obvious in the passages leading up to the murder. Rqskolnikov prays, 'Lord, show me my path - I renounce that accursed... dream of mine' (ie the murder)(2), and immediately, as if in response, the unexpected occurs:

Later on, when he recalled that time and all that happened to him during those days, minute by minute, point by point, he was superstitiously impressed by one circumstance, which, though in itself not very exceptional, always seemed to him afterwards the predestined turning-point of his fate. He could never understand and explain to himself why, when he was tired and worn out, when it would have been more convenient for _him to go home by the shortest and most direct way, he had returned by the Hay Market where he had no need to go... But why, he was always asking himself, why had such an important, such a decisive and at the same time such an absolutely chance meeting happened in the Hay Market (where he had moreover no reason to go) at the very hour, the very minute of his life when he was just in the very mood and in the very circumstances in which that meeting was able to exert the gravest and most decisive influence on his whole destiny? As though it had been lying in wait for him on purpose!(3)

Here, in so fateful a result of his prayer, there is indeed a suggestion of a causality beyond the merely naturalistic, operating through his chance thoughts and wanderings. Its credibility is increased by the 'always seemed to him afterwards' - that is to say, in his moments of cool reflection much later, and not just in the periods of overheated intensity that follow the murder. But the result is not what might be expected: it must be noted that, so far from answering his prayer with deliverance, the 'chance meeting' serves to present him with a clear opportunity to carry out the murder. At the beginning of the next chapter Dostoevsky presents a plausible

(1) Fyodor Dostoevsky, Crime and Punishment (1865-66), trans. Constance Garnett (1914), p.356. Except where indicated otherwise, all references are to the Heinemann edition of 1945, henceforth referred to as CP. (2) Ibid, p.55. (3) Ibid.

naturalistic explanation of the 'chance meeting', but immediately returns to the alternative, supernaturalistic, interpretation:

But Raskolnikov had become superstitious of late. The traces of superstition remained in him long after, and were almost ineradicable. And in all this he was always afterwards disposed to see something strange and mysterious, as it were the presence of some peculiar influences and coincidences.(1)

'Superstition' sounds pejorative. But Dostoevsky moves on straightaway to an incident for which coincidence is only marginally possible as an interpretation: Raskolnikov overhears a conversation in which it is suggested that the murder of the old pawnbroker, the very same woman whom he himself is thinking of killing, could be justified since it would set her money free for 'a hundred thousand good deeds':

This coincidence always seemed strange to him. This trivial talk in a tavern had an immense influence on him in his later action; as though there had really been in it something preordained, some guiding hint.(2)

The striking thing here is that this 'something preordained' sways Raskolnikov towards murder rather than away from it. It may all be the product of Raskolnikov's feverish imagination; or it may be evil in origin ('When reason fails, the devil helps!', Raskolnikov thinks as he solves the unforeseen problem of how to obtain an axe for the murder(3)). But the book also raises the bizarre possibility that the hand of God may be operating to provide Raskolnikov with a situation in which he is allowed to murder and so learn the falsity of his radical philosophical theories (an instance of the 'permissive will of God', in theological terms). The enigmatic detective Porfiry suggests a possible unity as he urges Raskolnikov to confess and accept a prison sentence:

(1) Ibid, p.57. (2) Ibid, pp. 60-61. (3) Ibid, p.66.

Seek and ye shall find. This may be God's means for bringing you to Him... At least you didn't deceive yourself for long, you went straight to the furthest point at one bound. How do I regard you? I regard you as one of those men who would stand and smile at their torturer while he cuts their entrails out, if only they have found faith or God. Find it and you will live. You have long needed a change of air. Suffering, too, is a good thing... You ought to thank God, perhaps. How do you know? Perhaps God is saving you for something.(1)

And certainly it will be through the sufferings of his sentence to Siberia that Raskolnikov will find his resurrection. It is at least possible, then, that these coincidences can be seen as God making a way for Raskolnikov to go 'straight to the furthest point at one bound'. (Porfiry's assessment receives credibility in that it is he who detects Raskolnikov's guilt.)

There is another character who strengthens the suggestion of the reality of God's presence and activity as a conceivable if highly paradoxical interpretation of events: the prostitute Sonia. Sonia is a crucial character in the novel; it is she who faithfully follows Raskolnikov into exile and is the means of his conversion and 'resurrection'. Obviously, then, her attitudes towards events carry some weight -backed up as they are by her ability to survive spiritually in enforced degradation. For Sonia has turned - agonisingly - to prostitution for her destitute family's sake, and -almost miraculously - 'has still preserved the purity of her spirit', as Raskolnikov observes:

He was still confronted by the question, how could she have remained so long in that position without going out of her mind? ...What held her up -surely not depravity? All that infamy had obviously only touched her mechanically, not one drop of real depravity had penetrated to her heart; he saw that.(2)

What 'holds her up', as it turns out, is - despite her own wretched experience -her strong belief in providence. Raskolnikov wonders, 'Does she expect a miracle? No doubt she does. Doesn't that all mean madness?'(3) -raising the two alternatives of madness and supernaturalism that arise in the narrative of his own experience too:

(1) Ibid, pp.404-05. (2) Ibid, p.286. (3) Ibid.

'So you pray to God a great deal, Sonia?' he asked her.

Sonia did not speak, he stood beside her waiting for an answer.

'What should I be without God?' she whispered, rapidly, forcibly, glancing at him with suddenly flashing eyes, and squeezing his hand...

'That's the way out! That's the explanation,' he decided, scrutinising her with eager curiosity, with a new, strange, almost morbid feeling. He gazed at that pale, thin, irregular, angular little face, those soft blue eyes, which could flash with such fire, such stern energy, that little body still shaking with indignation and anger - and it all seemed to him more and more strange, almost impossible. 'She is a religious maniac!' he repeated to himself... Everything about Sonia seemed to him strange and more wonderful every moment. (1)

Sonia's providential worldview receives considerable endorsement in what it does for her -though 'She is a religious maniac!' keeps the alternative interpretation in view. And at their next encounter, the question of providence is brought to bear on the central issue of the book. Raskolnikov suggests that man's need to look after his own destiny gives him the right to direct events even at the cost of murder; Sonia asserts a different causality, albeit one with its own mystery:

'But I can't know the Divine Providence... And why do you ask what can't be answered? What's the use of such foolish questions? How could it happen that it should depend on my decision -who has made me a judge to decide who is to live and who is not to live?'

'Oh, if the Divine Providence is to be mixed up in it, there is no doing anything,' Raskolnikov grumbled morosely.(2)

Quite so: if God indeed acts in historical reality, then the whole ethical issue becomes totally different; there can be no grounds for murder committed on the basis that the ends justify the means. Instead, the life of faith will mean trusting God for deliverance against the probabilities of the situation. (But there is an unexplored problem here: faith in God would surely rule out Sonia's resort to prostitution to meet her family's needs as much as it does Raskolnikov's murder.)

Raskolnikov proceeds to confess his murder to Sonia. He has several possible explanations of his act. First he justifies it in the terms of man having to look after his own destiny, as the necessary foundation for his career. Then, acknowledging that as 'all nonsense, it's almost all talk', he presents it as his solution to the problems of his mother and sister. Sonia objects, 'No, that's not right, not right', and Raskolnikov changes his mind and describes it in terms of moral self-criticism: 'Better... imagine -yes, it's certainly better -imagine that I am vain, envious, malicious, base, vindictive and... well, perhaps with a tendency to insanity.' But he swings back immediately ('No, that's not it. Again I am telling you wrong') and proceeds to assert his rights as the potential master-spirit, breaking free from the ethics of the common herd, who 'dares most of all' and thereby 'will be most in the right... I... I wanted to have the daring... And I killed her.' Sonia counters immediately on grounds that are not only ethical but also supernaturalistic:

(1) Ibid,p.287. (2) Ibid p.359.

'Oh, hush, hush!' cried Sonia, clasping her hands.
'you turned away from God and God has smitten you, has given you over to the devil!'
'Then, Sonia, when I used to lie there in the dark and all this became clear to me, was it a temptation of the devil, eh?'
'Hush, don't laugh, blasphemer! You don't understand, you don't understand! Oh God! He won't understand!'
'Hush Sonia, I am not laughing. I know myself that it was the devil leading me.'

His last attempt at explanation is that 'I did the murder for myself, for myself alone... I wanted to find out then and quickly whether I was a louse like everybody else or a man' (ie a master-spirit ethically free to 'step over barriers'). But by now he will accept the supernatural framework: 'I want to prove one thing only, that the devil led me on then and he has shown me since that I had not the right to take that path, because I am just such a louse as all the rest.'(1)

In this crucial discussion, Dostoevsky is presenting us with several alternative interpretations for the events of the book. One of these, the one that closes that part of their conversation, has the weight of Sonia's character behind it; and that is the interpretation that involves a providential perspective. To say this is not to say that Sonia is to be understood as Dostoevsky's mouthpiece: rather, it is to say that, among the various different approaches we are offered, the supernaturalistic understanding should be considered as having some weight. But then it becomes a possibility that the ambivalences of the earlier narrative are events that should be read along supernaturalistic lines. The final conclusion of the narrative has the same effect. Raskolnikov confesses his murder and is sent to Siberia; Sonia follows him loyally, and it is through his relationship with her that he finally attains 'a full resurrection into a new life'(2) -expressed in his taking up the New Testament for the first time, four paragraphs before the book's close. Such a denouement gives a real endorsement to a (re)reading of the book's events in terms of providentialist causality: the final revelation

of a pattern suggests that the earlier mysterious hints were perhaps not illusory.

This conclusion is not rendered unavoidable. The book's theme is not supernaturalism versus naturalism, but rather 'crime and punishment': it is first of all the narrative of Raskolnikov's rediscovery of the reality of ethical categories, his realisation that 'crime' and 'punishment' are meaningful terms - and, indeed, 'love', as proven by Sonia's faithfulness. It is possible to share Sonia's 'feelings, her aspirations at least', as Raskolnikov hopes at the close, without necessarily endorsing her assertions in the area of causality. Nothing is 'proven'; nonetheless, Dostoevsky has modelled a process in which the Christian worldview, with its real moral categories and its interpretation of events that denies them to be 'rigidly restricted to terrestrial characters', might well be worthy of a faith-commitment as a correct picture of how things are.

(1) Ibid, pp.365-69. (2) Ibid, p.481.

Dostoevsky creates a similar situation in The Brothers Karamazov, which is often seen as his masterpiece. This novel is in part concerned with the clash between the scepticism (mixed with a longing for faith) of Ivan Karamazov, and the faith (mingled with doubt) of the saintly Father Zossima and his pupil Alyosha, Ivan's brother. The fifth and sixth books of the novel exemplify this clash; and in them the issue of supernaturalism is clearly raised. In the fifth book, 'Pro and Contra', Ivan is portrayed presenting a powerful series of arguments against Christianity, drawn from such areas as the problem of the suffering of innocent children. Dostoevsky then presents the memoirs of Father Zossima in the sixth book as a kind of reply.

And for Father Zossima, God is involved in human life, superintending its development. He tells the story of how he came to enter the monastery: 'Five months later by God's grace I entered upon the safe and blessed path, praising the unseen finger which had guided me so clearly to it.'(1) No overt miracle is involved; what is asserted is God's sovereignty and activity over and through the development of Zossima's thinking. The same is true when Zossima befriends a murderer who has gone undetected for fourteen years, but with a agonised conscience; the murderer tells him, 'I have been for fourteen years "in the hands of the living God", that's how one must think of those fourteen years'.(2) Next day he confesses the murder in public; nobody believes him. Zossima sees this as God's answer to prayer; and the murderer himself agrees - even when he falls mortally ill: 'God has had pity on me and is calling me to Himself. I know I am dying, but I feel joy and peace for the first time after so many years.'(3) In the sixth book, then, the 'Christian' option that Zossima represents includes, as a matter of course, a providentialist way of looking at the causes underlying events; 'the hands of the living God' are carrying out their purposes in men's lives. Such a perspective is only one man's opinion; but that man, Zossima, is one whom the book presents in a very favourable light.

The next book, 'Alyosha', narrates a crisis in Alyosha's development, and raises the issue of supernaturalism again, in a rather more complex manner. Father Zossima has gained something of a reputation of a miracle-worker, and after his death crowds visit his monastery expecting miracles. Instead, Zossima's body decomposes much more rapidly than it ought. This is taken as a sign of divine displeasure by Zossima's opponents in the monastery, and causes considerable confusion amongst his friends. The narrator comments,

In reality it was the most natural and trivial matter... Afterwards, even many years afterwards, some sensible monks were amazed and horrified, when they recalled that day, that the scandal could have reached such proportions.(4)

(1) Fyodor Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov (1879-80), trans. Constance Garnett (1912), pp.324-125. (2) Ibid,p.321. (3)Ibid, p.323. (4) Ibid, pp. 342-43.

But the narrator is not querying the doctrine of providence; instead, he simply rejects the naively simplistic way in which the monks interpret it. And he stresses his own orthodoxy as he does so: he goes on to say that 'it seemed as though God had in this case let the minority' (that is, the minority of monks who were opposed to Zossima) 'get the upper hand for the t{me'(1); which retains a supernaturalistic context by placing the whole action within the permissive will of God.

However, Alyosha's faith is severely shaken:

Why this sign from heaven.... where is the
finger of Providence? Why did Providence hide its face
'at the most critical moment' (so Alyosha thought it), as
though voluntarily submitting to the blind, dumb, pitiless
laws of nature?(2)

And Alyosha, demanding 'justice' (ie that God's will should be shown visibly to be righteous), echoes his sceptical brother Ivan's words: 'I am not rebelling against my God; I simply "don't accept his world"'(3). Then, in repudiation of his monastic vows, he eats sausage, orders vodka, and goes off to the disreputable Grushenka (who is conducting an affair with both Alyosha's father and his brother Mitya). But at Grushenka's house, it would seem, Alyosha gets his miracle, a miracle of character transformation, of conversion: Alyosha's selfless pity and loving interest trigger off a spiritual crisis in Grushenka, and she confesses to him her own guilt. Alyosha returns to the monastery in a changed mood: 'There was reigning in his soul a sense of the wholeness of things.'(4) He dreams of Christ at Cana, and on waking has an ecstatic experience of love for the entire heavens, and the world, human and natural; at the end of which we read, "Someone visited my soul in that hour", he used to say afterwards, with implicit faith in his

words'.(5) Alyosha has come to an understanding of God's providential will, and God's world, in contrast both to his original, highly simplistic expectation of miracles, and his subsequent rejection. And in that experience Dostoevsky is presenting the involvement of the supernatural (the true experience of miracle as distinct from the false expectation, and also the supernatural visitation) as - almost certainly - a fundamental part of Alyosha's spiritual development.

The events that befall the third and wildest Karamazov brother, Mitya, surely offer themselves to be read as containing the same movement: retaining a deep-rooted providentialism while demonstrating the falsity of a superficial faith. Mitya is threatening to kill his father; yet he tells Alyosha that,

I believe in miracles.... In a miracle of Divine Providence. God knows my heart. He sees my despair. He sees the whole picture. Surely he won't let something awful happen. Alyosha, I believe in miracles.

(1) Ibid, p.344. (2) Ibid.pp.352-53. (3) Ibid,p.354; cf. Ivan's peroration on p.251. (4) Ibid,p.375. (5) Ibid, p.379.

Mitya is not exactly a paragon of virtue: but Alyosha is, and he concurs.(1) Yet 'something awful' does happen. The Karamazovs' father is murdered; and Mitya is the main suspect, since he has threatened to kill his father. So, although he is innocent, he is judged guilty and sentenced to Siberia: 'Divine Providence' has failed to perform as expected, it seems. But in fact Dostoevsky refers to this event a number of times in a manner that suggests the real involvement of God; and in these we see just how his hints at supernaturalism are operating. First of all, it is clear that Mitya Karamazov, like Raskolnikov in Crime and Punishment, is a character in need of some kind of reformation. He embodies what Alyosha calls 'the primitive force of the Karamazovs...a crude, unbridled, earthly force. Does the spirit of God move above that force? Even that I don't know. '(2) This is one of the many questions the book raises: if God and Mitya Karamazov exist in the same universe, what will happen? What will God do?

The intuitive Father Zossima suggests an answer after Mitya has taken part in an outrageous scene in his presence. Zossima astonishes everyone by bowing to the ground before him; and he explains later to Alyosha, 'I bowed down yesterday to the great suffering in store for him.'⁽³⁾ Alyosha likewise tells Mitya after his arrest that 'To-morrow will be a great and awful day for you, the judgement of God will be accomplished.' In his reply, Mitya voices the same awareness of providential judgement:

Brother, these last two months I've found in myself a new man. A new man has risen up in me. He was hidden in me, but would never have come to the surface if it hadn't been for this blow from heaven. I am afraid! And what do I care if I spend twenty years in the mines breaking out ore with a hammer? I am not a bit afraid of that -it's something else I am afraid of now: that that new man may leave me... I didn't kill father, but I've got to go... Oh yes, we shall be in chains and there will be no freedom, but then, in our great sorrow, we shall rise again to joy, without which man cannot live nor God exist, for God gives joy: it's His privilege - a grand one. Ah, man should be dissolved in prayer!... One cannot exist in prison without God: it's even more impossible than out of prison.⁽⁴⁾

Mitya says many bizarre things in the book, and his mood changes swiftly: by putting the full expression of these ideas into Mitya's mouth, and so casting a certain doubt on them, Dostoevsky avoids giving them too great an endorsement, avoids sacrificing the conflict and ambivalence of beliefs and attitudes that is so fundamental to his novels. But he wants his readers to take the

(1) Ibid,p.121-22. (2) Ibid,p.225. (3) Ibid,p.292. (4) Ibid, pp. 625-26.

idea seriously. 'I've sworn to amend, and every day I've done the same filthy things', Mitya says. 'I understand now that such men as I need a blow, a blow of destiny... Never, never should I have risen of myself!... I want to suffer and by suffering I shall be purified. Perhaps I shall be purified, gentlemen?'⁽¹⁾

Here, therefore, as in Crime and Punishment, Dostoevsky seems to offer his reader a possible, and complex, providentialistic interpretation of horrific events, while keeping his distance from a naive, over-simplistic approach -though Mitya, unlike Raskolnikov, does not express his depravity to the point of murder

in order to be brought to his 'resurrection'. (Mitya states more than once that it was because 'God was watching over me then'(2) that he did not murder his father when the opportunity arose.) Mitya is a dubious and highly-strung character, but what he says gains credibility through its endorsement by Zossima and Alyosha, both of whom possess some measure of 'second-sight'. And the plan has room for the sceptical Ivan too; as Alyosha prays for his brothers, he perceives Ivan's brain-fever (in which, incidentally, Ivan has visions of the devil) as part of it: 'God, in whom he disbelieved, and His truth were gaining mastery over his heart, which still refused to submit.'(3)

Yet Dostoevsky is a novelist who creates worlds into which different perspectives are interwoven, in which God's providential will is perceived not by sight but by faith; and, indeed, worlds where in the long run it is possible to deny the accuracy of the faith-perspective altogether, and to conclude that the non-supernaturalistic perspective is adequate. Mitya may have been preserved by divine intervention from committing murder; nevertheless, the murder still takes place - one reptile devours another, in Ivan's phrase. Similarly Mitya, though guiltless, is pronounced guilty, which would be in line with the providential pattern of the sections that have just been quoted; but that is not how the book ends, for Mitya is last seen planning, not to go to his sentence in Siberia, but to escape and go to America -a course of action he sees possibly as running 'away from suffering. A sign has come, I reject the sign. I have a way of salvation and I turn my back on it... What becomes of our hymn from underground?'(4) The tidiness of the pattern disappears, leaving the reader with Alyosha's final opinion that 'You are not ready, and such a cross is not for you.'(5) The perspectives shift and change, and no interpretation of events has assured certainty.

And of course this has the taste of reality; even seen from a providentialist point of view. Every Christian must frequently face the situation Alyosha faces at the close, where an apparently tidy conception of God's strategy is suddenly thrown into doubt. Considered as supernaturalistic fiction, then, this is thoroughly realistic. But the doubts extend deeper in this novel. The above quotations have been from the sections representing matters from Alyosha's point of view; but there is the point of view of the sceptic Ivan too. And from Ivan's perspective, Alyosha's reinterpretation of the will of God at the close of the novel merely demonstrates that a providentialist understanding of events is unnecessary. Putting the two perspectives together creates a world about the foundations of which there remains a deep ambiguity.

(1) Ibid,pp.538-39. Amongst other things, this is a partial answer to Ivan's arguments against faith, which are based on the problem of suffering. (2) Ibid,p.412; and cf. p.498. (3) Ibid,p.695. (4) Ibid,p.630. (5) Ibid,p.807.

In this ambiguity lies the essence of Dostoevsky's vision. Janko Lavrin writes that the 'very form of a Dostoevskian novel results from the dynamic tension between several contradictory planes and trends of one and the consciousness -each of them with its own conclusions... Entire chapters of his have a power of their own precisely because they are so ambiguous. '(1) In building such a successful model of this ambiguity lies some of his greatness. Twentieth-century Christian novelists have confronted these issues too: Jack Clemo's Wilding Graft presents the same two perspectives on providence - raising in particular the problem of suffering, as Ivan Karamazov does; while C.S. Lewis'

Till We Have Faces asks the related question, If the gods exist and are good, why do they not speak clearly? But Dostoevsky's vision is not marked by the convinced faith of Cleo or Lewis: the ambiguity, the contradiction, is what stands out most strongly. Ivan Karamazov is easily as persuasive as Father Zossima.

Now to say this is not to insist that Dostoevsky ought to have weighted the scales to present Zossima's and Alyosha's perspective with a certainty Dostoevsky did not feel it truly possessed. But to recognize Dostoevsky's novel for the thing it is, it is necessary to perceive the nature of its underlying vision.(2) The ambivalence of The Brothers Karamazov may be fairly 'realistic', since to many people the world does seem to possess just this ambivalence regarding any providential design; and even those who have come to assured faith must regard the perception of ambivalence as something understandable, even if it calls for further exploration. But such an evenly-balanced 'dynamic tension' exists as the final basis of the novel because it matches Dostoevsky's own uncertainty.

'How dreadfully it has tormented me -and torments me even now- this longing for faith', he wrote in 1854, 'which is all the stronger for the proofs I have against it.'(3) He knew his novels were a great deal else besides expressions of an assuredly Christian vision: 'These fools', he wrote of his critics in his journal, 'could not even conceive of so strong a denial of God as the one to which I gave expression... You might search Europe in vain for so powerful an expression of atheism'(4) -which is certainly true of Ivan Karamazov's arguments. (To this reader, at least, Dostoevsky's ability to draw his reader into the turmoil of his own doubts has created some of the most powerful anti-Christian fiction in the history of the novel.) Dostoevsky's novels show the reader what a providentialist perspective might look like; it can be portrayed, and might be accurate, and the supernatural might be operative -but then again, it might not.

(1) Janko Lavrin, Dostoevsky: a Study (1943), pp.30,31.

(2) Of course in our humanistic era, with its loss of assured faith, that final uncertainty or ambiguity can tend itself to be used as a criterion of excellence. But that is no more an aesthetic judgement than is an assessment from an earlier era which would have condemned it as a 'bad' novel for not concluding with an affirmation of orthodoxy. (Either judgement might still be a valid judgement; that would be decided on other grounds -and hopefully in the open, not as a covert value-judgement. Neither is a specifically aesthetic judgement.) (3) Letter to Madame Fonvizin, quoted ibid, p.64. (4)Quoted ibid.

There is a second reason for this, and that is Dostoevsky's concentration on the subjective aspect of religious belief.

It is not miracles that dispose realists to belief. The genuine realist, if he is an unbeliever, will always find strength and ability to disbelieve in the miraculous, and if he is confronted with a miracle as an irrefutable fact he would rather disbelieve his own senses than admit the fact.... Faith does not, in the realist, spring from the miracle, but the miracle from faith.(1)

And in Ivan Karamazov's celebrated fable of the Grand Inquisitor, the suggestion is that only such a person would be prepared to use such evidence -this being, implies Ivan, a surrender to the temptation Christ rejected, to win adherents by the use of miracles: 'Thou wouldst not enslave man by a miracle, and didst crave faith given freely, not based on miracle.'(2)

But to understand Dostoevsky's novels in relation to the biblical worldview, it is necessary to note the rather more complex manner in which the New Testament treats this issue. For although Christ did indeed refuse to validate his claims by signs given on demand(3), this was because the evidence was being demanded, not as part of a bona fide search after the truth, but merely as a challenge, or even, as it would seem in one case, from a desire for entertainment.(4) Christ was not demanding a blind faith, a leap in the dark: rather, He promised that those who would commit themselves to following Him would 'know' the truth of the matter.(5) Accordingly, John, when he refers to Christ's miracles in his gospel, uses the word semeion or 'sign', and states that the purpose of his recording these was to bring about belief.(6) It should also be noted that Christ's refusal to provide signs for any and all was not total: He made one exception, the resurrection.(7)

(1) The Brothers Karamazov, p.21. (2) Ibid, p.263. Of course an important school of modern theological thinking has followed Dostoevsky in this understanding of faith; in particular Bultmann and his disciples. (3) Eg Matthew 12:38, Mark 8:11-12, Luke 23:8-9, John 6:30. (4) Luke 23:8-9. Furthermore, such demands were often made after he had worked a miracle for a specific purpose, ignoring the evidence already granted and demanding a further spectacle. Thus John 6:30 follows the feeding of the five thousand; similarly Matthew 12:38 comes after an argument about Christ's exorcisms which took as its starting-point an awareness shared by all concerned that the events had occurred. (5) Eg John 7:17. (6) John 20:30-31. Peter takes a similar attitude towards the evidential value of miracles on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:22). (7) Eg Matthew 12:39-40 - a statement He repeats elsewhere - and John 2:19-22. In Romans 1:4 and Acts 17:31 Paul sees the resurrection as the final verification, to all, of Christ's claims. Throughout the Acts the early church refer continually to the recent event of the resurrection as the indisputable evidence for the gospel; and it has retained this centrality to the Christian proclamation ever since.

Dostoevsky, however, seems to see faith as something separate, not only from the kind of confirmation and endorsement that could be provided by dubious contemporary miracles, but from any objective confirmation whatsoever. It may be that this was a result of a nineteenth-century despair of the external evidence that left him in a position close to a Kierkegaardian Christian existentialism, with a leap of faith, a belief marked by real devotion but unconnected to facts. 'If any one could prove to me that Christ is outside the truth, and if the truth really did exclude Christ, I would prefer to stay with Christ and not with the truth.'(1) Or, as Ivan Karamazov says in the preface to his fable: 'It is fifteen centuries since man has ceased to see signs from Heaven.'

No signs from Heaven come today
To add to what the heart doth say.

There was nothing left but faith in what the heart doth say'.(2) 'Nothing left': it is not surprising that radical uncertainty should be the result.

'If you believe -or if you desire very much to believe -then devote yourself to Him', wrote Dostoevsky in 1880 shortly before his death, 'and the torments resulting from the inner duality will be considerably relieved; your spirit will be pacified, and this is the main thing.'(3) Whether it is an illusory peace is left unclear (four years later Ibsen would raise that very issue of life-illusions in The Wild Duck); the internal is 'the main thing', not what is happening outside. As a result, although he is very aware that values, morality and meaning in life depend on God's real existence (as he suggests in different ways in Crime and Punishment, The Brothers Karamazov, and also The Possessed), yet the religious content of Dostoevsky's novels centres on the internal, 'what the heart doth say'. Alyosha, he says, took on his vocation 'because, at that time, it alone struck his imagination and presented itself to him as offering an ideal means of escape for his soul from darkness to light'(4); and the object and anchor of Alyosha's faith tends to be his veneration for Father Zossima, even more than for Christ Himself. And, significantly, the end of the book is concerned with the regenerative function ('there is nothing higher and stronger and more wholesome and good for life in the future') of 'some good memory'; not of God, but 'especially a memory of childhood, of home'.(5) The Godward dimension in salvation is missing from the finale. We should not be surprised that such a novelist does not resolve the ambiguities of his world, as to whether God is truly present in it or not.(6)

(1) Quoted Lavrin, op.cit.,p.64. (2) The Brothers Karamazov, p.254. (3) Quoted Lavrin, ibid. Cf. Colin Brown on Kierkegaard's similar predicament: 'At times his view of God seems to have a good deal in common with the Wizard of Oz. It is not so much his existence that counts, but the thought of his existence' (Philosophy and the Christian Faith (1969),p.130). (4) The Brothers Karamazov, p.21. (5) Ibid,p.819. (6) Therein, of course, lies the route to the situation which many 'religious novelists' end up, where religion tends to become a mere biographical phenomenon, as we noted in our earlier discussion of the nineteenth-century English novelists. ('What matters about the "recognition of something to be lived for beyond the mere satisfaction of self" is not its truth but its function', writes Laurence Lerner (The Truth-tellers (1967),p.43)).

In many ways, therefore, we should see Dostoevsky as a child of his time, and the foundation of his novels as nineteenth-century doubt. Yet, even so, they demonstrate (pace Ian Watt's words cited at the beginning of the chapter) that the novel need not be 'rigidly restricted' to the non-supernaturalistic. He shows his readers a little of how the world appears when seen through the providentialist worldview of Sonia, Zossima, or Alyosha; he depicts what the objective, supernatural forces might look like, that they believe are active in their lives, even though he does not commit himself conclusively to their affirmative 'vision. To step into the world of Dostoevsky's novels, and watch his gigantic semi-lunatics

lumbering around in the halflight, is both to expose oneself to a profound assault on faith in the God who acts, and yet, at the same time, to be aware that it is possible to present the activity of that God in fiction.

If we wish a final proof of that, we could find it in certain of the fictions of Dostoevsky's great contemporary and compatriot, Leo Tolstoy. Tolstoy was no evangelical; but at certain points in his life he wrote rather like one. Tolstoy's approach is to tell a story of ordinary, human, social events, and then suddenly to draw the curtain aside and reveal that, behind all this, a higher power is at work shaping events; in Resurrection, for example:

So Nekhlyudov, now appreciating the baseness of what he had done, felt the mighty hand of the Master; but he still did not realise the significance of what he had done, or recognize the Master's hand. He did not want to believe that what he saw now was his doing; but the inexorable, invisible hand held him and he already had a presentiment that he would never wriggle free.(1)

Another example is the striking short story The Death of Ivan Ilyich -a powerful 'conversion story' if ever there was one. God is absent from the early pages of realistically-described social interaction, just as He is absent from Ivan Ilyich's perception of his experience at this point. But as time goes on, and Ilyich becomes stricken by a steadily-worsening disease, he grows nauseated at the bourgeois shallowness of his life. As he confronts the reality of death, deeper realities begin to come into focus:

He only waited till Gerasim had gone into the next room and restrained himself no longer but wept like a child. He wept on account of his helplessness, his terrible loneliness, the cruelty of man, the cruelty of God, and the absence of God.(2)

(1) Leo Tolstoy, Resurrection (1899; trans. Rosemary Edmonds, 1966), p.111. (2) Leo Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilyich (1886; the Aylmer Maude translation is conveniently reprinted in Eleven Modern Short Novels, ed. Leo Hamalian and Edmond L. Volpe (New York, 1970)); p.46.

The big questions come into his mind: 'Maybe I did not live as I ought to have done... But how could that be, when I did everything properly?' But the bourgeois 'properly' is proving inadequate. His mind returns to his law-court experiences and the ushers' proclamation 'The judge is coming, the judge' (a tactful way of introducing the reality of the ultimate 'judge' who is indeed coming); and 'he ceased crying, but turning his face to the wall continued to ponder on the same question: Why, and for what purpose is there all this horror?'(1)

We are moving here through the Eliotesque progression: the boredom, the horror...and then the glory.(2) But conventional religion does not bring the glory to Ilyich: it is only another pointless component of the 'what was considered good by the most highly placed people' that has dominated his life. Hence it is after he takes communion at his wife's urging that there comes the final realisation 'All you have lived for is falsehood and deception, hiding life and death from you.' (3) This passage is sometimes seized upon as a precursor of Sartrean negation; but in Tolstoy's hands it represents the final collapse of that which is sham, making room for the One who is reality itself to pass through. After _another page (and three days solidly screaming 'I won't'), he has a sense of approaching something that terrifies him:

He felt that his agony was due to his being thrust into that black hole and still more to his not being able to get right into it. He was hindered from getting into it by his conviction that his life had been a good one. That very justification of his life held him fast and prevented his moving forward, and it caused him most torment of all. (4)

In the terms of the Acts account of St Paul's conversion, he is 'kicking against the goads'; by his self-justifications he is evading 'repentance', in the truest, life-encompassing sense of that word. But two hours before his death, the 'outside' takes a decisive hand:

(1) Ibid, p.48. (2) Eliot uses this phrase to sum up the ultimate realities in The Use of Poetry, and Helen Gardner aptly applies the progression to Eliot's own work in The Art of T.S. Eliot (1949), p.79. (3) The Death of Ivan Ilyich, pp.51-52. (4)Ibid, p.53.

At that very moment Ivan Ilyich fell through and caught sight of the light, and it was revealed to him that though his life had not been what it should have been, this could still be rectified.

He is able to express this repentance in its implications for his wife and son. And it is all in the presence of God now: 'He tried to add, "forgive me," but said "forego" and waved his hand, knowing that He whose understanding mattered would understand.' Ilyich has faced up to the God who is the true priority; and so -immediately

-his pain ceases to be significant, having accomplished the task for which 'He whose understanding mattered' had permitted it:

"And the pain?" he asked himself. "What has become of it? Where are you, pain?" He turned his attention to it. "Yes, here it is. Well, what of it? Let the pain be... And death... where is it?"... There was no fear because there was no death. In the place of death there was light.

"Death is finished," he said to himself. "It is no more!"

He drew in a breath, stopped in the midst of a sigh, stretched out, and died.(1)

It is a powerful, unsentimental story. To this reader, at least, it is 'true' where the death in Brideshead Revisited discussed earlier is not, because Tolstoy's treatment so clearly presents the deathbed transformation as a meaningful culmination of all the process of disillusionment that has gone before. Pain, death, and meditation are brought together, through tactfully-stated but nonetheless quite overt divine revelation, to a meaningful pattern of grace; creating one of the most powerful statements about death in European fiction. And it is given its shape by providence: in the world of this highly effective fiction, God is a God who is ultimately present and intimately active: the overt revelation at the close makes clear that He has been sovereign in the process throughout.

Ian Watt is wrong: providentialist fiction is entirely possible. It is just our post-Enlightenment consensus that has made it so difficult.

(1) Ibid, pp.53-54.

APPENDIX II: THE FICTIONAL HYPOTHESIS

So much for texts that Ian Watt cites in his insistence that the novel must restrict itself 'rigidly' to the non-supernatural. Let us now turn to the theoretical issues involved. It is indeed true that a consistent supernaturalism will affect the causality of a novel at its very base. But this should not surprise us. 'Like a science, or like mathematics, the novel proceeds by hypothesis', writes Dorothy Van Ghent:

It says, implicitly, "Given such and such conditions, then

such and such would take place." The hypothesis on which the novel is built is the abstract aspect of its form.(1)

In other words, any novel takes as its starting-point, its 'given', certain assumptions about the nature and contents of reality: these assumptions will seldom be stated directly, but they are nevertheless determinative of what can and will happen in the novel, because some kind of selection is inevitable in the very act of composition. (2) Van Ghent gives two examples from early English fiction: in Bunyan, she says, the primacy of relationship with God decides what will be depicted; in Moll Flanders, in contrast, 'the depiction of a human creature "conditioned" to react only to material facts' produces a world 'astonishingly without spiritual dimension'.(3) It is impossible, then, for unmediated reality to be depicted in the novel: what is seen is at most a hypothetical model of reality, itself based on some kind of worldview, implicit or explicit. Art, says Rookmaaker, 'always gives an interpretation of reality, of the thing seen.'(4) Mark Schorer likewise defines the novelist's technique as

...any selection, structure, or distortion, any form or rhythm imposed upon the world of action... One cannot properly say that a writer has no technique, or that he eschews technique, for, being a writer, he cannot do so.(5)

'Technique' inevitably presents us with experience 'shaped', shaped by a particular set of attitudes towards reality, whether conscious or unconscious.

(1) Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel: Form and Fiction (New York, 1953; Harper edition of 1961), p.3. (2) Cf. also George J. Becker: 'And if we wish to pursue the "I am a camera" metaphor, we must remember that even what the camera presents us with is a made thing in the sense that it is composed and selected -which is certainly verified the moment we consider cinematic art even of the most documentary sort.' (Introduction to Documents of Modern Literary Realism (Princeton, 1963), pp.37-38) (3) Van Ghent, op.cit., p.34. (4) H.R. Rookmaaker, Modern Art and the Death of a Culture (1970), p.236. (5) Mark Schorer, 'Technique as discovery', in Twentieth Century Literary Criticism, ed. David Lodge (1972), p.388.

Thus even 'naive realism' is a technique that 'imposes a structure upon the world of action', and such involves a particular set of attitudes concerning the makeup of reality. In Defoe, for example, says Van Ghent,

an intense selectivity has limited the facts of Moll Flanders' world to a certain few kinds of facts, and has ignored great masses of other facts that we think of as making up the plenum of actual reality. Such selectivity warns us that this realistic novel is not actually an

"objective", "reportorial", "photographic" representation of reality; its selectivity is that of the work of art, whose purpose is not that of an "objective" report.(1)

The same is true of late nineteenth-century Realism, which, as we noted in an earlier section, was motivated by its own creed and set of dogmas as to what occurred in the universe: the art of Zola, complained Arthur Symons, was 'nature seen through a formula... He observes, indeed, with astonishing minuteness, but he observes in support of preconceived ideas.'(2) Looking outside the Naturalist movement, we can take note of F.W.J.Hemmings' remarks on Tolstoy:

To say that Tolstoy was realist because he reproduced the realities of life...means in practice absolutely nothing... It needs little reflection to put the question: 'How can you tell Tolstoy is reproducing the realities of life? How do you know that his inventions are nearer to what actually is, than the invention of Dostoevsky -or indeed of any other writer?'(3)

(1) Van Ghent, op.cit., p.35. (2) Quoted K.Graham, English Criticism of the Novel 1865-1900 (1965), p.57. (3) F.W.J. Hemmings, The Russian Novel in France 1884-1914 (1950), p.42.

Sure enough, Dostoevsky complained that 'What most people regard as fantastic and lacking in universality, I hold to be the inmost essence of truth'! (1) In short, the use of the term 'realism' implies some kind of predetermined definition as to what is and is not real; and 'realism' as a literary technique for shaping narrative is only a certain type of fictive hypothesis based on a certain kind of metaphysic.(2)

Now, since, as Erich Heller has written, 'The confused history of

man is largely the history of conflicting senses of reality'(3), the novel tradition contains a wide variety of fictive hypotheses, and we as readers are offered a large number of alternatives. It may be, indeed, that the world is a little bit like Hardy's depiction. Or Dickens, or George Eliot; or Greene, or Charlotte Bronte; or Steinbeck or Faulkner, or Gabriel Garcia Marquez. If every novel is going to be based not on unmediated reality but on a fictive hypothesis, if, as Lawrence said, every novel implies 'some theory of being, some metaphysic'(4), then there is no neutral authority that can declare that one or more such hypotheses is not to be given expression in the novel form. Hence a novel may with as good justification be written with Christian supernaturalism as the underlying hypothesis of its world as anything else. If not, if the Christian novelist must bow to some naturalistic consensus, she will find herself, ironically, voicing Theodore Dreiser's complaint:

You couldn't write about life as it was: you had to write
about it as someone else thought it was -the ministers and
farmers and dullards of the home.(5)

(1) Quoted Miriam Allott, Novelists on the Novel (1959),p.68.(2) Cf. Roger Fowler, Linguistics and the Novel (1977),p.99: 'Note that "realism" is not an actuality, but a convention, a theory. Henry James in The Portrait of a Lady, or in his more withdrawn way Hemingway in The Killers, writes to a theory of the way people have knowledge of each other; Joyce articulates the thoughts of Leopold Bloom in an artificially constructed language which, by convention, has come to be accepted as the representation of a fragmented, unfocused consciousness of that sort.' Van Ghent summarises the issue thus:
'"Realism"...implies, when it is used to describe the factually-oriented novel, that spatial-temporal facts are the only "real"... What is blurred over by the statement is the hypothetical structure of even the most "documentary" or "circumstantial" kind of fiction' (op.cit.,p.33).
(3) Erich Heller, quoted in Becker,op.cit.,p.592. (4) D.H.Lawrence, 'Study of Thomas Hardy' in Phoenix (1936), quoted Wayne Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago,1961),p.79. (5) Quoted Becker, op.cit., p.18.

Such a fictive hypothesis based on a consistent supernaturalism will be radically different from naturalism, in that it will present certain events -notably the activity of God -that would be missing from other hypotheses. But we should note that these are not its whole concern. Donald Bell has objected to 'the tendency...to treat religion as a compartment of life, whereas the Christian faith is to permeate all areas of life.'(1) Hence there can be no such thing as a limited 'Christian subject-matter'. Auerbach demonstrated in his famous study Mimesis that the historical Christian literary

tradition was wedded to a love of reality in its fullness: and it must continue to be so. Indeed, the belief in God as Creator makes the entire length and breadth of creation 'Christian subject-matter': man and woman in the image of God, nature created by God, the sicknesses and developments of the God-ordained social structures of the family, local community and state, and so on: and, permeating and irradiating all these, the divine presence, because 'in everything God works for good with those who love Him'.(2) A consistently providentialistic novel must measure up to the challenge posed by the humanist critic Peter Faulkner:

That note - the ability to find in the ordinary experiences of human life a quality that raises it to a higher level - is surely characteristic of humanistic writing, and very remote from the world of Graham Greene.(3)

Remote from Greene it is indeed, as we have noted: but this merely marks how far Greene drifted from the historical Christian literary tradition. The evangelical poet Jack Clemo writes in his usual swashbuckling manner that 'the creative spirit in the literary and plastic arts can only add to a human chaos unless it affirms, directly or indirectly, the value of a transcendent kingdom'(4); but, he adds, the latter is nothing other-worldly, or rather nothing solely other-worldly, because in authentic Christian discipleship 'every sphere of life is disturbed by these whispers from the Unseen; there is the secret pact with God, followed by reckless action to which the world has no clue.'(5) It is 'a life completely overswept' (i.e. in every area) 'by the forces of the eternal world.'(6) In short, the entire human enterprise is the arena of the divine invasion; and the novelist taking Christian supernaturalism as the basis of his fictional world will not be limited to detailing his characters' devotions.

(1) Quoted Merle Meeter, Literature and the Gospel (Nutley, New Jersey, 1972), p.98. (2) Romans 8:28. There may, of course, be differences in treatment: for example, the Bible's presentation of subject-matter pertaining to both normal and corrupted sexuality is quite overt, but it does not employ the kind of voyeuristic specificity we might find in a blockbuster paperback. (3) Peter Faulkner, Humanism in the English Novel (1975), p.169. (4) Jack Clemo, The Invading Gospel (1958: Lakeland edition of 1972), p.37. This remark might seem to be of particular relevance to Greene. (5) Ibid, p.46. (6) Ibid, p.30.

(ii) Fiction and Propaganda

Several possible objections may be raised to this use of Christian supernaturalism as fictive hypothesis. Let's take them one by one.

The most likely objection - but perhaps less now than formerly - is that such an approach to fiction transforms art into propaganda. But no

more licence is sought by the Christian novelist than is taken by - amongst others - Dickens, George Eliot or Lawrence, all of whom could often be said to have a message they wish to put across! Likewise R.W.B. Lewis remarked that what he called the 'second generation' of twentieth-century novelists -Moravia, Camus, Silone, Faulkner, Greene and Malraux -

...have somewhat departed from the traditional aim of presenting a picture or telling a tale...and have directed fiction toward rebellion or conversion or inquiry - disguises of another and equally traditional aim, the aim of instruction.(1)

Greene, indeed, has gone so far as to claim that it is 'the traditional and essential right of a novelist...to express his views... Even the author, poor devil, has a right to exist.'(2) For the Christian the narrator of Salinger's Seymour has expressed the situation exactly:

An ecstatically happy prose writer...can't be moderate or temperate or brief.... In the wake of anything as large and consuming as happiness. he necessarily forfeits the much smaller, but, for a writer, always rather exquisite pleasure of appearing on the page serenely sitting on a fence.(3)

Hence T.S. Eliot rejects 'that Olympian elevation and superior indifference' which accepts the role of being 'merely one among many entertainers'(4); and Jack Clemo attacks the idea that 'a certain amount of spiritual paralysis was...essential to a balanced faith, essential to art'(5), because 'nothing but disaster can result from the

(1) R.W.B.Lewis, The Picaresque Saint (1960), p.214. (2)Graham Greene, Collected Essays (1969; Penguin edition of 1970), pp.92-93. (3) Quoted Wayne Booth, op.cit.,p.66. (4) T.S.Eliot, After Strange Gods (1934),pp.37,34. (5) Clemo, op.cit.,p.62.

artistic integrity which compels a man to be a detached and cynical spectator of redemption'(1) -as he would not be of, say, sex.

Writers such as these would not accept that ideological content in a novel is in principle wrong, unless it can be faulted for manifest clumsiness.

Therefore D.H. Lawrence writes, 'The novel is not, as a rule, immoral because the novelist has any dominant idea, or purpose. The immorality lies in the novelist's helpless, unconscious predilection', or at any rate anything that causes him to put 'his thumb in the scale, to pull down the balance to his own predilection.'(2) It is not the idea-content, but the idea-content mismanaged, that is wrong. It may be appropriate to cite E.M. Forster's remark that 'For me the whole intricate question of method resolves itself not into formulae but into the power of the writer to bounce the reader into accepting what he says.'(3)

Yet in a sense the matter is still simpler than that. For Christian novelists to write with a supernaturalistic fictive hypothesis is no more propagandist than for the agnostic novelist to use a naturalistic hypothesis. Strictly speaking they are not even being didactic: they are merely depicting the world as they see it; and their intention is to arouse the sense of wonder(4) rather than to suggest that the whole religious thing is rather dubious and probably has a perfectly good psychological or sociological cause. Every novelist employs a fictive

(1) Ibid, p.37. (2) D.H. Lawrence. 'Morality and the Novel', in Lodge, op.cit..pp.128-129. (3) E.M.Forster, in ibid, p.143. (4) This, of course, can be argued to be the goal of the aesthetic experience in general, as in Sallie McFague Teselle, Literature and the Christian Life (Yale,1966),p.73.

hypothesis, and none are entirely 'objective' beyond a certain point: the assertion and celebration of a God who exists and acts is the fictive hypothesis underlying the Christian's work, because it is the determining factor in their view of the world. Otherwise, indeed, they could be accused of unfaithfulness to their deepest vision, and of a

craven capitulation to the dominant agnostic consensus. In this sense a supernaturalistic fictive hypothesis is merely a matter of honesty to, and faithful recording of, the artist's own vision.

(iii) Fiction and Proof

A second possible objection to a Christian-supernatural fictional hypothesis proceeds in the opposite direction, and argues that, if the supernatural is employed in the novel, it should be as the end-point of a process of proof, and not assumed throughout. 'The very brilliance of Dostoevsky's presentation shows that he cannot assume, but must prove, the reality of the spirit', writes Watt approvingly of The Brothers Karamazov.⁽¹⁾ Such a suggestion seems dangerously close to confounding the function of the novel with the logical progression of ideas that one might expect to find in a work of apologetics. 'A novel is an impression, not an argument', affirmed Hardy in the Preface to Tess of the D'Urbervilles: that is to say, its task is, at most, to give an imaginative working-through of its particular fictive hypothesis, rather than to justify the latter by the marshalling of arguments to a logical conclusion.

There would, indeed, seem to be something of a logical fallacy in Watt's position. For if, as he suggests, a novelist's means are 'rigidly restricted to terrestrial characters and actions'⁽²⁾, if a particular book's events have been limited to a closed naturalistic system, then it has already been decided, been presupposed, that no supernatural agent has any effect on the pattern of events; and no proof can retrospectively

(1) Watt, op.cit., p.94. (2) Watt, ibid, p.93.

introduce something that has been explicitly and deliberately ruled out from the start. Logically, if something is entirely absent, then proving its presence will be impossible! It is the definition or tentative identification of divine activity, and not the instances of that activity, that can be left to the culmination of the novel: the revelation of the true nature or patterning of an element which has earlier been ambiguous, but must already be present in the novel's world at some level. This activity will thus be an integral part of the fictive hypothesis all along, although it may not have been revealed as such. If the novelist wishes to assert that God is at work in history, they have to indicate what they are talking about.

And in fact such a procedure, in which supernaturalism serves as the underlying hypothesis to be explored, rather than - or as well as - the culmination of the argument, is more in line than might be expected with the methodology of some contemporary Christian apologetics. The problems of constructing any kind of positivistic proof in a watertight logical progression have been amply illustrated by the vicissitudes of Descartes' minimal proposition 'I think therefore I am'; and if the existence of the self, and the existence of the empirical universe (which Descartes was working his way towards) should be so difficult to demonstrate in any undeniable fashion, then 'proving God' by this sort of method appears a daunting task. Furthermore, both C.S.Lewis(1) and

(1) Cf. C.S. Lewis, *Miracles* (1947; Fontana edition of 1960), ch.3, esp. pp.26-27.

Cornelius Van Til(1) have drawn attention to the fact that the very employment of the reasoning faculty in such a discussion is a presupposition that can really only be justified at a later stage of the argument; for example, by the suggestion that the reason is an instrument created by God, the activities of which may be expected (in some circumstances at least) to correspond to a fair degree with the reality of the universe outside it. Hence it has been argued that the Christian apologist should take as his starting-point God and not human reason: and then, having propounded a consistent biblical worldview that contains its own justification for its use of reason, proceed to demonstrate the correlation between its assertions and the universe as we know it. Francis Schaeffer, for example, argues that

Scientific proof, philosophical proof and religious proof follow the same rules. We may have any problem before us which we wish to solve; it may concern a chemical reaction, or the meaning of man. After the question has been defined, in each case proof consists of two steps:

- A. The theory must be non-contradictory and must give an answer to the phenomenon in question.
- B. We must be able to live consistently with our theory.

(2)

So that instead of working from the data to an inductive generalization, we can construct a hypothesis that answers the problem. which will then either be falsified or not falsified by its own internal consistency and its correspondence to the actual state of

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Cornelius Van Til, The Defence of the Faith (Philadelphia,1955), p.119.
(2) Francis Schaeffer, The God Who Is There (1968),p.100.

the universe. (Such a methodology is by no means peculiar to Christian apologetics, of course; it resembles the approach to scientific research expounded by Karl Popper, arguably the greatest philosopher of science of the century, in The Logic of Scientific Discovery (1959) and elsewhere.(1))

The application of this to the supernaturalistic novel is clear. To say that the writer 'cannot assume, but must prove, the reality of the spirit' is to employ ideas obsolete in disciplines more rigorously concerned with the nature of proof. It is only by assuming the fictional hypothesis, demonstrating its meaningful consistency, and then 'matching it up', as it were, with the actual state of things outside the novel, that the original hypothesis can in any sense whatsoever be 'proven'. This matching up or proof will take place in the reading process. The novel may be considered as a hypothesis claiming to bear some similarity to reality; the 'proof' is brought into being by (to use Conrad's phrase) 'making you see' and recognise a consistency and a correlation with external reality - and 'making you see' throughout the entire length of the novel. This too is appropriate because, as Colin Brown writes, 'The kind of hypothesis that the Bible presents is not a remote, static, abstract one, but an interpretation of life which makes sense as we go along living it.'(2) The supernatural, then, may rightly be assumed from the start, and if 'proof' is in any

(1) A useful non-specialist introduction to Popper's thought is Bryan Magee, Popper (1973); see particularly the second chapter.

(2) Colin Brown, Philosophy and the Christian Faith (1969), p.266. Cf. John 7:17.

way the business of the novel at all, that proof emerges in the overall working-through of the underlying hypothesis.

For various reasons such a 'proof' will not be total in a novel. In the real world faith is not very often the product solely of observation of the patterning of events in one's own life.

Accordingly, it might be unrealistic to present the events of a novel as being in themselves a totally conclusive apologetic for faith, unless it is clear that what the novel portrays is not claimed as normal. The Christian, believing in providence, will obviously be more likely to see a patterning in the events of their life than will the agnostic: they supply an interpretation which

is feasible but is not usually (in the events of their own life, as against those of the Bible) absolutely assured or proven. The rational foundation of their faith may well lie mostly in other areas.

Furthermore, it is not often that the Christian will feel able to make an absolutely definite assertion as to the exact nature of providence in their life: they are more likely to make a tentative statement about the direction of God's leading, that may have to be revised in the light of further events and further leading. There is, then, an element of uncertainty in the Christian's interpretation of providence in the events of their own life; and this element exists because they are usually supplying their interpretation of the events by means of their own fallible and only partially-trained judgement, whereas in the Bible (in the events of Exodus, say, or of the book of

Acts) interpretation is supplied by divine revelation. And, of course, a novelist, as against a biographer or a historian, is presenting events that are fictional rather than actual. For all these reasons the Christian novelist's aim cannot be to provide a total vindication of their faith(!), to 'prove', conclusively, in toto, the 'reality of the spirit'; but rather, eventually, to offer a tentative report, or more accurately a possible model, of the workings of providence in daily life. This model, offered as a hypothesis, certainly has a place in a total apologetic: it will hardly be a complete proof. That is, after all, not its purpose.

It seems unreasonable, then, to expect the novelist to 'prove rather than assume' the presence of the supernatural in their work. It is only if they transcend the naturalistic convention and, as it were, set forth their fictional hypothesis, that they can in any sense and in any measure 'prove' it by its imaginative working-through in their fiction.

(iv) Mimesis and the Novel

A third possible objection is of a different kind. It may be objected that we are prioritizing the relationship between the work of art and an external, pre-existing reality which it in some way represents, whereas in fact the important feature of a work of art is the work itself as an autonomous structure of language.

Now we must certainly accept that the primary reference of the aesthetic object (under God) is indeed its own intrinsic reality. Obviously the Christian critic is far from being committed automatically to an aesthetic based entirely on realism or imitation of the 'outside world': the idea that humans are made in the image of a God who is a creator implies that we too are beings capable of 'making it new'. (References to the aesthetic awareness as early as the second chapter of Genesis imply that the biblical view of humanity includes that awareness as an essential characteristic.(1)) A 'Christian' novel may, then, be primarily about itself, about its own newly-invented events and characters, about its own words and sentences and paragraphs. Unlike other objects, writes Teselle,

the art object is experienced as a self-sufficient object presenting its own highly-valued and structured set of particulars. It is this distinctive valuation or new insight or novel shape that initially attracts the eye, not the relationship between this reality and reality more broadly conceived.(2)

(1) Genesis 2:9. Cf. also the creative (though also reality-oriented!) use of language in the naming of the beasts, vv.19-20, and the poetic (though again reality-oriented) outburst of v.23. (2) Teselle, op.cit., p.85.

However, there are always a large number of things that can be said about any work of art (as has been amply proven by the mushrooming of the literary-critical industry!) And one of these many is the relationship of a work to the reality that preexists it, even though, as Teselle reminds us, that reality is perceptible

only through the experience of it, the particular experience expressed in the poem. Another way of putting this would be to say that a poem is about something else only by way of itself, about a wider reality only by way of its own reality.(1)

Hence Francis Schaeffer, rejecting the two alternatives of 'art for art's sake' and art as 'only an embodiment of a message', states as a basic principle that while 'a work of art is first of all a work of art', yet 'the artist makes a body of work and this body of work shows his worldview.'(2) While the primary reference of a work of art may be itself, there is an almost inevitable connection between the nature of a work of art and the external reality in which it comes into being; or rather the artist's perception of that reality, that is, their worldview. The artwork cannot simply emerge ex nihilo; there must be some correlation between the 'secondary world' created by the artist and the 'outside world' as perceived by their worldview. The worldview -with all its inconsistencies, ambiguities and competing 'codes' -will leave its mark.

And thus our concern in this study has been to explore this basic relationship, in examining the means by which a major aspect - a

(1) Teselle, ibid,p.88. (2) Francis Schaeffer, Art and the Bible (1973),pp.34-36.

fundamental, highly significant aspect -of the Christian vision of the world finds expression in that fusion of the mimesis of reality and the ordering or 'making anew' by the artist that is the final work. This section has sought to demonstrate that supernaturalism and prose fiction are not inherently incompatible: rather, the 'new world' of a novel may as justifiably be built upon a fictional hypothesis in the shape of Christian supernaturalism as any other. And the fact that this has so seldom happened in the English novel tells us a good deal about its function as a form embodying (and thereby reinforcing) a post-Enlightenment vision of the world; no fictional hypothesis is altogether an island...

(v) Modes of Supernaturalism

Finally there is a theological issue. It may be argued that an overemphasis on the miraculous is unbiblical, in that 'signs and wonders' are not presented in the Bible as an entirely everyday matter, and Scripture records long stretches of history without any mention of an overt miracle at all; and likewise that it is unrealistic, in that the Christian does not live in expectation of a miracle every five minutes. The divinely-ordained laws of the universe do not require constant alteration and suspension.

Much of this is true, and it is important to note that the supernaturalistic and the overtly miraculous are not synonymous. The doctrine of providence covers the whole of existence. The New Testament depicts God as the one who 'upholds all things by the word of His power'(1); and the prayer 'Give us this day our daily bread' sets all the activities and structures of daily life within a context of divine sovereignty. God's activity, then, is not to be seen only in terms of the miraculous. Rather, the Christian sees the whole world as the arena of God's redemptive strategy. Before the Fall, according to Genesis, the creation was in total harmony. (2) At the Fall man rebelled against God, demanding

(1) Hebrews 1:3. (2) Genesis 1:31.

the right to be 'as gods', autonomous and self-determining units without any responsibility to God or to divine law.(1) As man had been placed as God's regent on the earth(2}, the consequence of human rebellion was that the whole earth became 'subjected to frustration'.(3} Henceforth the natural laws of cause and effect would no longer operate purposively to a creative and harmonious conclusion for all involved.(4} Within the human world there would be cycles of meaningless, directionless repetitiveness, as Ecclesiastes, in its survey of what is 'under the sun', describes:

Vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun? One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever. The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose... That thing which hath been, it is that which shall be...and there is no new thing under the sun.(5)

The New Testament presents the Incarnation as the divine reply to this predicament. Christ advanced into Galilee proclaiming the coming of the kingdom of God, and verifying his claims with miracles, healing the blind, raising the dead, casting out demons. (6) These actions were the signs of the Messiah predicted by the Old Testament, the public demonstration that the reversal of the meaningless disorder of the Fall had begun. Christ's death, as an atonement for sin, and His resurrection are accordingly the inauguration of an entirely new era. As a result history becomes an arena in which the kingdom of God begins to be manifested.

(1)Genesis 3:5. (2) Genesis 1:26, 2:15. (3) Romans 8:20. (4) Genesis 3:18-19. (5) Ecclesiastes 1:2-5,9. (6) Luke 4:18-21, Matthew 11:2-5.

Paul writes:

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the first-born among many brethren.(1)

God is at work, active in the lives of His people to bring about a return in far greater fullness to the expression of God in man that was defaced at the Fall. Human history has recovered shape and direction.

Now, while it is obviously possible for the Christian to give an account of a day's events purely in terms of general providence, with no reference whatsoever to supernatural causality of any other kind, yet as the scope expands or deepens this overall strategy of redemption will come into view. The novel form tends to take a wide view of life and reality; and also, by the very act of choosing certain events, facts, characters and so forth for depiction, the novelist highlights their material as being in some way significant and worthy of record. For the Christian novelist the divine plan of salvation will obviously be the primary underlying fact in any significant human history (not least because of its all-inclusiveness): and in a narrative with the scope

(1) Romans 8:28-29.

and breadth of a novel, not to express this aspect would in some sense be to relegate it as of secondary importance.

And if the crested universe and crested history exist primarily as the arena of redemption, then that fact has implications that are tangible in all but the most truly 'insignificant' areas: can be visualised, let us say, except where the focus is extremely small. It may be that within a very limited compass the actual bearing of the redemptive purpose of the events narrated is imperceptible and will, quite appropriately, be left out. But as the scope of the narrative expands to cover months or years, or as it is to some extent universalised, it reaches a point where the Christian will feel that the divine strategy must be taken into account, as an important 'figure in the carpet', a pattern giving meaning to the whole.

Thus, while a Christian may buy a loaf of bread without consciously reflecting on its salvational context(!)(1), if they are reflecting on a period of three years of their life, or the development of their marriage, or the part their life plays in their community, or a series of encounters which made a profound impression on their character - the kind of material that is commonly the scope of the novel - then they

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Perhaps this is a bad example: the practice of 'saying grace' for a meal, and the prayer 'Give us this day our daily bread', represent just such a 'conscious reflection'!

will think in terms of the God to whose care and overruling they have entrusted these areas. Within such a context, as we noted earlier, love, war, art, politics, in short the whole of human society, can be seen. And the phrase 'care and overruling' implies a positive supernaturalistic strategy at work within the created world of human history maintained by providence.

We may tentatively distinguish three broad areas of this 'care and overruling'. Firstly, there is the basic situation in which this strategy operates primarily within the personalities of individuals (whether Christian or not), with the goal of bringing them to know Christ and 'forming Christ' (1) in them. Much of the New Testament is concerned with events on this level: God's initial calling, conviction of wrongdoing and alienation, rebirth through the Spirit, daily empowering, the deepening revelation of God to the Christian, loving and God-inspired service to the world, and much else besides can be seen in these terms, where there is no alteration of 'normal' causality in the external, visible world. Furthermore, the Christian on earth is not

(1) Galatians 4:19.

intended to be kept safely out of reach of the historical consequences of the Fall: Jesus prayed, 'My prayer is not that You take them out of the world, but that You protect them from the evil one.'(1) Accordingly there will be occasions when the events of the fallen universe come upon the individual in all their anarchic, destructive futility: and though 'in everything God works for good with those who love Him', though He is not absent from such situations, yet He may in His sovereignty choose for a time to work only within the Christian - seeming, even, to be absent - rather than in altering the external situation. We are here in the area of God's permissive, rather than His active, will.

The book of Job is a good example; not until the end of the book does God alter the external circumstances, yet the whole narrative is set within a clear context of divine sovereignty.(2) Or there is the book of Habakkuk, where it is precisely the apparent inactivity of God that is the problem (and the challenge to growth in maturity and faith). In this respect a volume like Solzhenitsyn's A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich likewise finds its place within the biblical worldview. In such narratives there may be no miraculous deliverance, but the possibility will be present that in some sense God can be 'a very present help in trouble'. Paul promises, as a man who knew intense suffering, that

(1) John 17:15. (2) Cf. Roger Forster and Paul Marston. God's Strategy in Human History (1973), pp.3-12 et passim.

God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.(1)

That 'way of escape' may be internal rather than external. But there is in this passage a sense of an ongoing, sustaining relationship with God that is the all-important distinction from the situation in Greene's trilogy, for example, where God seems almost absent from both the external and internal spheres.

Secondly, the Bible depicts situations in which God is organizing the various currents of history to produce particular configurations and particular issues at various points, whether in the life of an individual, or in the extension of the divine kingdom in a particular situation. Here no obviously 'miraculous' occurrence is involved: what is 'more than natural' is the collocation of events. Berkouwer has noted that in the Old Testament 'it is striking to observe how often the purpose of God is reached without radical intervention'.(2) For example, in Genesis 37 Joseph is saved from his brothers by Reuben, then sent on to Egypt by his brothers: but it is God to whom Joseph attributes his arrival in Egypt, which is the cause of the deliverance of both Egypt and Israel from famine. 'Thus the activity of God is revealed, not as a deus ex machina, but in the action of the brothers.'(3) Similarly in the book of Esther it is the normal

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1 Corinthians 10:13. (2) G.C.Berkouwer, The Providence of God, trans. Lewis B. Smerdes (Grand Rapids,1952),p.92. (3) Ibid, p.90.

proceedings of the Persian Empire, and the emperor's search for a new queen, that place Esther in a position to preserve her people; and, in the wider context of the Old Testament as a whole, to ensure the uninterrupted progress of divine strategy. But clearly this is to be read as a divine deliverance. Obviously such a narrative presupposes that God is intervening in, or giving direction to, the general movement of history, if only in the particular choice or temperament of individuals. But it is what one might call a covert rather than an overt providence.

Besides this there is of course the category of overt 'miracle'. It should be pointed out that a miracle does not involve the temporary incursion by God into a closed naturalistic universe that is otherwise autonomous: that would be close to deism. The rationale of the miraculous is, as Berkouwer says, that 'in miracles God takes another way than that which had come to be expected of him in the usual course of events.'(1) The normal causes are superseded by the action of the First Cause Himself: His divinely-ordained laws are overruled by the special and purposive fiat of the divine Lawgiver. This is what one might call 'overt providence'. How common such events may be is a matter on which there is some disagreement amongst Christians. What is plain is that miracles are not comparable to the magician's bag of tricks: they are never arbitrary or merely spectacular, but are always closely related to God's strategy in history.

(1) Ibid, p.214.

Many Christians would agree that some remarkable advances in the history of Christianity have been accompanied by a clear awareness of God answering prayer, guiding, and providing resources and contacts as His kingdom advanced. One could instance the lives of such people as Hudson Taylor, C.T.Studd, or George Muller. The poet Jack Clemo has gone on to claim that the unbelief of the Church is the main reason why such overt divine activity has come to seem abnormal rather than normative: 'The nominal church member may go through life with as little sense of plan or purpose as the ordinary outsider', he says, 'but the true convert is trained for a specific place in God's redemptive strategy. This is the next step beyond surrender.'(1) Certainly it is a feature of Christian experience that God sometimes acts in the most striking way when the Christian follows His leading in a manner which will prove disastrous if God is absent: there is a relationship between the Christian's self-committal to God and God's to him. The hiddenness of God, then, may at times be the result of human unbelief and timidity.

However, many modern accounts of providence have tended to put much more emphasis on what we have called the 'covert providence', the orchestrating of ordinary events, as the norm, than on the 'overt miracle' where normal causality is suspended altogether. This is by and large true of the lives of Hudson Taylor

(1) Clemo, op.cit.,pp.43-44.

et al as well. But it should be noted that this in no way represents

a retreat from the claim of direct divine intervention. There is still a pronounced sense of God at work in the progression of events. Clemo remarks, 'Since the object of the covenant is to show that God's ways are not man's ways, there is usually an element of resistance to common sense in the divine proposal.'(1) William MacDonald concurs: 'Faith does not operate in the realm of the possible. There is no glory for God in that which is humanly possible. Faith begins where man's power ends.'(2) Faith is not merely a pious application of religious terminology to commonplace events. Even if no overt miracle is involved, the divine strategy may well be marked by a tendency to run counter to the apparent probabilities of the situation.

But the biblical picture is one in which this purpose may not be universally recognised; it is entirely possible (up until the last judgement!) for the individual to neglect or ignore the divine patterning in experience. Christ Himself taught that the direction of God would in general be perceived only by those who were willing to follow God.(3) The divine strategy becomes meaningful in this life to those who cooperate with it: 'in everything God works for good with those who love Him'.(4) Otherwise, events may well seem merely the directionless results of closed causation; no plan will appear where the Planner is rejected. So the scheme of providence cannot biblically be depicted as something blatantly apparent; nevertheless, to the Christian it is present as a shape that can be discerned by the perspective of faith within the flux of events.

Consequently the Christian cannot settle for a vision or model of

(1) Clemo, op. cit., p.45. (2) William MacDonald, True Discipleship (1963), p.30. (3) Cf. John 7:17. (4) Romans 8:28.

events that is devoid of the strategy of God. His/her faith is built on a triumphant hope that God is at work in every situation, even when He is apparently absent - indeed, even when we are doing our best to build our own decrepit kingdoms. The providential pattern (in its various modes) cannot sensibly be ignored in a narrative of events that has a scope as wide as that which the novel usually claims. The miraculous may not be an everyday event; but even where providence operates only within human personalities, there is something definite, some trend or meaning in the situation as it is finally to be perceived, that would be capable of depiction.

And that is the ultimate significance of events. To neglect or ignore it is easy. But such a failure of vision amounts, to the Christian, to the neglect or ignoring of final significance, of the all-important meaning of what our lives are about. To allow our life-narratives to be shaped by an entirely fictional absence of God (and to train other readers that way) is to miss their point in the most vital way conceivable.